

ART. XII. – *The Harrington Tomb at Cartmel Priory Church.*¹

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THE so-called 'Harrington Tomb' (Plate I) at Cartmel priory is "one of the best of its date in England" as Pevsner has recently claimed,² and is one of the limited number commemorating top-ranking medieval aristocrats, of which very substantial remains have survived in northern England. It has not hitherto received the high degree of attention which it deserves. Properly speaking it is not a tomb but the battered remains of a chantry chapel, founded in memory of Lord John Harrington (d. 1347) and his wife Joan (née Dacre), both of whose family arms were formerly clearly visible on the monument.

Almost certainly this chantry chapel was originally situated in the centre of the western bay of the Town Choir, where signs of it were seen when the area now covered by the organ was recently opened up, including a large stone block, laid east and west and of about the same length as the present tomb and roughly a foot square in cross-section. Originally the chantry must have been of two bays with a stone altar at its eastern end, and would have resembled the rather less damaged chantry chapel of John, 4th Lord Harrington at Porlock in Somerset. Almost certainly its altar was destroyed and the rest of the tomb badly damaged by the Cromwellian soldiers who spent the night at Cartmel on 1st October 1643 after a minor battle in Furness. Although it is quite clear that during their stay at Cartmel they displayed in the church that fanatical iconoclasm for which they are notorious, thanks, probably, to the briefness of their sojourn very considerable remains of the Harrington tomb have survived. Probably very soon after its maltreatment it was decided, probably by the then owner of Holker, a very pious "church papist", to reconstruct elsewhere the sadly battered remains of the chantry. The safest place was rightly thought to be in the east part of the wall which divides the sanctuary from the Town Choir. Here it was somewhat roughly fitted in and still remains. This move entailed the destruction of part of the sedilia and of a large recess in the south side of the wall which contained a fine effigy of a prior of the house, clad in the robes of his order, which was moved on to the floor below, where it still remains. This move almost certainly led to the planks of the tomb's tester being reduced in length by some six inches to prevent them projecting beyond the face of the wall; very recent examination has shown that this shortcoming was not uniformly applied to the same side of the planks.

Originally, as was usual in such cases, the tomb was brightly painted, but at a date or dates unknown, and perhaps in the 18th century, such decoration as then remained was covered with whitewash, which was unhappily removed too vigorously and crudely in Victorian times. As a result, as we shall see, the only remains of the original medieval paintings which have survived are some on the tester or canopy which is set on high over the effigies. The tomb consists of the four main elements:—

1. The great stone chest

This originally contained the mortal remains of Lord John Harrington and his wife Joan (née Dacre) and is 6ft. long, 5ft. 6ins. broad and 3ft. 3ins. high. Its sides are

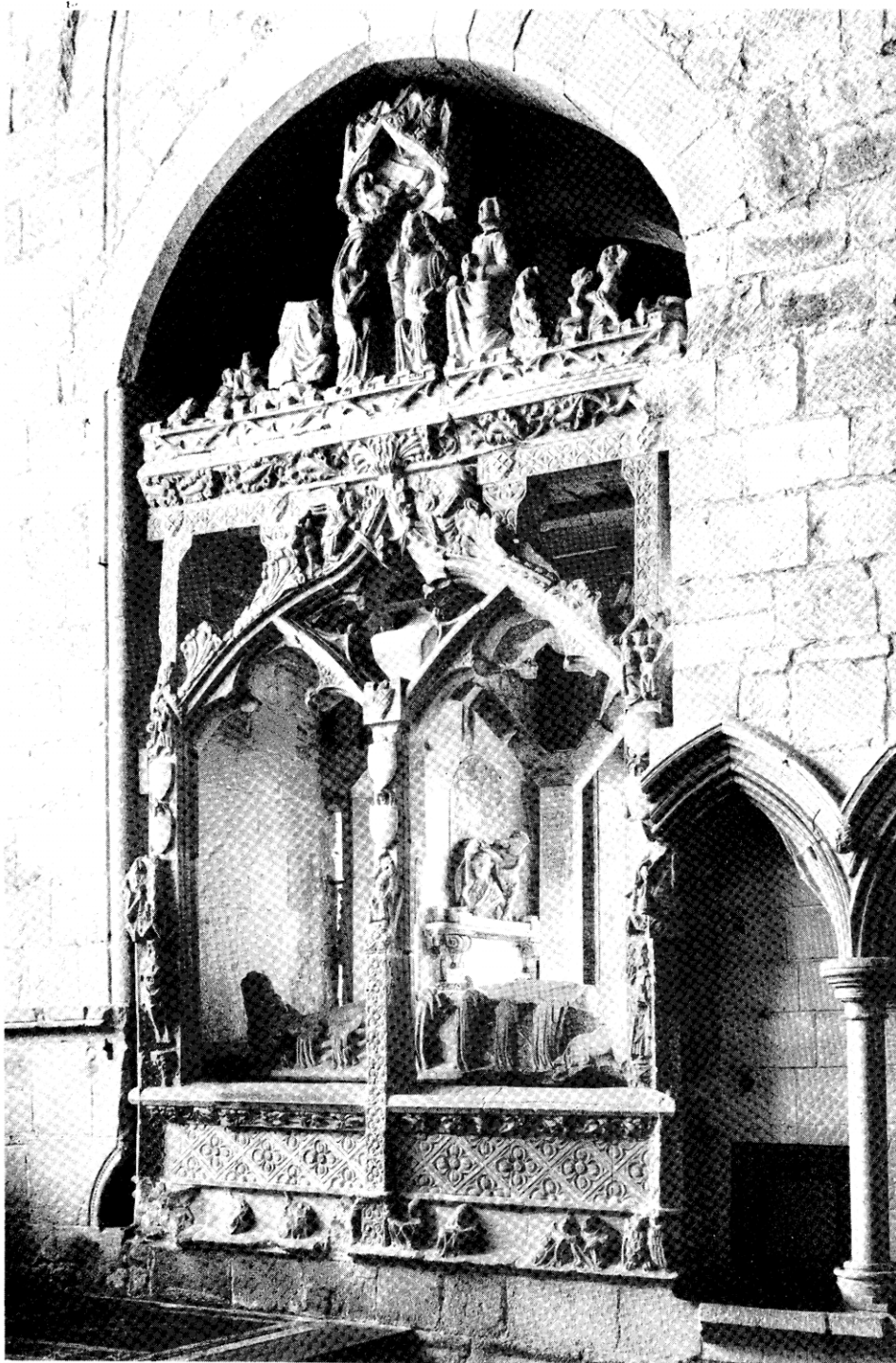


PLATE. 1. – The Harrington Tomb – north side.

(photo: Dr. J. G. Bate)

skilfully carved with an elaborate diaper pattern of diamonds, that on the south side incorporating in them the escallop or shell which dominated the Dacre coat of arms. At the base of each corner of the chest were put the traditional symbols of the Four Evangelists – on the south side are the ox of St. Luke and the eagle of St. John, both fairly well preserved, on the north what are evidently the damaged man of Matthew and the almost totally destroyed lion of St. Mark. Between them are carved a series of small seated figures in monastic costume engaged in singing what is presumably a requiem. The precentor is shown beating time with uplifted hand and one group of three canons share a large book sustained by a lectern, this being the maximum number allowed to do this by their observances. Along the rim of the north and south sides of the top of the tomb are a series of small figures almost certainly representing Austin canons, which are very surprisingly cut in the same block of stone as the chest – “this is a unique feature” comments Pevsner.

2. The effigies

On the top of the tomb chest lie the effigies of Lord John (exactly six feet long) with that of his wife on his right hand side. This is five feet six inches long and is very little damaged, but there is a large ugly crack across the face of her husband and a little damage to his armour. The heads of lord and lady are each supported by a pair of angels which, like most of the processing canons around them, have been badly smashed. Both figures are shown with their hands uplifted and holding a conical object representing a heart, (?in memory of the injunction in the Mass “Lift up your hearts”). Lord John’s feet rest on a lion (whose bravery, it is said, barons should copy), those of his wife on a somewhat damaged dog (whose fidelity wives should emulate). Lady Joan wears a very loose-fitting dress stretching down to her feet, its folds being contained at the waist by a broadish belt; she wears a veil and wimple. Her husband wears the type of helmet known as a bascinet and full chain armour, together with a surcoat that, like the shield on his left-hand side, bears the *fretty* coat of arms of his family. His sword hangs from a heavy belt, his right leg is crossed over the left leg at its calf. Recent examination has shown that the stone from the which the effigies are made is almost certainly local, but the standard of carving of the effigies is so very much higher than the rest of the tomb that it was almost certainly produced by an outside craftsman. Two very rough sketches of parts of the monument made in 1646 by one Daniel King have been published in our *Transactions* by J. Brownbill.³ One shows the two effigies and behind their heads, on what was almost certainly vanished board, the arms of the Harringtons and Dacres.

In 1832 the chest of the tomb was opened under the leadership of the local antiquary – Mr William Field, with the consent of the incumbent, the Rev. Thomas Remington. Of what was found we have an inadequate account given by Stockdale “In the midst of the cavity which was of considerable size, there appeared a small heap of bones, both those of the human species and of birds; lime rubbish, pieces of thick leather, rusty iron and some part of a skull containing a number of perfectly sound teeth, all promiscuously mixed together”.⁴ Stockdale also mentions a very small piece of leather stitched doublet, a small round piece of iron about half an inch in diameter, highly oxidised, the thigh bone of a large bird, and a molar tooth “very sound and perfect”. These were then “in the possession of Mr James Field of Cartmel, a relative of the late Mr Field, along with the tooth, given to him by the late clerk of Cartmel church, Wm. Fell, who obtained it



PLATE 2. – Effigies of Lord John and Lady Joan Harrington.

(photo: Dr. J. G. Bate)

when the tomb was open", and happily very recently have been restored to the church. Mr. Rigge mentions records of other oddments not all of which may have come from the tomb. The most notable was a large piece of stout leather, twelve inches by ten, with about half of the left arm-hole, "thought to have been part of a leather doublet" and "several pieces of rusty iron like nails perhaps coffin nails an inch and a half long". He states, "most of these relics were left as they were, but I was able to present some of them to Sir Richard Harrington, Bart., of Whitbourne Court, Worcestershire, the present linear representative of this ancient family".⁵ The present writer's grandmother, Lucy Agnes Butterworth (née Remington) informed him that, as a small child when staying at Aynsome (the family residence), she remembers being told that bones from the Harrington tomb were stored in a tin in a chest-of-drawers there but she was too frightened to explore further! The Remingtons sold up Aynsome and its contents some fifty years ago, when these relics may well have disappeared, after having, of course, been originally acquired by the Rev. Thomas Remington.

3. Corner Columns and Arches

At the corner of the chest are stout columns which support the ceiling of the tomb, between which on their north and south sides rise elegant ogee arches which reach up to the tomb's ceiling. Their heads have carved thereon a representation of a soul being drawn up to heaven in a sheet by a pair of angels. The arches are divided into two by tracery rising from a short central pillar. That on the south side has modern work along with medieval work which is not *in situ*. The small central pillar on the north side is intact and shows a seated figure (? Christ) blessing, above which are three shields, the top one of which displays the *fretty* coat of Harrington.

The corner columns have triple bands of sculpture:-

(a) *Bottom – Small statues of the saints:-*

S.W. – St. Peter with his key and Our Lady with the Holy Child; above is St. Michael with a very large trumpet.

S.E. – St. Katherine with her wheel and an empty niche; above St. Michael as before.

N.E. – An unidentifiable figure and St. John the Baptist with *Agnus Dei* emblem – above a censuring angel.

N.W. – An unidentifiable figure and an archbishop (? St. William of York).

(b) *Top – Rather poorly carved scenes from the life of Christ:-*

S.W. – The scourging of Christ, His hands shown bound around a very slim pillar.

S.E. – The crucified body of Christ.

N.W. – The blindfolded Christ being buffeted.

N.E. – St. Mary Magdalene drying Christ's feet with her hair.

Between these two bands of carving are carved a number of shields:-

S.W. – a blank shield

S.E. – a tilting shield

N.W. – two blank shields (? modern copies)

N.E. – ditto (ditto)

4. The Tester

The four corner columns support a massive stone frame carved with a foliated design, which supports a tester or canopy made from massive wooden boards. Its upper side is plain, but its lower one is of the greatest interest, retaining important remains of contemporary painting. Some of these have suffered severely from being whitewashed fairly heavily, albeit unevenly, and some of its planks have been incorrectly replaced when the tomb was inserted in its present position. There can be no doubt that the design was originally dominated by a large coloured figure of the Resurrected Christ, but at present only fragments of it, including His feet are clearly visible. The most notable features now, are two quatrefoils which contain very well-preserved drawings of the symbols of St. Matthew (a man) and St. Luke (an ox), each with their names duly inserted and having wings to indicate their celestial nature (Plate 3). These two are among the earliest surviving features of their kind in England and of the highest quality, which makes one regret greatly that they are so difficult to view. It is to be hoped that this remarkable tester will soon receive the skilled overhaul so long overdue and now being planned.



PLATE 3. – Portion of the tester with emblems of St. Matthew and St. Luke.

(photo: Dr. J. G. Bate)

What is the age of the Harrington “tomb”? it is much to be regretted that we cannot give a very precise answer to this question, owing to the inadequacy of surviving documentary evidence. The sole date concerning it of which we can be quite certain is

that of Lord John Harrington's death in 1347. But it was quite common for medieval grandees to prepare their tombs before they died, and it is at least feasible that the effigies were made at a different time from the chest and canopy around them – they are certainly made of stone from a different part of the quarry from which both certainly came. An attempt has been made to date the effigies from the stylistic evidence of the armour. Ward Perkins claims that the armour of Lord John shown on his effigy is “at least twenty years earlier in date than 1347” and argues that “the body armour and sword belt are of a type that was generally obsolete by c. 1325. The effigy must fall between the fifteen years 1310-25”.⁶ But he also admits that the canopy and its ornament appears to belong to the second quarter of the 14th century. Crossley dates the monument to c. 1340.⁷

However, anyone versed in the history of our area knows how very unwise it is not to make full allowance for the time-lag which often separates work in Lakeland from that in southern England, as is shown, for example, by the fact that the Runic alphabet was being used in Furness no little time after it was extinct in most of the rest of the country. To rely heavily on stylistic evidence to date armour here with precision is certainly perilous. In a letter to the present writer the Master of Armouries, Mr A. V. B. Norman, points out that parallels to Lord John's mail and helmet have been found in Yorkshire “as late as the 1330s”, as have examples of his type of sword belt of the same decade. In view of this it would be unwise to dogmatise over the precise date of the effigies and the rest of the tomb. They may have been carved at rather different times, but both may well belong to the second quarter of the fourteenth century.

Two minor points remain to be noted. On the top of the tomb, now, as in Whitaker's day, are several loose bits of carving. Their original habitat is uncertain but some of them, at least, may have belonged to a small reredos which originally stood behind the little altar at the east end of the chantry chapel. Those on the north side probably formed a set depicting the Coronation of the Virgin, those on the south side are a miscellany, and possibly not all of one date.

Probably when the Town Choir was reconstructed, about 1320-40, an effigy of an Austin canon, who was probably the prior of Cartmel at this time, was carved from the same distinctive stone as that of the effigies of Lord and Lady Harrington, and placed in a sizable recess in the north wall of the Town Choir. This niche was largely destroyed when the Harrington tomb was inserted there in the seventeenth century, only the base of it being now visible. Probably at this time a stone base was constructed on the floor of the two layers (the top one being of red sandstone) on which the effigy was placed and still rests (Plate 4). It shows the same skilful hand as the Harrington effigy and was probably done at the same time by the same carver. Very few medieval effigies of Austin canons in England remain but there are others at Hexham, Edington and St. Bartholomew's Smithfield; the Cartmel effigy is much superior to the first two and vies with the third in quality. The head of the figure is supported by two badly damaged angels and its feet rest on a somewhat complex dragon. The prior, if, as is likely, such he be, wears what is probably a long cassock, over which is a rochet or surplice with very wide open sleeves, over which is the very long cloak (*cappa*). The usual very capacious hood is attached and is here neatly folded back behind his head which rests on a small cushion. The features of the face have been somewhat damaged in the course of time.

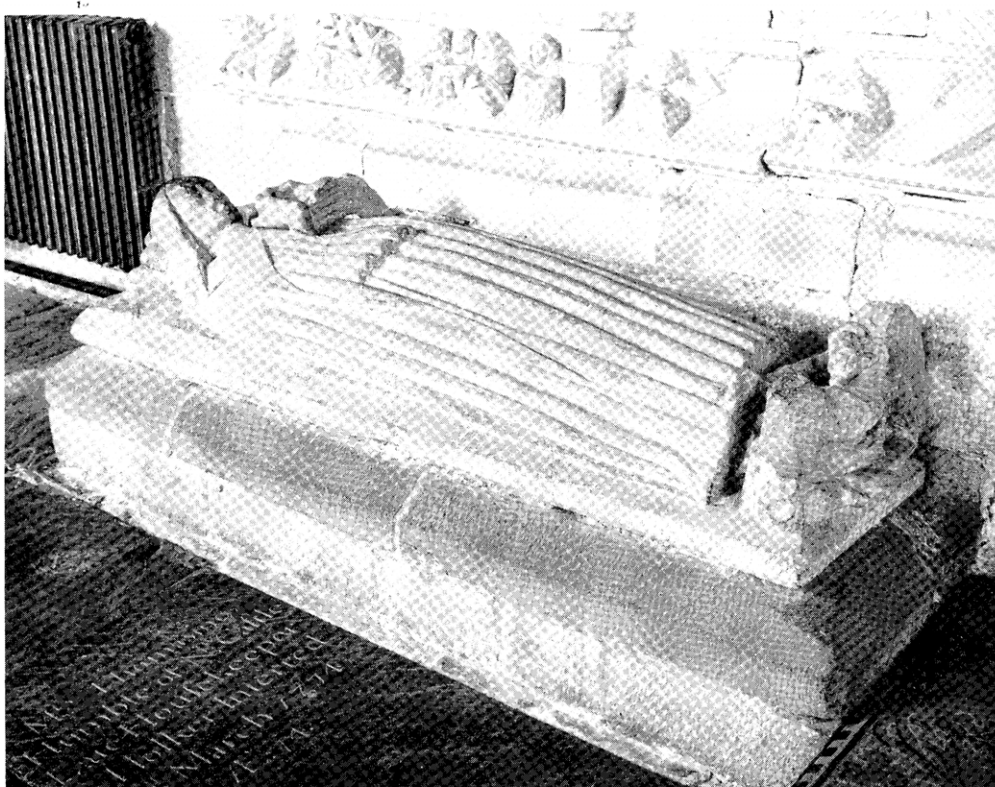


PLATE 4. – Effigy of Austin Canon with base of tomb above.

(photo: Dr. J. G. Bate)

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Dr J. G. Bate for providing the illustrations for this paper and to the Cartmel Parish Church Council for their kind permission to have them taken.

Notes and References

- ¹ H. F. Rigge, 'The Harrington Tomb in Cartmel Priory Church', CW1, v, 109-20 is a useful pioneer article. I am indebted to Lady Wedgwood, F.S.A. for several useful comments on my draft of this paper.
- ² Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Lancashire* (1969), 89-90.
- ³ CW2, xxv, 373-4.
- ⁴ J. Stockdale, *Annals of Cartmel* (1892), 545-9.
- ⁵ *Cartmel Priory Church* (2nd edn., Cartmel, 1885), 13.
- ⁶ J. B. Ward Perkins, 'The Harrington Effigy in Cartmel Priory', *The Antiquaries Journal*, xxiii (1943), 26-30.
- ⁷ F. H. Crossley, *English Church Monuments 1150-1550* (1933), 58.