



A Salisbury-Cathedral-centric view of History.

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CADAVER TOMBS - 3

Part of the uniformity of the cadaver tomb is the way its funerary shroud is positioned. It is almost always knotted behind the head from where it runs down the length of the body, rising to cover the modesty of the deceased, before knotting again at the feet.



Figure 13 John Baret's cadaver showing shroud detail



Figure 14 Thomas Bennett's tomb showing the same shroud detail

The head rests on a pillow and the feet among, beside or on symbols of death. These are very different to other funerary monuments which utilise greyhounds or lions to symbolise loyalty, purity and bravery (see John Cheney's tomb for comparison). Thomas Bennett's feet rest beside a skull and on a mole. The symbolism of the skull is obvious, the mole is used to symbolise death and the afterlife because it spends its life below ground in the darkness of the soil.

Cadaver tombs were polychrome (painted to look life-like). A spot of red paint is still visible in the eye socket of the skull at Thomas' feet. They also have their eyes either fully open or half open, again reinforcing this idea of sentience. In the medieval period, the belief was that once you'd reached the skeletal stage (the dry stage) of death you no longer felt anything, so by that point you didn't need praying for. For this reason, scholars separate cadaver tombs from those transi tombs that bear a skeleton effigy as belonging to a different tradition.



Figure 15 Thomas Bennett's mole

During the course of researching this article I dug into Bennett's life and discovered some apparent inconsistencies. His tomb is all about modesty and death being the great leveller, and he did seem to care for those in less privileged positions than himself (his will records that he was so concerned by the lack of formal provision for lodgings and food for the cathedral choirboys that he left them a milking cow so they would have access to daily milk), but he was also the man who sentenced the eminent musician John Marbeck to death by burning for heresy in 1543 (Marbeck was later pardoned by Bishop Gardiner and so avoided that dreadful fate). That Bennett was rich and powerful is evidenced by documents that show he was on a list of persons applied to for a loan to meet the expenses of an invasion of France in 1544 (he gave 100 marks). He was also in a position of trust with Cromwell, communicating directly with him, and offered Leadenhall (his home from 1524) to Henry VIII when he visited Salisbury in 1535. He signed the 10 Articles (an Act that promoted Protestant ideas over Catholic) in 1536, yet when Mary Tudor came to the throne in 1553 he was able to demonstrate sufficient commitment to the Catholic faith that Mary confirmed him in his role as Precentor at the cathedral.

So how do we reconcile these apparent contradictions? This was an unsettled period in English history when nothing, neither religion nor loyalty, was clear or straightforward and those in positions of authority could easily find themselves out of Royal favour and losing their heads for it. Bennett witnessed first-hand Wolsey's fall from grace after Henry VIII lost patience with him over his divorce from Katherine of Aragon; as a result of his connection to Wolsey, Bennett was stripped of his post of Chancellor of the cathedral in 1529, only to be reinstated in 1533. I suspect Bennett, living in uncertain, unsafe and changeable times, had simply learned over his long career to do what he had to do to keep his position and his head, while trying to help those he felt he had a responsibility to.

I hope I have shown in this article that cadaver tombs are historically important objects and that we are very fortunate to have two in such good condition in the cathedral. They are rare survivors of a turbulent period, one where the Church of England was being forged. For a historian like me, they are one of the few ways we have of getting a real glimpse inside the medieval mind, providing us as they do with an opportunity to roll back six hundred years and step into a world that's long gone.

I think the best way to understand the power that a cadaver tomb wielded (still wields?), is to pay Thomas Bennett's a visit. Look at his arm. It's shiny. How many times over the centuries must his tomb have provoked that unconscious act of solidarity, empathy and pity that is suggested by the polish on that arm? For the shine can only have come from countless hands reaching out to touch him, most of them long after a belief in purgatory had faded. The impulse to care about another human being, someone we don't know but nevertheless perceive as being in pain and therefore needing our help is epitomised by that shiny arm on Thomas' tomb. There's something very powerful and reassuring in that.



If you'd like to know more about cadaver tombs or have any information about them you would like to share please email me. I'm currently making my way round the forty-four we have in England and Wales and am keen to collect and collate as much information, ideas, insights and thoughts about them as possible. sstileman223@gmail.com.

Useful further reading:

Adams, A. Barker, J. (2016) Revisiting the Monument. Fifty years since Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture. Available at https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/60866/1/Chapter_6.pdf

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British Library Online. Chronicle of the Black Death, 1348. Available at <https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item103973.html>

Chalier, P. (2013) A glimpse into the early origins of medieval anatomy through the oldest conserved human dissection (Western Europe, 13th C A.D.). Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4042035/>

Churches Conservation Trust. (2022)

Medieval Death: Exploring cadaver tombs. Available at <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/what-we-do/blog/english-and-welsh-carved-cadavers-an-overview-with-dr-christina-welch.html>

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- King, P. (1987) Contexts of the cadaver tomb in fifteenth century England. PhD Thesis, University of York. Available at <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/4274/>
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- Panofsky, E. (1964) Tomb sculpture: its changing aspect from ancient Egypt to Bernini. London: Thames & Hudson
- Mann, Z. (2021) Art of the Black Death: Medieval Artists Facing a Pandemic. Available at <https://www.thecollector.com/black-death-medieval-art-and-artists/>
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BRITONS NEVER NEVER...

Frances, Theresa Stuart, Duchess of Richmond 1647 - 1702, was a prominent member of the Restoration Court and her great claim to fame was that she refused to become Charles II's mistress. She was one of the *Windsor Beauties* painted by Sir Peter Lely. Samuel Pepys recorded that she was the greatest beauty he ever saw - and this was the man who had a portrait of Nell Gwyn (un)dressed as cupid over his desk at the Admiralty. The Count of Gramont said of her that *it would be difficult to imagine less brain combined with more beauty*. It was fitting then that she became the model for *Britannia*, commissioned by Charles II from John Roettiers to commemorate the Peace of Breda* following the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1667. This was the first national personification since Roman times and it is still going strong.



*This is not to be confused with the Declaration of Breda (1660) by Charles II prior to his return to England. General Monck was the instigator but the negotiations were entrusted to Charles' Chancellor, Edward Hyde (1609 - 1674), who later became Earl of Clarendon and was a member of a great Wiltshire family.

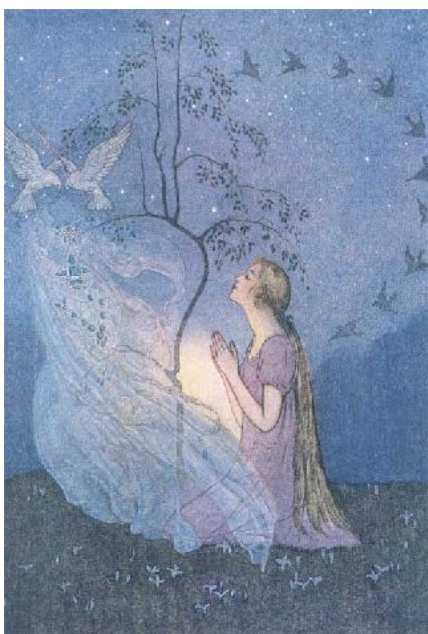
CINDERS

The pantomime Cinderella is always a great British favourite but the storyline is just one of thousands of variants throughout the world. The oldest record of the Cinderella story is by the Greek geographer Strabo in his book *Geographica*. *Rhodopis*, a Greek courtesan living in Naucratis, Egypt, had her sandal stolen by an eagle whilst she was bathing. The eagle flew to Memphis and whilst the king was administering justice, dropped it in his lap. The king was stirred by the beautiful shape and the strangeness of the occurrence and sent men all over the kingdom to find the woman who wore the sandal. She was eventually brought to Memphis where she became the wife of the king.

The same story is reported by the Roman orator Aelian (175 - 235) who adds the name of the pharaoh, *Psmmetichus*. Another possible root is *Aspasia of Phoea* whose tale is told in Aelian's *Varia Storia*. In this story her attractions come to the notice of the Persian, Cyrus The Younger.



Marie de France recounts the 12th century tale of the *Ash-Tree Girl* (called *Fresne*) who is abandoned as a twin because in those days it was believed that two fathers must be involved. In this case she marries a nobleman. *Ciklemfusa* is a Maltese variant and *Ye Xian*, a Chinese one. *Tam and Cam* is from Vietnam and *Neang Kantoc* from Cambodia.



The One Thousand and One Nights also has the story but this includes being harassed by two elder siblings. The German brothers Grimm called their protagonist *Aschenputtel* and as you would expect there is no fairy godmother, but the first European version was of *Cenerentola* published in Naples by Giambattista Basile in his *Pentamerone*. It was in 1697 that Charles Perrault published *Cendrillon, ou la petite pantoufle de verre* and it is this story that we still read to our children and grandchildren. Above, one of Gustave Doré's illustrations for *Les Contes de Perrault* in 1862. *Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, in the public domain.*

I notice that although we link 'cinders' to hearth ashes the original stories refer to an ash-tree. In the 1920 illustration left by Elenore Abbott (*Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, in the public domain*), she follows the German version with Cinderella praying to an ash-tree and the dress being brought by birds.

Panto itself evolved from Italy's *Commedia dell'arte* but with elements from masques and music hall. It could be said to hark right back to Classical times. The word comes from Latin (but originally Greek) *panto* = all and *mimos* = mimic. In Roman times the story was based on a myth or legend and involved a silent masked male dancer and accompanied by a sung libretto from a singer or chorus. There were overtones of eroticism and effeminacy. The *commedia* added stock characters such as *Pierrot*, *Punch* and *Columbine* but the British chose *Harlequin* for their central character - greatly helped by the clown, *Grimaldi*. The gender switching, perhaps surprisingly, was Victorian - Oh no it wasn't!