

The Stirrup Court Cemetery Coffin Hardware

Philip J. Woodley

This report presents the analysis of the coffin hardware from the 19th century Euro-Canadian Stirrup Court Cemetery. The results of this analysis and comparisons with other cemeteries has produced a chronology of coffin shape and coffin hardware for 19th century southern Ontario. Both rectangular coffins and coffin hardware had been introduced by mid-century, and hardware was increasingly used and varied by the late 1800s.

The results of this chronology are combined with historical and skeletal data to determine the identity of the individuals buried at Stirrup Court. Relative cost can be estimated for coffins, but there is no simple correlation between social status and the quantity of coffin hardware.

Introduction:

Until recently, historic cemetery research in southern Ontario was restricted to discussions of headstones and other features visible on the surface of the ground (e.g., Osborne 1974; Hanks 1974). But industrial and housing development has necessitated the excavation of historic cemeteries (e.g., Pearce 1989; Saunders and Lazenby 1991) and has provided the data for this report.

Coffins are artifacts firmly fixed to the fashions of a society at a particular point in time. "A cemetery should reflect the local, historical flow of attitudes about community" (Dethlefsen 1981: 137). These attitude changes are shown by changes in coffins and coffin hardware through time (Habenstein and Lamers 1977: 98). Each coffin reflects the prevailing attitudes of adornment and construction and, as with most aspects of life, these should reflect status and the change in attitudes through time. With the industrialization of North America and the introduction of manufactured goods, the 19th century was a time of change, and this was reflected in the introduction and widespread use of a variety of types of coffin hardware.

The Stirrup Court Cemetery, located on the outskirts of London, Ontario (Fig. 1), was excavated in 1982 by William Fox of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, London and Dr. Michael Spence of the University of Western Ontario.

Headstones were not present and its location was

unknown before human remains were uncovered in the course of house construction. Most of the burials were excavated *in situ* (Fig. 2) but skeletal material and one coffin plaque were recovered from fill piles in other parts of London (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986: 107). It is believed "...that most of the burials in the cemetery were removed, and that most (though certainly not all) of the human bone from the disturbed area and the fill locations was recovered" (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986: 107). Where hardware is assigned to a particular grave in this article, it was recovered by the excavations; the coffin plaque with no grave assignment was recovered from the fill pile.

There were approximately twenty-seven individuals originally buried in the cemetery of which six had previously been exhumed (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986). The people buried at Stirrup Court were of British descent and are believed to have been buried between 1840 and 1890 (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986: 107; Wm. Fox, pers. comm. 1990). The Stirrup Court Cemetery was originally the Stiles family cemetery, but by about 1870 it was being used as a community cemetery (Wm. Fox, personal communication, 1990). Of the twenty coffins excavated at Stirrup Court five had previously had the skeleton exhumed for reburial elsewhere. The hurried nature of the salvage excavation may not have allowed sufficient time to recover all artifacts (M. Spence pers. comm. 1990). For example, few nails were recovered from the burials. Some of the exhumed burials (e.g., Burial 15) had only one of each type of hardware present; presumably the remaining hardware, for example coffin handles, had been removed when the burial was exhumed.

This paper describes the coffin hardware recovered from these excavations. Even with the above concerns in mind, this presumably is a representative sample of the coffin hardware from the cemetery. Hardware from each coffin is discussed in detail and used to determine chronological differences in coffin shape and coffin hardware. Artifacts with known dates are compared to hardware from the Harvie (Woodley 1991) and Wise Cemeteries (Pearce 1989) to define a chronology of 19th century southern Ontario coffin shape and coffin hardware. The results are com -

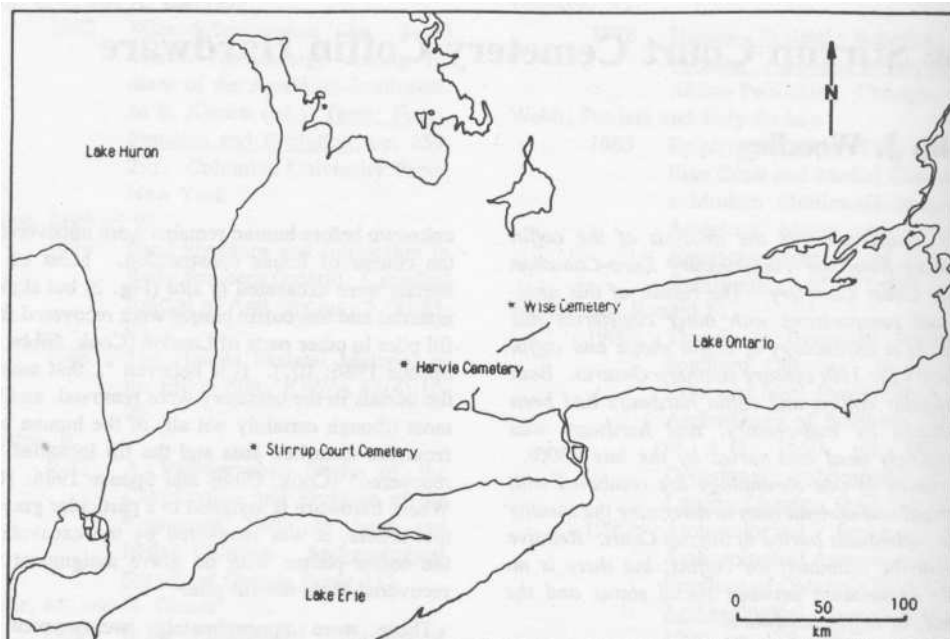


Figure 1. The Location of The Stirrup Court, Harvie and Wise Cemeteries

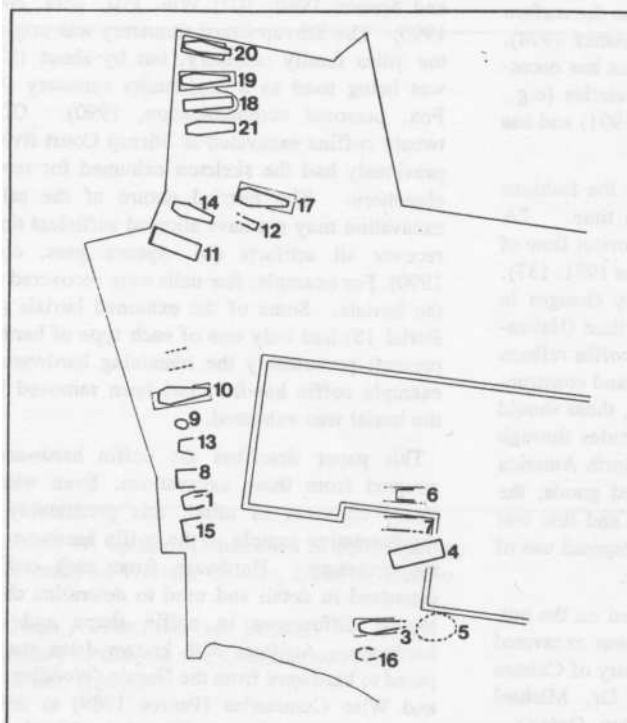


Figure 2. The Stirrup Court Cemetery, Including the Edge of Excavation and the House Footings

bind with historical and skeletal data and burial location within the cemetery to help determine the identity of the individuals buried at Stirrup Court. Intra-site status will be briefly examined by comparing coffin hardware associated with burials of about the same date. The social meaning of coffin hardware is not addressed in this report.

The Cemetery Sample:

Family records included with the will of Edward Stiles indicate that there could be as many as thirteen immediate Stiles family members buried at Stirrup Court (Table 1), but additional family records concerning the Stiles family (Table 2) indicate that other family members may also have been buried there. These are family records, not cemetery records and therefore might be incomplete. The children of John Stiles were exhumed for reburial elsewhere (Wm. Fox, personal communication, April 1990), excluding them from the sample. The skeletons from burials #1, 8, 9, 13, and 15 had previously been exhumed (M. Spence, pers. comm., 1990) for reburial elsewhere.

The Stiles family patriarch, Edward Sr. (1767 - 1830), and matriarch, Sarah Sr. (1766 - 1832), had ten children: Edward Jr. (1794 - 1838); Mary (1795 - 1871); Elizabeth (1797 - 1833); Ann (1799 - n.d.); John (1798 - 1879); Sarah (1800 - 1842); Sophia (1802 - 1867); Amelia (1803 - 1867); Samuel (1804 - 1828); and finally Stephen (1806 - 1846). Mary Stiles married Robert Fennell and had four children: Robert (1821 - 1836), Sarah (1823 - 1910), Sophia (1834 - 1840), and Mary Ann (n.d.). John Stiles' first wife, Elizabeth Kent (1812 - 1833) had three children before she died, possibly while giving birth to twins (d. 1833) or shortly thereafter. John later married Hannah (1816 - 1896), and they had eight children, three of whom, Elizabeth (1838 - 1896), Ellen E. (1844 - 1850) and Harry E. (1852 - 1861), could also have been buried at Stirrup Court. Sarah Stiles and ---Hussey (first name unknown) married and had three children, of whom William Hussey (1839 - 1883) was buried at Stirrup Court (Burial 10). Based on the dates of death of the Stiles family members (Tables 1 and 2), the Stirrup Court cemetery was probably used as early as 1828 and as late as 1896.

Coffin Hardware:

Coffin hardware is made from metal castings specifically manufactured for coffin use. For the coffin hardware types used in this report I follow

the terminology used by Hacker-Norton and Trinkley (1984). Coffin plaques (e.g., Fig. 3: A) are metal plates, usually fastened to the coffin lid, which usually provide the name, and date of death either painted or etched on the face of the plaque.

Handles, used to carry the coffin, are of the swing bail (e.g., Fig. 3: E) or short bar (e.g., Fig. 4: D) types. Both types are fastened to the coffin sides by lugs or backing plates, usually by two to four screws. The swing bail handles had a single U-shaped section which was fastened to the lugs by a pivot pin on either end of the bracket. The handle pivots on the pin so it can swing out when needed. Short bar handles were made of three pieces: the handle is a short bar with end tips fixed into two arms or brackets, and the whole assemblage is attached to the lugs by pivot pins, allowing the handle to move. With some variation, both types of handles were generally constructed of three individual pieces (the handle and the two lugs) which were assembled when the handle was mounted to the coffin. Handles were usually manufactured so to pivot to a ninety-degree angle, so as not to pinch the hand when in use.

Thumbscrews (e.g., Fig. 3: D) had large white metal heads attached to an iron screw, and were used to fasten the lid to the coffin. Thumbscrews were usually paired with escutcheons (Fig. 3: B), which are flat, decorative metal plates that were screwed to the coffin lid and used as a guide for the thumbscrew. After the lid was placed on the coffin, the thumbscrew was inserted through the escutcheon and lid and screwed into the coffin side to hold the lid in place. Caplifters, similar in construction to the thumbscrews, had a white metal handle attached to an iron screw which was threaded into the coffin lid, and used as decorative lid handles.

White metal coffin screws were simply iron screws with ornamental white metal heads used for coffin decoration. As with the screws, coffin tacks had ornamental white metal heads, but the head was fastened to a very short nail or tack too short for coffin construction and therefore solely decorative. Coffin studs (e.g., Fig. 5: B) were quadrilateral, star-shaped or round decorative tin screw or nail covers used as inexpensive casket decorations.

Coffin windows were simply a hole through the coffin lid with a pane of glass fixed in place. Presumably this allowed the body to be viewed without leaving the coffin open. Strictly speaking glass coffin windows are not hardware, but they are coffin adornment and therefore are included in this report.

Table 1 - Death Records from the will of Edward Stiles

1828	Jan.16th	Samuel Stiles, Aged 23 Years (born 1804)*
1830	March 25th	Edward Stiles Sen, Died 64 Years of Age (born 1767)
1832	May 29th	Sarah Stiles Sen', Died 67 Years old (born 1766)
1833	Sept. 20 th	Elizabeth Stiles, Died 36 Years old (born 1797)
1833	Nov. 11 th	Elizabeth (Kent), the Wife of John Stiles, Died in the 22nd Year of Her Age (born 1812)
1836	June 18 th	Robert Fennell Died Aged 16 Years (born 1821)
1838	Jan.' 7th	Edward Stiles Jun'. Died Aged 43 Years (born 1794)
1840	Dec. 12 th	Sophia Fennell Died Aged - 7 years (born 1834)
1842	July 27 th	Sarah (Stiles) Hussey Died Aged - 41 years (born 1800)
1846	March 15 th	Stephen Stiles Died in his 40th year (born 1806)
1867	June 13 th	Amy Stiles Died in her 63 year (born 1803)
1883	Aug. 13 th	William Hussey Died Aged 45 years (born 1839)
1885	Jan 13th	Sophia Stiles Died Aged 82/10 mos. (born 1802)

* year of birth was not recorded, and are added in brackets

Table 2 - Other Stiles Family Members

1833	Twins of Elizabeth (Kent) Stiles; apparently she died during childbirth
1850*	Ellen E. Stiles, 6 year old daughter of John Stiles (born 1844)
1855	Samuel Platt, Married to Granddaughter of Edward and Sarah Stiles (born 7)
1861 *	Harry E. Stiles, 9 year old son of John Stiles (born 1852)
1871	Mary Fennell, Daughter of Edward and Sarah Stiles (born 1795)
1879	John Stiles, Son of Edward and Sarah Stiles (born 1789)
1896*	Elizabeth (Stiles) Shrapnell, daughter of John Stiles (born 1838)
1896	Hannah, John Stiles 2nd wife (born 1816)
?	Robert Fennel
?	--- Hussey
?	Ann Stiles (1799 - 7)

* These are thought to have been exhumed for John Stiles (Fox, pers. comm. 1990).

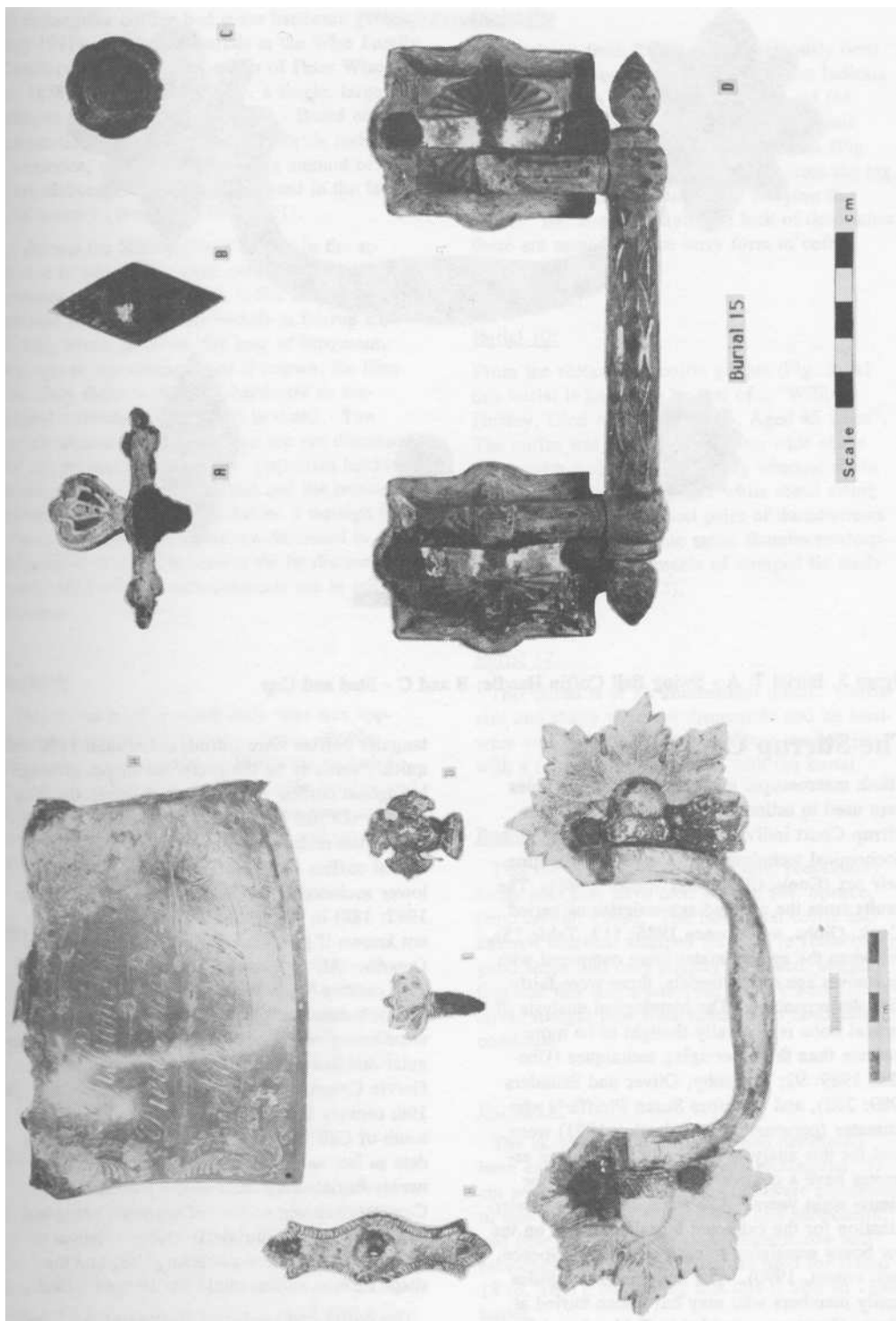


Figure 3. Burial 10: A - Coffin Plaque; B - Escutcheon; C - Caplifter; D - Thumbscrew; E - Swing Bail Coffin Handle

Figure 4. Burial 15: A - Matched Thumbscrew and Escutcheon; B and C - Studs; D - Short Bar Coffin Handle

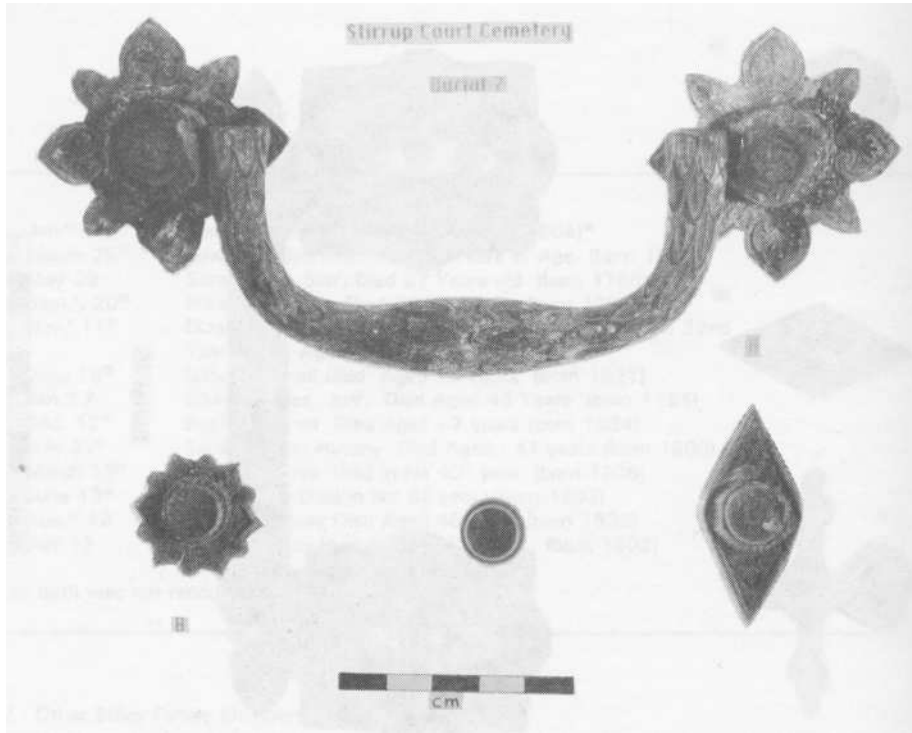


Figure 5. Burial 7: A - Swing Bail Coffin Handle; B and C - Stud and Cap

The Stirrup Court Burials:

Both macroscopic and histological techniques were used to estimate the ages-at-death of the Stirrup Court individuals, and macroscopic and biochemical techniques were used to determine their sex (Cook, Gibbs, and Spence 1986). The results from the age and sex estimations varied (Cook, Gibbs, and Spence 1986: 113, Table 15), and when the age estimates were compared with the known age of the burials, there were fairly wide discrepancies. The histological analysis of cortical bone is generally thought to be more accurate than the other aging techniques (Ubelaker 1989: 92; Lazenby, Oliver and Saunders 1989: 262), and therefore Susan Pfeiffer's age estimates (personal communication 1991) were used for this analysis (Table 3). These age estimates have a confidence interval of plus- or minus- eight years. Age estimates and sex determination for the exhumed burials is based on the few bones remaining in each coffin (M. Spence, pers. comm. 1990). The known ages of Stiles family members who may have been buried at Stirrup Court are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Hexagonal or octagonal shaped coffins were the main types used in the early 19th century. Rec-

tangular coffins were introduced around 1850 and quickly came to be the preferred shape, although hexagonal coffins were still used late in the 19th century (Coffin 1976: 101). "After the introduction of the rectangular casket, the use of octagonal coffins became limited to members of lower socioeconomic classes" (Blakely and Beck 1982: 188) in the southern United States. It is not known if the same can be said for southern Ontario. All five coffins identified at the early 19th century Wise Family Cemetery (c. 1815 - 1858), located outside of Richmond Hill (Fig. 1), were hexagonal (Pearce 1989). And both rectangular and hexagonal coffins were found at the Harvie Cemetery (Saunders and Lazenby 1991), a 19th century Euro-Canadian cemetery located south of Galt (Fig. 1), where hexagonal coffins date as late as 1894 (Woodley 1991). Of the twenty burials excavated at the Stirrup Court Cemetery, eleven of the coffins were hexagonal (including that of Burial 10 which is known to date to 1883), five were rectangular, and the shape of four coffins could not be determined.

The coffin and hardware analysis of the Harvie Cemetery indicated that the hexagonal coffins without hardware pre-date those with hardware. All of the rectangular coffins post-date 1850, and

all rectangular coffins had some hardware (Woodley 1991). Of the six burials at the Wise Family Cemetery, only the latest coffin of Peter Wise Jr. (d. 1858) had coffin hardware, a single, large, stamped tin plaque (Pearce 1989). Based on the information from Stirrup Court, Harvie and Wise Cemeteries, there is an increasing amount of, and more elaborate coffin hardware used in the late 19th century (Woodley 1990; 1991).

I discuss the Stirrup Court burials in the sequence in which they were excavated. Table 3 provides the burial number, coffin shape and associated hardware for the burials at Stirrup Court, and, where possible, the year of interment, sex, age or age estimate and if known, the identity. Only those with coffin hardware or associated artifacts are discussed in detail. The burials without coffin hardware are not discussed, but are presented in Table 3. Important hardware details are discussed in the text and the remaining information is presented in Tables 4 through 9. The artifacts in these tables are discussed in the determined order of interment (to be discussed later). All hardware measurements are in millimetres.

Burial 4:

This burial is of an adult male who was approximately eighty years old at death. Coffin shape was not discernible. Hardware included four decorated swing-bail type coffin handles and fifteen tin studs (Fig. 6). The studs were manufactured from two pieces. The cap and the base (Fig. 6: A and B).

Burial 6:

This burial was for an adult male, sixty-one years old, whose identity remains unknown. The coffin was rectangular, and the hardware consisted of a single, coffin plaque (Fig. 7) which reads..."SAM---G. A--TH, DIED 12th OCT. '55, AGED 61 Years."

Burial 7:

The oval coffin plaque recovered from this burial reads... " Sarah Lawrence, Died Sept. 1, 1878, aged 81 years"; gold paint is etched into the inscription. The coffin shape could not be determined, but it had a glass viewing window above the head and shoulders. Hardware consisted of four swing-bail coffin handles and four-teen decorative tin studs (Fig. 5).

Burial 8:

The skeleton from Burial 8 had previously been exhumed, but remaining bone fragments indicate a child between five and seven years old (M. Spence, pers. comm. 1990). Two very plain swing bail coffin handles were recovered (Fig. 8); these handles swing 180 degrees from the lug, and would pinch the hand when carrying the coffin. Based on the style and lack of decoration, these are most likely an early form of coffin handle.

Burial 10:

From the rectangular coffin plaque (Fig. 3: A) this burial is known to be that of... "William Hussey, Died Aug. 13th, 1883, Aged 45 years". The coffin was hexagonal, 70 mm wide at the chest, with a clear glass viewing window above the head and shoulders. Six white metal swing bail handles, five identical pairs of thumbscrews and escutcheons, a white metal thumbscrew/cap lifter and twelve fragments of stamped tin studs were recovered (Fig. 3).

Burial 12:

This burial is of an unidentified infant. Coffin size and shape were not discernible and no hardware was recovered. Only a silver straight pin with a round head was found with the burial.

Burial 13:

This burial contained two infants, presumably twins who may have died at birth (M. Spence, pers. comm. 1990). The hexagonal coffin had thirteen identical stamped tin studs in remarkably good shape and only slightly tarnished, suggesting that this was a late 19th century burial. Two silver straight pins were found, also in excellent condition.

Burial 15:

The skeleton from Burial 15 had previously been exhumed. The coffin was rectangular, 53 cm wide, with the remaining hardware comprised of one handle, one thumbscrew and escutcheon, and four studs (Fig. 4). The thumbscrew and escutcheon are identical to those used for Burial 18 (d. 1881), suggesting that this is also an 1880s burial.

Table 3 - The Stirrup Court Cemetery

Burial	Shape	Size	Hardware	Date	Sex ¹	Age ²	Known Identity
1	hexagonal	-	-	-	-	child (5 -7)	exhumed
3	hexagonal	-	-	-	F	77+-	-
4	hexagonal	-	4 handles, 15 studs	-	M	80+-	-
5	-	-	-	-	F	78+-	-
6	rectangular	-	1 coffin plaque	1855	M	61	Sam-- G. A--th
7	-	-	1 glass viewing window, 1 coffin plaque, 4 handles, 14 studs,	1878	F	81	Sarah Lawrence
8	rectangular	33 cm	2 handles	-	-	child (6-10)	exhumed
9	rectangular	-	-	-	-	infant	exhumed
10	hexagonal	70 cm wide	1 glass viewing window, 1 coffin plaque, 6 handles, 6 thumbscrews, 5 escutcheons, 12 studs	1883	M	45	William Hussey
11	-	45 cm	-	-	M	36+-	-
12	-	-	1 silver pin	-	-	infant	-
13	hexagonal	-	13 studs, 2 silver pins	-	-	2 infants	exhumed
14	hexagonal	-	-	-	M	65+-	-
15	rectangular	53 cm wide	1 handle, 1 thumbscrew and escutcheon, 4 studs	-	7	7	exhumed
16	hexagonal	-	-	-	M	50+-	-
17	hexagonal	22 cm	-	-	M	76+-	-
18	rectangular	200 x 48	1 viewing window, 1 plaque, 6 handles, 6 thumbscrews, 2 escutcheons, 2 decorations, 25 studs, 1 white metal screw, lining	1881	F	84	Helen Robotham
19	hexagonal	200 x 55	1 coffin plaque, coffin lining (7)	-	M	72+-	-
20	hexagonal	194x52-	-	-	M	47+-	-
21	hexagonal	195x52	6 handles, 23 studs	-	M	36+-	-
Plaque 1	-	-	1 coffin plaque	1867	F	63	Amelia Stiles

1. Sex determinations are from Cook, Gibbs, and Spence (1986:113, Table 15).

2. Adult age estimates (+- 8 years) are from S. Pfeiffer (pers. comm. 1991) and child age estimates are from M. Spence (pers. comm. 1990).

Burial 18:

This was the most elaborate burial at the Stirrup Court Cemetery, with the largest quantity of coffin hardware. The coffin was rectangular, 200 cm long x 48 cm wide, with a clear glass viewing window above the head and shoulders; a coloured cloth on the inside of the window would have obscured the head from view (M. Spence, pers. comm. 1990). The silver-plated rectangular coffin plaque (Fig. 9: A) reads... "Helen Robotham, Died Dec. 19th 1881, Aged 84 years." There were six short bar handles, eight thumbscrews and four escutcheons, twenty-seven tin studs, and a white

metal coffin screw (13.5 mm x 8.9 mm) recovered (Fig. 9). The handles have... "PAT. DEC. 3 1879" stamped on the back and... "PATENTED MARCH 18 1879" on the lug. Two decorative iron pieces (53.4 mm high and 48.0 mm wide) were also recovered. Both are rusty, making it difficult to determine the design, but they appear to be stylized angels with flowing robes or wings.

Also found was an odd brass artifact (Fig. 9: B) (89.9 mm long, 12.8 mm wide, and 11.7 mm wide at the head, and > 1 mm thick), similar in shape to a small spoon, which was fastened to the coffin by two screws. It still has coffin wood attached to

WOODLEY: STIRRUP COURT CEMETERY 53

Table - Coffin Plaques

Burial	Freq.	Type/Material	Length	Width	Thick	Description
6	1	stamped tin-plated iron	550	345 +	1.4	A large lozenge-shaped shield in the centre surrounded by flowing drapes and floral boughs. Above the shield is a 5-pointed crown and the faces of 3 cherubs.
19	1	stamped tin-plated iron	7	7	7	Lozenge shaped surrounded by braids, but very badly fragmented; inscription is illegible.
PI. 1	1	stamped tin-plated iron	354+	250 +	>1	Lozenge-shaped shield flanked by angels, with a crown and cherubs above.
7	1	pressed and plated tin	157.8	96.5	0.9	Irregular shape; plain except for a lightly etched cross-hatch around the outside; script text.
18	1	stamped and plated tin	167.4	98.8	1.0	Rectangular, with the ends rolled up like a scroll. Hand-written lettering has lightly incised lines above and below.
10	1	stamped white metal	136.2	95.5	5.3	Rectangular, flower and bough motif in each corner. Lightly incised lines emphasize the lettering.

Table 5 - Coffin Handles

Burial	Freq ^a	Material/Type	Length	Width	Thick	Description
8	2	iron/swing-bail	120.4	67.5	19.9	Plain rectangular lug with plain U-shaped handle.
21	6	iron/swing-bail	92.1	69.2	20.2	An indistinct floral motif on the handle with a cherub's face framed by the oval handle.
7	4	white metal/ swing-bail	182.9	75.2	14.1	Lugs are irregular in shape with a complex series of leaves and geometric designs. The handle has overlapping, stylized leaves.
18	6	silver-plated white metal/ short-bar	206.6	79.5	22.6	Very elaborate with a flowing curtain or drape motif and geometric designs in each corner.
10	6	white metal/ swing bail	209.6	82.4	14.8	Lugs have acorn and oak leaf motif; handles are plain.
4	4	white metal/ swing bail	172.6	74.7	12.6	Upside down thistle-like motif, "Lincoln's Drape" design.
15	1	silver plated white metal/ short bar	174.0	82.1	19.3	Lug is rectangular with a smaller rectangle inside with leaves and vines inside and out. Handle shaft - stylized overlapping leaf motif with pine cones ends; bracket ends are hands.

Table 6 - Stamped Tin Coffin Studs

Burial	Freq.	Shape	Length	Width	Height	Description
21	4	irregular	58.7	32.4	2.6	Geometric design with raised dots.
21	19	quadrilateral	49.1	23.6	11.6	Base has a ridge around the perimeter with vine decorations on the face; centre is a raised circle with a flower in the centre.
7	3	multi-sided	28.3	28.9	8.9	Constructed of a base and separate cap; geometric design.
7	11	quadrilateral	48.5	28.3	10.6	Base has a ridge around the perimeter with vine decorations on the face; centre is raised and surrounds a flower.
18	1	quadrilateral	49.8	22.0	9.5	Stepped in profile with a flowing bough motif on the base and a flower motif in the centre.
18	24	quadrilateral	46.6	22.6	9.0	Central flower; lines radiate from the centre of the base.
10	12	circular	24.7	24.7	9.5	Flower-shaped; a raised, circular cup with a central flower.
4	13	6-pointed star	30.7	30.7	7.3	Progressively smaller, terraced 6-pointed stars, with a flower in the centre.
4	2	6-pointed star	32.4	32.6	2.6	Flat with no decoration; presumably used as a base for the first type.
15	2	flower shape	28.0	28.0	5.4	Base is ruffled; the raised centre has flowers around the edge and a stylized cross in the centre.
15	2	quadrilateral	48.5	22.9	9.8	The base has a cross-hatched motif; the central bubble has short, light hash marks surrounding a central flower.
13	13	6-pointed star	29.4	29.3	8.3	Terraced stars with flowers at the points and a raised circular cup in the centre with a raised flower motif.

Table 7 - Coffin Thumbscrews

Burial	Freq.	Material	Height	Width	Thick	Description
18	8	silver plated-white metal	30.4	22.6	4.2	Flower shaped with a geometric design and stippled background. Silver plated. Motif matches the escutcheon from this burial.
10	5	silver plated-white metal	32.8	30.4	3.8	Three edges with a small shield in the centre; circular base has a floral design.
15	1	silver plated-white metal	30.4	22.6	4.2	Elaborate geometric pattern; identical to those from burial 18.

Table 8 - Coffin Escutcheons

Burial	Freq.	Material	Length	Width	Thick	Description
18	8	silver plated-white metal	63.1	22.1	2.3	Geometric shape and design, angles and lines with a cross-hatched background.
10	5	silver plated-white metal	76.5	24.3	2.5	Irregular shape with a pebbled design around perimeter.
15	1	silver plated-white metal	62.4	22.5	3.0	Elaborate geometric pattern, identical to those from burial 18.

Table 9 - Coffin Caplifters

Burial	Freq.	Material	Height	Width	Thick	Description
10	1	white metal	21.9	24.6	4.3	Five boughs stem from the base, each with a small ball on the end.

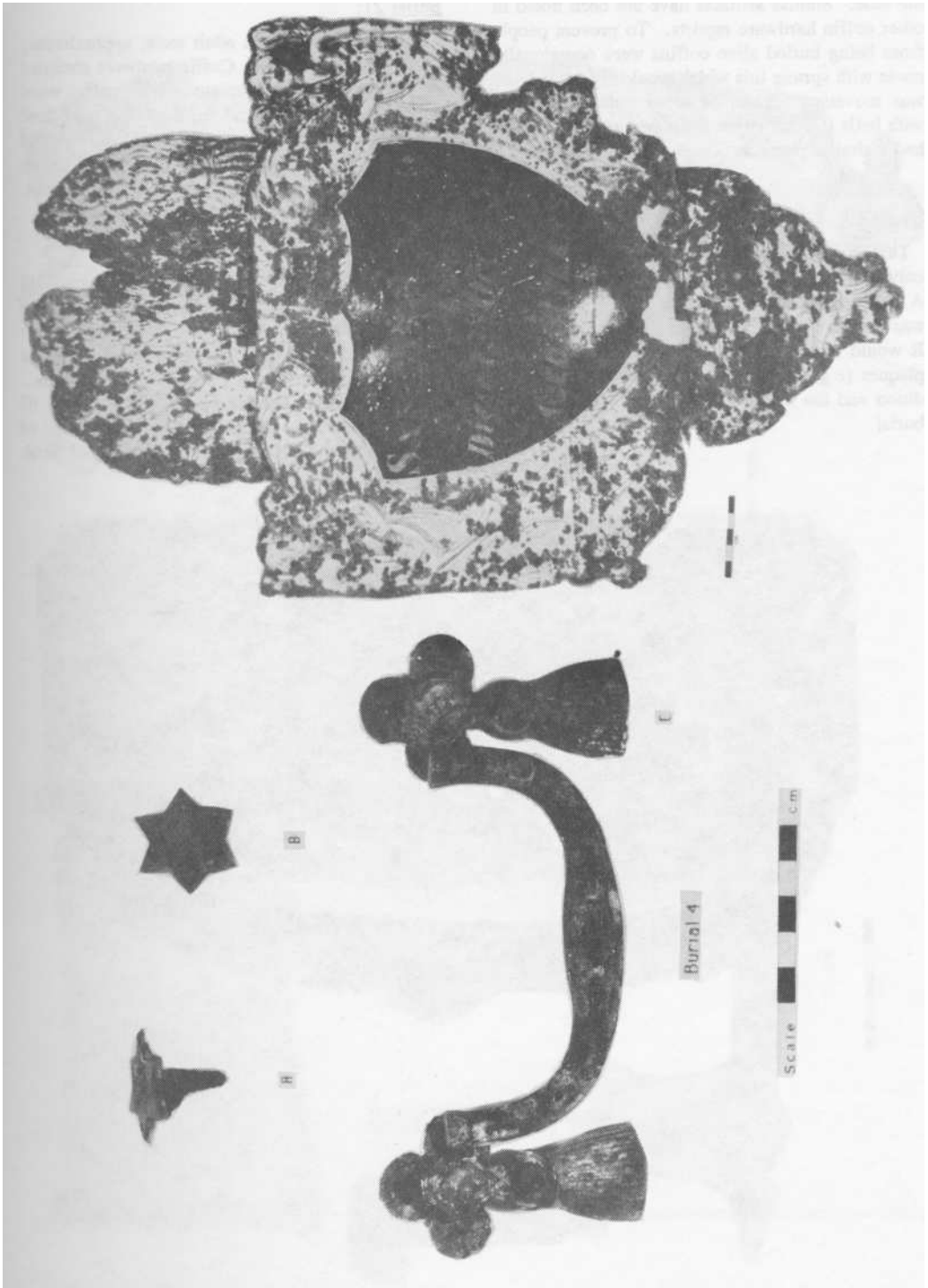


Figure 6. Burial 4: A and B - Studs; C - Swing Bail Coffin Handle

Figure 7. Coffin Plaque from Burial 6

the base. Similar artifacts have not been noted in other coffin hardware reports. To prevent people from being buried alive coffins were occasionally made with sprung lids which would fly off if there was movement inside, or some were constructed with bells (Coffin 1976: 106); perhaps this artifact had a similar purpose.

Burial 19:

This burial is of an adult male approximately seventy-two years of age whose identity is unknown. A badly fragmented and rusty iron coffin plaque was found, but the inscription was not discernible. It would have been similar in shape to the other plaques (e.g., Burial 6, Plaque 1). Its poor condition and the motif suggests that this is an early burial.

Burial 21:

This burial was of an adult male, approximately thirty-six years of age. Coffin hardware consisted of six handles and four studs with coffin wood attached, one with wood on the back, and three with wood on the front; they may have decorated the top of the coffin side and the lid was placed on top, or the coffin may have collapsed in on them.

Coffin Plaques:

It is unlikely that the coffin plaque (Fig. 10) recovered from the fill pile belongs with any of the burials described above. It is nearly identical to the plaque from Burial 6, except that it is smaller and in poorer condition. The inscription reads... "AMY STILES, Died June 13 1867, AGED 63 Yrs." This coffin plaque represents the burial of Amelia Stiles, the daughter of Edward and Sarah Stiles (senior).



Figure 8. Coffin Handle from Burial 8

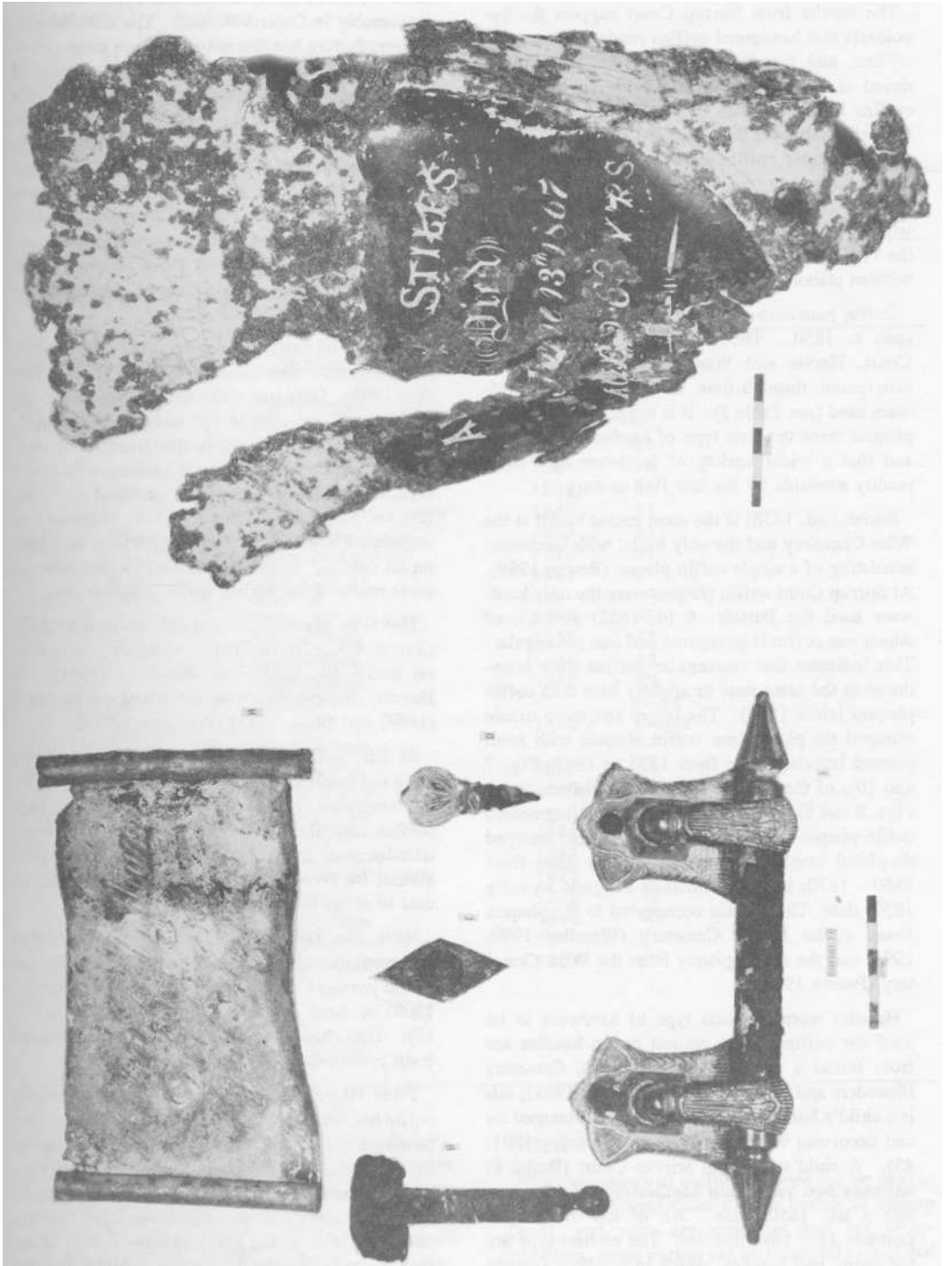


Figure 9. Burial 18: A - Plaque; B - Unknown; C - Stud; D - Thumbscrew; E - Short Bar Coffin Handle

Figure 10. Coffin Plaque Recovered from Fill Pile

Discussion:

The results from Stirrup Court support the hypothesis that hexagonal coffins predate rectangular coffins, and that rectangular coffins were introduced circa 1850. Six of the eleven hexagonal coffins have no coffin hardware, and one of the five with hardware dates to 1883 (Table 3). All of the rectangular coffins have coffin hardware, and all are thought to post-date 1850. One exception is Burial 9, an infant buried in a rectangular coffin without hardware, but in general it seems that in the 19th century newborns and infants were buried without elaborate coffins.

Coffin hardware was first used in southern Ontario c. 1850. The hardware from the Stirrup Court, Harvie and Wise Cemeteries, suggest a progression through time in the amount of hardware used (see Table 3). It is suggested that coffin plaques were the first type of hardware available, and that a wider variety of hardware was more readily available by the late 19th century.

Burial 1 (d. 1858) is the most recent burial at the Wise Cemetery and the only burial with hardware, consisting of a single coffin plaque (Pearce 1989). At Stirrup Court coffin plaques were the only hardware used for Burials 6 (d. 1855) and 19, of which one coffin is hexagonal and one rectangular. This indicates that rectangular coffins were introduced at the same time or slightly later than coffin plaques (circa 1850). The larger and more ornate stamped tin plated iron coffin plaques with hand painted lettering, date from 1855 to 1867 (Fig. 7 and 10); of the smaller white metal plaques (e.g., Figs. 8 and 9) the earliest is 1878. The fragmented coffin plaque (Burial 19) is of the larger, stamped tin-plated iron type, indicating that it dates from 1850 - 1870; its poor condition suggests an early 1850s date. These dates correspond to the plaques found at the Harvie Cemetery (Woodley 1990, 1991) and the single plaque from the Wise Cemetery (Pearce 1989).

Handles were the next type of hardware to be used for coffins. The earliest coffin handles are from Burial 2 (d. 1860) at the Harvie Cemetery (Saunders and Lazenby 1991; Woodley 1991); this is a child's burial and the handles were stamped tin and decorated with cherubs faces (Woodley 1991: 45). A child's coffin at Stirrup Court (Burial 8) has only two very plain handles (Fig. 6), suggesting a late 1850s date. All of the coffins that postdate 1860 have handles. The earliest type are the swing bail handles, which in southern Ontario seem to date from 1860, followed by short bar handles which date to the 1880s; both types continued to be used into the 20th century in the

United States (e.g., Rose 1985; Trinkley and Hacker-Norton 1984; Garrow and Symes 1987) and presumably in Ontario as well. The material used to manufacture handles may also have some chronological significance. Iron was used on some of the earliest handle examples at Stirrup Court (Burials 8 and 21), and the earliest handle at Harvie (Burial 8) was made of stamped tin. All of the silver plated white metal handles from Stirrup Court are late 19th century. The 1879 patent date for the handles used for Burial 18 suggest that short bar handles would have been available by the late 1870s. Their use only two years after the patent date also indicates a fairly rapid distribution of coffin hardware after manufacture.

White metal coffin screws are used at the Harvie Cemetery from the 1860s to the late 1870s (Woodley 1991). Only one white metal screw was found at Stirrup Court (Burial 18) which dates to 1881, but it was used with twenty-five stamped tin studs and was presumably left from earlier coffin construction. The less expensive stamped tin studs (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984: 36) were first introduced in the 1870s, after which they were used on all coffins. It seems that the less expensive tin studs replaced the earlier white metal screws.

The first glass viewing windows date to 1878 (Stirrup Court Burial 7) after which they were used on Burial 10 (1883), and Burial 18 (1881). At Harvie, viewing windows are found on Burials 7 (1894) and 14 (c. 1883) (Woodley 1991).

At Stirrup Court, escutcheons and thumbscrews were not used on Burial 7 which dates from 1878, but were used in 1881 (Burial 18) and on the later coffins (Burial 15, and Burial 10). At Harvie, thumbscrews and escutcheons post-date c.1883 (Burial 14) (Woodley 1991). Presumably caplifters date to about the same time period.

Nails can also be used to determine relative interment dates for coffins, i.e. whether the nails are of the wrought (17th - early 18th century), cut (c. 1800) or wire (c. 1870) variety (Loveday 1983: 15). Unfortunately too few nails were recovered from Stirrup Court to apply this method.

Table 10 provides a chronology of 19th century coffin hardware use for southern Ontario. It cannot be assumed that the coffin hardware represented at the Stirrup Court, Harvie and Wise cemeteries are the earliest examples of each type, but they can be used to establish a working chronology. At this point, because of the small sample size, it is not possible to separate the design motifs of the different hardware types, but in general it appears that the early hardware is plain and the later hardware is

Table 10 - Southern Ontario Coffin Hardware Chronology

Date (Approx.)	Hardware
c. 1850 - 1870	Large Stamped Tin-Plated Iron Coffin Plaques with painted inscriptions
c. 1860 >	Swing Bail Coffin Handles
c. 1860 - 1871	Decorative White Metal Coffin Screws and Tacks
c. 1870 >	Stamped Tin Studs
c. 1878 >	Smaller White Metal Coffin Plaques with engraved inscriptions
c. 1878 >	Short Bar Coffin Handles
c. 1878 >	Coffin Lid Viewing Windows
c. 1881 >	Thumbscrews/Caplifters and Escutcheons

Table 11 - Stirrup Court Burial Identity

Burial	Est. Age	Postulated Identity	Date	Age
1	5-7	Sophia Fennel or Ellen E. Stiles*	1840 1850	7 6
3	77+-	Sarah Stiles Sr.	1832	67
4	80+-	Walter Lawrence	1884	76
5	78 +-	Elizabeth Stiles or Sarah (Stiles) Hussey*	1833 1842	36 41
6	59+-	Sam--- G. A--ih (K)	1855	61
7	72+-	Sarah Lawrence (K)	1878	81
8	6-10	Harry E. Stiles	1861	9
9	infant	unknown	-	infant
10	46+-	William Hussey (K)	1883	45
11	36+-	Samuel Stiles Edward Stiles Jr. Stephen Stiles*	1828 1838 1846	23 43 40
12	infant	unknown	-	infant
13	infants	unknown	1880 >	infants
14	65+-	unknown male	-	-
15	NA	Sophia Stiles	1885	82
16	50+-	Edward E. Stiles Sr.	1830	64
17	76+-	unknown male	-	-
18	60+-	Helen Robotham (K)	1881	84
19	72+-	Samuel Platt (?)	1855	?
20	47 +-	Samuel Stiles Edward Stiles Jr.* Stephen Stiles	1828 1838 1846	23 43 40
21	36+-	unknown male	1870s >	-
Plaque 1	-	Amelia Stiles (K)	1867	63

* preferred identity

K = known identity

more elaborate with distinctive geometric designs. This change in coffin adornment is mainly an effect of the sudden availability of coffin hardware, but it may also be a part of changing attitudes towards death and the symbolic aspect of death, first noted from 18th century New England tombstones (Detlefsen and Deetz 1966, 1977; Ludwig 1966).

Burial Identity:

The chronology of coffin hardware can be used to estimate interment dates for the burials at Stirrup Court, and with age estimates and sex determinations, some burials can be tentatively identified (Table 11). There are more burials in the cemetery than Stiles family members, the family cemetery had become a community cemetery by 1870, and

not all of the burials were recovered as individuals (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986), making the identification of all burials impossible at this point. It should be noted that even though the early burials at Stirrup Court should all be family members, all burials may not have been recorded (in Tables 1 and 2), or some could be hired hands, etc. There are also discrepancies between estimated and actual age (Table 10), therefore, age estimates can only be used as a rough guide for identification.

At undisturbed 19th century cemeteries, I have observed that headstones indicate that husbands and wives are usually buried side by side. This pattern is also found at the Harvie (Saunders and Lazenby 1991) and Wise (Pearce 1989) family cemeteries. At Stirrup Court, Burials 7, Sarah Lawrence, and 4 (Male) are side by side (Fig. 2). The age at death and interment dates are within five years of one another, suggesting that Burial 4 is most likely that of Walter Lawrence, Sarah's husband. The side-by-side location of Burials 16 and 3, an elderly male and female in hexagonal coffins without hardware, suggests that these could be Edward Stiles Sr. (Burial 16) and Sarah Stiles Sr. (Burial 3), the family patriarch and matriarch.

William Hussey (Burial 10), Edward and Sarah Stiles' grandson, was buried in the row on the west side of the cemetery (Fig. 2). Except for William Hussey (aged forty-five) and possibly the disinterred individual in Burial 15, the burials in this row are children and infants, presumably Edward and Sarah Sr.'s children, grandchildren or great grandchildren, suggesting that this part of the cemetery was where the majority of the Stiles family members were buried. Following this reasoning and the coffin hardware evidence, indicating an 1880s date, Burial 15 could be Sophia Stiles (1802 - 1885), or possibly Elizabeth (Stiles) Shrapnell (1838 - 1891); there is no record of Elizabeth's burial at Stirrup Court (see Tables 1 and 2). The hexagonal coffin and the absence of hardware indicates that the child in Burial 1 pre-dates 1850, and therefore could be seven year old Sophia Fennell (d. 1840), or possibly six year old Ellen E. Stiles (d. 1850). The hardware for the child in Burial 8 included only two very plain coffin handles, suggesting it was early (c. 1860) and implying that Burial 8 could be that of nine year old Harry E. Stiles (d. 1861). There are no records of the infants in Burials 13 and 9. The excellent condition of the studs from Burial 13 indicate a late burial; studs are found only on coffins that post-date 1870. Therefore the two infants in Burial 13 were not the twins (d. 1833) of Elizabeth (Kent) Stiles (d.1833) who apparently died in childbirth. No other twins are recorded in

the family records. The post-1880 date, after the cemetery was used as a community cemetery, suggests that the twins could have been members of another family, but they were buried with the Stiles family members. As mentioned, infant or newborn deaths were often not recorded, nor was coffin hardware often used.

Identifying the remainder of the burials is mainly guess-work. If Burials 16 and 3 are Edward and Sarah Stiles, than Burial 5, an elderly female in a plain hexagonal coffin situated at their feet, could be one of their daughters, either Elizabeth (d. 1833) or Sarah Jr. (d. 1842). Another possibility is that Burial 5 is Elizabeth (Kent) Stiles (d. 1831), but if she died giving birth to twins they would most likely have been buried with her. For example, Burial 13 at the Harvie Cemetery contained Janet McArthur Harvie and her newborn baby (Saunders and Lazenby 1991), and an 1830s burial from Breslau held an adult female and a newborn infant (M. Spence, pers. comm. 1990). Elizabeth (Kent) Stiles could also have been buried elsewhere with her husband.

All rectangular coffins, both at the Harvie Cemetery (Woodley 1991) and at Stirrup Court, have hardware and therefore the coffins of unknown shape without hardware are probably early and most likely hexagonal. Because the cemetery was not used as a community cemetery until after 1870 (Cook, Gibbs and Spence 1986; Wm. Fox pers. comm., 1990), the unidentified burials without hardware (pre-1850) are most likely all Stiles family members or people closely associated with the family. This suggests that the adult males buried in the plain hexagonal coffin of Burial 20, and the plain unidentified coffin of Burial 11, could be Samuel Stiles (d. 1828), Edward Stiles Jr. (d. 1-838), or Stephen Stiles (d.1846). The age estimates for the plain hexagonal coffins of Burial 14 (65+-) and Burial 17 (72+-) are too old for Samuel, Edward Jr. and Stephen Stiles. Burial 19 (72+-) had a single plaque (c. 1850s) and therefore could be Samuel Platt (d. 1855), for whom I have no age, but since he married a granddaughter of Edward and Sarah Sr., this is unlikely unless he was much older than she was when they married. Only further investigation can make burial identification more specific.

For some of the burials it is not clear who is buried where (Table 11). It is also evident, based on the chronology of coffins and coffin hardware, that not all of the Stiles family members are buried at Stirrup Court. I do not have the birth and death dates of some family members, such as Robert Fennell, Mary Ann Fennell, --- Hussey, or for Ann Stiles (1800 - ?), and there are husbands and wives

unaccounted for. Presumably some family members would have married, moved, eventually died and been buried elsewhere. As well, there are other individuals (e.g., Walter and Sarah Lawrence, Sam--G--th, and Helen Robotham) buried at Stirrup Court, for whom I have no record.

Hardware Manufacture:

The coffin hardware recovered from the Stirrup Court Cemetery is either identical or closely resembles that from the Harvie Cemetery (Woodley 1991) and the plaque from the Wise Cemetery (Pearce 1989). It is also similar to hardware from cemeteries in the southern United States; for example, the Mount Pleasant cemetery, Charleston County, South Carolina (Trinkley and Hacker-Norton 1984), the Big Lazer Creek cemetery, Talbot County, Georgia (Garrow and Symes 1987), and the Cedar Grove Baptist Church cemetery, Arkansas (Rose 1985). Similar, unused late 19th century coffin hardware has been described for the A.L. Calhoun hardware store in Clio, South Carolina (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984). This similarity suggests that most coffin hardware came from a few manufacturers and/or distributors, and that the distribution was fairly rapid (e.g., the handles from Burial 18). And apparently, new hardware types were used as they became available. Burials, therefore, reflect the fashion of their day, with families ensuring their relatives receive a "proper" burial.

Cost should have been the most important factor involved when deciding what items were to be fixed to a coffin. Most decorative coffin paraphernalia (eg., studs) are manufactured of inexpensive stamped tin (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984: 11-12; Woodley 1991: 48). Handle cost is reflected more in whether the hardware is made of white metal, plated white metal, or, rarely, brass (Hacker-Norton and Trinkley 1984: 11-12). Therefore the more elaborate coffins with an abundance of hardware do not necessarily indicate an expensive burial; most of this elaborate white metal or stamped tin hardware would be analogous to inexpensive costume jewellery.

Inferred Status:

Prehistoric archaeologists regard cemeteries and burials as important sources of social and political information. As will be shown, based on the chronology and identity of burials at Stirrup Court, this is not necessarily the case for 19th century cemeteries. Burial location (Fig. 2) provides clues

to the identity of individuals but not to their status. As at the Harvie cemetery (Woodley 1991: 48), most of the early 19th century coffins at Stirrup Court have no hardware, and therefore cannot be used to infer status. But there is evidence against determining that all of the coffins without hardware are early. The late 19th century St. Barnabas Cemetery, in Medicine Hat, Alberta, had both hexagonal and rectangular shaped coffins but only glass viewing windows were present (Finnigan 1981); but coffin hardware may not have been readily available in a frontier town. At the 19th century Uxbridge Almhouse Burial Ground, a pauper's cemetery in southeastern Massachusetts, only a few hinges and some plate glass viewing windows were recorded (Bell 1990). These paupers were buried by the community without charge and the costs were kept to a minimum and therefore hardware was not used. There are evidently regional and social differences in the quantity and types of coffin hardware used. Even so, the evidence from the Stirrup Court, Harvie and Wise Cemeteries would suggest that the burials without hardware all date to the early 19th century.

The hardware chronology indicates that not all hardware types were uniformly available or used through time. Therefore estimations of status cannot be based on the quantity of hardware pre-sent, and it is only possible to infer status between burials with similar dates. For example, the two most elaborate coffins at Stirrup Court, the 1881 coffin of Helen Robotham (Burial 18) and the 1883 coffin of William Hussey (Burial 10) both have large quantities of hardware. But this does not suggest these people had more status than the others. The similarity of hardware indicates that these burials display the norm for coffin decoration by the 1880s. It is suggested that both of these coffins were fairly expensive because similar silver-plated ware was used. Another possible economic indicator may be that coffin plaques were not uniformly used on all post-1850 coffins. Why do some have plaques while others do not? Or, why are there differences between the quantity of handles used on some coffins? Is this use-oriented behaviour (coffins for small people) or are handles too expensive? And why are infants generally interred without hardware? Unfortunately it cannot be determined yet whether there are economic or social answers to these questions.

In conclusion, the cemetery should be analysed as a series of isolated interments through time, each adorned after the fashion of its day based on the availability of coffin hardware. With the time difference evident between burials, it is impossible to compare directly coffins with lots of hardware to

those with little or none. Intra- and inter-site status can only be determined by comparing hardware between burials of about the same date, and status is indicated by the quality of hardware, not the quantity. This will only be confirmed by examining more extensive collections from larger cemeteries. This also suggests that if a model based on a unilateral correlation between the presence and absence of grave inclusions does not work for historic cemeteries, than analysing status from prehistoric cemeteries based on a similar assumption may be somewhat simplistic.

Summary and Conclusions:

This description of an historic cemetery has used artifact types, spatial location, skeletal information and historic documents to determine a chronology of coffin shape and hardware for 19th century southern Ontario. It has shown that coffin hardware in conjunction with coffin shape can determine relative interment dates, that rectangular coffins were introduced at about the same time or shortly after coffin hardware, and that coffin hardware in southern Ontario postdates 1850. Coffin hardware types and styles change through time, resulting in a chronology of hardware types for 19th century southern Ontario. This chronology was used in conjunction with skeletal and historical data to determine the relative date of interment and the identity of individuals buried at the Stirrup Court Cemetery. It has not been entirely successful, but it is a beginning. It is noteworthy that status cannot be inferred solely from the presence or absence of coffin hardware, but only by comparing the hardware from burials of about the same date.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Michael Spence, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Western Ontario, for allowing me to analyse the Stirrup Court Cemetery coffin hardware, providing information about the site, and for editing an earlier draft of this report; Mike's comments and criticisms were most helpful. I would also like to thank Mr. William Fox, of the Ministry of Culture and Communications, for providing access to his field notes, the field map, and unpublished historical information, Dr. Susan Pfeiffer, School of Human Biology, University of Guelph, for allowing me to use her unpublished age estimates, and Mr. Stephen Loring, University of South Carolina, for sending me copies of cemetery reports from the southern United States.

References Cited:

- Bell, Edward L.
1990 The Historical Archaeology of Mortuary Behaviour: Coffin Hardware from Uxbridge, Massachusetts. Historical Archaeology 24(3): 54-78.
- Blakely, Robert L. and Lane A. Beck
1982 Bioarchaeology in the Urban Context. In Archaeology of Urban America: The Search For Pattern and Process. New York: Academic Press pp. 175 - 207.
- Coffin, Margaret M.
1976 Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning. Nashville, New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers.
- Cook, Megan, Linda Gibbs, and Michael Spence
1986 Age and Sex Identification in the Stirrup Court Cemetery. In Studies in Southwestern Ontario Archaeology. London: London Chapter of the Ontario Archaeology Society. pp. 107 - 116.
- Dethlefsen, Edwin S.
1981 The Cemetery and Culture Change: Archaeological Focus and Ethnographic Perspective. In Modern Material --- Culture: The Archaeology of Us. Richard A. Gould and Michael B. Schiffer, editors. New York: Academic Press. pp. 137 - 159.
- Dethlefsen, Edwin S. and James Deetz
1966 Death's Heads, Cherubs and Willow Trees: Experimental Archaeology In Colonial Cemeteries. American Antiquity 31 (4): 502 - 510.
- 1977 Death's Heads, Cherubs and Willow Trees. In Passing: The Vision of Death In America. Charles. O. Jackson, editor. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. pp. 48 - 60.
- Finnigan, James T.
1981 St. Barnabas Burials: Salvage Excavations At A Late 19th Century Cemetery. NA'PAO: A Saskatchewan Anthropological Journal 11(1-2): 41-48.

- Garrow, Patrick H. and Steven A. Symes
1987 **The Big Lazer Creek Unmarked Cemetery: A Multidisciplinary Investigation.** Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author.
- Habenstein, Robert W. and William M. Lamers
1977 The Pattern Of Late Nineteenth--Century Funerals. In Passing: The Vision of Death in America. Charles O. Jackson, editor. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press. pp. 91 - 102.
- Hacker-Norton, Debi and Michael Trinkley
1984 Remember Man Though Art Dust: Coffin Hardware of the Early Twentieth Century. Columbia, South Carolina: Chicora Foundation, Inc. Research Series 2.
- Hanks, Carole
1974 Early Ontario -- Gravestones. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited.
- Lazenby, Richard A., Lindsay Oliver and Shelley R. Saunders
1989 The Use Of Rib Histomorphometry As An Aid In The Personal Identification Of Unknown Skeletons. Canadian Society for Forensic Science Journal 22(3): 261 - 271.
- Loveday, Amos J. Jr.
1983 The Rise And Decline Of The American Cut Nail Industry: A Study of the Interrelationships of Technology, Business Organization and Management Techniques. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Ludwig, Allen I.
1966 Graven Images: New England Stone Carving and Its Symbols, 1650 - 1815. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Osborne, Brian S.
1974 The Cemeteries of the Midland District of Upper Canada: A Note on Mortality in a Frontier Society. Pioneer America 6 (1): 46 - 55.
- Pearce, Robert J.
1989 Excavation of the Wise Family Pioneer Cemetery, Part 1. In Excavation of the Wise Family Pioneer Cemetery and Homestead, Lot 17, Concession 2, Town of Richmond Hill. Unpublished report in the possession of the author.
- Rose, Jerome C. (editor)
1985 Gone To A Better Land: A Biohistory Of A Rural Black Cemetery In The Post-Reconstruction South. Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series No. 25.
- Saunders, Shelley R. and Richard Lazenby, editors
1991 The Links That Bind: The Nineteenth Century Harvie Family Burying Ground. Occasional Papers in Northeastern Archaeology, No. 5. Copetown Press.
- Trinkley, Michael and Debi Hacker-Norton
1984 Analysis of Coffin Hardware From 38CH778, Charleston County, South Carolina. Columbia, S.C.: Chicora Foundation, Inc. Research Series 3.
- Ubelaker, Douglas H.
1989 Human Skeletal Remains: Excavation, Analysis, Interpretation. Second Edition. Washington: Taraxacum Manuals On Archaeology 2.
- Woodley, Philip J.
1990 You Can't Take It With You: The Harvie And Stirrup Court Cemeteries. Paper presented at the CAA conference, Whitehorse.
1991 Harvie Coffin Hardware and Artifact Analysis. In The Links That Bind: The Nineteenth Century Harvie Family Burying Ground. Edited by Shelley R. Saunders and Richard Lazenby. Occasional Papers in Northeastern Archaeology, No. 5. Copetown Press. pp. 41-55.

Philip J. Woodley
405 - 255 Bold St., Hamilton, Ontario U P 1W1