

St. Peter's Church, St. Albans: Some Recent Discoveries

BY CHARLES E. JONES, F.S.A.

THE Pemberton family was well known in St. Albans and the county during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sir Goddard Pemberton, Lord of the Manor of Shelton in Bedfordshire, was Sheriff of Hertfordshire in 1615; his son Roger held the same office in 1620; his grandson Ralph was Mayor of St. Albans in 1627 and 1638; while his great-grandson, Sir Francis Pemberton, comes into English history as a Lord Chief Justice who was removed from the Bench and the Privy Council in 1683 for want of zeal against Lord Russell, resumed practice as counsel and, by his successful defence of the seven bishops, helped to bring about the revolution of 1688. He died at Highgate in 1697.¹

But it is with Roger Pemberton that we are at present concerned. He lived in St. Peter's Street, for we read that on December 7th, 1612, he was "presented" for putting posts or rails in front of his house in that thoroughfare.² He was in trouble again on June 12th, 1620, when he was reported by the viewers of St. Peter's parish for having a post standing in the street before his house to the annoyance of his Majesty's liege subjects, and timber lying at the sawpit in St. Peter's Street.³

Roger died on November 13th, 1627, in the 72nd year of his age, leaving a Will dated exactly three years previously, with a codicil added six days before his death. The Will is a lengthy document beginning with a confession of faith consisting of some 300 words, followed by an expression of his wish "to bee interred in the p'ish Church of St. Mary-Bowe London if it maie conveniently bee so,⁴ otherwise in such other place as

¹ *Memorial Brasses in Hertfordshire Churches*, by W. F. Andrews.

² *Corporation Records of St. Albans*, by A. E. Gibbs, p. 61.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴ *Inq. post mortem*, 6 Car I, pt. 13, No. 50, shows that he held property in that parish. See *Herts. Genealogist and Antiquary*, vol. iii, p. 242.

shalbe thought fitt and convenient by mine Executors in a decent manner without any vaine pompe or shew." He directs that almshouses for "sixe poor old Widdowes" shall be built on land he had bought for the purpose in Bowgate, as the north end of St. Peter's Street was then called. The endowment was £30 per annum, out of which £1 was to be paid to each inmate yearly "towardre their clothes hose shoes and linnen," as well as £4 each for "meate breade drincke and firing." Conditions of residence were that the widows must not be less than sixty years of age and "have bynne and then shalbe of good honest lyfe and behaviour and cyvill carriage . . . peaceable and quiet." If any pensioner made herself unpleasant to the others she was to lose a half-year's cash allowance and, unless she mended her ways during the six months' probation, was to be turned out. The Will also laid down that the women must attend "to heare divine service and sermons in the p'ish Church of St. Peter's every Sundaie."⁵

And so the Pemberton Almshouses were built nearly opposite the west end of St. Peter's Church and remain to-day as a very pleasing memorial of Roger Pemberton.

Apparently, burial at St. Mary-le-Bow presented some difficulty, for Roger was interred under the floor of the south aisle of St. Peter's and over the grave was placed a brass consisting of four parts:—

1. Effigy of Roger Pemberton (18" high).
2. Effigy of Elizabeth, his wife (18" high).
3. Figures of their six children⁶ (on a plate 12" by 12").
4. An inscription (on a plate 24" by 10").

Chauncy, in his *Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire* (1700) records the inscription, which evidently was at that time still in position below Nos. 1, 2 and 3, while Clutterbuck's *History of Hertfordshire* (1815) gives details of the brass and mentions that No. 4 is a palimpsest, a discovery that may well have been made during repairs to the church.⁷

⁵ I am indebted to Miss H. M. M. Lane for kindly supplying me with a copy of the Will.

⁶ Ralph, Robert, John, Elizabeth (died in infancy), Elizabeth and Tecla.

⁷ Clutterbuck's remarks (vol. i, pp. 118 and 119) with regard to the Rev. Charles Ray's tomb are apparently incorrect.

At some later date the plate bearing the inscription disappeared and the remainder of the brass was taken up and placed in a locker in the church. In 1905 Mr. Willoughby Arthur Pemberton, a descendant, had the three parts placed on a tablet which was affixed to the east wall of the south aisle, some thirteen feet to the east of the grave, the missing inscription being replaced by a modern copy bearing the words recorded in Chauncy's history.

Recently one of our members discovered the missing portion among some builders' material and restored it to St. Peter's Church, where it has now been placed below the memorial and hinged in such a way that both sides can be seen.

The obverse, in Roman letter, reads as follows:—

MEMORIAE & VIRTVTIS SACRVM :
 HERE LYETH ROGER PEMBERTON ESQ,
 SOMETyme HIGHE SHEREIFE OF THIS
 COVNTY WHOE BY HIS LASTE WILL
 ORDAYNED SIX ALMES HOWSES TO BE
 BVILT NEERE THIS CHVRCHE FOR SIX
 POORE WIDOWES AND HATHE GIVEN OWT
 OF HIS MANNO OF SHELTON IN THE
 COVNTYE OF BEDD THIRTYE POWNDES
 PERANNVM FOREVER FOR THEIRE MAYN-
 TENANCE TO WHOSE PIOVS MEMORYE
 ELIZABETH HIS LOVEINGE WYFE AND
 RAPHE PEMBERTON THEIRE DVTYFVLL
 SONNE MAIOR OF THIS TOWNE, EXECV-
 TORS OF HIS LAST WILL HAVE DEDI-
 CATED THIS REMEMBRANCE, HEE LIVED
 WELL & DEPARTED THIS LYFE THE 13 OF
 NOVEMBER 1627 IN THE 72 YEARE OF HIS
 AGE. HEERE NOWE HIS BODY RESTES IN
 EXPECTACION OF A IOYFVLL RESVRREC-
 TION.



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THE PEMBERTON ALMSHOUSES, ST. ALBANS.

[*Photo F. Henshaw.*]



• MEMORIE & VIRTUTIS SACRVM: •

HERE LYETH ROGER PEMBERTON ESQ. SOMETyme HIGH SHERIFFE OF THIS COVNTY WHOE BY HIS LASTE WILL ORDAYNED SIX ALMES HOWSES TO BE BVILT NEERE THIS CIVRCHE FOR SIX POORE WIDOWES & HATH GIVEN OWT OF HIS MANNOR OF SHELTON IN THE COVNTYE OF BEDD THIRTYE POWNDES PER ANNUM FOREVER FOR THEIR MAYNTENANCE TO WHOSE PIOUS MEMORYE ELIZABETH HIS LOVEINGE WIFE & RAPH. PEMBERTON THEIR DVTYFVLL SONE MAIO^r OF THIS TOWNE, EXECVTORS OF HIS LAST WILL HAVE DEDICATED THIS REMEMBRANCE, HE LIVED WEIL & DEPARTED THIS LYFE THE 13 OF NOVEMBER 1627 IN THE 72 YEARE OF HIS AGE HERE NOWE HIS BODY RESTE IN EXPECTACION OF A IOYFVLL RESVRRECTION

OBVERSE.

here lyeth John Ball brackemaker which gave to the
plowst wardens of this church x^s yearly for a mettall
obite to be kepte for the soules of hys wyf Elizabeth hys
wyf and John ball hys tader & Thymon hys moder
the said John decessed the xij day of Octobyr the yere of o^r
lord m^c lxxv on whose soules Ihu have mercy Amen

REVERSE.

PALIMPSEST BRASS IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, ST. ALBANS.



On the reverse, in Gothic letter, are the words :—

**Here lyeth John Ball brickemaker which gave to the
pson & wardens of this chirch Xs yerely for a ppetuall
obite to be kepte for the soulys of hym & Elizabeth his
wyf and John Ball his fader & Crystyan his moder & the
said John decessed the XIII day of Octobre the yere of our
Lord MCCC on whose soules Ihu have mercy. Amen.**

Unfortunately I have been unable, so far, to learn anything with regard to John Ball, nor can his will be found at Somerset House or at Lincoln. The Charity Commission, when drawing up a new scheme by which the ten shillings per annum was directed to be used for the benefit of the poor, do not appear to have had before them a copy of the will.⁸ The benefaction was a rent-charge issuing out of a field known by the name of Key Field, situate between the old and new London roads.

Since the Ball/Pemberton brass was found, two other memorials have come to light in the vestry of the church. One is of lead, and bears, in cursive characters, the following inscription :—

GULIELMUS
DOBYNS
ARMIGER OBIIT
25 JANU^{RY}
1708

In the Parish Register the burial is thus recorded :—

Feb. 1, 1708-9 Wm. Dobyns Esqr. from Lincoln's Inn, London (noe certif.).

To the east of the chancel there lies in the churchyard a stone, which Cussans says was originally in the church itself, inscribed with the words :—

William Dobyns of Lincolns Inn Esq. dyed ye
25th of January 1708-9. He lyes Buried
here as hee desired neere the Ashes of four of
his Children.

⁸ *Reports of the Commissioners—Charities and Education—for the county of Hertford*, vol. xiv, 1815-1839. Key Field was then the property of Mr. David Watson.

We meet the name of William Dobyys again in the following inscriptions:—

On the east face of the north pier of the chancel arch:—

Two Daughters of William Dobyys Esq. and Elisabeth his Wife (both of her name) lye near this place in y^e same grave with their brothers Abraham & Robert. The Eldest Daughter was born 26th Jan: 1682-3 and dyed 12th of Feb: Following. The youngest was born 21th of Octob^r 1685 and dyed 10th of July 1686. All these four Children (as also their Brothers William and Henry yett liveing) were Nursed in this Towne of St. Albans.

Beneath is this tablet:—

Here lyes buried Abraham Dobyys second sonn of William Dobyys of Lincolns Inn in the Couty of Middlesex esq. by Elisabeth his wife, daughter of Henry Shelley of Lewes in the couty of Sussex, esq. This child was born y^e 25th day of October 1677 and dyed y^e 25th day of December following. Here lyes also Robert four^h sonn of the above named William & Elizabeth Dobyys. He dyed the 20th day of July 1681 aged five weekes.

There are twenty-three entries in the St. Peter's registers between the years 1673 and 1738, relating to the Dobyys family, and fourteen of these record burials. Henry Dobyys was Mayor of St. Albans in 1690 and again in 1702, while the virtues of Lieut.-Col. William Dobyys, who died in 1738 at the age of eighty-eight, are very fully extolled on a memorial on the east wall of the north aisle.

The third memorial found is of brass, and bears the arms of Wyndham impaling Dobyys,⁹ with the inscription:—

M^{RS}. ELIZTH. WINDHAM
DIED MARCH Y^e 5th,
1735
IN THE 43D. YEAR
OF HER AGE.

⁹ Azure a chevron between three lions' heads erased Or, impaling Azure a chevron between three annulets Or.

The entry in the Parish Register reads :—

Mch. 15. 1735-6. Mrs. Elizabeth Wyndham from
London,

and the arms show that she was one of the Dobyns
family.

It is to be hoped that information with regard to John
Ball may yet come to light, and any assistance that our
members can render will be welcome.

*[I wish to express my thanks to the Monumental Brass Society for lending
the two blocks of the Ball Pemberton brass, and to Mr. F. Henshaw for
allowing me to use his photograph of the Pemberton Almshouses.]*