

ON THE GHOSTS OF SOME BRASSES FORMERLY IN
CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

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IN April, 1920, I had the rare privilege of being conducted round the Cathedral by the late Ralph Griffin. As we were perambulating the exterior, he suddenly inquired whether I had ever seen the ghost of a brass, and on my replying in the negative, he led me (having first exacted a promise of secrecy) to the undercroft of Henry IV's Chantry. There, on the south wall, I beheld the outline of a large cross-legged knight, while on the east wall were imprints left by a number of smaller figures.

Being pledged to silence, I concluded that Mr. Griffin had it in mind to write something on the subject of these "ghosts", and it was not, therefore, till some time after his death that I mentioned them to Mr. R. H. D'Elboux, who had never heard of them, but went to investigate and reported that they were still visible. Later, in May, 1951, he and I made a joint inspection, as a result of which these photographs were taken.

There can be no doubt that a number of monumental brasses, which had been cast out of the interior, were once nailed up here; fragments of the nails and clamps still remain, hammered into the mortar between the building stones. They evidently remained in position for a considerable time, but I can find no record either of their erection at this spot or of their subsequent removal, though the former event must be presumed to have occurred before 1790.

The east wall, to which the smaller brasses were affixed, had, apparently not long beforehand, received a coat of plaster, and the brasses served to protect the plaster they covered from the discoloration that befell the rest of it, while on the unplastered south wall the reverse process occurred, the figure of the knight preserving the colour of the stone behind it, while most of the remainder, in the lapse of time, weathered to a lighter hue.

The following outlines are still recognizable :

I. ON SOUTH WALL (Pl. I)

1. ?Sir William de Septvans, 1323.

Effigy of a knight, bareheaded and cross-legged, in long surcoat with ailettes at the shoulders and large heater-shaped shield, rounded to the body, on the left arm. The bottom edge is not clearly defined, but the

length was approximately 75 in. and width across the elbows about 20. Both in shape and dimensions this figure corresponds almost exactly to that of Sir Robert de Septvans at Chartham (75 in. long by $19\frac{3}{4}$ in. across elbows), and both were evidently produced in the same workshop at about the same time.

A plan of the ledger-stones in the Cathedral, apparently made shortly before the Nave was re-floored, c. 1790, and still preserved in the Chapter Library, shows minute sketches of brasses for Sir William Septvans Senior (No. 44) and Sir William Septvans Junior (No. 43); these were for Sir William Septvans the second (1407) and his son, Sir William Septvans the third (1448), whose inscriptions are recorded by Weever. The former was great-grandson of Sir Robert, whose son, the first Sir William, died in 1323.

Weever does not mention any monument in the Cathedral for this Sir William, but the inscription belonging to the figure may have been lost before his time, and the records he made were in any case far from exhaustive. Neither do Richard Scarlett's notes on the Cathedral (Brit. Mus. Harl. MS. 1366), made a generation earlier, in 1599, refer to the first Sir William.

The style of the Chartham brass suggests a date some ten to twenty years later than that usually assigned (1306), and despite the silence of Scarlett and Weever, it looks as though two brasses were executed at the time of the first Sir William's death, one for himself, laid down in the Cathedral and now lost, and the other for Sir Robert his father, which still remains at Chartham.

I am told that, among the ignorant, the knight's "ghost" was, in comparatively recent times, still known as "Nell Cook"!

II. ON EAST WALL (Pl. II)

2. Civilian, Elizabethan, ?c. 1580; about 21 in. long by $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. across elbows.
3. ?Mouth scroll, fifteenth or early sixteenth century; about 9 in. by 1 in. To left of No. 2's head.
4. Inscription plate, date uncertain; about 5 in. by 17 in. Beneath No. 2.
5. Civilian, c. 1470-80, about 38 in. long by 11 in. across elbows.
6. Mouth scroll, fifteenth or early sixteenth century; about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $10\frac{1}{2}$ in. To right of No. 5's head.
7. Large roundel, date uncertain; diameter about 17 in. To right of No. 5.
8. Group of six or seven children (?sons), date uncertain; about 7 in. by 15 in. Under No. 7.



"GHOST" OF ? SIR WILLIAM DE SEPTVANS, 1323
(S. wall of Henry IV's Chantry)



THE SMALLER "GHOSTS"
(E. wall of Chantry)

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9. ?Early sixteenth-century lady ; about 36 in. by 12 in. across elbows. To right of No. 8.
10. Mouth scroll, fifteenth or early sixteenth century ; about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. To left of No. 9's head.
11. What *may* be the small figure of a lady in butterfly head-dress, kneeling at a prayer-desk, late fifteenth century ; about 12 in. by 6 in. Above No. 5.
12. Lower part of an effigy (?female), date uncertain ; about 18 in. long by 8 in. across foot. To right of No. 11.

There are remains of nails in other places on the undercroft walls, and also what may possibly be parts of other "ghosts", but of these I can make nothing, save that one, to left of No. 2, might conceivably be the imprint of an inscription plate, about 5 in. by 14 in.

The plan of the ledgers gives no help in identifying any of the "ghosts", but in the floor at north-west corner of Cloisters is a marble slab, $85\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 46 in., bearing indents for the brasses of a civilian and wife, c. 1470-80. The male effigy was 38 in. long by rather more than $10\frac{1}{2}$ in. across elbows, and No. 5 may possibly be his "ghost"; the wife's figure measured 36 in. by 9 in. Beneath them was a foot inscription (3 in. by 27 in.), and under this ? a representation of the Trinity (10 in. by 5 in.), below which a small kneeling figure (12 in. by 8 in.), apparently a priest, was shown, turned to dexter, between two groups of children (sons $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in., daughters $7\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $7\frac{3}{4}$ in.) and two prayer scrolls (16 in. by $1\frac{1}{4}$ in.). At the corners were ? the symbols of the Evangelists (6 in. by 6 in. each). This slab, which is figured in *Some Indents of Lost Brasses in Kent*, published by the late Ralph Griffin, F.S.A., in January, 1914, was formerly in the Chapter House.

I am indebted to Messrs. B. & W. Fisk-Moore, Ltd., for their excellent photographs of the "ghosts".