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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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## PLATE 2

Right (a), the Bridgeman effigies in St Laurence's church, Ludlow, showing the fine workmanship and detailing. The head of Frances, Lady Bridgeman, is particularly convincing.

*See p. 49.*



Left (b), the cartouche on the north side of the tomb chest, showing the Bridgeman, Woodward, Daunt and Olepenne quarterings. The poor restoration is clearly visible.

*See p. 53.*

*Photographs: Gareth Thomas, FRPS.*

## THE BRIDGEMAN TOMB, S<sup>T</sup> LAURENCE'S LUDLOW

Janet Verasanso

The heraldic visitations were designed to curb the proliferation of unauthorized arms and, at the same time, to recognize the aspirations and acquired gentility of new men by means of an armorial grant.<sup>1</sup> In spite of omissions and occasional inaccuracies this vast collection of information on the Tudor and Stuart gentry constitutes a superb corpus of genealogical information. As a demonstration of the confusion which can arise in neglecting these valuable records, I have chosen the Bridgeman tomb in St Laurence's church, Ludlow.

Among the many handsome tombs in St Laurence's church perhaps the most highly executed, if the least colourful, is that of Sir John Bridgeman and his wife Frances (**Plate 2a**). Sir John, who died aged 70 at Ludlow castle on 5 February 1637/8, rests beneath a dignified marble tomb chest on which lie two fine effigies, the whole surrounded by palisading, and located on the south side of St John's chapel. The memorial inscription tells us that the tomb was erected by his wife, and was in compliance with the instructions in his will 'to be buried in such sort as the Lady Francis my welbeloved wife ... shall thinke good'.<sup>2</sup> It was suggested by Thomas Wright in his *History of Ludlow* that the full-length figures 'may be presumed' to have been 'finished' by Francisco Fanelli, who was working in England at the time of Sir John's death, and who excelled at portraiture in both bronze and marble.<sup>3</sup> If this attribution is correct, the effigies can be dated prior to 1641/2 when Fanelli left England for Paris. The diarist John Evelyn dismissed Fanelli as not belonging to the first rank of contemporary Italian artists working in England; nevertheless Charles I awarded the sculptor a pension of £60 in recognition of his artistic achievements. Supporting his suggestion that these effigies included work by Fanelli, Wright claimed that they resemble portraits of Sir John and Lady Bridgeman by Van Dyck. However the catalogue raisonné of Van Dyck's work omits any mention of these portraits.<sup>4</sup> Indeed it has been said that the imitators of Van Dyck 'form a numerous and nameless tribe'. Instead, perhaps, it should be assumed that these paintings, which descended to Henry Toye Bridgeman in 1745 and, by 1796, had been purchased by

<sup>1</sup> G. D. Squibb, *Munimenta Heraldica* (Harl. Soc. pubns. n.s. 4: London 1984), pp. 130-2. For visitation procedures in the midlands see P. Styles, 'The Heralds' Visitations of Warwickshire, 1682-3', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 71 (1953), pp. 94-134; J. Verasanso, 'The Staffordshire Heraldic Visitations: their nature and function', *Midland History* 26 (2001), pp. 128-43.

<sup>2</sup> Proved 23 March 1637/8, PCC: NA PROB 11/176/234.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Wright, *The History of Ludlow and its neighbourhood* (Ludlow 1852), p. 465; H. T. Weyman, *The Glass in Ludlow Church* (Ludlow 1905), p. 5. Weyman perpetuates this speculative view in his work on Ludlow church. However it remains conjectural, since there are no documented tombs by this sculptor.

<sup>4</sup> E. Larsen, *The Paintings of Anthony Van Dyck* (Freren Luca 1988); E. Waterhouse, *Paintings in Britain 1530-1790* (London 1953), p. 51.

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Dr James Johnstone, M.D., of Kidderminster and Worcester, were by another artist, possibly a follower of Van Dyck.

The tomb, embodying the elegant forms of the classical canon, comprises the recumbent figures of Sir John and his wife. He lies in judge's robes with right arm, now with hand missing, across his chest, a lion couchant at his feet. His wife, both of whose hands are missing, also has her right arm across her chest, and according to Wright, she once held a book in her right hand. No longer young at the time of her husband's death, Lady Bridgeman's attire reflects the fashion of earlier days. She is represented as wearing the already outmoded ruff; equally the sleeves of her tight bodice are puffed in a style that went out of fashion in the mid-1630s.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless her head is covered by a delicately carved lace-edged hood turned back to reveal a fashionable fringe and curls. At her feet lies a spaniel. Above the figures and against the wainscot is a black marble memorial inscription with a Latin text, the whole surmounted by an entablature and narrow classical cornice. Placed on the entablature, between festoons of fruit and foliage (symbols of the Resurrection) are three cartouches, displaying on the left the well-known arms of Bridgeman with a crescent cadency mark, and on the right those of his wife, Frances Daunt. In the centre, beneath a cherub, the arms of Bridgeman impale Daunt. Below, on the tomb chest, are two unusual and identical coats of arms which are discussed below.

What does this tomb tell us about Sir John whose reputation as a harsh judge was hardly endearing? The text, heraldry and classical decoration are concerned to impart an image of authority. The inscription informs us that he was a serjeant-at-law and Chief Justice of Chester. Furthermore, the heraldry shows that he belonged to a gentle family which had successfully matched with heiresses, enhancing his family's prestige and perhaps wealth. These identifiers communicate to the observer that here lies a person of quality whose tomb reflects his status. It attests his social position as a public servant of note; clearly in death Sir John's rank is assured for all time.

Sir John's career was both long and distinguished. Trained as a barrister, on becoming a serjeant-at-law in 1623 he was knighted by the king. In 1625, after his appointment as chief justice of Chester, he played an important and prominent part in the affairs of the border counties, and at the request of the king in 1626, he became one of the five councillors in ordinary on the Council of the Marches.<sup>6</sup> This council had been granted to the Prince of Wales in 1471 to impose order from a local, centralized base in Ludlow.<sup>7</sup> As part of Tudor policy to control distant areas, the powers of this prerogative court were dramatically increased by statute during the sixteenth century to further control this lawless region; the council's criminal, civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions, therefore, covered a wide range of offences, together with mili-

<sup>5</sup> K. A. Esdaile, *English Church Monuments 1510-1840* (London 1946), p. 127; F. Kelly and R. Schwabe, *A Short History of Costume and Armour 1066-1800* (London 1931), pp. 35f. Lady Spencer's effigy at Great Brington, Northamptonshire, reflects the high fashion of 1638.

<sup>6</sup> W. Bazeley, 'History of Prinknash Park', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 7 (1882-3), pp. 286f.

<sup>7</sup> Penry Williams, *The Council of the Marches of Wales under Elizabeth I* (Cardiff 1958), pp. 3, 6, 20.

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tary duties and the selection of local officials.<sup>8</sup> Among the council officials the chief justice of Chester was, after the lord president, the most powerful and important member. In fact it is possible that Sir John performed the duties of lord president during the vacancy caused by the death of the Earl of Northampton in 1630, until the arrival of John, Earl of Bridgewater, in the following year.<sup>9</sup> Evidently a man of great energy, he was active both as Recorder of Gloucester and Deputy Constable of the Forest of Dean, and in 1627, as Commissioner for the forced loan in Shropshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire where, in spite of opposition and occasional refusal, he was particularly effective.<sup>10</sup> The Privy Council had been compelled to raise funds by means of a forced loan on the wealthy after parliament refused to grant a subsidy to the king in 1626 and was therefore dissolved.<sup>11</sup>

Sir John's frequent attendance at assizes in Wales and the Marches in connection with the collection of 'ship money' is also recorded.<sup>12</sup> The king's need to strengthen his navy, the cost of which could not be met by normal revenues, resulted in the revival of this unpopular levy. Prior to 1635 this had fallen on port towns, but in order to raise further revenue it was now extended to cover the whole country. This fiscal measure caused great resentment and met with considerable opposition.<sup>13</sup>

Sir John's reputation as a severe and harsh judge, characteristics which seem to be replicated in the features of his effigy, is confirmed by his ruthless treatment of Gloucestershire men who had rioted against enclosure in 1631, where he was one of the Commissioners of Oyer and Terminer.<sup>14</sup> As Recorder of Ludlow he was known for the severity of the sentences he passed down to those who had perpetrated only minor offences. However, in stark contrast to his treatment of the Gloucestershire and Ludlow men, it is recorded in the Calendars of State Papers Domestic that Sir John would often defend the hard-pressed people of Shropshire, Flint and Denbigh against the extortions and oppressive conduct of the sheriffs, whose efforts to collect ship money were occasionally seen by him to be both unjust and harsh. Sir Paul Harris, High Sheriff of Shropshire in 1637, wrote bitterly to the Privy Council complaining that Sir John 'much hindered me' by reducing the assessments in Ludlow and elsewhere, 'I can get but little money since'.<sup>15</sup>

Late in Elizabeth's reign Bridgeman had married Frances Daunt, heir to her father after the death of her brother in 1597; encouraged by her husband, they occupied the family home, Owlpen manor in Gloucestershire. However, the property had

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 312. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction was concerned with recusancy.

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Skeel, *The Council of the Marches* (London 1904), p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> D. Hirst, *Authority and Conflict, England 1603-1658* (London 1968), pp. 147f.

<sup>12</sup> Bazeley, *op. cit.* pp. 289f.

<sup>13</sup> M. Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed, Britain 1603-1714* (London 1996), p. 121f.

<sup>14</sup> Bazeley, *op. cit.* p. 288; *CSP Dom 1631-33*, p. 178: 3 Nov. 1631; in a letter to the Privy Council '140 have been indicted'; *ibid.* p. 336: 25 May 1632.

<sup>15</sup> *CSP Dom 1636-7*, pp. 419 (3 Feb. 1636-7), 506 (17 March 1636-7); *CSP Dom 1637*, pp. 378 (19 Aug. 1637), 495 (25 Oct. 1637); *CSP Dom 1637-8*, pp. 92 (undated, 1637?), 199 (29 Jan. 1637-8).

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been entailed by her grandfather on his male heirs, and was claimed by an uncle who, according to John Smyth of Nibley, exhibited a bill in the Star Chamber against a neighbour, Sir Thomas Throckmorton.<sup>16</sup> Described by Smyth as 'that powerful and plotting gent', Frances' close relative, Sir Thomas had made the marriage and abetted the title.<sup>17</sup> A long lawsuit ensued which was not finally resolved until about 15 years after the death of Frances' father in 1590. The Bridgemans were unsuccessful. Instead, the nearby manor of Nympsfield was purchased from Sir Richard Verney, and in 1628, the mansion house and park at Prinknash, Gloucestershire, where, until the 1920s, the Bridgeman coat of arms could be seen on an elaborate mantlepiece. This was, however, later sold to America.<sup>18</sup> After Sir John's death, Frances continued to live at Prinknash, which became the headquarters of Prince Rupert during the siege of Gloucester in 1643. She died in 1655, and in her will expressed a wish to be buried with her husband in St Laurence's church, Ludlow, where her effigy was already in place. Amongst numerous bequests, she left 40 shillings to the poor of the town, to be distributed at the discretion of the churchwardens.<sup>19</sup>

The issue of the origin of the Gloucestershire branch of the Bridgeman family to which Sir John belonged remains unresolved. Whereas the arms of the Gloucestershire and Devonshire branches (from which the earls of Bradford descend) are virtually identical, historians are uncertain which represents the senior line. 'Strong presumptive evidence' of a close family relationship was suggested by the Revd G. T. O. Bridgeman in his history of Weston-under-Lizard.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, he claimed that the bishop of Chester, John Bridgeman (1577-1652) of the Devonshire branch, on failure of his male issue and those of two brothers and a cousin, settled his estates on Sir John.<sup>21</sup> Frances' will also provides further impetus to this hypothesis: she named the bishop's eminent son Orlando (Lord Chief Justice of Common Pleas, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer and Lord Keeper) as one of her executors.

In trying to produce a full description of the tomb, it became obvious that the heraldry presented some difficulties. Reference was made to the only work devoted solely to the heraldry of St Laurence's by David Bridgeman-Sutton, a copy of which is to be found in Ludlow public library.<sup>22</sup> Whereas this detailed work is largely accurate, unfortunately, with regard to the Bridgeman tomb, the author was led astray by

<sup>16</sup> Sir John Maclean, (ed.), *A Description of the Hundred of Berkeley by Smyth of Nibley*, (Gloucester 1885) vol. 3, p. 312. The suit was probably only heard in Chancery, and was not taken as far as the Star Chamber; Gos. R.O. D456 (Owlpen Papers).

<sup>17</sup> Maclean, loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Father Fabian of Prinknash Abbey for this information.

<sup>19</sup> Will proved 2 Feb. 1655/6, PCC: NA PROB 11/253/153

<sup>20</sup> E. R. O. Bridgeman, 'The History of the Manor and Parish of Weston-under-Lizard, in the County of Staffordshire', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* n.s. 2 (1899), p. 194. This history was compiled by Revd G. T. O. Bridgeman.

<sup>21</sup> Wm. Salt Library, Stafford, 54/11/65: copy of a letter from G. T. O. Bridgeman addressed to Mr Wilkinson, 26 Nov. 1856. Sir John died 15 years before the bishop.

<sup>22</sup> D. Bridgeman-Sutton, *The Heraldry of St Lawrence's Church Ludlow* (n.d.). Ludlow Public Library, not catalogued.

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the difficulties which can be encountered in Papworth's *Ordinary of British Armorial*. Correct interpretation of this publication is possible if it is used in conjunction with other source material. Nevertheless, Bridgeman-Sutton extracted the arms of Bewley and Broughton from this volume as representing those of Sir John's wife. No reference can have been made to the relevant heraldic visitations, nor to the manuscript volume 'Genealogies connected to the County of Salop and the principality of Wales' compiled by Joseph Morris, now in the Shropshire Archives centre.<sup>23</sup> This might have led the author to the Gloucestershire visitation of 1623, in which both the ancestry and arms of Bridgeman and his wife are succinctly laid out.<sup>24</sup> Where poor restoration has taken place, as in this case, the difficulty of interpretation can be compounded and the later installation of the close palisading around the tomb would certainly present problems for both restorer and armorist. Incorrect attribution of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century arms can easily occur, and reinforces the need to consult the available records.

On the north and west sides of the chest tomb are two unusual shields of arms containing five quarterings (**Plate 2b**). Bridgeman-Sutton claims that the second quartering represents the arms of Frances, dowager Viscountess Nelson, granted to her on 20 December 1805 after the death of her husband at the battle of Trafalgar. Noting that this is mysterious, he goes on to state that 'it is safe to assume that they were inserted when the tomb was restored in ... c.1860'. However, the Bridgeman arms with the mysterious quartering were among the numerous armorial bearings belonging to Council of the Marches officials, formerly displayed in the council chamber in Ludlow castle during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the drawing (1795) by the Revd Edward Williams, who recorded tombs and memorials inside Shropshire churches in the late eighteenth century, shows clearly that these shields were extant at that time, which even without reference to the visitations, would indicate that the quartering in question could not have been the arms of Lady Nelson.<sup>26</sup> A possibility that it could originally have been similar to hers is hinted, but thorough investigation would have resolved the problem. This quartering represents the arms of Woodward; Sir John's grandfather having married a co-

<sup>23</sup> Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury: 6001/4077, vol. 1, p. 158. J. Blakeway in his 'Pedigrees of Shropshire Families' (Shropshire Archives, microfilm 27 pp. 92f.) states that the Bridgeman Earls of Bradford originated in Dean Magna, Gloucs., where the visitations show that Sir John also originated.

<sup>24</sup> J. Maclean and W. C. Hearne (eds.), *The Visitation of Gloucester, taken in the year 1623 ... with pedigrees from the Heralds' Visitations of 1569 and 1582-3* (Harl. Soc. pubns. 21: London 1885), pp. 26-8, 185f.

<sup>25</sup> R. H. Clive, *Documents connected with the History of Ludlow and the Lords Marcher* (London 1841), p. 240. He states that there were 256 coats of arms in the council chamber which, when the castle fell into decay after the dissolution of the Council in 1689, found their way to the Bull Inn, Ludlow, where they were converted into wainscotting. They are now missing. Clive also named the second and third quarterings as belonging to Prescott.

<sup>26</sup> BL Add Mss. 21237; Williams also executed competent watercolours of the exterior of Shropshire churches.

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heiress of John Woodward of Great Deane in the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, these two shields do not represent the marital arms of Sir John, but are those of his son George, who died in 1643 at Cirencester whither he had been summoned by King Charles. The first and fifth quarterings are those of Bridgeman, the second Woodward, third Daunt and fourth Olepenne (Owlpen). An early John Daunt had married Margery, heir to her grandfather, John de Olepenne, in the mid-fifteenth century. Greater clarity, without compromising the representation of George's descent, would have resulted if the second Bridgeman quartering had been eliminated.

The misattribution of the coats of arms on the Bridgeman tomb serves to highlight the crucial importance of reference to heraldic visitations, whenever a similar anomaly on a tomb erected during the visitation period becomes apparent. For genealogists, where lineage cannot be corroborated elsewhere, significant information can frequently be found by interpreting the evidence provided by these unique records.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Burke, *GA*, p. 1132, states that the arms were granted to Woodward of Deane in 1420.

<sup>28</sup> This article was first published in the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*.