

# Four graves uncovered in dirt floor in early English church in Jamestown

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Crosses mark where the remains were found of four of the earliest leaders of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in America. They were buried for more than 400 years near the altar of what was America's first Protestant church, in Jamestown, Virginia. Photo: Joe Fudge/The Daily Press via AP

WASHINGTON — The bones of four of America's earliest leaders have been found. They were buried more than 400 years ago in a church in Jamestown, Virginia.

The four graves were uncovered in a dirt floor. The floor was once part of Jamestown's church. A team of scientists and historians announced the discovery July 28. The church is where Pocahontas, the daughter of a Native American chief, married Englishman John Rolfe. Their marriage led to peace between the Powhatan Indians and colonists at Jamestown. It was the first permanent English colony in America.

## **A Minister, Two Captains, A Knight**

Archaeologists also found artifacts buried with the leaders. One of them was a mysterious Catholic box. The container would have been for the bones belonging to saints. These are holy people in the Catholic Church.

The team announced its discovery at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. The museum is studying those buried in the church.

Archaeologists have been studying the site since 1994. Archaeologists dig up artifacts to learn more about human history.

The team found the bones of the Reverend Robert Hunt. He was Jamestown's first English minister and was known as a peacemaker. They also found the remains of Captain Gabriel Archer, an enemy of colony leader John Smith. Sir Ferdinando Wainman, whose skeleton was also found, was likely the first knight buried in America. The last man was Captain William West, who died in a fight with the Powhatan Indians. The three other men likely died from illnesses.

## **A Box Of Catholic Relics**

The early leaders were buried between 1608 and 1610.

In Archer's coffin, archaeologists found a captain's staff. Archer helped lead some of the earliest journeys to Jamestown. He died at the age of 34. This occurred during a six-month period known as the "starving time." Many died due to disease, hunger and battles with Indians.

A small silver box on Archer's coffin turns out likely to be a container for Catholic relics, or holy objects. Inside it are bone fragments and a bottle for holy water. Archer's parents were Catholic. Being Catholic was against the law in England at the time. The discovery raises the question of whether Archer was a secret Catholic.

In West's grave, archaeologists found part of a cloth sash in a block of soil. The silk material was too delicate to remove from the dirt. Instead, archaeologists removed the entire block of dirt.

## **Putting A Puzzle Together**

Archaeologists will continue searching the church site. They expect to eventually find the grave of Sir Thomas West. He was an early governor of Virginia. The Delaware colony was named after West, who was also known as Lord De La Warr.

The artifacts will go on display soon at "Historic Jamestowne." The site includes the archaeological dig and a museum.

The Smithsonian museum created a 3-D scan. The museum scanned the excavation site, bones and artifacts. The scan will be posted online.

The archaeology team said the discovery is a big puzzle.

"The things that we look at and can read from the bones are simply details that you're not going to find in the history books," said Douglas Owsley. He is with the Smithsonian and studies ancient bones. "These are men that you might not know their name," he said. Still, it is important to learn about the early leaders of the country.