

A FRENCH PURCHASE OF ENGLISH ALABASTER IN 1414.

In his *Notes sur les Architectes de Rouen*,¹ M. Charles de Beaurepaire, the learned *Archiviste* of the Department of Seine-Inférieure, has published the text of two documents which possess a special interest for English archaeologists, and he has very kindly consented to their being reprinted in this *Journal*. They relate to a voyage to England undertaken by Alexandre de Berneval, mason, in 1414, for the purpose of purchasing alabaster. This Alexandre was one of the most prominent architect-masons of Rouen in the first half of the fifteenth century, and it may be interesting to add here a few notes on his career, summarised from M. de Beaurepaire's account of him.

The earliest mention of Alexandre de Berneval dates from 1409, when a certain Colin Anquetil, of Rouen, was apprenticed to "Sandrin de Berneval, machon," for five years to learn the "mestier de machonnerie." Besides his employment by the abbot and convent of Fécamp described in the documents printed below, he agreed, in 1420, to make for them a stone tabernacle for the keeping and exposition of a venerated relic known as the *Pas-du-Pelerin* or *Pas-de-l'Ange*; the contract describes him as "Maistre Alexandre de Berneval, demeurant a présent a Rouen." In 1419 he was employed by Guillaume d'Estouteville, lord of Blainville and Torcy, a relation of the abbot of Fécamp. In February, 1419, he was appointed to the office of "maître des œuvres de maçonnerie au bailliage de Rouen," which he held up to his death, and he was associated with Salvart in the works of the palace built at Rouen by Henry V.² He is best known, however, in connection with his work on the abbey-church of Saint-Ouen, where he was master-mason from 1422 at latest. He died at the beginning of

¹ *Bulletin des Amis des monuments rouennais* for the year 1902, pages 85-87.

² Afterwards known as the *Vieux-Palais*, demolished in 1793.

1441, and was buried in the church of Saint-Ouen, where his grave-cover is still preserved in one of the chapels of the choir. On this stone are engraved two life-size figures, with an architectural canopy over each. The dexter figure represents Alexandre de Berneval, with a pair of compasses in his right hand, and a drawing of a quarter of a rose-window in his left. The sinister figure represents a younger man, with a pair of compasses in his right hand, and a drawing of the plan of a building in his left.¹ At the angles of the border are the symbols of the four Evangelists, but the inscription has never been cut in the border around the sinister figure. The inscription on the border below and at the side of the dexter figure reads thus :

Cy gist maistre Alixandre de Berneval, maistre des œuvres de machonnerie du Roy nre sire du baillage de Rouen et de ceste eglise, qui trespassa l'an de grace mil CCC. XL., le v jour de janvier. Pries Dieu pour l'ame de luy.

Alexandre de Berneval has been the victim of a legend, related by Dom Pommeraye, to the effect that he murdered his apprentice because the latter had designed a rose-window in the north transept which surpassed that of his master in the south transept. The legend, which doubtless owed its origin to the two figures represented on the grave-cover, was exploded as a fable by Quicherat,² who showed that the sinister figure represented Colin de Berneval, who succeeded his father as master-mason of Saint-Ouen, and that the reason why the second inscription was never cut was that Colin was buried elsewhere. It seems to be certain that Alexandre executed some considerable part of the south transept, and Quicherat attributes the rose of the north transept and the high vaults of both transepts to his son Colin.

The two documents brought to light by M. de Beaurepaire, and printed below,³ show that in 1414 Alexandre de Berneval was employed by Estoud

¹ An excellent illustration of the grave-cover accompanies M. de Beaurepaire's paper (*op. cit.*, opposite p. 93).

² *Documents inédits sur la construction de Saint-Ouen de Rouen*, in the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 3rd Series, iii (1852), 464-476. Jules Quicherat,

Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, 2nd part, ed. by R. de Lasteyrie (1886), 215-227.

³ These documents are among the archives of the abbey of Fécamp, which are preserved with the archives of the department of Seine-Inférieure.

d'Estouteville, abbot of Fécamp (from 1391 to 1422), and his monks to execute for their church some work in alabaster, of which unfortunately nothing is known. Alexandre was commissioned to go to England to purchase the necessary alabaster. The first of the two documents is a charter-party, by which the abbot and convent chartered a ship called *Vendredi*, whose master "after God" was Walter Nyessem (? Neasham) of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The ship-master engaged to sail "at the first reasonable good weather that God shall send him," with Alexandre and his three companions, from the port of Harfleur to the port of Hull, and to bring them back safely with the alabaster or such other cargo as his ship should be able to carry. The abbot and convent advanced him two hundred golden crowns to be expended in such merchandise as Alexandre and his companions should buy, and he was to be paid for the freight at an agreed rate. The charter-party is dated July 9th, 1414.

The second document is Alexandre de Berneval's account of his journey. He and his three companions, Martin Lause, Raoul Le Pape, and Jehan de Paris, sailed from Harfleur in the *Vendredi* on Friday, July 13th, 1414. They reached Newcastle¹ on the following Wednesday (July 18th), and there they stayed eight days "at the expense of the said Englishman" (the ship-master). They left Newcastle on St. Christopher's Day (July 25th), and arrived the fourth day after at Nottingham. "And thence the said Englishman took them to a village called Chellaston, where the alabaster was, and found there the merchant who sold it, called master Thomas Prentis, with whom the said Englishman made a bargain to deliver to him certain pieces of alabaster at a certain price, by an agreement between them two in the presence of the aforesaid persons, by which the said Prentis should receive immediately forty golden crowns, undertaking to deliver the said stone at the port of Hull in England. And the terms were made in the town of Nottingham in England between these

¹ Not Hull, as seems to have been intended by the charter-party, though Hull would appear to have been the more convenient port.

English merchants. And afterwards, forthwith and immediately, the said English merchant took the said master Alexandre and those in his company to the port of the Vicenerey¹ in England, and caused them to cross over thence to Dieppe. And everything was done at the cost and expense of the said Walter, the Englishman, from the time that they left Harfleur to their return to Dieppe, together with four horses bought by the said Englishman. And they were absent on the said journey by the space of five or six weeks, at the cost of the said merchant as above said, with the money for their said horses, etc."

The merchant from whom Alexandre de Berneval bought the alabaster was evidently the same Thomas Prentis who with Robert Sutton of Chellaston, "kervers," contracted in 1419 to make the alabaster tomb of Ralph Green, which still exists in Lowick church, Northamptonshire.²

These documents prove that the reputation of the Chellaston alabaster had extended far in the early part of the fifteenth century, and they tend also to confirm the idea that alabaster was sent in block from the Trent valley to be worked in other places.³ They do not, of course, throw any light on the export of sculptured panels for retables, of which a very large number are still preserved in the churches and museums of France, to say nothing of other countries. It may be hoped, however, that evidence on this point also may be forthcoming from the archives of France.

JOHN BILSON.

Eu nom de Dieu soit. *Amen.* Sachent tous qui ceste karte d'affretement, partie par A. B. C., verront ou orront, que damp Nicolle Ducroq, religieux en l'abbeye et couvent de Fescamp a afreté, pour et en nom de révérend père en Dieu Mons^r l'abbé et couvent de Fescamp, la nef nommée Vendredi, dont est maistre, apres Dieu,

¹ Is this Winchelsea?

² Contract printed by Mr. Albert Hartshorne, quoted in Mr. W. H. St. John Hope's paper *On the early working of alabaster in England*, in the *Archæological Journal*, lxi, 230.

³ For the towns where alabaster is known to have been worked, see Mr. Hope's paper, pp. 239-240, where the whole question is admirably discussed.

Gaultier Nyessem, demourant en Angleterre en la ville du Neufchastel sur Tine et a lui appartenant, pour partir et singler du port de Harefleu, du premier bon temps resonnable que Dieu lui enverra, tout debout, a droite charge, ou dit pais d'Angleterre, au port du Houll ; et sera tenu ledit maistre de mener et ramener en sa compagnie seurement et sauvement quatre personnes, serviteurs dudit Mons^r l'abbé, c'est assavoir Sandrin de Berneval, Martin Lausse, Raoul Le Pape et Jehan Deparis, aux despens dudit Mons^r l'abbé, c'est assavoir que ledit maistre doit chargier ou faire chargier en sa dicte nef la pierre d'alebastre ou autre marchandise, de toute et telle charge comme la dicte nef pourra porter, où par les diz serviteurs ou l'un d'eulx voudront faire charger en icelle nef apres ce que tout sera livre audit mestre au bort de sa dicte nef par iceulx serviteurs et a leurs despens ; et apres ce que la dicte nef sera chargie ainsi que dessus est dit, elle doit singler et venir tout debout au port de Fescamp, de Harefleu ou es mettes d'environ, et le dit maistre livrer la dicte marchandise audit Mons^r l'abbé et couvent ou a son commandement, hors les grosses aventures ; et se doit tout chargier et deschargier tout au plus tost que fere se pourra ; et congnot et confessa ledit maistre avoir eu et receu la somme de deux cens escuz d'or dudit abbe, par la main dudit damp Nicolle Ducroq, pour employer en marchandise au prouffit du dit abbe et par lesdiz serviteurs ; et où cas que les diz serviteurs ne voudroient aucune chose acheter et qu'ilz ne veissent en ce le prouffit dudit Mons^r l'abbé, ledit maistre ne les pourroit contraindre de rien acheter, mes seroit tenu a lez amener par deça et estre paie de son fret ainsi qu'il appartendroit ; et en icellui cas, ledit maistre seroit tenu de rendre et restituer ladicte somme de II^c escuz, sauf a rabatre son dit fret et salere ; et pour acomplir et fere le dit voyage ledit maistre doit avoir pour chacun tonnel pesant la somme de cinq a six escuz d'or en l'ordonnance de damp Richart de Beaune, religieux audit lieu de Fescamp. Et se le dit maistre paie aucun argent pour le dit abbe a la requeste des dits serviteurs d'icellui abbe, le dit abbe le sera tenu rendre et restituer audit maistre ; et apres la dicte marchandise deschargie et livree, se marchandise y a, icellui maistre doit estre paie de tout son fret et de ce qu'il ara paie pour et eu nom dudit abbe bien et deurement sans contredit. Et se aucun empeschement les diz serviteurs avoient par dela, Jaquelin Le Bouchier, bourgeois de Harefleu, se submist a lez desempeschier et pourcachier a ses propres coux et despens ; et premierement, et avant tout, aux despens dudit maistre, touages et lamanages, petis et grans, sont sur ledit abbe, aux us et coustumes de la mer et de la riviere de Seine ; et pour toutes lesquelles choses dessus dictes et chacunes d'icelles tenir, acomplir et de point en point enterigner en la maniere que dit est, ledit maistre en obliga son corps, sa dicte nef, apparaux et agrees d'icelle et tous ses biens meubles et heritages, presens et avenir, et ledit damp Nicolle Du Croq, pour et eu nom que dessus, toute la dicte marchandise et les biens dudit abbe et couvent, où qu'ils soient, presens et a venir ; et ledit damp Nicolle Ducroq, pour et eu nom que dessus toute ladite marchandise et les biens dudit abbe et couvent où qu'ilz soient presens et a venir ; et de ce fu aplegie ledit damp Nicolle Du Croq par Guillaume Dubois et ledit Jaquelin Le Bouchier, bourgeois de Harefleu. Ce fu fait et passe en la ville de Harefleu, de l'acort et consentement des dictes parties, l'an mil

quatre cens et quatorze, le ix^e jour de juillet, en la présence de Guillaume Dugardin et moy Jehan Descamps, clerc commis par Olivier Gabart, clerc tabellion jure pour le roy notre sire eu siege de Harefleu, qui ay cy mis mon signe manuel, en tesmoin de verité.

Signé : O. GABART. J. DESCAMPS.

Memore de l'apointement et marchié pour le frait d'une nef, pour aller, en Engleterre, en la ville de Noeuf Chastel sur Tine etc., comme il appert par une carte partie. Et est assavoir que l'an mil III^e et XIII, le XIII^e jour de juillet, parti maistre Alixandre de Berneval, machon, Martin Lause, Raoul Le Pape et Jehan de Paris en sa compaignie, pour aler en Engleterre par le commandement et ordenance de reverend pere en Dieu Mons^r de Fescamp, qui pour lors estoit ; et partirent audit jour, en la compaignie de Gaultier Nyessem, engloiz, meneur des dessusdiz eu dit pays d'Engleterre, en sa nef nommee Vendredi, et partirent de Harefleu ; et les mena jusques au port du dit lieu de Noeuf Castel, et arriverent le mercredi ensuivant, et la sejournerent les dessus dits l'espace de VIII jours aux despens dudit engloiz ; et de la partirent le jour Saint Xritoffle et ariverent le III^e jour apres en Notyngant ; et d'ilec les mena le dit engloiz a ung village nomme Chaleston où crait l'alebastre ; et la trouva le marchant qui le vent, nommé maistre Thomas Prentis, auquel le dit engloiz marchanda de lui livrer chertainnes pieches d'alebastre par certain pris, d'acort ensemble a eulx deulx, en la présence des dessus diz, par ainsi que ledit Prentis recheut présentement avant les mains quarante escuz d'or, promettant rendre la dite pierre au port de Houl en Engleterre ; et fut fait l'apointement en la ville de Notyngant en Engleterre entre yceulx marchans engloiz ; et depuis cen, tantost et incontinent, le dit engloiz marchant amena ledit maistre Alixandre et ceulx de sa compaignie jusquez au port des Vicenerey en Engleterre, et les fit passer par deça a Dieppe ; et tout fait aux coustz et despens dudit Gaultier, engloiz, depuis le temps qu'ilz partirent de Harefleu jusquez à leur retour par deça a Dieppe, avec IIII chevaux achetez par ledit engloiz, et vaquerent eu temps dessus dit eu dit viage par l'espace de cinq à six sepmaines, aux despens du dit marchant, comme dessus, avec l'argent des diz chevalx etc.

Et est ce memore fait et escript par le dit et relaxion du dit maistre Alixandre, lequel affermoit en avoir bonne et fresche memore etc.