

# THE CONSERVATION OF THE REYNES MONUMENTS AND FONT AT CLIFTON REYNES

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*Conservation of the monuments in the church at Clifton Reynes not only saved some important sculptures from deterioration, but led to a number of interesting discoveries.*

In an earlier article on the Reynes Monuments,<sup>1</sup> the author drew attention not only to their considerable historic interest but also to their increasingly fragile condition. This was subsequently confirmed by a report from the church architect, Mr A. P. Reynolds, who also expressed concern for the fine, late fourteenth-century Reynes Font.<sup>2</sup>

In view of their importance, advice was sought from Philip Lankester, Conservation Officer at the Council for the Care of Churches, who, after further tests by John Larson at the Department of Conservation in the Victoria and Albert Museum, approved conservation reports by Messrs Harrison Hill<sup>3</sup> and Mr B. S. Egan.<sup>4</sup>

The items that were considered at risk are situated in the Reynes Chapel and the Baptistry at the west end of the south aisle (see Fig. 1). Using the same method of identification adopted in the earlier article, they listed:

## *C1 and C2:*

The wooden effigies of a Knight and his Lady within the wall-tomb; the Knight with skullcap, hood and coat of mail; the Lady in kirtle and veil; dated c. 1300.

## *C4 and C5:*

The wooden effigies of a Knight and a Lady upon the altar or chest-tomb beneath the western arch separating the Chapel from the Chancel; the Knight with basinet, heater shield,

and what may be an early form of cyclas; the Lady in a kirtle, whimple and veil; both with excellent detail and dated c. 1331-3.

## *C3 and C6:*

The north and south sides of the chest-tomb on which *C4* and *C5* lie, and which is assembled from at least three earlier memorials. On *C3* five important armorial quatrefoils related to the Chamberlaine family, c. 1331; on *C6*, five armorial quatrefoils relating to Reynes and Greene, c. 1349. In the main, attributed to Thomas Reynes II, who died c. 1349.

## *C8:*

An elaborate chest tomb beneath the eastern arch, on the north and south sides of which are eight figured niches surmounted by armorial shields of great genealogical interest. Surmounting the monument are the recumbent stone figures of a Knight and his Lady, the Knight in semiplate armour with a dog at his feet having a name on its collar. The memorial is attributed to Thomas Reynes III, who died in 1391, and is believed to have fought together with his father, Thomas Reynes II, at the Battle of Crécy in 1346.

## *C9:*

An incised slab with brass shields at each corner bearing the arms of Reynes, and at its centre the effigy of a Knight in full plate armour having at its feet an inscription to John Reynes, *miles*, and the date 1428. Although parts of the brass-work are missing, it remains a fine speci-

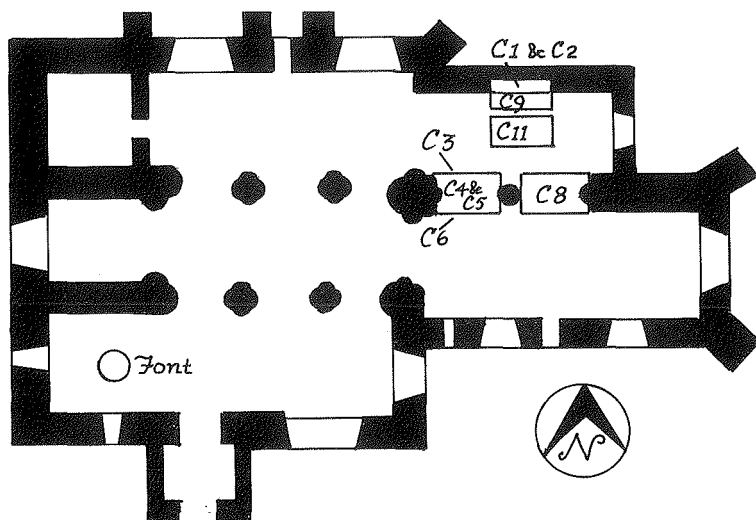


Fig. 1. Plan of St Mary's church, Clifton Reynes, showing position of features referred to in the text.

men and an important link with the other monuments.

#### *C11:*

An incised slab, next to and of the same size as C9, with brass shields at each corner bearing the arms of Reynes impaling Tyringham, and at its centre the figures of a Lady and a gentleman lying in open shrouds, dated c.1500. This was not included in the original article, but remains of great interest, both in the details of the figures and in the continuity of design with C9.

#### *The Font:*

This stands at the western end of the south aisle and is handsomely carved in a limestone similar in texture to that used in the composite monument. It consists of an octagonal bowl, stem and base, each side of the bowl being decorated with a shallow niche containing, variously, the figures of the Virgin, the Trinity and Saints. At each angle is an attached octagonal column which terminates in a carved head on the underbowl surface, where roses alternate with the faces. On the angle facing the south door, however, the head is replaced by a shield. Below the bowl, the eight sides of the stem are decorated with window tracery. The cone-shaped canopy dates from 1845.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Damage and Treatment*

In the case of the stone items, although there had been considerable physical damage, the main problem was identified as the crystallisation of various salts drawn to the surface by rising damp, with resulting expansion, blistering and exfoliation of finer details. This was especially marked in the clunch type stone of C8, and the underbowl surfaces of the Font.

The wooden effigies had suffered considerably in the past from the attacks of beetle larvae and wet rot; the latter being a continuing threat with the moisture content of their base being a reported 28%, and that of the effigies 22%. They were also at risk from theft.<sup>6</sup>

The brasses, with the exception of the lower dexter shield of C9, and the lower sinister of C11, were all loose and some had cracked. Various degrees of corrosion were noted due to the use of mortar and iron screws in previous repairs.

It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate all the possible forms of treatment, but the primary consideration was to secure the objects from the effects of damp and physical damage. To this end, the two stone monuments

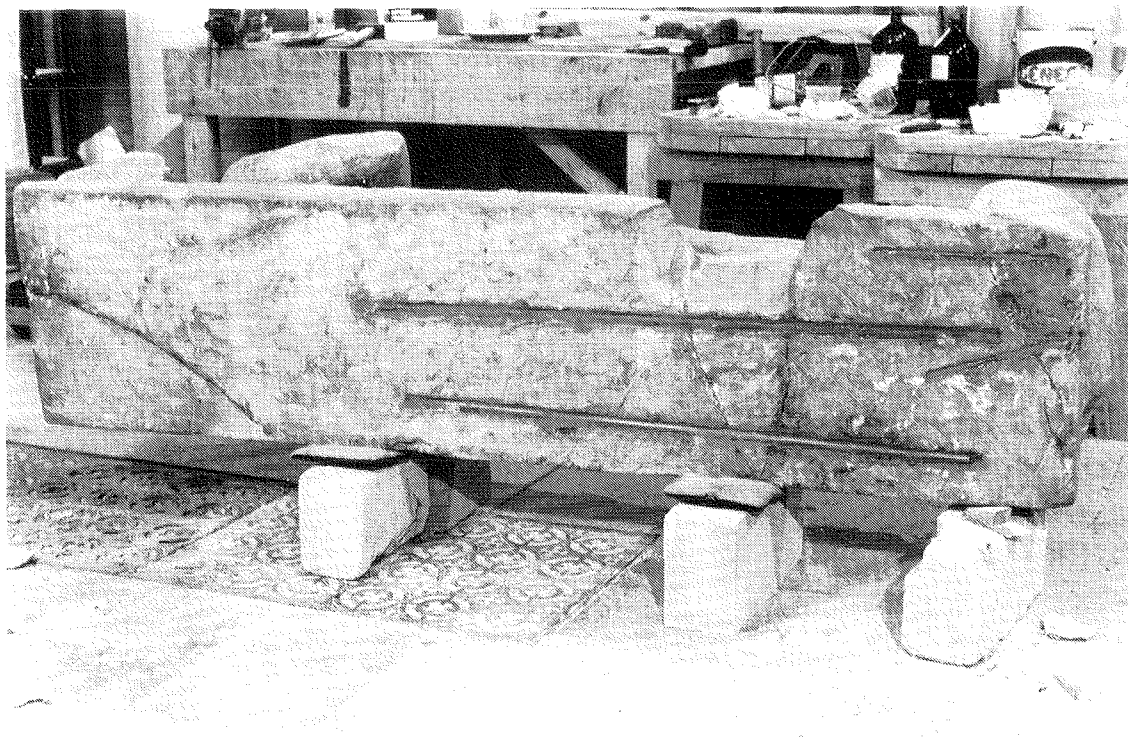


Plate I. Underside of effigy of Thomas Reynes III showing fractures and reinforcement with stainless steel rods. Courtesy of Harrison Hill.

and the Font were dismantled, and after treatment, reset on firm concrete foundations with bitumastic and lead membranes to act as a fully effective damp course. In the case of the wooden effigies, however, heavy slabs of slate were the chosen damp course, to which the figures were secured with internal stainless steel hoops, thus reducing the chances of theft. The brasses, it was felt, would be at less risk if their supporting slabs could be moved to a less trodden area, but as the PCC were reluctant to disturb their traditional site, they were left *in situ*.

The secondary consideration was the need to clean, consolidate and, where necessary, repair the objects. In the case of the stone work, major fractures were secured with stainless steel rods, but the extremely friable surfaces dictated the use of organic polymers, which are, to a considerable extent, reversible in their action.<sup>7</sup> A

preparation of polyvinyl-alcohol allowed blistering surfaces to be fixed, softened with solvents, and pressed back into their original positions without loss of detail. Similar solvents, sparingly applied, were used to remove stains and accumulations of dirt. Other specially formulated polymers, notably *Paraloid B72*, were encouraged to soak through the surface layers to provide a ground strength and a stability which is believed to exceed 500 years.<sup>8</sup> The tendency for such treated surfaces to 'burst' due to accumulating internal changes, was considered countered by: (a) the relatively stable physical conditions prevailing in the church (b) the damp courses (c) the use of the minimal effective consolidant.

The wooden effigies, where damaged or porous, were treated with similar polymers and, since wood consists of natural organic polymers, a very stable result is expected. As a

precaution against future infestations by wood beetles and surface absorption of moisture, the effigies were treated with insecticides and given a coating of highly flexible, micro-crystalline wax.

The brasses were washed clean of dirt and old mortar and, where fractured, were reinforced with brass plates and solder. The steel rivets (used as repairs in the last century) were all replaced by brass, which together with remaining medieval ones were reset and held in the stone matrix with a resin and white sand mortar. The plates were then reset and bedded in a bitumastic compound, *Rito*, which retains a useful degree of plasticity when dry. At the time of writing, no satisfactory material has been found to refill the broken edges of the matrix, and care will be needed by walkers to avoid tripping against the exposed sides of some plates.

In all, these various treatments have greatly improved the strength and appearance of the items at risk; but all involved with this work are fully aware of the need for regular monitoring.

#### *Discoveries Arising from the Conservation Work*

##### *The Stone Monuments*

The dismantling of the monument C3/6, beneath the western arch of the Reynes Chapel, revealed a continuation of the half-column at its head down to a simple base level with the Chancel floor. Although slightly damaged, the base shared the same basic design as that seen on the central column, and is about 8.75 inches wide. However, the hope that fragments of missing sections might be revealed was not fulfilled, although cleaning and consolidation has clarified the differences between the north and south sides, and those at the east end.

On the north side, C3, the outer border is decorated with small, tightly carved quatrefoils. Along the foot of the panel, the spaces between the large quatrefoils are occupied by further small quatrefoils, but along the top by alternate quatrefoils and single flowers. The upper lobe of each large quatrefoil is embellished with a

double flower. The south side, C6, has no decoration in its outer border; the small quatrefoils are of a more open design, and more freely carved; and the upper lobes of the large quatrefoils bear single flowers with six petals. At the east end, the panel is decorated with much larger double flowers, having ten inner and ten outer petals. Consolidation has clarified, not only the subtle differences between the designs of the three sides of the composite memorial, but also the difference between the pointed leaves where quatrefoils were intended, and rounded petals where flowers were depicted.

Treatment of the table-tomb, C8, beneath the eastern arch, was, however very much more revealing. The removal of the monument did not show traces of a continuing eastern pier as expected, but a rough rubble wall. The half-column finished level with the tomb, but there is a further eight inches of clean dressed freestone before rubble begins. This may suggest that the column had originally terminated about that level on some feature which has since been removed; probably to allow the monument to fit beneath the arch.

At this point the conservators made their most interesting discovery: in the east end of the tomb a small burial chamber had been formed by building low walls and spanning them with a stone slab, using a short length of oak beam to make up the width. In this chamber was found the disjointed skeleton of a man.<sup>9</sup>

This discovery immediately excited great interest since it is becoming increasingly rare to find human remains within medieval chest tombs, so many having been 'purified' in Victorian and earlier times. After proper consultations, permission was given to have the remains examined by an Historical Human Biologist, Anne Stirland, who was at the time working on the Mary Rose project.

In addition there was amongst the dust which accompanied the skeleton, a small thimble of folded and riveted copper bearing slight traces of gilt, which was sent to the Armouries at the Tower of London for examination. A subse-

quent report identified it as a chape from a leather scabbard belonging to a diamond sectioned quillon dagger dating no later than 1350, although possibly earlier.<sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere among the rubble packing were found pieces of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century stained glass together with fragments of animal bones and a molar tooth from a herbivore. Although the animal remains may give rise to some speculation, it seems likely that soil from an adjacent farm had been used during an earlier rebuild.

The subsequent cleaning and consolidation of the stonework revealed two new points of interest. The first was the discovery of red pigment between the surcoat and a gauntlet on the Knight's effigy.

The second was a clearer appreciation of the details on the dog's collar, which remains of great interest, the author having failed to find a further example of a dog's name being so recorded on a medieval stone monument despite enquiries in the UK and on the Continent.

Before consolidation and cleaning, the collar exhibited, in sequence, a *fleur-de-lys*-shaped clasp, the letter *B*, and a rose stud followed by the letter *O*. This last letter was in the centre of the collar and was followed by an apparently featureless section.

After cleaning, it could be seen that there had been a second rose stud following the letter *O*, and that the remainder of the collar, although damaged, had never been smooth. This suggests two interesting possibilities.

The first, that the Anglo-French *BO* had been followed by a leashing tie or ring: the second, that it had been a four-lettered name with studs between the letters, the last two letters and studs having been worn by greater exposure. Out of a number of possibilities *BORS* seems the most likely, having been the name of one of King Arthur's Knights.<sup>11</sup> In the context of the times, either would have been possible, although the author regards the first as more likely.

#### *The Skeletal Remains in Chest-tomb C8*

Mrs Stirland's full report is included as an appendix, but in substance we have the following picture. The remains indicate a man of about 5 foot 8 inches tall, with dental problems, which suggests a diet comparatively rich in sugars. Skeletal changes in response to stress are those likely to have been common in a knight, and there is evidence of a fracture in the lower vertebrae when comparatively young. His age is estimated at 40+, or possibly older.

In the circumstances, we can probably accept the skeleton as being original to the tomb. Although some of the smaller bones are missing, reasonable care seems to have been taken to keep the remains, and their accompanying chape, together, and they are clearly not a chance assemblage from elsewhere.

If we accept the lowest estimate of age as correct, then the remains are those of a man about 40, who would have been born c.1345. Since only a Reynes would have been buried at Clifton in such a tomb, we would then have to postulate another generation between Thomas II and Thomas III, for which there is no warrant in manorial records or pedigrees.

However it is not necessary to accept such a low estimate. Age is estimated by the degree of dental attrition and the effects of other ageing processes, and we would expect these to be less marked in a person of high social status than in an average individual. A knight of 60 could well have the physical condition of a labourer of about 40, and since we believe Thomas III was about 60 at the time of his death, it seems likely that the remains are indeed his.

The evidence relating to a back injury when young may also explain why, having fought at Crécy, he has not been identified among those local Knights mentioned in accounts of the Black Prince's following campaigns; for if he had received his injury at Crécy, it might well have prevented active campaigning for a considerable time.

The discovery of the chape must also be considered in the light of this history, for details of

style and genealogical evidence suggests the memorial had been carefully planned some years before Thomas's death; we may well suppose that the Knight had insisted, not only that his favourite hound be recorded at his feet, but also that he be buried with the weapons of his youth. It was in this belief that the remains were re-interred within the monument in a small casket made by a village craftsman, Mr F. Harris, with the following inscription: 'Thomas Reynes, knight at the Battle of Crécy, d. 1390'.

#### *The Wooden Effigies, Brasses, and Font*

The Wooden Effigies have benefited considerably from their treatment in respect of appearance and security, but the only fresh information obtained was the recognition of an additional pigment.<sup>12</sup> Kelke in the nineteenth century had reported the presence of red colouring on areas of the effigies, but most of these had disappeared, except for traces beneath the left arm of the Knight of W2. However, particles of white pigment were discovered on the adjacent female effigy within the folds of her dress on the left-hand side just above her feet, and on the leg of a dog at her feet.

The Brasses revealed no new evidence although the extent to which they had been riveted and repaired with mortar caused some surprise, with 24 new rivets being required in all.

The Font required the removal of a considerable quantity of surface salts before consolidation could begin, and what had previously looked like cherubs now present a more sage appearance. Prior to treatment it would have been difficult to decide whether the single shield

was plain or had trace of carving, but now it is almost certain that the shield had been flat and relied on a painted surface to depict the donor's arms.

When the Font was dismantled the conservators were surprised to find an unexpectedly large soak-away beneath the stem, closely resembling a bottle well, with the stone plinth forming the cap. In view of this it was thought prudent to leave the plinth *in situ* and to place the lead membrane over the plinth rather than under it. Although the well most probably dates from the re-siting of the font in Victorian times, there remains the speculation that the builders chanced upon or re-used an ancient one.

#### *Summary*

It is hoped that this article will have drawn attention to some of the rewards, as well as the problems of undertaking conservation measures. In general, it is thought preferable (providing the causes are known) to apply simple preservative measures as early as possible until a definitive treatment can be identified.

In the case of the Reynes Monuments and Font, the PCC would like to thank all those experts and public bodies, who, having recognised the urgency of the problems, have given their time and money towards the completion of this work; and in particular the following organisations which contributed some £19,700 towards the total cost of £23,700, the balance having been raised by the villagers: The Francis Coales Charitable Foundation; The Pilgrims Trust; English Heritage; The Oxford Diocesan Board of finance; The Borough of Milton Keynes.

## APPENDIX: THE HUMAN BONES FROM THE MAUSOLEUM AT CLIFTON REYNES

Ann Stirland

The human bones from the Mausoleum at Clifton Reynes present an interesting case of forensic anthropology. The purpose of their examination and this subsequent report is to try and establish whether their owner could be one Thomas Reynes III.

According to the records, this individual was born in AD 1331 and died in 1390, having fought at the battle of Crécy. The bones from the Mausoleum should belong to this Thomas Reynes, but were removed and replaced in the eighteenth century when a new owner

decided to redesign the chapel. It was therefore decided to have them examined to see if it were possible that they could have belonged to this knight.

Although this skeleton is substantially complete, some areas are missing. They are: some vertebrae from all segments of the column; the manubrium and sternum; both clavicles; the left radius and ulna and all of both hands apart from the right 4th metacarpal; both patellae; all tarsals and phalanges and 6 metatarsals. The bone is quite friable and soft, breaking easily. The skeleton is that of an adult male in late middle age and 173 cm or about 5 ft 8 ins tall.

#### *Pathology*

The teeth are of interest, since they have a high frequency of both caries and abscesses. Two maxillary and three mandibular teeth are caried and four maxillary and two mandibular are abscessed. Five teeth were lost *ante-mortem*, all but one being molars. This suggests the individual concerned had a diet that was high in sugar in one form or another. Age has been estimated from the attrition rates on the two surviving molars and gives a value of at least 40+ years. The condition of much of the rest of the skeleton, however, suggests that the individual could well have been older.

There is much osteophytic lipping and spurring of the surviving bones, particularly of ligament and tendon insertions on both femora, tibiae, fibulae and pelvis. There are marginal osteophytes on both lumbar vertebrae 4 and 5 and on the costal pits of thoracic 11 and 12 and the transverse processes of 8–10 inclusive. The sternal ends of 8 right and 3 left ribs are pitted and eroded with ossification of the costal cartilage. All the above pathology can be degenerative in nature, particularly the ossification of costal cartilages.

The arms and shoulders have some interesting changes. The muscle attachments are very well developed indeed on both humeri, including those concerned directly with movements of the shoulder. There is spurring of the attachments on the right radius and humeral epicondyle. The right humerus is rather more bowed than the left, at the distal end. A radiograph showed a slight disruption of the medullary cavity and thickening of the cortex which may be a very old, possibly bowing, fracture. There is also pitting and lipping of the capsule attachment on the posterior glenoid labrum of the right scapular and on the clavicular articulation on the acromion. There is pitting of the area of attachment of the coracoclavicular ligament on the inferior side of the left acromion. These changes suggest concentration on movement of the shoulder girdles, involving rotation, extension and abduction, with particular emphasis on the right side. Such movements might be made by a medieval knight. One other pathology should be mentioned. The left transverse process of the 3rd lumbar vertebra shows evidence of an old, healed fracture.

#### *Conclusions*

The skeleton is that of a man in late middle age with a stature of about 5 ft 8 ins. The condition of the teeth suggest a fairly rich diet, probably high in sugar in one form or another. Apart from the degenerative condition of the skeleton, the specific pathology of the arms and shoulders, particularly on the right side, suggest the sort of activity that might be associated with the wielding of weapons such as a heavy sword. The old fractures of the arm and the vertebra might also be associated with warfare, particularly as Thomas Reynes would have been only 15 years old at the battle of Crécy and much remodelling of the bone would have occurred. It is, therefore, a reasonable possibility that this skeleton could be that of Thomas Reynes III.

## REFERENCES

1. *Recs. Bucks* 22 (1980) 105.
2. Report by H. A. Rolls & Partners, Church Architects, Leighton Buzzard (Parish chest).
3. Report by Harrison Hill Ltd, Little Oakley, Northants (Parish chest).
4. Report by Mr B. S. Egan, Stony Stratford, Bucks (Parish chest).
5. *Recs. Bucks* 6, 398; J. L. Myers, *History of Clifton Reynes*.
6. See *International Society for the Study of Church Monuments*, Bulletin 6, 1982. Burchfield church paid £4,000 for the return of a single wooden effigy stolen and sold in Belgium.
7. C. V. Horie, *Materials for Conservation* (Butterworth, 1987).
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 31 and 106.
9. Harrison Hill, Conservation report on Thomas III (Parish chest and Council for the Care of Churches).
10. Communication with Miss N. C. Moyle, Royal Armouries (Parish chest).
11. Kindly suggested by Edward Ellis Esq., Emberton.
12. W. H. Kelke, 'Sculptured Monuments in Buckinghamshire', *Recs. Bucks* 3, 12.