

ENGLISH MILITARY EFFIGIES AND THEIR RELATION TO
THE HISTORY OF ARMOUR, WITH REFERENCES TO
SOME EXAMPLES IN DERBYSHIRE.¹

By the BARON DE COSSON, F.S.A., F.R.G.S.

When Mr. St. John Hope asked me to write some notes on the Military effigies of Derbyshire, I hoped to be able to see beforehand all those of which he gave me a list, forty-seven in number. The time at my disposal only allowed me to see twenty-four of these, but I chose those which seemed to me more especially interesting from their date and preservation.

I was well repaid for my trouble, for besides learning how beautiful the county of Derby is, I found the study of its effigies to be a most interesting and instructive one. It is deeply interesting from two points of view.

In the first place our English effigies are the most important and most carefully wrought work now remaining to us of the English school of sculpture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Monumental effigies in our churches have often escaped destruction where other, and, it may be more important works of the sculptor's art, have been ruthlessly destroyed.

And a careful study of what effigies I have been able to see, has convinced me that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a really excellent school of sculpture existed in this country, a school which could hold its own with that of any other country at the same date, Italy alone excepted, for we know that at that period Italy was quite half-a-century in advance of the rest of Europe in all matters of fine art.

Of this school of English sculpture, what were probably the greatest works, have all been swept away by circumstances with which antiquaries are all acquainted.

At one time our churches were filled with works of

¹ Read in the Historical Section at the Derby Meeting, August 3rd, 1885.

painting and sculpture. Of the painting but a few mutilated fragments remain, and of the sculpture the monumental effigies are what have suffered least from zeal and fanaticism, although they have not entirely escaped the scarcely less destructive carelessness and indifference with which they were regarded during a long period of time.

When I say that the English sculptor could have held his own against him of other countries, it must be remembered that in order to make a just comparison, we must only compare his work in effigies (about the only example of his work now existing) with the effigies of other countries; not with those works, in which imagination, sentiment, and the more attractive artistic qualities could be displayed, and I have no hesitation in saying that effigy for effigy, the work of the Englishman, is equal to that of the German, the Frenchman, or the Fleming.

As I have said the more attractive works of the English sculptor have disappeared, and if we enquire why if so fine a school of sculpture existed in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it did not progress and develope at the period of the Renaissance, as happened in other countries, I will venture to suggest that the complete cessation of a demand for its work, and the continual destruction of the works already existing which took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, brought it to an abrupt and premature end. To the soft and delicate modelling and the admirable technical execution of the alabaster effigies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, succeed those wooden looking dolls in stiffly folded dresses which kneel with stony gaze on the monuments of the reigns of the Stuarts.

So complete, so final was the extinction of all English art, that during long years the arts of painting and sculpture in their higher forms were almost exclusively practised in England by foreigners, who brought to this country the art of the Renaissance, then already in rapid decay abroad, and from the teaching of these foreign professors of an art already in its decline, has the art of England suffered, almost to the present day, so much so that for many long years no great art that was truly national in its character could be said to exist in the land.

Now if we go back to our effigies, and I fear I have strayed too far from them, we shall find first, that they possess very great interest as works of English art, and therefore form an interesting subject of study to the student, whilst the next point which gives them a strong claim upon our attention (and it is one which is especially interesting to me), is the marvellous faithfulness with which they reproduce the armour worn when they were made, and the manner in which they teach us the story of the gradual growth and development of defensive armour in this country.

Thoroughly to appreciate this wonderful accuracy, it is necessary to have a very complete technical knowledge of real armour, to have seen, to have examined, to have weighed, to have felt as much real armour as possible, to have endeavoured to learn how the armour was made, what means of manufacture the mediæval armourer possessed, to have thought out the why and the wherefore from a constructive and mechanical point of view of each piece found, and of each form given to it. And here I may repeat what I have said in previous papers, that in all really fine armour of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there was a good and workmanlike reason for each piece, and still more so for the special form given to it, and that those pieces and those forms often give proof of the greatest thought and ingenuity in constructive design.

After the end of the fifteenth century, it is true that we often find extravagancies of form and construction, due to special fancies of the armourer or of the wearer, but these were sure signs that the decline of the armourer's art was rapidly drawing nigh.

I venture to say that if anyone makes the thorough study of real specimens of armour which I have mentioned, and for that he must have seen as many collections and museums as possible, for in each one he may learn something new and unexpected; he will then be able to say almost with certainty on looking at any work of art, whether the armour presented therein was faithfully and exactly copied from armour then worn, or whether it was only generally accurate in form and fashion without caring about constructive details, or lastly whether as was sometimes the case, it was the result of the fancy and

imagination of the artist, who not infrequently thought more of exhibiting those qualities, than of showing his knowledge of armour.

Now, the great value of monumental effigies to the student of armour is, that down to the end of the fifteenth century, they almost universally belong to the first of these classes.

The business of the sculptor was to make a simple and accurate presentment of the man; to show him to us as he was when alive. Not as was so often the case at a later date, to show him to us in clothes which he never wore, habited as no human eyes had ever seen him habited.

Truth in a tomb, was then thought becoming, nay, imperative, not the fanciful posturing and theatrical bombast which in later ages often proclaims falsehoods which the silent dead beneath, however humble-minded he may have been in life, has now no power to recall.

I do not say that pompous epitaphs always proclaim falsehoods, some of the dead who lie beneath them may have possessed all the virtues with which they are credited, but when a gentleman of the reign of Queen Anne is represented in Roman armour, a distinct falsehood is proclaimed, and so when the late Prince Consort was shown in the armour of the fifteenth century on his monument at Windsor Castle, he was shown as wearing that which he had never worn in his life.

It may be said that the Roman armour was allegorical of the Roman virtue of the gentleman in the full bottomed wig, and that the fifteenth century armour was emblematical of the Knightly and Christian virtue of the Prince Consort, but how much simpler, how much more dignified, how much less ridiculous to future generations, are those monuments which show a man as he was, in the apparel he was proudest of perhaps, and tell nothing but the plain truth to posterity.

How grand is the dignity of the effigies at Norbury and at Longford! There is the Knight laid low at last, clad in the harness in which he has fought for king and country, his hands joined in humble prayer.

And when there is an inscription, it contains no vain-glorious vaunting of his virtue, but simply—"Here lies so

and so, of such a place, soldier or knight, who died on such a day in such a year. May god have mercy on his soul."

Who amongst even the best of us would not rather have such an epitaph, than one declaring that we were all virtue and perfection.

When at Tissington, near Ashburne, I saw an epitaph to a twice married Fitzherbert, dated 1619, which pleased me exceedingly.

"Love, Justice, Honour here
All at once in one appear ;
Let the reader silent be,
And do homage on his knee
To this Reverend Esquire,
Y^t hath now his full desire
Of that peace he ever loved—
In his life and death approved—
Layd here with his two loyall friends,
Most renowned in their ends."

The idea of asking the stranger who entered that village church to bend the knee, not to God, but to the Reverend Esquire, struck me as very delightful.

These fine early effigies then, not only interest us by their admirable workmanship, but they also set us an example of good taste and plain truthfulness in our commemoration of the dead.

But to us archæologists their truth and faithfulness make them especially valuable, for they tell the story of the growth, development, and decline of that defensive armour, which in the middle ages chiefly exercised the ingenuity and skill of the worker in steel. That mechanical ingenuity and invention which now is applied to the construction of machine guns, torpedoes, and iron-clad ships, was then exercised in devising weapons, engines of war and defensive armour for the human body. It was the same long struggle between the arms of offense and the armour of defense, and if we may learn from the struggle that is past, we may predict that in the future the guns and torpedoes will win the day.

It has been usual to divide this history of armour into

the period of pure chain mail armour, the period of chain and plate combined, and the period of plate armour, admitting a transitional period between each of these; but although this is a good rough division, still I cannot say it satisfies me.

In the history of armour we shall find certain periods where there is a *dominating type* of armour to which all other examples approximate more or less, during a considerable period. To this succeeds a shorter period of change and experiment, and after that another dominating type appears. Of course, as in the fashion of dress, there were always slow and gradual changes during the reign of the type; just as during the reign of crinoline, the crinoline varied slightly in form, nevertheless there was a distinct crinoline period. So in armour there are distinct periods when all the armour approximates to one type, which periods are followed by shorter times of unrest and experiment before another type gets established. Individual fancies will occasionally furnish us with extraordinary examples, but these do not affect the matter any more than occasional monstrosities affect the systems of botany and natural history.

At the time of the Conquest, defensive armour would seem to have consisted of a conical helmet and a long shirt of chain mail or scale armour, but it is only in the next century that the military effigies come to our assistance.

They first help us by showing us the appearance of those knights who fought against the Saracens under the Lion-hearted Richard, and at this period we have a very distinct type of armament.

The head piece of various construction usually approximates to the cylindrical and flat topped form. The hawberk or shirt of mail is long, reaching to the knee, whilst it also covers the arms and hands. The legs and feet are completely covered by the chausses. A long surcoat without sleeves is put on over the hawberk, it is confined to the waist by a small belt, but below the waist is open down to the front. The shield is long, reaching from the shoulder to the knee, and the sword is hung to a broad strap high on the hips.

I have seen no effigy of that type in Derbyshire, but at

Norbury we have a fine example of the next type which forms a distinct land mark in the story of armour. Here we have a rounded hood or coif of mail laced round the forehead and up one side. The surcoat is shorter showing the knees, which are protected by the stout and often quilted breeches worn over the chausses; whilst in addition we frequently see a plate of metal over the knee, the forerunner of the defenses of plate which so altered the appearance of the knight in the next century. To this period probably belongs the headless effigy in banded mail at Newton Solney, although it differs in the way in which the sword is hung, from the general type of this period.

This second period of chain armour with its rounded hood, broad sword belt, and shorter hawberk may begin about 1250 and end about 1300. The first of our series of English brasses, that of Sir John d'Aubernoun, 1277, shows a splendid example of this type of armour.

With the fourteenth century begins a somewhat long and very interesting period of transition not without its distinctive features, however, but it is a period of much change and many experiments.

We have what are called ailettes for the protection of the shoulder tried and discarded. It had been discovered that hard knocks with a mace or an axe would inflict much damage on the knight through his hawberk, even though it had a good quilted gambison under it, so plates of steel were devised to be fixed on the most exposed points such as joints.

It was soon found that thin plates of steel placed on the outside of the hawberk on the arm, and over the chausses on the shin, would render the knight much less vulnerable, and also that if the summit of the steel head-piece were made somewhat conical, a blow delivered straight down on it would probably glance off. And thus was the pointed bassinet originated, a head-piece which remained in use for a very extended period.

During this transition period we often find chains attached to the breast of the knight to secure his sword from being wrested from his grasp and his helmet from being torn off his head and cast to the ground, for from an earlier period it had been customary to put a large

helmet over the smaller head-piece ordinarily worn, when in the heat of battle or for the tourney.

Of this transitional period, which may date from 1300 to 1335 or 1340, I have seen no example in this county, but it is well known from the brasses of Bacon, Septuans, Fitzralph, and Sir John d'Abernoun the younger, and from a number of effigies in other parts of the country.

About the year 1335 or 1340, the military equipment of an English knight settled down into a type which barely changed until the end of the fourteenth century, and the main features of which dominated in the military equipment through the first half of the next century.

Of this type there are some very fine examples at Newton Solney, in an effigy which may date from about 1370, at Longford, in two effigies of the Longfords, said to date from 1357 and 1402, and at Ashburn, in the effigy of Edmund Cokayne, who, although he died in 1403, is armed in a somewhat earlier fashion. The main features of this type are the beautiful pointed bassinet, with a camail of mail to it, the tight surcoat much padded on the breast, and often as at Longford emblazoned with the knight's armorial bearings, the horizontal sword belt formed of square plaques of embossed metal low down on the hips, and the arms and legs covered with close-fitting plate armour simple in form, and showing the mail beneath at the joints, gauntlets, and sollerets.

What was the growth of the armour covering breast and back during the long period when the close surcoat was worn, is, so far as effigies go, a sealed book. We know that when the surcoat first closes up it covers a simple hawberk, and when a hundred years later it is discarded, it discloses a very complete and well constructed breast and back plate of steel. In one case only do we get a glimpse at an intermediate stage. In a fine monument at Ash Church, Kent, dating from about 1335, the lacing of the surcoat at the side permits us to see a portion of the body defence, and it is clearly seen to be composed of rectangular plates like tiles

¹ The only remains of an actual cuirass of the 14th century which exist are, as far as I am aware, those found in the

ruins of the Castle of Tannenburg and engraved and described by Hefnne, "Die Burg Tannenburg und ihre Ausgrabungen."

riveted into a flexible garment, perhaps of leather or quilted stuff.¹

The monument of Sir Thurstan de Bower at Tideswell is a grand, though much mutilated example of the next type of armour, whilst that of Sir Thomas de Wendesley at Bakewell, is a good example of the transition to it, he still having a camail of mail and a surcoat, although the decoration of his bassinet, and of the armour on his limbs belong more to the fully developed type as seen at Tideswell, and of which, perhaps the finest example extant is on the right side of the chancel at Longford.

The features of this fourth type are that the bassinet is more acutely pointed, whilst over the forehead and round its edges are richly decorated work probably in gilt engraved and embossed brass. An enriched orle or wreath surrounds the bassinet, probably to keep the tilting helm steady when placed over it. A bavair of plate over a chin piece of the same material, with a corresponding piece behind, take the place of the camail. The breast plate is composed of two pieces strapped together in the middle high up on the breast, and the back plate is of similar construction.

The skirt is composed of two sets of semicircular plates strapped together at the sides, one set hanging from the breast and one from the body. The lowest of these plates in front is sometimes divided in the middle so as to form rudimentary tassets. The sword belt is still horizontal and highly decorated. The arm pits are often covered by small plates of shield-like form. The elbow and knee pieces show a tendency to become more ample, and the edges of the armour on the limbs are usually ornamented with richly decorated bands of metal.

After a short transition during which the bassinet loses its acute point and becomes round topped, we come to the fifth type shown in our effigies and of which two such splendid examples exist in the chancel at Norbury in the monuments of Sir Nicholas and Sir Ralph Fitzherbert and to which the miniature effigy of Thomas Cokayne at Youlgreave, and that of John Bradbourne at Ashburne also belong.

Here the head piece (not often shown in effigies) was a sallad or an armet. There was a high collar or standard

of mail round the neck, the breast plate fitted close to the form of the body, there was usually a lance rest on it, and the shoulder piece on the right side was cut away to allow of the passage of the lance, for the shoulder pieces had now greatly developed in size, and were additionally strengthened by reinforcing pieces. The elbow pieces usually attached to the dress below by aiglettes or points tied outside had also become very large as had also the wings of the knee pieces. In fact all the joints are well protected by the development of the pieces of armour near them. The skirt was shorter than before, and to it hung four tassets—two large ones in front and two rather smaller ones at the sides.

The thigh pieces had a plate hinged to their outer edges so as more completely to encase the thighs, and the sollerets became very pointed, those ridiculously long points called poulaines being often further attached to them when the knight was on horseback. It is not unusual for the armour of this period to be beautifully ribbed, sometimes spirally, sometimes fanwise, and the many existing examples of armour of the second half of the fifteenth century, show it to have been marvellously flexible and light, and made of a splendid quality of steel, which allowed it to combine that lightness with great strength. Such it remained to the end of the fifteenth century, when a complete change in fashion took place,¹ and indeed from this date onwards, the history of armour is so well known or may be so completely studied from existing examples, that we need not enter on it here.

I have briefly drawn attention to those facts which may be learned from our English effigies, and in no county, I imagine, can they be better learned than in Derbyshire.

It must be a matter of lasting regret that Charles Stothard did not come into Derbyshire and portray its beautiful effigies in his work, which may be said to be a continued source of wonder to the student of these remains by its almost faultless accuracy when compared with any similar work of its date, and which will remain

¹ Exemplified by a complete suit of fluted armour of the early years of Henry the eighth's reign which the author

exhibited in the temporary museum at the Derby meeting.

a pattern and a standard of what such works should be. If what I have said about these English effigies should prove an incentive to any able draughtsman to render the beautiful ones remaining in Derbyshire useful to all archæologists and to preserve them for posterity by accurate delineation, I shall feel that I have not spoken in vain, and that he who ever he may be will deserve the gratitude of all future students of the military history of this country in the same measure that we owe it to Charles Stothard.

To place what I have said in a practical form, I should be much tempted for the sake of convenience and ease of memory, to give to each of the five dominating types shown in the armour on English military effigies and brasses anterior to the year 1500, a name connecting it with an important military event in English history.

The first two types might be called after two Crusades with which they are associated, or after the English kings who took part in them, and as we probably owe much of the fashion prevailing in the chain mail period to the contact of Europeans and Saracens during the Crusades, the names would not be unappropriate. The three last types I would name after well-known conflicts in English military annals.

In a complete history of English armour from the time of the Conquest, there would be a first or Conqueror's type followed by a period of transition brought about by the first Crusade.

I will venture, therefore, subject to more mature consideration respecting the exact date at which each type begins and leaves off, to divide the armour shown on effigies and brasses anterior to the year 1500, into the following types and periods of transition, illustrating them by the plates in Stothard's "*Monumental Effigies*," (edition of 1876),¹ Boutell's "*Monumental Brasses and Slabs*" (1847), and such effigies in Derbyshire as I have myself studied.

¹ These were displayed on a board in the order given when the paper was read.

FIRST TYPE, 1190 (?) to 1225. (*Type of the Third Crusade, or Cœur-de-Lion type*).

Illustrated by the effigies in the Temple Church. (Stothard plates 10 and 15).

TRANSITION, 1225 to 1250.

Illustrated by the effigy of William Longespée, (S. 17, 18), and the effigy in Gloucester Cathedral called Robert Duke of Normandy, (S. 22, 23).

SECOND TYPE, 1250 to 1300. (*Type of the Fourth Crusade, or Edward I. type.*)

Illustrated by the effigies in Goberton church, (S. 37.); Hitchendon church, (S. 39.); of Robert de Vere, + 1221, but which seems to date from circa 1275, (S. 36.); William de Valence (S. 44, 45.); Edmund Crouchback, (S. 42, 43.) (and in Derbyshire, by the fine effigy in Norbury church attributed to Sir Henry Fitzherbert, and two effigies in Newton Solney church, one of which is in banded mail.

The earliest of our series of brasses also belong to this period. beginning with that of Sir John d'Aubernoun (Boutell page 27). Sir Roger de Trumpington (B. 30.), and Sir Robert de Bures (B. frontispiece).

TRANSITION, 1300 to 1335 or 1340.

This is a period of much experiment and change. Scarcely two of the monuments which illustrate it are alike, and this great variety may be instructively compared with the uniformity of effigies and brasses during the long duration of the next dominant type. This transitional period is illustrated by the effigies of Robert du Bois (S. 57.), Aymer de Valence (S. 48, 49.), a Blanchfront (S. 71, 72.), John of Eltham (S. 55, 56), an effigy in Ash church (S. 61, 62). Sir Oliver Ingham, + 1343, but whose armour seems of earlier date (S. 66, 67), and by the brasses of Sir Robert de Septuans (B. 35), a Bacon (S. 51, and B. 36), a Fitzralph (B. 37), Sir John de Creke (B. 39), Sir John d'Aubernoun the younger (S. 60 and B. 41), and a brass at Sheppey (S. 54).

THIRD TYPE, 1335 or 1340 to 1400. (*Crecy type.*¹)

In the effigy of Sir Roger de Kerdeston, + 1337 (S. 63, 64), this type, which lasted longer than any other, is already developed, and it is illustrated by the effigies of Sir Humphrey Littlebury (S. 75, 76), Edward the Black Prince (S. 85, 86), Sir Thomas Cawne, a most admirable example (S. 77), Sir Roger du Bois (S. 58), Sir Hugh Calvely (S. 98, 99), Sir Guy Brian (S. 97, 98), and in Derbyshire by two most admirable effigies in Longford church, by that of Edward Cokayne at Ashbourne, by one at Newton Solney, and by the exquisitely wrought half length figure of Sir Godfrey Foljambe at Bakewell; whilst the brasses of this period are too numerous to mention.

¹ If I find this date too early, I would call this the Poitiers type, but I leave this for further study.

TRANSITION 1400 to 1415.

The effigy of Michael de la Pole (S. 108), and in Derbyshire the fine effigy of Sir Thomas Wendesley at Bakewell, illustrate this period. I shall no longer refer to the brasses as they are too numerous.

FOURTH TYPE, 1415 to 1435. (*Agincourt type*).

Admirable examples are seen in the effigies of Sir Edmund de Thorpe (S. 112), Ralph Neville (S. 89, 90), and Phelipp Lord Bardolf (S. 110, 111), and in Derbyshire, this type is illustrated by a beautiful effigy in Longford church, by that of Sir Thurstan de Bower at Tideswell, and by that of Sir John Cokayne at Ashbourne.

TRANSITION, 1435 to 1445.

The effigy of John Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel (S. 119, 120), and in Derbyshire an effigy at Kedleston attributed to John Curzon, + 1406, but the armour of which seems rather to belong to 1435-45, illustrate the changes that were taking place.

FIFTH TYPE, 1445 to 1480, or perhaps 1500. (*War of the Roses type*).

The effigy of Robert Lord Hungerford (S. 129, 130) is a very fine and complete example of this type; whilst in Derbyshire two most admirable ones exist at Norbury, in the effigies of Sir Nicholas and Sir Ralph Fitzherbert. A Curzon effigy at Kedleston, and those of Thomas Cokayne at Youlgreave, and John Bradbourne at Ashbourne, belong to this type which is further illustrated by numerous brasses.

The wonderfully wrought effigy in gilt brass of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, cast by William Austin, citizen and founder of London about 1452, belongs to the period of the Roses type, but I have an almost complete conviction and proof that the original suit of armour which William Austin reproduced with such marvellous fidelity was of North-Italian and most probably of Milanese manufacture, so I do not include it in the list of those monuments which illustrate the development of English armour.

After the Cœur-de-Lion and Edward I. types, where chain mail forms the universal form of defence, we have a most interesting transitional period, when experiments are tried with plates on various joints, soon extending themselves to the limbs, whilst the Crecy, Agincourt, and Roses types show the development and gradual perfection of the process of covering the whole of the human body with a flexible covering of steel plates.

This is a much more complex and difficult problem than is usually supposed.

To combine great strength of resistance in the armour, with absolute freedom in all the varied motions of our limbs, to form all these moving plates so that in whatsoever position the limb was, the covering should still be complete and impenetrable, was a task needing great inventive faculties, but it was achieved with a rare success and completeness by the skilled armourer of the second half of the fifteenth century, and I do not think that it would be possible at the present day, with all our mechanical appliances, to obtain a more perfect result, taking in view exactly what was then needed.

Strange to say, although in the first half of the sixteenth century the decoration and artistic beauty of armour reached their highest perfection, still, from a mechanical and scientific point of view, the best armour anterior to the year 1500 is always finer than that which follows it, and the decline in its practical usefulness goes on rapidly all through the sixteenth century, although often masked by the splendour of artistic decoration lavished on the finer examples now remaining to us.