

The troubled 1320s and the unidentified effigy in Deddington Church



In a recess in the south aisle of Deddington Church (near the porch), there is a stone effigy of a man, in legal attire, recumbent in an attitude of prayer, with no indication as to his identity. The tomb has been dated on stylistic grounds to c.1330, making it the oldest surviving monument in the church.

Until recently, the only recorded attempt to identify the effigy was by F.E. Howard in 1931, who opined that the effigy was that of Ralph de Bereford of Barford St. John.

Mr. Howard's identification appeared in a short piece in the Deddington Deanery Magazine of July 1931:

OUR JUDGE. - A month or two ago I promised to give further details about the figure in the Church. Here are the particulars kindly sent by Mr. F.E. Howard. Date of the Effigy c.1330. Almost certainly the effigy of Ralph de Bereford who owned Barford St. John and land at Milcombe in 1315 and was appointed Judge Itinerant with Adam de Brome in 1329.

Mr. Howard's identification finds reflection in Mary Vane Turner's 'The Story of Deddington', published in 1933. There is a transcript in Annex I below of the relevant paragraph in Chapter 2: Parish Church.

The Victoria County History (1983) comments that "the effigy of a 14th-century lawyer is conjectured, without much evidence, to be Ralph of Barford" [Barford St. John]. VCH refrains from delving any further, however.

In his 'History of Deddington' published in 1963, Sir Howard Colvin similarly commented "It has been conjectured that this represents Ralph de Bereford (i.e. Barford), a justice itinerant in the reign of Edward III, but this is no more than a speculation".

The identity of the unidentified man of law has recently been exhaustively researched by Nigel Saul, Emeritus Professor of Mediaeval History at Royal Holloway College, who is an authority on early church tomb monuments.

Professor Saul has written up his findings in the 2023 issue of *Oxoniensia* (Volume 88), the journal of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS). The article, entitled "The Mysterious Lawyer; the Tomb Effigy of an Unidentified Man of Law at Deddington", runs to 13 pages in small typeface, with 56 footnotes.

Several Ralph de Berefords were recorded in the Deddington area in the 1320s, another at Barford St. Michael for instance, and there were a number of places in the country called Barford, whilst 'de Bereford' may have been toponymic (that is, a name based on a place name) rather than a specific family name.

Although there is an absence of direct evidence, Professor Saul concludes that, on a balance of probabilities, the effigy is likely to be that of Ralph de Bereford (died 1329), a justice and commissioner, who may have taken his name from Barford in south-east Wiltshire, rather than the Ralph de Bereford from Barford St. John suggested by F.E. Howard in the Deddington Deanery Magazine.

Articles in *Oxoniensia* are copyright protected, and online access is limited to OAHS members (annual subscription £18) until five years have elapsed since publication of the relevant article. There is a synopsis of Professor Saul's article, which the OAHS has kindly allowed us to reproduce, in Annex II below.

In researching the career of Ralph de Bereford, Professor Saul has highlighted his connection with the notorious Despensers (Hugh the elder and Hugh the younger), who were unpopular favourites of Edward II (1307-1327), and his participation in hearings to try those involved in attacks, in 1322, on Despenser properties in north Oxfordshire, including Deddington, and on the properties of William Aylmer (or William de Aylmer), rector of Deddington (1318-1328).

Aylmer was a nominee of the elder Despenser, lord of the Duchy manor and patron of the living. He was a wealthy cleric, employing a steward and bailiff to manage his various estates. It is unclear to what extent Aylmer may have resided in Deddington, as he employed two chaplains in the parish.

In the consequent legal proceedings in 1322, one of the charges lists 95 parties (including 16 women) accused, "with others", of breaking into Aylmer's properties in Deddington ('Dadyngton' or 'Dadynton') and Caversham, and carrying away his goods, suggestive of the occurrence of a riot or riots. The list of defendants also includes a Ralph de Bereford, perhaps from Barford St. John or Barford St. Michael.



It appears that the mass attacks on Aylmer's properties continued into 1323, indicative of continuing civil unrest. In July that year, 139 parties (including 13 women and 5 churchmen), "and others", were accused of breaking into his houses in Deddington

('Datyngton' or 'Dadyngton') and Caversham "at divers times", and carrying away his goods.

There are transcripts in Annex III below of the relevant entries in the Calendar of Patent Rolls concerning the consequent legal proceedings, courtesy of British History Online.

The elder Despenser was a ruthless and unprincipled character, whilst his son's behaviour was even more unsavoury. It has been suggested that the younger Despenser had a relationship with the king similar to that of an earlier royal favourite, Piers Gaveston (who was briefly held at the rectory house (now Castle House) next to the church in Deddington in 1312, before being abducted and executed).

The unreasonable behaviour of the two Despensers, who made themselves indispensable to the king, resulted in civil war with most of the barons and the queen. Both of the Despensers were captured by the barons in 1326, and executed. The hapless Edward II was forced to abdicate in 1327, never to be heard of again.

On account of the Despenser connection, therefore, the inhabitants of Deddington had direct experience in the 1320s of the turbulence associated with the troubled reign of Edward II.

David French (April 2024)

Annex I

Extract from Chapter 2: Parish Church of 'The Story of Deddington', by Mary Vane Turner, 1933

Allusion has been made to the recessed arches in the outer wall. One of these in the south aisle contains a stone figure, recumbent in an attitude of prayer. For long there was no clue to its identity, but research seems to establish the fact that it is the effigy of a judge. In the Deddington Deanery Magazine for July, 1931, Mr. F. E. Howard ascribes the effigy to Ralph de Beresford who owned land at Barford St. John in 1315, and was appointed Judge 'itinerant' in 1329. Enquiries made of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society resulted in their recording that John de Stonore, Chief Baron of the Exchequer (1329) buried in Dorchester Abbey (Oxon) is represented in the same coif, tippet, sleeveless gown and long undergarment, thus giving further evidence that the robes are those of a judge, not of a woman or priest as some have declared. The last information is in the September 1931 number of the Deddington Deanery Magazine. The deep crack or cut traversing the robe has been attributed by one antiquarian to the sharpening of 'Round Head' swords therein !

<https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/publishedhistories/mvt/2.theparishchurch>

Annex II

Synopsis of Professor Saul's article in Oxoniensia, 2023

In a wall recess in the south aisle of Deddington church is the tomb effigy of an unidentified lawyer, shown wearing a coif, and datable on stylistic grounds to c.1330.

No antiquarian evidence survives to indicate who the person commemorated might be and, although the name of Ralph de Bereford has sometimes been suggested, the case for associating him with the tomb has remained unproven. On the evidence of a parliamentary subsidy return of 1316, it is suggested that the man commemorated is indeed Ralph de Bereford and that the origins of his tenurial connection with Deddington are to be found in his ties with the elder Hugh Despenser, who acquired the lordship of one of the manors in the town. [This summary is published by kind permission of The Oxoniensia. Copyright on the full article for non-subscribers exists until 2029]

Annex III

Extracts from the Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1321-1324

Membrane 16d, page 155

York, 6 May 1322

Commission of oyer and terminer to Thomas de Gardinis, Richard de la Bere, John le Botiller of Lanultut and Thomas de Achecote (Commissioners).

Complainant: William Aylmer, parson of the church of Dadyngton.

Alleged misdemeanours: That the defendants broke into his houses at Dadynton and Caveresham, co. Oxford, and carried away his goods.

Defendants: John de Wynton, William de Skelton, Robert Breton of **Dadyngton**, John Stedeman, Robert le Cartere, John Wadde, John la Mare, Agnes de Stowe, Richard 'Inthelane', William 'Anneysmanstowe', Hugh King, Henry Luffyng, John Rotour, Adam Hayot, John Blake, John le Fychere, Richard Tibbesone, Richard Humber, Richard le Suour, John Bretoun, the younger, John Bretoun, the elder, Adam Aungevyn, William son of Richard, Michael de Wotton, Cicely de Fakenham, Isolda de Oxenford, Alice le Ledyettere, Alexander le Barbour, John Lenglish, Richard Ruglish, William Neuman, William Gylot, John Honyman, Emma Scorth, William Mayo, Alice Donne, John de Oxon, John Gerveys, Agnes de Pythinton, Ralph de Bereford, Thomas Snel, John le Mouner, Agnes de Fakenham, John le Lokiere, John Neugh, Margery Gygour, Margery North, William Gygour, John le Fullere, Simon Cachefrensh, William Tonay, Robert Perkyn, Simon 'Thepersonesheldare', Walter de Mildecoumbe, Henry Partrich of Wodestoke, Hugh le Mouner, Vincent de Storteford of London, 'wolmongere', Adam Hocard of **Dadynton**, William Mazoun, John de London, 'tailleur', Hugh Andreu, William Dobbe, Thomas le Glasiere, Thomas Cok, William le Suour of **Dadynton**, Richard Bifeld, William le Swon, Nicholas Carlot, Simon le Sclat[ter]e, Gilbert Kempe, Gilbert de Berewyk, William Symple, Hugh de Tankevill, Henry Tankevill, Richard de Perle of Drayton, John le Heyward of Sutton by Abyndon, Thomas Musard of Brackele, Hugh Puddyng of Wodestok, Thomas Reysun, Philip Bacun, Juliana Bretoun, William Walrond, Richard le Smyth, Agnes Aleblast[er] of Kempton, Ralph le Peyntour, William Duryval, Robert Honyman, Emma de Bubenhull, Robert le Cartere, Juliana Cope, Agnes de Fakenham, John de Upton, Alice Swote, John le Tailleur of Aynho, and William Godhous, with others.

Membrane 9d, page 165

Haverah, 28 May 1322

Commission of oyer and terminer to John de Stonore, Ralph de Bereford, and Thomas de Louth (Commissioners).

Complainant: The Crown.

Alleged misdemeanours: That the defendants entered the manors of Dadyngton, Kertlyngton, Piriton, Hasele, Ascote and Spelesbury, co. Oxford, lately in the king's hands, took and led away horses, cattle, sheep and swans, and committed other trespasses.

Defendants: John de Wynton, William de Skelton, Nicholas Brachet, John de Leycestre, John Perceval, John Cheverel, Henry de Wode, John Coltrep, Edmund Danvers, John de Holt, Henry Trenchard, Ralph de Multon, Alexander de Scalebrok (Skalebrok), Thomas Wythaye, Roger Mael, Thomas Artheu, Thomas de Berkele, Thomas de Ipwell, Richard de Louches, Maurice son of Maurice de Berkele and Thomas son of Maurice de Berkele, with others.

Membrane 7d, page 168

Haverah, 28 May 1322

Commission of oyer and terminer to John de Stonore, Ralph de Bereford and Thomas de Louth (Commissioners).

Complainant: Hugh le Despenser [the elder], Earl of Winchester.

Alleged misdemeanours: That the defendants entered the Earl's manors at Dadyngton, Kertlyngton, Piriton, Hasele, Ascote and Spelesbury, co. Oxford, took and led away horses, cattle, sheep and swans, and committed other trespasses.

Defendants: John de Wynton, and others.

Membrane 23d, page 368

Burstwick, 15 July 1323

Commission of oyer and terminer to Richard de la Bere, John le Botiller of Lanultit and Thomas de Achecote (Commissioners).

Complainant: William Aylmer, parson of the church of Dadyngton.

Alleged misdemeanours: That the defendants and others broke [*sic*] his houses at Dadyngton and Caveresham, co. Oxford, at divers times and carried away his goods.

Defendants: John de Wynton, William de Skelton, Robert Breton of **Dadyngton**, John Stedman, Robert le Cartere, John Wade, John la Mare, Richard 'in the lane', Hugh Kyng, Henry Luffyng, John Rotour, Adam Hayot, John Blake, John le Ficher, Richard le Suor, Adam Angevyn, John le Englissh, Richard le Englissh, William Neuman, John Honyman, William Mayo, John de Oxon, John Gerveys, Ralph de Bereford, Thomas Snel, John le Mouner, John le Lokiere, John Neugh, Margery

Gygour, Margery North, William Gigour, John le Fullere, Simon Caccheffrensh, Robert Perkyn, Simon 'the persones heldere', Walter de Mildecombe, Henry Partrich of Wodestok, Hugh le Mouner, Adam Hocard of **Dadyngton**, William le Machon, Hugh Andreu, William Dobbe, Thomas Coke, William le Suour of **Dadyngton**, Nicholas Carlot, Gilbert Kempe, Gilbert de Berewyk, William Symple, Richard de Per[le] of Drayton, John le Haiward of Sutton by Abyndon, Thomas Mussard of Brackele, Hugh Puddyng of Wodestok, Thomas Reison, William Walrond, Richard le Smyth, Ralph le Payntor, William Durival, Robert Honyman, Robert le Cartere, John de Upton, John le Taylour of Aynho, Richard de Ovvyng, Richard 'Jonesmanfachel', John Crull of Redyng, John de Campo, William atte Bourne, Hugh Blundel, William de London, John Bollenhevede, Robert le Cartere, John de Sheperugge, Thomas de Wynchinden, chaplain, Adam de Berewyk, of Choudeseye, John, abbot of Nottele, brother John de Tettesword, his fellow-canon, Thomas Judde 'the abbotesbaillyf' of Nutele, William le Glasiere of Redyng, John Gobvent of Redyng, John de Scours, Ralph Mounchy of Redyng, Adam le Peyntor of Redyng, Walter de Staunton, Henry Aylmar, Richard de Brakele of **Dadyngton**, Robert Cokel of **Dadyngton**, Philip Akeward, John Akeward, Roger, prior of Burcestre, John Serich of Wrecchwyk, Hugh Simondes, Thomas Taylour, Agnes Aylnoth, Juliana Hardy, Gilbert Janekyns, Hugh le Duk, Thomas le Vuol, Simon Osemond, William le Rede, Richard le Duk, Alice Onwyne, William Hardy, John Hugwes, John Hardy, Robert Hickes, John Colyn, Nicholas Osemund, Hugh Beuel, John Bytheheye, Hugh Kyng, Robert le Heorl, Joan de Weston, John de Mertton, John atte Breche of Wrecchewyk, William son of William le Flemyng of Shareshulle, Richard atte Mulle of Bereford Seynt Michel, Robert le Joustere, Richard le Longe, John son of Roger atte Forde, John Berteweye, Richard le Bonde, John le Hopper, Richard Perkyn, Robert Sprotun, William Honyman, Thomas Jones, Richard Gerveys, John Perkyn, Adam Gerveise, Roger Broun, Roger atte Forde, Richard atte Merssh of Bereford, Robert de Cheddeworth, Alice la Ledietare, Emma Scorth, Agnes de Pythington, Agnes de Fakenham, Emma de Bobenhull, Agnes Abbast of **Hempton**, Juliana Cope, and others.