On the left and above are the skull and reconstruction of a woman believed to be one of the earliest English females in the settlement of Jamestown.

For over a decade, Doug Owsley (on left), forensic anthropologist at the Smithsonian, has been studying the bones of America’s early colonists. This double burial is the grave of two men buried in James Fort, on Jamestown Island, in 1607.

**Written in Bone**

**FORENSIC FILES OF THE 17TH CENTURY CHESAPEAKE**

The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the largest and most visited natural history museum in the world, will hold an exhibition, opening Winter 2009, that explores how forensic science is expanding our understanding of life in 17th century America.

What can we learn from bones? From burials? The answers, gathered from state-of-the-art scientific skeletal analysis, are remarkably detailed, often previously unexplained – and eminently suited for presentation in a dynamic object- and media-rich exhibition.

Until fairly recently, we could only piece together the story of the early Chesapeake colonists from historical documents. For visitors, *Written in Bone* will vividly demonstrate how the mysteries “locked” in our own skeleton and those hundreds of years old can be revealed. With the application of sophisticated modern forensic anthropology, archaeology, and historical research to recently excavated 17th century remains, the colonists themselves can tell their stories – a legacy written in bone.
An innovative view of history from the perspective of skeletal biology, forensic anthropology and archaeology will provide the visitor an extraordinary glimpse into the personal lives of 17th century colonists – their occupations and physical activities, healthcare, diets, diseases, causes of death, burial practices, and in some cases their personal identities.

Evidence suggests that the individual to the left is Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, an explorer and backer of the Jamestown settlement who died two months after his arrival to the island. His remains were discovered near James Fort in a formal burial. The investigation into his identity will be featured in the exhibition.

This 17th century surgical drill from Virginia is similar to the instrument used in the procedure evident on the skull fragment to the right.

Skeletal remains provide unique insights into medical care in colonial America. The circular cuts on this skull fragment from Jamestown show an aborted surgical procedure called trephination. Additional cuts in the bone indicate an autopsy was also conducted.

This program is in partnership with the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities; Historic St. Mary’s City, MD; Colonial Williamsburg, VA; Anne Arundel County’s Lost Towns Project, MD; Museum of London, UK; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture; and The History Channel.

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