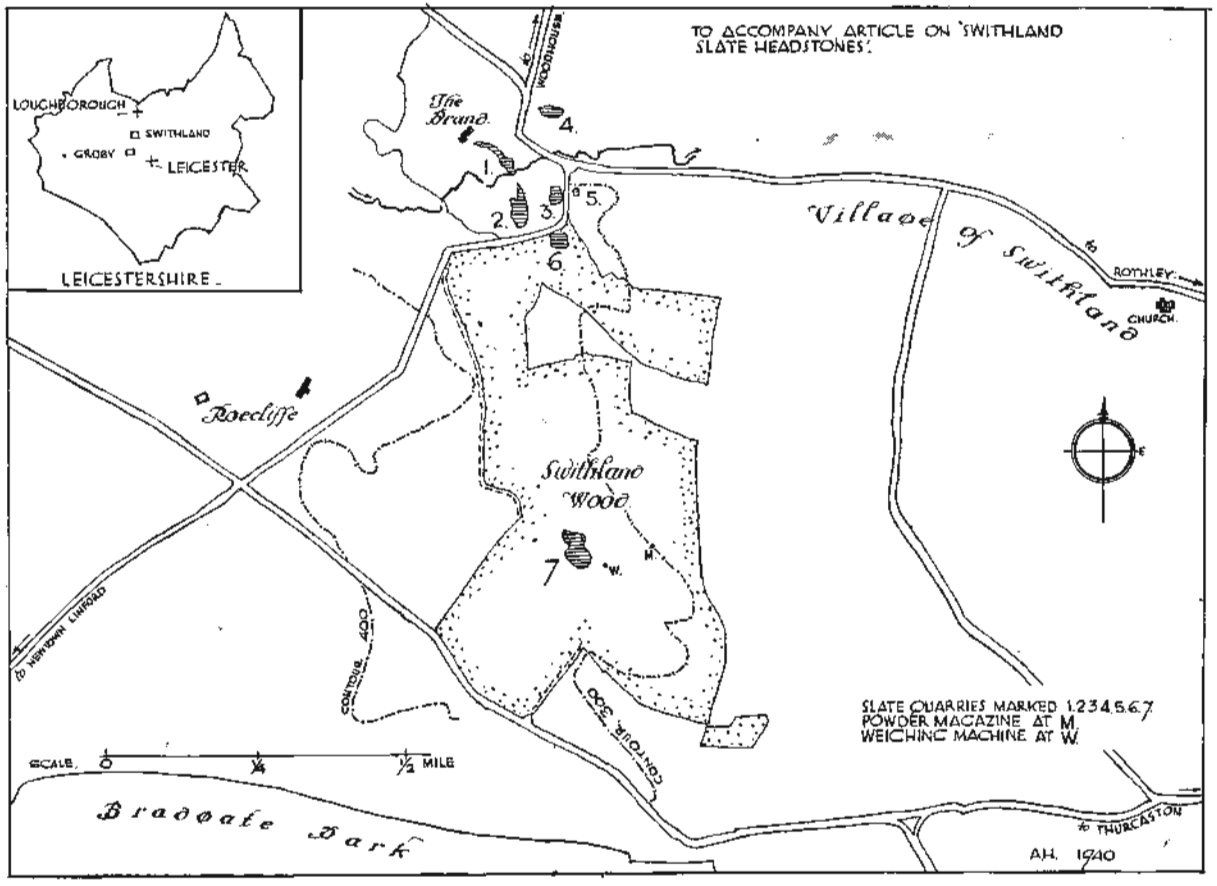
SWITHLAND SLATE HEADSTONES

BY ALBERT HERBERT, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.

with a Foreword by

LT.-COL. SIR ROBERT MARTIN, C.M.G., D.L.



FRONTISPIECE

FOREWORD

Of the many interesting features which give the area known as Charnwood Forest its peculiar charm, its almost unique geological character has a notable place. Among the great variety of rocks forming the foundation of the Charnian landscape is the vein of workable slate which occurs in the volcanic rocks of the southern half of the Forest. These deposits of slates have been known for many centuries; there is a strong reason to believe that the Romans worked them, as they worked so many of our British minerals, while the size and depth of the quarries at Swithland give clear proof of the extent to which they have been worked in more recent times.

The main seat of the slate industry was at Swithland, where, in the middle of that part of the wood which was purchased by the Leicester Rotary Club and entrusted to the Bradgate Park Trustees, there are two great hollows in the ground with vertical sides and half filled with water. It was mainly from these pits that the raw materials of the industry with which Mr. Albert Herbert deals in his paper, were quarried during a period extending over some hundreds of years.

These activities were carried on in the Swithland pits up to the year 1887. I can myself remember being taken a year or two before then for a picnic in Swithland Wood. Peering over the edge of what seemed to my childish eyes, to be a chasm of almost limitless depth at the bottom of which tiny figures were at work, I heard the reverberations from their hammer blows echoing round the vertical sides of the quarry.

Slate stone had also been quarried for many years up to the early part of the nineteenth century at The Brand by the old-established Hind family, whose name will be found in connection with The Brand in the Charnwood Forest Award.*

Small quantities of roofing slates were produced at varying periods from the rock near Woodhouse Eaves church and from the King's Hill, near the Hanging Rocks. Slates from this latter quarry, distinguished by their reddish-purple colour, may still be seen on the roofs of some of the houses in the village of old Woodhouse.

A slate quarry at Groby, west of the main road, about half a mile north-west of the village was worked well into the 19th century. I can remember seeing the old-fashioned beam engine which used to drive the saws and the polishing tables.

The products of these quarries were of a very varied character. Besides roofing slates, of which very large quantities were produced, perhaps the Swithland gravestones were best known. As will be seen from Mr. Herbert's paper many of these gravestones afford extremely beautiful examples of design, lettering and ornamentation—incised and in relief.

* Royal Assent, dated 1829.

Many of the older farmhouses have slate troughs for salting bacon and for holding milk and with slate slabs for the dairy pavings. The presses in which the famous Leicestershire cheeses were made usually had slate stone weights descending on to slate slabs, in which were channels for the escape of the whey.

Little or no information now exists as to the numbers of the men employed when the industry was at its height. That they were not inconsiderable and their earnings substantial may perhaps be inferred from the fact that the number of public houses in the neighbourhood of the quarries was at one time materially greater than it is at present. In the latter years of the eighteenth century a number of cottages, built out of rough stones from the slate pits by the quarrymen, were erected on the waste ground off the Maplewell Road, Woodhouse Eaves.

The Swithland roofing slates, being heavier than the Welsh, require stronger timbers to carry them and entail more labour in fixing. Probably these facts, together with a marked reduction in the railway rates from North Wales to the Midlands, led to the falling off of the trade up to the 'eighties of the last century and to the eventual closing down of the industry.

In addition to the dimensioned work described above, great use was made of the waste products of the quarries in the neighbourhood. Swithland slabs, unsuited for one reason or another for conversion into gravestones, are laid in hundreds of gateways in Leicestershire as "kivverers" to the underlying water channels. The cellars in the ruins of Bradgate House are paved with slabs, from Swithland, or possibly from the pits at Groby, while the smaller specimens form the tops of the drains which run under the kitchen floor.

For stone wall building, whether dry or mortared, there is no better material than the rough stone from the slate quarries; its decided jointing and pronounced cleavage afford a maximum of long "bonders" for securing an ideal form of wall construction. There are many interesting examples to be seen in the neighbourhood, notably the stone walls round Swithland Wood, along the dam of the Cropstone Reservoir, and that fine retaining wall to Groby churchyard.

Local slate from the old spoil heaps has been used in the task of national defence. Many thousands of tons from the quarry in the northern corner of Swithland Wood were taken during the first half of the present war as foundation material for the runways of a Midland aerodrome.

R. E. MARTIN

Swithland Slate Headstones

by Albert Herbert, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.

THE Swithland slate beds are situated in the area known as Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, comprising about seventeen square miles of upland country and lying to the north-west of Leicester city.

This composite Charnwood landscape is seen to consist of pastoral country interspersed with a number of isolated rocky crags peering through (about 1,000 in all). These are the exposed remnants of an extremely ancient mountain range whose base lies deeply buried under the much more recent marly clays of the pastoral valleys between.

These ancient crags are among the oldest rocks known and are part of a buried dome of highly denuded volcanic rocks which were ejected from a long-active volcano in the Archæan or Pre-Cambrian period. They consist of a varied series of consolidated tuffs, ashes, agglomerates and lavas, injected with crystalline rocks, the whole of the volcanic series having been later altered by earth movements which have modified their structure. The chief divisions are given below in descending order:—

C.	The Brand Series.	3. Swithland and Groby slates.
		2. Conglomerate, Grit and Quartzite.
		1. Purple and Green slates.
B.	The Maplewell Series.	5. Olive Hornstones of Bradgate.
		4. Woodhouse Hornstones and Grits
		3. Slate Agglomerate of Roecliffe.
		2. Hornstones of Beacon Hill.
		1. Felsitic or Rhyolite Agglomerate.
A.	The Blackbrook Series.	1. The Hornstones ("tuffs") and Volcanic Grits.

The Blackbrook age was characterised by "youthful" explosive volcanic activity and was followed in Maplewell time by long continued and very violent eruptions, the material from which was carried far by the wind as fine ash, while near the vent, large lumps (or bombs) were dropped into the coarser and finer ashes to make agglomerates of varying coarseness. The final stage of time in the Brand series was of subsiding activity and 'old age' prior to extinction, when volcanic muds were poured out from the crater. After consolidation the whole mountain range was folded and fractured and these muds together with all the other associated rocks were subjected to earth stresses, which converted the muds into slates by a re-arrangement of the particles of their make-up and impressed planes of cleavage into their structure converting them into rocks called "slate". In the neighbourhood these slate beds or layers have been quarried and used for centuries as roofing material. Up to about sixty years ago they were extensively quarried for roofing slates, and particularly for monumental purposes. Several disused quarries can be seen in the south

eastern and south western flanks of the Charnwood Forest area, chiefly around Swithland (whose name probably means 'to cleave'), Woodhouse Eaves and Groby. (See frontispiece).

In texture these slates are harder and much coarser, and consequently much thicker, than the more common Welsh and Cumberland slates now so widely used. In colour, Swithland slate varies from a rich purple to green. The most esteemed variety is that which exhibits a cloudy green and grey colouring, on fine rubbing. The provenance of the greenest coloured slate is in the Groby area, but it is of less durable quality. These slates have fallen into disuse chiefly on account of their thickness, and consequently added weight and inferiority of thin cleavability as compared with their cheaper competitors. Their durability, however, and strength is obvious wherever they are used. As a building stone an example may be seen in St. Mark's church in Belgrave Gate, Leicester, the stone for which was quarried from the quarry on the Beaumanor Estate at the Hanging Rocks, Woodhouse Eaves.

DESCRIPTION OF THE QUARRIES

There is a group of three quarries at Brand Hills in Sir Robert Martin's grounds. One on the north side of the streamlet flowing eastward to Swithland village—the largest, the centre one, presents a most impressive quarry face, some seventy feet high on its eastern side. A view of this occurs in "Charnwood Forest and its Historians" published by our Society in the year 1930. Its lovely weathered colouring will be recalled by those who have visited the Brand.

A small quarry, still further to the south, is at the angle of and abutting the road leading from the Brand to Roecliffe. The largest of the quarries is situated towards the western edge of the extensive Swithland wood with access from Hall Gates Road and the Brand Hill Road. Visitors will realise the danger due to the sloping spoil banks of loose shale and chippings and will be struck by the fearsome aspect of the sheer side.

PRODUCTS

The products of the Swithland quarries were many and varied. It is of interest to note that some of the *tesserae* in the Roman pavements, *circa* 175 A.D., of the forum area at Leicester consist of Swithland slate. Roofing slates obviously, accounted for a considerable proportion of the output and there are in the historical records of Leicester Castle as far back as the fourteenth century references to the roofing with Swithland slates.*

*In his account published in *Transactions*, Vol. XXLL, part 2, the contributor, Mr. Levi Fox, quotes, *inter alia* :—

> "1377—1378—two thousand slates were purchased at 3/1d. per thousand, this including the cost of cartage to the castle. These slates were put on the hall (roof) by Philip Sclater and Thomas Whytte. (D.L. Min. Acc. 212/3247, m 5)."

Among other references in the accounts 1377—78 one relates to the holeing of slates by contract—with John of London—another to 6,000 (oak) slate pins costing 1/6d.

Besides the millions of roofing slates produced at these quarries in the last three centuries alone, there were many other products such as buttress-weatherings and plinths (Groby church), gate-posts, thresholds and steps, milestones, fireplace surrounds, gable panels, cattle and dog troughs, dairy utensils, cheese presses, window sills and wall copings; even clock faces, as at Belgrave Parish church, which is square and fixed diagonally, and at Groby, which is circular. For this article consideration is devoted more especially to the design and details of slate headstones and ornamental work.

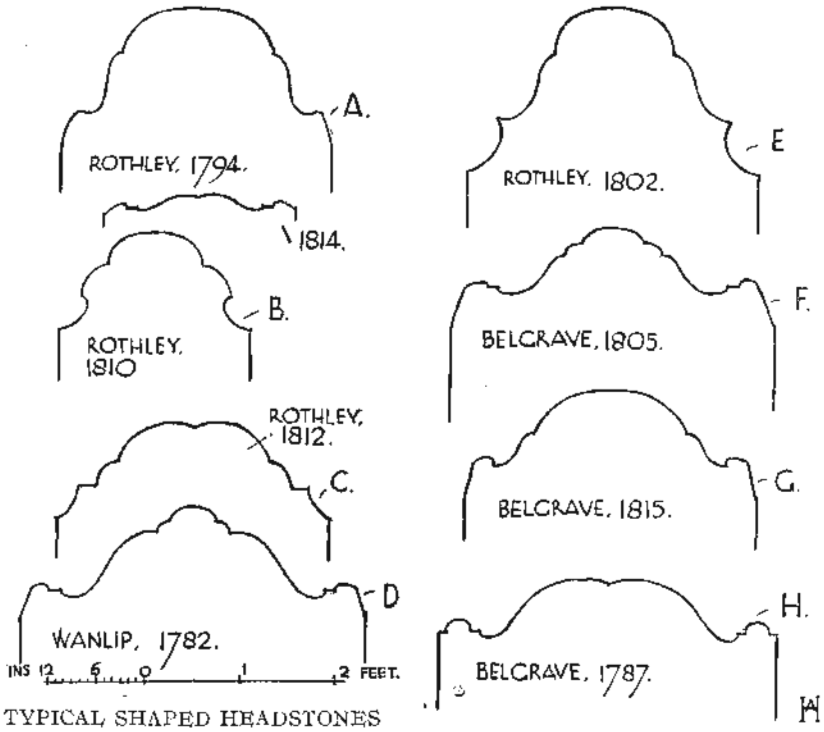
It is impossible to do more than conjecture as to the number of wrought headstones, but one may safely estimate it in terms of thousands in Leicestershire alone, where examples are to be found in most churchyards. There are upwards of eleven hundred at the parish churchyard at Loughborough, seven hundred in St. Margaret's churchyard, Leicester, many hundreds at St. Mary's (de Castro), Leicester and, to take typical instances, some one hundred and nine at Rothley churchyard. At Swithland there are one hundred and nine; at Willoughby Waterless, twenty-seven; at Bagworth, forty-two; at Sharnford, twenty-five; at Anstey, ninety-five.

A few were sent further afield. There are specimens to be found at Chesterfield and Alfreton (Derbyshire) and Selston and Sutton in Ashfield (Notts.) .

That the manufacture of this great quantity naturally entailed an immense amount of artistic skill and labour goes without saying. There was no mass production in those times, for every item varied in design, though the general lines of some isolated example are sometimes found repeated in quite unexpected and distant places, as in the case of the Clarke slab (1711) at Swithland, and another at Queniborough, both of which embody a crown as a chief *motif*. The designs though similar at times are never duplicated exactly. The trade indicated a condition of prosperous, healthy and progressive employment. As above stated there was no standard of size; there was indeed endless variety both in size and workmanship. The modest early examples are in great contrast to the later ones which are comparatively very ambitious in size. For instance, the exposed superficial area of the face of the Fisher Memorial (Wanlip 1782) exceeds by twenty times that of the Dorathie Hall (Swithland 1673). The edges of the earliest examples are usually chipped, not sawn, or at least only partially sawn.

The adoption of shaped tops may possibly have arisen accidentally through blemishes being discovered during manufacture at one or both of the upper angles: conceivably by cutting away a defective angle and adopting a curve a slab was produced having larger finished height than if a rectangular outline had been insisted upon. In any case since the slabs as quarried were irregular, a shaped top would almost always avoid waste. The fact remains that once this vogue of shaped tops was begun, it was continued. (See fig. No. 1).

FIG. Nº 1.



TYPICAL SHAPED HEADSTONES

Among the numerous subtleties adopted which add to the quality and interest are very slight undulations in the front surfaces, obviously intentially contrived. It may be taken as an axiom that the backs of the meritorious headstones are almost exclusively rough wrought.

The first instance where the artificer added his own name was *circa* 1750.

When slabs were ordered the intention frequently was to divide the face vertically—the dexter side for the husband's name and the sinister side for that of the wife. There are cases where one side or other remains blank until this day, as the Biddle (1794) Rothley. When a considerable interval has taken place after the first internment, the services of the same sculptor or letter-cutter have not been available, and the added lettering is obviously by another "hand"—frequently one of inferior capacity. This may be seen in the Tayler memorial at Wanlip (1730) and is also exemplified in the Chatwin memorial, Rothley (1802-1824).

There is no question that a headstone needed to be removed and placed on a "banker" when further inscriptions were added. It would be an impossibility otherwise to carry out the work. It is well to remember that much waste is involved in reducing the irregularly quarried slabs to

their finished size. We may safely assume that at least fifty per cent. of the original weight would be lost in the process of working.

It was early discovered that the rare qualities of Swithland slate justified its use in preference to foreign material and, moreover, it was readily at hand.

LEDGER STONES AND SLABS

We may here draw a parallel between the forerunners, the black marble Ledger slabs, and the later ones in Swithland slate. Ledger stones occur in many districts in England throughout the 17th century. The dominating circular panels in certain headstones at All Saints, Leicester, have their prototype in the typical English Ledger stones, such as those perpetuating the memory of the Babington family in the floor of the north aisle at Rothley. Not only did Swithland slate tend to supersede foreign and distant marble for ledgers, but we find that, in the construction of the built up composite mural tablets (of late Elizabethan storied type) wherein foreign black marble was originally used, Swithland slate now began to take its place for pilasters and panels. In the Babington mural tablet, at Rothley (s. wall of chancel) dated 1648, the upright strips forming the pilasters are of Belgian black marble and the panel bearing the lengthy inscriptions in the lower portion is of the local slate.

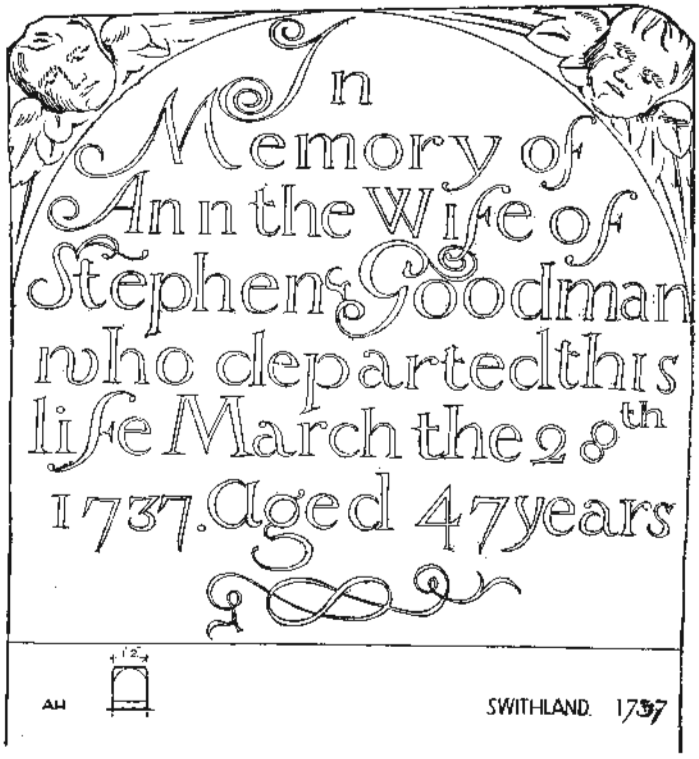
OUTLINES

The outlines of the earliest known slabs were invariably rectangular and the stones, as has been said, very small in size, even as small as eleven and a half inches (see illustration of the Prierth slab, May 1673, Swithland, Fig. No. 2, the oldest known to the writer).

Another noticeable feature is that, in the very earliest examples, the lettering is carried up to the edges and fills the whole visible space. (See figs. No. 2 and No. 2A.)

The next in point of date to the "Prierth" slab, in the same churchyard, commemorates Dorathie Hall (October 1673). See fig. No. 2A. This latter incidentally has an inscription on both sides. The style of the lettering is based on "block type" and is Vee cut. A contemporary one is that of Richard Blackwell (1688), see fig. No. 2B, and is of the usual small dimensions characteristic of this early phase. It forms a humble memorial of the past, which may well be the handiwork of a complete amateur who wished to mark permanently the place of sepulture of a beloved one. It is completely devoid of any dexterity. No setting-out lines have been drawn on the surface and there is little or no attempt to secure regularity, but neither dampness nor frost seems to have had the slightest corrosive effect upon it. Presumably, in addition to a constantly sharpened chisel or knife blade, a small lead hammer was used. An ordinary wooden mallet, owing to its size, would be too clumsy and incidentally be inclined to obscure the work. The same comments largely apply to the Dorathie Hall stone, the edges of which are hammered or "bruised" off.

FIG. No. 5.

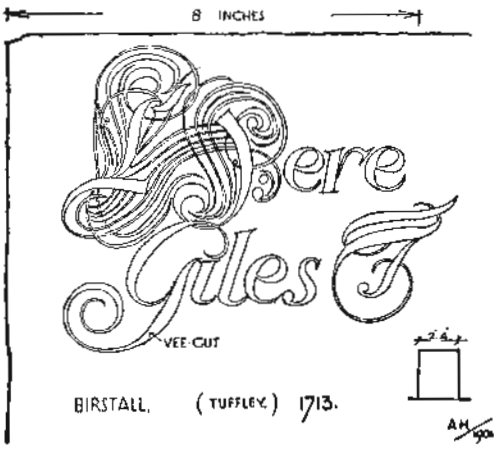


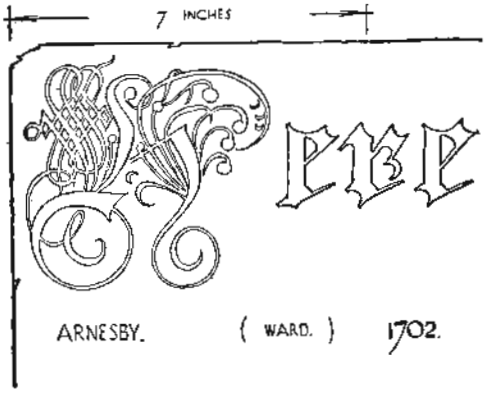
LETTERING

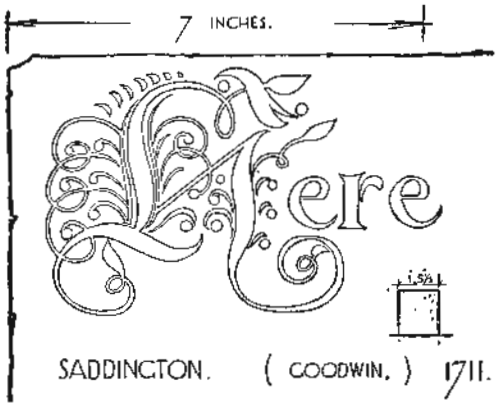
Generally speaking, this is cut horizontally—the fine setting-out lines can be detected after more than two hundred years—but in some cases, as at Newtown Linford, the lettering is set out on a series of concentric lines either concave or convex, or both.

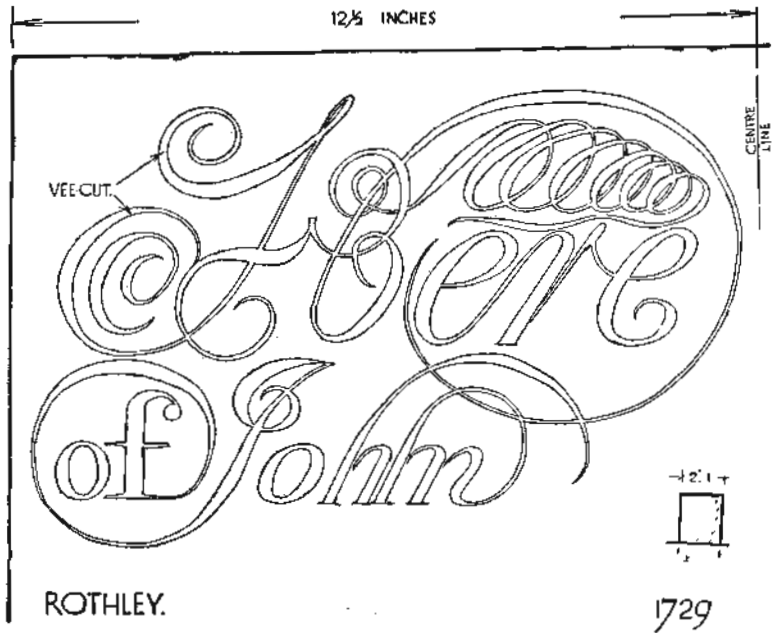
As will have been noted, the first types of lettering used were of a rather severe "block" pattern (see fig. 2A), and decidedly amateurish in execution with occasional scrolls to the initial letters. Later, there is a mixture of "block" and trajan type combined with script and "copper plate" scrolls of a most elaborate interlacing and almost extravagant kind but withal admirable in design and remarkably free in execution. It is quite likely that the letter cutting and incisions were facilitated by the presence of quarry sap, which disappears after long seasoning.

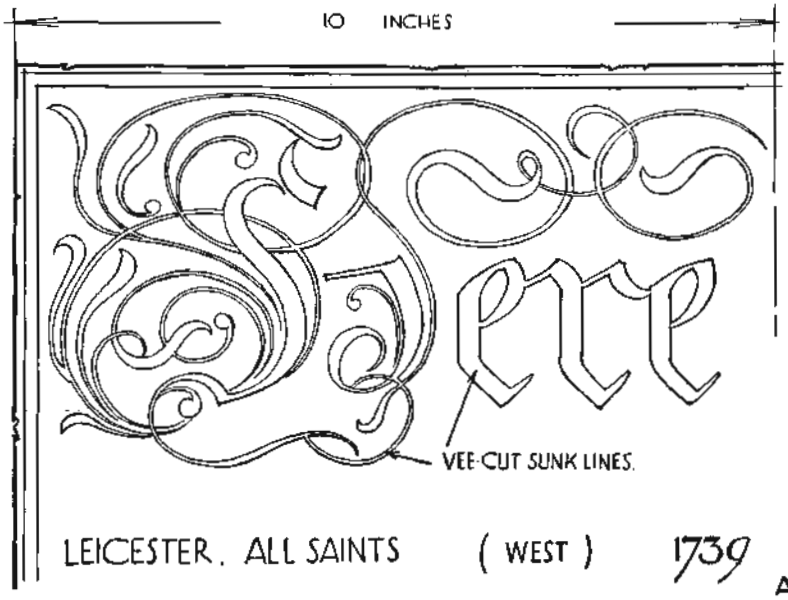
Reference to several of the accompanying illustrations will shew the emphasis by the engraver to initial letters, but special mention must be made of outstanding cases—as for instance, the capital aitches in the headstones at Birstall (Tuffley), at Arnesby (Ward) and at Saddington (Goodwin) where the elaboration is carried out with extraordinary grace and refinement.

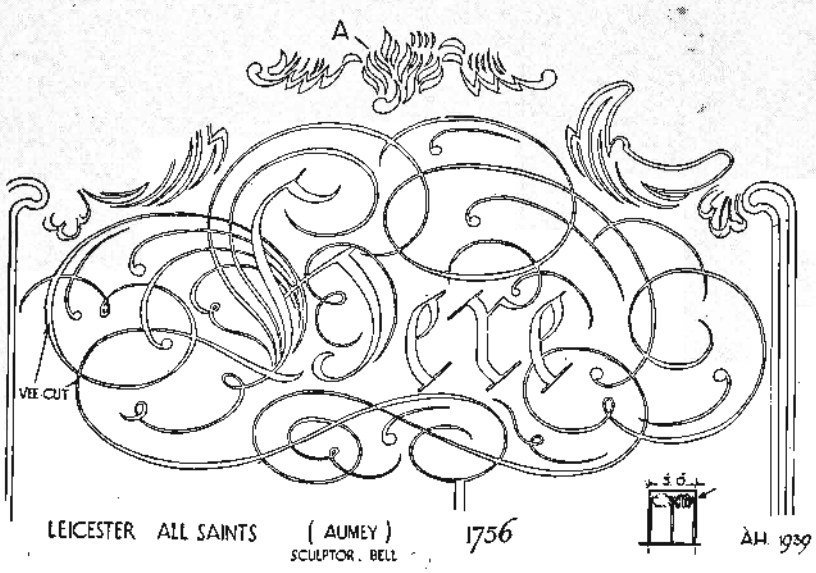












Note incised ornament as "filling" at A.

FIG. No. 6.

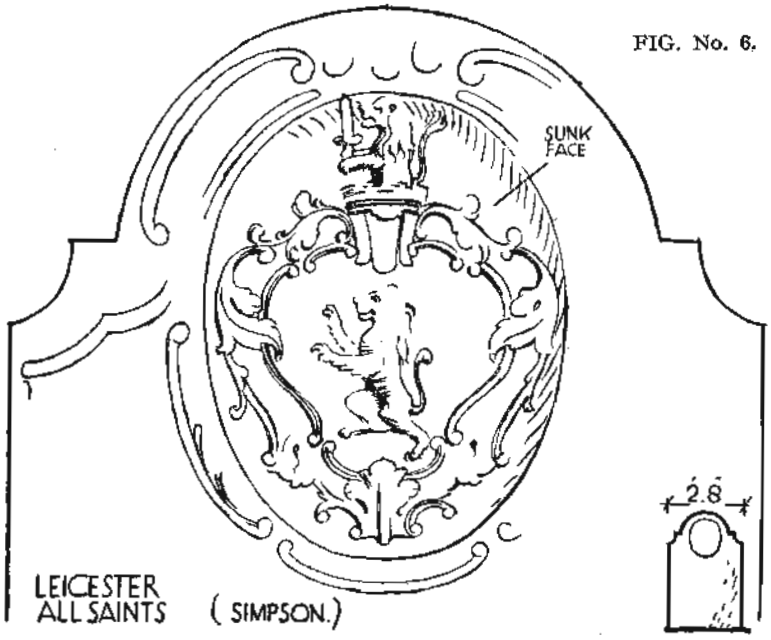
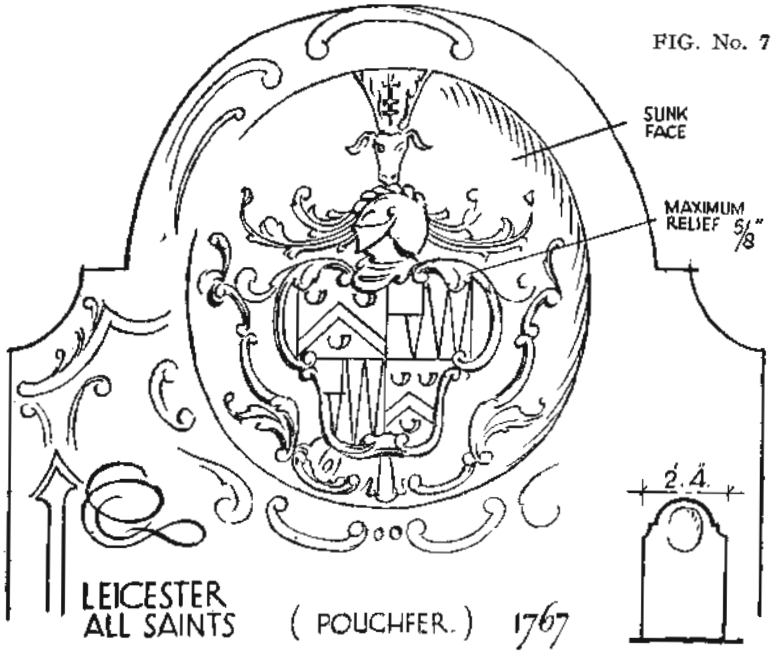


FIG. No. 7



HERALDRY

A subsidiary school of heraldic sculptors of proficiency must have developed about the year 1760, as proved by the skilful renderings on the Simpson and Poughfer stones at All Saints, Leicester. See fig. No. 6 and fig. No. 7).

VERSES

These were adopted and are met with fairly often as in several instances at Belgrave.

TEXTS

Biblical texts are frequently employed and small panels or labels, interspersed among the sculptural compositions, containing texts abound. In some of such compositions miniature tombstones are modelled bearing biblical texts, e.g. Belgrave, Rothley, etc.

WHITE STOPPING

Occasionally we find sunk incisions "stopped" or filled in flush with a white or ivory white cement. This is met with more especially in interior work. The upright slate headstone to Benjamin Farnham (1747) under the east window of the Farnham chapel, Quorn, is thus treated. There is a church on the Hinckley side of Leicestershire where there are several instances of incised slabs forming the pavement where this has been done and a very effective result obtained. The stopping has remained intact for upwards of a century and a half and shews little signs of wear or of falling out—evidence again of the mason's mastery of his craft and knowledge of the limits of his materials. We know of no instances where this pointing has been attempted in external work, probably it was early discovered that frosty weather had the effect of bursting and loosening the cement inlay. An alternative method was to gild the vee cut edges, as effectively adopted in two instances at Anstey church, north wall of tower (Martin). There is also the case of those four impressive stones in the Herrick chapel at St. Martin's, Leicester, where the incised, intaglio ornament, as well as the lettering, is covered in leaf gold.

ARTIFICERS

By making close inspections and comparisons in various districts it has not only been possible to collect the names of the most prominent producers of these memorials, but also to obtain the approximate years in which they continued in their craft. The following tables assists one in arriving at some kind of chronological sequence of the craftsmen and their activities.

NAME	WHERE SPECIMENS MAY BE SEEN	DATE
AINSWORTH	Loughborough, All Saints'	1803
BELL	Leicester, All Saints'	1753
BEER, E.	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1845
BETTONEY	Belgrave, St. Peter's	1819
BIRTCHNELL	Leicester, St. Margaret's Leicester, All Saints'	1848 1853
BRAMLEY	Loughborough, All Saints'	1817
CARVER	Loughborough, All Saints'	1751
CLAY	Leicester, St. Martin's	1788
CRACKEN	Leicester, St. Margaret's	1853
DUNICLIFF	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1777
HACK (of Loughborough)	Shepshed, St. Botolph Leicester, St. Margaret's Loughborough, All Saints'	1830 1838 1841
HIND, H.	Leicester, St. Margaret's Loughborough, All Saints' Leicester, St. Leonard's Leicester, St. Martin's	1793 1793 1821 1843
HULL, S.	Leicester, All Saints' Belgrave, St. Peter's	1761 1834
HULL & POLLARD	Thurcaston, All Saints' Leicester, St. Margaret's Thurcaston, All Saints'	1795 1822 1831
KINNES	Belgrave, St. Peter's	1755
KIRK	Leicester, St. Margaret's Belgrave, St. Peter's	1832 1774
LEWIN	Leicester, St. Margaret's Leicester, St. Margaret's	1843 1811
McCRACKEN	Leicester, St. Margaret's Leicester, St. Margaret's	1820 1829
MASON	Leicester, St. Margaret's	1830

MITCHELL	Loughborough, All Saints'	1784
MORTIN	Leicester, St. Martin's	1789
	Leicester, All Saints'	1812
	Loughborough, All Saints'	1816
	Leicester, St. Margaret's	1822
PECK	Loughborough, All Saints'	1770
POLLARD & SHENTON	Thurcaston, All Saints'	1795
	Leicester, All Saints'	1815
	Thurcaston, All Saints'	1831
RILEY	Leicester, St. Martin's	1802
	Leicester, St. Margaret's	1804
	Belgrave, St. Peter's	1809
	Leicester, St. Martin's	1810
	Leicester, All Saints'	1825
RUDKIN	Loughborough, All Saints'	1816
	Rothley, St. Mary the Virgin	1839
SLARCY G. (Nottingham)	Rothley, St. Mary the Virgin	1800
SLATER, C.	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1815
	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1846
WEBSTER	Loughborough, All Saints'	1734
	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1771
WINFIELD, J.	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1778
	Loughborough, All Saints'	1787
	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1793
	Shepshed, St. Botolph	1798

As the above schedule will show, the most persistent firm is that of Hind. They were certainly producting headstones for at least ninety-four years. This firm worked the Swithland quarries until the middle of the 19th century. See further note.

The mention of 18th century headstones at St. Leonard's Leicester, may provoke a question as to their provenance for the church is comparatively modern—and they, obviously, must have been collected from elsewhere.

INSCRIPTIONS

About the middle of the 18th century a practice became prevalent of cutting more deeply the ornament and even more still that of the lettering and dating.

A most ingenious tying together of capital initial letters on two adjacent lines, combined with deep cutting, is shewn in the typical example at Rothley (Oldershaw 1736), see fig. No. 9. This incidentally shows an advance in design over that at Birstall (Yates 1688) fig. No. 8. An even finer example, involving three lines, is that at Rothley (Pagett 1732) fig. No. 10. The beautiful arrangement of this linking together has a fine decorative effect, as will readily be admitted.

FIG. No. 8.

Inscriptions are not, at times, without a sense of humour. There is the instance at St. Margaret's, Leicester, where "Life is but a fleeting shadow" terminates that to John Phipps who died *aet* 119 years!

The "misdirected justice" headstone to John Fenton 1778 (Leicester, St. Martin's) is too well known to call for a repeated description or comment here.

A modest memorial at Belgrave (dated 1689) perpetuates the name of one Herick whose extraordinary Christian affix is spelt Abstananc.

"It pleased the Lord a coultch to send which soon his precious life did end" occurs at Willoughby Waterless (Herbert 1796).*

At Loughborough there seems to have been no hesitation to record the vocation, or trade, of the deceased and we consequently have such inscriptions as:—

John Clarke, Butcher. 1741/2.
William Bone, Toolmaker. 1733.
James Mitchell, Ironmonger and Cutler. 1788.
Joseph Clarke, Apothecary. 1721.

*The deceased was killed *aet* 16 in a tunnel at Saddington reservoir and was a great-uncle of the writer.

FIG. No. 9.

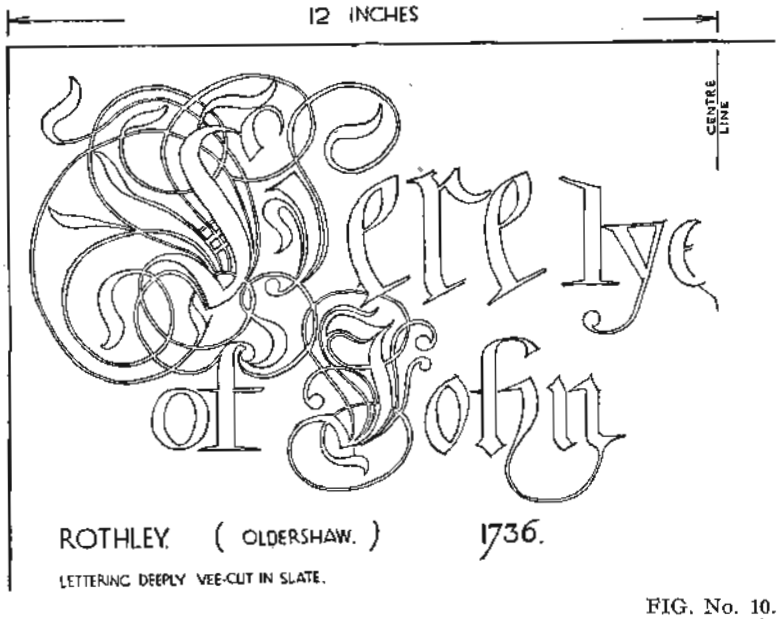
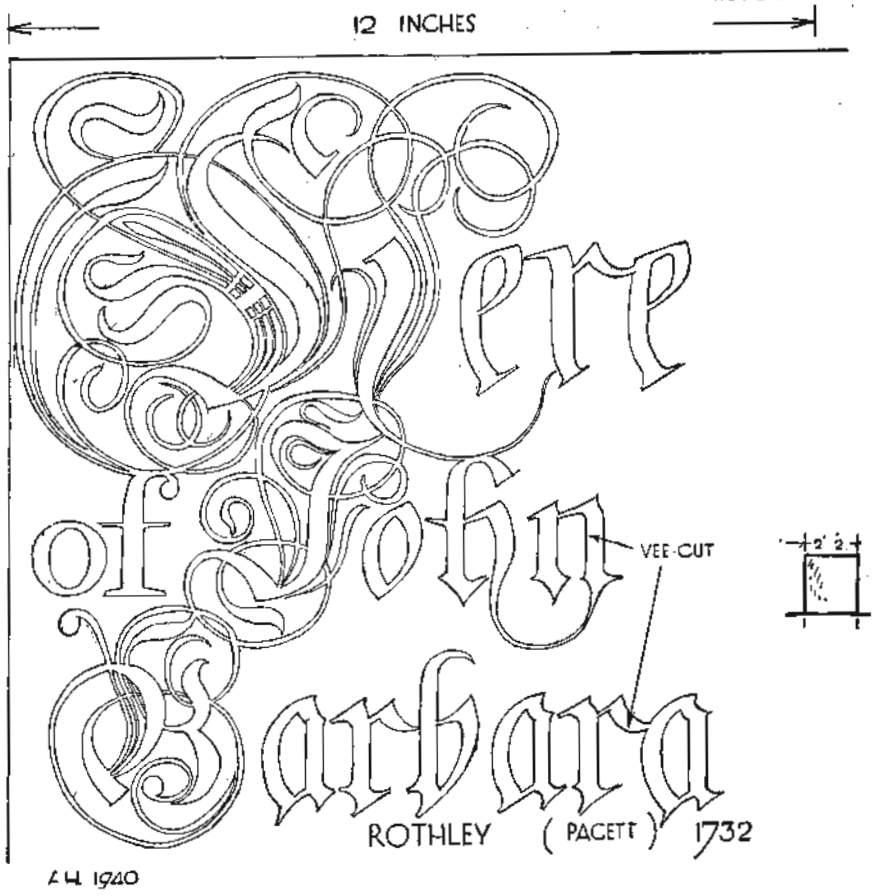


FIG. No. 10.



Other slabs perpetuate the names of a saddler—an edge-tool maker—a mat maker—a plumber—a currier—a grocer, and so on.

The George Davies Harley's slab at Belgrave states that the deceased was a comedian at Leicester and "was (a native) of Norwich."

The first instance where the artificer added his name is *circa* 1750.

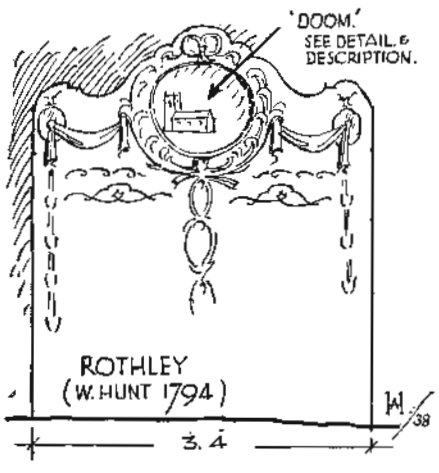
A recent visit to a typical Welsh village churchyard (at Llangerniew, Denbigh) enabled a general comparison to be drawn. Here, at Llangerniew, practically the whole of the headstones were of Welsh slate and dating from the 16th century. The early practice was to employ a much thicker slab either laid flat on the ground or otherwise raised by supporting the angles on rough stones, thus forming a low table or bench. Later the custom was to select a thinner slab and set it upright.

Inscriptions were terse—rarely a prefix "in memory of" or a "here lieth", thus:—

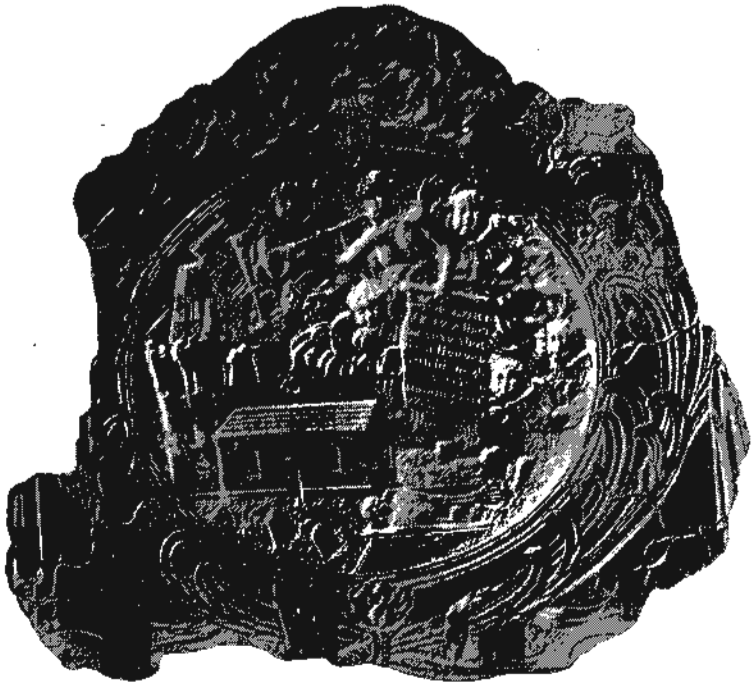
——— Lloyd son of ——— Lloyd.
b——— d———

There was a complete absence of the fine vee cutting—the wonderful flourishes and ingenious coupling together of capital letters, which the splendid indigenous craft, so universal in our own county graveyards, portrays.

There is no doubt that at times the craftsman over-reached himself in his ambition to excel. There is the instance, probably the most extravagant extant, at Rothley (W. Hunt, 1794), where the upper part of the headstone includes in its design a "resurrection" or "doom." A pictorial representation of a village churchyard shows a church in process of dismemberment, due presumably to an earthquake or other awful convulsion. The spire is bursting to pieces, the graves yield up their dead and to add to the effectiveness the miniature gravestones have a series of admonitions carved on them. Angels with trumpets herald the liberation of the godly and the doom of the wicked. See fig. No. 13.



The carver has seized on his own *locale* for inspiration. The church is a portrayal of Swithland church with the Danvers chapel in the foreground. Incidentally this view illustrates the fabric as it existed at the end of the eighteenth century and before the two-light traceried windows were substituted for the original semi-circular headed openings. To assist in heightening the impression of chaos the shattered spire has been invented by the carver.



The Doom—from a plaster cast. Fig. 13.

A detail from a plaster cast. Fig. 14.

FIG. No. 15.

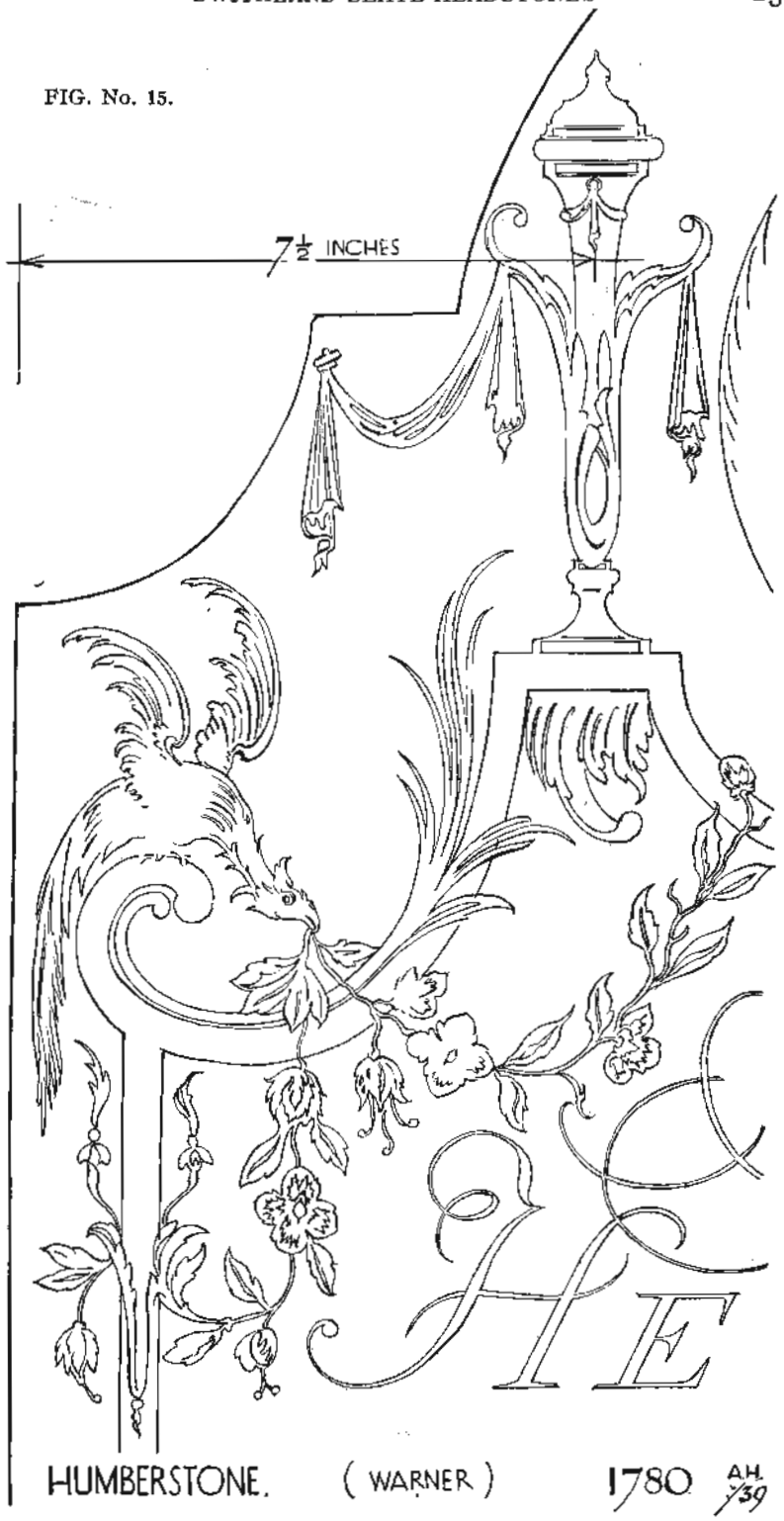
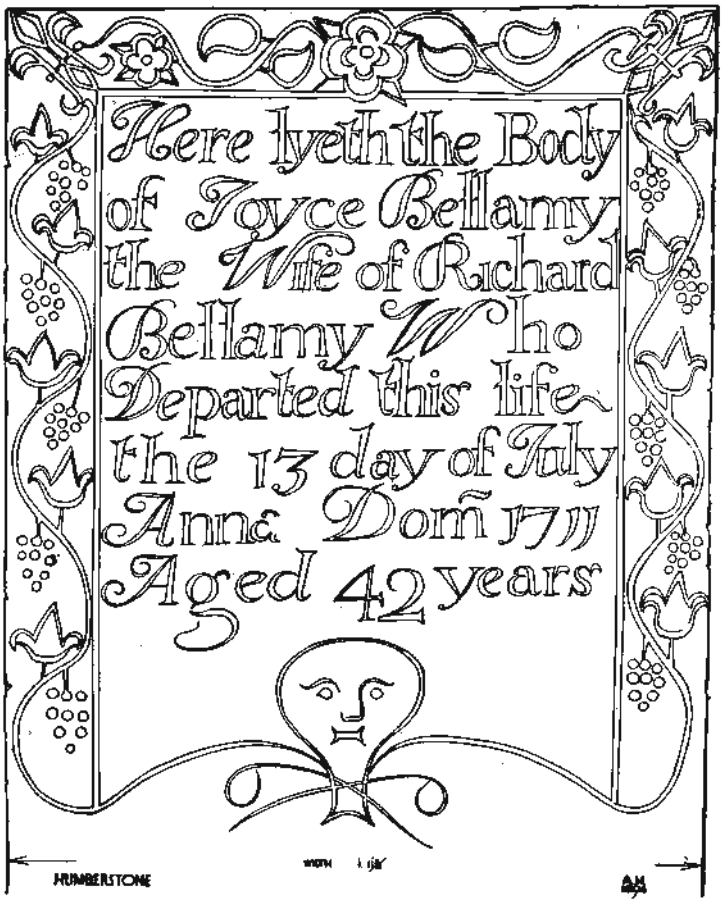


FIG. No. 16.

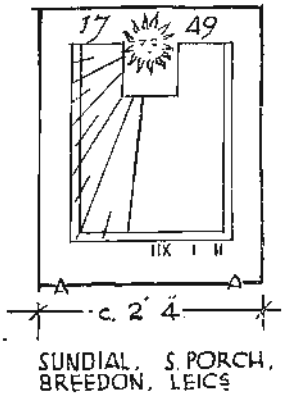


Another stone, which may be singled out as an instance of superfluous elaboration of incised line is that at Humberstone, see fig. No. 15. (Warner 1780). With all due appreciation of the extraordinary refinement there is the feeling that the design would be more appropriate if simplified and were rather less like a once conventional wallpaper.

A charming example which will, however, always remain a little classic of its type is that delightful stone to Joyce Bellamy. See fig. No. 16.

TABLE TOMBS

Mention may be appropriately made of two slate table tombs—one with finely engraved copper panels (Earl of Lanesborough, 1745) and a later one (Robert Hind). Both of these at Swithland.



SUNDIAL, S. PORCH, BREEDON, LEICS

SUNDIALS

Among the many uses not already enumerated to which Swithland slate was put were Sundials, both vertical and horizontal. There is an admirable example of the former set over the south porch at Breedon-on-the-Hill. It is rectangular in form and the border lines and the incisions generally are excellently laid out. The date, as will be noted in 1749. Another, of more generous proportions, is to be seen at St. Nicholas church, Leicester, and is some eleven years older.

CHIMNEY PIECES

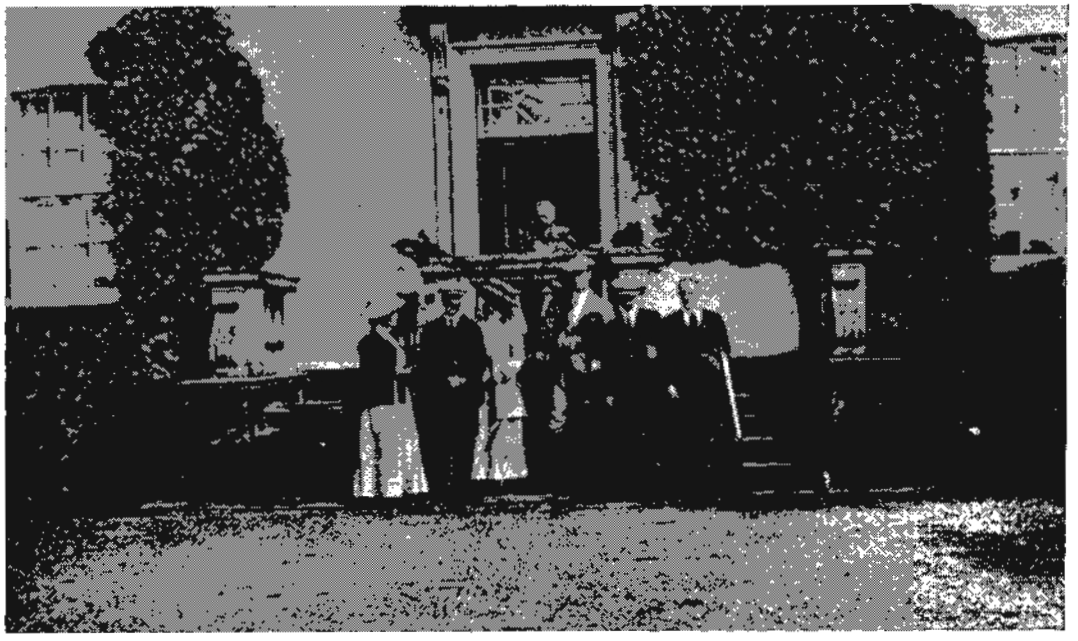
Many houses of the early Georgian type in Leicester as well as in the surrounding villages contain chimney-pieces of Swithland slate. These are consistently refined in design and the embellishment of the rooms was often further enhanced by the inclusion of a charming fire-grate from the famous Carron foundry. Whether the slate figure work was inspired by the Carron patterns or otherwise is a moot point, but the writer possesses a broken lintel belonging to such a slate fireplace which has exquisitely modelled bronze rosettes let into the face. Excellent examples formerly existed in Wyggeston House, Highcross Street, Leicester.

The Boney Slab at Newtown Linford (1683) is an example of Epistho-graphy, having inscriptions on both sides. This is also the case with one at Shepshed and two at Swithland.

IN SUMMARY

Early Headstones:—

1 John Prierth, 1673 (probably the earliest extant), Swithland, 11½ in.
2 Dorathie Hall, 1673, Swithland, note 11 in. wide (only) rectangular.
3 John Boney, 1683, Newtown Linford.
4 Richard Brewin, 1684, Rothley, 1 ft. 6 in. wide, rectangular.
5 Richard Blackwell, 1688, Swithland, 1 ft. 5 in. wide, rectangular.
6 Abstananc Herick, 1689, Belgrave, 1 ft. 7 in. wide.
7 Thomas Stanton, 1690, Belgrave, 1 ft. 5½ in. wide, rectangular.
8 John Clarke, of Swithland, 1701, Belgrave.



WHETSTONE PASTURES—MAIN ENTRANCE—THE FORMER HOME OF THE HIND FAMILY

THE HIND FAMILY

A prominent local family who were for long associated with this great industry in the 18th and 19th centuries was that of the Hinds. Nichols in his *History of Leicestershire* describes the Mr. Hind of his day (c. 1804) in complimentary terms and as "well known for his ingenious devices on these slate stones" and gives his name as one of the three proprietors of the Swithland pits—the others being the Earl of Stamford and the Hon. Butler-Danvers. They became very prosperous in course of time. The name of the family is honourably preserved in the "Hind Homes" at Cropstone, founded in recent years by descendants.

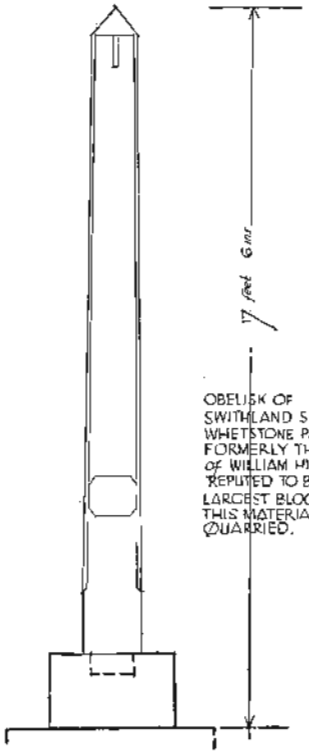


FIG. No. 18.

A member of one branch of the family built and lived at a house near the Narborough Cross Roads, just south of L.N.E. Railway new line at Whetstone, while another member purchased a large estate and erected a spacious house together with farm buildings, all on generous lines, with capacious barns and buildings—to be known as "Whetstone Pastures." Here, as might be expected in the circumstances, their material abounds everywhere. A fine rusticated "rubbed" slate plinth surrounds the house for a height of some four feet—the window sills, entrance steps and balustrades are of similar material—a court yard is paved with squared slabs, copings, pivot blocks and sundry dressings are also in evidence, also slate mounting blocks. The reputed largest block ever quarried was worked into a tall obelisk which stands in the open park-like field in front of the house, with base courses thereunder. See fig. No. 18.

It is recorded that it was intended that one of the raised panels in this obelisk should have the following inscription:—

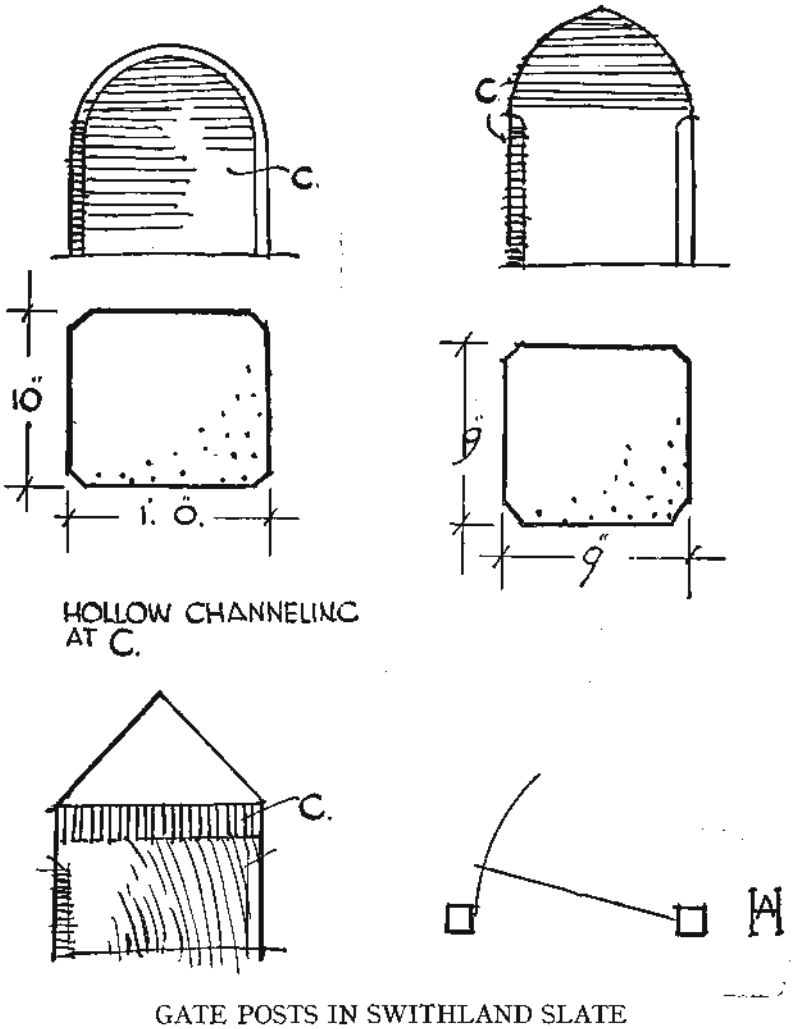
"I, William Hind, of Whetstone Pastures
Went through life with sore disasters*
But in spite of all my fate
I bought these lands by selling slate."

and the tradition is so strong that this is more than likely.

Many of the gateposts on the estate are of slate. Similar ones are to be seen on the Loughborough turnpike and at the Brand. See details, fig. No. 19.

*Query, an allusion to the disastrous floods which swamped the quarry workings.

FIG. No. 19.



GATE POSTS IN SWITHLAND SLATE

Among the unexpected items on the Pastures estate is a slate coffin, 6 ft. 6 in. long, now diverted from its original purpose and standing in a farmyard, serving as a cattle drinking-trough. We can imagine the labour required in hollowing this out for the thickness of the sides and bottom is only 2½ in.

The Pastures' property ceased to belong to the Hind family some years ago, when it was acquired by an adjoining owner and agriculturalist, Mr. William Herbert, who subsequently enlarged the house which originally was more or less four-square in plan.

Some years ago, during an alteration, the writer was present when a discovery was made in the roof space of a large quantity of most interesting papers and documents relating to early slate contracts; the contents, as it were, of a Counting house—orders for consignments of slates and other articles, etc. One was an instruction from the then Lord Harborough wherein the transit was to be partially by "bote" conveyance. Other documents included receipts with the old fashioned repetition at the foot "I say £....." and a human touch was present in scribbled draft replies to influential customers before the fair copy was made out. Some of these records were lent by the writer to the late Mr. S. P. Pick, but unfortunately they were mislaid and subsequently lost.

Nichols, in his *History of Leicestershire*, writes (c. 1794) at some length on the quarries at Swithland and gives a full description with many details of the large number of workers, the methods of blasting——the cost of the finished products, etc. See p.p. 1049 and 1050, Vol. 6.

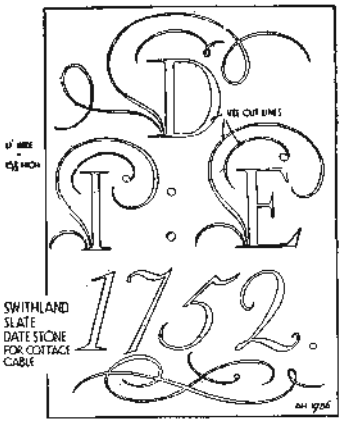
He states that the current charges were as follows:—

> "All slabs of, or under 20 inches wide are charged at 20d. per (superficial) foot, the price being raised a penny per inch as they advance in width till they are 30 inches wide—then the price is 2/6 till they are 3 feet wide—from 3 feet and above the price is 2/9d. per foot."
>
> "The price of roofing slates is 3/- a score for the large sort and the same sum for six score of the common sort."

Nichols gives a copper plate engraving shewing a quarry face—the means of lifting and transport by framed wood legs and overhead gear being indicated. (Opp. p. 1050, fig. 4).

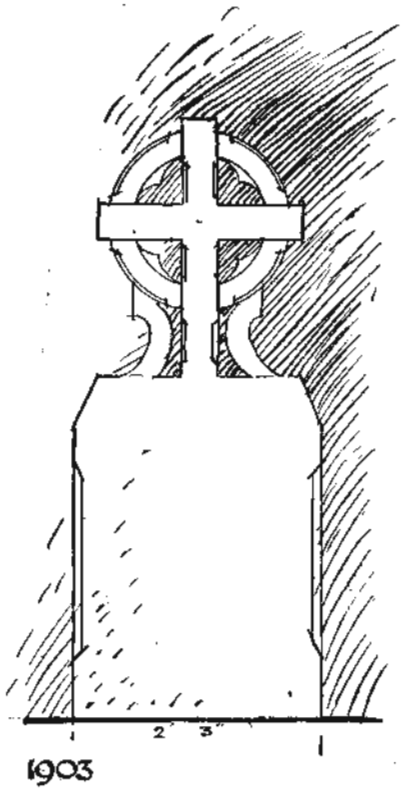
IRONWORK

In connection with such an active trade a large quantity of wrought metal was required and a considerable staff of smiths would have augmented the pay-roll. It is to the credit of these smiths supplying the ironwork for gate-hangings and cheese-presses, etc., that much of it is shapely and well fashioned and still in good working order to this day.



May a word be added for the benefit of students who may be interested in the intricacies of this excellent indigenous craft? A quick means of making a rubbing is to use a wash-leather covered pad which is slightly smeared over with linseed oil and "housemaids" black lead—a much less laborious method than by using a 6B pencil—but in both cases it is a two-person affair if vexatious slipping and displacement is to be avoided during the process.

My acknowledgments are due to Sir Robert Martin, C.M.G., for looking over the proof; to my friend Mr. H. H. Gregory, M.A., of the Leicester Museum, for kindly refreshing my memory in regard to the geological aspect of the subject and for helpful suggestions, and my thanks are also due to Mrs. S. H. Skillington for the loan of photographs from her collection.



An instance of a wood design being erroneously executed in slate