

Observations on the Armour Depicted on Three Mid-15th-Century Military Effigies in the Kirk of St. Nicholas, Aberdeen¹

By Tobias E. Capwell

Three-dimensional fifteenth-century effigies in Scotland are generally considered to fall into two groups: those of the West Highlands and what is usually referred to as the 'Lowland' group. The former group is quite distinct and stylistically unrelated to effigial sculpture elsewhere in Britain. Military Highland examples generally show their subjects wearing light armour more suited to Highland warfare. This generally consists of an open-faced basinet, sometimes with a dependant aventail, and a padded coat armour, probably textile. The 'Lowland' group, by contrast, generally seems to be more closely comparable with effigies in England, France, and the Low Countries, showing men in full plate armour.

Around eighty Scottish Lowland effigies dating from the fifteenth century survive. Of these, thirty-five represent men in full plate armour, either knights or squires. Many are extremely worn, badly damaged, or fragmentary; some have been left exposed to the elements for many years, and indeed continue to deteriorate to this day. **(Figure 1)**

Given the very limited extent of fifteenth-century Lowland effigial sculpture, especially that having military associations, the group of three effigies in the Kirk of St. Nicholas, Aberdeen, should be considered one of the most significant single collections of the art-form remaining, rivalled only perhaps by the similar group of three at Corstorphine in Midlothian.² The Ab-

erdeen effigies are in a comparatively excellent state of preservation and are all superb examples of their types and sub-types. The Kirk includes examples of both major fifteenth-century Lowland groupings,



Figure 1: Effigy of John Stewart, circa 1445. Culross Abbey, Fife. (Author's photograph)

¹The author would like to thank Ann Norman for granting him access to the archive of the late A.V.B. Norman during the preparation of this piece. The author has examined some but not all of the Scottish Lowland effigies himself; rather, he has relied on Norman's notes, sketches, and photographs of those examples not yet viewed. The 'Kilmun' and 'Borthwick' sub-group distinctions are also Norman's.

²See Norman, A.V.B., 'A Scottish Military Effigy of the 15th Century', *Scottish Art Review*, 9, 1 (1963, special number 2/6), pp. 24-5, 34.