

## Proposals for re-instatement

The **Montague Tomb** stands in the northern nave arcade of the Abbey and commemorates Bishop James Montague who was Bishop of Bath & Wells between 1608 and 1616. He was known to be a generous benefactor of both Bath Abbey and Winchester Cathedral – where he moved in 1616 when he became Bishop of Winchester. In an Abbey church building filled with memorials, Montague's stands out as a result of its location and design. It was created by Nicholas Johnson with William Cure the Younger, London-based sculptors of repute, installed c.1618.



**Our proposal is to conserve the original Montague Tomb railings that date back to 1618 that are currently in storage and re-install them in their original position, surrounding the tomb of Bishop James Montague in Bath Abbey.** NB. This application also seeks ratification for the removal of the railings back in 2017. Unfortunately, the railings were temporarily removed in 2017 without first receiving Bath & Wells DAC Faculty as it was incorrectly assumed that the Abbeys Overarching Faculty in respect of our Footprint Project covered the temporary removal of these historic railings. The re-installation of the railings, will once again, make the Bishop Montague Tomb complete.

## **Bath Abbey – Introduction**

The Abbey Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, commonly known as Bath Abbey, is a parish church of the Church of England and former Benedictine monastery in Bath, Somerset, England. Founded in the 7th century, it was reorganised in the 10th century and rebuilt in the 12th and 16th centuries and major restoration work was carried out by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the 1860s. It is one of the largest examples of Perpendicular Gothic architecture in the West Country. The medieval abbey church also served as a cathedral in the 12th century although after long contention between churchmen in Bath and Wells the seat of the Diocese of Bath and Wells was later consolidated at Wells Cathedral. The Benedictine community was dissolved in 1539 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The church architecture is cruciform in plan and can seat up to 1,000 patrons. An active place of worship, it also hosts civic ceremonies, concerts and lectures. In 2023 a new space in the vaults below the church was developed into a museum known as the Discovery Centre.

The Abbey is a Grade I listed building, with a great expanse of 52 glass windows which caused it to be known as The Lantern of The West. The Abbey is the last of the perpendicular gothic churches in England to be built with some of the finest fan vaulting in the country and with a stunning west front which includes sculptures of angels climbing to heaven on two stone ladders, representing Jacob's Ladder. Notably, the Abbey contains over 1500 wall and floor memorials (the latter known as ledger stones) as well as a collection of commemorative stained glass. The church has a Klais organ and a peal of ten bells.

Today, Bath Abbey is a flourishing parish church which sits at the heart of the UNESCO World Heritage City of Bath and with this forms part of the City's rich heritage which reaches back to Roman times. The City of Bath is famed for its "two waters": the water of the River Avon and the hot natural spring water below the City which rises into the Roman Baths next door to the Abbey. This hot natural spring water supplies heat to the Abbey via an eco-friendly underfloor heating system that connects to the waste-water leaving the Roman Baths through a 2000 year old Great Roman Drain.

Bath Abbey welcomes over 350,000 visitors each year from all around the world, especially from USA and the Far East and as such is a "House of Prayer for all nations", praying with and for needy people locally and all around the world, regardless of their political, ethnic or religious affiliation.

## **Statement of Significance**

Bishop James Montague (1568-1618)

James Edward Montague was born in Northamptonshire in around 1568 to Sir Edward Montagu of Boughton (a landowner and politician) and Elizabeth Harington. After graduating from Christ's College, Cambridge he became the first Master of Sidney Sussex College, also in Cambridge, in 1596. By 1603 he was the Dean of the Chapter Royal, part of the Royal Household, and became close to King James I. He was a Calvinist and with others, introduced the king to several radical religious figures including the Puritan Arthur Hildersham, Henry Jacob and John Burges.

He was made Dean of Lichfield from July 1603 before moving to be Dean of Worcester in December 1604. In 1608 Montague was made Bishop of Bath & Wells with an enthronement

at Wells Cathedral. As the Bishop, he spent large sums of money restoring the Bishops Palace at Wells. He also spent much of his own money on repairs to Bath Abbey. The Abbey had been left empty after being closed by King Henry VIII in 1539. It had subsequently been given to the City of Bath and Queen Elizabeth I allowed a national collection so that it could be restored. Bishop Montague paid for the nave to be re-roofed. Upon his death in July 1618 an alabaster tomb was built to house his body. The effigy was carved by Nicholas Johnson and the tomb was constructed by William Cure stonemason.

The memorial to Bishop James Montagu is located in the North Aisle of Bath Abbey. It was originally surrounded by a set of simple, painted iron railings with a crest or shield mounted on an extended post on each side (see image below).



**figs.02 and 03:** The Montague Tomb and railings, photos taken before Footprints Project and the temporary removal of the railings. as seen from the centre of the nave, as existing (2024)

### Bishop Montague Tomb Railings

The tomb of Bishop Montague is surrounded by a series of simple railings (the “Montague railings”) made of wrought iron. There is a large forged square at each corner with a tenon sitting down into a stone base forming the monuments plinth. Fixed to each at ground level is a flat iron rail with round holes set at regular intervals into which fitted the tenons from the perimeter railings were set on a diamond and passed through a top rail. Each is topped with a spike finial with a pair of forged collars below. The top rail is angular in shape with the vertical face decorated with simple connected semicircles along the top edge and a recessed line at the bottom edge. Sitting on top of each corner post is a decorative flag with lower barley twist section, forged C sections and topped with an iron cross. Fixed to each of the corner staffs, beneath the cross, is a flag painted with one of two family crests. At the centre of each long side of railings is an additional post with a painted, circular plaque on top displaying the family crest set within a painted belt containing the words from the Order of the Garter.

The tomb was formerly surrounded by iron railings, installed when the memorial was first constructed. (A drawing showing part of the railings is reproduced at **fig.04** on the next page). The railings were removed temporarily during the Abbey Footprint Project in 2019. The railings needed to be removed (and were bubble wrapped and placed into storage) to enable works to be carried out directly underneath the tomb and for a frame to be erected to hold the weight of the tomb whilst the work under it was taking place. A large cavity had been identified under the tomb, and this needed filling and the base structure beneath the tomb needed strengthening. The ledger-stone repairs became delayed due to the Pandemic which in turn delayed the return of the railings.





**fig.05:** The railings photographed earlier in 2024, at their temporary storage location.



The Footprint Project completed in 2023 and the team at Bath Abbey now wish to remove the railings from storage, conserve and re-instate the railings in their original setting.

In 2017, when the Montague Railings were removed and placed into storage, it was wrongly assumed by our predecessors, that this temporary removal was permitted under the over-arching faculty that had been provided to Bath Abbey by the DAC for the Footprint Project works.

It has only now come to light now, at the point of returning the Montague Railings, that we have re-checked the over-arching faculty and can see no authority for the Abbey to have temporarily moved the railings.

We apologise for temporarily removing the Montague Railings without an appropriate faculty however we now wish to simply conserve them and return them to their original setting. Below is an image of the Bishop Montague Tomb as it looks today without the railings.

### **Statement of Need**

We (“Bath Abbey PCC”) are keen to return the Bishop Montague railings to their original position in Bath Abbey. It is agreed by all concerned that The Bishop Montague tomb is incomplete without the railings being re-installed to where they once were.

In a conservation report dated November 2014, David Odgers notes *‘Considering these are the original railings, they are in remarkable condition, with all rails intact and all the ornaments still present. They are a very significant part of the monument with a remarkable hand-made quality; each of the balusters is slightly different, whether in width, length of spike or in the gap between the bands.’*

In order to be best informed regarding the potential treatment of the railings, earlier this year the Abbey commissioned a paint analysis report from Peter Meehan of the Historic Metalwork Conservation Company Ltd. The painted finish is somewhat uneven, but it was believed that the paint on the railings may date back to 1618 when Bishop Montague’s tomb was erected at the Abbey.

The 2024 paint analysis report is attached. The report states that: *‘On most samples the earliest paint layer is a forge paint, a thick black layer that would have been applied by the*



*blacksmith after the railing parts had been forged. This is followed by a layer of red lead primer. There is a pink coloured intermediate coat followed by two layers of topcoat with the second one being a dark red colour. On a number of samples, a final 'black' layer is visible. This appears to be a resin varnish layer that would have been applied to give a gloss finish to the paintwork. We know this is a resin varnish layer as it can be seen to fluoresce under UV light. This varnish layer was not found on all of the samples and is probably because it has degraded over time.'*

*'From the paint samples taken it can be seen that the Montague Tomb railings have only ever been painted once, after they had been installed. This paint finish therefore dates to the early 17th century and is a rare survivor of an historic paint scheme. It is likely to have survived as the tomb sits within the Abbey and the paint has largely been protected from the normal agents of deterioration: strong daylight, UV light, high and fluctuating temperatures and rainwater. It has therefore degraded only very slowly but is now very friable being over 400 years old.'*

The report goes on to suggest that *'As part of any plan to reinstate the railings around the Montague Tomb it is recommended that at least a small part of the original paint scheme is conserved and preserved as a possible unique survivor of an early 17th century paint finish.'*

We have approached two reputable local firms to carry out the reinstallation work: Iron Art of Bath and Dorothea Restorations of Bristol. Both firms are skilled and capable of doing the work however we have chosen Dorothea as: they appear to have more direct experience in this type of work; they have more capacity to do the work; and they have a close relationship with the paint analyst.

#### **Consultation:**

We met with the standing committee of the DAC on 29.08.24 and discussed the conservation of the railings. The DAC team have advised us that Peter Meehan should write a brief for Dorothea, which sets out explicitly the cleaning and conservation work that needs to be carried out. Peter Meehan is to also inspect the railings once the work has been completed to confirm that it has been carried out to his satisfaction. We will follow this guidance.

With regards to the re-instatement of the railings, Dorothea have been in contact with Emerys (who removed the railings in 2017, under guidance from Dorothea) and took photos of the railings in situ and being removed. Dorothea will re-bore the holes in the Abbey floor upon which the railings base plate and flagpoles sit and will again follow the guidance of Peter Meehan re whether to use lead putty. Any work with "lead" will take place out of Abbey visiting hours. Also, Dorothea will supply us with a Risk Assessment and Methodology Statement.

We have notified the Church Monuments Society that the railings are being returned (they have written thanking us) and we have also notified Bath Preservation Trust whose CEO (Alex Sherman) visited the Abbey and also was pleased that the railings are being conserved and returned to their original place.

We have been provided with quotes and costings for the railings to be cleaned, conserved and re-installed and they amount to £28K+VAT (which includes the paint analysis report and briefing and certification from Peter Meehan to Dorothea). We have the funds to cover these costs although we will also apply for grants that we are aware are available.

Once the railings have been re-instated, we will look to insert some interpretation about Bishop Montague and the tomb nearby. The interpretation will be in a similar style to other interpretation in the Abbey. The interpretation will also mention that the railings are painted with lead paint and so we would ask the public not to touch.

## **Summary**

We need to return the Montague Railings. This matter has been outstanding for a long time. We are proposing for the railings to be re-instated over the next few months by qualified and experienced specialists. We have written to the Church Monuments Society, met with Bath Preservation Trust, Bath & Wells DAC and they have confirmed to us that they are all pleased that the railings are being conserved and returned back to their original location.

Taking in account the specialist's report on the painting of the railings, and the fact that they, in the main, retain their original painted scheme, no further finishing of the railings is proposed.

We would very much welcome the granting of this FACULTY for the conservation and re-instatement of the Montague Railings.

In order to complete the outstanding aspects of the Faculty approval process, we would also ask that ratification be also forthcoming for the removal and temporary storage of the railings back in 2017, to enable completion of the repair works required for the neighbouring ledgerstones and to make safe and stable the area underneath the Montague Tomb – works which were undertaken as part of the Footprints Project.

## **Appendices:**

The supporting documents provide further background. These include a conservation report by Odgers Conservation, undertaken in 2014, before the Footprints Project was undertaken. The paint analysis and sampling report by Peter Meehan is also included in the submission.

Bath Abbey

November 4<sup>th</sup> 2024