

NOTICES OF MEDIAEVAL SCULPTURE AND WORKINGS
IN ALABASTER IN ENGLAND.

Numerous tombs, effigies, and incised slabs of alabaster, are to be found in most parts of England, more particularly in the Midland counties ; and pits of the material still exist at Chellaston, near Derby, and at Fauld, under Tutbury Castle, which have been worked time out of mind. "Marbellers in alabaster" are also mentioned as extensively employed at Burton-upon-Trent, from an early period, probably, to the end of the reign of Elizabeth. These facts lead to the conclusion, that an extensive and valuable branch of native industrial art, though now almost forgotten, once flourished in this kingdom.

The desire to invite attention to the use of this material by mediæval sculptors in England, rather than thoroughly to investigate so interesting a subject, has induced me to offer the following particulars. It is to be regretted, that in Stothard's beautiful work on *Monumental Effigies*, as also in many of the County histories, the material of which tombs and effigies are formed has not been precisely mentioned ; and Mr. Gough, who is laudably accurate in such details, sometimes errs in designating the alabaster as white marble, as in the Beauchamp tomb at Warwick, one of the earliest examples, date about 1370 :¹ but, so carefully selected was the alabaster of that period, for monumental purposes, that it is scarcely distinguishable from Carrara marble.

The earliest specimen of ornamental carved works in alabaster is perhaps that still remaining in the Norman arch of the west doorway of Tutbury Church. "This arch," observes Mr. Garner, "has seven principal mouldings, of which the innermost but one is of alabaster ; all are richly adorned with zig-zag, beak-head, flowered, and other devices."² The most ancient remaining example, it is believed, of a purely sculptural character, is the cross-legged effigy, said to represent Sir John de Hanbury, in Hanbury Church, Staffordshire. Its date appears not later than 1240. The material,

¹ Gough's *Sep. Mon.*, vol i., part 2, p. 127.

² Garner's *Staffordshire*, p. 143.

however, does not seem to have received much attention till a century or more later ; but from about the middle of the 14th century, it came gradually into very general use. A fine and early example of this date is the Beauchamp tomb at Warwick, with the effigies of Thomas Earl of Warwick, who died in 1369, and his lady, with statuettes around the tomb. About the same period Sir Thomas Poynings, in his will, dated 48 Edward III., 1374, bequeaths his body to be buried in the midst of the choir of the Abbey of St. Radegund in Kent, and appoints that a fair tomb should be placed over his grave, with the image of a knight thereon, made of alabaster.³ Mr. Gough assigns a mutilated effigy in Radford Church, Notts, to Thomas Furnivall, who died 39 Edward III., 1369 ; but it is probably of later date. In the succeeding reigns, those of Richard II. and Henry IV., several fine examples occur, and amongst these may especially be noticed the beautiful tombs of Henry IV. and his Queen, at Canterbury ; that of Ralph, Earl of Westmoreland, and his two Countesses, in Staindrop Church, co. Durham ; and that of Thomas, Earl of Arundel and his Countess, in Arundel Church.⁴ The monument in Old St. Paul's (as described by Dugdale) of John of Gaunt, who died in 1399, was of alabaster ; the alabaster is stated to have been brought from Staffordshire. Tutbury and its vicinity was the property of John of Gaunt ; and in the records of Tutbury Priory, Robert Earl of Derby is stated to have translated the remains of Henry de Ferrers, and deposited

³ Dugdale Bar. ii., p. 134.

⁴ In Bakewell Church is an elegant canopied niche of alabaster, containing the semi-effigies of Godfrey Foljambe, who died 1376, and his lady Avenal, 1383. (Lysons's Derbysh., p. cccxxv.) The same author has noticed alabaster effigies and tombs as existing in the following churches: Ashbourne, Longford, Newton Solney, Cubley, Barlborough, Dronfield, Norbury, Aston, Radborne, Kedleston, Duffield, &c.

In Lysons's Cheshire are engraved from Buubury Church a fine tomb and effigy of Sir Hugh Calveley, 1394 ; and from Barthomley Church a tomb and effigy of Sir Robert Fulshurst and lady (Rich. II. or Hen. IV.), very similar in style and workmanship to the Arderne tomb at Elford, Staffordshire. Sir Robert fought at Poitiers, and died 13 Ric. II. In Notts, alabaster monuments are said to occur

(as I learn from Mr. Davis, of Shelton, Staffordshire,) at Willoughby-on-the-Wolds, Wollaston, Markham-on-Trent, Clifton, Rateliff-on-Soar, East and West Leake, Stapleford, Strelley and Langar. In Staffordshire, as in Derby and Notts, there is scarcely a church which does not contain alabaster tombs or effigies, and the observation may extend to the adjoining counties, the slabs there supplying the places of the monumental brasses of the eastern and southern counties. Ecclesiastical effigies, also of alabaster, of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, abound in most of our cathedral churches. At Tong, in Shropshire, are fine early alabaster tombs of the Vernons ; and at Spilsby, in Lincolnshire, those of the Willoughbys of Eresby. See Gough, vol. i., part 2, pp. 187-189.

the bones near to the high altar, where he erected a tomb of alabaster over them. During the recent excavations at Tutbury Church, in an apsidal east end, were discovered some blocks of alabaster, but without ornament. At the close of the 14th century an interesting fact is presented to our notice, in the exportation of the monument and effigy of John, Duke of Bretagne, first husband of Queen Joan of Navarre, for erection in Nantes Cathedral. He died November 1, 1399. For the honour of our country, observes Mr. Gough, it was executed by three English workmen, Thomas Colyn, Thomas Holewell, and Thomas Poppehowe, to whom the King, Henry IV., granted a passport to carry it over, February 9, 1408. This permission occurs in Rymer's *Fœdera*, and a representation of the tomb is given in Lobineau's *Histoire de Bretagne*, p. 498.⁵ This tomb existed till very lately at Nantes; but by a recent communication from M. Lecointre Dupont, of Poitiers, to Mr. G. B. Davis, of Shelton, Staffordshire, it appears to have been destroyed or removed. In character it was very similar to those of knights in England, of the same period; and, considering that it was executed by order of the Queen, it is not unlikely that the same artists, by whom this work was produced, were employed on some of the fine tombs above noticed. Although no mention is made of the locality in which these workmen lived, it is possible that they carried on their art in London, obtaining their material from Derbyshire or Staffordshire.⁶

⁵ The effigy is described by Gough, *Sep. Mon.* vol. ii., part 2, p. 35. Some notion of the costume may be obtained from the representations given in *Montfaucon, Mon. Franc.* vol. iii., pl. 32; and a valuable drawing of the same subject may be found in the collection of French monuments bequeathed by Gough to the Bodleian, tome v., f. 40. The passport conceded by Henry IV., Feb. 24, 1408, is thus expressed:—"Pro Tumba nuper Ducis Britanniae.—Rex universis et singulis admiralibus, &c. Sciatis quod Nos, ad supplicationem carissimæ consortis nostræ, quæ ad quandam Tumbam Alabaustri, quam pro Duce Britanniae defuncto, quondam viro suo, fieri fecit, in Bargea de Seynt Nicholas de Nantes, in Britannia, una cum tribus ligeorum nostrorum Anglicorum, qui eandem Tumbam operati fuerunt, videlicet, Thoma Colyn, Thoma Holewell et Thoma Poppehowe, ad Tumbam prædictam in ecclesia de Nantes in Britannia

assidendum et ponendum ad præsens ordinavit mittendum." It proceeds to grant safe conduct to John Guychard, master of the said barge, on his passage to Brittany, and return, &c. Rymer, *Fœd.* vol. viii., pp. 510, 511.

⁶ In naming the exportation of this tomb to Mr. Tennant, the mineralogist of the Strand, he informed me that he had observed a tomb and effigy of alabaster in the church of St. Ursula, at Cologne, the material of which he noted as being in his belief British, from its peculiar texture and general appearance. The date of the tomb, however, appeared to be as late as 1659. I would suggest to members of the Institute, who are in the habit of visiting the continent, to note any similar examples; I feel convinced that few persons are aware of the extent to which these alabaster workings were carried on in various parts of England, especially in the 15th and 16th centuries.

A few years later we find that Sir Hugh Burnell, in his will, dated Oct. 2, 1417, bequeathed his body to be buried in the choir of the Abbey of Hales, co. Salop, "under a fayre tomb of alabaster," there prepared by himself, near to the body of Joyce, his wife.⁷

Whether the tomb and effigy of Thomas, first Earl of Derby, are of alabaster, or still exist, I have not ascertained. By his will, dated July 28, 1504, he provides a tomb to be placed in Burscough Priory Church, near Lathom, Lancashire, the present burial-place of the Derby family, with images of himself and his two wives; and he likewise appoints that the "personages" which he had caused to be made for his father and mother, grandfather and great-grandfather, should be set in the arches of the chancel, in the places provided.⁸ At this period, however, alabaster was extensively used for effigies and tombs.⁹ Sir William Compton, by his will, dated March 8, 14 Henry VIII., 1522, orders a tomb of alabaster to be made for his father, and set over his grave, and his arms cut thereon.¹

About this date we have proof of at least one locality where the alabaster was wrought; and, subsequently, through the researches of a talented member of the Institute, we have been made acquainted with the names of two of the tomb-makers, or "marbellers," at Burton-upon-Trent.

Leland, in his Itinerary, thus speaks of the works at this place,—“At Burton are many marbellers, working in alabaster,” an expression from which we may infer that they were not newly established there, but that the manufacture had existed long previously to Leland’s visit, and continued at that time in a flourishing condition.² At a later period, in

⁷ Dugdale, Bar. vol. ii., p. 62.

⁸ Ibid. p. 249.

⁹ Among the alabaster tombs of the 15th cent., are those of Sir Edmund de Thorpe and his lady, 1418; a Fitzalan and lady at Arundel; the De Marmions at Tanfield, Yorkshire; the Stanley effigy at Elford; those at Tong, Salop; a mutilated figure of a knight, finely sculptured, at Bakewell Church, time of Henry IV.; the Arden tomb, in Aston Church, Warwickshire; Sir Humphrey de Stafford and lady, 1450, at Bromsgrove, Worcestershire; the fine Beaufort tomb, at Wimbourn Minster; a Harcourt and lady, at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon; the Spencer effigy, in Great Brington Church,

Northamptonshire, and numerous others. In the Midland counties such effigies abound, and in our cathedral churches many memorials of ecclesiastical personages are to be seen, sculptured in this fine material.

¹ Dugdale, Bar. vol. ii., p. 402.

² Shaw, Hist. of Staffordshire, vol. i., p. 13. Sir Oswald Mosley, in a communication with which I have been recently favoured, observes, after stating the difficulty of investigating the subject at Burton,—“The last person who had works of this description at Burton, for toys rather than effigies and tombs, was named Burnett, but the manager’s name was Ineley; he came from Suffolk; and after

the reign of Elizabeth, Camden notices Burton as still famous for this branch of native industry.

To the interesting researches of Mr. Evelyn Shirley, and a communication brought by him before the meeting of the Institute at Oxford, as also to the family evidences comprised in the "*Stemmata Shirleiana*," privately printed by the same gentleman, we are indebted for two elaborate contracts for the sculpture and erection of alabaster tombs and effigies. The first, printed at length in the *Journal*, vol. VIII., p. 185, is an Indenture, dated September 20, 23 Elizabeth, 1581, between George Shirley, executor of Thomas Fermor, Esq., and Richard Roiley with Gabriel, his son, described as tomb-makers, of Burton-upon-Trent, who covenanted to work a fair tomb of alabaster stone, at or near Mr. Fermor's grave, in the church of Somerton, Oxfordshire, with effigies of that gentleman, in armour, and of his wife, according to the minutely detailed instructions regarding the costume and ornaments, the heraldry, and inscription. The tomb itself was to measure $6\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by 4 ft., its height being 5 ft. The tomb-maker covenanted to complete the work for the sum of 40*l.*, and he received a further gratuity of 40*s.*³ The executors' accounts comprise various entries relating to the conveyance of the tomb to Somerton, for which the "waynman" received 4*l.* 3*s.* 4*d.*, as also to the setting up of the tomb, and grating before it, and the painting the said tomb.

This monument, as I am informed by the Rector of Somerton, is in good preservation, and is composed of pale-coloured alabaster.

The second contract above mentioned was for the construction of the tomb and effigy of John Shirley, Esq., father of George Shirley, Mr. Fermor's executor, to be placed in the church of Bredon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire, where it still exists. A representation of this monument may be seen in the "*Stemmata Shirleiana*," p. 63, where the contract is given at length, bearing date August 9, 27 Elizabeth, 1585. It is between Mr. George Shirley and the same parties, Richard and Gabriel Roiley, of Burton; but the document is not executed. The cost of the tomb, with a single

twenty years or thereabouts he failed, and the works were finally abandoned by a man named Cunningham, who succeeded him, and removed to Derby about thirty years ago. I think it very probable that

the manufacture of sepulchral monuments ceased there during the civil wars, and has never again been revived."

³ Forty pounds may be considered as equivalent to 400*l.* at the present time.

effigy, recumbent on a mat, the whole painted and gilt, &c., was covenanted to be 22*l*.

These contracts are rendered doubly interesting, as distinctly marking the locality where such works were produced, and the names of the artists employed. Soon after the period of the Royleys, from certain influences, this extensive branch of industry totally declined at Burton and at other localities whence the supply of alabaster had been obtained. Mr. Shaw, the Historian of Staffordshire, who resided in the neighbourhood, observes, after quoting Leland and Camden,—“How long Burton continued thus famous, we are not informed, but certainly there has been no such manufactory here of late years, though alabaster is still plentiful on the sides of Needwood Forest, particularly about Tutbury.” Lysons, in his History of Derbyshire, after stating the annual supply to the potteries and other places from the Chellaston pits at about 1000 tons, observes, citing Pilkington, that another pit existed at Aston; and formerly there were others in the parish of Elvaston, on Ballingdon Hill, near Ambaston, places near Chellaston, from whence the most valuable supply of alabaster was obtained. These pits were, however, closed when Lysons wrote.

There were doubtless other places besides Burton where alabaster was quarried, in former times. Harrison, whose “Description of England,” prefixed to Holinshed’s Chronicles, appears to have been written about 1579, in his chapter of quarries of stone for building, their variety and excellent quality, observes,—“Of white marble also we have store, and so faire as the Marpesian of Paris Ile.—If marble will not serve, then have we the finest alabaster that maie elsewhere bee had, as about Saint Davids of Wales; also neere to Beau manour, which is about foure or five miles from Leicester, and taken to be the best, although there are diverse other quarries hereof beyond the Trent, as in Yorkeshire, &c. and fullie so good as that, whose names at this time are out of my remembrance.” He speaks also of the “plaister” of Axholme, dug in sundry places in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire, used instead of lime to “blanch” houses, and which he considered to be a fine kind of alabaster; adding, in regard to the various kinds and uses of “plaister,” that “we have now devised to cast it in moulds for windows and pillars of what forme and fashion we list, even as alabaster it selfe: and

with such stuffe sundrie houses in Yorkshire are furnished of late."⁴

The disuse of this fine material for monumental purposes, for nearly three centuries, may be attributable to the decline of the art from want of patronage, and partly to the introduction of gunpowder into the pits in lieu of the mediæval saw and picks; whereby an increased quantity of the material was obtained, but of unsound quality, and unfit for the purposes of sculpture. At Chellaston several indications of mediæval workings have recently been met with (1850-51). Iron wedge-shaped picks have been found, from 8 to 12 inches in length; early lewis holes have also been noticed, and saw-cuts, chisellings and pickings; and at about 16 feet below the surface, a jug of half-baked ware, an oaken ladder, an S. hook similar to those in present use by frame sawyers, and a fine slab of alabaster, 7 ft. 3 in. by 2 ft. 6 in. by 7 in. skilfully sawn and in sound condition.⁵ At Fauld, near Tutbury, not only are there pits in full work, yielding every variety, but pits long since abandoned are in many places observable, extending to the summit of the ridge on which Hanbury stands. This slope is still called "The Castle Haye," and extends north-east from Hanbury, towards Tutbury. It forms part of the Duchy of Lancaster; and, in a survey of Royal Parks adjoining Needwood, taken in the reign of Philip and Mary, the following statement occurs,—“The park of Castle Haye has been disparked, and the herbage kept for the king's use. The compass thereof exceeded four miles, and in it were plaster pits, the rent of which, with the herbage, by the year was 5*l.* 5*s.*, a considerable sum in those days.”⁶ Both at Chellaston and Fauld recent demands have again brought the saw and pick into use, and not only have several fine blocks been quarried and remain at the pits, but depôts are being formed in London for the supply of this material for sculpture and architectural purposes.⁷ Having recently, in the execution of the effigy and tomb of the late Earl of Powis, now placed in Welchpool Church, Mont-

⁴ The Description of England, book iii., c. 9. Holinsh, vol. i., p. 235.

⁵ These particulars were communicated to me by Mr Upton, local agent for Messrs. Smith, the proprietors.

⁶ For this information I am indebted to Mr. H. Hill, proprietor of the Fauld quarry.

⁷ Alabaster or gypsum occurs in the

new red sandstone, and besides being abundant in Derbyshire and Staffordshire, it is likewise procured from pits near Carlisle; at Newark, Notts; near Yeovil, Somerset; and at Blue Anchor, near Watchet, in the county last named, there is a fine rock of this material, washed by the sea.

gomeryshire, tested the value of this material, I can speak with confidence in regard to the ease with which it is worked, and the advantage, in an economical point of view, as compared with marble; the chief, and perhaps only objections to its use, are the extreme difficulty of fine finish, and the ease with which it may be injured.

The foregoing observations may, it is hoped, lead the antiquary to bestow upon certain subjects of investigation, connected with the sculptor's art in mediæval times, more close attention than they have hitherto received in England. There are doubtless other points of interest in relation to the uses of alabaster in our country to which I have not adverted in these brief notices. Beside the productions of large dimension—effigies of life size, and stately tombs, to which attention has been chiefly called, there exist various elaborate works of minor proportion—panels or tablets representing groups of small figures, in high relief, sculptured in alabaster, and for the most part showing traces of rich colouring and gilding. Of these several remarkable examples have been produced at meetings of the Institute; and they appear to have originally formed portions of tabernacle work, such as enriched the reredorse of an altar, or the shrine of a saint. Four such tablets were shown in the Museum, formed during the meeting of the Society at Norwich, and another is preserved at the Bishop's palace in that city. Of this class of sculptured relics are those curious representations of the head of St. John the Baptist in a charger, surrounded by figures of saints. One was placed in the Institute's Museum at Salisbury by the Rev. Edward Duke, and there are two in the possession of Mr. Bowyer Nichols. All these appear to be of the 15th century, and as specimens of carving in alabaster, doubtless executed in England, they claim notice, not less than as highly curious examples of symbolism and design at that period.⁸

EDWARD RICHARDSON.

⁸ Four of these singular tablets, representing the head of the Baptist *in disco*, have been described. One is figured in Stukeley's *Palaographia Brit.*, a second by Schnebbelie, in the *Antiquaries' Museum*; and two in *Gent. Mag.*, Sept. 1824, p. 209. See Notes to the *Bury Wills*, edited by Mr. Tymms for the Camden Society, p. 255.

It may be desirable to mark the distinction

between the true alabaster of the ancients, a carbonate of lime, and the gypseous alabaster (so called), which is a sulphate of lime. The former is hard, and effervesces with acid: the latter soft, so as to be easily scratched, and does not immediately effervesce. See the *Dictionary of Architecture*, published by the Architect. Publication Society.