

Notes on the Effigies of Sir John Poulet and Constance, his Wife, in the Church of All Saints, Nunney

BY ALFRED C. FRYER, PH.D., F.S.A.

THE table-tomb with the effigy of a knight with his lady lying beside him once stood free from the wall in the body of the Church, and was moved at some date a little later than Collinson published his *History of Somerset* in 1791. The place it now occupies is in a cramped position in the north transept, known as the Chapel of St. Katherine. In order to force it into the north-east corner one end was mutilated; the other end was placed against another monument and one side is now touching the north wall so that only one side is exposed to view.

The coat-of-arms blazoned on the breast and both sleeves of the tabard are those of the Delamare family (*Gules*) *two lions passant guardant (argent)*. This well-known coat-of-arms led the writer, as well as several others who took an interest in this monument, to search for some Delamare knight of the Tabard Period.¹ We have now to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to Commander S. N. Smith, R.N., who, after some careful research, has discovered to whom these two effigies are intended to be a memorial.

The crucial point lies in the fact that Sir John Poulet was, through his mother Eleanor, nephew and heir of Sir Ellis Delamare, as the following record of the Close Rolls shows :—²
'Thomas Stawell knight . . . William Poulet of Melcombe

¹ *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, lxxviii, 54–56, Plate XII, fig. 3; lxx, 77–78, Plate VII, fig. 1. These illustrations have been introduced here again as Plate XIII.

² *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1429–35, 66, 67.

. . . (and others) . . . to John Poulet esquire, son and heir of Eleanor Poulet sister of Ellis Delamare, knight, being cousin and heir of the said Ellis, and to Constance his wife and the heirs of their bodies . . . with remainder to Joan wife of John Newburgh esquire and daughter of John Delamare knight . . . Indenture tripartite of the Manor of Fyssherton, Wilts., which the grantors had by feoffment of the said John Poulet. Dated at Melcombe, Sunday after St. Gregory the Pope 6 Henry VI' (14 March 1427-8).³

Eleanor Poulet died 28 April 1413, and was buried in the south aisle of the Church at North Petherton. The father of Sir Ellis and Eleanor Delamare had a license on 8 February 1393-4 for the foundation of a chantry at the altar of St. Katherine, in the Church of Nunney.⁴

The five shields are carved in relief on the one side of the monument now exposed to view, and through the courtesy of Commander S. N. Smith the writer is permitted to give his readings of these five coats of arms.⁵

- I. (*Gules*) *two lions passant guardant (argent)* DELAMARE.
- II. Quarterly : 1 and 4, (*Sable*) *three swords in pile (argent), hilted (or)* POULET, quartering DELAMARE.
- III. (*Or*) *a lion rampant queue fourchée (sable)* WELLE, impaling (*Gules*) *three water bougets, 2 and 1 (argent)* ROOS.
- IV. (*Or*) *a lion rampant queue fourchée (sable)* WELLE, impaling (*Gules*) *a lion rampant (argent)* MOWBRAY.
- V. Quarterly : 1 and 4, *Barry of 6 (or and vert) a bend (gules)* PONYNGES, the last charged in dexter chief with an annulet for difference ; 2 and 3 (*Argent*) *on a chief (gules) two pierced mullets of six points (or)* ST. JOHN, impaling (*Gules*) *two lions passant (argent)* LE STRANGE.

Before the monument was ruthlessly removed into the north transept it was visited by Richard Symonds in 1644⁶ and

³ *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, fifth ser., ix, 84.

⁴ *Cal. Patent Rolls* (1391-6), 370.

⁵ *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, fifth ser., ix, 86.

⁶ *Diary of Richard Symonds*, Camden Society, 33. He records that in the north window of the chapel were the arms *Gules, two lions passant guardant argent, collared azure*. However, no Delamare lions on either the knight's tabard or table tomb are collared.

Collinson⁷ also studied it at some date before he published his *History of Somerset* in 1791, and they give us some records of the shields of arms on the table-tomb that are now no longer visible :—

- A. Quarterly : 1 and 4 (*Gules*) *two lions passant guardant (argent)* DELAMARE : 2 and 3, *on a chief two mullets*. This is recorded by Symonds. The full description should have been (*Argent*) *on a chief (gules) two pierced mullets of six points (or)* ST. JOHN.
- B. Isabel de St. John, *suo jure* Baroness St. John, younger daughter and eventually sole heir of Hugh, Lord St. John of Basing, born 29 June 1333, died 16 October 1393. (*Argent*) *on a chief (gules) two pierced mullets of six points (or)* ST. JOHN. Collinson records only, *In chief two mullets*.
- C. Dexter, the same as the preceding : impaling a 'lion erect'. This is evidently for (*Or*) *a lion rampant queue fourchéé (Sable)* WELLE.

Five coats of arms out of the above blazons, *viz.* III to V and B and C, are those of Constance Poulet's own ancestors as follows :—

- (C) Her father, Sir Hugh Ponynges (died before 10 February 1427–8), impaling those of his wife Eleanor de Welle.
- (V) Her paternal grandfather (died 7 March 1428–9) Thomas Ponynges Lord St. John, quartering his mother's arms and impaling those of his wife, Joan Le Strange.
- (B) Her paternal great-grandmother, Isabel *suo jure* Baroness St. John (died 16 October 1393).
- (IV) Her maternal grandfather, John 5th Lord Welle (died 26 August 1421), impaling those of his wife, Eleanor Mowbray.
- (III) Her maternal great grandfather, John 4th Lord Welle (died 11 October 1361), impaling those of his wife, Margaret Roos.

⁷ Collinson, *History of Somerset*, ii, 220.

It is therefore clear from the heraldry on the monument that the figures represent Sir John Poulet, d. 31 January 1436, who appears to have used the Delamare arms when he came into possession of the Delamare estates; and his wife Constance, d. 27 November 1422, daughter of Hugh Ponynges (or St. John).

This effigy of a great lady of the Ponynges (St. John) family and wife of Sir John Poulet has been sadly maltreated. It belongs to an age when portraiture was rarely attempted, yet her features, so sadly mutilated, indicate a vigorous personality possessing considerable strength of will. She is represented in a long veil on which is placed a gold circlet richly gemmed.

Collinson⁸ saw this monument nearly one-and-a-half centuries ago and he found the coats-of-arms were difficult to interpret as they were 'daubed over with whitewash'. He adds 'two of them are now illegible'. It is some thirty-five years since our late member, Mr. Francis Were, made some study of them, finding some difficulties and considering No. IV was 'much defaced'.⁹ Commander S. N. Smith, however, took an electric torch with him which enabled him to distinguish the details on these five coats-of-arms with comparative ease.

⁸ Collinson, *History of Somerset*, ii, 220.

⁹ *Som. & Dor. N. & Q.*, vii, 154.



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