

# Oxfordshire

## BURFORD PARISH CHURCH

### **Tombs and Monuments, by Nicholas Cooper**

There are no remaining monuments in Burford church from before the late 14th century, probably reflecting the fact that in the Middle Ages the lord of the manor was an absentee. However, it is possible that recesses in the south wall of the early 14th-century St Thomas's chapel held effigies.

From the late 14th century to the early 16th a number survive, though all except the brass to John and Alice (Alys) Spicer, 1437, beneath the crossing, have been defaced and their inscriptions lost. Several indents remain, showing several of them to have been bracket brasses of the same general design as the Spicers'.

There are four tomb chests of the late 14th to early 16th centuries, three in the chancel south aisle and one in the south transept. None can be identified. That in the south transept, probably of the early 15th century, has a slab with a brass indent, and a line of angels holding shields; a small fragment of inscription remains on the edge of the slab. In 1574 three shields were recorded, one of them bearing a merchant's mark, but there is not enough information to identify the occupant.

From the middle of the 16th century Renaissance forms were being employed by Burford masons, although these were not as yet very sophisticated. A series of monuments to members of the Silvester family, ranged along the south side of the Lady Chapel and dating from 1568 to 1626, are all executed to a common design, comprising a tomb chest with panelled front; above each is a reredos with strapwork and good roman lettering.<sup>1</sup> There are later memorials to the family up to 1904. The principal 16th-century monument in the church is that to Sir Edmund Harman (died 1577), erected during his lifetime in 1569 against the north wall of the nave. Harman, purchaser of The Priory (i.e. the dissolved Hospital of St John), had been Master of the Barber-Surgeon's company in 1540. The monument is in the form of a shallow altar tomb: the lower tier has panels containing kneeling figures of Harman's children,

between Ionic columns, and is separated by a cornice with a Vitruvian scroll from the upper tier, carved with an inscription set in a strapwork cartouche. Within the strapwork are figures of native American Indians. The design is copied from an engraving by Cornelis Bos, probably published c.1540 in Antwerp or Groningen, but the reason for Harman's choice of subject is not known.<sup>2</sup> Over the whole is an achievement of arms with a helmet. Harman probably lived at Taynton rather than in Burford, and since his wife's coffin plate was found in Taynton church in 1810 may have been buried there. It is possible, however, that Harman's tomb is that in the north-west corner of the Silvester aisle. Harmon was married to Agnes Silvester, and in 1660 it was recorded that a tomb in this location carried the arms of the Barber Surgeons' Company. The tomb itself shares many details of design with the series of Silvester tombs.<sup>3</sup>

The finest of the monuments in the church is that to Lawrence Tanfield (died 1625) in the north chancel transept. This has the effigies of Tanfield and his wife on a slab, with a *gisant* below, all beneath a canopy with six black marble columns, obelisks at the angels and figures of Virtues. His daughter kneels at the head, and his grandson Lucius Cary at the feet. The work is not documented, but has been attributed to the Southwark sculptor Gerard Christmas.<sup>4</sup>

There are several other 17th-century monuments, of varied quality and of varied source. That to John Warren, 1659, at the western end of the Silvester aisle, has a tablet crowned by a pediment which is supported by caryatids; these are crude and surprisingly old-fashioned for their age, suggestive of a local school of craftsmen to some extent isolated from advanced styles. The bust of John Harris, 1674, now in St Thomas's chapel but formerly in the Silvester aisle, is of a form that is also more characteristic of the early 17th century, but it is very much more accomplished and is unlikely to be by a local sculptor.

The number of 18th- and 19th-century monuments in the church is small by comparison with some other places of similar size, and probably reflects the poverty of the town. Members of the Bartholomew and Silvester families continued to be commemorated in spaces on existing monuments, and there are many ledger slabs from the mid 17th to late 18th centuries which commemorate members of the Chavasse and other families. There are no monuments to any members of the Lenthall family, who were buried in a

vault in the north transept. William Lenthall, the founder of the Burford family, left instructions in his will that he was to be buried under a plain slab with the simple inscription 'vermis sum' [I am a worm].

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<sup>1</sup> The repetition of the design for successive members of the family prompts comparison with the Fettiplace tombs at Fulbrook.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan England* (1997), 51; Margaret Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain, 1530-1830* (1964), 9.

<sup>3</sup> R.H. Gretton, *The Burford Records* (1920), 118; R. and J. Moody, *A Thousand Years of Burford* (2006), 20.

<sup>4</sup> J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), 506.