

Knight on a Bed of Stones : Survey

The following summary below was written by Kate Nightingale who had already written up her painstaking research about the tomb, A Hero of Crecy?, published by the Reepham Society in 1998. The summary includes observations from the survey of the box tomb in St. Mary's Church, Reepham, made by Tobit Curteis Associates between 2002 & 2005.

Judging by the adhesive residue on the backs of the pictures it is evident that these notes & the accompanying pictures in GB/REE/2104301700 were used in a RS display/exhibition (no date), probably in St. Mary's.

Description

During 2002/5 the tomb has been extensively surveyed prior to conservation treatment following serious deterioration in parts of the fabric of the tomb.

The tomb was recorded in the nineteenth century by Blomefield, Stothard and others when it was in better condition than now. It is one of a unique group of four East Anglian tombs, carved in clunch, and displaying common features.

Originally, this tomb was described as belonging to a group of three tombs depicting 'A Knight on a Bed of Stones' - at Reepham and Ingham in Norfolk and Burrough Green in Cambridgeshire. The likeness to the tomb at Ingham is marked - both tombs have carved and painted 'weepers' round the sides of the tomb and both military effigies are in the same position. The weepers on both tombs are painted but the effigy of the knight at Reepham does not appear to have been painted at all and the quality of the carving on the armour is much more refined and detailed.

The effigy and canopy of Sir Oliver Ingham have remains of extensive painted details and it is quite badly damaged. The Burrough Green tomb is now regarded as a later copy.

The Reepham tomb is the finest quality and has survived with less damage to the effigy itself. The most striking common feature is the uncomfortable twisted position of the effigy lying on stones - the significance of which has been disputed but never established.

The tomb is the last resting place of a member of the de Kerdiston family. It is now decided, almost certainly, that it contains the last remains of Sir William de Kerdiston who died in 1361. In the past the tomb has been attributed to several members of the de Kerdiston family, including Sir Fulke, who, it was said, was a crusader. (The figure has his legs crossed- said, mistakenly, to indicate the tomb of a crusader.) The tomb has now been dated by stylistic and other evidence to the middle of the fifteenth century. Romantics will be pleased to learn that the Sir William buried here fought in the Hundred Years' War and was almost certainly at the Battle of Crecy.

The Weepers

The 'weepers' on the front and return of the tomb chest represent family and friends mourning the deceased.

The polychromy is extremely sophisticated. At present all that remains is what looks like faded blue or red paint on the background of each figure. The figures themselves have been quite badly damaged over the centuries, either intentionally or by attempts to preserve them - traces of limewash were found all over the tomb.

Due to deterioration of the soft stone the paint has been quite badly damaged. The recent analysis has established that the figures were coloured red, black, yellow, white and green with naturalistic flesh tones.

The effigy and rear panel, unusually, show no traces at all of pigment. The effigy itself still shows fine chisel marks as well as extremely fine details which would have disappeared if paint had been cleaned off. Possibly some applied decoration existed on the belt. The wall behind has been re-plastered so any evidence for a wall painting there is lost. (Stothard describes a painting at the back of the Ingham tomb.)

The surveyors suggest that the decorative style used on the effigy (without polychromy) may anticipate the style made popular on alabaster monuments of the following century.

Present and Future Conservation

- The deterioration to this important medieval tomb has led to a detailed analysis of the damage and a plan for conservation.
- The wall around the tomb is now dry but the conclusion is that water seepage in the past has resulted in chemical changes in the stone of the tomb which has resulted in damage to the painting as salts are released.
- It is recommended that these areas be cleaned with ionised water and the paint be re-adhered and consolidated to prevent future deterioration.
- Concern was expressed about the proximity of a rainwater downpipe, ideally this should be re-sited.
- The canopy of the tomb needs repair - especially the central pendant. This is a priority.
- It is suggested that the tomb be inspected at every quinquennial.