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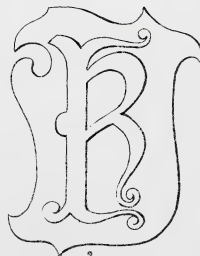
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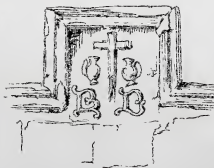


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- 1, 2. *Transoms, Beffy window Saint Mary's Tower, Taunton.*  
 3, 4. *Shields from St. George's chapel, Windsor, bearing the initials of Reginald Bray.*  
 5. *Almshouse, W. Monkton.*



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6. *Abbot Beere's Initials, St. Benedict's, Glastonbury.*  
 7. *Monogram of Abbot Beere, Beere's Almshouse Chapel, Glaston.*  
 8. *Abbot Beere's Monogram, St. Benedict's Glaston.*

Remarks on the Initials, R.B.A.S.,  
found on St. Mary's Tower,  
Taunton.

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BY W. FRANCK ELLIOT.

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THE valuable papers which have been read at the yearly meetings of this Society, and published in its reports, on, and including notices of, the Church Towers of the county, render it necessary that I should assign a reason for meddling on the present occasion with St. Mary's, Taunton. During the demolition of the tower, when the shields bearing the initials R. B. A. S., with the accompanying angels, had glided from their elevated position on the belfry window to the dust below, I was so much struck by the significant action of the winged symbols supporting the four shields on which are sculptured the above letters as to induce me (scantily provided as I am with archæological lore) to attempt an interpretation of their meaning.

It will be observed six angels are introduced, two of which support the shields with each hand, and four support the same with one, while with the other they evidently

point significantly to whoever or whatever may be signified by the four letters. (See Plate XI.)

It is thus made probable, by these letters R. B., which signify Reginald Bray, at St. George's, Windsor, and Richard Beere, at Glastonbury, that it must be to one or other of these distinguished men that the angelic forms draw attention ; and it is in order to elicit from some one of our able archæologists a more certain light on this subject than I am enabled to throw that I now suggest some reasons for my belief that Sir Reginald Bray was the illustrious man, as architect of the tower, denoted by these initials.

There may possibly have been some record relating to the builder of the tower on a scroll, which, supported by angels, was sculptured on the transome of the belfry window on its west front, nearest the south side ; if so, it perished during an age in which archæological research was dormant—though there is no evidence of letters remaining, nor in any published authority is any mention made of the four initial letters ; and I only find the two first, R. B., noticed by Mr. Ferrey, who, in his *Remarks on the Gothic Towers of Somerset*, in the Rev. Dr. Cottle's book published in aid of the fund for the restoration of St. Mary Magdalen, says : "There are unfortunately no coats of arms or cognizances upon the tower to settle the exact date when it was built ; but on the transomes of the two upper series of belfry windows are sculptured angels supporting shields, on which are carved the initials R. B. These letters may refer to Richard Beere, Abbot of Glastonbury, who presided over the establishment in the 15th century—a dignitary eminently skilled in architecture, and who built the churches at Glastonbury, on which are sculptured the same initials, R. B. It is, therefore, not unlikely

that he may have designed the beautiful tower of St. Mary's church." Now I cannot think it likely Abbot Beere did design this steeple; for if he were "eminently skilled in architecture," which I think is doubtful, and that he did *not* build both the *Glastonbury churches* seems very certain—why should he confer on Taunton a much more noble tower than he erected on his own ground—a town in the diocese of Wells, with whose Bishops the Abbots of Glaston were seldom on the best terms?

As regards the two Glastonbury churches, the Rev. Richard Warner, in his history of that place, makes it evident that Abbot Beere was totally unconnected with the building of St. John's, and had only to do with the repair of St. Benedict. He says: "The gorgeous tower of Taunton, indeed, may have been built by the grateful Henry VII, at a time when the simpler beauties of the pure Gothic had been entirely superseded by the unmeaning, meretricious ornaments of the florid style; but that the sober graces of St. John the Baptist's tower at Glaston should have been the production of *the same era*, is an hypothesis which cannot possibly be granted." He likewise adds: "Among the curious accounts of the Churchwardens of the parish is an account without date, headed thus: 'Compotus Thomæ Colbrook, super visoris fabricæ ecclesiæ Sancti Johannis ibidem.' In this we find the following entries: 'Et de xii*d.* de tabulo vendito. I. Morthfield et Ricardo Attwelle, et de xxiii*li.* xiii*s.* iii*d.*; receptis de Thome Dunster, de bonis ecclesiæ de remanentibus;' together with various receipts of sums, arising from the sale of old materials, amounting together to between £40 and £50, as well as charges for building materials and workmen, to the extent of £117 4*s.* 11½*d.* Now it appears from other Churchwardens' accounts, that John Dunster was

warden in the year 1418, and John Morthfield in 1421 ; and it follows, in consequence, that the re-structure of the church must have been between those years, or, at least, about that period. The sum expended also—a very large one in those times —shows a work commensurate to the re-edification of the church and aisles, the only parts spoken of in the *Comptus* of Colebrooke. The tower, perhaps, had been recently built, and did not therefore require renovation. So that neither Abbot Beere's "head conceived or hand prepared" aught towards the building of St. John's church. Touching St. Benedict our historian says : " Its style is that of the plain, solid, early Gothic ; its members, a western tower, nave, north aisle and porch, chancel and vestry. As the initials of Richard Beere, R. B., the immediate successor of the last Abbot, Richard Wheting, occur over the porch,\* it seems to follow that the church was indebted to him for considerable repairs or additions. The stone pulpit, and octagonal font for total immersion, within the church, those certain marks of an early age, are proofs that the body of it was built long anterior to the period in which Abbot Beere lived," proving beyond a doubt that, as at the hospital for lepers, at Monkton, near Taunton, the initials, accompanied by the Abbot's mitre, here introduced, but record a repair. As to his skill in architecture—when I read " that he built the new lodgings by the great chamber, called the King's lodgings, in the gallery, as also the new lodgings for secular priests and clerks of our lady ; that he likewise built the greater part of Edgar's chapel, at the east end of the church, at both sides ; strengthened the steeple in the middle by a vault and two arches (otherwise it had fallen) ; made a chapel of our Lady of Loretto, join-

\* See illustration, Plate XII.





ALMSHOUSE IN THE PARISH OF WEST MONKTON, FORMERLY A HOSPITAL FOR LEPERS.

ing to the north side of the church ; that he made withal a chapel of the sepulchre in the south end of the nave of the church ; an almshouse with a chapel in the north part of the abbey, and the manor place at Sharpham, in the park"—I but understand that he caused these works to be done, and perhaps, as a man of some architectural knowledge, regulated the doing ; but as to designing and executing, I may for the same reasons believe that he was eminent as a working goldsmith ; as I read "that he made a rich altar of silver gilt and set it before the high altar." Also in reading this list of works redounding to his glory, how can we account for the omission of the building of St. Mary's tower, a far more famous work than any of these recorded ? There are other Abbots named as having built portions of Glastonbury Abbey, much in the same way as it is recorded that Richard Beere "busied himself in adding to the Monastery such buildings as were deemed necessary to its character and almost unique perfection," such as Nicholas de Frome, who "built the house of reception for the sick poor, the Abbot's great audience chamber, the Bishop's apartment, and other needful edifices." But I do not apprehend it is intended to convey to us that such buildings were from the original designs of these holy men. An unfortunate coincidence of initials has, I believe, led many, with Mr. Ferrey, to suppose that Abbot Beere was the architect of St. Mary's steeple ; and had it not been for the two letters, on shields on the transomes of the other windows, which he has not noticed, I believe I should not have questioned the Abbot's claim. But there are four letters on these windows, R. B. A. S., and it was in endeavouring to decipher the two latter that I was induced to believe that Richard Beere was not the name signified. The idea that R. B. signified Richard

Beere seems confirmed by the fact that the same letters occur on a stone in a wall close to the town of Taunton, accompanied by an Abbot's mitre, and that this building was a hospital for lepers, founded by one Lambright, in the reign of Henry III, afterwards enlarged by Richard Beere. But then it should be remembered that this house stands in the parish of West Monkton, the manor of which belonged to the Abbots of Glastonbury, and that the successors of Lambright annexed the advowson of the hospital thereof to the Abbey. And it must be remarked that though the place is little better in appearance than a cow-shed, and that it was only improved by Beere, we have this made evident, not only by his initials, but by the Abbot's mitre. (See Plate XII.)

Who then, having deposed the Abbot, can be recognised as shadowed forth in the mysterious R. B. A. S.? I reply Reginald Bray, Architectus Senatus, (or perhaps, for the last letter, some other interpretation). Sir Reginald Bray, Knight of the Garter and Bath, Privy Counsellor, Constable of the Castle of Oakham, in Rutlandshire, Joint Chief Justice of all the Forests south of Kent, High Treasurer, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, High Steward of Oxford, and Architect, being principally concerned in this capacity, in building his Royal master's chapel at Westminster, and finishing St. George's Chapel, Windsor, where his device—a hemp-break and his initials, R. B.—frequently appear. Such is the eminent man I suggest as the architect of St. Mary's Tower, and I have strong reasons for so doing.

If you turn to the *Companion to Parker's Glossary of Architecture*, you will find that "in 1488 the nave and aisles of St. Mary's, Oxford, were built by subscription, and that the architect was Sir Reginald Bray, having con-



tributed 40 marks to the work." Here, then, we have an R. B. engaged in ecclesiastical architecture during the late Perpendicular period. He was also a person of great devotion, and a bountiful friend to many churches, as the following records will prove. John, Abbot of Newminster, in Northumberland, addresses him as the founder of the Monastery of Pipwell, in Northamptonshire. The Dean and Chapter of Lincoln, in recompense of his services to them, receive him, and my lady his wife, to be brother and sister of their chapter. The prior of the Cathedral of Durham receives him in the like manner. We also find that he was a great favorite with Henry VII, and that he was recommended by the Bishop of Ely as "a man sober, secret, and well-witted to compass the marriage of the king with the Princess Elizabeth; and that he had entered heartily into the design of advancing the Earl of Richmond to the throne, and engaged Sir Giles, afterwards Lord Daubeney, and other gentlemen of note, to take part with Henry; and not only did he serve his king in the civil capacities above named, but as a soldier also "he by indenture covenanted to serve him in his wars beyond the seas." He was made Knight Banneret after the Battle of Bosworth, and was also at the battle of Blackheath when Lord Audrey, from Wells, had headed the Cornish rebels; so that there is little doubt but that he was with the king's army when it advanced against Perkin Warbeck, who had seized Taunton Castle—his friend, Lord Daubeney, being constable of the castle at this period.

Whatever truth there may be in the tradition that Henry VII built churches in this county, in acknowledgment of the support given by its people to the Lancastrian party, there seems but little doubt but that he was in some way a benefactor to this town, as we find

his arms on the gate of the castle, with the inscription, "Vive le Roi Henri."\* We learn, too, that his favorite counsellor had great delight and skill in architecture, that "he was a man of devotion, and a bountiful friend to many churches," so that we may suppose that he would readily exert his talents to compass any act of grace intended by his Royal master. Now, as St. Mary's tower was certainly built about this time, may we not, without forcing probability, conjecture (the church having been enlarged during the Perpendicular period, which its architectural development will prove) that the noble tower was added through the munificence of the monarch, and the available talent of the minister, and that the letters on its belfry windows may be fairly interpreted: "Reginald Bray, Architectus Senatus."

You may say such are but conjectures; but remember that they are founded on these facts: That King Henry VII was at Taunton at the period when St. Mary's tower was built; † that he was accompanied by officers of state,

\* That many of the towers and churches of Somerset have badges used by the king is strong evidence that he was in some way connected with these buildings. In allusion to the tradition that he built many of the churches, we find the following passage in *Wharton's Spenser's Fairy Queen*, vol. ii., p. 259: "Most of the churches in Somersetshire (which are remarkably elegant) are in the style of the Florid Gothic. The reason is this: Somersetshire, in the civil wars between York and Lancaster, was strongly and entirely attached to the Lancastrian party. In reward for this service, Henry VII, when he came to the crown, rebuilt their churches."

† There can be no doubt on this point, as it is distinctly recorded in an old book containing the proceedings of the Corporation at the time "that the King, with the whole of his army, numbering upwards of ten thousand men, *on their way to the west to oppose the rebels*, passed through Wells, and here they halted for at least a day and a night, and probably longer; and it appears that the King was received by the Lord Bishop (Oliver King), Nicholas Wapp, the Mayor, and the burgesses of the town. It is believed that the King lodged at the Deanery, where it is said that he was received with princely hospitality by Dr. J. Gunthorpe, the Dean.

which is more than probable included his favourite minister, who we know took an active part in the civil wars; that the friend of that minister, Lord Daubeney, was Constable of Taunton Castle; and that Sir Reginald was eminent as an architect. There is another reason for believing that Taunton may have been much in favour with the King just now, as it was at this period that Richard Fox was Bishop of Wells—a divine who rendered important services in helping Henry to the throne; and that he was well disposed towards the town we have evidence in the grammar-school he has given us. Another of the favourites of Henry VII was also in the west; Dr. Oliver King about this time was Archdeacon of Taunton, still rising in favour, until he was at length promoted to the see of Bath and Wells. He it is said had great knowledge of Gothic architecture, and was induced by a vision to rebuild Bath Abbey. We also find that he was Registrar of the Order of the Garter, of which Sir Reginald was a Knight.\* They both died in the same

\* By the occurrence of so many circumstances common to each of these notable men; their favour with the King; their knowledge and love of architecture; and their connection with the Order of the Garter—imagination leads one to picture Bray as taking an active share in designing the new Abbey, the style being Tudor, and the pierced parapet of the tower having a strong resemblance to St. Mary's, Taunton. It would seem also that King Henry was in some way connected with the building, as beneath the pedestals supporting the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul we find the portcullis and the union rose crowned, and a niche over the great western door is supposed originally to have contained his figure, his arms, crowned with supporters, being sculptured at the base. Below another bracket, likewise on the west point, are two shields, charged with the arms of the see, surmounted by a dragon and greyhound, Henry's supporters, sustaining a rose crowned.

There was another important Tudor building, richly decorated with the arms and badges of the seventh Henry, in the course of construction at this time, whose fan tracery roof resembles in design that of Bath Abbey, St. George's, Windsor, and the Westminster Chapel, and the termination of whose turrets are almost identical with the buttresses at Westminster,—I allude to King's College, Cambridge. We have stated on authority that

year, and both founded chantry chapels at St. George's, Windsor, in which they were buried.

If these facts prove nothing beyond, they identify Henry VII with the church architecture of the county, in connection with men holding important offices in Somerset, one of whom was remarkable for his skill as an architect.

The ancestors of the Lord Daubeney, also, who Sir R. Bray engaged to assist him in helping Henry to the throne, held for centuries the manor of South Petherton, at which place they no doubt had a mansion, as I find a Sir Giles Daubeney, in the year 1444, "bequeathing his body to be buried in the chapel of our Lady within the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, South Petherton, where divers of his family lay interred." Now we learn that two of the staunchest adherents and greatest favourites of the King were Daubeney and Bray; and as we find in the small town of South Petherton a building of this period, having on one end a portion so rich in architectural decoration as

Bray had a principal concern in building Henry the Seventh's chapel, and in finishing and bringing to perfection the chapel of St. George, his initials being introduced on the ceiling of the latter in many places. Now this ceiling is of rich fan tracery, as is likewise that more famous one of the Royal chapel of the Abbey, and that most famous of King's College, Cambridge. Where, then, is the improbability that the unknown architect of the chapel at Cambridge may have been Sir Reginald Bray? It is very certain that his royal master gave £5,000 towards the building of this chapel, which, as we find "the stone roofs to the seven chapels in the body of the church were to be built at the rate of £20 each," was a considerable sum for such a purpose. In turning to a description of the chapel in the *History of Cambridge*, published by Ackermann, I find it stated that the foundation of this singular edifice was laid by Henry VI upon St. James's day, in the twenty-fourth year of his reign, 1446; but as it is said "that only the east and part of the north and south walls of the chapel, beginning from the east, were finished during the reign of the founder," and that Mr. I. Smith, Fellow of the College in 1742, says, according to Cole, "It is not certain how far the building was raised in the founder's time, and that it was left in a state of suspension and neglect until 1479, during the reign of Edward IV, and that it proceeded, with interrup-

to have given rise to the tradition that it was formerly a palace—what seems more probable than that this elaborately decorated portion of the structure was designed for Daubeney by his friend Bray? Indeed the windows, running as they do from the base to the summit of the walls, the two stories being separated only by a rich ornament of shields, in the same continuous jamb, have a sort of resemblance to the three sets of windows in St. Mary's Tower, and strengthens the supposition that it may have been designed by the same genius.

Another link in the chain: We find one more ancient family in the neighbourhood in favour with the King; for if Sir Reginald Bray "bore a rich salt of gold" at the christening of Prince Arthur, Sir Richard Warre was created a Knight of the Bath at his marriage, Bray being still alive. This renders it likely that the Hestercombe

tious, until the reign of Henry VII, when the stone-work was completed," may we not fairly assume, seeing that the style is nearly half a century later than that named as its foundation, being essentially Tudor, abounding both internally and externally with the arms and badges of the Seventh Henry—may we not fairly assume that, though the foundation may have been laid during the reign of Henry VI, and some small portion of the walls built, that the original design may have been altered to the then prevailing Florid Gothic? It not only appears to me that this may have been so, but I fancy I can detect such a resemblance, in parts, between this building and that of the Abbey Chapel and the ceiling of St. George's, Windsor, as may lead one to the conclusion that they were all the work of the same master mind—the Tudor Bray, and that the ceiling which astonishes the world may have been constructed by the architect of St. Mary's Tower. That the roof and towers were designed in Henry the Seventh's reign, we have proof from an indenture dated 4 Henry VIII, A.D. 1512, "that the great stone roof of the chapel divided into twelve arches, and built of Weldon stone, according to a plan signed by the executors of Henry VII, was to be set up within three years, at the price of £100 for each arch;" while from another indenture, which is dated in the same year, we find that £100 was the sum agreed to be paid for each of the towers by which the exterior of the chapel is embellished. The peculiar termination of these towers, more than any other feature in the building, resembling as they do the buttresses supporting the flying arches of Henry the Seventh's Chapel, Westminster, induces me to believe that they are the work of the same man, rather than of the same period.



granite found in the Tower of St. Mary's may have been a gift from Sir Richard Warre to assist the church in carrying out Sir Reginald's design; and likewise makes it more probable that the neighbourhood which afforded King Henry such valuable adherents would probably come in for more than ordinary marks of royal favour.

The initials R. B. also occur on a shield\* in a window of the church, accompanied by a monogram,† such as, I am told, a Freemason might probably adopt; and that Sir



Reginald Bray was a Freemason high in the craft is certain, as we have it recorded in an old book, entitled *Constitution of Freemasonry*, that "King Henry VII, being Grand Master, chose for one of his wardens of England Sir R. Bray, the other being John Islip, Abbot of Westminster, by whom the King summoned a lodge of masters

\* Dr. Cottle moved this shield to its present position in the north-west window, from a window south of the Tower.

† *Merchants' Marks*.—It has been surmised that this monogram may possibly be a merchant's mark, as such signs were frequently used by them, consisting for the most part of a figure resembling a numerical 4, turned backwards, which, it has been conjectured, represents the mast and yard of a ship; but then, says Parker, in his *Glossary of Heraldry*—"If this conjecture be well founded, why did the early printers so often use this figure?" It is much more likely that the triangle symbolises the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as the cross does that of the Atonement; and this probability seems increased by the same authority on *Merchants' Marks*—that "this term is too narrow in its import, as marks of the kind, so termed, were used not only by merchants, but by ecclesiastics." It will be observed the figure of the monogram in question is not a figure of 4 turned backwards, but one turned upside down—if it has any resemblance to a figure of 4 at all. As this monogram occurs in one of the windows of the church, it possibly may not apply to Bray; but the coincidence of the initials seemed too striking to leave it unnoticed.

in the palace, with whom he walked in ample form to the east end of Westminster Abbey, and levelled the footstone of his famous chapel on June 24th, 1502 ; that the King likewise employed Grand Warden Bray to raise the middle chapel of Windsor, and to rebuild the palace of Sheen-upon-Thames, which the King called Richmond ; and to enlarge the old palace of Greenwich, calling it Placentia, where he built a pretty box, called 'The Queen's House.'" He is likewise supposed to have built the chancel of the Abbey Church of Great Malvern, where, in the east window, his figure is introduced, with that of Prince Arthur, kneeling.

It seems probable that Bray may have done little more than furnished the plans and elevation of St. Mary's Tower, and that the builders were driven to an economic method of construction in carrying out the grand design, which may account for the loose way in which some portions of the building seem to have been put together, and the inaccuracies which occur in the setting the buttresses, the measurements of the belfry windows, which differ slightly in width the one from the other in the same story, and in the several chambers of the tower, which are none of them quite square. As regards the architectural merits of the building, a professional member of our Society tells us "that for height and magnificence it may claim nearly, if not quite, the first rank in the country ;" but then, he adds, "it sins against the first law of tower building, which should be a gradual increase of lightness and decoration towards the top, the lower part being plain and massive ; that having double windows nearly as large as those in the belfry stage in the two stories beneath, this progressive diminution of massiveness is quite lost, and that it is top heavy." Another learned member tells us

that the towers of Bishop's Lydeard, St. James, Taunton, Chewton, Huish Episcopi, Kingston, Staple Fitzpaine, and particularly St. Mary's, Taunton, are in fact post-Gothic buildings, inasmuch as the great principles of construction are altogether neglected in their structure ; that with St. Mary's all these faults are exaggerated ; but then, he tells us, that to adduce what is beautiful from faulty principles, requires an amount of talent which falls to the lot of few.

These remarks help, I think, to separate St. Mary's from all other Perpendicular towers in the county ; and though they may prove it critically faulty, confirm an originality, the general effect of which is magnificent, and which I think may induce us to accept it as the work of a master mind that had other important demands on its action.

That Sir Reginald Bray was connected with the west of England is proved by his having settled at Barrington, in Gloucestershire, where the male line of that branch became extinct about 110 years since. And we learn by his will that he had manors and lands in that county and in Somersetshire. That there is no existing record that may render it certain that Bray built St. Mary's Tower, need not surprise us, as it would be difficult to name the architect of many of the most important buildings of this period. This is made evident by the most improbable conjecture that Wolsey built the famous tower of Maudlin College, Oxford, he being about two and twenty at the time of its execution. Indeed, as Bray was High Steward of Oxford during the reign of Henry VII, and that it is proved by the mass that was said from the summit of that tower every first of May, for the benefit of the soul of the departed monarch, that he must in some way have been its benefactor, and that as Bray is recorded to have built

the nave and aisles of St. Mary's church in that city, seeing also that Maudlin Tower, Oxford, and St. Mary's Tower, Taunton, have a sort of family resemblance, it appears to me more than probable that both these noble towers emanated from the same genius.

It was observed by a learned archæologist of our Society that St. Mary's, Oxford, judging from its style, must be full half a century earlier than St. Mary's. But that a building may be much earlier than its style seems to denote is proved by Mr. Scott's observations on Doncaster tower. He says, "The next deviation from the original design was the re-erection of the magnificent central tower. This would appear not to have been commenced till about 1425, as it contained in a very conspicuous position, and at no very great height up, the arms of Archbishop Kempe, supported by an angel. Were it not for this evidence I should, I confess, have placed the work considerably earlier, the details are so exceedingly fine, and are so early in their character." I have since found that the first stone of Magdalen Tower, Oxford, was laid on the 9th of August, 1492, by Richard Mayew, then President; and that it was not finished until 1505.

In a very full and authentic biography, contributed by one of the family, to be found in Keppes' biography, Bray is only named as building his royal master's chapel at Westminster, and finishing that of Windsor. And though he is said to have given 40 marks towards the repair of St. Mary's, Oxford, by the same authority, no mention is made of his having been its architect. In Parker's *Glossary of Architecture* it is stated that he was the architect of the said nave and aisles; and you have seen that another author informs us that he rebuilt a palace at Sheen, enlarged the old palace at Greenwich, and

rebuilt Bayard Castle." At Great Malvern church we find it asserted that he was the architect of the chancel of the noble building. But apart from the King's Chapel, Westminster, St. Mary's, Oxford, and St. George's Windsor, there seems no positive record that he was employed on any of these important buildings. Since then so little effort was made in this age to perpetuate the fame of its artists, we need be little surprised that we have nothing more than the letters on St. Mary's Tower, and the monogram in the windows, to guide us in our research; but should rather congratulate ourselves that we have a clue so sufficient; which clue, gentlemen, I leave in your more able hands.

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