Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury: the Burghfield Effigy

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THE CRAFTSMEN of a Midland alabaster workshop, very possibly Burton-on-Trent, were responsible for a group of widely scattered mid-fifteenth century monumental effigies, with very marked characteristics. Sir John Chideock and his lady at Christchurch, Hampshire (now Dorset), and the tomb of Lord Hungerford in Salisbury Cathedral, are probably the best-known of these. Also in the group are Baron Fitzwalter and his wife at Little Dunmow, Essex, the mutilated figures of Sir Thomas Greene and lady at Greens Norton, Northants., and the finely preserved effigies of Lionel, Lord Welles, who was killed at Towton in 1461, and his first wife, at Methley, in Yorkshire.

It can be seen that the workshop was patronised by families of some consequence; understandably so, as the craftsmanship evidenced in design and execution is very fine. It is not surprising therefore, to find that the effigy appropriated to Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, now in Burghfield Church, Berkshire, in spite of much damage, still exhibits some of the characteristics of the same workshop style. The lady's effigy lying alongside is of the same material, but her head-dress, a wide crespine with box-like 'cauls' over the ears, and short veiling down the back, seems to indicate a dating earlier in the fifteenth century. Her head lies on double cushions, but there do not appear to have been any accompanying angels, as there certainly were alongside the knight's effigy. It would therefore seem that she does not represent Alice Montacute, but possibly the Countess of an earlier, Montacute, Earl of Salisbury.

As the effigies must have originally been in the Priory at Bisham, the burial place of the Earls of Salisbury, it is to be presumed that they were removed thence when the Priory was suppressed in 1538,[1] but why they should end up at Burghfield, some miles away, is not immediately clear.

A possible theory was put forward in an article, 'The mystery of the Burghfield effigies,' by E. A. Greening Lamborn in 1944.[2] who points out that the lord of the manor of Burghfield at the time was Sir John Williams, later Baron Williams of Thame, a man of some influence and considerable affluence, by

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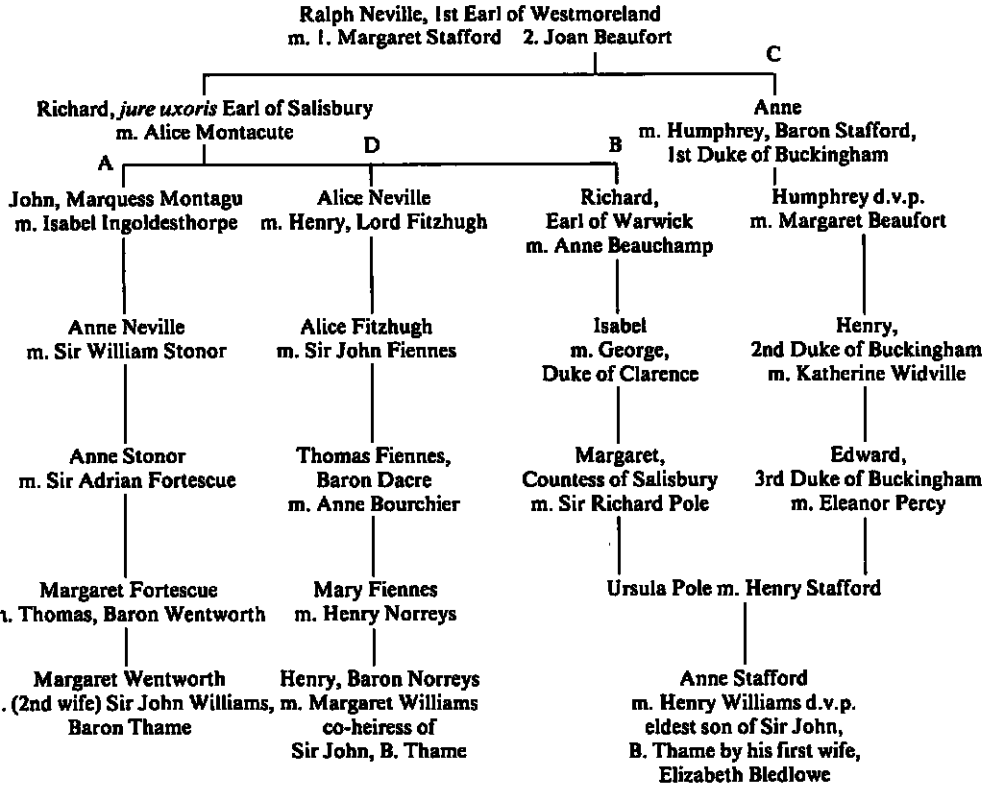
virtue of his services to the crown over four reigns. His second wife was a Margaret Wentworth, 'Salisbury's direct descendant.' Checking this statement establishes, as can be seen from the genealogical table (A), that the link, though somewhat tenuous, is a valid one. It is tempting to think this a neat answer to the riddle of Burghfield, until we realise that the marriage did not take place until 1557, nearly twenty years after the Dissolution.[3] It is difficult to imagine that Sir John would acquire the effigies on his own account, though as one of the King's 'visitors' or commissioners at the Dissolution, he was probably in a position to do so.

Lamborn mentions a tradition that the 'Montagu' tombs were removed in the first instance to the neighbouring mansion at Bisham, which it seems, was owned and occupied at that time by Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, Richard Neville's great-grand-daughter.[4] Margaret, as we know, was the daughter of George, Duke of Clarence and Isabel Neville, and the latter was the child of Warwick the Kingmaker, eldest son of the Earl of Salisbury. Lamborn remarks that if it was indeed there, the monument could not have remained long, as the house was given to Anne of Cleves after Margaret's beheading in 1541. What he does not do is to pursue that particular genealogical line to its interesting conclusion, in that the Countess's grand-daughter, Anne Stafford, married the eldest son of Sir John Williams by his first wife (genealogical table B).[5] Anne Stafford was in fact doubly descended from the Nevilles, as her father's great-great-grandmother was the Earl of Salisbury's sister (genealogical table C). Her



husband, Henry Williams, died in his father's lifetime, and Lamborn makes the point that Sir John's son-in-law, Henry Norreys, as the husband of one of the co-heiresses, succeeded to the Burghfield lordships. Henry Norreys was yet another great-great-great grandchild of the Earl of Salisbury (genealogical table D), making three connected with Burghfield through an alliance with the Williams family, and thus qualifying as possible 'rescuers' of the two effigies. If any of them were responsible, it must have been some years after the Dissolution, and in the interim the figures, judging by their present condition, had an unsettled existence.

The damage was certainly sustained early. As Lamborn tells us, in 1665, Elias Ashmole made an heraldic Visitation of Berkshire, and recorded of Burghfield that part of a coat-of-arms, 'tho imperfect', remained on the knight's breast, and he showed the second quarter to have borne a saltire with a label, and the fourth sub-quarter of the first quarter, a fusilly fess.[6] Ashmole did not ascribe the arms, nor did he note the Garter that must originally have encircled the Earl's

left leg below the knee. This makes it more than probable that the legs were already broken off. At this time the effigies were lying on the south side of the chancel of the old church. The present Burghfield church is modern, and the figures are in the vestibule at the west end.

Apart from the loss of limbs, the mutilation of both effigies is such as might have been sustained had they been dragged face downwards for some distance. It is difficult to account in any other way for the shearing off of all detail to such a uniform depth. This treatment could hardly have been countenanced by those concerned for their preservation, so one can only conjecture that the spoilers of the religious houses or careless labourers were to blame.

However it came about, these two figures appear to be the poor remnant of a goodly company of Montacutes and Nevilles — the only survivors of the monumental glories of Bisham.

Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, made provision for his obsequies and monument in his will, but the circumstances of his death resulted in long delay in carrying out his wishes. Captured at the Battle of Wakefield on 30 December 1460, and executed the day after at Pontefract, his head was impaled above a York city gate along with those of his brother-in-law, Richard, Duke of York, and his nephew, Edmund, Earl of Rutland, where it stayed until the new King Edward IV had vanquished the Lancastrians and was in a position to have it taken down and re-united with the rest of the remains. It was more than two years before the funeral ceremonies took place for him, his son Sir Thomas Neville, who also fell at Wakefield, and his Countess, Alice Montacute, recently deceased.[7] Lamborn rehearses how the 'Enterment of the Erle of Salisbery at Bushame' took place on

> 'the 15 day of Janyur the second yere off the regne of Kinge Edward the Fourth the Earle of Warwike a mylle w'tout the townn metinge the corsse conveyed the same to the place where he was interd; at which place was reseived the body and bonys by the Bischop of Exetur, Chauncelere of Englond, the Bishop (sic) of Salisbery, the Bischop of Seint Assa and two Abbots all myterd w' a solempne procession . . . Item on the morne aftur the Estats Princes Lords & Ladys came into the highe masse. Item then offered the Duke of Clarence And the Duchesse of Suff. and the Duk. Item the Erle of Warwick Item the Erle of Worcestre Item the Lord Montague Item the Lord Hastings Item the Lord Fitz Hewe . . .'[8]

No doubt the monument erected over the Earl and his Countess rivalled in splendour that of his father, Ralph Neville, first Earl of Westmoreland and his two wives in the collegiate church of Staindrop, County Durham, and perhaps, had it been in what became a country parish church instead of an Augustinian priory, it would have invited less attention from the iconoclasts of the Reformation.

Up to a point it is possible to deduce what the monument was like, as we have those mentioned in the first paragraph of this article for purposes of comparison. The nearest perfect as a whole, is the Welles monument, which still retains much of its tomb-chest, with forward-facing angels holding painted heraldic shields. This design is just one possibility for the Neville monument. However, we can gain a clear idea of what the Countess of Salisbury's effigy must have looked like merely by studying the graceful figures of the FitzWalter, Chideock, Greene and

Welles ladies; they are all very similar, each wearing a back-swept horned head-dress, just revealing the ears, and in the case of the FitzWalter and Welles ladies, ornately decorated; a sideless surcoat over a deep-cuffed kirtle, and a long mantle falling from the shoulders. The Welles mantle is of particular interest, being finely carved with the Welles and Waterton arms, and we may be confident that the Montacute heiress would display equal splendour.

The Earl of Salisbury's effigy as we see it today, is but a fragment of what must have been a highly competently sculpted figure, very much as the five comparable knights can still be seen to be.

The short-haired head rests on double cushions, as does that of Lord Hungerford at Salisbury, rather than on a crested helm as with the other four. The face of course has gone, but no doubt would have borne the expressive lines across the forehead and down the sides of the somewhat simian mouth, the heavy-lidded eyes and decisive chin, distinctive of the workshop. The mail standard though damaged, remains round the neck, but the collar has almost entirely disappeared. Enough survives to the perceptive eye however, to establish its Yorkist origin; in the extreme corners on either side the neck, remain, on the left, a sun, and on the right, a rose. If as tradition says, Edward IV instituted the suns and roses livery collar after the Battle of Mortimer's Cross, the Earl of Salisbury, though never wearing one in the flesh, must have been one of the earliest to display one on his effigy. The rest of the group wear collars of SS, except Lord

Close-up of knight, showing 'sun' on livery collar

Welles, who, though an ardent supporter of the red rose, wears a heavy chain of plain links. Possibly this was a Lancastrian expedient in a Yorkist age.

Lord Welles' effigy probably bears the nearest resemblance to Richard Neville's, and there is every likelihood that they would be in the making at the same time. Lord Welles wears the Garter as Salisbury would have done, and his ridged and fluted armour is covered by a short-sleeved tabard, beautifully carved on breast and sleeve with his arms of a lion rampant tail fourchée. His hips are girt by a belt of ornamented square links.

The Neville belt has been entirely rubbed away on the top surface, but similar square links remain down each side. On his right side, in the gap between the front and back of the tabard, the straps and buckles fastening the fauld are still clear-cut. There remain traces of the arms Ashmole saw on the breast of the tabard in 1665, the Neville saltire in the second quarter and the Montacute fusilly fess in the lower corner of the first. He did not note the feet of the Monthermer eagle against traces of gold background, which can be seen alongside the latter in the corners formed and protected by the couter on the right elbow.

Nor did he see apparently, the heraldry on the back of the tabard as recorded in the early years of this century by J. Challenor Smith in an article, 'Notes on the brasses and effigies at Burghfield, Berkshire', who tells us that in his day 'In protected parts on the back of the figure the Nevill field and the Montacute fusils still retain portions of the red tincture.'[9]

Smith also quotes from a manuscript of the Rev. D. T. Powell,[10] who had visited Burghfield about 1802, before the old church was demolished and the new one built, and recorded that the effigies were:

> 'Under the arch between the altar and the chapel . . . evidently moved from some other place for no vestige of the altar-part of the monum' is to be found . . . the face of the knight not only gone but his head half ground (as it were) away but yet there is sufficient of the whole left plainly to see that this was one of the finest and noblest statues of the time ab' Edw:iv[th] and near exactly resembles that of Lord Fitzwalter at Dunmow . . . On the surcoat which is over his armour I could plainly discern the arms thereon emboss'd or carved . . . . Quarterly, 1 and 4 quarterly Montague (3 fusils) 2 and 3 Monthermer, an eagle; 2 and 3 Nevil (a cross saltire and a label of 3 pins) . . . There can be no doubt but that these statues came from Bisham abbey and are of Richard Nevil earl of Salisbury . . . and of Alice his Countess.'[11]

Lamborn, apparently unaware of the findings of Powell and Smith, tells how in 1931, he and the architect, F. E. Howard, inspected the heraldry on the Earl's effigy and observed for themselves what could be seen on the back of the tabard.[12] He mentions the scarlet fusils of Montacute, the green eagle of Monthermer and the Neville saltire differenced by a gobony label.

These findings can, with a little difficulty,be corroborated to some extent today. The protective iron railing impedes a clear sighting, and it is necessary that the eyes should be almost at ground level. A flashlight is also a useful adjunct. What can then be seen behind or under the left arm, are, above, the fusils of Montacute, and below, a crisply carved Monthermer eagle displayed. Some red pigment remains on the fusils, but the eagle is no longer green; it, its 'field' or background, and strangely, that of the fusils, are now transmuted into a uniform orangey gold.

There is of course, accumulated dust and dirt on and around the Burghfield effigy, and it is greatly to be wished that the figure of such an eminent Yorkist as the Earl of Salisbury should be preserved, damaged though it is. To raise it two or three feet from the floor, and perhaps judiciously remove the dust and cobwebs with a soft brush, would do much to reveal detail which cannot at present be seen, especially original pigment in protected crevices. Consolidation of such pigment wherever it occurs, is also desirable. Thus might a caring present redeem an uncaring past.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Priory was surrendered to Henry VIII in 1536; it was given a charter as an abbey, but this it was forced to surrender only a few months later in June 1538.
2. *Notes and Queries*, vol. 186, no. 10 (6 May 1944), p.219.
3. *Complete Peerage*, vol. 12, part 2, London 1959, p.653.
4. *Notes and Queries, op. cit.*, p.219.
5. Sir John died in 1559 and the alabaster monument with effigies of him and his first wife, who died in 1556, is at Thame in Oxfordshire, though she was buried at Rycote where their home was.
6. *Notes and Queries, op. cit.*, p.217 (Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS.850, f.25).
7. P. M. Kendall, *Richard the Third*, London 1955, p.49; citing *Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household*, London 1790, p.131.
8. *Notes and Queries, op. cit.*, p.218; citing a Dugdale account in the College of Arms quoted in Swallow's *De Nova Villa*.
9. *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. 6 (1912), pp.217-223.
10. BL.Additional MS.17457. Mr. Powell has proved an invaluable witness previously: see P. Routh & R. Knowles, A Ryther legacy: the monuments assessed, Wakefield 1981, pp.21, 22.
11. W. J. Hemp briefly drew attention to these sources of information in a rejoinder to Lamborn's article in *Notes and Queries*, vol. 186, no. 13 (17 June 1944), p.297.
12. *Notes and Queries*, vol. 186, no. 10 (6 May 1944), p.217.