

## King James I. and St. Albans Abbey.

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**A**S the benefactions of King James I to St. Albans Abbey form a somewhat obscure subject, I may be forgiven if I venture to describe the steps by which my attention was drawn to this detail of the history of the Abbey. A few years ago I had the good fortune to discover the long-lost Churchwardens' Book of Brington, Northamptonshire; it contained the accounts of the church from 1599 to 1687, and among many interesting details there were three payments for repairs of the Church at St. Albans in the year 1613; two of these are shown in the illustration; the first, near the foot of the left-hand page, reads :—

Item. p<sup>d</sup> to. the Churche of . St. albones—vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>

This was early in the year, before Easter. The lower part of the next page was cut out by some person who had used it for making a " memorandum "; this enables us to show the second entry about St. Albans, which will be seen on the right-hand page, just below the cut edge :

Item p<sup>d</sup> to. the parrishe of St Albomes the—  
xxiiiij<sup>th</sup> of June. 1613.).....<sup>v</sup>J<sup>s</sup> <sup>vii</sup>J<sup>d</sup>

The third and final payment was made towards the end of October :—

Item p<sup>d</sup>. to St Albones Churche for the bilding—iiij<sup>s</sup> iiiij<sup>d</sup>

There were thus three sums paid, two of 6s. 8d. and one of 3s. 4d., the total amounting to 16s. 8d., a much larger sum than usual, as most of the collectors had to be content with 2s. 6d. or less.<sup>1</sup>

Church Briefs were issued by royal licence, without whifh no one was allowed to make collections outside

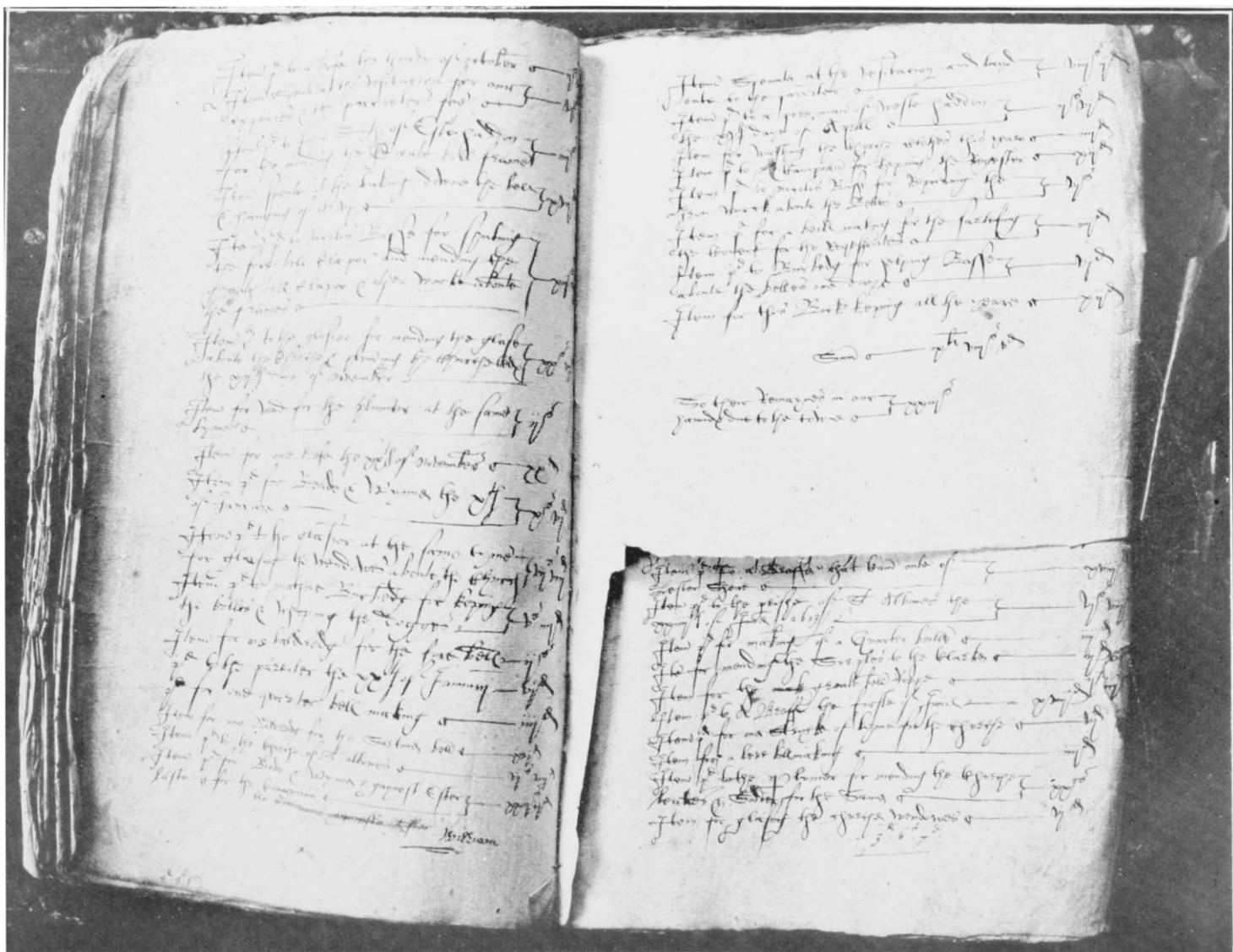
<sup>1</sup> At the top of the right-hand page there is an entry of 2s 6d. paid to a " brefe." The eleventh entry on this page reads, " Item pd to . mathue Burbedg for keping the belles & wheping the dogges— 5s 4d." The sexton was provided with a whip for driving dogs away from the church during services, and had an annual stipend of 8d. for this work.

his own parish; originally they had been sent out by the Pope, who sometimes found it easier to send them out than to gather in the proceeds : in 1233 a papal mandate was sent to the Abbot of St. Albans " to compel those who detain alms collected for the hospital of Altopascio to give them up."\* In 1536 Henry VIII declared papal briefs void, thereby diverting fees to the royal coffers. In the time of James I the brief was a printed paper, a copy of which was sent to each church, setting forth the royal licence and the purpose for which alms were requested, with a blank space at the foot in which the churchwardens had to certify that a stated sum had been collected after the reading of the brief at Divine Service : there is a note in the Prayer Book to direct that briefs are to be read after the Nicene Creed, as being " enjoined by the King." They were abolished in 1827. The most complete list of these briefs and of the payments made for them is given in Bewes' *Church Briefs*, which mentions some later briefs for the repair of St. Albans Abbey in 1680, 1734, and 1764, but has no reference to this early brief. So far as I have been able to discover, these entries in the Brington book are the only churchwardens' accounts of this 1613 brief known to exist.

Brington has pleasant associations with St. Albans, commemorated by the names of some of the streets of St. Albans; Althorp, the home of Earl Spencer, is in the parish; in the Spencer Chapel of Brington Church there is a beautiful monument by Flaxman to the memory of the Countess Spencer who planted the cedar trees in the Sumpter Yard of the Abbey and in front of the Marlborough Almshouses. Dr. Benjamin Preedy, Head Master of St. Albans School, was appointed Rector of Brington in 1775, and left a charming list of the characters of his parishioners, in which one of them is immortalised as " a good housewife, but plain." He was succeeded at Brington by his nephew, who had been a curate of St. Stephens Church, St. Albans.

The Brington book revealed the interesting fact that Robert Washington, great-uncle of the Washington who emigrated to Virginia, was churchwarden in 1601; the

\* Bewes, page 8.



CHURCHWARDENS' BOOK OF GREAT BRINGTON.

Two payments for repairs of St. Albans Abbey, 1613.



churchwardens were chosen afresh each year, with the result that some of them were illiterate and far from expert at finance : Robert Washington kept a fatherly eye on his successors and often came to the rescue when their " sum total " was at fault; he had to balance the accounts for 1612, and it will be noticed that the total at the foot of the right-hand page of our illustration, £3. 6. 7., is written in Arabic numerals, the rest of the page being in the old Roman notation. The Arabic system, invented by some unknown genius who introduced the use of 0 for indicating such numbers as 10, was slowly superseding the clumsy methods of calculation with Roman figures and the chequer-board kept by the village inn; Robert Washington incidentally shows how difficult it was to grasp the new method at first, for he writes 1601 as i6i. He seems to have been the mainstay of the parish in dealing with such conundrums as briefs, which were often handed to his care; and there can be little doubt that he took a prominent part in securing the payment for St. Albans Abbey.

The next light on the subject came from a memorial of black marble on the chancel wall of St. Stephen's Church; this was found in 1913 by the late Reverend F. Fielding Ould in the belfry-loft, where it lay in fragments; it was pieced together most successfully, and bears this inscription :—

## M E M O R A E     S A C R V M

VNDER THIS MARBLE LIETH THE BODY OF IAMES  
 ROLFE ESQ., OFFICIAL OF THE ARCHDEACONRY  
 OF S<sup>T</sup> ALBANS COMMISSARIE OF THE ARCHDEA-  
 CONRY OF HVNTINGDON AND ONE OF THE  
 MAISTERS OF THE CHANCERIE WHOE LIVED LXV  
 YEARES, AND DIED THE XXVII<sup>TH</sup> OF OCTOBER A°DNI  
 MDCXXX

## E P I T A P H I V M

IAMES art thou heere? and must this Church of Steven  
 Inshrine thy bodie now thy soul<sup>s</sup> in heaven?  
 Had not thy monument binn better fixt  
 Neere unto that of Abbott Iohn the Sixt  
 By Albans Shrine where thy religious care

Redeem<sup>d</sup> those sacred reliques from dispaire,  
 No' thou wast wise and sure thou thoughtes' it better  
 To make each Proto-Martyrs church thy debtor.  
 That glories kept by thee from ruin<sup>s</sup> rust,  
 And this may glorie that it keepes thy dust.

M<sup>RIS</sup> GRACE ROLFE IN A PIOVS LOVE TO  
 THE WORTHY MEMORIE OF HER DECEASED  
 HVS BAND ERECTED THIS MONVMENT.

Many of James Rolfe's activities are traced in the *Records of the Old Archdeaconry of St. Albans*, from which we learn that in 1626 he was living at " St. Julians nere unto St. Albans;"\* the inscription consoles him for having to be content with his parish church as his place of burial. It seems probable that James Rolfe had charge of the collection for the Abbey, no light task, and that he superintended the repairs. The chief interest of this inscription, however, is that it indicates the part of the Abbey that was saved from ruin; the shrine, as we now know it, was not standing then, so that the reference must be to the Saint's Chapel and the chantry of Abbot John de Wheathampstead. As there is no sign of Jacobean restoration-work in this part of the Abbey, I thought it probable that the roof must have been at fault; Captain \V. H. R. Blacking has very kindly considered the question from the standpoint of his architectural knowledge of the Abbey, and is inclined to think that the principal work must have been the restoration of the roof of this part.

The next help came from the loan of a little book, *The History of Verulam and St. Alban's*, published by S. G. Shaw in 1815, from which it is clear that these repairs were commemorated by an inscription in the Abbey, beneath one of the windows; Mr. J. T. Watkins, the Head Verger of the Abbey, tells me that the window in question was the one above the South Door, near the cedar tree; this window was entirely remodelled by Lord Grimthorpe, so that the early description has a special interest: " In one of these windows was a representation of the martyrdom of St. Alban, in painted glass : only a few fragments of which remain in the crockets. On

\* Page 155, No. 258.

the wall below was the following inscription, now almost defaced :

" MDCXXIII

"This image of our frailty, painted glass,  
Shews where the life and death of Alban was.  
A knight beheads the Martyr; but so soon,  
His eyes dropt out to see what he had done;  
And leaving their own head, seem'd with a tear  
To wail the other head laid mangled there;  
Because, before, his eyes no tear would shed,  
His eyes themselves like tears fall from his head.  
Oh ! bloody fact, that while St. Albans dies,  
The murderer himself weeps out his eyes.

In zeal to Heav'n, where holy Alban's bones  
Were buried, Offa rais'd this heap of stones;  
Which, after by devouring Time abused,  
Into the dying parts had life infused  
By James the First, of England, to become  
The glory of Alban's Proto-martyrdom.

" This alludes to some repairs which the Church underwent in the time of James, and which, by the most gross flattery, were thus attributed to that King."

From this we gather that the repairs were completed by 1623; the inscription apparently was placed near to the part of the Abbey which had been preserved. The two inscriptions which have been quoted, from the Abbey and St. Stephens, seem to have been concocted by the same poetical genius.

The information in this little book is derived from Carter's monumental work on the Abbey, which bears the date 1810, as I am informed by Mr. Watkins, to whose extensive knowledge I owe the next item, which is buried away in a footnote to a late edition (1887) of Dr. H. J. B. Nicholson's *The Abbey of St. Alban*: " In A.D. 1612—James the First, by brief. That monarch took a personal view of the structure as he made his progress into the north, and ' out of his princely zeal and pious inclination to preserve so antient a monument and memorable witness of the first conversion of this Kingdom from

paganisme to Christianity, granted a Brief for collections to be made throughout England and Wales, for the speedy repair of the same; and about two thousand pounds were thus collected; which was most justly and truly expended' (An Old MS)." I have not been able to find the old manuscript from which this is quoted. The date of the royal visit to the Abbey is given by Nichols, *Progresses of King James I*, vol. II, p. 451 : " On the 20th of July (1612), the King left Theobalds and proceeded to St. Alban's; but I have not discovered whether he slept in the Town, or at Sir Francis Bacon's at Gorhambury."

King James I is not highly esteemed by our historians; yet the early years of his reign were distinguished by his statesmanlike efforts to allay religious discord by securing a new translation of the Bible, resulting in the publication of the Authorised Version. " that stateliest monument of English prose," in 1611. His visit to the Abbey occurred in the following year, and it is pleasant to find that the latter part of his reign was marked by his care for the most celebrated of England's monuments.