

## ON CHAUCER'S MONUMENT IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.<sup>1</sup>

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On a careful examination of the monuments and sepulchral effigies in many of our Cathedrals I have, not unfrequently, met with instances, in which it has been evident that the effigies were not those of the individuals to whom they had been popularly ascribed, but were of a much earlier or later period.

Of these facts I purpose adducing a few examples.

On the south side of the Lady Chapel, Hereford Cathedral, is the reputed sepulchral effigy of Dean Borew, who died A.D. 1462. On a close examination it is evidently the effigy of a Dean of a much earlier period, that is not later than the early half of the fourteenth century, or prior to the year 1350.<sup>2</sup>

In the priory church of Hexham, Northumberland, is an effigy ascribed to Prior Richard; now, there were three priors of that name, but this effigy, which is of the fifteenth century, is of a much later period than the last of them.

The monument and effigy in Chichester Cathedral ascribed to Bishop Richard de la Wych, who died A.D. 1253—better known as St. Richard, his canonization having taken place A.D. 1262, is at least a century later in date and the monument of some other bishop.

In the Cathedral of Canterbury, in the south aisle of the choir, on the south side, is a monument or high tomb on which reclines a sepulchral effigy which has been popularly assigned to Archbishop Walter Reynolds, who died A.D. 1327. It is not the effigy of an archbishop, but rather that of a mitred prior; and I would ascribe it to Prior Henry de Eastry, who died A.D. 1331.

I have found in Wells Cathedral monuments equally misappropriated to prelates of that see.

The monument of Chaucer, who died A.D. 1400, placed beneath the east window of the south transept of Westminster Abbey, is one deserving of attention.

<sup>1</sup> Read in the Antiquarian Section at the Bedford Meeting, July 26, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> A representation of this effigy appears in the *Archæological Journal*, xxxiv, 418.

It is not the original monument as Dart, in his history of the Abbey, A.D. 1723, tells us ; for, according to him, Chaucer "was buried before the chapel of St. Bennet, where his stone of broad grey marble as (says he) I take it, was not long since remaining, but was taken up when Mr. Drydens monument was erected, and sawn to mend the pavements." Now Dryden's monument was set up in 1720, on the site it would appear, if Dart is correct, of the grave of Chaucer, west of the chapel of St. Bennet and some distance north in a straight line of Chaucer's monument.

The latter consists of a high tomb, placed north and south, divided in front into three compartments, each containing a shield within a cusped quatrefoil.

This tomb is beneath a recessed and overhanging canopy, open in front, but displaying three hanging arches ogee shaped, crocketted and finialled, and cusped within, panelled at the back, and finished at the top with an horizontal hollow moulding containing flowers at intervals.

Dart gives the inscription as follows :—

M. S.  
 QUI FUIT ANGLORUM VATES TER MAXIMUS OLIM  
 GALFRIDUS CHAUCER CONDITOR HOC TUMULO  
 ANNUM SI QUERAS DOMINI, SI TEMPORA MORTIS  
 ECCE NOTE SUBSUNT, QUÆ TIBI CUNCTA NOTANT  
 25 OCTOBRI, 1400.  
 ÆRUMNARUM REQUIES MORS  
 N BRIGHAM HOS FECIT MUSARUM NOMINE SUMPTUS  
 1555.

By which it appears that this monument was erected in the middle of the sixteenth century by Nicholas Brigham, an admirer of the poet upwards of 150 years after his death. The inscription denotes that he was here buried ; but Dart states that he was buried before the chapel of St. Bennet.

But this monument is very evidently not of the date of the period in which it was here erected, when it would probably have been designed in the style of the renaissance, neither is it, as may be seen from its architectural details, a work coeval with the death of the poet ; it is clearly of an intermediate period, of a date I should fix as *circa* 1470-1480. It may fairly be compared with the monument in the same abbey church of Dudley, Bishop of Durham, who died A.D. 1483.

How then are we to account for this anomaly? I think, in reply, I may venture on a fair and reasonable conjecture.

From the "Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London," edited by my friend the late John Gough Nichols, one of the most eminent antiquaries of his day, for the Camden Society, and published A.D. 1852, the following extracts have been taken:—

"1538. Also this yere was alle the placys of relygione "within the citte of London subprest in November."

"1547. Item: the v day after in September beganne "the Kynges vysytation at Powelles. . . . Item at this "same tyme was pullyed up *all the tomes*; grett stones all "the auteres, with the stalles and walles of the qweer "and auteres in the church that was some tyme the Gray "Freeres, and solde, and the qweer made smaller."

"1552. Item the xxv day of October was the pluckyng "down of alle the alteres and chappelles in alle Powlles "church with *alle the toumes* at the commandment of the "byshoppe then beyng Nicholas Rydley . . . . and "wolde a pullyd downe John a Gauntes tome; but there "was a commandment (to) the contrary from the counsell, "and soo yt was made all playne as it aperes."

Mr. J. G. Nichols, in his preface to the Chronicle, from which the above extracts have been taken, informs us that "all the tombs and large grave stones were at the same time taken away and sold for the paltry sum of fifty pounds." Amidst the general destruction of ancestral memorials which was accomplished in those days of heartless and impious spoliation, this act, perhaps, exceeded all others of the kind.

The church of the Grey Friars had been the favorite place of sepulture with those of the aristocracy of England who had died in the metropolis.

According to the reckoning of Weever, the church had been honoured with the sepulture of four queens, four duchesses, four countesses, one duke, two earls, eight barons and some thirty-five knights; and in all 663 persons of quality. Stowe tells us that "there were nine tombs of alabaster and marble environed with spikes of iron in the choir, and one tomb in the body of the church, also coped with iron; besides seven score grave stones of

marble." Both Stowe and Weever derived their information from a catalogue of all the sepulchral monuments, made some time before the expulsion of the friars, which is still preserved in their Register. To the artistic antiquary it would have offered greater interest had it described the character of the monuments more fully; but it particularizes the "raised tombs and they were more numerous than Stowe calculated." Amongst the latter were in the Lady Chapel, that of Sir Walter Langley, 1470. In the Chapel of the Apostles, south of the choir, was a great raised tomb to Sir Walter Blount, Knight of the Garter, 1477; and another to John Blount, Lord Mountjoy, 1485. Either of these in architectural design would approximate in date the monument in Westminster Abbey erected as a memorial of Chaucer in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Stowe, in his Survey of London, further informs us that the ten tombs above-mentioned were "all pulled down, besides 140 grave-stones of marble, all sold for £50 or thereabouts, by Sir Martin Bowes, goldsmith and alderman of London."

At the price at which these raised monuments or high tombs and sepulchral marble slabs were sold—150 for £50—they averaged only 6s. 8d. each; although the raised tombs, ten in number, may have severally realized much more. We cannot be surprised then that some of these may have been purchased at a low rate, with a view to their being utilised as future monuments to others.

One of these, it is most probable, was bought by Nicholas Brigham with the intent to remove it and re-erect it as a monument to one whom, as a poet, he revered; and here he could do so at small cost, so far as regarded the monument itself, its subsequent re-erection proving, perhaps, the larger portion of the costs of the undertaking.

It is much to be regretted that the late Dean of Westminster had not his attention drawn to an investigation of the probable site of sepulchre of the poet Chaucer, on which there are, as I have shewn, conflicting opinions. After all, his works are the most fitting memorial of his fame.