

THE MEDIEVAL FREESTONE EFFIGIES IN

BUNBURY CHURCH

by

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In comparison with the splendid effigy and tomb of Sir Hugh Calveley, (2) the five medieval freestone effigies that still remain in Bunbury church are a sad disappointment. Detached from their tombs, which no longer survive, mutilated and weather worn, they retain no traces of the gesso and bright colours with which they must once have been enriched. There is, however, less cause to wonder at this than at the fact that they have survived at all, for they lay unprotected in the churchyard for at least three hundred years. The date when they were removed from inside the church is unknown but it was probably during the rebuilding by Sir Hugh Calveley in the late 14th century or possibly during the partial rebuilding during the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

The earliest record of the effigies is contained in the Randle Holme notes on Bunbury church, dated 1580, in the British Museum (3):

"in the Church yard lyeth diuers portraitures of men & women cut in stone amongst others, there is two in their Armour with Sheilds very auntient with these coates on them"

The 'coates' referred to are sketched above the note. One, attached to the vague outline of an effigy, bears a bend with a label of five points and is labelled 'St. Peiers'; the other, labelled 'spurstow' bears six mullets or stars. The latter is clearly the first effigy described below: the former is unfortunately no longer to be found though it was apparently still visible in the churchyard as recently as 1882 (4).

In the 1680's Bunbury Church was visited by the antiquary Thomas Dingley (ob. 1695) who included the following in his manuscript History from Marble (5):

"..... yett several good families have fair Tombstones in ye Church Yard among which ye S[urvel] yor greatest benefactor towards the building hereof and thirteen Tombstones of the family called Haughton of Haughton they are altogether on the South side of the Church towards the wall One whereof was a Knight Templar as appears by the figure being in Armor and Cross legg,d" (6)

None of the later accounts of Bunbury Church contains anything of interest concerning the freestone effigies until that included in the Cheshire volume of Lyson's Magna Brittainia which appeared in 1810 (7). This gives a list of the figures then visible:

"In the church-yard at Bunbury, on the north side of the church, are several ancient monuments, to be referred to the latter end of this century [i.e. the 13th] or the beginning of the fourteenth, which may have been originally in the church. One of them has the effigies [sic] of a Crusader in the act of drawing

his sword, much mutilated; another, that of a lady, with a canopy over her head, much defaced; a third has the effigies of a knight, and near him that of a lady; round the edge of the latter is this fragment of an inscription in Lombardic capitals '.....ur lone le Spourstou. p.....' "

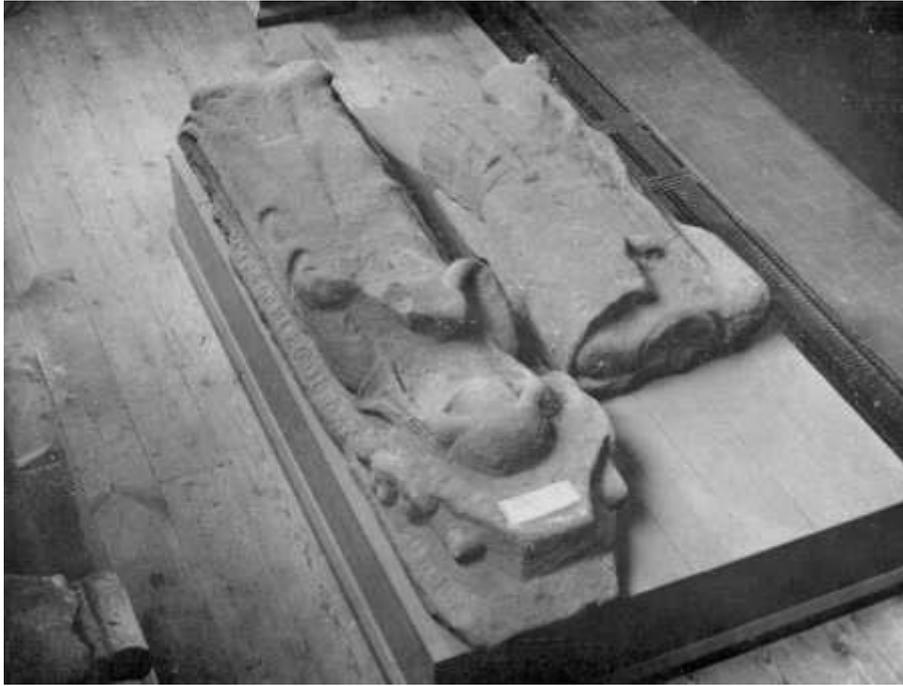
The 'Crusader in the act of drawing his sword' is almost certainly the missing 'St. Peiers' effigy of the 1580 note. The other three are respectively the second, first and third effigies described below. That this is so is shown by the more-detailed description of the effigies given, in the same order, in the first edition of Ormerod's History of Cheshire, published nine years later: (8).

'Some tombstones now placed on the south side have most probably been removed from the churchFour..... are slabs, with recumbent figures, which have been torn from altar tombs; one near the dial is too much mutilated for any thing of its original form to be ascertained (9); another represents a lady in a hood, with long flowing drapery, clasping between her hands what resembles a large book. Two others represent a knight and his lady, and are placed near the S.E. angle of the church-yard. The knight is much mutilated, but his belt, surcoat, dagger and sword are apparent and on his shield, which is slung by a thong, may be traced a bend between two stars (10) The projection of the charge from the shield is so much worn, that it can only be seen under a strong western sun, but it may easily be felt by the hand..... The lady is habited in long drapery, with a girdle and tassel at the waist. The head (now destroyed) reposed on a lozenge formed cushion, under which is a rude carving of some animal. Round the tomb is an inscription in longobardic capitals, too much mutilated to be decyphered'.

Helsby's edition of Ormerod's work, published in 1882, repeats the above passage verbatim (11) but continues 'Some additions were made to these during the late [i.e. the 1872] restoration of the church',. After referring to some cross-slabs the passage goes on to describe the last two effigies listed below: 'There are also two small effigies here, one of the time of Edw. I being a man in armour; another with a cloak like a pilgrim's, reaching to the ankles. This last was discovered in 1865 by Mr. Lowe, in the churchyard, lying face downwards'. Helsby also describes (12) another effigy, no longer extant, discovered during the 1872 restoration: 'Another tombstone was also found in the nave near the chancel, carved with the figure of an ecclesiastic in his robes, and a dog, or a lion, at his feet. This being of a friable nature, came to pieces in removing as though it had been calcined.'

The monuments were moved into the Church and were for many years displayed loose at the W. end of the S. nave-aisle. In 1955 they were removed to their present position mounted on plinths in the North aisle.

All the figures are probably of local workmanship but it is not possible at present to establish this with certainty.



Person 2

Person 1

I PERSON

Unknown knight. Possibly a member of the Spurstow family. [\(Picture\)](#).

DATE

Probably c. 1320-25.

MATERIAL

Yellow-grey sandstone

MEASUREMENTS

Length, 3 ft. 9 in.; width 1 ft. 9 in.

DESCRIPTION

The head, legs and right arm are missing and the whole surface is so weathered that few details can be made out. The left arm and side are covered from shoulder to hip by a large, heater-shaped shield, curved towards the body, while the right hand appears to have rested on the hilt of the dagger which hangs over the front of the right thigh. The body is covered by a plain surcoat which is pouched round the waist as if over a narrow belt. It is split up the front for convenience in riding and the two ends are turned back to reveal the lower edge of the mail hauberk worn beneath. A broad plain belt hangs slackly round the hips; attached to it by the 'interlaced thong' [\(13\)](#) method over the top of the left thigh is the sword. This is badly mutilated but appears to have had a circular pommel, short grip, long, straight quillons and a broad, two-edged blade. The dagger is little more than a faint mark in the stone and no details can be made out. The shield originally bore six mullets carved in relief, as shown in the drawing of 1580, but only three of these now remain on the sinister side. There are faint traces of the guige passing from the shield across the chest and over the right shoulder. Despite its very poor condition this effigy can be dated with a fair degree of accuracy. The method of attaching the sword-sheath to the belt shown here is one that was in vogue during the last half of the 13th century, and the early years of the 14th century. It is found with decreasing frequency on English monuments after c. 1310 and the latest example so far recorded appears to be that on the brass of Sir William Fitzralph (ob. c. 1323) at Pebmarsh, Essex [\(14\)](#). The presence of a dagger on the Bunbury effigy, however, indicates a date well into the 14th century. Daggers were, of course, used from a very early period but I am unable to discover an example illustrated on an English monument earlier than that worn by the small figure at the feet of the effigy of Sir Robert de

Shurland (c. 1320-25) at Minster, Isle of Sheppey ([15](#)). We are probably safe therefore in dating the Bunbury effigy to c. 1320-25.

The identity of the person commemorated is unknown. As already mentioned the arms are identified in the Randle Holme note of 1580 as those of the local family of Spurstow, though there appears to be no evidence that they ever used more than three mullets ([16](#)). But members of the family are known to have been buried at Bunbury ([17](#)) and this may be an early variant of their arms. J. P. Rylands and F. C. Beazley in their paper on the Bunbury monuments ([18](#)) suggested that 'at the early date of this monument the number of charges on the shield would not be definitely fixed' and tentatively ascribe it to William de Spurstow who was sheriff of Cheshire in 1281. This seems unlikely in view of the probable date of the figure.

- II PERSON** Unknown lady (Nicol de Tu.....t.....) ([Picture](#)).
- DATE** Early 14th century.
- MATERIAL** Yellow-grey sandstone
- MEASUREMENTS** Length of effigy, 5 ft. 1 in.; length of slab, 6 ft. 2.5 in.; width of slab at head, 1 ft. 8 in.; at feet, 1 ft. 6.5 in.
- DESCRIPTION** In fair condition though badly weathered. The head is unsupported and the hands, of which the left is missing, hold a large shapeless object (perhaps a book or small shield) ([19](#)) on the breast. The legs are uncrossed but the left knee is slightly flexed. At the feet two small animals (?dogs) sit back to back; at the top is a small cusped gablette ([20](#)) now very defaced. A wimple and veil are worn in the head; the veil which leaves only the face exposed, hangs below the level of the shoulders on either side. The body is covered by a long flowing dress which completely conceals the feet; it has tight-fitting, wrist-length sleeves. The edge of the slab is chamfered and bears an inscription in Lombardic capitals of which the only decipherable part readsPVR. NICOL DE TV.....T..... ([21](#)).

Costume similar to that shown on this effigy was in vogue from c. 1250 to c. 1350 and cannot be dated accurately. The gablette over the head seems, however, to be of early 14th century form ([22](#)) while the general appearance of the figure is similar to that of a number of female effigies dating from the first three decades of this century ([23](#)). It can therefore be assigned to the same period with a fair degree of certainty ([24](#)).



Joan de Spurstow

III PERSON

Joan de Spurstow. ([Picture](#)) Perhaps the widow (living 1372/3) of Thomas de Spurstow.

DATE

Probably c. 1350-80.

MATERIAL

Red sandstone.

MEASUREMENTS

Length of effigy, 5 ft. 3 in.; length of slab, 5 ft. 5.5 in.; width of slab, at head 1 ft. 7 in., at feet 1 ft. 6.5 in.

DESCRIPTION

In poor condition, the hands, arms and face are almost entirely obliterated and the whole surface is very worn. The head rests on two pillows, the lower and larger one oblong with rounded corners, the upper one lozenge-shaped with a tassel at each of the two horizontally opposite corners. The hands appear to have been clasped on the breast in prayer. The legs, which are hidden by the skirt, appear to be straight and the feet rest on the back of a grotesque head flanged by two small dogs sitting on their haunches facing inwards. Sufficient remains of the head to show that it was covered by a veil hanging below the level of the shoulders at the back and sides. The body is covered by a cote-hardie ([25](#)) pleated in shallow vertical folds; it fits the trunk closely but flares out slightly at the hips into a skirt which hangs almost to the level of the ankles. Below this can be seen the bottom three inches of the under-kirtle, also pleated vertically, which hangs almost to the ground leaving only the toes exposed. Carved immediately below the place where the left hand was originally is part of a sleeve-tippet, presumably attached to the cote-hardie. The shoes are pointed; no details of their fastenings can be seen. The edge of the slab is chamfered and carved with the following somewhat defaced inscription in Lombardic capitals.:

PRYETZ PVR IONE DE SPOVRSTOV KY GYST [ICI DIEV] SVR SA ALME EIT
MERCII The underside of the slab is shaped to form the lid of a tomb-chest.

Sleeve tippets seem to have been fashionable in England only during the period c. 1350-80 ([26](#)); the effigy therefore presumably dates from this period. The Joan de Spurstow it commemorates was probably the widow, known to have been alive in 46 Edward III (1372/3), of Thomas de Spurstow ([27](#)).

The figure has certain affinities with the contemporary half-effigy of Alice de Ridlegh in St. John's Church, Chester, and is probably a product of the same local workshop ([28](#)). No definite pronouncement on this point is likely to be possible, however, until all the monumental effigies in churches along the Welsh borders have been studied.



Person 4
Person 5

IV PERSON	Unknown knight. (Picture).
DATE	c. 1350-1420.
MATERIAL	Red sandstone.
MEASUREMENTS	Length of effigy, 3 ft. 8 in.; length of slab, 4 ft. 3 in.; width of slab at head, 1 ft. 7.25 in.; at feet, 1 ft. 7 in.
DESCRIPTION	Miniature effigy in very poor condition. All details of the hands, arms, feet and head have been almost entirely obliterated. The face has been crudely re-carved, the eyes, nose and mouth being indicated merely by incisions. The head rests on two pillows, the lower and larger one oblong with rounded tasselled corners, and the upper one lozenge-shaped with a tassel at each of the two horizontally opposite corners. The hands have been clasped on the breast in prayer, the legs are straight and the feet rest on a couchant animal (? a lion) with a long tail stretching up the sinister edge of the slab. The head as it now exists is bare and the body is covered by a tight-fitting jupon which curves in at the waist and extends to the tops of the thighs. Encircling the hips is a broad baudric supporting a sword on the left and a large dagger on the right. All are too worn for any details to be seen, as are the legs and feet also.

The sword and dagger were not normally worn with civilian dress in the Middle Ages and their presence here indicates that the effigy represents an armoured knight ([29](#)). In all probability its original appearance resembled that of the effigy of Sir Hugh Calveley in the chancel at Bunbury.

Most English military effigies and brasses of the period c. 1350-1420 have the same wasp-waisted outline as the figure under discussion and it is therefore impossible to date it more precisely than this. The fact that the pillows supporting the head are of almost identical form to those on the effigy of Joan de Spurstow, which is also made from a similar type of sandstone, suggests that it may perhaps be a contemporary product of the same workshop.

V PERSON	Unknown civilian. (Picture).
DATE	14th or 15th century.
MATERIAL	Red Sandstone.
MEASUREMENTS	Length of effigy, 2 ft. 11 in.; length of slab, 3 ft. 5 in.; width of slab at head, 1 ft. 4 in.; at feet. 1 ft. 1 in.
DESCRIPTION	Miniature effigy in very defaced condition. The head is supported by two oblong pillows of which the lower one is the larger. The hands, which are almost entirely obliterated, were clasped on the breast in prayer. The legs are straight and the feet rest on a couchant animal too defaced to identify but, in view of the fact that it has a long tail curled across its back, probably a lion. The whole figure is set within an oblong frame formed by a narrow moulding. The head appears to be bare with the hair arranged to form two side-curls reaching to the middle of the neck. The face is completely obliterated. The body is covered by a smock-like garment which hangs in shallow vertical folds to the level of the calves; it has a straight lower edge and long sleeves. The legs appear to be covered by tight-fitting hose. No details of the feet can be deciphered.

It is quite impossible to date this figure accurately. Robes of similar form were worn by civilians from at least as early as the middle of the 13th century until well into the last quarter of the 15th century ([30](#)). The figure at Bunbury could date from anywhere within this period.

As mentioned above this effigy was found in 1865 lying face downwards in the churchyard.

NOTES.

- 1 See also J. P. Rylands and F. C. Beazley, 'The Monuments at Bunbury Church, Cheshire: Pt. I, Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. 69 (1917), pp. 97-145; F. H. Crossley, 'Mediaeval Monumental Effigies Remaining in Cheshire', *Ibid.*, Vol. 76 (1924), pp. 1-51; C. Blair, 'The Pre-Reformation Effigies of Cheshire: Pt. I, Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, Vol. LX (1948), pp. 117-147.
- 2 See C. Blair, *The Effigy and Tomb of Sir Hugh Calveley* (Bunbury paper, No. 4).
- 3 Harl. Ms. 2151. Reproduced by Rylands and Beazley, *loc. cit.*, opposite p. 115.
- 4 See note [9](#).
- 5 Thomas Dingley, *History from Marble* (Camden Society, London, 1867-8), Vol. II, p. cccxcv (418).
- 6 The belief that cross-legged effigies represent Crusaders still persists though there is not a shred of evidence to support it.
- 7 D. Lyson, *Magna Brittainia*, Vol. II, Pt. II (London, 1810), p. 45.
- 8 G. Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, (London, 1819), Vol. II, pp. 143-4.
- 9 This must have been the 'St. Peiers' effigy of the Randle Holme note. Helsby did not delete the reference to it from his edition of Ormerod's work, published in 1882, so it was presumably still visible at that time.

- 10 This is quite incorrect.
- 11 G. Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, Second edition revised and enlarged by Thomas Helsby (London, 1882), Vol. II, pp. 267-8
- 12 Ibid, p. 265.
- 13 See note [14](#).
- 14 The classic illustration of this form of fastening is on the brass of Sir John d'Abernon the Elder (ob. 1277) at Stoke D'Abernon, Surrey. For a general account of it see Sir Guy F. Laking, *A Record of European Armour and Arms*, Vol. I (London, 1920), pp. 87-8; also *Journal of the Arms and Armour Society*, Vol. III, No 2 (London, June, 1959), pp. 41-3.
- 15 C. A. Stothard, *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* (London, 1832), Pt. 41. The dagger on the allegedly late 13th century de Montfort effigy at Hughenden, Bucks, is a 16th century addition.
- 16 The manuscript of the new Ordinary of Arms, at present held by the Society of Antiquaries, which includes a great deal of material drawn from medieval sources, records no example of a Spurstow bearing more than three mullets. There is a very strong possibility therefore that the arms on the effigy have no connection with the Spurstows. In the first part of my paper 'The Pre-Reformation Effigies of Cheshire' I suggested (loc. cit. p. 131) that this and the next effigy to be described might commemorate a husband and wife and that they might therefore have come from a single tomb. If this is correct the fragment of an inscription on the female effigy, which had not been read when my paper was published, shows that the arms must be those of the 'de Tu.....t.....' family which has so far proved unidentifiable. Conversely, of course, if the arms are a variant of those used by the Spurstow family there can hardly be any connection between the two effigies.
- 17 E.g. [effigy No. III](#).
- 18 Op. cit. p. 137.
- 19 As, for example, on the effigy of a lady (c. 1300) at Haccombe, Devon. See E. S. Prior and A. Gardner *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England* (Cambridge, 1912), Fig. 698.
- 20 This term is used to describe the canopy over the head of an effigy in the indentures, dated 14th February, 1418/19, for the erection of the Greene tomb at Lowick, Northants. See F. H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments* (London, 1921), p. 30.
- 21 It has only been possible to read this from a photograph taken under special lighting conditions. The general form of the complete inscription must have been similar to that on effigy No. III.
- 22 For example, those on the effigies of a knight and lady (c. 1320) at Howden, E. Riding. See Prior and Gardner, op. cit., Fig. 706.
- 23 E.g. the Haccombe effigy referred to in Note 19 and the effigy of a lady (c. 1300) in the Lady Chapel of Worcester Cathedral. See Prior and Gardner, op. cit., Fig. 691.
- 24 For the possible connection between this effigy and effigy No. I see Note [16](#).
- 25 The cote-hardie, an overgarment worn by both sexes, was close fitting as far as the waist where it flared into a loose skirt. According to the late F. M. Kelly and Randolph Schwabe (*A Short History of Costume and Armour*, London, 1931, Vol. 1, p. 18) 'the sleeves till c. 1350 covered the arm to the elbow, whence they hung loose in a tongue-shaped flap.....which was then generally replaced by a tippet,

i.e., a broad band of stuff (generally white), whereof one end encircled the arm above the elbow, the other flying free in a streamer three or four feet long'.

- 26 See Note 25; also Kelly and Schwabe, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 21 and 29. Costume very similar to that on the Spurstow effigy was depicted on the brass of Sir Miles Stapleton (ob. 1364) and his wife formerly at Ingham, Norfolk (Stothard, *op. cit.* Pl. 68).
- 27 See the Spurstow pedigree given by Helsby, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 294. Helsby himself suggests that the effigy represents the wife of Richard de Spurstow (living 1405/6) whose name is unknown. Apart from the details of the costume already mentioned the use of French for the inscription makes it extremely unlikely that the effigy could be as late as this.
- 28 The de Ridlegh effigy is inscribed and dated but unfortunately a satisfactory reading of the date has yet to be produced. The style, of the costume, which includes a cote-hardie with sleeve tippets, suggests, however, that it is contemporary with Joan de Spurstow's effigy. It is clearly a product of the local workshop responsible for the effigy of John de Whitmore (ob. 1374) in Holy Trinity Church, Chester, and for effigies at Northop, Flintshire and Bettws-y-Coed, Denbighshire.
- 29 It should be mentioned, however, that the padded civilian jupon of the period had a similar outline to the military jupon worn over armour. It is just conceivable, therefore, that this effigy is an exception to the rule and represents a civilian wearing sword and dagger.
- 30 See, for example, the effigy of c. 1240 in St. James's Church, Bristol (Prior and Gardner, *op. cit.*, Fig. 679) and brasses of 1356, 1391, 1455 and c. 1475 at Gt. Berkhamstead, Herts., Stoke Fleming, Devon, Taplow, Bucks., and St. Mary-at-Tower, Ipswich (Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of Rubbings of Brasses and Incised Slabs*, London, 1929, Pls. 40, 42 and 43).

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