



## MYSTERY OF BURIAL VAULT AT LITTLEBURY

Standing grouped round the vault as it is opened are (left to right) the Dowager Lady Braybrooke, the Rural Dean, Mr. Dickinson, P.C. F. Weightman and a "Weekly News" reporter.

**T**HE discovery of a bricked vault in the nave of Littlebury Church caused some excitement in clerical circles in Saffron Walden on Tuesday. Workmen restoring the flooring reported their find and rumours circulated that the vault contained medieval remains.

On Tuesday afternoon the Rural Dean (Canon M. R. Sinker) visited the church to inspect the discovery, accompanied by Mr. P. G. M. Dickinson, F.S.A., the well-known historian and archaeologist.

### MEDIEVAL SKULL.

On arrival they found a hole one foot square had been broken in the roof of the vault, which lay at the east end of the nave on the south side—below a pew regularly occupied by the Dowager Lady Braybrooke.

About two feet below the roof of the vault the remains of a skull could be clearly seen in a lidless coffin, but when more of the roof was removed, another skull was seen, together with a number of bones. There was no trace of clothing or shrouding. The mystery grew as Mr. Dickinson pronounced the brickwork to be not more than 100 years old. Further examination revealed that although one skull and some bones

were undoubtedly of great age, probably medieval, the other skull and bones were not so old.

The lid was found in several pieces neatly packed on either side of the coffin, whilst the coffin itself contained a heap of rubble at one end. After questioning those watching the operations, Mr. Dickinson said it appeared that when restoration work had been carried out almost a century ago when the chancel was rebuilt, the bones had been discovered. Conveniently handy was the unused vault. The bones were placed in

what was evidently an exhumed coffin and re-interred in the vault. Hence the absence of clothing or other materials, except shrouding studs and handles.

Mr. Dickinson said that it was customary for a priest to be buried near the high altar and possibly the oldest skull was that of a former priest. As far as the other skull and bones were concerned, he said it was quite a common practice for yeomen and others to be buried in the nave.

The existence of graves in the nave was known many years ago when the present heating apparatus was installed, for the workmen of the time were warned that the pipe could not go under the floor "because of the bones."