

Cheshire Knights and Some of Their Ladies was the title chosen for his presentation to Sandbach History Society by Tony Bostock.

Mr Bostock said that in Cheshire churches there are over 60 effigies, over half of them belonging to the medieval period (in which he is particularly interested) and others being from the early modern period. He regarded them as extraordinary pieces of art and said that the detail, carved by a mason, was remarkable, showing costumes, head dresses, armour, etc. Originally, there would have been inscriptions to say who they were but these are now usually lost. He also pointed out that when new they would have been brightly painted.

He went on to describe about 20 of the effigies, looking particularly at how they could be identified. The first example he gave was at St Mary, Rostherne which is carved in low relief and its rough execution suggests 13th century. It is not known whom the effigy represents but a shield, suspended from the right shoulder, on which there are two bars suggests that it is a member of the Venables family who had the advowson of the church at the time.

In the churchyard of St Mary, Astbury, there are four late 13th or early 14th century effigies, three men and a lady, on tomb chests. They are made of sandstone and have weathered badly. It is not known who they are but it can be surmised that they are members of the Venables family, who had the advowson of the church, or the Brereton family, local landowners – or both.

An effigy in the church of St Chad, Farndon, dating from the late 13th or early 14th century tells us whom it represents as the name of Sir Patrick de Barton is inscribed on the shield – but which Sir Patrick?

The effigy in St Wilfred, Grappenhall, has been “restored” in the 19th century with some parts replaced. It represents Sir William Boydell, but it is significant as it shows a change in costume – helping to date it.

Other examples Mr Bostock described included the following from the south Cheshire area.

In the church at Astbury is an effigy of Sir Ralph Davenport. The monument is in very good condition – although slightly out of proportion – and there is much detail to be seen. Davenports were Sergeants of the Peace for the Macclesfield Hundred who had the power of summary execution of a felon. Sir Ralph died in 1383.

At St Mary, Nantwich is an effigy which Mr Bostock described as “a bit of a mess” – the man has lost his legs at the thigh and there is considerable surface damage – but it is interesting because it is made of alabaster which is far superior to sandstone in achieving detail. The effigy is of Sir David Craddock, who died in 1390, and who had an education in law. He entered royal service and became a Chief Justice for Wales. He had a reputation for being ruthless and was moved to south Wales and later became Mayor of Bordeaux.

An effigy in the church of St Bertoline, Barthomley is normally ascribed to Sir Robert Foulshurst. Legend has it that Robert was one of the heroes at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. However, evidence suggests that he was serving elsewhere that time. Mr Bostock pointed out the detail of a collar which is Lancastrian, suggesting that the effigy was commissioned

after 1399, ten years after Robert had died. He said the effigy is, in fact, Sir Thomas Foulshurst, the son of Robert, who died in 1404.

Around the neck of an effigy at Acton, in the church of St Mary, is another example of a collar of SSs which is closely associated with the royal House of Lancaster and must be one of the earliest examples in England, said Mr Bostock. The effigy is that of William Mainwaring who died in 1399. Although he married twice he had no children and was succeeded by his half-brother John Mainwaring whose effigy can be found in St Lawrence's church, Over Peover, alongside his wife, Margaret.

In St Oswald's Church, Malpas – described by Mr Bostock as “a fabulous church” – is the tomb of Sir Randle Brereton and his wife, Eleanor, which he said is the finest in the county and thought by some to be the best example of its period in the country. It is an alabaster carving of the early 16th century. Randle represents the fourth generation of the branch of Breretons who resided at Malpas. One of Randle's sons, Sir William Brereton, Chamberlain to Henry VIII, was executed in 1536 on suspicion of having an affair with Ann Boleyn.

Mr Bostock ended by saying that we should look at these effigies as history; as tangible evidence of Cheshire's past and the individuals who shaped it. But also, he said, they are works of art; attractive sculptures which show the skills of the mason several centuries ago. He said that he hoped members would be motivated to go and see some of these effigies close-up and examine the details of these wonderful pieces of history.

For more details see Tony Bostock: *Cheshire's Monuments of the Past : I* (Published 2016 and available from Amazon, £8.50)