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HERALDIC LEDGER STONES.

BY N. E. TOKE.

GREAT attention has been paid in years past to the study of Monumental Brasses, and rubbings have been taken of the majority of those now extant in the British Isles, even when the brass consists merely of a shield of arms or of a plain inscription. This is particularly the case in Kent, whose numerous brasses have been illustrated by Mr. W. D. Belcher and others, and carefully catalogued and described by Messrs. Ralph Griffin and Mill Stephenson.

It seems strange, therefore, that little or no interest has been taken in the heraldic ledger-stones, of which the county possesses many examples. These consist, as a rule, of slabs of bluish-grey marble, 6 to 7 feet in length and about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in width, on which is cut an achievement of arms with an inscription below. The achievement is either incised in the manner of an engraved brass, or, far more frequently, cut in relief within a roundel, or medallion, about 22 inches in diameter.

Out of 160 heraldic ledger-stones noted in some fifty churches in East Kent only fourteen are incised; seven others being partly incised and partly in relief. All the incised and semi-incised stones belong to the last half of the seventeenth century, and may be regarded as transitional between the preceding period of brasses and the medallions in relief which are characteristic of the eighteenth century.

With the exception of the two extremely poor specimens to Benjamin and Philadelphia Greenwood (1773) at St. Mary Cray, there are only two brasses in Kent with figures or shields of arms subsequent to 1650—stone having now replaced brass for heraldic memorials. The reason for this change was possibly the great havoc wrought by the Cromwellian soldiery in the Civil War. The brasses could be easily wrenched off and cast into cannon, or melted down for the sake of the metal; in 1644 Lincoln Cathedral lost

207 of its brasses in this way, and other cathedrals and churches suffered in proportion. But a heavy ledger-stone was not easily removable, and was of little use for other purposes. It is therefore probable that armigerous families wishing to commemorate their dead preferred to employ stone for this purpose, because it offered no temptation to marauding soldiers. Be this as it may, it is certain that stone replaced brass throughout the country for monumental memorials from 1650 onwards.

The seven semi-incised stones—four of which occur in New Romney Church—are peculiar in that the shield of arms is cut in relief on a slab of white marble inserted in a blue ledger stone on which is incised the mantling or other design round the shield. It is probable that this form was suggested by brasses in their setting of stone, and it may be noted in this connection that the latest figure brass in Kent—that at Great Chart (1680)—is surrounded by six coats of arms cut in the stone background.

The medallions in relief were produced, for the most part, between 1700 and 1750. Out of over 140 of which I have made rubbings, thirty-four belong to the seventeenth century, twenty-seven to the second half and the remainder to the first half of the eighteenth century. The earliest medallion of this kind which I have come across is dated 1634, but this is exceptional inasmuch as it is not cut on a ledger stone but on a tomb with sloping sides. The most recent one is dated 1794.

It seems curious that the fashion in heraldic monumental memorials should have changed thus abruptly at the close of the eighteenth century. In the next century heraldic ledger stones are replaced by mural tablets on which the coats of arms are painted in colours. The bluish-grey ledger stones continued to be used far into the nineteenth century, but only for the purpose of inscriptions—heraldry being relegated to the walls. With the prohibition of burials within churches, the use of ledger stones has almost ceased, although in a few cases they are being employed again as a setting for modern brasses.

The engraving of the incised stones calls for little comment ; it is obviously a continuation of that of the later brasses, and was very probably executed by the engravers in brass who found that with the disuse of the harder material their occupation was in danger of extinction.

The medallions, on the contrary, are worth special study, not only by genealogists to whom the armorial bearings and full inscriptions should prove of considerable value, but also by heraldic artists, to whom the varied forms of the shields and the often beautiful carving of the arms, mantling and scroll-work should be of assistance.

In spite of many enquiries I have not yet succeeded in discovering whether these medallions were executed by guilds of engravers or by local artists. In several cases the inscriptions have evidently been cut by a more or less illiterate workman—capitals and small letters being used indiscriminately in the same word—but even then the coat of arms is often well designed and the mantling artistically rendered. This would lead one to suppose that the achievement was the work of a professional craftsman, while the lettering was executed by the local stone mason. But Mr. Martin Hardie, Keeper of the Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, whom I consulted on this point, is of opinion that both arms and inscription were done locally, illiteracy not necessarily entailing the lack of artistic talent. This opinion seemed corroborated by the fact that no two medallions are exactly alike in the arrangement of the mantling or other design round the shield. Had the work been executed by guilds of engravers, one might suppose that stereotyped designs would have been employed to save trouble. On the other hand, an ex-worker in stone told me that it was easier for a craftsman to engrave freehand than to use a stock pattern. The point, therefore, needs further elucidation. If the stones were engraved by guilds, records should exist somewhere of the cost of production, selling prices, and the purchasers' names.

The provenance of the bluish-grey ledger-stones is also

an interesting subject for inquiry, yet one difficult to determine. In colour and appearance they resemble slate, but are much harder and more durable than that material. I made numerous inquiries both in this country and in Belgium, where precisely the same ledger-stones with achievements of arms and inscriptions are found in the churches, but no one could give me any certain information until I found a broken fragment of one of these stones and sent it to the Geological Survey and Museum in Jermyn Street, S.W. On analysis, Dr. H. Thomas reported the stone to be a black limestone of carboniferous age which has been found in various places in England and Wales, but which comes principally from Belgium, where the material, for all practical purposes, is identical in character and composition with the English stone. It is probable that these monumental slabs were imported from Belgium in the same way as plates of "latten" (*laiton*) had been in the era of brasses. This would account for their prevalence in Kent and East Anglia, for the transport of these heavy stones would be easier and cheaper by sea than by road.

Although the stone is hard, it is, of course, far more easily destroyed than brass, and these heraldic memorials are rapidly becoming indecipherable in churches where they are not covered by matting, or otherwise protected. This is especially the case in the N.W. and S.W. transepts of Canterbury Cathedral, whose pavements of ledger-stones are fast being worn away by the feet of the thousands of visitors who flock to the building.

It was with a view to preserving records of these valuable memorials that I first started making rubbings, and I hope that others will be induced to continue the task. It is possible, of course, to make a photograph directly from the stone, although an exposure of an hour or two is necessary even in a well-lighted church, and the result is usually very flat and disappointing. A rubbing with heelball, on the other hand, shows up boldly the main features of the achievement, though it cannot represent the under-cut portions of work in relief. Attempts to reproduce anything but the upper



1



2



3

HERALDIC SCULPTURED MEDALLIONS.

1. Benjamin Cobb, New Romney.
2. Sir Thomas Hardres, Bart., Upper Hardres.
3. John Fowle, Lydd.

surface of the carving result in failure, owing to the tearing of the paper.

The accompanying illustrations show the effect of this method of reproducing the medallions. Two of them, Nos. 1 and 3, are taken from the churches of New Romney and Lydd ; No. 2 is given to show a variation in the form of the shield and mantling.

They may be blazoned as follows :

- (1) *Ar., a chevron between three moor-cocks gu., for Cobb, impaling a cross within a bordure engrailed, for Grebell. Crest. Out of a ducal coronet, or, a demi-leopard rampant, ppr.*

These are the arms of Benjamin Cobb of New Romney, *obt.* 1756, and his wife Catherine, daughter of Allan Grebell of Rye.

- (2) *Gu., a lion rampant erm., oppressed by a chevron or, bearing the hand of Ulster, for Hardres, impaling Ar., on a chevron engr. between three rooks sa. as many chess-rooks of the first, for Rooke. Crest. A stag's head, attired.*

These are the arms of Sir Thomas Hardres of Upper Hardres, Bt., *obt.* 1688, and his wife Ursula, daughter of Sir Wm. Rooke, Kt.

- (3) *Ar. a chevron, gu. ; on a chief of the last, three mullets of the first. Crest. A griffin's head erased, ar., pierced through the neck by an arrow, gu., barbed, ar., vulned of the second.*

These are the arms of John Fowle of Lydd, *obt.* 1727.