

THE PRESERVATION OF CHURCH MONUMENTS

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MORE people visit English churches than ever before, and there is widespread appreciation of their contents. Watch these visitors and you will see how often it is the monuments which catch their eye. English churches have a larger population of monuments than any other country. I use the word "population" because it is the sculptured representation of men and women which kindles the imagination more quickly than the epitaphs inscribed on tablets or floor slabs.

They range from the recumbent, cross-legged effigy of the mediaeval knight, the Elizabethan kneeling in his ruff, to the county magnate standing in his marble toga. These people were all once alive as we are now alive. They were the actors in the history of this country, whether they were famous or little known. They worshipped in these same surroundings. Here they were baptized, married and buried, generation after generation. The number, variety and range of our monuments provide a gallery of English sculpture such as no other institution can supply.

Some may say that one must not regard a church as a museum. True enough, but from the beginning of time man has made every effort to beautify and embellish his place of worship. It is our duty to see that these memorials of piety are properly kept so that many eyes can read their message. That they should be kept reasonably clean goes without saying, even though the majority are not. As a rule this presents no difficulty except in industrial towns with a black and sulphur-laden atmosphere.

Furthermore, they must be properly looked after when they become frail through age or are damaged by hazard. No one is likely to object to this, though the expense of upkeep may be a difficulty. But many may disagree strongly about the steps to be taken when repair becomes necessary. It is to give some guidance that these words have been written.

CLEANING OF MONUMENTS

The cleaning of church monuments depends in the first place on the material of which they are made. A feather brush or bellows should be sufficient to remove accumulated dust. Where monuments are made of

statuary marble, limestone or alabaster, or any other stone with a smooth surface and solid consistency, cleaning is best done with plain water and a sponge. If this does not suffice, expert advice should be sought. All stone is porous, and soap if used at all should be employed sparingly. It may stain the surface, and if it contains ammonia or caustic soda, have a damaging effect. All soap should be completely washed away afterwards. In the case of soft stones, like clunch, which is an inspissated chalk, or any stone with a cretaceous texture, even water should be used with care and limited to a damp sponge. After washing, marble can be brightened by a touch of wax polish.

The problem is made more difficult when the stone has been discoloured by city smoke. Under these conditions alabaster and Purbeck marble become stained an ugly brown, as can be seen, for instance, on the monuments in Aston Church, Birmingham, and on many tombs in Westminster Abbey.

Acid should not be used for cleaning. Although it can remove stains from marble, it can produce a yellow stain of its own.

When washing monuments, notice should be taken of any traces of original colour. A light touch is necessary, and energetic scrubbing with a hard brush by church helpers should never be allowed. In the past some church monuments have been cleaned with pumice-stone, which has removed the outer surface of the stone itself. Stone acquires by exposure a protective skin; when the old abraded surface is removed, the result may be pleasing to the eye, but the process leaves the surface tender and vulnerable. It also takes the monument one step further from what it originally was, and may well distort its appearance, especially with regard to the features of the human face.

Monuments are sometimes used as repositories for hassocks, the materials of church cleaners, piles of old prayer-books, etc. This should never be permitted—it has been the cause of much careless damage.

RESTORATION OF MONUMENTS

The old battle that used to rage between those who wanted to replace the broken noses and limbs of antique sculpture, and those who objected to the practice, was settled in this century by a verdict in favour of the latter. The debate still continues with regard to church monuments. The question resolves itself as to whether too literal a restoration will kill the true character of the original. Style is so indescribably subtle and elusive.

In the case of monuments where the sculptured figure is only part of a much larger composition, the position is complicated by further considerations. It can, however, be laid down as a firm rule that restoration should always be approached with the greatest reserve and a full sense of

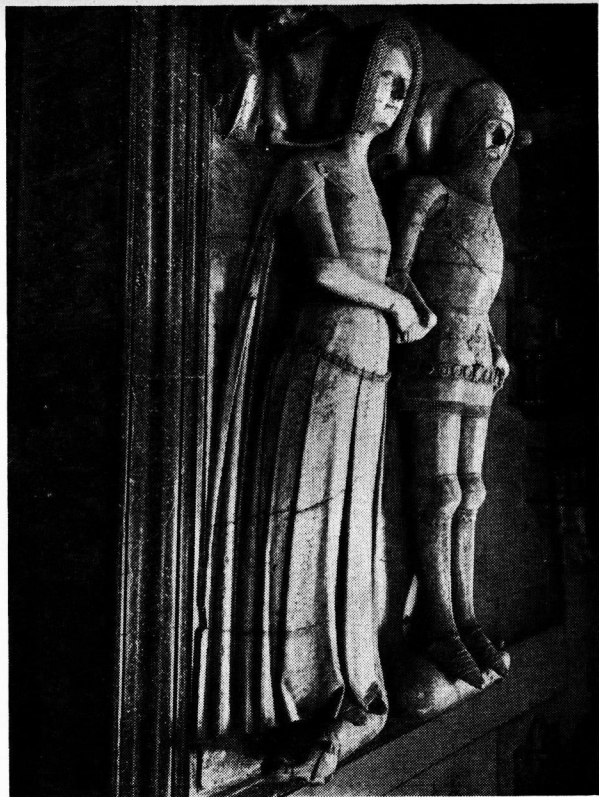


PLATE 4

Alabaster effigy of Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, d. 1370, and his wife Catherine, in St. Mary's Church, Warwick.



PLATE 5

Effigy in painted alabaster of Sir Robert Harcourt, d. 1471, in Stanton Harcourt Church, Oxfordshire.

Photo : F. H. Crossley.

responsibility. Nearly as many monuments have been ruined by excess of zeal as by neglect.

Most people will agree that dismembered limbs and decapitated heads should be put back in position in cases where the original detached pieces survive. This is first-aid rather than restoration.

Restoration, when permissible, should always be done in precisely the same materials as the original. William Morris's views on the restoration of architecture do not apply here. When the feet of an effigy have been damaged (especially on recumbent figures), restoration can generally be carried out without artistic loss to the whole. Where the hands have gone, they can generally be copied from those of a contemporary effigy, but the work requires great skill and sympathy. But when it comes to the face, a modern copy tends to betray only too clearly its date of execution and may completely spoil the appearance of the whole. Human features are best left alone, and the eye of imagination allowed to supply what is missing.

It stands to reason that no original part of a monument should ever be removed to be replaced by a new substitute, unless the original is so decayed as to be a disfigurement. Even then it is a question of deciding which is the greater disfigurement, the perished original or the alien substitute.

Repairs to architectural features, such as canopies and testers, can be carried out with more confidence. This is more a matter for the drawing-board rather than the artist, and success depends finally upon the skill of the craftsman. When restoring a monument the best professional advice should be sought and only craftsmen with experience of this kind of work employed.

COLOURING

It can be said as a generalization that sculpture of all periods and civilizations was originally coloured. This certainly applied to that of classical times, a condition which the neo-Greek revival ignored and preferred to reconstitute in chaste white marble. The sculptors of the XVIIIth century concentrated upon the subtlety of modelling for their effect, and some sculptors of 150 years ago would have been shocked to realize how the antique sculpture which they admired had originally looked. Mediaeval monuments were nearly always coloured, and were as brightly painted as their authors could make them. Paint was more sparingly used on the later alabasters, for this came to be appreciated for its natural tone, and in the XVth century painting was often restricted to face, hands, hair, and the gilding of accessories.

It should be borne in mind that colour still surviving on mediaeval monuments in protected places may not always be the final colour, but

a foundation for it. Charles Stothard, who removed with his pen-knife the churchwardens' whitewash on the monuments which he drew so sympathetically, was often misled by the colouring he found there. Red has for centuries been used as a basis for gilding, and where it occurs on an ancient effigy it may be evidence of this part having once been gilt.

Colour and gilding should not as a rule be applied directly to the stone, but on a foundation of gesso. This was always the case with wooden monuments, and diapered patterns and the links of mail were enhanced by the use of punches impressed in the plaster when soft.

The recolouring of monuments which have lost all or most of their colouring, requires the greatest caution. Touching up can be done where monuments still retain much of their original colour, but have small exposed areas, such as on knees and elbows, where the colour has been rubbed away. In these cases it is, I think, legitimate to patch by renewing the missing colour on these places, and so modify the unsightly spotty effect which time has produced. It should be remembered when matching old and new colours that paint tends to change with time, and the new colour may look quite different in fifty years' time. In all cases it is essential that all methods used in touching up should be the same as those used on the original. That is to say, care must be taken to use priming and media of exactly the same kind as the old. It follows that monuments painted in tempera should never be touched up with oil paint.

Where nearly all the original colour of the monument has gone, a complete recolouring may seriously alter the character of the work, and result in staring eyes, lipsticked mouths and strong colours which make effigies look like waxworks or children's toys. Where a monument has received abrasion, the question of recolouring becomes fraught with danger. If the face has lost its nose, or hands their fingers, and these details are not replaced in stone, the painter is left with an insoluble problem. He can hardly spread flesh colour over an amputated stump, nor can he be realistic and paint it a blood red. One finds numerous cases where monuments have been half-restored in colour, and well-meaning restorers have played for safety by leaving the main part of the effigy in its present state, perhaps colouring the heraldry only. Admittedly heraldry was intended to be coloured and loses much of its significance when the colouring is lost. There is no particular objection to recolouring heraldry because it is usually possible to find what tinctures were originally used. Colour and gilding gives life and brightness, but care should be taken that the painting of shields of arms in colour does not throw the rest of the composition out of tone, or increase by contrast its delapidated appearance.

In some cases monuments have been kept constantly painted by bodies



PLATE 6

Monument in alabaster of Thomas, 1st Earl of Rutland, d. 1543, and his wife Eleanor, made by Richard Parker, mason, of Burton-on-Trent. Bottesford Church, Leicestershire.

Photo : *F. H. Crossley.*

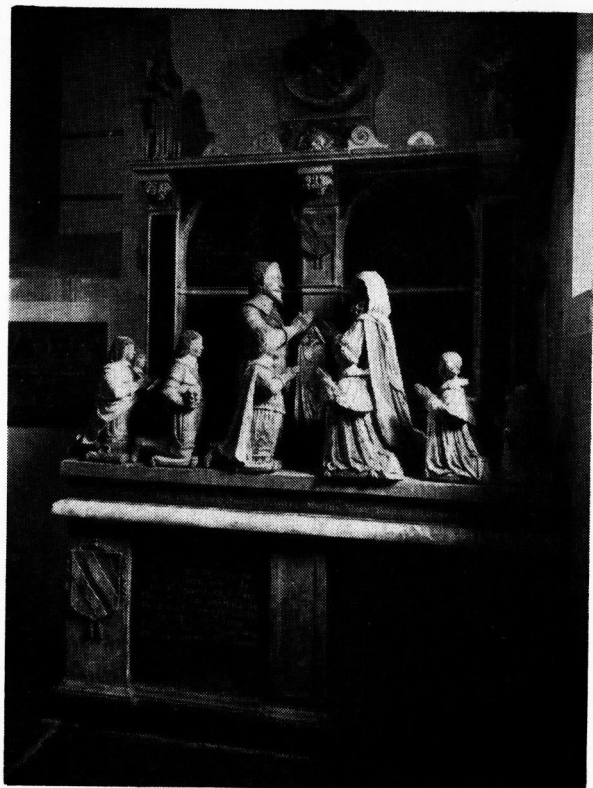


PLATE 7

Monument with kneeling figures of alabaster against a background of black touch, to Sir Cope D'Oyley, d. 1633, and his family. Hambleton Church, Buckinghamshire.

Photo : *H. Felton.*

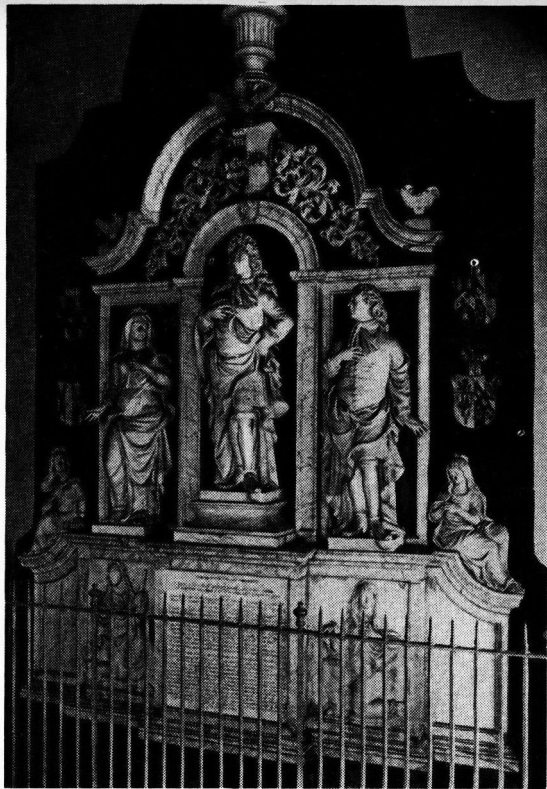


PLATE 8

Monument, ascribed to John Nost (Van Ost) the Elder, with standing figure in white marble against black of Thomas Spencer, d. 1684, and his wife Jean, at Yarnton Church, Oxfordshire.

Photo : F. H. Crossley.



PLATE 9

Marble monument to John Petty, 1st Earl of Shelburne, d. 1761, and his family, signed by Peter Scheemakers, in High Wycombe Church, Buckinghamshire.

Photo : H. Felton.

which have special concern for them, such as that of Cardinal Beaufort in Winchester Cathedral. How many times this monument has been repainted it is impossible to say, but in cases such as this care should be taken that the colouring is correct and not necessarily a casual reproduction of what is already on it. Otherwise there is a tendency to move further and further from the original in the course of years.

One knows, of course, that different periods had their own particular preferences for certain pigments; for example, the very pale blue used for *azure* in Georgian heraldry, and the warm brown tints used to shade a gilded scroll. But it is not always realized that different schools of monumental masons, working at the same time, had each their own idiosyncrasies. There is, for instance, an East Anglian School of the late XVIth century that can be recognized by its fondness for a kind of puce and for sooty rather than clear colours, as on the monuments of the Kitson family at Hengrave in Suffolk.

CLASSES OF MONUMENTS

The monuments in English churches fall into seven broad categories, each with its sub-divisions:

- I *Mediaeval sculptured monuments* generally take the form of a recumbent effigy, often on a table-tomb, sometimes in a wall recess or under an arched canopy. The effigy developed from the incised slab of the XIIth century (*see* Class VI) and can be classified by the material used:
 - (i) The Purbeck marble figures of the XIIIth century (Plate 1).
 - (ii) The freestone figures which cover the whole period, generally made from the nearest available quarry (limestone, sandstone, or clunch, Plate 2).
 - (iii) The alabaster figures, the material for which was mostly quarried in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Its use spread rapidly in the XIVth century and dominated English monuments in the XVth century (Plates 3, 4, 5).
 - (iv) Oak figures of which about 96 survive, covering all periods. Facial portraiture is rare except in special cases.
- II *The Renaissance monuments* (1537-1660)
 The Dissolution of the Monasteries which accompanied the Reformation spelt the end of the ecclesiastical Gothic style. In England this coincided with the introduction of the Italian style of "the Renaissance." It was first introduced by Torrigiano of Florence (Westminster Abbey) and his compatriots in the reign of Henry VIII, but was finally established by the Dutch and Flemish masons who came over as refugees in the middle and second half of the XVIth century. They adopted our native alabaster as their principal medium, but used other materials as accessories. Their work is



PLATE II
Bust in high relief supported by a cherub in the round at Cartmel
Priory, Lancashire, by Joseph Nollekens.

Photo : *F. H. Crossley.*



PLATE 10
Marble monument to Richard Boyle, Viscount Shannon,
Field Marshal, d. 1740, with military tent as background,
signed by L. F. Roubiliac. Walton-on-Thames Church,
Surrey. Erected by his daughter, 1755.

Photo : *Miss M. Whinney.*

well shown in family chapels such as those at Chenies and Bottesford. The names of the masons are often recorded, such as Johnson (Jansen), Cure, Christmas, Colt, and their followers, Stone, Marshall, Eve-sham, etc. The old recumbent position is varied by reclining, kneeling and even standing poses. They differ greatly in size ranging from wall tablets to large canopied erections (Plate 7). In their later works, especially Stone's, white and black marble or slate begins to take the place of painted alabaster and coloured stones. Portraiture is now established.

III *The Baroque* (1660-1780)

Produced under Continental influence in the grand manner. Their authorship is generally known and inscribed. Scheemaekers (Plate 9), the Von Nosts (Plate 8), Rysbrack, Dutchmen, Roubiliac (Plate 10), a Frenchman and the Englishmen, Bushnell, Gibbons, Cibber, Bird, and the Stantons. Their work varies in size from wall tablets and busts to elaborate compositions with trumpeting angels and full-size figures. Westminster Abbey is full of them, but they are also represented in country churches, especially in those which stand in the park of a great Palladian house.

IV *The Neo-Classics* (1780-1837)

Represented by Nollekens (Plate 11), Flaxman (Plate 12), Banks, Bacon, Chantrey, etc. All represented in Westminster Abbey. The accent is on portraiture and the setting severe rather than flamboyant.

Classes III and IV have recently emerged from the misprision in which they were long held as being pagan and pompous, and have become the subject of intensive study.

V *The Victorians*

Their monuments need no amplification except to say that as time goes on they are taking their place in the history of English taste.

In addition to the above monuments, mostly worked in the round, there are other classes of which mention should be made:

VI *Floor Slabs*

- (i) Mediaeval incised slabs specially numerous in the north of England; flat, often with a margin of Lombardic lettering and sometimes including in outline or low relief a human figure, but more often a cross, a crozier or a symbol of war or husbandry. The earliest surviving whole-length incised figure is that of Aubrey de Vere, d. 1141, formerly at Colne Priory, Essex, now at Bures, Suffolk.
- (ii) Mediaeval coped stones and coffin lids, often carved in low relief.
- (iii) Ledger stones laid flush with the floor, carved with a shield



PLATE 12

Marble monument with suppliant figure and angel, commemorating Mary Lushington, d. 1797, aged 25 years, by John Flaxman, in Lewisham Church, Kent.

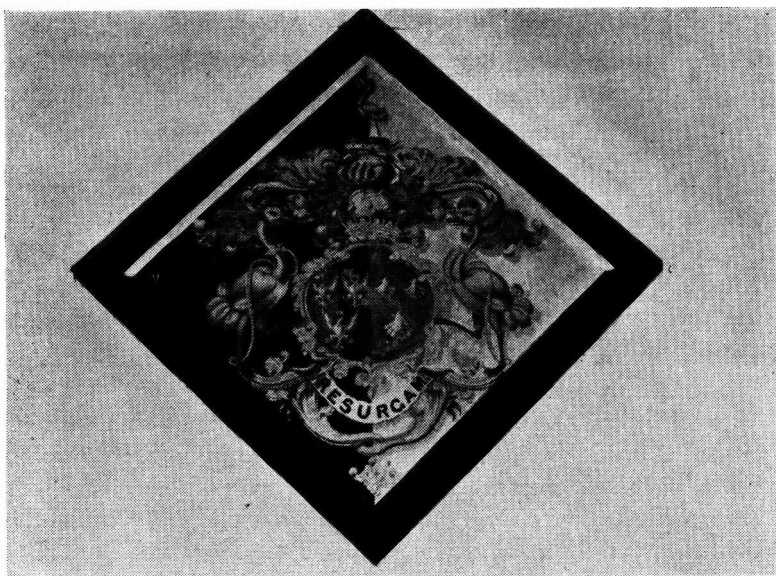


PLATE 13

Hatchment of the family of Coke in Tittleshall Church, Norfolk.

Photo : F. J. Palmer.

of arms, good lettering, and generally dating from the XVIIIth century.

VII *Monumental Brasses* (XIIIth-XVIIth centuries)

This is a rich subject in itself on which much has been written. The late Mr. Mill Stephenson (1926) compiled an almost complete list of those surviving in the country. They require little attention as they are made of a very durable material. Being mostly laid in Purbeck marble slabs in the floor, their chief danger is from the wear of people's feet. They should therefore be protected by carpets with an underfelt, and swept regularly to remove grit. Many have been removed from their slabs and placed vertically on walls. This is not to be recommended, as they then become subject to damp running down the walls; also it means in most cases disassociating them from the place of burial. Both brass and slab should be regarded as one unit. "Indents," that is to say slabs from which the brasses have been removed, should not be regarded as having lost their interest thereby. The earliest English brass is known solely from its indent, and many fine lost brasses are recorded in this way. Durham Cathedral is virtually paved with indents.

ACCESSORIES

The accessories of monuments, such as funeral achievements, iron hearses (railings), etc., deserve equal respect. The presence of funeral armour suspended over the monument on iron brackets (perches), shows that the deceased received a heralds' funeral. The officers of arms in their tabards carried the insignia in procession before the bier; helm with crest, escutcheon of arms, coat of arms, banners, gauntlets, sword and spurs. The ceremonial is well illustrated in Lant's Roll of the funeral of Sir Philip Sydney; the earliest surviving achievements are those of the Black Prince in Canterbury Cathedral.

Funeral armour is not to be confused with "mortuaries." The latter were bequests to the church and could be sold for its benefit. At the funeral in London of the third Earl of Essex, the Parliamentary general, his personal armour was carried by high military officers in addition to his funeral armour, which was borne by the heralds.

After the funeral had taken place the armour was hung over the tomb "for ever," as a mark of the status of the deceased in his life-time. The practice of hanging a painted hatchment of the arms of the deceased over the door of his house for a year and then depositing it in the church, has not quite died out. It is still done by colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. Hatchments, as evidence of local history, should be preserved.

All the illustrations, except Plates 5 and 7, are reproduced here by courtesy of the National Buildings Record.