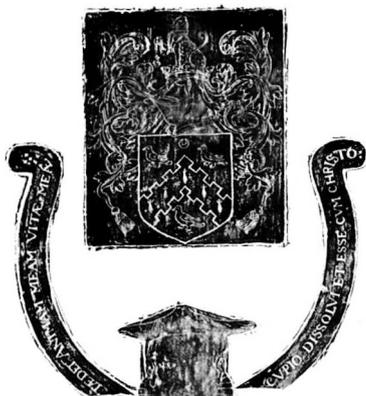




John Wythines



IT is a far cry from Chester to Battle Abbey; and hitherto the only connection between the old city and this famous abbey has been the legendary story about King Harold's taking refuge, after his disastrous defeat, in the Hermitage below St. John's Church. During a holiday ramble in the Autumn, visiting Battle Church, I spied a brass in the chancel, which I found to be that of a Cheshire man. Having on me the responsibility of finding material for the pages of our Journal, I ventured to think that a copy of this brass, with some account of the man whose memory is preserved in it, would be acceptable. Unfortunately, but little information can be obtained of John Wythines' parentage or family. The brass records that he had been Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, and for forty-two years Dean of Battle. I have searched through the list of Vice-Chancellors in Le Neve's *Fasti Ecclesie Anglicanæ*, but his name does not appear there. From 1576 to 1590, the list of Vice-Chancellors is complete. In 1563, 1565, 1568, 1569, 1570, no name is given, though it is very probable that the Vice-Chancellor of the previous year held office for two years. John Wythines may have held the office in one of these years. But it is remarkable that Anthony à Wood, in his *Fasti Oxonienses*, says nothing of this. The only person at all like in name mentioned by him is John Withyns of Brasenose College.



HIC IACET IOHANNES WYTHINES IN TPAE
NOBILI CIVITATE CESTRIÆ NATVS ET IN
ACADEMIA OXON EDVGVATVS IBIQVE ANNI
NASI COLLEGIJ SOCIVS SACRE THEOLOGIE
DOCTOR ACADEMIEQ OXON PREDICE
VICEANCELLARIVS HVIVSQ ECCLESIAE DE
BATTTEL XLII ANNOS DECANVS QVI OBIIIT
XVIJ DIE MARTIJ ANNO ÆTATIS SVÆ 64
ET SALVTIS HVMANÆ 1615

VIXI DVVM VOLVI VOLVI DVVM CHRISTE VOLEBAS
NEC MIHI VITA BREVIS NEC MIHI LONGA FVIT
VIVO TIBI MORIORO TIBI TIBI CHRISTE RESVRGAM
MORTVVS ET VIVVS SVM MANEOQ TVVS

“. . . 1567 Batchelor of Divinity. Only one was admitted this year, viz., John Withynes of Brasen-nose College, which is all I know of him.”

“1570 Inc. Doctor of Divinity. John Withyns of Brasen-nose College.”

In the “*Registers of the University of Oxford*,” published by the Oxford Historical Society, the following particulars are given:—

“WYTHERS, or WITHYS, or WITHES, or WITHENS JOHN, sup. for B.A., 9 Dec., 1557; Adm. 18 Jan. 1558-9; det. in Lent; sup. for M.A., 19 Dec., 1561; licensed 23 Jan., 1561-2; inc. 26 Jan. Fellow of Brasenose.” p. 235.

WITHENES or WITHENS JOHN, M.A., sup. for B.D., 25 Feb., 1566-7; Adm. 10 May; sup. for D.D.; April, 1570; lic. 1570; disp. June from his circuitus, because the public prelector of Theology was not at home last night when he went round (quando circuiret) and Mr. Bickly, inceptor of Theology is allowed to depose for him because there is not a competent number of Doctors, inc. 10 July, of Brasenose.

In these records, “sup.” is an abbreviation for supplicate = ask permission to take a degree; “det.” = determined, *i.e.*, performed the final exercises for the B.A. degree; “disp.” = dispensed, granted a dispensation or exemption from some requirement of the statutes; “incepted” = completed the final exercises for a Master’s or Doctor’s degree; “lic.” = licensed to a degree.

John Wythines was a man of considerable position and influence. He and his friends are discussed unfavourably in a report made to Lord Burleigh, apparently about the time of the Spanish Armada. The report is endorsed—“24 Aug., 1596. D. Lies information of certaine abuses in Sussex,” being chiefly concerned with recusants in that county of whom the Dean of Battle was a leader. The actual date of the document from internal evidence is certainly some years earlier

than 1596. The report is included in the Collection of Burghley Papers in the British Museum, "*Lansdown MSS.* 82, 49." The passages relating to the Dean of Battle are as follows:—

“Since the L. Montagues coming to dwel at Battle, Religion in that countrey, and especially in that towne is greatly decayed: as may appeare by these fewe poyntes. D. Withen’s Deane of Battle, where the La: Montague lyeth, is suspected to be very backward in religion, for this 2 yeares and more he neither ministreth the Com’union, nor receaveth it, but com’only if there be a Com’union he getteth some other to doe it and ether getteth himselfe out of the towne or keepeth his house. His wife cometh scarce twice a year to Church and receaveth not the Com’union; he hath a sonne and a daughter at man’s estate, which never received the Com’union, his company wh. he keepeth is most with recusantes, especially one D. Gray, and one M. Terry. This Gray is a priest whom Sir Frauncys Walsingham co’mitted, and about a year ago he was confined, and now liveth in my Ladyes house, being suspected to doe much harme both with the Deane and other therabouts. Of late he hath found out an holy wel in Battle parke, whither many especially women resort like a young pilgrimage, and called D. Graye’s wel. I have heard y^t ther hath bene above a score together there at evening prayer tyme on a Sunday. Terry was a schoolmaster in Battle, and had the bringing up of most of the gentlemen in that Countrey. He likewise was co’mitted (as I remember) by Sir Fr. Wals: and hath continued in prison till Lent last, and then came to Battle, wher he now dwelleth, a recusant: and is suspected to doe much harme. These two and the Deane are great companions. The jurisdiction of the place is in the Deane; wholly exempt from the Byshop’s visitation, and is altogether neglected by him, so that they doe what the list. There are many in the towne that never receive the Co’union, and come very seldome at Church.

On the other side of Battle Parke dwelleth Mr. Edmond Pelham, the chiefest justice of peace in that rape and ruleth most: who is very backward in religion, himselfe cometh to church but slakly: hath not this twelvemonth and more

received the Co'munion : his wife was a profest recusant, both when she dwelt at Battle, and wher they now dwel : but since the last parlament she hath bene at church : and now useth it twice or thrise a yeare, but she never receaveth the Co'munion : he hath two daughters maryed who never received the Co'munion, and come to church as the mother doth. He is chiefe of my Lo: Montague's counsel, and a great man with the Deane of Battle. There are many recusants frequent his house."

I am indebted to the courtesy of the present Very Reverend Dean of Battle for a rubbing of the Brass, here reproduced, and to Miss Kingsford, of Torfield House, Hastings, for some particulars of the man commemorated on it. Perhaps some member of our Society may be able to supplement this incomplete notice of one who should not be allowed to be omitted from the roll of Cheshire worthies.

The inscription on the brass, translated, is as follows :
"Here lies John Wythines, born in the famous City of Chester, and educated in the University of Oxford ; a Fellow of Brasenose College, Doctor of Divinity, Vice-Chancellor of the aforesaid University of Oxford, and Dean of this Church of Battel for 42 yeares. He died on the 18th day of March, in the 84th year of his age, and of man's salvation 1615.

"I lived so long as I willed.
I willed so long as Thou, O Christ, didst will.
Nor to me was my life [too] short or [too] long.
I live to Thee and die to Thee.
To Thee, Christ, shall I rise again.
Dead and living Thine I am and Thine I remain."