

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN



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TRINITY COLLEGE
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Replied 22.11.91

Mr. K. Littler
The Green
Turvey
Bedfordshire
England.

W.S.

Dear Mr. Littler,

I was interested to hear of your queries about the Mordaunt tomb in Turvey church. I enclose a couple of photocopies which should clarify things a little. As a symbol of fidelity, the dog was a standard device in Medieval tomb sculpture, particularly when husband and wife are depicted together. It is also found in painting, as in Van Eyck's double portrait (1434) of Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife in the National Gallery, where a terrier is placed in front of the couple.

It is most unlikely the faces bear any actual resemblance to Sir John Mordaunt and his wife. This would have been possible only.

- (a) if the sculptor carved the effigies while Sir John was alive and if he was prepared to 'sit' while a copy of his face was made.
- (b) if a death mask was taken for use by the sculptor. (Unlikely outside royal circles)
- (c) If painted portraits of Sir John existed which could serve as a model. (Such things were still rare about 1500).

Most aristocratic effigies were conventional and standardised, despite the exceptions quoted in the photocopy. I would be very surprised if the Turvey faces looked anything

like Sir John and his wife. However, the big problem is how can one tell ? Unless other visual records exist, it is almost impossible to confirm such possibilities.

The angels hold a cushion for Sir John's wife. This is a common device (for both males and females) from the early fourteenth century onwards. I cannot recall readily any explanation, though it might be worth checking in E. Prior and A. Gardner. An account of Medieval figure sculpture - England (1912) (Unfortunately I do not possess a copy so I cannot look it up). I should imagine it was a way of suggesting the care for the deceased in heaven but this is more speculation on ecclesiastical portraits one sometimes encounters angels surveying censors.

I am sorry if this is a bit vague, but I hope it is of some help.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Stalley

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