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Late Gothic/Renaissance Art

An amateur actress uncovered a 500-year-old long-lost vault at a historic church after accidentally putting her foot through the floor tiles during rehearsals.



Kathy Mills exposed the entrance to the secret chamber that had been hidden for centuries as she rehearsed a scene for a production of the musical *Quasimodo* at St. Mary's Church, in Redgrave, Suffolk. She dislodged a marble flagstone near the altar of the 14th-century building and her foot vanished into a dark void below. Though she suffered a swollen ankle, it was worth it to be told she had uncovered a mystery tomb containing coffins thought to contain the remains of the village's aristocracy stretching back centuries. "They lifted it up (the flagstone) and you could just see some mud and sand underneath. It's possible my foot went down eight inches. I wondered where I was going. It was quite a shock. I was thrilled when they told me I had discovered this vault they did not know was there. One or two people have now started calling me the Tomb Raider."

Rumors had been rife for decades that an intriguing labyrinth of passages and tombs lay under the ancient slabs of the church, now owned by The Churches Conservation Trust. Bob Hayward, chairman of Redgrave Church Heritage Trust, said stories had passed through the generations of how people walked through the tunnels as recently as the 1920s, but records of their existence could not be found.

Now the damaged flagstones (caused by rotted timbers under the floor tiles) were lifted up and a light lowered down where a tunnel was discovered with a set of steps descending into the ground visible in one direction and a cluster of about six coffins tucked inside a dark chamber in the other. The coffins are thought to belong to descendants of the local ruling Holt family. Sir John Holt became lord of the manor in 1703 and an imposing memorial to his life sits above the newly uncovered vault. But the chamber is believed to have been built deep in the 1500s by the Bacon family although their remains are located in another tomb beneath the

church's font. Mr. Hayward said: "It's exciting. You think you know these places but you don't until something like this happens."

Re-written from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/7887511/Actress-uncovers-500-year-old-church-vault-by-accident.html>