

THE SHREWSBURY TOMB AT ERITH

By R. J. NINNIS

THE church of St. John the Baptist at Erith possesses several figure brasses but only one three-dimensional sepulchral effigy.¹ This singular sculpture, representing Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury (*ob.* 1567), forms part of a monument which, although much noted by antiquaries and topographers, does not seem to have been recorded in detail.

The virtually identical monument (dated 1563) of Frances Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, niece of Henry VIII and mother of Lady Jane Grey, in St. Edmund's chapel at Westminster Abbey,² is well served by both the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments³ and Professor Pevsner.⁴ The purpose of these notes is to remedy the deficiency in regard to the Countess's monument and, in comparing the two tombs, to show that whereas the Erith tomb is now mutilated and drab, it could be legitimately restored. The Westminster tomb, now restored and resplendent in heraldic colour and gilding, was until a few years ago battered and grimy.

Both monuments comprise a rectangular tomb chest supporting a life-size recumbent effigy. They are faced with carved alabaster and have a plinth of two steps of grey marble (at Erith there is an additional grey marble 'slab'⁵ between the effigy and the tomb chest). At each corner of the chest is a Roman Doric column, the flutings being filled with a convex moulding to one-third their height. The sides of the chest are divided into three equal bays by pilasters which have shallow panels filled with strapwork. The ends of the chest are of one bay; each bay contains a panel of egg-and-dart moulding.

At Westminster the panels are arranged in the following way: At the west end the panel contains a shield of arms within a strapwork cartouche. On the north and south sides the central panels bear inscriptions of incised Roman capitals, while the flanking panels each

¹ The Hellenic female mourner on Chantrey's Eardley Monument being in a different category of monumental sculpture.

² Cf. also the tomb chest of Sir Philip and Sir Thomas Hoby (c. 1566) at Bisham, Berks. However, this is not a free-standing monument and the effigies are semi-recumbent.

³ *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London*, Vol. 1; Westminster Abbey (1924), 42 and plates 27 and 191.

⁴ *The Buildings of England*, London, Vol 1; The Cities of London and Westminster (second edition 1962), 394 and plate 31a.

⁵ Features termed 'slabs' are each composed of several facings.



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contain a lozenge of arms, surmounted by a ducal coronet and framed by strapwork.⁶ This seems the logical arrangement, and its abandonment at Erith must have been due to the peculiar siting.

The entablature has no architrave, but a deep frieze, divided above each column and pilaster by a bracket. These brackets support the boldly projecting cornice, which is formed by the top 'slab' of the tomb chest. Between the brackets the frieze is decorated by plain panels each the width of the large panel below. A form of acanthus leaf decorates the brackets and the corners of the egg-and-dart panels.

Both figures are also similar; a recumbent effigy of a peeress resting upon a rush mattress, the rolled-up end of which supports a cushion under the head. An animal rests against the feet. Within this convention, however, there are many differences. The Duchess wears a gown with decorated hem, over which is a close-fitting bodice and an ermine over-skirt, open at the front. The high neck and close sleeves are edged with frills. A circular jewel lies upon the breast, held by a chain about the neck. Over all is an ermine-faced mantle with fur cape; this lies open and in folds at each side, but it is held together over the shoulders by a cord. The tasselled ends of this cord fall to the sides below knee level. Upon the head is a ducal coronet and a French cap of network pattern, revealing the hair at either side. The hands are clasped together over a small prayer book; the fingers are adorned with rings.

Against the feet, and crouching upon the turned-back end of the mattress which folds over the hem of the mantle (the latter extending a little beyond the hem of the gown), is a crowned lion, the tail is curled back against the soles of the lady's feet, and, like the main, is impressively carved. The cushion has a shallow relief representing brocade.

The costume of the Countess is similar, but with these differences: A plain ermine bodice with short skirt of plain material,⁷ under which is a long ermine skirt. The mantle, ermine lined, but with a plain facing, has only a narrow turned-down collar. The hair is entirely enclosed in a cap, with a veil at the back, upon which is a countess's coronet. Apart from the decorated surrounds to the cord holes of the mantle, there are no adornments.⁸ The hands and the foot-rest are

⁶ The ends of four thyrsi, placed saltirewise, project from the strapwork surround of each lozenge. The inscription panels on both monuments have a bead moulding within the egg-and-dart. At Westminster the east end, only a foot or so from the wall, has a plain slab of alabaster filling the space between the columns, and the brackets at this end are not decorated. At Erith the east end of the tomb is against the east wall.

⁷ If this interpretation is correct, the rendering is rather curious. One would expect the bottom edge of the bodice to be above, not below, the surface of the 'short skirt', whereas the latter is carved as a band in slight relief to the ermine of both bodice and gown.

⁸ The Countess was a widow, whereas the Duchess, who died in 1559, was commemorated by her second husband, Adrian Stokes. Her monument bears the date 1563 over the shield at the west end.

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mostly broken away, but were probably similar to those features on the tomb at Westminster.⁹

There are certain other differences in the two effigies; the Duchess's figure is slighter and younger in appearance and it may be that an attempt at portraiture was made in each case. At Erith the detail of the effigy is not so intricate, but the rendering is a little more realistic; for instance, the ermine gown and mantle lie in heavy folds, whereas the Duchess's ermine gown has the stiff look of starched linen.

The tombs are, within an inch or two, the same size; the principal dimensions of the Shrewsbury tomb being:

Lower Step

Length (from east wall): 7 ft. 4 in.; width: 4 ft. 9 in.

Tomb Chest (at base)

Length: 6 ft. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.; width: 2 ft. 4 in.

Cornice of Tomb Chest

Length (from east wall): 7 ft 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; width: 3 ft. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Effigy Slab, Mattress and Effigy, carved from a single block of alabaster:

Length: 5 ft. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; width: 1 ft. 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.; height: 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

The two steps of grey marble slabs are each 6 in. deep.

The overall height of the tomb chest is 3 ft. 2 in.

The additional 'slab' between the tomb chest and the effigy consists of several pieces of grey marble, 3 in. deep and placed in a rectangle 6 ft. 2 in. \times 2 ft. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

The overall height of the monument, from the floor, is 5 ft. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

The tomb has a core of red brick, as revealed on the south side where the pilasters are missing.

The alabaster at Erith is very white and even in colouring, that at Westminster is more red and mottled. The shield and the lozenges are smaller than at Westminster and consequently the larger space left within the panels gave greater scope in carving the strapwork.

At Westminster the tomb was placed immediately to the north of the site of St. Edmund's altar. At Erith the tomb is in the south-east corner of the south chapel, with its east end against the wall and its south side a foot or so from the south wall; it is therefore seen only from the north and west.

It will be obvious from the foregoing that this comment on the Duchess's monument is equally applicable to that of the Countess:

'An important memento of what monuments of a high order were like at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Still the free-standing tomb-chest of the Middle Ages, and still the recumbent

⁹ But see below.

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effigy. Still reposeful attitude . . . The figure lies, after the new Netherlandish fashion, on a mat . . .¹⁰

The design is a Renaissance interpretation of the miniature architectural treatment of late Gothic tomb chests; column and entablature substituted for buttressed pier and chamfered cornice. The corner columns and egg-and-dart mouldings are the only strictly correct elements and the influence of Mannerism shows in the use of the strap-work. These surrounds are crisply carved in relief and relate the shields and lozenges to the panels in the same way as had the quatrefoil on Gothic tombs.

However, in spite of the use of apparently Mannerist devices, the liberties taken, for example, with the entablature, are probably due to naïvety rather than to a truly Mannerist disregard for the rules pertaining to the Orders.

Both monuments have the Renaissance qualities of harmony and repose, achieved by the subtle texture of the alabaster (especially at Erith) and a general restraint in carving, colouring and gilding.

All the facings of the chests, except the armorial panels are stereotyped components. The quality of carving is fine and differences in the execution of the two tombs are only those that are both unavoidable and welcome in hand-carved work.

Sir James Mann¹¹ and Mr. Eric Mercer¹² both attribute the Hoby and Suffolk tombs to the Early Southwark School of tomb makers: 'It is possible that William Cure, the elder, who came over from Holland in 1541 to work at Nonsuch, was one of its leading figures . . .'¹³ It was the year of the Countess of Shrewsbury's death that saw the arrival in this country of Gerard Johnson, one of the foremost members of what may be called the Later Southwark School. The products of these later masons are characterized by the use of obelisks, gadrooning of cornices and other enrichments quite divorced from the severe work of the older School.

Dr. Margaret Whinney¹⁴ notes that the Hoby and Suffolk tomb chests have similar details, but points out that the Duchess's effigy is of the traditional English type, whereas the semi-recumbent poses of the Hoby brothers are 'unique in England at this date'. Dr. Whinney suggests that the Hoby figures may have been executed in France, by Pierre Bontemps or by a member of his studio called to England.

Bontemps' colleague, the architect Philibert de l'Orme, used a rather severe architectural style with decorative motifs generally confined within panels. The two men co-operated on the tomb of Francis I at

¹⁰ N. Pevsner, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *English Church Monuments, 1536-1625*, Walpole Soc., xxi (1932-3), 12.

¹² *English Art, 1553-1625* (1962), 230.

¹³ E. Mercer, *loc. cit.*

¹⁴ *Sculpture in Britain, 1530-1830* (1964), 9 and 233 note 30.

St. Denis, of which it has been said 'the scale of the monument is so small that it is difficult to escape the idea of a toy model'.¹⁵

Such characteristics may be detected in the Hoby, Suffolk and Shrewsbury tomb chests, and the strapwork of Bontemps' Urn for the Heart of Francis I (1550) is reminiscent of the decorations on the English tombs. The design common to the three tomb chests may be an amalgam of French, Flemish or Dutch ideas, whilst the effigies of the two ladies, even if carved by French or Netherlandish masons, follow the static recumbency which may be regarded as typically English. It is significant that the Westminster example has some of those parts that face the wall left free of carving. This suggests that someone from the workshop was able to visit the site for the proposed monument and was thus able to economize on the carved work, and cut the cost of production. Evidently those concerned with the Shrewsbury tomb did not appreciate how unsuitable the site was for a tomb of this design.

The Westminster tomb has suffered some mutilation, notably to the cornice of the chest. In the lower sinister corner of the effigy a rectangular portion has been replaced and during the last restoration the coronet, nose and the westernmost tassels of the cushion were restored. The lion's crown is still mutilated. The coronet is the single part of the effigy that is newly gilt but traces of the red (?) base of former gilding remain on the jewellery and the lion's crown, mane and tail. The tomb chest makes the greatest contribution to a splendid effect and apart from the heraldic tinctures, the coronets, panel mouldings, and parts of the columns and brackets are gilded.

The Erith tomb seems to have suffered from the effects of settling and some of the facings of the chest are fractured, while on the south side, the two pilasters are missing. The two eastern corners of the cornice are broken off, as is the north-east corner of the additional grey 'slab'. Of the effigy, the coronet, nose and hands are mutilated and only the lower portion of the animal remains. The lion on the Duchess's monument is carved entirely from the same block of alabaster as the lady's figure, and the carving of the end of the sweeping tail surely does not stem only from aesthetic considerations. It is also a practical way of avoiding the unprotected projection of the feet which could easily be damaged. At Erith, from the clean break, it seems that the missing part of the animal was formed of a separate piece of alabaster which was probably also the reason for carving the tail against the sinister side of the mattress.

A few years ago this tomb was cleaned and the shield and lozenges were repainted and the coronets regilded. Traces remain of earlier

¹⁵ Sir Reginald Blomfield, *Studies in Architecture* (1905), 162.

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gilding on the 'eggs' of the egg-and-dart mouldings, the strapwork of the pilasters and the acanthus on the brackets.

The effigy retains traces of gilding on the coronet, the tassels of the mantle cord and the cushion tassels.

If a restoration of the Shrewsbury tomb were to be undertaken, it would surely be safe to follow the Westminster example in replacing missing portions. In the absence of such a close parallel one would probably have assumed the hands to have had the palms together and the fingers extended. From what is left, the animal at the feet is almost certainly a lion, as at Westminster.¹⁶

Of the tomb at Erith, Weever¹⁷ says:

'In the upper end of the South Isle of this Church stands a faire tombe, with this Inscription: left at the first imperfect.

Elizabeth second wife to George late Earle of Shrewsbury, Lord Steward to king Henry the seventh, and to king Henry the eight his Household, by whom she had issue, John, and Lady Anne, wife to William Earle of Pembroke, Lord Steward of Queene Elizabeth's Household: which Lady Anne had beene married before to M. Peter Compton Esquire, by whom she had issue Sir Henry Compton knight, now living.

This Elizabeth Countesse of Shrewsbury, was daughter and one of the heires of Sir Richard Walden knight, Lord of the Towne of Erith, whose body lyeth here likewise entombed.'

In 1769 Thorpe¹⁸ reported: 'On the South side is a noble altar tomb of white marble for Elizabeth countesse of Shrewsbury . . . On the sides of the tomb are her arms with a great variety of quarterings, the colours of which are now defaced, together with the inscription, which is preserved in Weever.'

Some of the heraldic tinctures applied to the Shrewsbury tomb a few years ago seem to be incorrect, neither do they follow older (probably the original) colouring, some of which is still faintly discernible on the lozenge on the south side. In the following description of the arms, reference has been made to several authors¹⁹ for identification and correct tinctures.

¹⁶ With differences noted above; it probably alludes to the lion of the Talbots. The lion on the Suffolk tomb (almost certainly ducally crowned) seems to represent the principal charge of the Brandons.

¹⁷ John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631), 335.

¹⁸ John Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense* (1769), 986.

¹⁹ (i) Sir Bernard Burke, *General Armory* (1878).

(ii) Rev. John Stayce, M.A., 'On the Monuments in the Shrewsbury Chapel in the Parish Church of Sheffield', in the *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, xxx (1874), 177.

(iii) Rev. Carus Vale Collier, B.A., 'Notes on the Heraldry in the Parish Church of Sheffield', in *The Reliquary*, iv (n.s.) (1890), 212.

See this for an explanation of the Talbot marshalling of arms.

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NORTH SIDE

I Eastern Panel: Shield within a strapwork cartouche, the fourth Earl of Shrewsbury impaling Elizabeth, heiress of Walden, Owgan and Joyce.

Dexter: Quarterly of ten.²⁰

- 1 Gules, a lion rampant within a bordure engrailed or (Talbot).
- 2 Bendy of ten argent and gules (Old Talbot).
- 3 Azure, a lion rampant within a bordure or (Montgomery).
- 4 Gules, three garbs within a double tressure fleurie counter fleurie or (Comyn).
- 5 Barry of ten argent and azure, an orle of martlets gules (Valence).
- 6 Gules, two lions passant argent (Strange).
- 7 Gules, a saltire argent charged at fesspoint with a martlet for difference (Nevil).
- 8 Argent, a bend between six martlets gules (Furnival).
- 9 Or, a fret gules (Verdon).
- 10 Argent, a lion rampant per fess gules and sable (Lovetot).

Sinister: Quarterly.

- 1 and 4 Or, on a bend gules cotised azure between six martlets gules, three wings argent (Walden).²¹
- 2 Or, on a chief sable three martlets or, at fesspoint a crescent gules (Owgan).²²
- 3 Argent, a chevron between three bay leaves gules (Joyce).²³

II Central Panel: Lozenge within strapwork cartouche and surmounted by a Countess's coronet; Walden quartering Owgan and Joyce.

III Western Panel: Lozenge, etc., as II.

WEST END

IV This panel contains a lozenge, within a strapwork cartouche and surmounted by a countess's coronet, bearing the same impalement as I.

²⁰ In St. Edmund's Chapel at Westminster Abbey and, by a curious coincidence, opposite the Duchess of Suffolk's tomb, is Maximilian Colt's monument to the seventh Earl of Shrewsbury. It is crowned by a magnificent achievement of arms with a shield quarterly of sixteen, including the ten Talbot coats featured on the tomb at Erith. Colt's own drawing of this monument is reproduced as the frontispiece in Katherine A. Esdaile's *English Church Monuments, 1510-1840*, (1946).

²¹ *Visitation of Kent, 1530-1*, The Harleian Society, lxxiv, 20.

²² *Visitation of Kent, 1619*, The Harleian Society, xlii, 155, note 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

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SOUTH SIDE

V Western Panel: Lozenge, etc. as IV.

VI and VII Central and Eastern Panels: Both have the egg-and-dart and bead mouldings but the centres are completely blank.

The absence of traces of an inscription points to the probability of the tomb having been placed in the corner when first erected. The panels were probably arranged in their eccentric order on the instructions of the executors. The inscription panels, being the plainest, were relegated to the more inaccessible positions on the tomb, while the richly carved and painted heraldic panels were placed where they would give the greatest effect.²⁴

In the context of English heraldry, Sir W. H. St. John Hope²⁵ has said that the Duchess's tomb is an early example of the use of the lozenge for the display of ladies' arms. As there is at most, five years difference in the production of the tombs, the Erith example may perhaps claim the same distinction. In France the same use of this device, exclusively for the display of ladies' arms as opposed to the indiscriminate use of shield or lozenge for decorative effect, may be seen at least as early as the tombs of Margaret of Bourbon and Margaret of Austria at Brou, begun in 1526.²⁶

At Framlingham, Suffolk, the tomb of Henry, Duke of Richmond, has a lozenge to hold the arms of his wife. Although the date in this instance is obscure, it probably ante-dates the Duchess of Suffolk's tomb by about ten years, and the design, if not the execution, is probably French.

Elizabeth was the co-heiress of Sir Richard Walden by his second wife, Margery; her mother being the co-heiress of the Welsh families of Owgan and Joyce. She married George Talbot, fourth Earl of Shrewsbury, 'probably after 1510'.²⁷ His first wife Anne, daughter of William first Lord Hastings, was buried in Sheffield parish church (now the

²⁴ The present arrangement of the panels may, however, date only from 1851. On page 55 of the Vestry Minute Book, in use from 1846-1857 (Kent County Archives Office, Maidstone; Cat. Mk. P 137), is the following entry, signed by Rev. J. J. Wilkinson, Vicar: '1851—During this year the fine old Tomb of the Countess of Shrewsbury, being in danger of falling, was taken down and re-erected at the expence of the vicar.' In the light of Thorpe's description it seems doubtful that the position of the tomb itself has ever been changed.

²⁵ *A Grammar of English Heraldry*, revised by A. R. Wagner (1953), 32.

²⁶ E. Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (1964), 78 and figs. 341-3. A seventeenth-century drawing of the destroyed tomb of René of Anjou and his first wife (mid-fifteenth century), formerly in Angers Cathedral (*id.*, fig. 267), clearly shows lozenges used specifically to represent the lady's arms. However, the drawing seems to indicate that the monument had undergone some later alteration. Professor Panofsky accepts the very late appearance of various features as evidence that the tomb 'provided we can trust the seventeenth-century drawing... was... distinctly Italianate in style' (*id.*, 65). It may be that the artist interpreted the Early Renaissance features in the more advanced style of his own day.

²⁷ G. E. Cockayne, *The Complete Peerage* (1896).

cathedral). Consequently the Earl had the south chapel built there to contain the tomb of himself and his two wives. The fine Late Gothic tomb has representations of both Anne and Elizabeth on either side of their husband. The ladies wear coronets and heraldic mantles whilst the Earl wears the mantle and insignia of the Order of the Garter. The Latin inscription also states, erroneously, that Elizabeth was buried there.²⁸

The Earl died 26th July, 1538, at his Manor of Wingfield, Derbyshire and was buried at Sheffield.²⁹

Sir Richard Walden had leased the Manor of Erith from the crown,³⁰ and in 1545 it was granted to Elizabeth 'by the description of the Manor of Eryth, alias Lysnes, with all its members and appurtenances, to hold in capite, by Knight's service'.³¹ She died in July 1567, her will, being dated 30th June, was proved 17th July, 1567. She willed 'that within one yeare next after my decease there be a tombe made over me with a flat Stone of marble havinge the picture of me with myne armes graven the'in'.³² She therefore intended to be commemorated by a brass, in this she would have followed a well-established precedent for the Walden memorials at Erith.³³

The Manor of Erith passed to her daughter, Anne Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, from whom it descended to the Comptons of Warwickshire. Eventually, c. 1650, Sir William Compton 'conveyed [it] to Mr. Lodowick, of London; who quickly sold it to Nicholas Vanacker'.³⁴ It is the tomb of Vanacker's son, Francis, which answers that of the Countess, and stands in the north-east corner of the south chapel at Erith.

The Countess of Pembroke's will³⁵ makes it obvious that her mother's tomb also serves as her own monument: '. . . my Bodey to be buried in the chappell within the parishe of Earhithe in the countie of Kent besides the bodie of my deere mother the late Countes of Shrewsburie and as touchinge the order and manner of my burriall and the

²⁸ Rev. John Stayce, *op. cit.*

²⁹ G. E. Cockayne, *op. cit.*

³⁰ *A Guide to Erith Parish Church* (1967), 11. The origin of this information is not given. N.B. Weever refers to Sir Richard as 'Lord of the Town of Erith'.

³¹ Edward Hasted, *History of Kent* (1797), xi, 242.

³² Wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and now preserved in the Principal Probate Registry, Somerset House, London; ref. 21 Stonarde.

³³ Members of the Walden family, commemorated by brasses at Erith:
(i) Emme Wode, daughter of John Walden, Mayor of the Staple of Calais (1471).

(ii) Richard Walden, Esq. and Elizabeth, his wife (1496). (Only the brass of three sons remains.)

(iii) Sir Richard Walden and Margery, his wife (1536) (now lost).

(iv) Elizabeth Hawte, daughter of Sir Richard Walden by his first wife Margaret (1537).

³⁴ Hasted, *op. cit.*, 244.

³⁵ Wills, as above; ref. 54 Rutland.

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bringinge of my bodye to the earthe I doe wholly refer the same unto the will and disposition of myne executors hereafter named to whom I have often declared my mynde therin. So be it I will that in any charge or expence to be disbursed or laide out by my executors in and aboute my saide burriall they shall not exceede the sume of twoe hundred poundes of currant englishe money.' She died in 1588 and was buried 8th August.³⁶ Hasted says she was buried 'with great solemnity' so the £200 was probably devoted entirely to the ceremony.

The inscription seen by Weever may have been painted upon a board and hung up over the tomb. As he does not mention an inscription specifically for the Countess of Pembroke, it may be that her executors were content with mention of her in her mother's inscription.

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³⁶ G. E. Cockayne, *op. cit.*