

## WOODEN EFFIGIES

An effigy is a likeness of a person and is usually life sized and often above a tomb. Most effigies in churches are of stone. In the medieval period many effigies were carved from wood and then colourfully painted but very few have survived. We are fortunate to have three in our church. I should like to express my gratitude to my husband, Dr Neil Sinclair, who has taken all the photographs.

Mrs Elisabeth Sinclair 2012

The three wooden effigies in the church are thought to be 13<sup>th</sup> Century from the style of dress and, from the standard of carving, they are thought to be from a London atelier. There is some uncertainty about who these effigies represent. They were thought by Weever to be members of the de Vere family. In 1255 William de St Clere held 20 acres in Danbury and by 1279 he had a park and was Sheriff. He died in 1290 and left one third of the manor to his widow Felicia for life and the rest went to his heirs, Robert his son and Sir John Fitz Simon de Vere his son in law. The Fitz Simon de Veres held it until 1362. However Morant suggested that the effigies are members of the St Clere family which now seems more likely. The family held the manor in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries and used the North aisle as their private chapel. They are also credited with building the church. The crossing of the effigy's legs has been cited in support of this theory, as apparently it can be construed as symbolizing church builders. Effigies of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century knights often have their lower legs crossed. For a long time this was thought to indicate that the knight had been on the Crusades but historians have now rejected this idea.

In 1867 a member of the Royal Antiquarian Society visited the church and made drawings of the effigies which he suggested should be moved to Westminster Abbey, but fortunately the advice was ignored.

### Wooden Effigy South aisle South Wall

A recumbent effigy of man in suit of mail. The effigy is unfinished. It has a coif (*close fitting cap*) with filet round temples, a hauberk (*chain mail tunic*) and a long sleeveless surcoat, with no identifying marks. It is more open in front than in 2 or 3, so the right knee is revealed and shown to be protected by genouillères (*knee pads*). It has a narrow belt and a shield strap crosses the left arm to suggest the shield would be placed vertically and to the side. The shield is missing. No hole for a fixing peg is visible, which would support this idea. There is a broad sword belt with a narrow guige (*leather strap*) fastening sword to it, the buckle fastens to the right. There are spurs (but the pricks have gone) and straps. The head lies straight on two pillows, the upper one is lozenged, the lower one is square. There is the suggestion of a moustache. There is a deep recess on either side of the nose by the eyes. The hands are raised together in prayer. Mail markings are not carved on arms, hands or legs, suggesting it was not finished. The right leg crosses the left at the knee, and there is a hole in the surcoat on the left of this leg. The right foot lies near the head of a lion, left of it near the tail. The lion has well defined mane but its body is broken across the middle.

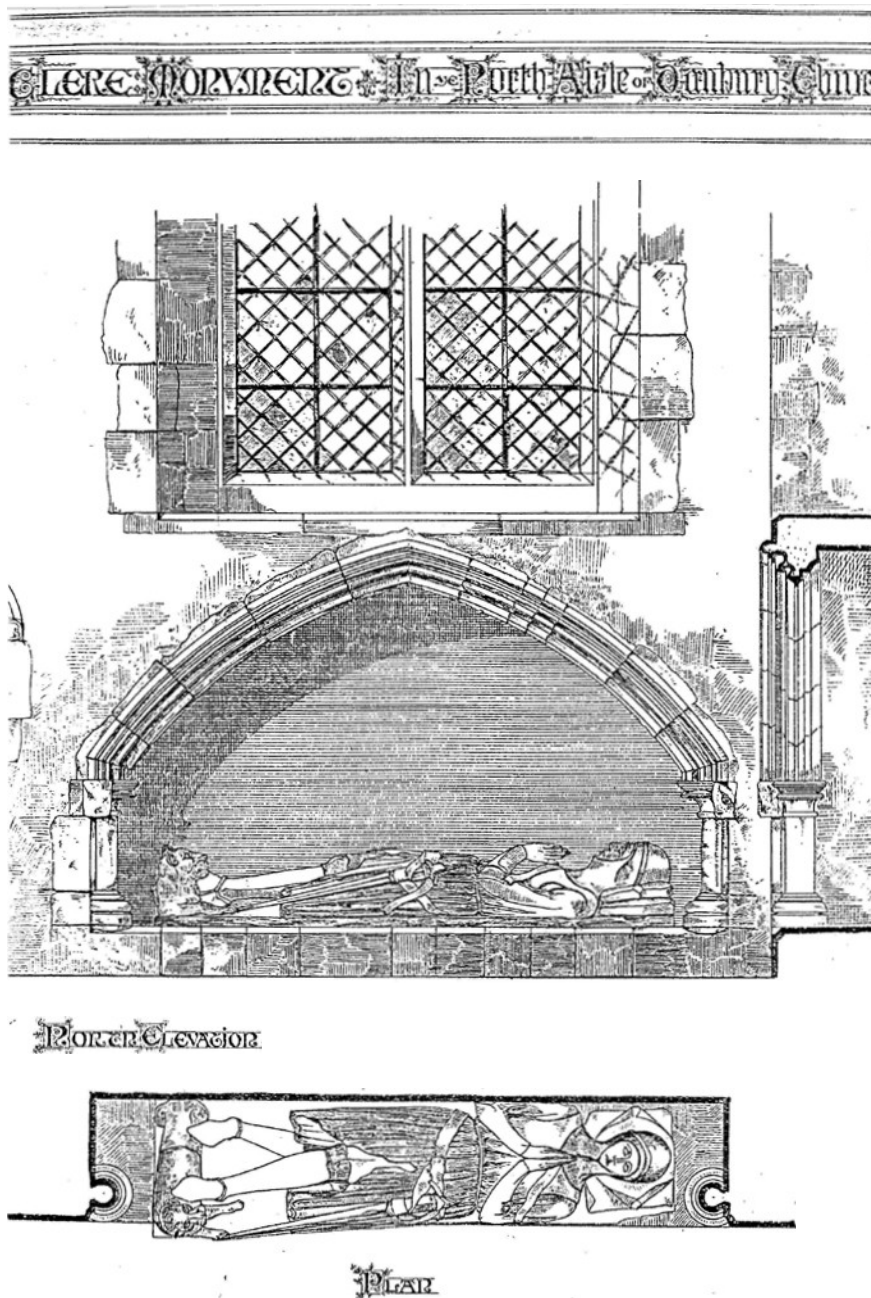
The table is carved as one with the effigy from a solid trunk of oak, with the effigy hollowed out from underneath. The straight edge of the table is missing on the left below the leg and it is badly damaged at base. There is heavy beetle infestation especially of the table and there are traces of gesso (*white primer*) and preservative. The condition is poor compared to the other two effigies in North aisle.

The effigy lies in a niche consisting of a richly moulded pointed segmental arch, slightly stilted, supported on short engaged shafts with moulded capitals and bases and covered by a hood mould. The overhang of the effigy is more marked at the base than the head.

Effigy: h 31cm l 201cm d 45cm : Niche h 135cm l 242cm d 46.4cm. Height from floor of niche 19cm.

This effigy is known to have been moved around the church. It may well have been with the other two in the St Clere's private chapel in the North aisle. In 1621 Weever reported it to be in the medieval South aisle in a corresponding niche to those in the North aisle. Suckling said it was taken from this niche and laid on a 'red brick basement' against the East end of the North aisle in 1776 and was still there when he wrote his book in 1845. In 1866, builders involved in a further renovation of the South aisle found bits of the arch to the original niche which they thought the effigy had occupied, and they pieced them together and restored the arch and the niche and replaced the effigy in the South aisle. (This conflicts with the drawings in Chancellor's book of 1890 headed 'The St Clere Monuments in ye North Aisle of Danbury Church'.) However it was definitely in its present position by 1921.

From: Chancellor Frederick Ancient and Sepulchral Monuments of Essex 1890

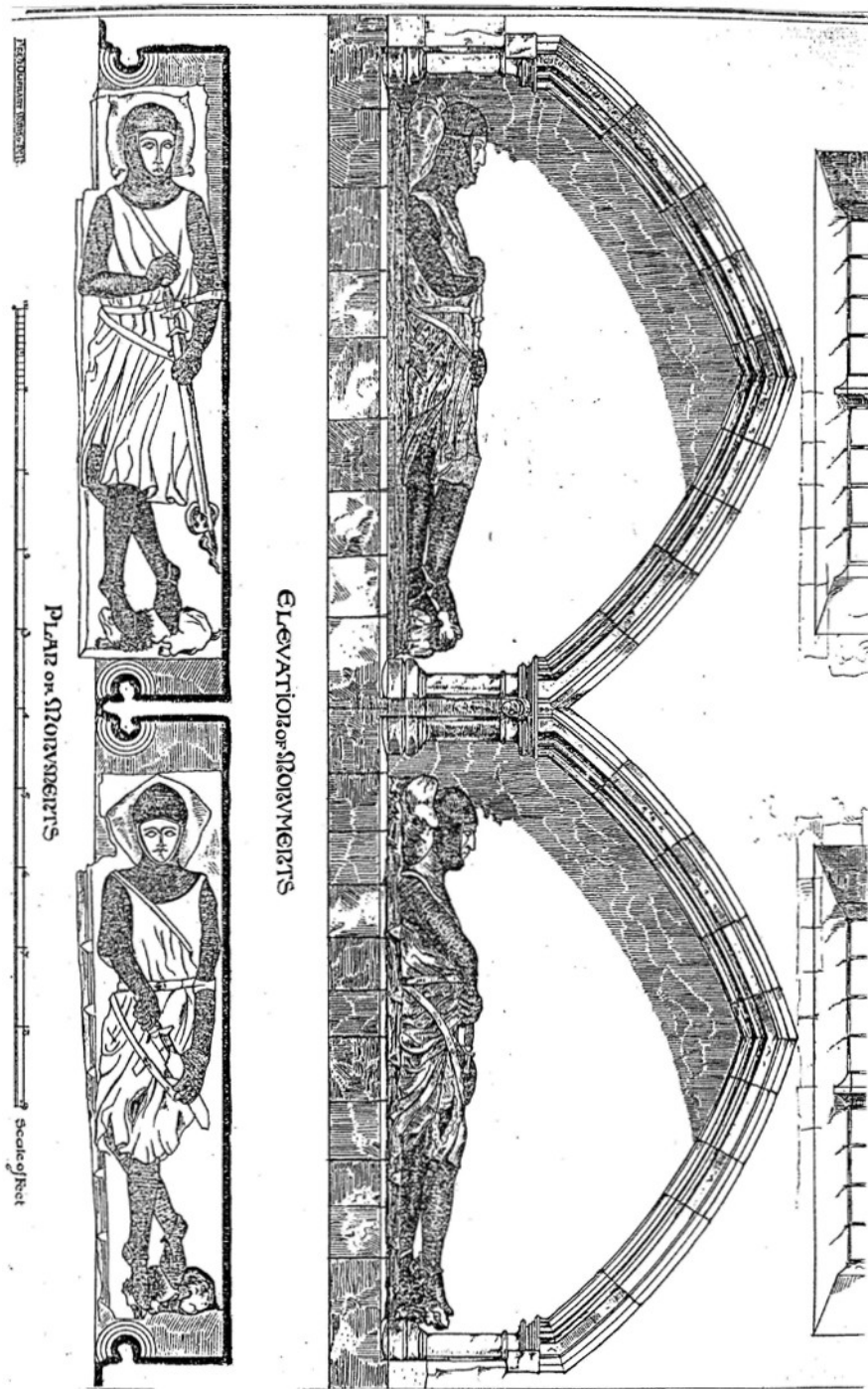




### Two wooden Effigies North aisle North Wall

The two effigies are arranged to form a pair in twin recesses in North wall. Each niche consists of a richly moulded pointed segmental arch, slightly stilted, supported on short engaged shafts with moulded capitals and bases and covered by a hood mould, the whole forming a canopy for the niche. In the centre of the two niches, between their pillars, there is a defaced face and below this is a hole to which something could have been attached or this may just be damage. The length of the stone slabs on which they lie fit their unequal sizes well, but because of the narrowness of the slabs depth, there is a marked overlap of the effigies in their length. (Wooden shelves have been added recently for the effigies to lie on and an alarm system has been installed.)





13. From ANCIENT SEPULCHRAL MONUMENTS OF ESSEX

1. A recumbent effigy of man in suit of mail with coif (*close fitting cap*), hauberk (*chain mail tunic*) and hose of mail. A long sleeveless surcoat, with no identifying marks, reaches to and covers the knees. The girdle is buckled to the left. There is a shield strap. The shield is missing, but a peg hole is visible by left armpit. There is a sword belt, spurs (pricks broken) and straps. The head rests on a square cushion with very pointed corners, giving the appearance of soft fabric. The head is turned slightly towards the left shoulder. The hands wear mail and there is a right sheathing sword, not yet completely replaced. The cross handle of the sword is broken and around the end of the blade a snake is entwined, with its head looking up to the man's face. The left leg crosses the right just below the knee with the left foot resting on an animal's head and the right foot on its body. The animal's head is mutilated and it is difficult to decide if it is a lion or a dog. It has the shape more of a dog but appears to have a curly mane. The table underneath the effigy and on which it rests is carved in one piece with the effigy from solid trunk of oak. The effigy is hollowed out from underneath. The underside of the figure has been hollowed out with a tool with a 2.5cm edge. The right edge is chamfered. It is cut back nearly to the edge of the figure from top to shoulder and again for 2cm by waist. Other edges are unfinished and on left side the absence of the table allows the effigy to lie hard up against church wall. There is some evidence of beetle infestation in the table, but the condition of the figure is comparatively good. There are holes in the table by the feet, left calf and left elbow. There are traces of gesso (*white primer*) on the figure, but no evidence of colour so it is not known if this was originally painted. There is some evidence of preservative in black patches on the table. In 1968 this effigy was exhibited in Paris as part of a display of Gothic Art in the Louvre organized by Nikolaus Pevsner.

Effigy : h 33cm l 201cm d 55cm : Niche h 137cm l 242cm d 48cm.





2. A recumbent effigy of a man in a suit of mail with coif (*close fitting cap*), hauberk (*chain mail tunic*) and hose of mail. A long sleeveless surcoat, with no identifying marks, reaches to and covers the knees. The girdle buckled to the right. There is a shield strap and the shield is missing, but a peg hole is visible by the left armpit. There is a sword belt, spurs (pricks broken) and straps. The head rests on a lozenge shaped cushion and lies straight, though it drops down slightly to the left. The nose is defaced. The hands wear mail and the right elbow is angled up slightly with the hand sheathing or unsheathing sword. The left hand is on the scabbard which is broken. The left leg crosses the right just below the knee with the left foot resting on an animal's head and the right foot on its body. The animal's head is turned to look away from the effigy. (Again it is not certain whether it is a dog or a lion. The table is carved in one piece with effigy. The right edge is stepped, though it is broken away from top to right shoulder. There are six shields carved along edge but no identification is possible. The top and bottom edges of table are unfinished. The left edge almost rotted away so that the effigy is able to be pushed hard against the wall. The underside is hollowed out. There are traces of gesso and preservative. The condition is not good, with a large hole between thighs which shows evidence of attempted repair with remaining nail heads. There is heavy beetle infestation especially of the table.  
Effigy : h 41cm l 206cm d 56cm : Niche h 142cm l 240cm d 51cm.







#### References

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RCHM Royal Commission on Historical Monuments SE Essex

Fryer Alfred C Wooden monumental effigies in England and Wales