

## The Effigy of 'John de Middleton' at Wells

---

BY THE VERY REV. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D., F.S.A.,  
*Dean of Wells.*

---

THE purpose of this article is threefold : (1) to discuss the attribution of the name John de Middleton to an effigy in the cathedral church at Wells ; (2) to draw attention to an unpublished volume of Latin poems written in 1667 by Alexander Huish, a prebendary of Wells ; and (3) to give some information as to the plans and sketches relating to Wells, made by John Carter *c.* 1794, and now preserved partly in the British Museum and partly in the library of the Society of Antiquaries.

(1) In the northern chapel of the choir transept at Wells there is a large recess in the middle of the north wall, in which lies the effigy of a priest. Collinson, whose *History* was published in 1791, describes it thus (III, 400) :

On the north side of the choir is another chapel called *Milton's Chapel*, having in the middle against the wall an ancient tomb, containing the remains of *John de Middleton*, or *Milton*, who was the founder thereof. This John de Middleton was collated to the chancellorship of Wells, A.D. 1337 ; but he in a short time quitted it, and assumed the habit of a friar-minor.

No reference is given for this statement, which is repeated again and again by subsequent writers. Phelps, however, does not commit himself to it, but says only (II, 85) : ' In the wall, under a canopy, is the recumbent figure of a priest.' And the latest authority to deal with the matter, Dr. A. C. Fryer, in his ' Monumental Effigies in Somerset ' (*Proceedings*, LXVI, 53),

suggests a doubt as to the identification: 'Possibly,' he writes, 'John de Middleton or Milton, collated to chancellorship of Wells 1337, but soon quitted office and assumed habit of friar minor.' He dates the effigy *c.* 1340; and the canopied wall-recess in which it lies he assigns to the fifteenth century.

We must begin by examining what is known of this John de Middleton, who for a brief period in 1337 held the chancellorship of the cathedral church. Bishop Drokensford's register (*S.R.S.*, I, p. 145) mentions a clerk of this name who was appointed proxy in an appeal to the Pope in 1320; and also records the institution of John de Middleton, priest, to the rectory of Templecombe in Feb. 1322 on the presentation of Shaftesbury Abbey (*ib.*, p. 197). Bishop Ralph's register (*S.R.S.*, x, p. 482) shews another rector in possession in 1343. We do not know whether this J. de M. was the same person as the Master John de Middleton with whom we are here concerned. A like uncertainty attaches to the mention in the *Calendar of Papal Letters* (15 May, 1328) of John de Middleton, canon of London; and in the register of John de Pontissara, bishop of Winchester, of John de Middleton, who was collated to the vicarage of Twyford in 1301.

But we are on sure ground when we find from Bishop Ralph's register that Master John de Middleton was the bishop's commissary from *c.* 1332 to 1345; that he was rector of Bradford near Taunton from 1333 to 1350, when he resigned and presented to the church as lord of Bradford manor. He was instituted to the rectory of Shepton Beauchamp in 1335, but he resigned it two years later; and then we find the following curious series of entries (pp. 314 f.):

19 Nov. 1337. To Master John de Middleton, late rector of Shepton Beauchamp: 'We confer on you the chancellorship of our church of Wells.'

— Dec. 1337. To the bishop of Winchester: 'We intend to promote Simon de Bristol to the chancellorship of Wells. We pray you to present Master John de Middleton to the church of Bleadon by exchange.' The bishop of Winchester does so on 9 Dec., and on 15 Dec. J. de M. is instituted to Bleadon, and S. de B. admitted to the chancellorship.

We do not know what lies behind this strange record. It is

hardly likely that Master John de Middleton's tenure of the chancellorship was merely a temporary arrangement designed to secure his appointment to Bleadon, of which the bishop of Winchester was patron. A more reasonable explanation may be that the bishop found that he had made a mistake in appointing to the chancellorship an outsider, of whom there seems to be no indication at all that he ever held a prebend at Wells.

In Feb. 1345 he ceased to be the bishop's commissary, and became rector of Wrytlington, which he held until 1350; and this we may presume to have been the year of his death. The rectory of Bleadon he appears to have resigned early in 1349. We find nothing to indicate that he 'assumed the habit of a friar-minor.' Nor does there seem to be any obvious reason why he should have had a tomb or monument at Wells.

Before we take leave of John de Middleton we may note that in Bishop Ralph's recently published *Household Roll* (*S.R.S.*, xxxix, p. 102) we find that the bishop was at Wells on 20 November 1337, the day on which according to the chapter record (*Cal. of Wells MSS.*, I, 239, 548) he admitted John de Middleton as chancellor in the chapel of his palace. And also that on 23 November two *ferra* are brought into the account at Evercreech as purchased at Wells for the horses of Master J. de Milton (p. 108).

(2) There has recently been presented to the Library of the Dean and Chapter by Mr. A. W. Page, already a generous donor to the Public Library at Bath, a volume of unpublished Latin poems written in 1667 by Alexander Huish, an aged and infirm prebendary of Wells, who died at his rectory of Beckington in the following year. The book contains verses in praise of Wells, and a series of epitaphs on the tombs of the bishops; and there are several interesting references to the state of the cathedral church in his early youth. An account of their author will be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was born at Wells,<sup>1</sup> as we gather from his preface, in 1595.

1. Other members of the family at Wells would appear to be Edward Huishe, who was appointed bishop's registrar in 1619, and James Huish, who held the same office from 1634 till he resigned it in 1661 (*Cal. of Wells MSS.*, II, index). Edward Huish *alias* Clarke was churchwarden of St. Cuthbert's in 1625.

He was among the original scholars appointed by the foundress of Wadham College, Oxford, and was admitted a fellow in 1615. In 1627 he was appointed prebendary of Wedmore Secunda; and he became rector of Beckington in 1628, and also of Hornblotton in 1638. He suffered imprisonment under the Commonwealth, but recovered his preferments at the Restoration, and was made prebendary of Whitelackington in September 1660: he died in April 1668.

In a volume in Lambeth Library (*Cod. Misc.*, 943, pp. 485-510) there is an elaborate account of the troubles relating to the Holy Table at Beckington. The story in brief is this. Some sixty years before Alex. Huish became rector the place of the Altar had been levelled, and a 'mount' had been raised in the middle of the chancel. This had been wainscotted, and seats with kneeling-boards set around the Holy Table which was set thereon. No authority could be shown for the change, and the churchwardens were ordered to put the chancel back as it had been, and to place the Holy Table against the east wall. They steadfastly refused, and after various warnings were excommunicated for a year, and afterwards went to prison rather than yield. Then the change was made by authority, and the churchwardens on release did penance and were absolved. This last fact is recorded in Rushworth's *Collections*, vol. II, p. 300 under 1635: and the story is continued, *ibid.*, part III, vol. I, pp. 97f., where under 1640 we learn that the inhabitants petitioned Parliament against the 'innovations,' and Alex. Huish was summoned before a committee as a 'delinquent.' He in turn went to prison, and he lost his living. The Lambeth MS. gives two documents in his hand: (1) His account of the difficulties connected with his presentation to Beckington, and (2) his statement regarding the condition of the chancel. Incidentally he tells us that James Huish, the bishop's registrar, was his brother. The whole of this material deserves to be printed, as giving a vivid picture of the times.

Besides other occasional poems Huish brought out in 1660 a volume entitled *Musa Ruralia*. He made his mark as a biblical scholar, and assisted Brian Walton in the production of his famous 'Polyglott Bible,' collating the *Codex Alexandrinus*.

Some new light is thrown by our little manuscript book on the effigy which we have been considering, and also apparently on the fifteenth-century recess in which it now lies. In one of his poems he tells us that in the chapel in question, which by a former inscription in the glass he knew as the Chapel of Corpus Christi, there were two nameless effigies: one was low down and in the wall, the other high up within iron railings. The second of these is no doubt the effigy on the tomb which stands on the south side of the chapel, and which until recently was assigned to Dean John Forest, who died in 1446. From its similarity in structure and position to the tomb of Bishop Drokensford in the southern transept, it was assigned by Canon Church to Dean John de Godelee († 1333), in whose time this part of the church was built. It is possible still to read, almost with certainty, the remains of the lettering painted on the edge of the tomb as: HIC : IACET : MAGISTER : IOH . . .

But what was the effigy low down and in the wall? We can hardly doubt that this was the fourteenth-century effigy which came to be assigned to John de Middleton, and which now lies in the fifteenth-century recess. Possibly its present position was that in which Alexander Huish saw it: indeed this is the most likely supposition. But it must not be forgotten that two tombs have come into this chapel since his time, and there may have been a low recess in the wall behind either of them: certain it is that the canopied recess in which it now lies is not its original resting-place. The tomb on the east is that of Bishop Creyghton († 1672), who was dean at the time when the poems were written. The tomb on the west, which projects a little in front of the recess, is that of Bishop Berkeley, who died in 1581: but in Huish's time it was still in its original place between the two easternmost columns of the presbytery. Indeed Collinson (1791) describes it as still there; but by 1809, as we learn from the first edition of John Davis's *Guide*, it had been moved to make room for the monument erected to Bishop Kidder by the instructions of his daughter, who died in 1728.

Before we cite the poem a word may be said as to the designation of this chapel as the Chapel of Corpus Christi. The inscription in the glass is no longer there to attest it. But the title occurs twice in the documents of the dean and chapter.

In 1488 John Austell, canon residentiary, was given leave to have his burial in the Chapel of Corpus Christi within the cathedral church (*Cal. of Wells MSS.*, II, 111): in his will, however, dated 1498 (*S.R.S.*, XVI, 370), he desires to be buried 'in the Chapel of the Holy Ghost,<sup>1</sup> on the north side of the high altar.' In 1512 a place of burial was granted to Mr. Thomas Goldwege 'in the Chapel of Corpus Christi on the north part of the church' (*Cal.*, II, 232).

Now in the first part of the fourteenth century two altars were erected in the eastern aisle of the main north transept, on the way leading to the chapter house: one of them was dedicated to the Holy Cross, the other (where Bishop Still's monument now is) to Corpus Christi. In 1513, however, we find Bishop Cornish in his will (*S.R.S.*, XIX, 167) speaking of an alternative site for his tomb between the altars of Holy Cross and St. David. The explanation of this otherwise puzzling statement may be that, when a Chapel of Corpus Christi was founded in the north part of the choir transept, the earlier altar of Corpus Christi was assigned to St. David.

In Capellâ Corporis Christi ad Euro-Notum extra<sup>2</sup> Presbyterii.  
Epitaphium duorum ignoti nominis.<sup>3</sup>

Corporis hanc Christi titulo notam esse Capellam  
Inscriptum fragili legimus ante vitro:  
In quâ momenti duo conspicienda prioris,  
At diversimodi sunt monumenta sitûs:  
Unum propter humum in muro et depressius illud;  
Intra aliud celsum ferrea clathra magis.  
Qui fuerint, benè non constat, dignoscitur autem  
Non minimæ ex statutis hosce fuisse notæ.  
Nomina celantur mundo: celata nec obsunt,  
Cœlata in cœlis si meliore stylo:

1. This designation does not seem to occur elsewhere.

2. *Chori* was first written; then over it *extra*.

3. I cannot but think that in the titles of both poems the aged author has confused the north and south sides of the church. *Euro-Notus* means 'south-east,' and *ad Aquilonem* 'northwards': but he surely means the opposite in both cases.

Corporis et Christi plus membra fuisse juvabit,  
Corporis in Christi quàm jacuisse Sacro :  
His nec enim prodest statua alta, humilisque nocebit ;  
Qui debent homines surgere, non statuæ.

We now come to our second poem. It describes the accidental discovery in an arched recess, when Alexander Huish was a boy, of a fresco which had been covered over with plaster or whitewash. When nimble fingers had picked it bare, there was disclosed a Crucifix surrounded by all the Instruments of the Passion, and beneath it was a Sepulchre. Within two days the whole was obliterated by order of the Dean.

The description suggests an Easter Sepulchre, such as was commonly provided on the north side of a church. The title of the poem is difficult to interpret ; but the fifteenth-century recess in the north wall of the chapel which we have been considering suggests itself as most obviously fulfilling the requirements. There is unhappily no trace whatever now of any fresco on the wall.

The poem makes no mention of the effigy which now lies in this recess. But sixty years may well have intervened between the discovery of the fresco and the writing of the poem which speaks of the nameless effigy 'low down and in the wall.' And, as we have already said, the effigy may have lain in some other recess in the same wall, before the two episcopal monuments were set up in this chapel.

Infra partem muri arcuatam extra Chorum, Capellam Corporis Christi ad Aquilonem respicientem. Historia Passionis Christi depicta.

---

Passio dum Christi depicta coloribus olim  
Heicè fuit vivis, cum omnibus articulis ;  
Hæc super-inducto crusto disparuit albo  
Nec pars ulla ejus conspicienda fuit.  
Pars crusti cecidit parva, apparetque rubellus  
Nescio quis subtis sanguineusque color.  
Quod qui cernebant, digitis atque unguibus album  
Abradunt leviter, quicquid erat reliquum.  
De Christo passo paries jam nudus apertam  
Plenamque ante oculos exhibet historiam.

Tanquam miraculi vulgatur fama per urbem :  
 Accurrunt homines ; tunc puer ipse et ego.  
 Crux hinc et Christi quæ sunt Insignia dicta  
 Cum Cruce et ad vivum expressa fuere simul.  
 Cum sudore calix, funes, laterna facesque :  
 Cum gallo lapsi commonitore Petri.  
 Virgæ hinc cum flagris, è spinis plexa corona ;  
 Coccinea hinc vestis ludicra et alba simul [data].  
 Inque loco sceptri regalis, vilis arundo,  
 Quâ caput incussum, sputa alapæque graves.  
 Judicis hic etiam pelvis descripta Pilati,  
 Et non ablato crimine, lota manus.  
 Instrumenta necis ; cum forfice, malleus, atque  
 Clavi ; pro tunicâ hinc alea jacta fuit.  
 Spongia quinetiam fuit hinc cum felle et aceto ;  
 Militis et penetrans Lancea dira latus.  
 Hæc, quantum memini, saltem ex his plurima in isto,  
 Quæque solent alibi, scripta fuere loco :  
 Subtus et hæc, si non me fallit imago, Sepulchrum  
 Subjectum, cui Crux insereretur, erat.  
 Spargitur interea, quàm verè ignoro, fuisse,  
 Illi qui cultum servitiumque darent.  
 Fertur ad Ecclesiæ res quàm citò tota Decanum :  
 Ille quid ? actutum convocat artificem :  
 Datque in mandatis, Cædat : cæditque, supersit  
 Ut Crucis aut Fixi nè minimum historiæ :  
 Atque hæc, ut memini, Inventæ Crucis atque Recisæ  
 Res infra binos acta, peracta, dies.  
 Quisquis es, hæc ævi quàm sis brevis, à Cruce discas ;  
 Nunc homo, mox nec homo, nec quid habens hominis.  
 Prodiit ex utero muri hujus Ephemera proles ;  
 Crux hodiè, cràs nec Crux, nec ei similis :  
 Quæ calce hic Pariâ multos obducta per annos,  
 Luces haud totas vidit aperta duas,  
 Occidit in cunis plagis confossa tot Infans,  
 Quot, nisi qui Fixus, vulnera nemo tulit.  
 Quique erat in causa tumulatus hic ipse Decanus  
 Furtivè propter debita nocte fuit :  
 Justo judicio inflictum quod vulgus in ipsum  
 Ob deformatam hanc censuit esse Crucem.  
 Læsa ut Crux, Christus quâ mundi debita solvit,  
 Non solvendi hujus debita causa foret ;



Qui reus atque Crucis Christi fuit atque Sepulehri,  
Vix ut gauderet pro tumulo ipse loco ;  
Transversim graduum qui in Virginis æde sepultus,  
Adversus Christi tam Crucis et Tumuli.  
Sic lapis impositus, quamvis nunc indè remotus,  
Atque etiam gradibus reddita forma prior.

(3) Several questions still call for an answer :

(a) If this effigy was nameless in 1667, how did Collinson come by his identification of it with John de Middleton, or Milton ?

(b) Where did he acquire his information that John de Middleton 'assumed the habit of a friar-minor' ?

(c) At what exact date was Bishop Berkeley's monument moved into this chapel from its place in the presbytery, in order to make room for Bishop Kidder's ?

(d) Where was Bishop Kidder's monument between the years c. 1728—c. 1809 ?

If we look at John Carter's plan of the cathedral church which he made (c. 1794) for the Society of Antiquaries—the eastern portion of which was reproduced to illustrate the article on 'Saxon Bishops of Wells' in *Archæologia*, LXV, 110—we find a monument with a figure on it in the position in the presbytery in which Collinson (1791) places Bishop Berkeley's tomb : but this tomb never had an effigy on it. In the same plan there is a monument with a figure on it where Bishop Berkeley's tomb now stands.

As to Bishop Kidder, Collinson (III, 400) only says : 'At the upper end of the north aisle lies Bishop Kidder.' Carter's plan shews nothing in this place.

In view of this confusion I invited the skilled assistance of Mr. A. B. Connor of Weston-super-Mare, who had already studied some of Carter's notes and sketches in the British Museum in connexion with attempts to trace ancient brasses. The result of his research throws light on some of our questions, though it leaves some as yet unanswered.

So much information is contained in Mr. Connor's notes that I make no apology for reproducing them in full.

## BRITISH MUSEUM.

*Additional MS.* 29932 is one of a series of small folio volumes made up from Carter's sketch-books.

The volume containing Wells is entitled—A Collection of Sketches | relating to the Antiquities of this Kingdom taken from the real objects | in | 1794 | forming | Vol<sup>e</sup> the Sixteenth.

At the beginning of the book is a verbal description of the monuments with brief historical notes, followed by numerous pencil sketches—plans, elevations and architectural details of the Cathedral, Bishop's Palace, Deanery, Vicars' Close and Prebendal Houses.

Folios 58—62 are sketches with measurements of monuments, brasses and matrices, numbered in red pencil to correspond with similar numbers in the large plan in *MS.* 29943, referred to later.

There is a small sketch-plan, shewing the situation of monuments, lettered to refer to a key below.

*Additional MS.* 29943 is one of a series of huge volumes, containing sketches too large for inclusion in the smaller volumes.

There is a very large plan of the Cathedral, shewing all monuments and slabs, numbered in red pencil to refer to the sketches in the smaller volume mentioned above. There are also large plans and elevations of the whole of the Liberty, and separate ones of the Bishop's Palace, Deanery and Vicars' Close, including the Chapter-house and Chain-gate.

## LIBRARY OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES.

One of a series of large book-boxes contains very beautiful drawings—plans and elevations, for which the drawings in the British Museum were the working-sketches.

Among them is a plan of the Chapter-house and surroundings on a large scale, showing the Chapel of St John the Baptist.

## MONUMENT OF BISHOP BERKELEY.

*Add. MS.* 29932. The notes at the beginning of the volume say: "Next above these [Saxon bishops in the North Choir Aisle] between two pillars under a neat [tomb] railed with Iron Bp. Ralph de Salopia who died August 14<sup>th</sup> 1363, above him behind the alter hangings opposite to Bp. Still is a plain tomb for Bp. Gilbert Berkeley who died Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1581."

The sketch-plan shows his monument between the two easternmost pillars of the presbytery on the North side.

*Add. MS.* 29943. The large plan of the Cathedral shows this position occupied by a tomb with effigy.

THE SO-CALLED MILTON, OR MIDDLETON, MONUMENT.

*Add. MS.* 29932. The notes at the beginning of the volume say : " In the North Chapel above the Choir is the Tomb and effigies of Dean Forrest who died March 25<sup>th</sup> 1446. In the said Chapel against the wall under an arch a Tomb seemingly as ancient as the Chapel lies as supposed Frier Milton by whose name tradition says this Chappel is called. I presume he was the same person as John de Middelton or Milton whom I find collated to the Chancellorship año 1337 which he soon quitted & as I guess took upon him the Habit of a Frier minor which was very common in this age and dying in some Neighbouring Cell was here buried by his Direction given in his lifetime he having provably while he belong[ed] to this Church provided himself a monument in it. At his feet is a monument for Bp. Creighton," etc.

The sketch-plan shows this in the centre of the North wall of the Chapel.

*Society of Antiquaries* plan of the Chapter-house and Chapel shows this monument in the North-West Corner.