William Dugdale’s Monumental Inaccuracies and Shakespeare’s Stratford Monument


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The funerary monument to William Shakespeare in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon, is a typical 'scholar monument' of the type that developed in the late-16th century which was popular for memorializing academics and clerics well into the 17th century (see fig 12, p14 for other examples).1 Erected probably not later than 1618,2 it depicts a half-effigy of the poet attired in a subfusc, an academic gown with the sleeves ribboned and pinned back like a short cape as worn by Oxford University undergraduates, and engaged in his earthly profession, writing. The first published depiction of the monument appeared in William Dugdale’s 1656 Antiquities of Warwickshire.3 The engraving, thought to be by Wenceslaus Hollar or one of his workmen, was based on a sketch made by Dugdale probably in 1649,4 and both depictions differ markedly in some respects from the monument as it appears today.

An article published in 2006 in TLS by Sir Brian Vickers asserted that the monument had been installed originally for Shakespeare’s father, John, and later remodeled to suit his poet son.5 Based on it and subsequent discussion in the letters column, Lois Potter wrote in her 2012 Shakespeare biography that ‘it is not certain whether the [monument] image ever showed the poet.’6 A year later, a team of scholars from Aberystwyth University presented a lecture flatly declaring that ‘[t]he original funerary bust remembers a businessman who is clutching a
sack of corn, approximately a bushel’s worth, holding it safe and ready to sell to the highest bidder.7

Vickers’ inspiration was a Web page authored by Richard Kennedy, an Oxfordian,8 ‘The Woolpack Man: John Shakspeare’s Monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-on-Avon’.9 Kennedy assumes that Dugdale’s drawing was accurate at the time of execution and argues that the monument originally honored Shakespeare’s father, John, a glover, farmer, and illegal wool-trader and money-lender, for his civic service as alderman and High Bailiff, the equivalent of modern-day mayor. He identifies the large pillow the figure clutches in the drawing as a wool pack, ‘an emblematic token of his mortal accomplishment’.

Kennedy is not the first to claim that Dugdale’s engraving was accurate and that the original monument was substantially altered. The monument was repaired and ‘beautified’ in 1749 under the supervision of the Rev. Joseph Greene, the first of several restorations over the centuries.10 Ten years later Greene reported that dissimilarities between the 1740 Shakespeare memorial in Westminster Abbey and the Stratford bust had raised questions in the public mind over whether the renovation had changed the effigy.11 In 1844 Peter Cunningham, one of the charter members of what would become the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, declared his faith in the accuracy of Hollar and Dugdale.12 And in 1904 Charlotte Stopes proposed that the current effigy was modeled upon a 1744 engraving and replaced the original that depicted Shakespeare shortly before his death with his hands laid ‘on a large cushion, suspiciously resembling a wool-sack’, a conjecture that to her chagrin was adopted by Sir George Greenwood and became a cornerstone of anti-Stratfordian argument.13 Both Stopes and Greenwood were rebutted by Andrew Lang in 1912 and M. H. Spielmann in 1923.14

Lang pointed out the blatant discrepancies between the monument of George Carew, earl of Totnes, and his wife Joyce, née Clopton, also in the Stratford church, and the corresponding engraving in Dugdale’s book. Stopes replied that ‘[t]he drawing of the Carew Clopton monument does not appear in [Dugdale’s] Diary, which means that the Clopton family, and not Dugdale, was responsible for its drawing and its inaccuracies’ (her emphasis).15 Spielmann added that the monument to William Clopton (father of Joyce) in the same chapel is also portrayed inaccurately by Dugdale, but Greenwood only repeats Stopes’ previous answer to Lang.16 Both Stopes and Greenwood had seen Dugdale’s sketchbook,17 which contains a drawing of the Clopton monument, but neither mentioned that drawing or addressed the question of why the family would have supplied a draw-
Dugdale’s artistic accuracy is the crucial heart of the argument. In addition to the Shakespeare, Carew, and Clopton monument sketches, many of Dugdale’s other original monument sketches are preserved in the ancestral library at Merevale Hall in northern Warwickshire. A careful and methodical comparison of the surviving monuments with Dugdale’s sketches and the engravings in his Antiquities reveals that the major discrepancies between the Shakespeare monument, Dugdale’s drawing, and Hollar’s engraving—the incorrect facial features, the disproportionate head and limbs, the cushion/sack, the inaccurate architectural features, and the strangely-constructed putti—are found also in other monument representations by Dugdale and Hollar, therefore they are much more likely the result of Dugdale’s unfaithful artistic portrayals than any later alterations of the monument.

Not all images in Dugdale’s Antiquities are inaccurate. The engraving on page 154 of the wall memorial to Ellen Campion (d. 1632) in the Baginton church of St John the Baptist is astonishingly detailed and accurate. The signature ‘W. Hollar fecit’ suggests that Hollar probably used his own drawing for the engraving, and indeed it compares well with his signed engraving of William Aubrey’s monument published by Dugdale in his History of St Paul’s Cathedral (1658). But on the same page of the Campion engraving, the depiction of the brass memorial of William Bagot (d. 1407) and his wife Margaret in the same church follows the inaccuracies in Dugdale’s sketch (B27v): the sloped shoulders, the changed visages, the disproportionately smaller heads, and the inaccurately drawn costumes, all of which are present in Dugdale’s drawing of the Shakespeare monument.

No drawings survive of the monument of William Peyto (d. 1639) at St. Giles church at Chesterton or of the tomb of Sir Thomas Lucy (d. 1640) in St. Leonard’s church at Charlecote Park, but their engravings are obviously inaccurate. Lucy’s monument bust (fig 4) sports a shaped moustache and conical goatee remarkably similar to that on Shakespeare’s bust, but the sketcher or engraver or both rendered them in the same manner as the Shakespeare depictions, turning down the lines of the moustache, blunting the goatee, and spreading it upward along the jaw line to meet the tips of the moustache.

Dugdale’s undated sketch of the monument of Sir Fulke Greville (d. 1559) and his wife Anne in the St. Nicolas church in Alcester survives (B33r). The engraver improves the drawing but renders it even more inaccurately, mistaking the positions of the praying hands, tightening Greville’s collar, and transforming
Figure 2: from left, the William and Margaret Bagot brass monument in the Baginton church of St John the Baptist; Dugdale’s undated drawing; Hollar’s engraving.

Figure 3: from left: bust of William Peyto; engraving of bust from Dugdale’s Antiquities, p. 383.
the woman’s hairpiece.

Cushion

The cushion upon which Shakespeare rests his hands is probably the most blatant difference between the existing monument and the early depictions. Stopes writes that ‘the hands are laid stiffly, palms downward, on a large cushion, suspiciously resembling a woolsack.’ Vickers says the effigy is ‘resting his hands on a woolsack’ that the 18th-century renovators ‘transformed ... into some kind of cushion, a wholly unsuitable writing surface’, and Archer, Turley, and Thomas describe it as ‘a sack of corn’. However, comparisons to other sketches by Dugdale reveal that the Shakespeare depiction is consistent with those: though the cushions are almost uniformly lozenge shaped with tassels, Dugdale drew them out of perspective as if they were set up on edge with all four corners and tassels revealed. It appears that the hatching that delineates the cushion edge in the sketch was mistaken by the engraver to depict the cushion as a puffy oval shape.

In the Church of St Theobald and St Chad in Caldecote three members of the Purefoy family, Francis (d. 1613) and William (d. 1615) are portrayed on one wall monument and Michael (d. 1627) is portrayed singly on another, with all figures kneeling on cushions. Dugdale’s original sketches are lost, but the
Figure 5: from top: detail from tomb of Sir Fulke and Lady Anne Greville; detail of Dugdale’s sketch; detail of engraving from Antiquities, p. 573.
engravings exhibit many of the characteristics that Vickers takes for evidence that the Shakespeare monument has been altered: the subjects’ appearances are changed, especially the facial hair; their costumes differ markedly, especially in the number of armor plates; the overhead arches are wider, and the relative distance between the arches and the heads of the subjects differ. The tasseled cushions are very similar to those of the Shakespeare monument, but they are engraved ‘suspiciously resembling a woolsack’. Yet no question exists that these monuments placed on the walls of a private chapel are the same as those depicted in Dugdale’s Antiquities.

Dugdale and Hollar’s depictions of the Edward (d. 1592) and Dorothy Holt wall memorial in the Aston parish church of St Peter and St Paul in Birmingham (fig 7) present dissimilarities that parallel the Shakespeare monument depictions. The figures’ eyes cast downward; in the sketch and engraving, they gaze upward. Her headdress has changed from a Tudor hood to a veil or a scarf. Both Dugdale and Hollar have changed the shell in the background into vague petal-like rays. The beard of the male figure, the angle of the couple’s arms, the depiction of the cushions, the height of the altar, and the relative distance of the figures from the arch all deviate from those of monument.

In the drawing of the wall monument of Robert (d. 1603) and Mary Burdette in All Saints Church in Seckington (fig 8, p10) Dugdale transgenders one of the daughters and moves the figure on the left to balance the number of sons and daughters. Dugdale’s continuing problem with perspective is apparent: again he depicts the cushions as pillows, which are in turn transformed into carpets by the engraver who apparently is not Hollar. The books on each side of the lectern are tipped upward at an impossible angle in the same manner as the cushions; the engraver leaves them out. The relative distance of the figures from the arch, the position of the arms, and the changed countenances of the figures are all congruent with the disparities in the Shakespeare monument sketch. The details of the coats of arms, however, are pictured accurately.

**Putti**

Vickers also lists the features of the putti placed on either side of the coat of arms as evidence that the monument was changed. He notes that in the drawing
Figure 6: Details of the monuments of (top, from left) Francis, William, and Michael Purefoy, and Hollar’s engravings in Dugdale’s Antiquities (pp. 790-1).
Figure 7: from top: Detail of the Holt memorial in the Aston parish church of St Peter and St Paul in Birmingham; detail of Dugdale’s undated sketch; and Hollar’s engraving from Antiquities p. 642.
Figure 8: from top: detail of the Burdette monument at All Saints Church in Seckington; Dugdale’s drawing, dated 1 Aug 1639; and the engraving from Dugdale’s Antiquities p. 814.
their legs dangle off the cornice, that the right putto holds an hourglass instead of an inverted torch, and that the present-day figures, with their curled locks and pompadours, are more suitable to the Georgian than the Jacobean period.\textsuperscript{23}

Dugdale’s drawing follows the basic poses of the putti on the monument, with the exception of the figure on the right, whose left leg is crossed over the right, possibly a misconstrual of the inverted torch being held by the figure’s left hand. Both putti are also precariously perched with their legs hanging off the ledge of the cornice, a position not seen in any such tableau that I have been able to find. Enough examples of Dugdale’s draftsmanship have been presented to show that he often changed the positions of appendages, and these are well within his range of error. While it may seem an error unlikely to have been made had Dugdale been sketching on site, he took similar liberties with the putti in his drawing of the heraldic shield of Basil Feilding taken from his tomb in the Church of St Edith in Monks Kirby, Warwickshire, which Dugdale notes was taken by himself in May 1637.\textsuperscript{24} More likely he worked from separate sketches of the putti having forgotten their exact placement on the monument, hence the erasures and redrawings.\textsuperscript{25}

George Vertue’s engraving of the monument for Alexander Pope’s 1725 edition is clearly based upon a detailed eye-witness drawing.\textsuperscript{26} Vertue placed what appear to be candles or torches in the hands of the putti and perched them on an hourglass and skull respectively. Only the spade handle in the hand of the left putto and only the torch handle in the hand of the putto on the right are visible to an observer standing on the floor, which was approximately 18 inches lower before the renovation in the late nineteenth century. The artist could have taken those to be representations of candles or torches. Finally, a comparison of the Shakespeare monument putti with one from the tomb of Sir William Pope, later Earl of Downe (d. 1631), (fig 10, p12), demonstrates that the hairstyles of the allegorical figures are consistent with others of the same general era.\textsuperscript{27} Almost identical putti are present on the tomb of Roger Manners, 5th Earl of Rutland, built 1618-19 by Nicholas Jansen, brother and business partner of Garret Jansen, the builder of Shakespere’s tomb.

One change noted by Vickers indeed might have occurred when the monument’s architrave was replaced in 1748 or earlier.\textsuperscript{28} Leopard heads could have been present on the frieze above the acanthus ornaments when Dugdale sketched the monument. Decorative rosettes or heraldic shields survive on several similar monuments at Oxford University all made about the same time.
Figure 9: The putti representing labor and rest, from left, as they appear today, Dugdale’s sketch, Hollar’s engraving, and Vertue’s engraving.

Figure 10: from left: detail from end of the tomb of Basil Feilding, death date unknown, Sheriff of Warwickshire 1568, and Goodith (or Judith), his wife (d. 1580); Dugdale’s drawing dated May 1637; and the engraving from Antiquities, p. 54. Church of St Edith in Monks Kirby, Warwickshire.
as Shakespeare’s, as the three examples illustrate. As this study establishes, he routinely omitted many details and distorted others in his sketches, but my limited survey of monuments uncovered no examples of Dugdale adding features that were not present, though some poorly-sketched details obviously confused the engravers.

Seven rosettes attach to the ceiling of the arch above the Shakespeare effigy, and two could have been attached to the frieze as in Ralph Hutchison’s monument in fig 11, (p13). However, given Dugdale’s inventive depictions of other monuments, another plausible explanation could be that he exaggerated the front volute of the decorative capital and placed it higher, with the engraver taking them for decorative devices and, being more familiar with architectural elements, then added the front volute to the capital. If they were present, the rosettes or leopard heads could have been lost sometime between 1649, when Dugdale sketched the monument, and 1725, when Vertue’s engraving appeared in Pope’s edition of Shakespeare.

Critics of the monument have avoided discussing the similarities between the effigy and Dugdale’s drawing, focusing instead in the differences. But the similarities vastly outnumber the differences, especially in the effigy’s dress. Vickers himself calls attention to the description by John Aubrey, who saw the monument sometime between 1640 and 1670 and described it perfectly:

Mr William Shakespeare [Poet] in his monument in the Church at Stratford upon Avon, his figure is thus, viz a Tawny satten doublet I
Tom Reedy

Figure 12: Wall funerary monuments of, from left, Ralph Hutchinson (d. 1606), St John’s College Chapel in Oxford; Robert Hovenden (d. 1614), All Souls College Chapel at Oxford; John Spenser (d. 1614), Corpus Christi College Chapel at Oxford.

Figure 13: from left, rosettes inside the arch of Shakespeare’s monument; detail of capital; (top) Dugdale’s sketch, and Hollar’s engraving.
thinke pinked and over that a black gowne like an Under-graduates at Oxford, sicilcet the sleeves of the gowne doe not cover the armes, but hang loose behind. When I learnt to read 1632 of John Brome the parish Clarke of Kington St Michael, his old father [above 80] who had been Clarke there before) dayly wore such a Gowne, with the sleeves pinned behind. I doe beleve that about the later end of Queen Elizabeths time ’twas the fashion for grave people, to weare such Gownes. (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Top. Gen. c 25, fo 203v)²⁹

Though Vickers calls attention to the ‘pinked’, or slashed, doublet in the present-day monument, despite the identical depiction of it in the Dugdale drawing, he confuses a jerkin, a sleeveless jacket with a closed front, with the subfusc gown the effigy is wearing, which is always open in the front.

Vickers also gives credence to Barbara Whittington-Jones’ theory that the monument is now situated in a different place on the wall than the hypothetical original monument. In 1964 Whittington-Jones claimed that ‘all photographs of John Hall’s monument³⁰ reveal four nails or knobs in the chancel wall exactly where one would expect the broader Dugdale to have been secured to the wall—there is one nail on either side and near the top of each square pillar, and one on either side of the central section immediately below the window-sill³¹ which Vickers says ‘must have held the solid backing frame of the original monument’. The four holes are clearly visible in fig 1 on page 1. However, no such holes or knobs are present in photographs taken in the 19th century or early 20th century. The original purpose of the holes was to hold a detachable steel cage that was installed around the monument in response to threats to deface the monument during the suffragette period.³² Nor does the monument hang; it is set into the stone of the wall, which is clearly visible in Vertue’s 1725 engraving.

Finally, other evidence discredits the idea that the monument honors Shakespeare’s father. In 1577 and 1591, John Shakespeare was listed as a recusant, a Catholic who refused to attend Church of England services in violation of the law; the reason given was that he was in fear of being arrested for debt. In 1570 he was accused of usury, and in 1572 he was fined for two counts of unlicensed dealing in wool.³³ It is extremely unlikely that the church would welcome a monument in its chancel depicting John Shakespeare’s illegal profession, no matter what position he had held on the town council; the appropriate garb would have been the fur-trimmed bailiff’s gown with a ceremonial mace. William Shake-
Figure 14: Photograph of Shakespeare’s monument c. 1890.
speare bought the remaining 31 years of a lease of church tithes in 1605, almost four years after his father’s death, which obligated him as a lay rector to help maintain the chancel. As a tithe-holder, he was entitled by custom to burial in the chancel, and his wealth provided his family the means to pay for it.

The logical implications of the visual and historical evidence presented are clear: unless one is prepared to argue that all these monuments have been substantially altered since Dugdale first depicted them—an argument without credibility—Shakespeare’s Stratford monument appears today substantially the same as when Dugdale sketched it in 1649, and the discrepancies between it and his depiction are due to the limitations of his artistic ability. A few years after Shakespeare’s burial, a monument was erected near his grave to honor his memory, a monument in all essential features identical to that which stands today.

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List of Figures

1  from left: Shakespeare’s monument as it appears today; Dugdale’s 1649 sketch; Hollar’s engraving as it appears in Dugdale’s Antiquities of Warwickshire (1656), p. 520.

2  from left, the William and Margaret Bagot brass monument in the Baginton church of St John the Baptist; Dugdale’s undated drawing; Hollar’s engraving.

3  from left: bust of William Peyto; engraving of bust from Dugdale’s Antiquities, p. 383.

4  from left: detail from tomb of Sir Thomas Lucy; detail of engraving of Lucy tomb, p. 402.

5  from top: detail from tomb of Sir Fulke and Lady Anne Greville; detail of Dugdale’s sketch; detail of engraving from Antiquities, p. 573.

6  Details of the monuments of (top, from left) Francis, William, and Michael Purefoy, and Hollar’s engravings in Dugdale’s Antiquities (pp. 790-1).

7  from top: Detail of the Holt memorial in the Aston parish church of St Peter and St Paul in Birmingham; detail of Dugdale’s undated sketch; and Hollar’s engraving from Antiquities p. 642.

8  from top: detail of the Burdette monument at All Saints Church in Seckington; Dugdale’s drawing, dated 1 Aug 1639; and the engraving from Dugdale’s Antiquities p. 814.

9  The putti representing labor and rest, from left, as they appear today, Dugdale’s sketch, Hollar’s engraving, and Vertue’s engraving.

10 from left: detail from end of the tomb of Basil Feilding, death date unknown, Sheriff of Warwickshire 1568, and Goodith (or Judith), his wife (d. 1580); Dugdale’s drawing dated May 1637; and the engraving from Antiquities, p. 54. Church of St Edith in Monks Kirby, Warwickshire.

11 The two putti from the Shakespeare monument compared with that of the William Pope monument in Wroxton All Saints Church, middle.
Wall funerary monuments of, from left, Ralph Hutchinson (d. 1606), St John’s College Chapel in Oxford; Robert Hovenden (d. 1614), All Souls College Chapel at Oxford; John Spenser (d. 1614), Corpus Christi College Chapel at Oxford.

from left, rosettes inside the arch of Shakespeare’s monument; detail of capital; (top) Dugdale’s sketch, and Hollar’s engraving.

Photograph of Shakespeare’s monument c. 1890.

Notes


5 Brian Vickers, ‘The face of the Bard?’ TLS, 18 and 25 August, 2006, pp. 16-17. Vickers makes several errors: Gheerart and Garret are variants of the same name; the monument plaque does not mistake Shakespeare’s age at death, and writing cushions are common in such monuments of the period.


8 A person who believes that Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, wrote the works of Shakespeare.

10 The latest in 2013.


15 Lang, Unknown, pp. 179–80; Stopes, Environment, p. 123.


17 Stopes, Environment, p. 122; Greenwood, Stratford Bust, p. 9.

18 The volume is stamped “DUGDALE/WARWICK/7/orIGINAL/MANUSCR” in gold on the spine, comprised of two separate booklets bound together. The first booklet (which I designate ‘A’) consists of 18 leaves, most depicting coats of arms displayed in church windows, the majority copied by Dugdale from other sources dating from the first three decades of the 17th century, but some taken by Dugdale himself. A few epitaph transcriptions are scattered among the sketches. The second section (designated ‘B’ in my references) consists of 34 folio leaves, most containing sketches and inscriptions in pencil and ink.


24 9v.

25 It is not clear which pages of the booklet were sketched on site and which were copied and redrawn later. While the majority are laid out symmetrically with a rule and straightedge and appear to be fair copies of rough sketches taken on site, the design
of the page with Shakespeare’s monument is awkward. Unlike all other pages in the booklet, the Carew tombstone epitaph is interrupted and continues on the verso, and Shakespeare’s epitaph and those of his family are found 22 pages earlier. See Reedy, pp. 194-5.


27 Pope’s monument was executed by Nicholas Stone, who from 1615 is recorded working with the tomb maker Bernard Janssen (Johnson) of Southwark, possibly a brother of Gerard Janssen (Johnson), the sculptor of Shakespeare’s monument.


30 Presumably Whittington-Jones means the Shakespeare monument; no monument to John Hall exists in the church.


33 Potter, Life, pp. 42-3.
