

ART. VII.—*Carved heads in Carlisle Cathedral.* By C. G. BULMAN.

*Read at Kendal, September 12th, 1957.*

THE cathedral at Carlisle, like all our great churches, displays a considerable amount of carved and ornamental work in mouldings and carvings, all of it appropriate to its various building periods. Excellent work it is too, and of the highest class both artistically and technically.

In addition to all this work, however, there are many carved heads to be seen scattered here and there about the building—a silent congregation which has gazed with unseeing eyes upon the services and the changes of more than six hundred years. Some of these heads are remarkable; they vary in quality but most are carved with great skill and a few are possibly portraits.

When I set out to write this paper I had expected that information would be available from books and from accepted authorities. This proved to be a deception. It is curious that very little information is available about medieval carved heads of the later period, and none at all of the earlier stages. Carvings of this kind appear to be a neglected branch of medieval art and my enquiries have shown that there is no recognised authority on the subject nor any standard by which to measure or assess these interesting heads.

Authorities consulted include the British Museum; the late Dr F. C. Eeles of the Central Council for the Care of Churches; Mr Howgrave-Graham of Westminster Abbey; and Mr John Harvey whose books on Gothic art are well known. All expressed conflicting views and uncertainties, and so, in the absence of agreement, or a

standard work on the subject, we are left to draw our own conclusions.

The pictures of the three heads which illustrate this article are the only ones which I have been able to obtain, but they are three of the most important ones, as I hope to show.

The first (fig. 1) is carved at the junction of two arches of the wall arcade at the east end of the south aisle in Carlisle Cathedral. This work forms part of the new eastern extension to the aisle following the disastrous fire of 1292 when the whole of the splendid new E. English choir was completely wrecked.

The head is competently carved, although perhaps somewhat mask-like, and the details of hair, moustache and head-dress beautifully done. Can it be reckoned as intended for a portrait, and if so, of whom? The head-dress, of curious turban-like form, is remarkable. In the volume *English Costume and Fashion* by H. Norris (Dent, 1927) a similar head-dress is illustrated under the period 1307-1327. Mr Norris says: "Many curious developments of the hood took place during this reign. First was the growth of the liripipe (the extended top of the hood) which when worn by fashionable youths attained a length of 6 ft. or more. It hung down the back or was carried over the arm. Alternatively at this time the liripipe was used to bind the hood to the head, being wound once, twice, or many times round it and the end tied in a knot at one side giving the head-dress the appearance of a turban. The practice had its use for it kept the hood secure on the head."

"Another curious fashion of wearing the hood was introduced by some Court dandy who being bored with the conventional way of wearing it, placed the facial opening on the head." It may be this latter fashion which we see at Carlisle, with the shoulder-piece of the hood screwed up to form a knot on the right hand side while the point hangs down on the left. This head-dress helps us to date this part of the Cathedral to the early years

FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

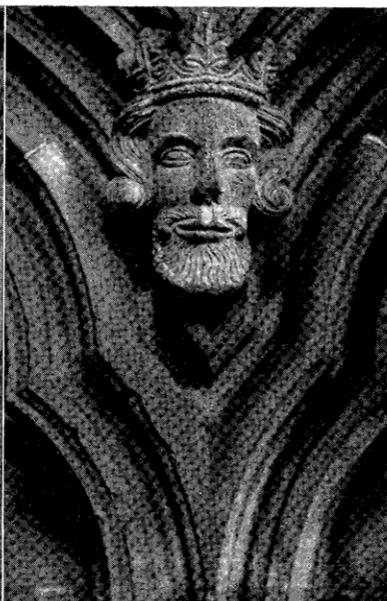


FIG. 3.



FIG. 4.

of the 14th century, which accords with historical and architectural evidence.

The next head (fig. 2) is more important, for it is the head of a crowned king and it is my opinion that it is a likeness of Edward I, or at least an attempt at a portrait by an artist not skilled in portraiture. It is not considered that the art of portraiture existed in early medieval times and the volume, *English Church Monuments* by Crossley (1921) states, "from the evidence before us we must conclude that the occasions are very rare. None of the contracts (for making the figures) specify a portrait." This may be so, but there is no doubt at all that some of the Royal figures on the tombs in Westminster Abbey are portraits, and we may instance those of Edward III, Richard II and Queen Anne of Bohemia; and Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, all of which Mr Crossley allows to be likenesses.

A conventional likeness of a king was not an uncommon subject for the end of a hood-mould over a door with a bishop on the other side. On the other hand some more important internal heads, carved on corbels and bosses are cautiously allowed to be possible representations of the reigning monarch, and Mr John Harvey suggests that a portrait-type may have been passed round among the master-builders.

Whatever the truth, and no one appears to be certain, there are, I suggest, strong reasons for thinking that our Royal head at Carlisle is an attempt to show a likeness of Edward I. Let us consider the date of the sculpture. We know that the great fire of May 1292 wrecked the new choir. In October of the same year Edward came to Carlisle with his feudal army in pursuit of his Scottish campaigns. For many years he was in and round Carlisle and apart from the great services which we know he attended in the Cathedral, in one of which Robert the Bruce was cursed as a traitor (February 1307) and the one on Midsummer Day 1307 in which he offered up his

litter in the great church before turning north to the Border as a dying man, he must have entered the building many times.

The evidence of the mouldings on the wall arcading adjacent to the heads suggests an early 14th-century date: in fact probably the opening decade, and we can take it for certain that this work in the eastern bay of the choir was in progress as part of the remodelling of the east end of the Cathedral after the fire of 1292. From the dates given above it is obvious that Edward would be a familiar figure in Carlisle at the time. His visits to the Cathedral must have meant that he was known to the mason who carved these figure heads. Otherwise why the head of an old king for he was old at the time and nearing his end?

It would appear to be more than a coincidence that the head of an aged king appears prominently displayed on a piece of architectural work which was being carried out at the Cathedral contemporaneously with Edward's visits to the church. Notice too the length and narrowness of the head and remember that the king's nickname was "Longshanks"—a name which suggests a man of tall and narrow build.

Another feature is the grotesque mouth. This does not arise from the incompetence of the sculptor, for the remainder of the head is beautifully done. The detail is magnificent and we can notice how each strand of the beard ends in a little curl. The obvious conclusion is that the sculptor meant the mouth to be like that and he hoped in this way to catch some resemblance of the king. The stern and resolute Edward was no doubt thin-lipped, and the sculptor, not being skilled in the art of portraiture, did his best to produce a likeness.

There appears to be no extant portrait or likeness of Edward I. Among the magnificent bronze figures of our kings remaining at Westminster Abbey is one of Henry III (1292) the father of Edward I. This superb effigy is the work of Master William Torel, goldsmith of London,

and according to Crossley (*English Church Monuments* (Batsford, 1921), p. 26) "is one of the finest examples of figure-work and metal-casting to be found in Europe." Edward himself is buried in the Abbey beneath a plain blue-marble stone, with the simple inscription "Edwardus Rex Malleus Scotorum". If we examine the effigy of Henry III (fig. 3) and compare the features with those depicted on the Carlisle head, we can observe a strong resemblance. The length of the nose, the thinness of the mouth and the general narrowness of the head all correspond. However conventional the portraits of each, it is remarkable that these features appear on both effigies.

If the supposition is correct, then we may have here at Carlisle the only portrait of Edward I in existence.

The third head (fig. 4) is remarkable and there can be no doubt that it is a portrait head. It is on one of the spandrels on the main arcade on the north side of the choir, and the photograph was taken by means of a telephoto lens. The features are strong and have a rather sneering or supercilious kind of expression, and this expression is even more apparent when the head is looked at from below.

It is later in date than the two other heads depicted and was probably executed about the middle of the 14th century when the rebuilding of the upper part of the choir was finally taken in hand. The head is shown wearing a hood and a few locks of hair are indicated on the forehead. The technique of carving is entirely different from that of the earlier heads. The rather mask-like character of these has been transformed into a vivid and life-like representation of a living human personage. The cloth fabric of the hood with its soft folds is effortlessly shown and the full and rather fleshy features splendidly portrayed; notice the dimple on the chin!

One would give a great deal to know whom this head represents. He is a layman and not a cleric and probably an important personage of his time. He is not a master-

mason, who would probably be shown wearing a hat or cap, and Mr John Harvey suggests that he might have been one of the great nobles who attended Edward I but the head is later in date than the reign of this king. Whoever he was he appears to have been a man of character and it is worthy of note that the head is carved on the bay adjacent to the original position of the high altar in medieval days.

The three heads which I have endeavoured to describe will give some indication of their quality and character. There are many others, of which two at least on the spandrils of the choir arcade appear to be portraits, one of them a cleric. Most of the others are more or less conventional but all of them are of interest.

In this paper I have attempted to investigate a field of medieval art which up to the present time appears to have received little attention. That there is room here for much further study and investigation is apparent, and I hope that the examples which I have been able to obtain from Carlisle Cathedral will prove of interest to the reader.

I am greatly indebted to Father J. E. Bamber of Dodding Green, Kendal, for the excellent photographs which he took for me to illustrate this article.