

SOME NEW DOCUMENTS CONCERNING  
THE BUILDING OF COWLING CASTLE  
AND COBHAM COLLEGE

BY D. KNOOP, G. P. JONES AND N. B. LEWIS.

THE architectural achievements of John, lord Cobham, the fourteenth century lord of Cobham and Cowling, have received frequent attention in the pages of *Archæologia Cantiana*,<sup>1</sup> and although lord Cobham is most widely known for the part he played in the national politics of Richard II's reign, his erection of the castle at Cowling and of the college at Cobham constitute, from the local point of view, a claim to remembrance no less valid and enduring.

In an early volume of *Archæologia Cantiana*<sup>2</sup> some light was thrown on the building operations at Cowling by the printing of a number of contemporary masons' receipts and indentures preserved among the muniments at Surrenden. It is now possible to add some further details from a similar collection of deeds preserved among the Harleian Charters in the British Museum<sup>3</sup> and printed in full in a recent issue of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*.<sup>4</sup>

One of these (Harl. Chart. 48.E.46) dated the 25th of January, 1383, refers to Cobham College, and is a receipt by a local mason, Robert atte Pette of "Lodisdon" (i.e. Luddesdown, two miles south of Cobham), for £2 2s. 6d. for work done in the "colegue et skolehous de Cobham." The nature of the work is not specified in the receipt but presumably it was some small repair or alteration needed since

<sup>1</sup> E.g. II, 95 ; XI, 77 and 128 ; XVIII, 447 ; and XXVII, 64 and 110.

<sup>2</sup> II, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Harleian Charters 48.E.37, 39, 41, 42, 44 and 46.

<sup>4</sup> "Some building activities of John, lord Cobham," by D. Knoop, G. P. Jones and N. B. Lewis, in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* (being the transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge), Vol. XLV, pt. i. pp. 48-53.

the erection in 1362.<sup>1</sup> The mason, Robert, does not seem to figure in any other of lord Cobham's building transactions, but he may have belonged to the same family as Thomas atte Pette, who appears in the Fabric Roll of Rochester Castle as a supplier of stone.<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of the six new documents all deal with Cowling Castle and give us further insight into the details of its erection. Some of the old documents record payments to the London mason, Thomas Wreck, and the London plumber, William Roberts, and it is, perhaps, more likely that their work was done on Cobham's London property than on his castle in Kent.<sup>3</sup> But the documents which do explicitly deal with Cowling show that the principal contractor was William Sharnhale, to whom lord Cobham owed no less a sum than £456 for his work there, while smaller amounts (ten marks, sixty shillings, eight pounds etc.) were paid to other workers, Thomas Crump, William Bestcherche and Lawrence atte Wood. One of the new documents (Harl. Chart. 48.E.39) also records a small payment of £10 to Sharnhale, though this amount is not necessarily to be added to the above total of his dues, since it was an advance payment made in December, 1381, for work to be done in the following season, and was very possibly included in the sum of £270.10.4. acknowledged in the following July.<sup>4</sup> The other four documents all deal with the work of Thomas Crump, and show that he took a much more considerable part in the building of the castle than the older documents indicated. One of these (Harl. Chart. 48.E.42),<sup>5</sup> is merely a bond for £60 given by Crump to Cobham in September, 1381, as surety for the fulfilment of his indentured contract to

<sup>1</sup> "The Chimney-piece in Cobham Hall," by Canon Scott-Robertson, *Arch. Cant.*, XVIII, 447.

<sup>2</sup> *Ars Quat. Cor.*, XLV, 50 and "The Fabric Roll of Rochester Castle," *Arch. Cant.*, II, 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ars Quat. Cor.*, loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, II, 98.

<sup>5</sup> It is not stated explicitly in Harl. Chart., 48.E.37, 41 and 42, that the payments are for work at Cowling, but the description of the work hardly leaves it in doubt.

make "machecolynges" before the following Christmas. Another (Harl. Chart. 48.E.41), dated on the 24th of September, 1381, is a receipt for £10 received by Crump in part payment of £30 due for making "machecolynges" while an endorsement on the document notes that Crump had subsequently received another £25 through Adam Colind, "irmonger."

But the most illuminating and interesting of the documents are the two indentures (Harl. Chart. 48.E.44 and 37), dated respectively the 26th of September and the 18th of October, 1381, which detail the work done or to be done and the payment to be received by Crump. The first contains Crump's account for building the great gateway of the castle, which, according to his measurement, contained eight and a quarter perches of wall in one tower, seven and three quarters in the other, and one perch of wall between the two, making a total of seventeen perches. For this he was to be paid at the rate of £2 per perch, so that with another £10 due for supplying freestone, he had earned £44. Since, however, he had already received £46.16.8., on account, that left him £2.16.8. in Cobham's debt, and when his measurements came to be checked by Henry Yevele, it was found that he had overestimated the extent of his building by more than two perches, so that out of the £46.16.8. he had received he had only earned £39. He was, moreover, in debt to Cobham for a "pasterne" (? a postern gate) in accordance with a previous indenture, and for 366 feet of corner-stone at 5d. a foot.

The second indenture specifies in very minute detail a number of smaller constructive works. Crump was to undertake ten "arketholes" each three feet long, without cross, and with fittings ("parail"), internally and externally: seven little doors ("petitz huis") each two and a half feet wide, of suitable height ("ove le hauteesse de les ditz huis come affiert"), with fittings internally and externally: fifty-four "nowalles" (newels, presumably for the winding stair of the towers), each four and a half feet long and seven inches high, and thirty other "nowells" three feet long and seven

inches high : fifty-three corbels, one foot square and “ of a good and suitable length ” for machicolations : and forty-two stones for half-arches, the said arches and corbels to be “ nettement chauffeiez.” For all this, and for carting the stone to Maidstone,<sup>1</sup> Crump was to receive £20.

Although, therefore, Crump’s activities were not on as large a scale as those of Sharnhale, he was entirely responsible for the building of the great gateway, and, apparently, for the machicolations and other fittings. This rather strange employment of two large-scale mason-contractors on the same building may perhaps be explained by a difference in the nature of the stone required for different parts of the work. One of Crump’s indentures<sup>2</sup> tells us that he was a local mason of Maidstone, and he may well have belonged to the same family as Ralph Crump, who in 1368 supplied hard stone from the quarries at Boughton (some four miles S. from Maidstone) for work at Rochester Castle.<sup>3</sup> If this surmise is correct, Thomas Crump was presumably called in as an auxiliary at Cowling, for those parts of the castle which required the special Boughton stone. It is, at any rate, interesting to know that one of the principal contractors was undoubtedly a local man.<sup>4</sup>

One other matter concerning which the new documents give corroborative detail is the relation of lord Cobham with Henry Yevele. The old documents showed that Yevele checked the measurements of Sharnhale’s work at Cowling. Another document among the Harleian Charters<sup>5</sup> shows that he designed some alterations made by Cobham to St. Dunstan’s Church in Tower Street, London (the street in

<sup>1</sup> Apparently the stone was taken from the quarry (see below) to Maidstone to be transported down the Medway. A later endorsement leaves it uncertain whether Crump was responsible for transporting the newels from Maidstone to Cowling or not.

<sup>2</sup> Harl. Chart., 48.E.44. [Ed.] The family were Otham masons.

<sup>3</sup> *Ars Quat. Cor.*, loc. cit. and *Arch. Cant.*, II, 112-4.

<sup>4</sup> Sharnhale was also, in all probability, a local man, though his residence is not stated in any of these deeds. His name, at any rate, appears in connection with work at Rochester in 1368. See *Ars. Quat. Cor.*, XLV, 51, and *Arch. Cant.*, II, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Harl. Chart., 48.E.43, printed in *Ars Quat. Cor.*, Vol. XLII, p. 111.

which Cobham had his town house)<sup>1</sup> and an entry on the Close Roll shows them associated in oversight of repairs at Canterbury in 1386.<sup>2</sup> The new documents, showing that Yevele also checked the measurements of Crump's work at Cowling (and evidently it was no mere formality), confirm the impression that he was "Cobham's architectural adviser, though whether he planned and designed Cowling Castle these documents do not show."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Harl. Chart., 48.E.42.

<sup>2</sup> Cal. of Close Rolls (1385-9), pp. 121 and 207.

<sup>3</sup> Cobham's choice of Yevele for this position is an indication of the keenness of his interest in architectural matters, Yevele being one of the leading masons of his day and carrying through important works for both Edward III and Richard II. For his career, see H. Wonnacott, "Henry Yevele, the King's Master Mason," in *Ars Quat. Cor.*, XXI, p. 244, and Knoop and Jones, "Henry Yevele and his Associates," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1935. The latter article contains some additional information concerning the Crump family.