

The tomb of Archbishop George Abbot

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The tomb of George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1611 until 1633, contains substantial elements of political, religious, social and architectural history. Abbot was a significant national and local individual in a period of uncertainty and conflict. His brother Maurice (or Morris) who ‘eternally pays the funeral obsequies’, provides a clear example of Stuart trading enterprise and the networks supporting public display. Stylistically, the tomb made by John and Matthias Christmas, London carvers and sculptors, demonstrates traditional and newer classical expression of complex questions about what post-Reformation memorials should portray. Later visitors to the monument have written trenchant assessments of Abbot and given their own interpretations of his tomb.

I commend my body to the earth in the assured hope of a joyful resurrection desiring to be buried in the Trinity Church at Guildford which is near unto my Hospital, that in the same town where my flesh had the beginning thereof it may rest as the depositum of my love of that place;¹ but I leave the circumstances of my interring and funeral to the judgement and discretion of mine Executors.²

George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote these words in his will just over a year before his death on 4 August 1633, when those executors, his youngest brother Morris³ and Morris’s son Maurice had to assume their responsibilities. His elaborate funeral was held a month later at Croydon, under the direction of the College of Heralds. Details in *The Proceeding at the Funerall of Georg Archbishop of Canterbury on Teusday the 3d of Septemb*⁴ describe how six Conductors led groups of poor men from London, Lambeth and Croydon with twenty from Guildford and the Master with ‘20 poor of the hospital of Guildford’. Noblemen, bishops and gentlemen, each with groups of servants, followed while heralds preceded the pall bearers with the coffin, attended by Sir Morris Abbot, other members of the family, the bishop of London and William Laud, archbishop elect and principal mourner. The next day Abbot’s body was brought for burial, the procession being met ‘att Guildford’s Townes ende’⁵ by the mayor John Hill and the magistrates. He was placed in a brick-lined vault in the Lady Chapel, south of the chancel of the medieval Holy Trinity church, in the town of his birth and upbringing, as he had wished.

The archbishop left no directions about a memorial to mark his place of burial, so it was wholly the responsibility of the executors or other family members to commission a monument to stand over the vault. The tomb which was put in place (fig 1) has been described both as deserving ‘a high place in the monumental art of the English Renaissance’⁶ and as being ‘twenty years behind the times and quite lifeless.’⁷ It commemorates a public figure and an academic, nationally significant both as archbishop of Canterbury and as a noteworthy member of one of the teams of scholars responsible for the translation of the

¹ Abbot was unusual among 16th and 17th century archbishops of Canterbury in making this choice; Canterbury or Croydon were the usual burial places (Reginald Pole went to Lambeth Palace chapel).

² Oldys 1777, 57–72.

³ Morris or Maurice Abbot (1565–1640). The spelling ‘Morris’ was used by contemporaries in Guildford to distinguish this member of the Abbot family from Maurice, his father and Maurice, his son (Taylor 1999, 14). In the inscription on George Abbot’s tomb, he is Mauricius Abbot.

⁴ LPL: MS 3153.

⁵ King 1863–4, 257–8

⁶ Burke 1949, 181.

⁷ Nairn & Pevsner 1962, 41.



Fig 1 The tomb of Archbishop Abbot. Late 19th century view of the tomb standing in the chancel side chapel, Holy Trinity church. (Photograph thought to be the work of William Shawcross (1858–1942) and now in Guildford Museum (G.8924). Reproduced by kind permission of Guildford Borough Council)

Bible into English, ordered by King James and published in 1611.⁸ Locally he is important as the founder of the House of Pity of the Holy Trinity (Abbot's Hospital). Standing in shadow, in a corner of a parish church, it may not be immediately apparent how much the monument can also show about the culture, customs and craftsmanship of early 17th century England, in a time of political and social transition. Additionally, it provides one example of the ongoing interaction between a physical monument and those who look at it; the iconography of the memorial has been the subject of elaborate explanation by one local historian, while the structure has been visited, rebuilt, repainted and cleaned, to the fascination and possible confusion of many more observers.

It was constructed in a period when monumental sculpture attracted an unusual degree of attention among designers and craftsmen. While the organisational and doctrinal upheavals of the Reformation brought change and uncertainty in ecclesiastical, social and political spheres, commissions for monuments gave an ongoing opportunity for employment (despite the breakup of workshops) and for both continuity and some innovation in sculpture. Intercession for the dead was forbidden, with a consequent loss of the motivation to use fine monuments to draw the eyes and prayers of the living on behalf of the deceased.⁹ Yet impressive commemoration went on, justified by other reasons: confirming the continuity and stability of society through the value of the example set, as well as underlining the individual worth of the dead person.¹⁰ Indeed, in some instances elaborate epitaphs focusing on the achievements of the deceased, on an impressive tomb, asserted the good standing of the subject in the face of criticism during life.¹¹ Heraldic display was also at least as prominent as it had been on many monuments before the Reformation; such display confirmed descent, title and landholding for later generations and was drawn on by lawyers and antiquaries. Indeed heralds claimed heraldic painting was the highest form of art¹² because of the purposes it served. Abbot's tomb illustrates a number of such characteristics of the monuments of his time. One of its inscriptions opens thus: 'Sacred to Eternal Memory: Reader, here you see the Monument of a great man, now dead, you may also see the memorable deeds of his life, which now remain.'¹³ By the time of his death, Abbot was out of favour with the king and with those who supported more elaborate forms of worship; he had also remained partially disgraced since accidentally killing a man in 1621 while out hunting. Faced with these disadvantages, those commissioning his memorial focused on setting out Abbot's 'prudence, piety and learning' before the world. The monument keeps to the tradition of a chest tomb supporting a recumbent alabaster¹⁴ figure, rather than presenting the newer kneeling or reclining effigy; such a solid structure by 'the very space it necessitated ensured that it connotated [...] high status. It was the preferred type for the commemoration of great prelates.'¹⁵ The painted shields around the canopy follow in the tradition of tombs of the nobility, but a developing code of civil honour and education in the early modern period was broadening the chivalric community to include families like the Abbots, none of whom would previously have borne personal arms.¹⁶ The colourful shields on Abbot's tomb show his personal blazon and stages in his career: as vice chancellor of Oxford University, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, then of London and archbishop of Canterbury; (although it also

⁸ Alexander 2012, 3. None of the scholars' memorials made any mention of their work on the 1611 Bible; such service was not seen as a personal achievement.

⁹ Chantry Act 1547; Marshall 2002, 94–6.

¹⁰ Holbrooke 1998, Ch 11; Llewellyn 2000, 374.

¹¹ Holbrooke 1998, Ch 11.

¹² Llewellyn 2000, 17, 185.

¹³ Latin inscriptions from the tomb are translated in Russell 1845, 63–4.

¹⁴ Alabaster – a fine grained form of gypsum – continued to be quarried around Nottingham during the later 16th and earlier 17th centuries, for tombs of eminent individuals at home and for European export.

¹⁵ Llewellyn 2000, 85–90.

¹⁶ James 1986, 339.

carries one shield apparently impaled with that of Wadham College, an institution that does not immediately appear to have any close link with Abbot's life.¹⁷

Parliament sought specifically to safeguard tombs from iconoclasm because of their value as exemplars of stability and good standing,¹⁸ for there were risks in setting up an impressive memorial.¹⁹ In *Ancient Funerall Monuments*, in 1631, John Weever wrote that people could be heard swearing 'to deface or quite demolish all funeral monuments [...] protesting that all these are remains of Antichrist, papisticall and damnable'²⁰ Samuel Harsnett, Archbishop of York, dying two years before Abbot, required that his full-length portrayal on a memorial brass should be 'so riveted and fastened cleane through the stone as sacrilegious hands maye not rend off the one without breaking the other.'²¹ (His memorial has survived). A significant number of Guildford people are thought to have shared the rigorous attitudes of the more puritan sort.²² However, Abbot's monument proved remarkably durable, even withstanding the collapse of the church and being moved into the newly built chancel side chapel in 1888.

Coupled with the traditional elements of Abbot's monument, some post-Reformation modifications and fresh ideas are also apparent. The chest tomb abutted the east wall of the church; such placement being 'regarded as a grander modern variant on the traditional hearse type.'²³ The strongly carved figure presents Abbot in episcopal robes under his parliamentary cloak, holding a small book in his right hand and gathering his cloak with his left, rather than being in an attitude of prayer. He shows something of the increasingly natural style more beautifully displayed by effigies elsewhere.²⁴ Six black touchstone columns support a canopy with broken pediments over his effigy. The flat canopy became quite widely used on elite tombs in the 16th century,²⁵ while the black columns with lozenge cushion capitals were part of a spreading classical influence. Increased use of fine polished stone was introduced in part by refugee Flemish and Huguenot craftsmen and pattern books from abroad.²⁶ On the canopy are ranged nine allegorical figures or acroteria; such representations from classical iconography of the cardinal virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance, with the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, had become increasingly widely used as representations of the Christian virtues and moral values of the deceased.²⁷ The particular qualities of the long-necked figures on Abbot's tomb have become difficult to identify, but many similar examples can be found on later Elizabethan and Stuart tombs;²⁸ one such is Thomas Bodley's wall-mounted memorial of 1630 by Nicholas Stone, in Merton College chapel, that displays three willowy, emblematic figures.²⁹ Bodley's monument is flanked by piles of carved books, a conceit echoed by the four piles of alabaster books supporting Abbot's tomb,³⁰ likely to be acknowledgements of their scholarship in both instances. At Abbot's feet, two large classical figures, set in niches against the wall, flank the tomb, one has 'Hic Gratia'

¹⁷ Repainting may have corrupted the attribution; alternatively, Abbot may have been involved in the foundation of Wadham in 1609.

¹⁸ Llewellyn 2000, 271.

¹⁹ Marshall 2002, 179.

²⁰ Weever 1631, 37–8.

²¹ Quoted in Marshall 2002, 180, from Brownlow 1993, 161.

²² Matthew Alexander, pers comm. William Dowsing was appointed Commissioner to remove the monuments of idolatry and superstition from all the churches. In the 1640s, in 'East Anglia there were certainly plenty of "popish inscriptions" for the parliamentary commissioner, William Dowsing, carefully to strip away' (Marshall 2002, 175).

²³ Llewellyn 2000, 85–90, 115–16.

²⁴ For example Elizabeth, Lady Carey in Stowe-Nine-Churches, Northhamptonshire (Kemp 1980, 78).

²⁵ Llewellyn 2000, 115.

²⁶ Maximillian Holt, from Arras, made Queen Elizabeth's tomb.

²⁷ Llewellyn 2000, 200, 374.

²⁸ Esdaile 1946, 90.

²⁹ There are figures and cherubs' heads (see below) on the font in Canterbury Cathedral commissioned in 1637 by John Warner, Dean of Lichfield, from John Christmas. Warner received his first preferment through George Abbot (Longstaffe-Gowan & Knox 2006, 49).

³⁰ Whinney & Millar 1957; Note in Walpole Society VII (1919), pp 85–6, 96.

above it, the other 'Hinc Lumen', possibly standing for divine grace and for faith illuminated by the scriptures. Cherub heads, increasingly popular in the 17th century (despite puritan hostility towards angels), look down. Skulls, skeletal hands and ribs are represented as within the tomb, visible behind a grill on the west side. Medieval memorials had emphasised the corruption of the body and the necessity of preparing for death and judgement, but a variety of symbols of mortality were widely shown after the Reformation.

The Latin inscriptions, giving the main events of Abbot's life, are carved with gold painted lettering on a black marble panel against the east wall and in black on a white panel on the west pediment. These extensive epitaphs present the achievements of a 'great man', who 'when he could go no higher on the earth (he) ascended to heaven full of years and honour.' They make clear the strong commemorative intent of such a memorial: 'Here, Oh! Stranger thou perceivest the monument of a great benefactor, now no more; thou may'st see also the lasting memorials of his life,³¹ setting out academic and ecclesiastical preferment on one panel and the crowning of Charles I, services to Oxford and provision of the Canterbury aqueduct and the hospital as major acts of charity on the other. For him his brother 'full of sorrow [...] eternally pays the funeral obsequies'.³²

As Abbot anticipated, the monument was shaped by 'the judgement and discretion' of his executors (or other family members). Since no contract for the memorial has been found, there can be no certainty about responsibility. However, since Morris (Maurice) is named, one likely proposition would be that it says as much about the connections and worldly position of his younger brother and nephew as it does about the archbishop. Of these, young Maurice was a barrister of the Inner Temple in London, who went on to sit in both the Short and Long Parliaments. His father, Morris Abbot,³³ fifth of the six remarkable Abbot brothers, was baptised in Holy Trinity on All Souls' Day 1565. He was apprenticed to a London cloth worker, becoming a freeman of the Drapers' Company. Trading successfully in cloth, indigo and spices, he prospered.³⁴ Morris was one of the original directors of the East India Company after it was incorporated in 1600; 24 years later, he was its Governor and a prominent member of the Levant and Muscovy Companies. He was the first man to be knighted when Charles I came to the throne in 1625, a year in which he also served as an MP. Morris became Alderman for the London ward of Bridge Without late in 1626, a Sheriff of the City of London in 1627 and Lord Mayor in 1638. Each year he would expect to be part of the procession and celebration staged as the Lord Mayor for the year took up his office, thus sharing in seeing the tableaux designed by such playwrights as Thomas Heywood and frequently constructed in the 1630s by members of the Christmas family serving as pageant masters. This experience may well have had a central importance in the design and making of his brother's memorial.

On the north-west corner of the archbishop's monument are carved the names of its makers (fig 2):

John	}	Christmas	{	Fratres
Matth:	}		{	Fecerunt

John (1598–1654) and Matthias (1605–54) signed a number of the memorials they made during the 1630s,³⁵ working with their father Gerard Christmas (1575–1633/4) as naval wood carvers, pageant and masque scene-builders and as stone sculptors. A contract for a monument to members of the Crane family shows that the Christmas's workshop was based in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate by 1626; Gerard was buried in the churchyard there in 1633 and John likewise in 1654, while John and Matthias served the parish as vestrymen in

³¹ Russell 1845, 63–4.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *DNB*: 1.

³⁴ Keay 1991, 26.

³⁵ Such as those of Sir Edward Lewknor at Denham, Suffolk, 1638; Ralph Hawtry at Ruislip, Middlesex, 1638; Mary Calthorpe at East Barsham, Norfolk, 1640.



Fig 2 The tomb of Archbishop Abbot. The names of the makers of the monument, John and Matthias Christmas, carved on the north-west corner. (Reproduced by kind permission of Roger Howes)

1644.³⁶ Gerard's identifiable work includes the water conduit (long gone) given by George Abbot to the people of Canterbury in 1626, following a design by Thomas Heywood. John and Matthias worked on Inigo Jones' designs for the Queen's House at Greenwich.³⁷ Gerard and then John served as Principal Carver to the Navy, in charge of work at Deptford and Woolwich, while Matthias held a similar post at Chatham and all three built scenery for City pageants during the 1620s and 30s.³⁸

With Abbot's tomb, it is uncertain whether Whinney is correct in stating³⁹ that the original contract was made with Gerard, who died in 1633, or with his sons; she gives no source, but White suggests that she based her view on an article in *The Builder* of May 1863, which implied incorrectly, that the names of all three family members were on the monument.⁴⁰ It is equally uncertain whether the Christmases settled upon a design directly with their patron or patrons or worked to a scheme designed for them. Like most craftsmen, they were 'clearly willing to produce any type [of monument] that was ordered.'⁴¹ However, it does seem clear that London carvers in particular and dramatists/designers were in regular contact over staging public displays whether theatrical, processional, decorative or memorial. Gerard Christmas worked first with Middleton and Dekker in the 1620s, constructing the staging for

³⁶ White 1999, 19 citing Guildhall MSS 6419/2 and 6419/5. Llewellyn (2000, 193) suggests the Christmases were based at St Giles in the Fields.

³⁷ Lees Milne, 1953.

³⁸ White 1999, 18.

³⁹ Whinney 1964, 60.

⁴⁰ White 1999, 25, note 4.

⁴¹ Whinney 1964, 63.

their series of presentations for the Lord Mayors' procession. Then, every year from 1631 to 1639 (except 1636), Thomas Heywood wrote each annual pageant, while Gerard, followed by his sons John and Matthias, devised the settings. Thus, these three sculptors and carvers had a close involvement with the allegorical, mythological and emblematic themes provided by Heywood and similar dramatists. Heywood had a high opinion of Gerard, writing of 'Mr Gerard Christmas, late deceased, as well in the Excquisite performance of his qualitie, as in his true sincerite, and honesty [...] as no man could outvie him in these Workes.'⁴² These are men who would have been known to Morris Abbot through his roles as alderman and sheriff; in 1638 he would have their services for his own pageant.⁴³ George Abbot himself employed Heywood to design the conduit (already mentioned), which he gave to benefit the people of Canterbury. This conduit shared characteristics with Abbot's tomb,⁴⁴ having a band of 'scutcheons' topped by slender allegorical statues and supported by Doric columns.

Just at the time when Abbot's tomb was under construction, Heywood and John Christmas also worked closely together on *The Sovereign of the Seas*, the most magnificent of the vessels built for Charles I with Ship Money, commissioned in 1634 and launched in 1637.⁴⁵ This levy earned the king 'so much opprobrium and endowed the country [...] with the noblest ship till then ever built'.⁴⁶ Heywood was commissioned by the king to devise the decoration. His scheme was executed by John Christmas between 1634 and 1637, after he succeeded his father as Principal Carver to the Navy in 1633. At the gilded stern, Edgar the Peaceful triumphed over seven prostrate kings. Counsel, carefulness, industry, strength, valour and victory with their attributes, together with classical gods, shields, trophies and signs of the zodiac spread in gilded abundance over the structure. This major work was undertaken by the sculptor, with his brother Matthias, at the same time as the commission for George Abbot's tomb. Later work by the Christmas brothers also carried allegorical figures echoing Abbot's tomb, for example the font given to Canterbury Cathedral in 1637 by John Warner (who received his first benefice from Archbishop Abbot) and Mary Calthorpe's memorial in East Barsham, Norfolk of 1640.

Just as no contract for Abbot's memorial is known, so the date when it was finished and put in place is uncertain, being given by some sources as 1635⁴⁷ and others as 1640.⁴⁸ The answer may perhaps be found in the Register of the Hospital,⁴⁹ where the relevant page is headed 'The payments of me, Jasper Yardley [the Master] from Michaelmas 1635 till Our Lady Day 1636 for ye Hospitall.' Five shillings was paid 'to Mr Myles that set up my Lord's tombe' for reinstating the crown on the royal arms displayed over the gate of the hospital, blown down in high wind. The next entry concerns the Christmas festival in 1635. There is no other reference to Mr Myles in the Register. He may have come down from London to assemble the monument once it had been made in the Cripplegate workshop or perhaps was a local workman, employed once the memorial had arrived in Guildford. Faced with storm damage in the autumn of 1635, the Master asked this conveniently available craftsman, who may even have lodged at the Hospital while assembling the Founder's memorial, to repair the coat of arms.⁵⁰

The monument, which was put in place, may be seen as both a traditional and as an innovative tomb made in a time of social, political and religious uncertainty. Since it was

⁴² Heywood 1635, quoted in Bergeron 2003, 367.

⁴³ A description of the pageant is published in Heywood 1638.

⁴⁴ Longstaffe-Gowan & Knox 2006, 54.

⁴⁵ Morris Abbot had connections with shipbuilding. As well as hiring merchant vessels, in 1616 he, with others, received a royal bounty for building six new merchant ships. He was responsible in 1637 for fitting out ships in accordance with the Ship Money Edict at the expense of the City of London (*DNB*: 1).

⁴⁶ Callender 1930, 4.

⁴⁷ Oldys 1777.

⁴⁸ Brayley 1848.

⁴⁹ SHC: 5305/6/1, 9.

⁵⁰ SHC: 5305/6/1, 99.

finished, it has stirred a variety of reactions in those who have looked at it; a number of people have left a record of their responses; countless other parishioners and visitors doubtless held unrecorded views. Samuel Pepys and John Aubrey both visited the monument while it stood in the medieval church. The Reverend William Cole came to see it in 1774 soon after the opening of the rebuilt church. He wrote an account,⁵¹ which was known to Philip Palmer, Victorian Lay Sacristan of Holy Trinity church and later Master of Abbot's Hospital when he gave a lecture on the monument in 1908, which was later published.⁵² Pepys looked at the monument while staying overnight in Guildford during 1688, when he found it and the other memorials 'kept mighty clean with curtains before them';⁵³ a level of approval not echoed by John Aubrey, who carefully described the effigy and structure before going on to lambast the malign effects of Abbot's influence, who 'was no Friend to the Church of England, whereof he was Head, but scandalously permitted that Poisonous Spirit of Puritanism to spread all over the whole Nation'⁵⁴ Both men understood that Abbot was wearing his episcopal robe under a parliamentary cloak. In 1774 the antiquarian the Reverend William Cole of Hornsey came, giving no specific reason for his interest in his written record, but riding from Strawberry Hill to Guildford with a sick horse to stay overnight at the White Hart, close to the church, because of his particular wish to see Abbot's tomb. Like Aubrey, he describes it carefully, noting the recent addition of 'an iron palisade gilt at top,' around the monument. He was puzzled by Abbot's parliamentary robe: 'having none of my books about me, I am at a loss to ascertain the nature of this Robe, [it] serves to cover the true Episcopal Habit of which he seems to have been ashamed. I hope I do him no wrong but the apparent Mischief he did in his Time and the vile Consequences of it in our Time both in Church and State make me the Severer on his memory.' Cole had already introduced his comments by describing the placing of the effigy 'with his feet touching the East wall of the South aisle, as if he would kick down the Church at least the ornamental part of it, and expressive enough of the Temper, Disposition and Ackings of this calvinistical and puritan Arch Bishop'.⁵⁵

Abbot's eclipse towards the end of his life continued to influence Aubrey's and Cole's opinions at least, despite his fine memorial. By 1845, when members of the Russell family, Guildford stationers, published an expanded edition of their *Guildford, a Descriptive and Historical view of the County Town of Surrey*, it was the style of the epitaphs rather than the character of the archbishop that drew criticism as 'two inscriptions, the Latinity of which is highly characteristic of the false taste and pedantic affectation of the age.'⁵⁶ Almost 100 years later, in 1908, Philip Palmer gave a much more admiring lecture about the iconography of the tomb to the senior pupils of George Abbot School on 29 October, the anniversary of Abbot's birth, at the request of descendants of the Abbot brothers. This was subsequently published in 1911 as a small book entitled *The Knight of the Red Cross or, the Romance of Archbishop Abbot's Tomb, in the Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, Guildford, Surrey*.⁵⁷ Palmer took as his starting point the uncertainty about the archbishop's clothing expressed by William Cole,⁵⁸ going on to develop an elaborate theory that the effigies and figures were illustrative of Book I Canto X of Spencer's *Faerie Queen*.⁵⁹ In the early 20th century the place of the archbishop's memorial within its wider stylistic world was perhaps not well understood. The statues in particular may have seemed in need of explanation. They do contrast quite strongly with

⁵¹ BL: Add. MS 5847 405, transcribed by Palmer (SHC: 5400/2/1-2).

⁵² Palmer 1911.

⁵³ Braybrooke 1858, 493.

⁵⁴ Aubrey 1975, 3, 285; Aubrey's *Natural History and Antiquities of Surrey* was first printed in 1718-19, edited by antiquarian Richard Rawlinson.

⁵⁵ BL: Add MSS 5847; transcribed by Palmer, 1883-1900, (SHC: 5400/2/1).

⁵⁶ Russell 1845, 63-4; a briefer, unillustrated 1st edn was published in 1801.

⁵⁷ Lancelot Andrewes' effigy in Southwark Cathedral is similarly dressed.

⁵⁸ Palmer had transcribed Cole's description in his notes, compiled 1883-1900, on the history of Guildford (SHC: 5400/2/1-2).

⁵⁹ Spencer 1995, 50-7.

the largely conventional alabaster effigy and heraldic shields.⁶⁰ Palmer seems to have been a very able local historian writing a well-researched short history of Holy Trinity church in 1888 and doing much work on the archives of the Hospital.⁶¹ Nonetheless, in his 1908 lecture he put forward no supporting evidence for his theory that Abbot himself represented the Red Cross Knight or St George, stating that ‘through this poem, like the leading strain in a piece of music, runs the life story of the faithful Knight [...] By subtle allusions, and light touches here and there, Abbot himself represented the Red Cross Knight or St George of England; the monument was designed to illustrate both the career of St George and the strenuous Christian life of the ecclesiastic who bore his name.’⁶² He acknowledged that the attributes, which might be ascribed to different acroteria, were tenuous or absent; but nonetheless among the statues he identified a number of personifications present in the poem: Una for truth, Fidelia for faith, Spirezza for hope, Charissa or Charity, together with Patience and Mercy. One statue was too damaged to be recognisable. In Spencer’s poem, each of these women ministers to the recuperating knight in the House of Holiness following his rescue from the dungeons of Error. The figures at the eastern end of the monument he saw as Britomart and Belpheobe, Spencerian representations of chastity and of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth. His conviction about the interpretation of the tomb was just as firm (and unsubstantiated) when he wrote some notes on the tomb for the parish magazine in 1919 after an official Visitation was made to the Hospital by Archbishop Davidson to mark the tercentenary of its foundation.⁶³

As a life-long Guildford resident, lay sacristan at Holy Trinity and a lay preacher, Palmer would have known various churches in the area; he certainly walked out to a number of them to preach.⁶⁴ While he would have been familiar with the appearance of other monuments in those churches, contemporary with Abbot’s tomb, he probably had little means of having a wider view of 17th century funerary sculpture; even now there is no national census of monuments that would make comprehensive comparisons possible.⁶⁵ The portions of the Hammond tomb that survive in Holy Trinity show Flemish strapwork and an epitaph. Monuments in Stoke d’Abernon and Wotton, for example, have some features similar to those on Abbot’s tomb: Pevsner characterises those in the north chapel at Wotton as ‘rough Jacobean’ busts or kneeling figures, swags and heavy pediments, while supporting figures on Elizabeth Darcy’s tomb which may represent virtues, are much more matronly than the statuettes at Guildford. Painted full length effigies of Sir Thomas Vincent (d. 1613) with his wife on her elbow can be seen at Stoke d’Abernon, while alabaster effigies of Thomas Cornwallis (d. 1626) and spouse are placed on a chest tomb in St Martin’s, East Horsley. None of these memorials shows marked parallels with that of George Abbot.

It is difficult to understand why Philip Palmer devised his elaborate explanation. Its very ingenuity seems to have delighted people ever since; 100 years after its publication, the details of his theory are still reproduced, in the church, for visitors to the tomb and studied carefully by many of them. In 1949, Joseph Burke published *Archbishop Abbot’s Tomb Guildford – a Problem in Early Caroline Iconography*.⁶⁶ He questioned Palmer’s theory, looking at the tomb in the context of both tradition and the fresh ideas coming from the Continent, other contemporary monuments and the experience and background of the people involved in creating it.

⁶⁰ Parts of one or two other monuments survived the collapse of the old church of Holy Trinity and were placed in the new building. None, as described by Aubrey (1718–19, 3) showed the obvious classicism of Abbot’s tomb.

⁶¹ Palmer 1888; LPL: MSS 1410–14.

⁶² Palmer 1911, 4.

⁶³ SHC: GU.HT /53/27. ‘Its [the monument’s] meaning seems to have been a secret at the time, but it shows the career of the Christian warrior defending truth against error, ie the story of St George and the Dragon. The space beneath the canopy is the School of Faith, the Church, and the Archbishop is the scholar, ever learning more and more.’

⁶⁴ SHC: GU.HT /57/4.

⁶⁵ Llewellyn 2000, 163.

⁶⁶ Burke 1949.

Burke draws out the religious traditions, which underpin Spencer's personifications and all Christian representations of blessed or virtuous behaviour. He demonstrates that figures such as Fidelia and Charitas are portrayed quite differently in *The Faerie Queen* from any figure on the tomb. He is sceptical of the assertion that the nimbus and scroll associated with the statue in the more northerly wall niche and the sun-image and chalice with the figure to the south, are attributes of Britomart and Belpheobe or symbols for God, grace, justice and free will. Burke goes on to place Abbot's memorial in the wider contemporary context of other applied carving, drawing out how a link may be established between the Guildford monument and *The Sovereign of the Seas*.⁶⁷ He describes how Heywood had 'royal leave to publish [...] unto the world's broad eyes A True Description of his majesties Royall Ship, Built this Year 1637 at Wool-wich in Kent, to the great glory of our English Nation and not paralleled in the Whole Christian World.'⁶⁸ In his description of the decoration, Heywood refers to contemporary criticism of the 'imagined obscurity' of his figures and mottoes.⁶⁹ He indicates that the general theme, rather than specific attributions, matters most. Just as the exact iconography for the royal ship does not seem to have been worked out in detail, so it is very probable that the figures on Abbot's tomb, whoever formed the design, stand for the virtues and moral uprightness of the archbishop, rather than illustrating any particular fable.

As well as the observations of visitors to the tomb, some details also exist of the partial damage, reinstatement and maintenance of the monument. Remarkably, it survived the destruction of the major part of the church in 1740 and having been stored at the archbishop's hospital, was reconstructed in 1764 in the newly completed church, at a cost of £3 10s 9d, with 2s 6d to the workmen for beer. It is possible that inaccurate repainting at this time may have led to the apparent inclusion of the arms of Wadham College among those on the tomb. Railings were added around it some short time before William Cole's visit of 1774 (fig 1). The records of his Hospital show that the trustees felt a responsibility towards their benefactor: between 1809 and 1824 they spent £8 on its maintenance as well as having it washed with vinegar in 1817 at a cost of 4s 2d. When the nave had been substantially refashioned in 1869, the *Surrey Advertiser and County Times* noted that 'the magnificent canopied monument to Archbishop Abbott [*sic*] has been thoroughly cleaned and renovated by Mr. Arthur Moon at the cost of the Governors of the Hospital.'⁷⁰ A note among papers in the Surrey Archaeological Society's archive mentions repainting in 1938, when the Wadham arms debate was commented on inconclusively by the painter, speaking to the sexton.⁷¹

With broken pediments, emblematic statues, cherubs, classical columns and coloured marble, Abbot's tomb displayed many of the features that distinguished post-Reformation memorials from earlier monuments, while also holding to a traditional chest design under a recumbent effigy. It was commissioned and constructed during the one period, between the Henrician Reformation and the Civil War, when monumental sculpture provided the most creative, though small-scale, field for English architectural design so that in parish churches across the country there are many elaborate memorials.⁷² Set in this context the monument may no longer seem to require the ingenious explanation of its iconography provided by Philip Palmer. However, it gains a wider significance as an example of skilled work produced during a particular conjunction of patronage, craftsmanship and trading wealth, at a time of religious and political uncertainty. It is also one mirror that can reflect something of the changing attitudes and beliefs of subsequent observers concerning the archbishop and about ways to memorialise the dead.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 188.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

⁶⁹ Heywood 1635, lines 637–46, quoted in the introduction to the critical edition by Young 1990.

⁷⁰ SHC: GU.HT /57/4.

⁷¹ SyAS: 373/9.

⁷² Esdaile 1946; Kemp 1985, 30–2.

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