

Sheriff Hutton: the Great Debate

PAULINE ROUTH AND RICHARD KNOWLES

A POPULAR THEORY assumes an authority proportionate to its longevity, and when at last the cold winds of reason start to blow, it hugs its ancient tatters more closely around it and turns its back to the blast. That the Sheriff Hutton monument is that of Edward of Middleham, is such a theory. The issues at Sheriff Hutton are clear-cut enough, and we feel were adequately presented in our original article.¹

However, 'Sheriff Hutton: Historic Doubts Reconsidered' by P. W. Hammond and W. E. Hampton² cannot pass unchallenged, if only because some statements in it are to say the least imprecise, and others so diffuse as to render any conclusion obscure. We feel that some of their arguments, particularly those regarding the original construction of the tomb, even if the evidence were sufficient to draw valid conclusions, were irrelevant to the matter in hand: the identification of the effigy.

Nevertheless, the question of construction having arisen, it should be said that the term 'altar tomb' as defined by Hammond and Hampton indicates a basic misunderstanding at the outset. As defined by Chambers' *Dictionary*, it is 'a monumental memorial, in form like an altar'; that is, like a table, the flat top being the essential characteristic, not the number of its sides. We can instance no example of an alabaster tomb that was originally three-sided against a wall (tombs built into wall niches and under canopies are in a different category), and there is insufficient evidence, in view of the vicissitudes undergone by the Sheriff Hutton monument through the centuries, to enable the conclusion to be drawn that it was thus originally constructed. The vertical projections mentioned by Hammond and Hampton are not ornately carved, being the remains of buttresses similar to those between the other niches such as can be seen on many 'Gothic' tomb-chests throughout the fifteenth century.

Medieval tomb construction is not yet fully understood, but study of surviving monuments and of the dismantling work recently carried out at Harewood, show that there was often a chamfered edge along the top of the panels, which served to mask the unsightly edge of the effigy slab, and sometimes bore an inscription, either carved into the alabaster or inlaid on a brass or latten fillet. Certainly the metal studs (there are three only, all on the side panel) may indicate the erstwhile existence of such an inscription at Sheriff Hutton, but this does not make unlikely a pre-1450 date for the tomb, as earlier examples survive, notable among which are those of the Black Prince at Canterbury (1376), Richard II at Westminster (1395) and William of Wykeham at Winchester (1404). The original inscription on Judge Gascoigne's tomb at Harewood (1419) is also believed to have been on latten.³ The only firm conclusion to be drawn is that their chance of survival is greater on more important, and thus 'protected', tombs.

It is our contention that the present condition of the Sheriff Hutton tomb rules out any definite theory as to how or where it originally may have been constructed, but a balance of comparable evidence would seem to indicate a free-standing altar tomb either in the chancel or in the south aisle, where we know there was a chantry chapel founded by the Nevilles around the time the aisles were added to the church in the middle of the fourteenth century,⁴ and in the windows of which Torre describes several Neville shields of arms. The position of the chapel, west of the chancel bays, is indicated still by the piscina in the south wall. The Gower chapel was added east of this in the late-middle fifteenth century.⁵ There is even a very remote possibility that the tomb was originally sited in the chapel of Sheriff Hutton castle. We have so far found no evidence that Glover saw it in the church at his 1584/5 Visitation, though he mentions the Thweng monument.⁶

The same reservation applies to the effigy. Its present condition cannot be used as evidence in determining its original position. It is true that the side against the wall shows more 'damage', but it is damage consistent with exposure to damp and weathering, not to wear or violence—the griffin by the head on this side is less damaged than that on the other.

Hammond and Hampton state that 'no-one explicitly describes the tomb as in pieces until Churchill in 1934 . . .'⁷ and seem reluctant to believe that it was so at the times of the earlier accounts. Apart from the Blore drawing of 1820, Todd in 1824 says 'It is placed in the bottom of the window . . . there is also a shield placed above the head, on which is a plain cross.' He then describes the side panel and adds 'This sculpture appears to be distinct from the monument above . . . and is placed a little below the window'.⁸ And surely Torre's description of the 'short image of a man . . . on either side 2 escocheons in both arg^t a cross gu.' is explicit enough?

As reasons for material and workmanship of inferior quality, Hammond and Hampton speculate variously on Richard's preoccupation with other matters, the dangers of carrying out the work after his death, and the possibility that the monument was intended to be a temporary one.⁹ They do not attempt to reconcile these with their later assertion that 'The tomb is elaborately carved, and is worthy of a person of rank, far more worthy indeed than if the tomb had been built for a virtually unknown son of even a powerful family'.¹⁰

We have always accepted that there is a wide tolerance in the dating of costume,¹¹ and it is a fact that instances of a hair-style short enough to show the ears can be found later in the fifteenth century, shorter certainly than that shown in the two manuscript representations of Edward of Middleham, but we venture to assert that it is not the very short 'bowl-crop' of the first half of the century as portrayed at Sheriff Hutton. It is untrue to state that the tomb 'is in such poor condition that one cannot be categorical'¹² about the hair-style. One can, and direct comparison with the effigies of Henry IV (1412) at Canterbury and Thomas Fitzalan (1415) at Arundel, makes a clear case.¹³ The damaged condition of the head-covering on the other hand, and the faults in the alabaster do tend to give the appearance of a coronet, but the question of who could or could not wear one (we feel it advisable to allow the same tolerance in this respect as in that of costume and hairstyle) is irrelevant when we consider that the earliest account we have of the effigy, Dodsworth's in 1623, describes the head-covering as a 'capp of

mayntenance'.¹⁴ Dugdale, though we feel it must be accepted that his account is a mere copy of Dodsworth's, describes it as a ducal cap.¹⁵ Torre in 1690, misquoted by Hammond and Hampton, called it 'a round cap or coronet'.¹⁶ The *Victoria County History* says that the effigy is 'wearing a curious cap'.¹⁷ It seems that when the tomb was damaged or dismantled, the head-covering became unrecognisable. The fact remains that Dodsworth in 1623 had no problem—he saw a 'capp'. It was clearly not a coronet.

The apparent inconsistencies in the heraldry of the monument and the glass have already been adequately covered in 'Sheriff Hutton: Historic Doubts.' The conclusions of Hammond and Hampton seem to hinge on the tomb's being three-sided (a premise we are unable to accept), and, as in the past, on a re-assessment of Dodsworth's notes. We do not consider that they have *satisfactorily* explained why the Duke of Gloucester's arms should be on the Prince of Wales's monument, nor why Dodsworth in describing the 'Midle Quayre window' should blazon the Montacute/Neville shield, but omit the Royal Arms, which we know to have been there also.

Hammond and Hampton's account of Dodsworth's Beauchamp/Newburgh shield is contrivance carried to inordinate lengths. They cannot find room for it on their three-sided tomb-chest, so they consign it to the window with the Neville coat, reserving the Royal Arms to the tomb. And yet they admit that the Royal Arms must also have been in the window, though even there they are guilty of mis-quotation. 'The one coat which we do know from Gill and Todd was once in the window, France and England quarterly . . .'¹⁸ Both nineteenth century writers describe the fragment as 'part of the Royal Arms of England',¹⁹ and this presents a reasonable explanation as to why neither mentions the Duke of Gloucester's label—surely it can be assumed that it was the lower part of the shield which survived? This too was presumably what Torre saw in 1690, not in an 'unspecified' window as Hammond and Hampton assert, but, as we made clear, in the middle quire window.²⁰ He was in the chancel—the 'midle quyre'—and when he had described the memorials (which are still there and identifiable) he says that in the window—the middle quire window—there were 2 old coats, one 'gu. 3 Lyons of Engl^d or.' We can make an educated guess that in the second were the three fleurs de lys of France.

Viewed objectively, all inconsistency disappears. Torre, Todd and Gill certify the Royal Arms to be in the glass. Dodsworth has the Montacute/Neville arms both in the glass and on the monument, and then blazons the differenced Royal Arms and Beauchamp/Newburgh. Is not the simplest and most reasonable interpretation that he was ascribing all three to the glass, and that they represented the union of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and Anne Neville?

Ultimately the identity of the effigy depends upon the interpretation of what Dodsworth saw. Unless the heraldry can beyond reasonable doubt be assigned to the monument, it can never be established as that of Edward of Middleham, and to continue to assert that it is, is to cloud the issue with conjecture that owes more to romantic wishful thinking than historical evidence. There is nothing to be gained by further rumination over the significance of the St. George's cross. Comparison of 'Sheriff Hutton: Historic Doubts Reconsidered', p.279, Hammond's *Edward of Middleham*, p.26, and Hampton's *Memorials of the Wars of the Roses*, p.231, affords plenty of scope for alternative, if somewhat contradictory, interpretations.

We are indebted to Hammond and Hampton for providing us with a reference, not only to the existence of Ralph, son of Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, but to the fact that he was buried at Sheriff Hutton—'*Radulphus, mortuus, apud Shirefhoton sepultus*'²¹—strengthening what was at best only a tentative ascription of Dodsworth's 'neat monument of alabaster'. As they say, 'We have to ask ourselves who died near Sheriff Hutton, of high rank, of at the very least Neville/Salisbury blood, whose tomb is not known.'²² They themselves seem to be subscribing to the probable answer.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Pauline Routh and Richard Knowles, Sheriff Hutton: Historic Doubts, *Ricardian*, Vol. V, No. 70, September, 1980, pp.235–242.
2. *Ricardian*, Vol. V, No. 71, December, 1980, pp.274–281.
3. T. D. Whitaker, *Loidis and Elmete* (1816), p.170.
4. *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1354–58*, p.510.
5. *Victoria County History: North Riding*, Vol. II (1923), p.184.
6. British Library: Add. Ms. 18011, fo.259.
7. Hammond and Hampton *op. cit.*, n.3.
8. George Todd, *Some account of Sheriff Hutton Castle* (York 1824), pp.45–6.
9. Hammond and Hampton, pp.275, 280, n.6.
10. *Ibid.*, p.279.
11. Routh and Knowles *op. cit.*, p.240.
12. Hammond and Hampton, p.276.
13. C. A. Stothard, *Monumental effigies of Great Britain* (1817), plates 102, 103, 105, 106; E. Blore, *Monumental Remains of Noble and Eminent Persons* (1826), plates 18, 20; F. H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments A.D. 1150–1550* (London 1933), pp.173, 185; L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: the Middle Ages* (1972), plate 155(A).
14. Bodleian Library: Dodsworth MS. 160, fo.210.
15. Hammond and Hampton, p.276.
16. Routh and Knowles, p.239.
17. *Victoria County History op. cit.*, p.185.
18. Hammond and Hampton, p.278.
19. Todd *op. cit.*, p.43; T. Gill, *Vallis Eboracensis* (1852), p.428.
20. Routh and Knowles, p.239.
21. *Genealogist*, New Series, Vol. 3 (1886), p.111.
22. Hammond and Hampton, p.279.