

blow, inflicted by a very sharp implement".¹⁴ The purpose of the exhumation satisfied, the parts were returned to the coffin which was then closed.

The coffin having been closed the fourth cervical vertebra was retained and came into the possession of Halford who had it mounted and used to show it as a curiosity to his dinner guests. Halford gave a detailed account to his grandson of how he came by the vertebra, saying that after the coffin had been closed three items were not replaced—the half vertebra, a tooth, and a portion of King Charles' beard. The Prince Regent said that it was not worth re-opening the coffin, and handing them to Halford said, "...these are more in your line than mine, you had better keep them".⁹

The medical gossip Clarke gives a different account, obtained from "...a physician of high repute...now lately deceased". Clarke wrote, "Halford found means to detach and purloin that portion of the fourth cervical vertebra which had been cut through by the axe; that he kept it as a curiosity; used to pass it around the dinner table after dinner for the examination of his guests."¹⁵

This latter account implies a criminal act by Halford, an offence that was also cited by Hill.³ Newman wrote in Halford's defence. He points out that the number of people present would have made it difficult, if not impossible, for Halford to secrete the artefact; additionally Dean Legge gave him a piece of paper in which to wrap the artefacts which bore the Dean's address, and this was noted by Dean Davidson when preparing a box for the relics before its reburial.⁹

The implication is that Halford obtained the vertebra by honest means. He treated it with reverence and constructed a box made of lignum vitae with the inscription "...see the very neckbone of King Charles I, alas cut off by iron (a sword) 1648 and in addition the Royal Beard".¹⁷ (The year 1648 is quoted both by Munk² and Halford¹⁴ and is clearly an error.)

With the death of Sir Henry, his grandson Sir Henry St John Halford, the third baronet, inherited the relics. He and his brother had no heirs so they were concerned as to what might become of them. Halford's grandson decided that they should be returned to the Royal family. The Prince of Wales received the relics apparently reluctantly.⁹ With Queen Victoria's permission the relics were replaced in the coffin of King Charles I. The Dean of Windsor had a leaden casket prepared which had the following inscription: "The relics in this case were taken from the coffin of King Charles I on April 1st 1813, by Sir Henry Halford, Physician to King George III. They were

by his grandson Sir Henry St. John Halford given to H.R.H. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales. On December 13th 1888 they were replaced by H.R.H. in this vault, their original resting place."¹⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Sir Henry Halford, despite his detractors, was clearly a respected physician. He apparently knew little of the basic sciences but was an accomplished Latin scholar, in his later years composing verse in Latin. Like many famous men he was maligned by those envious of him. The serious charge that he "purloined" the fourth cervical vertebra of King Charles I cannot be substantiated. Halford died at his home in Curzon Street, Mayfair, and was buried in the parish church at Wistow—his country seat. A memorial to him was erected there.¹

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Correction

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D J M Macdonald, C J Tollan, I Robertson, *et al.* Massive haemorrhage after a low-energy pubic ramus fracture in a 71-year-old woman. (*Postgrad Med J* 2006;**82**:e25). In this article the fourth author appears as B S Rana; the author usually uses B Rana as his publishing name.