

TOMB SLAB
in the SE corner of the Nave.

In the very South-East corner of the nave is an inscribed tomb slab:



A detailed description of it is in the Report of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (1934)¹:

Monument: In nave-in S.E.corner, incised slab with foliated cross under cinquefoil ogee canopy with crockets and finial, plain shield and marginal inscription in black-letter beginning "Hic jacet tumulata Alicia uxor...(Burtoni?)," 15th-century.

The earliest reference I have seen to it dates to 1890 when it was mentioned by the Reverend Barker, Vicar of Eardisland, in his Paper "Erislonde, Alias Eardisland, Alias Areland"²:

...on the floor under the leper window, with a black letter inscription, which I should be glad if any member of the Club will help decipher. All at present made out is – "Hic jacet.....Burtonii cujus animam propitietur Deus. Amen."

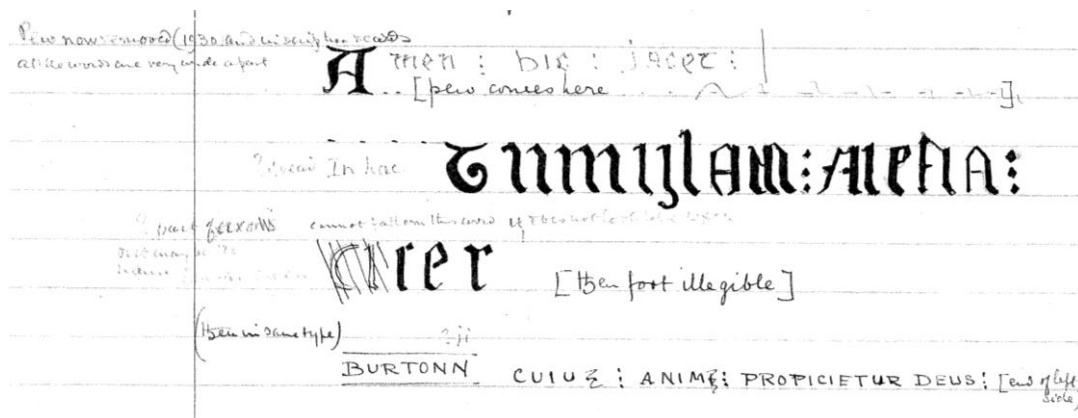
¹ RCHM, published by HMSO in 1934.

² WFC 1890-1892, pages 54-55.

Then in 1898³ George Marshall made notes which he headed “Eardisland co. Hereford. All the Inscriptions in the church.” These are now in Herefordshire Record Office.⁴

A good few years later he used these notes and some additions he made to them, in an article he published in the Transactions of the Woolhope Club in 1930. It is these two George Marshall references, the second overwritten by him onto the first, which are my sources for the remainder of this Paper.

To assist in this there follows a copy of his 1898 notes on which can be seen his later additions:⁵



It is now clear, from Marshall’s additional note, that the Reverend Barker used the words: *All at present made out is...* only partly because the inscription round the tomb slab had deteriorated with age; part of the slab was under a pew. There is a photograph, which I reproduce hereunder, which shows just how close to the East wall of the nave, at the South side of the chancel arch, the pews extended between the end of the 1864-1865 “restoration” and 1928 when:

...six more pews were removed at the East of the Nave, three from each side, thus creating a much-needed open space and also uncovering the two ancient tombs.⁶



³ Dated in his own hand “28 Sept. 1898”.

⁴ HRO BM81/1/19, page 121.

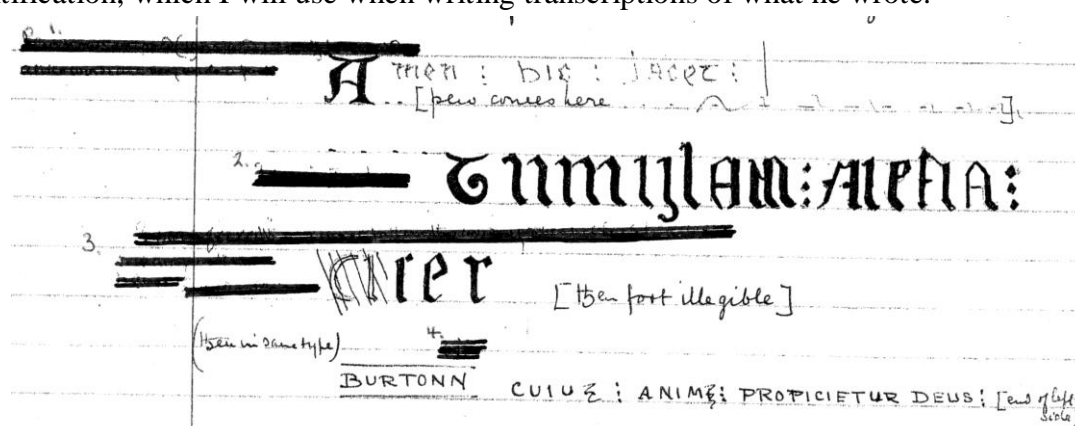
⁵ HRO BM81/1/19, page 121.

⁶ From “Record Book”, compiled by the Reverend Birley who was Vicar of Eardisland from 1917 to 1938. For this to be accurate three from each side must by then already have been removed at some earlier date, or the St Owen Tomb arch would not have been uncovered. This is, in fact, implied by Birley’s wording.

Barker in 1890 recorded eight words of the inscription, slightly altered the Latin and recorded the word ‘Amen’ at the very end of it.

Marshall’s original note of 1898 can not, as I once thought, have been copied from Reverend Barker’s 1890 item. Not only is the entry about Eardisland Church several pages into his (Marshall’s) “...All the Inscriptions...”, it shows in brackets [*pew comes here...*] suggesting on-site observation of it; as indeed is completely obvious to have been the case when taken in the context of all the other entries in his notes. If one takes it that he added the lettering in bold print after the pews were moved in 1928, Marshall also at first visit recorded the same eight words as Barker but with slightly different spellings and with the “men” of what later turned out to be “Amen” at the beginning⁷, not at the end. He also, perhaps in 1898, but not with certainty then, included two letters “C L” which he later (probably) deleted and added a further note and the three letters “r e r” in bold script.

As can be seen from the reproduction of the document on the previous page of this, Marshall’s additional notes are not very clear and the text as it now is seen is difficult to unravel. To assist in doing so, and to save a lot of descriptive writing, I show hereunder another copy of the document with the unclear notes blanked out but numbered for ease of identification, which I will use when writing transcriptions of what he wrote.⁸



1. This reads: *Pew now moved (1930) and inscription reads all the words are very far apart*
2. ? it read *In hac*
3. ? part of it *cannot fathom this word it does not look like uxor*
Just may be the name
Sancto Owen
4. ? ii He is wondering whether the word underneath this note should be *Burtonii* .

⁷ Which the recent photograph which I have included on page one of this shows to be correct.

⁸ I think that all his bold type relates to 1930, but only some of his notes which do not form part of the inscription itself. Wh he recorded or annotated what is not of great importance, but the legibility of his notes is.

And so to how Marshall used these notes in his Paper for the Woolhope Club⁹ in 1930. The part of his Paper relevant to this topic is reproduced hereunder:

On the floor of the nave in the south-east corner is an incised slab with a foliated cross under a canopy and one blank shield over the cross and two others at the sides in the framework above. Round the verge is an inscription in black letter, partly chipped away, but what remains reads, beginning at the top : " Amen : hic : jacet : | Tumulam : Alesia : cer (?) | | Burtonii cujus : Animz : Propicietur Deus : "]. This stone probably commemorates Alice daughter and heir of Sir Peter de Breuse, wife of Ralph St. Owen of Garnston and Burton. Ralph would seem to have died about 1355, and Alice may have survived him till 1369.

RCHM dated it to the 15th Century, Marshall to the mid 14th and suggested who Alice may have been. Of the two I consider that Marshall is more likely to be correct, simply because the only Alice St Owen I have seen recorded anywhere (at any date) is the one he quotes. It is likely that his source was the same as mine, viz. the 1569 Herald's Visitation of Herefordshire by Robert Cooke, Clarencieux King of Arms.¹⁰

Unless it was after all (as was suggested and then effectively dismissed as a possibility by Marshall in another part of his notes) the tomb slab shown by Dingley¹¹ to have been under the tomb arch a little way further West along the South wall of the church¹², why was it, commemorating as it does a person of at least local importance, tucked away right in the SE corner of what is now the nave. Was it always in that position or has it been moved?

The area where it is situated in the church was once:

*a little chappelle south belonging to Burton*¹³

The St Owen family is copiously recorded as holding the lordship of the manor of Burton from soon after the Norman Conquest until circa 1405. Where then, within this chapel, would a wife of the Lord of the Manor have been buried? The possibilities are limited by the size of the chapel, but even if that were not the case, either in front of the chapel altar, or close by it to left or right is the likely place. The chapel altar would undoubtedly have been against or very close to its East wall and therefore about half way between the South of the present chancel arch and the South wall of the church itself.

It is perfectly possible, then, that the tomb slab is still in its original position and has not been tucked away in a corner at the time of some subsequent reorganisation or renovation of the interior of the church.

⁹ Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club. 1930.

¹⁰ Ed. F.W.Weaver M.A., Exeter 1886.

¹¹ Dingley T. "History From Marble". Circa 1683.

¹² My opinion is that clearly it was not.

¹³ Harleian Mss 6868 via HRO BM 81/1/12, page 83. Its extent and position can be seen in the Architects drawing of the layout of the church before the 1864/1865 alterations.

