

HENRY YEVELE, ARCHITECT, AND HIS WORKS IN KENT.

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AMONG the English architects of the Middle Ages the figure of Henry Yevele stands out with marked individuality. Yevele is of great importance in our art history for several reasons, and not least because there is definite proof of his status as a designer. As has been pointed out by Professor Knoop and Mr. G. P. Jones in their latest account of his career,¹ "There can be no doubt that he was responsible for the design of that part of the church of St. Dunstan in Tower Street, London, which Nicholas Typerton, mason, in December 1381, undertook to erect for John, Lord Cobham, according to the design (*la devyse*) of Henry Yevele; . . . The work at Westminster Hall which was to be done according to a 'form and mould made by advice of Master Henry Zeveley' was that which Richard Washburn and John Swalwe, masons, undertook to erect in 1395. The 'form and mould' were to be delivered to the masons by Watkin Waldon (Walton), Yevele's warden, so that there can be no question that he was supplying the plan or design, and not merely giving advice."

Though such explicit statements are lacking in the case of other works known to have been carried out by him, comparison of the various buildings, tombs, and other features connected with his name shows clearly that he possessed a style as markedly individual and recognizable as that of any Renaissance architect such as Palladio or Wren. As in all cases, the problem of attribution is complicated by the existence of works by pupils and junior partners of the great master, whose styles were consciously and unconsciously copied from or founded upon his. It is as yet too early to form any definitive collection of his work, but the present essay is an attempt to gather the evidence, both documentary and stylistic, relating to his works in Kent, which included a large proportion of his output.

Yevele's career has formed the subject of several studies during the past century,² but up to now no evidence of his origin or early career has been forthcoming until he appears in London in 1356 as one of the chief mason hewers of the city. New light has, however, been thrown upon the problem by the evidence of the name itself, which first appears in the form "de Yeevelee" and later as Yeveley or

¹ D. Knoop and G. P. Jones: *An Introduction to Freemasonry*, 1937, 79.

² Notably by J. G. Nichols in *Lon. and Mddx. Arch. Soc. Trans.*, II, 259-66; by Professor A. F. Pollard in the *D.N.B.*; by Professor W. R. Lethaby in *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen*, and *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*; and by Professor D. Knoop and Mr. G. P. Jones in *R.I.B.A. Jnl.*, 25 May, 1935, and as an appendix to their *Introduction to Freemasonry*.

Zeveley, Yvele, Iveleghe, and Zyveley. Professor F. M. Stenton has recently studied these forms, and concludes¹ that the only known place-name which satisfies the conditions is Yeaveley, Derbyshire. This localization led to the discovery of a Roger and a Geoffrey "de Zeveleye," each of whom paid 18d. in the subsidy of 1327, at Uttoxeter, Staffs., only seven miles from Yeaveley.² Since Henry Yevele must have been born c. 1320, and mentions his parents "Roger and Marion" in his will, there is a strong probability that this Roger de Zeveleye is identical with his father.

Apart from works now lost, there is documentary evidence for attributing to Henry Yevele the nave, west cloister, and Abbot's House, at Westminster Abbey, begun about 1362;³ the original work of the London Charterhouse, 1371;⁴ the reconstruction of Westminster Hall, 1395;⁵ and in Westminster Abbey the three tombs of Edward III, Richard II,⁶ and Cardinal Langham,⁷ besides the works in Kent which will be considered in greater detail. Yevele also held certain offices: mason to Edward the Black Prince in 1359;⁸ King's Master Mason, 1360 to his death in 1400;⁹ Warden of London Bridge, 1365-1395;¹⁰ Master Mason to Westminster Abbey, c. 1372-1400;¹¹ in addition he is known to have worked for John of Gaunt and John, Lord Cobham, and to have been on terms of some intimacy with William of Wykeham.

Of particular importance in connection with his work in Kent are the offices he held under the Crown and under the Black Prince, and his association with Lord Cobham. The post of King's Master Mason was also referred to as that of "director of the works" or "devizer of masonry"¹² and it seems clear that long before Yevele's time it was approximately equivalent to the present-day position of Chief Architect in the Ministry of Works. The Master Mason was thus responsible for the design, erection and maintenance of Crown buildings, so far as technical matters were concerned, though where extensive timber work was required, he worked in association with the Chief Carpenter, as Yevele did with Hugh Herland at Westminster Hall. The medieval jurisdiction of the Master Mason was, however, usually

¹ In a letter to the present writer, dated 1st October, 1943.

² William Salt Soc., VII, p. 220.

³ W. R. Lethaby: *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*, 1925, pp. 136-52.

⁴ G. S. Davies: *Charterhouse in London*, pp. 9-10, 15-16.

⁵ Rymer's *Foedera*, III, IV, 105.

⁶ *Ibid.*; PRO, E.101/473/10.

⁷ Hist. MSS. Comm., 4th R., 179.

⁸ *Black Prince's Registers*, IV, 327.

⁹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1358-61, 462; 1367-70, 301.

¹⁰ D. Knoop and G. P. Jones: *An Introduction to Freemasonry*, p. 122, note 311.

¹¹ R. B. Rackham in *Proc. of the British Academy*, IV (1909-10), 10, 61.

¹² D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *op. cit.*, 77.

limited to England south of the Trent, separate officers being appointed for North and South Wales, and in the Palatine jurisdictions of Chester, Durham, and Lancaster.¹

There is thus a presumption that the Master Mason acted for all Crown works within his area, even where his name is not specifically mentioned in the accounts, and similarly the position of mason to the Prince of Wales would imply the design of works carried out for the Prince or on his estates.

The first Kentish work which is perhaps to be ascribed to Yevele is the famous castle at Queenborough in the Isle of Sheppey. The work began in 1361, and there is evidence that Master John Box, a mason who had been in the service of the Prior of Christchurch, Canterbury, and then in that of the Crown, in 1350, was in charge of the actual works from 1363 to 1369.² This by no means precludes the possibility of Yevele being the designer, for a work of such exceptional importance would require the constant attention of a resident master.

In or after 1363 the Black Prince's Chantry was begun in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral; the evidence here is stylistic, in addition to the presumptive value of Yevele's office as the Prince's mason. The mouldings and details of the piers and vaulting foreshadow the work of the new nave (which will be shown to have been to Yevele's design) and are of decidedly Perpendicular character. The similarity of the base-mouldings of the pier and responds to those of the nave, and to those of Yevele's nave piers at Westminster Abbey, is particularly to be noted. The chantry windows, however, bear no resemblance to any known work of Yevele's, and their unusual cusping belongs to the local Canterbury tradition. Presumably these windows were left in the hands of a local master who was engaged to supervise the work.

Repairs at Rochester Castle were in progress in 1368, when Yevele supplied 13 tons of Stapleton freestone at 8s. per ton;³ this does not necessarily mean that he visited Rochester, but as King's Master Mason he was the technical officer ultimately responsible for the repairs. In the following year his grant of the office was confirmed to him for life, and in 1372 he received orders to impress masons for Sandwich, but this was for embarkation to France and not for local work.⁴

The Black Prince, who had finally returned to England in 1372, died in 1376, leaving elaborate directions in his will for the making of

¹ Cf. J. H. Harvey: *The Medieval Office of Works*, in *Jnl. Brit. Archaeological Assoc.*, Vol. VI, 3rd series (1941), 20-87.

² *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1361-64, 430; 1367-70, 238; PRO, E.101/483/25. I am indebted for this reference to the kindness of Professor Douglas Knoop. For the only known plan and view of Queenborough Castle, see A. W. Clapham and W. H. Godfrey: *Some Famous Buildings*, pp. 271-5.

³ *Arch. Cant.*, II, 112.

⁴ *Rot. Franc.*, 46 Edw. III, m. 27.

his tomb. No record of its construction seems to have survived, but here too the stylistic evidence is strongly in favour of Yevele's authorship. Besides the arguments adduced by Mr. Arthur Oswald,¹ it may be noted that the exact design of the cusped panels holding shields is also to be found outside Yevele's west porch of Westminster Abbey, and in a precisely similar position on the west porch at Canterbury. The Westminster panels are original, though those at Canterbury are modern copies of the old work.

The bailiffs of Canterbury were granted a writ of aid for walling the city in 1378,² while work on the Black Prince's tomb must have been in progress, and before Archbishop Sudbury's death in 1381 the West Gate had been built. That Yevele was in charge of work on the walls of the town and close from 1385 onwards is attested by documents on the Patent and Close Rolls,³ and the traceried window on the eastern face of the West Gate is so similar to Yevele's windows in Westminster Hall, as well as to the aisle windows of the Cathedral nave, that there can be no doubt that he was the responsible architect from the start.

Contemporary with the erection of the West Gate was the start of the rebuilding of the Cathedral nave; the new aisle walls were built between 1377 and 1381, after which there was a period of ten years in which little was done. After the election of Prior Chillenden in 1391 the work was pushed on, and the whole nave was completed by 1405. Yevele was certainly in Canterbury in connection with works on the city walls from 1385, and in charge of repairs to the "dungeon" of the Castle from 1390 to 1393 or later.⁴ Meanwhile, he was appointed quantity surveyor of the works at Cowling Castle for John, Lord Cobham, begun in 1381.⁵ That he was also the architect admits of little doubt, for his design of Lord Cobham's other work at the church of St. Dunstan-in-the-East in London is specifically recorded. Besides this, his concern with defence works is proved by his appointment in 1380 as one of the four commissioners who were to consider the erection of towers on each side of the Thames for the protection of shipping.⁶ Another military work which strongly suggests the hand of Yevele is the great keep-gatehouse at Saltwood, near Hythe, built for Archbishop Courtenay, with whom he was undoubtedly in close touch.

When it was decided to rebuild the Medway bridge at Rochester in 1383, Yevele was a member of the commission set up for the purpose;⁷

¹ A. Oswald: *Canterbury Cathedral; the Nave and its Designer*, in *Burlington Mag.*, December, 1939, 221-8.

² *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1377-81, 274.

³ *Ibid.*, 1385-89, 103; *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1385-89, 121, 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1388-92, 249, 261, 294; *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1392-96, 45-46.

⁵ D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, *op. cit.*, 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1381-85, 221.

this was natural, for he had been Warden of London Bridge continuously since 1365, and in 1372 had built a bridge at Moulsham in Essex for the Abbot of Westminster.¹ A further commission at Rochester on which Yevele served was set up in 1386 to enquire into the receipts of the Rochester-Strood ferry service. After Richard II had overthrown the government of the Appellants in 1389, he appointed Geoffrey Chaucer as Clerk of the Works, and during the next 18 months Chaucer paid Yevele arrears of salary. Yevele's receipts prove his personal contact with the poet,² and official business on the walls and castle of Canterbury may well have caused them to ride together along the route which Chaucer was immortalizing in his Tales. In 1389, in the attempt to settle Yevele's arrears, he had been granted for life the manors of Tremworth and Vannes in Crundale,³ close to Wye, and it is possible that Yevele resided on these manors during the period when he was most busily engaged on work at Canterbury.

It may be that the foundations of an "Edwardian" gatehouse discovered by Mr. Graham Webster in 1939 beside the keep of Canterbury Castle,⁴ belong to the works carried out under Yevele from 1390 onwards, but only foundations now remain. Contemporaneous with the repairs at the Castle was the second period of work on the Cathedral nave, and the beginning of the new cloisters and rebuilding of the Chapter House. That Yevele held some office at the Cathedral is proved by Mr. Oswald's discovery that in 1398 he received a Christmas robe as one of the Prior's esquires, as did Stephen Lote, a mason who was Yevele's partner in the making of tombs for Cardinal Langham and for Richard II at Westminster Abbey, and who in 1400 succeeded Yevele as King's Master Mason.⁵

But even stronger than the documentary evidence is the proof afforded by the fabric itself: a detail of the close similarity between the western porches of Canterbury and Westminster has already been mentioned, but the resemblance goes much further. The late Professor Lethaby was able to reconstruct the original design of the interior of the Westminster west front,⁶ and its panelling carrying the divisions of the great window down to the plinth is almost exactly duplicated at Canterbury, even to the inverted tracery arch immediately over the doorway. The piers and their base-mouldings are closely related to those at Westminster, and Mr. Oswald has drawn attention to the parallel between the purely decorative rings on the Canterbury shafts,

¹ E. Jervoise: *Ancient Bridges of Mid and Eastern England*, 1932, 134.

² D. Knoop and G. P. Jones in *Jnl. R.I.B.A.*, 25 May, 1935, p. 804, notes 52, 57.

³ *Cals. Pat. Rolls*, 1388-92, 122-3; cf. Hasted's *Kent*, III, 182.

⁴ *Arch. Cant.*, LIII, 143. I am indebted to Mrs. Dorothy Gardiner for kindly drawing my attention to this.

⁵ A. Oswald, *op. cit.*, quoting Bodleian Tanner MS. 165.

⁶ W. R. Lethaby: *Westminster Abbey Re-examined*, 140-2.

and the similar rings at Westminster, where Yevele was following the design of the thirteenth century eastern bays. In the vaulting there is an interesting parallel to the vault of the Black Prince's Chantry in the crypt, in the use of lierne ribs springing from the curve of the wall-arches.

The tracery of the Canterbury cloister obviously bears the closest relation to that of the west cloister at Westminster, though the latter is less interesting, as might be expected, for it was one of Yevele's early works, built between 1362 and 1365. On the other hand, the tracery of the greater windows at Canterbury, the west window and those of the Chapter House, was presumably devised by Lote after Yevele's death; it lacks the decided touch which is found in the aisle and clerestory windows, and in the north and south windows of Westminster Hall where the same elements are used.

Nevertheless, the scheme of all the Canterbury works carried out under Prior Chillenden must be attributed to Yevele: his was the master brain that envisaged nave and transepts, cloister and chapter house, and he foresaw also the addition of western and central towers. To Yevele belongs the credit for launching the inspiration which in the fullness of time gave us the most perfect and finished expression of medieval architecture.¹

¹ The writer would be glad to receive information relating to Yevele, or to works which appear to be in his style; and also to hear of any carved head of a master mason in Canterbury Cathedral or elsewhere, which from its position might be intended as his portrait. Henry Yevele died on August 21st, 1400, probably aged about 80. *Cal. Close Rolls*, 1399-1402, 154.