

The Masons' Marks on Wells Cathedral Church

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THE whole subject of Masons' Marks is in need of investigation. This can best be done by recording the marks to be found not only on our great Cathedral and Abbey Churches but also on the Parish Churches. It is not generally realized how often they are to be found on the stones of quite small village churches. A few local village churches show marks identical with those on the Cathedral; these will be found recorded in footnotes.

An interesting paper 'Ancient Masons' Marks', by H. V. Overfield, M.I.C.E., City Engineer of Salisbury (1930-6), and now Borough Engineer of Scarborough, was published in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, vol. lii, No. clxxxvii (Dec. 1947). Many marks, a number of them similar to those in this paper, from Old Sarum, Salisbury Cathedral and the Close Wall, Winchester Cathedral, Romsey Abbey, Christchurch Priory, Lichfield Cathedral and Worcester Cathedral are figured.

A few facts emerge from the examination of the marks in Wells Cathedral. They were certainly cut on the 'banker'; they are frequently upside down and occasionally occur in positions in which it would have been impossible to cut them *in situ*, being partially covered by a shaft or other protruding member. They were not cut on every stone, whole acres of plain walling are without marks. Their frequency varies with the centuries. On Bishop Reginald's earlier work they are not found, they are rare on the ground floor of the Transepts but become common in the Triforium and Clearstory.

It is significant that whereas the first five piers, counting from the central tower, of the north nave arcade show no marks and the south arcade only one, the sixth pair, the last to be erected in Reginald's day, show three on the north and four on the south. Moreover of the next pair, the first of

LOCATIONS OF THE MARKS (the numbers refer to the numbered marks on the opposite page)

[*Reginald Fitz-Joselin (1174-1191)*]

CHOIR [None]

NORTH TRANSEPT—*Ground Floor*: Stair, 1-3; East, 4; West, 5. *Triforium*: North, 6; West, 7, 8. *Clearstory*: East, 9; West, 10-12.¹

SOUTH TRANSEPT—*Ground Floor*: Stair, 13-20²; South, 21-23; West, 24, 25. *Triforium*: East, 26-32; South, 33, 34; West, 35-37. *Clearstory*: East, 38-40.

NAVE, NORTH—*Ground Floor*: Stair to N. Porch, 41, 42; Arcade, Bays I-V [None], Bay VI, 43-45.³ *Triforium*: Bay I, 46; Bay II, 47-49; Bay III, 50-53; Flying Buttress, 54; Bay IV, 55-61; Flying Buttress, 62; Bay V, 63, 64; Flying Buttress, 65-67. *Clearstory*: Bay I, 68; Bay II, 69-77⁴; Bay III, 78-84; Bay IV, 85-87.

NAVE, SOUTH—*Ground Floor*: Bays I-III [None]; Bay IV, 88 (external); Bay V, 89 (internal); 90, 91 (external); Bay VI, 92-95 (internal); 96-98 (external). *Triforium*: Bay I [None]; Flying Buttress, 99; Bay II, 100-103; Flying Buttress, 104; Bay III, 105-108; Bay IV, 109-117; Flying Buttress, 118; Bay V, 119-123; Flying Buttress, 124. *Clearstory*: Bay I, 125-130; Bay II, 131-133; Bay III, 134-139; Bay IV, 140, 141.

[*Joselin of Wells (1206-1242)*]

NAVE, NORTH—*Ground Floor*: Bay VII, 142-146⁵; Bay VIII, 147; Bay IX, 148. *Triforium*: Bay VI, 149-158; Bay VII, 159. *Clearstory*: Bay V, 160; Bay VI, 161, 162; Bay VII, 163; Bay VIII, 164; Bay IX, 165; Bay X, 166.

NAVE, SOUTH—*Ground Floor*: Bay VII, 167-175⁶; Bay VIII, 176; Bay IX, 177-179; Bay X, 180. *Triforium*: Bay VI, 181; Bay VII, 182; Bay VIII, 183; Bay IX, 184. *Clearstory*: Bay V, 185-187; Bay VI, 188, 189; Bay VII, 190.

¹ No. 12 on work of repair of the Tower in the fourteenth century.

² No. 15 occurs at Nunney.

³ No. 44 occurs at Mells.

⁴ No. 75 occurs in Bristol Cathedral Lady Chapel.

⁵ No. 145 occurs in King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

⁶ No. 170 occurs at Trowbridge.

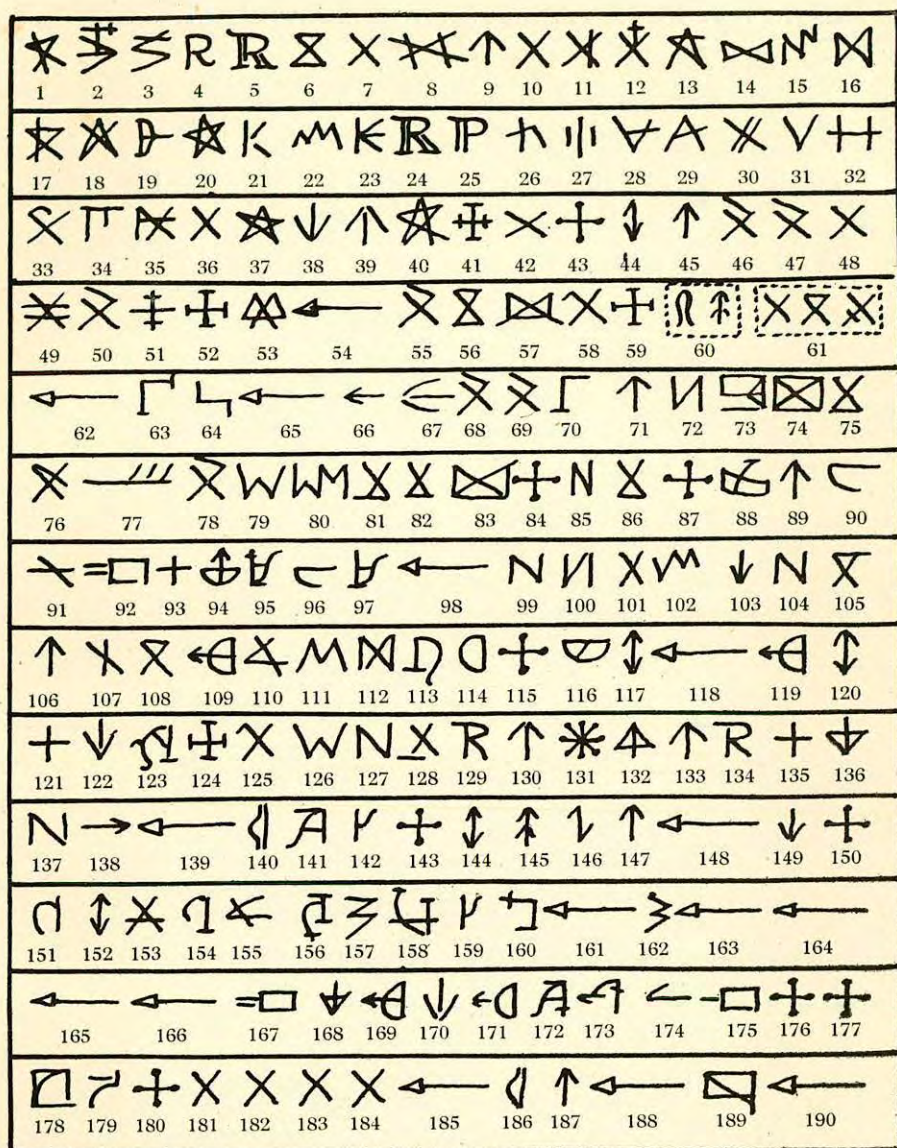


Fig. 1.

[*Joselin of Wells (contd.)*]

WEST FRONT—N.W. Tower : 191–193 (internal); 194 (external).

CENTRAL TOWER—*Lantern* : 195–214.⁷

[*Robert Burnell (1275–1292)*]

UNDERCROFT—*Exterior* : 215–217.

Interior : 218.

[*William of March (1293–1302)*]

LADY CHAPEL and ADJOINING CHAPELS—*Exterior* : 219–231.⁸

Interior : 232–241.⁹

St. Mary's Reredos : 242

CHOIR EXTENSION—*North* : 243–245.

South : 246–252.¹⁰

CHOIR SCREEN : 253.

CHAPTER HOUSE : 254–270.

[*John Harewell (1366–1386)*]

COMPLETION OF S.W. TOWER [By legacy] : 271–279.

[*Nicholas Bubwith (1407–1425)*]

COMPLETION OF N.W. TOWER [By legacy] : 280–316.¹¹

BUBWITH'S CHANTRY CHAPEL : 317.

CLOISTERS—*East Walk* : 318–331.¹²

[*Thomas Beckington (1443–1465)*]

CLOISTERS—*West Walk* : 332–346.^{13, 14}

CHAIN GATE : 347–364.^{15, 16}

BISHOP'S GATE : 365–368.

BISHOP'S BARN : 369–386.

⁷ No. 205 occurs at Hinton St. George.

⁸ No. 230 occurs at Glastonbury Crypt.

⁹ No. 239 occurs at Hinton St. George.

¹⁰ No. 246 occurs at Hinton St. George and Norton sub Hamdon.

¹¹ No. 281 occurs at Publow.

¹² No. 329 occurs at Hinton St. George and Norton sub Hamdon.

¹³ No. 340 occurs at Norton sub Hamdon.

¹⁴ No. 341 occurs at East Harptree.

¹⁵ No. 357 occurs at Hinton St. George.

¹⁶ No. 364 occurs at King's College, Cambridge.

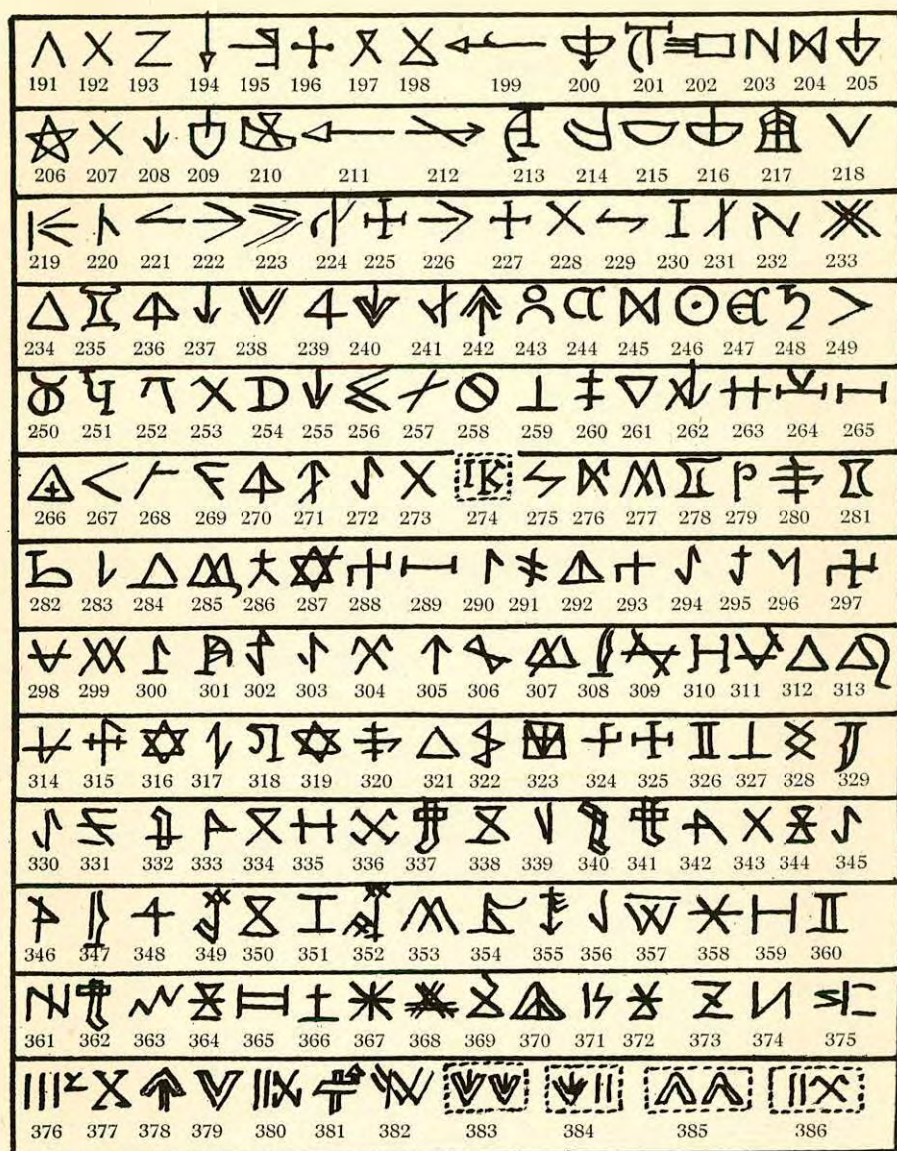


Fig. 2.

Joselin's work, twelve and nineteen stones are marked. This suggests that the masons were allowed or encouraged to put their marks on the beginning and end of their undertakings, possibly to mark the junction of their work with that of their predecessors and successors. This theory is strengthened by the existence of a group of seven on the south-west pier of the Lady Chapel which may well have been the last member of the Chapel to be erected. There are no visible marks on the corresponding pier on the north-west. It is interesting to note that one of these marks occurs also on the reredos of the Lady Chapel, showing that the reredos is contemporary with the chapel and probably in its rightful position.

In the fifteenth century marks became more numerous but in a somewhat spasmodic way. Harewell's western tower shows comparatively few, whereas Bubwith's is very prolific. They are not evident on the vault of Bubwith's cloister, probably because they are covered by the plaster and whitewash which so largely survive, but they are to be seen on the library stair and on the soffits of the openings on the ground floor. In Beckington's west walk almost every stone of the webbing of the vault shows a mark wherever the colourwash has flaked off. On the other hand none are visible on Treasurer Harris's South walk erected in 1507.

Marks often help in dating buildings; the incidence of the broad bladed arrowhead on the Bishops' Barn and in the Lady Chapel suggests that the barn is of the first quarter of the fourteenth century.

In the following list the marks have been arranged as far as possible in chronological order. The numbering of the bays is from the central tower outward.