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St Laurence's Church, East Harptree, Somerset (Diocese of Bath and Wells)

Monument of Sir John Newton d. 1568

Conservation Treatment Report



March 2023

Introduction and Brief

This report describes work undertaken in Spring 2022 to the monument of Sir John Newton in the church of St Laurence, East Harptree, Somerset. The work was commissioned by the architect, Tomas Griffin of B2 Architects on behalf of the PCC and formed part of the Project Newton programme of works currently in progress.

The project largely followed the recommendations set out in our *Condition Assessment and Conservation Recommendations* of July 2019, giving an overall brief but with some small alteration taking account of new developments. During the work, Mr Griffin conducted site visits at intervals, at which it was possible to discuss the situation and discoveries made in the process.

This report describes briefly the condition of the monument as found, then describes remedial work undertaken and preventive interventions to ensure future stability. It is illustrated with digital images taken with a Canon EOS 7D digital camera.

The Newton Monument

Brief Description (partly reproduced from our March 2019 report)

The monument of Sir John Newton stands in the south porch of the church of St Laurence, East Harptree, Somerset, to where it was moved from the east end of the church in 1882, having been at the east end of the chancel from at least 1603. The monument itself would appear to date from shortly after 1568, the date of Sir John's death. It is fixed against the east wall of the porch, on a three-stepped plinth which is probably not original. The monument is carved of limestone, apparently a variety of Bath stone; nineteenth century restoration is in Bath stone also. Remains of early polychrome on the heraldic details have generally been overpainted in the 19th century, but some fragments are still visible.

The Newton monument as currently composed consists of a tomb chest with the effigy of Sir John recumbent upon it and the kneeling figures of weepers – Sir John's eight sons on the left facing right, and his twelve daughters, on the right facing left. Sir John is shown in ceremonial armour of the day. The tomb chest has ovolo moulding and fluted pilasters flanking the weeper panels. A modified cyma plinth moulding completes the tomb chest.

Over this is a large entablature supported on six Ionic columns with cabled fluting and square bases carved with elaborate relief ornament. Similar arabesque relief ornament is to be found on the frieze, while the architrave is decorated with a checkerboard design and the cornice above has egg and dart, modillions with pendants and foliate ornament in orders. The soffits of the lintels between each column have a segmented pendant finished with a ball finial.

In the centre of the west cornice is a large achievement of arms in a circular cartouche with strapwork frame, bearing the complex heraldry of the deceased and topped with a figure of a kneeling knight. The soffit of the canopy over the figure itself has coffers with stylised Tudor roses in them.

There is an inscription in a recessed panel on the rear wall above the effigy, a tribute to the deceased Sir John in rhyming couplets. Over this is a course of modillion brackets. A second inscription forms the south end panel of the tomb chest and commemorates the construction of the tomb by Katherine Newton, wife to Henry Newton.

The monument apparently represents only a fragment of the original Newton monument, which originally had a second effigy – that of his wife Lady Margaret - and a correspondingly larger entablature. The age of the painted lettered inscription on the east wall of the monument/porch is in question; stylistically, it would not seem to be sixteenth century work, but it has itself been repaired, demonstrating that it is almost certainly earlier than the 1882 work which introduced significant areas of repair.

Condition As Found

The monument was found generally structurally sound, but with certain local problems that needed to be addressed and some unexplained cracking in the entablature and under the effigy. Internal metal elements had been detected in the fixings of the pendants and in the cornice and further investigation was required in these areas.

Further on-site surveying with metal meters detected more ferrous elements in the columns close to the east wall and these were the main fixings of the entablature to the wall.

Slight signs of dampness in the lower portions of the monument, including some local efflorescence of salts, did not appear to represent a serious threat to the stability of most surfaces. However, there was some surface disruption in the parts closest to the wall, and in the inscription panel located against the wall. Consolidation here was necessary.

The monument was superficially covered with deposits of dust and dirt, bat faeces and spider webs – the normal detritus associated with its situation. There was also spilt candle wax on the effigy's bier.

Conservation Programme

Initial Cleaning

The monument was cleaned with soft brushes and a vacuum cleaner, using magnification to ensure that any polychrome survivals were not lost. In fact, no original remnants of polychrome – for example on the effigy of weepers – was found, and this may suggest the monument was not in fact painted outside the heraldic emblems.

Small local areas of salt efflorescence were removed during this initial cleaning process; wax was removed with small spatulas and failed areas of repair work were also removed. Further light cleaning was undertaken in areas of soiling, including some areas of the rear wall inscription, with cotton swabs and pH-neutralised deionised water.

Investigation and Removal of Ferrous Elements

One pendant on the soffit was removed, and was found to have been fixed with non-ferrous metal (as the meter had indicated). This was re-fixed with a small phosphor bronze pin secured with polyester resin and re-pointed with lime mortar.

Two of the cramps in the top surface of the cornice stones were found to be corroded and disrupting the surrounding stonework; these were also removed and replaced with stainless steel cramps of similar size.

A new discovery, as mentioned above, was the presence of ferrous cramps restraining the eastern columns to the wall. These cramps had cracked the astragal moulding at the top of the columns and made some disruption in the stonework. Fine drills were used to free these cramps in the wall and the column, and they were then removed and replaced with cramps of stainless steel. These were secured in the wall with polyester resin and into the column with lime mortar packed around the cramp. The cracked sections of stone were then reinstated.

Repointing

A network of fine cracks, some at least caused by the ferrous elements mentioned above, was to be seen in the entablature; these cracks were pointed following the removal of the ironwork, with hot-mixed lime mortar matched to the surrounding stonework. These filled joints will allow future monitoring of the stability of the monument; frankly it is not expected that any serious movement will manifest in the near future.

Cleaning, Consolidation and Retouching of Inscription

The inscription had been most affected by deterioration, most probably due to some water penetration through the east wall of the porch (external repointing was undertaken by the main contractor during our work). This had led to loss of parts of some letters and difficulty in reading the inscription. There were similar problems in parts of the lower inscription on the south end of the tomb chest.

The inscriptions were lightly cleaned and fragile areas of lettering were consolidated with Primal B60a acrylic dispersion, diluted to 10% in water. Some minor lacunae in the support were filled with lime mortar, and retouching of the lettering was undertaken with dilute black Winsor and Newton acrylic paints (somewhat appropriately). The inscription was thereby rendered legible once more. The 19th century paint of the heraldic elements was cleaned with deionised water and cotton wool swabs.

Conclusion

The Newton monument has been investigated, consolidated and cleaned as necessary, to render it stable for the foreseeable future. It has to be accepted that its location in the uncontrolled environment of the church porch is far from ideal, and that in the future further

problems of water penetration and accretion of dirt and so on cannot be ruled out. However, the stability of the monument seems assured at present.

The monument should be cleaned and touched as little as possible and no flowers should be placed on its surfaces.

Torquil McNeilage

March 2023

PHOTOGRAPHS



1, 2. Examples of cracking along joints, found in the structure





3. Above: lead plug found in removed pendant

4. Below: the remnant of the lead plug in the soffit





5, 6, above. Opening up at the rear of the columns to identify rusting ironwork.

7. Area fixed with new cramp and replastered.



8. Replacing cramps in the cornice with Stainless steel

9. Sample of corroded cramps removed from the monument

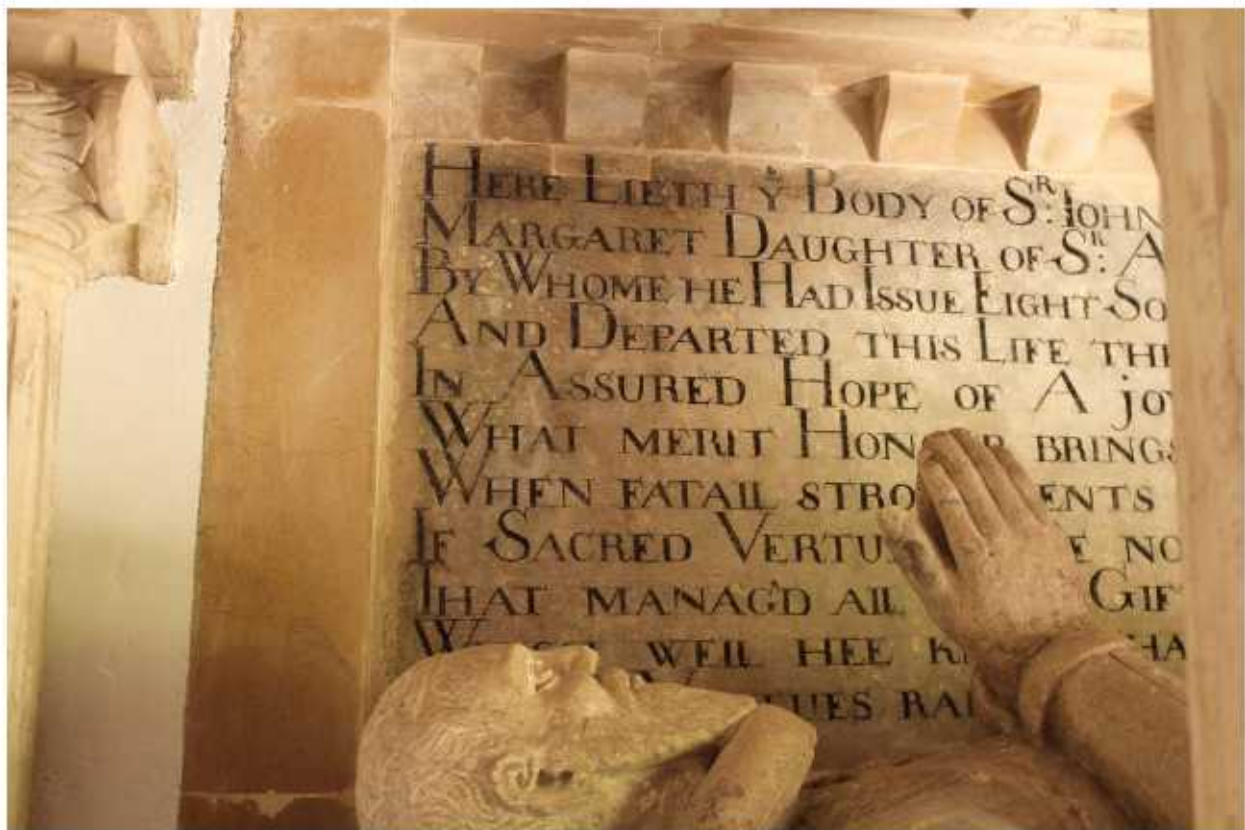




10, above. Weepers on the tomb chest, after cleaning.

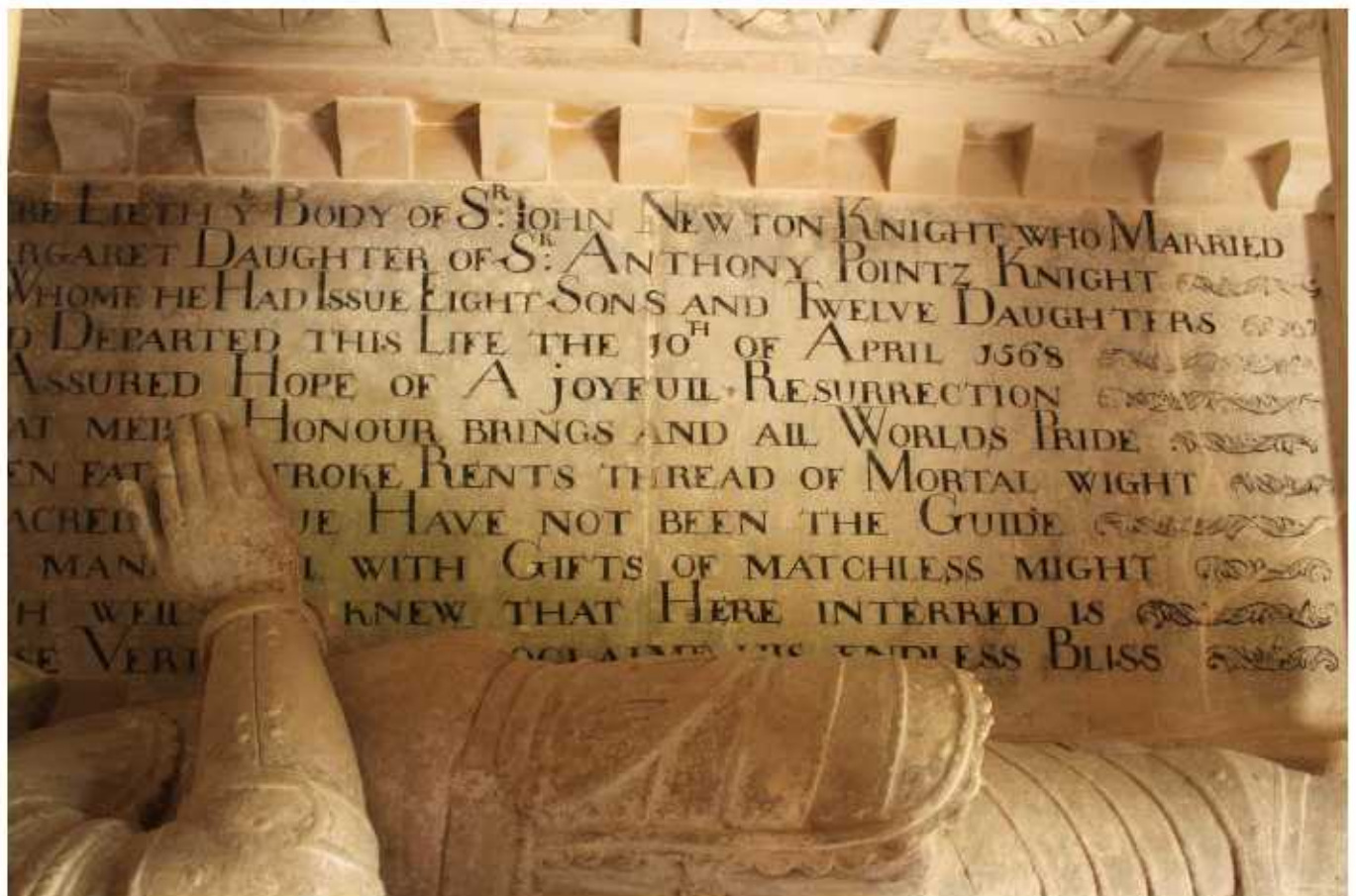


11. Damage to the lettered inscription on the rear wall.



12. Northern end of the inscription, after cleaning and retouching

13. Southern end of inscription after cleaning and retouching





14. Monument after work was completed

15. the topmost cartouched after cleaning and minor consolidation





16. Northern end of monument after work



17. Southern end of monument after work