
Review by George Klawitter

Sherlock, Peter. *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*. London & New York: Routledge, 2008. 296 pages.

Although we like to imagine England chock to the gills with memorials to various dead aristocrats, the truth is, as Peter Sherlock points out early in his fascinating book *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*, only about one-third of English nobility are commemorated with stone or brass. The problem was a matter of money: one of the most extravagant of memorialists, James I, for example, spent a little over 3,000 pounds on elaborate tombs in Westminster Abbey for his predecessor, his mother, and his daughters, but he spent over 10,000 pounds per annum on clothes. Indeed, some of England's most illustrious kings lie in lackluster areas. One need only think of Henry VIII's place in the floor of a side chapel at St. George's, Windsor, to be convinced of the fact that what Sherlock postulates is, in fact, correct: we have indeed taken greater care to honor our non-aristocratic politicians in America than England did in the Renaissance for its monarchs. Monuments, Sherlock notes, were rarely executed at the time of death: they were generally the result of a sudden desire by a nobleman to commemorate his ancestors and recently deceased relatives all in one fell architectural swoop in order either to set history straight or to recreate it in a favorable light.

As one might imagine, the Reformation effected a profound change in the way Renaissance folk looked at death. Once the concept of Purgatory was jettisoned, the fear of suffering attached to life after death melted away so that by the end of the sixteenth-century death came to be thought of as a sleep, the dead simply biding time until the body could be reunited to soul at the General Resurrection. Sherlock points out, however, that images of death, particularly skulls and hour glasses, continued to decorate tombs. The dozens of examples of tomb artwork that he marshals proves his main points nicely, and many of his descriptions are so precise the reader has little trouble imagining tombs. There are, of course, copious photos in the book. Fortunately for posterity most

monuments were spared the iconoclasts' hammers during the Reformation. A statute of 1550, which Sherlock refers to several times, explained to common folk that monuments were not articles of devotion but were simply historical artifacts. Then at Elizabeth's accession there was apparently some delay in monument erection until people could see exactly which way the queen's religious beliefs would affect memorials. In a proclamation of 1560, however, she allayed fears by protecting monuments from "breaking or defacing." One might argue in face of hundreds of extant monument verses that what was saved for us is actually thousands of lines of pious doggerel, but without it we would have a difficult time tracing the effect of changes in death theology on the laity. The verses do document for us a significant shift in attitude about the face of death for Renaissance folk. As Sherlock notes, statues, for example, no longer gazed upward toward an image of Christ crucified or the Virgin: they were more apt by the end of the sixteenth-century to gaze at the family coat of arms.

With the formation of the Society of Antiquaries in 1600, a group which met (much like an MLA convention) to hear papers on heraldry and place names, the twins "wit and brevity" emerged as ideals for monument verse. Among many other examples, Sherlock quotes lines from the grave of Lettice Knollys, wife of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester:

She that in her youth had bene
Darling to the maiden queen,
Till she was content to quitt
Her favour for her favouritt. (209)

Although Sherlock does not següe into epitaphs written for public display by major poets, such verses did appear. Marvell, for example, composed two noteworthy poems for the tombs of Sir John Trott's sons. I am not sure why Sherlock did not consider such pieces. It may very well be that he considers them "literature" and figures they have already been given their just coverage elsewhere.

The book concludes with an extensive analysis of one monument, that erected in 1635 in Salisbury Cathedral for Sir Thomas Gorges and his wife. The sixteen pages Sherlock devotes to this one memorial is a set piece and could serve as a template for future descriptions of English Renaissance tombs. The book

overall is quite readable, rarely tedious, and serves as a walking tour to readers who may never have the opportunity to examine firsthand the scores of tombs Sherlock researched. The book also will whet the appetite of readers who may have already given a tourist's nod at, for example, the Henry VII monument in Westminster Abbey: such readers will want to revisit that tomb after they have read Sherlock's book.

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