XX. *Historical notices of the Great Bell Tower of the Abbey Church of St. Edmundsbury: in a Letter from JOHN GAGE, Esq. F.R.S., Director, to HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F.R.S., Secretary.*

Read 20th January, 1831.

DEAR SIR,

Lincoln's Inn, 24th December, 1830.

THE body^a of St. Edmund reposed in a basilica of wood until Canute, in a kingly spirit, *animositate regia*,^b raised a stone church to the honour of the martyr, which Egelnothus Archbishop of Canterbury, dedicated,^c with pomp, in 1032: and it is a remarkable fact in the history of our ecclesiastical architecture, that within half a century after the erection of this church it was pronounced unworthy of the improvement which had at that time taken place in the art of building. Baldwin, Abbot of St. Edmund's, under the auspices of the Conqueror, laid the foundations of another church, because, says the monk Hermannus, a contemporary, *hæc quoque simplici facta schemate, non sic artificialis ut quædam construuntur hoc tempore*. The Presbytery of Baldwin's church, by the same author compared for magnificence to Solomon's Temple, was consecrated in 1095.^d

^a Magno *tabulatus* op'e multitudo fidelis in Beodrici villa sibi basilicam condidit, in primis, quã temp'e Cnuti piissimi Regis et Emme eius bone memorie coniugis, posteritas monachilis dilectione maiori *lapideam* reparavit, quæ etiã ab Eadnodo Cantuariensi Archi Ep'o dedicata ad usq' tempora n'ra duravit: hæc quoq' simplici facta scemate, non sic artificialis ut queda' construuntur hoc temp'e, a gloriosissimi Regis Angloru' Willelmi primi suasu, monitu, jussu, jussa est alia construi, &c. *Hermannus, MS. Cotton, Tib. B. II. fo. 77.* Ubi quiescit humatus Sanctus Eadmundus Rex et Martyr. *Liber Domesday.*

^b Malmesb. fo. 41.

^c *Regist'm Nigrum Abb. Burgi St. Edmundi, MS. Bibl. Pub. Cantab. M.M. 4. 19. fo. 91 b.* *Reg'm Sacristæ Abb. Burgi S. Edm. MS. Bibl. Pub. Cantab. F.F. 2. 23. fo. 21. 23 b.*

^d *Herm. fo. 80 b.*

The plan of the new building bore a near resemblance to Ely minster, and both had, at the west end, a high bell tower between lower lateral towers. It was not till the time of Samson X. abbot, elected in 1180, that the towers were finished.^e Under Hugh, his predecessor, Samson, as subsacrist and master of the works, had collected a large quantity of material for building the great tower of the church, and after his accession to the abbacy, he was enabled, by the pecuniary assistance of some of the burgesses, to accomplish the structure.^f The monk, Jocelin de Brackland, in his Chronicle of St. Edmund's, has left us a spirited portrait^g of this distinguished ecclesiastic.

"Abbot Samson," says this historian, "was of middle stature, nearly bald; his face neither round, nor long; his nose prominent; his lips thick; and eyes clear as crystal, and of a piercing aspect; with high and thick eyebrows, which were often shaved; his hearing was particularly distinct; his voice liable to become hoarse with the slightest cold. At the time of his election, he was forty-seven years of age, having passed seventeen in the cloister; he had then a few white hairs in his red beard, and a very few in his black and somewhat curly locks; but, within fourteen years after his election, his hair became altogether white as snow. A man always temperate, never slothful, full of vigour, delighting in horse and foot exercise until old age moderated this ardour; who, from the time he heard of the taking of the Cross, and of the fall of Jerusalem,^h put on breeches (*femoralia*) of hair cloth, and a shirt of the same texture, instead of linen: and abstained from all animal food, though he still had meat served at his table for the increase of his almsgiving: preferring milk, honey, and such like sweet diet, to any other.

^e Cronica Joscelini de Brakelond, MS. Harl. 1005.

^f *Attractum fecit magnum de lapidibus et sabulo ad magnam Turrim ecclesiæ construendam, &c.* Ibid. fo. 123.

^g Ibid. fo. 131.

^h "The news of this mournful event (which occurred in 1187) plunged the Christian world into the deepest consternation. The aged Pontiff died of a broken heart; William King of Sicily wore sackcloth for four days, and vowed to take the Cross; the other princes condemned their indolence, and the avarice which had prompted them to prefer their own petty interests before that which they deemed the common cause of the Christian religion." Lingard, Hist. of England, tom. II. fo. 148.

Liars, drunkards, and great talkers he hated.ⁱ He spoke French and Latin fluently, but relied more on strength of argument than on the graces of oratory. He could read English with much elegance, and was in the habit of preaching to the people in English, but after the dialect of Norfolk, where he was born and brought up; to which purpose he erected, in his church, a pulpit for the benefit of his hearers, and ornament of the church." The Chronicler, in another place, adds, that some of his enemies accused him of being choleric and unsocial, and called him *Pautnere*,^k and the *Barrator*¹ of Norfolk.

But, from this digression, let us return to the Great Bell Tower or campanile of the church, the south side of which, as we learn from the register^m of William Curteys, who was Abbot at that time, suddenly fell down on the 15th of the kalends of January 1430, in the ninth year of King Henry VI. upon a commemorative feast of the Blessed Virgin. It was fortunate that the accident happened about one o'clock in the day, when the people were not assembled in the church, for the Tower adjoined the nave at the west end,ⁿ and only an hour and a half earlier,

ⁱ In the Chronicle a tedious passage follows, which is here omitted: it tends chiefly to show the Abbot's indifference to food, and his desire that the monks should imitate his example in that respect.

^k Paltenerius.—Paltonarius, superbus, ferox, ex veteri Franco *Pautonnier*.—Du Cange. See also, Roquefort, *Pautonier*.

Then sayde our kyng of renon,
That hyghte Rychard Coer de Lyon,
" Off your sawes I am blythe;
Let see arme you now swythe!
Ster you my galye, Trenchemer;
I wol asaye that *Pawtener*.
With myn ax I schal hem frape,
Ther schal no Sarezyn escape!"

Richard Coer de Lion, Weber's Metr. Rom. vol. II. p. 99.
And you schall hear a totted frere
Say "*stryke Pautnere*."

The Kyng and the Hermyt. British Bibliograph. tom. IV. p. 90.

¹ A wrangler.

^m Registrum Curteys, abb. Burgi S. Edmundi penes Edm. Wodehouse, Arm. fo. 87 b. 88.

ⁿ De lamentabili casu magni Campanilis in occid. fine ejusdem monasterij. *Indentura receptorum abbatibus*. Ibid. fo. 309.

the whole or the greater part of the parish had been collected there to recite the office of our Lady ; the chapel of the Blessed Virgin, lately taken down, being then in rebuilding. The walls are represented to have been weakened by the wooden frame introduced for the support of the bells, of the immoderate use of which the monks had loudly complained. On the morrow of the feast of St. Thomas the Martyr, in the following year, the east side of the tower gave way, but in the mean time, the upper part with the lead and bells had been taken off, and at length, on the 4th of the kalends of April 1432, the north wall, on which the workmen were employed, came down without doing injury.

The Tower was in this dilapidated state when King Henry the Sixth^o visited the abbey in 1433, and the ruins prevented the Abbot and Convent from receiving the King at the west door of the church; on which account they met his Highness in full procession, half way between the south door and the gate of the precinct facing the west front, which gate, called by the monastic writers,^p *the great gate of the Church of St. Edmund*, or, *the great gate of the church-yard*, still remains an unrivalled example of gate-houses in the Circular Style.

To repair the damage occasioned by this calamity, Abbot Curteys, beside making certain appropriations^q from the abbey lands for the purpose,^r sought from the See of Rome a plenary indulgence to all the faithful who should contribute to the rebuilding of the Tower, the cost of which was estimated at sixty thousand ducats of gold.

The mason's contract^s occurs in the Abbot's register, and perhaps may be thought not unworthy of insertion in this place.

Indentura fac^d in^d Abbātem Priorem & Contū de S^co Edm^o,
& Jo^hem Wode masoun, pro repara^cone & reforma^c magni
Campani^t, cui⁹ tenor sequit' in hⁱ verba.

This bille indentyd maad att Bury the xxv day of Auguste, yn the 3er of Kyng Herry the vj. aftir the conquest the xiiij. betwen Willyam

^o De adventu Regis Henrici Sexti ad monasterium de S^co Edm'. Ibid. fo. 110. Archæologia, tom. XV. fo. 65. The Infirmary was also in ruins at that time.

^p Reg^m. Nigrum, passim.

^q Reg^m. Curteys, fol. 309.

^r Ibid. fo. 293 b.

^s Ibid. fo. 308.

Abbot of seynt Edmundys monasterye of Bury aforeseyd, P'our & Couent of the same place on the to ptye, and John Wode, masoun, of Colchestř, on the todir ptye, bereth wytnesse of certeyn couen'ntys maad betwix the seyde Abbot, P'our and Couent, and the seyde John Wode, that ys to seye, the seyde John Wode schal werke w^t on švāt vp on the stepil in the seyde monasterye in all mañ thynges that longe to fremasounrye, fro the feste of seynt Michael next folwyng aftyr the date afore rehşyd, yn to the terme of vij 3eer aftir next folwyng, takyng 3eerly of the seyde Abbot, P'our and Couent, for hys stypend and hys šuauntes x.li. yn mony at iiij termys in the yeer, that ys to seye, Cristemasse, Esñe, Mydsoñ, and Micheelmasse, be the handys of the maysť of the werkes assynyed be the Chapetr³. And the seyde John Wode schal haue hys bord in the Couentys halle for hym and hys man, for hym self as a gentilman, and for hys švaunt as for a yoman ; And therto too robys, on for hym self of gentilmannys liuere, and for hys šuaunt anothir of yomānys lyvere of the Sexteyñ : And yf no lyuere be youe, he schal haue for the seyde robys xxiiij.s. iiij.d. And for so myche that the seyde John schal haue hys robe, and mete and drynk in the P'ourys name, as on of hys gentilmen, therefore, suche tyme as he ys not occupyed in hys werk, he schal be tendyng vp on the P'our, and not goo out of towne passyng too dayes yn a quart, lesse than he haue a special leue of the P'our and of the maysť of the werkes : And yf he or hys man be absent from hys werk passyng ij dayes in a q'rř, than the maysť of the werk schal wyth drawe hys stipend aftyr the rate of the forseyd x.li. that ys to seye, for hys stipend eũy day that he ys absent fro hys werk v.d. and for hys šuaunt iiij.d. And in caas be he or hys šuaunt falle seek, as longe as he ys fro hys werk he schal not take for hys stipend, but alowe the maysť of the werk for eũy day, as yt ys seyde afore : Neũtheles the seyde Abbot, Priour and Couent gr'untyn, that althow the seyde John or hys šuaunt be cause of infirmyte may not werke, 3yt yf they will come to halle to ther mete, they schal haue yt there frely, and in non othir place, so that the infirmyte be not continually vp on them wherthorw they be lyke no more for to werke. In Wytnesse of all that ys seyde to fore, vn to the too ptye of thys bille indentyd, restyng in the handys of the sayde Abbot,

Prio' & Couentys syde, the seyd John Wode hath sett to hys seel: Un to the todir ptye of th same bille indentyd, restyng on the seyd John Wodys syde, in the name of the seyd Abbot, P'our & Couent, the Priour hath sette to hys seel. Youyn in the foreseyd monas̃ye, the yer and day afore rehersyd.

By subsequent agreement, preserved in the same record,[†] the Abbot was authorized to send as many workmen to the building as he might think expedient, paying into Wode's hands, as master of the works, for their wages and maintenance, three shillings per man weekly, in the winter months, and three shillings and four pence in summer. The Abbot also engaged^u with John Arnold and Herman Remond, brick-burners, that they should make for him, at his manor of Chevington, as many bricks as they were able within a year, the Abbot finding them materials, and a chamber, and paying two shillings for every thousand bricks, beside allowing to each a cloak and hood of his own livery.

Shortly after the commencement of the building of the Tower an inundation took place^x on the 29th May 1439, about two o'clock in the afternoon, when there was such a flow of water for an hour and a half, through the folding doors of St. James' Church,^y that it covered the benches nearly a hand's depth, and running through the church-yard toward the nave of the church of the monastery of St. Edmund, entered both the west and south doors, penetrating as far as the chapel of the Blessed Virgin *in cryptis*, where a boat could have floated, and notwithstanding the chapel was filled, the water in the nave was as high as a man's leg. The cellar and pantry in the Abbot's parlour were also filled with water. To avoid a similar accident in future, the Abbot, by the advice of his masons, gave orders that the pavement of the new Bell Tower should be raised three steps higher than it was before.

[†] Indentura dat. 1 Sept. 17 Hen. VI. Ibid. fo. 308 b.

^u Ibid. fo. 318 b. 319. This document will be found, numbered xxxvii. in the Appendix to the History of St. Edmundsbury Monastery. Dugdale's Monasticon Angl. Lond. 1819.

^x Regm. Curteys, fo. 323.

^y In front of St. James's Church is a deep shore or channel, now arched over, which was open within the memory of man, and subject to overflow.

In various testaments^z proved before the Sacrist of St. Edmund's, and dated at different times, from the year 1441, legacies occur toward rebuilding the Bell Tower. In 1461, John Amy, chaplain,^a desired to be buried *in magno ostio novi campanilis*; yet the structure was not then complete, for, in 1465, a legacy was^b bequeathed for more speedily finishing the campanile; and in testaments^c so late as the years 1495 and 1500, legacies were given for building the new steeple at the west end of the monastery. How little was it foreseen, that almost in the narrow compass of a quarter of a century, the same eagerness would be manifested in the demolition, as had been shown in the erection of those sacred edifices. Now, the very foundations of the once splendid monastery of St. Edmund in many parts are destroyed, a fate which has too often awaited monastic buildings in towns.

The flinty fragments of a south pier of the tower have escaped the hand of destruction, and, together with the flint work of the western façade, which is a mass of deformity, point out to us the spot where the Bell Tower once stood.

I am, dear Sir, Your obedient humble Servant,

JOHN GAGE.

^z Inter alia, "Itm lego fabrice nov' Campanil' mon' S'c'i Edm' iij^s. iiij^d." *Testam' Joh'is Hert*; dat. 21 Sept. 1441; prob. 16 Nov. sequ. *Reg'm Osbern*, fo. 248. It' lego ad fabricam novi Campanil' dict' mon' iiij^{or} marc'. *Testam' Dionysie Redgys*; dat' 26 Julii, 1449; prob' 12 Aug. sequ. *Reg'm Haulee*, fo. 129.

^a In p'mis lego a'i'am mea' Deo O'ipotenti, B'æ Mariæ Virg', et o'ib's Sc's, corpus q'3 meū eccle'asticæ sepulturæ, videl'; sub lapide jacente in mago ostio novi campanil' Mo's-t'ii S'c'i Ed'i in Bury p'd'. *Testam' Joh'is Amy* dat' 4 Maii, 1461; probat. 20 Julii sequ'. *Ibid*.

^b It' lego ad cel'iozem expedic'onem campanilis Monast' de Bury, S'c'i Ed'i noviter faciend' xxvj^s. viij^d. *Testam' Matth. Robert*; dat. 2 Apr. 1465; prob. 8 Maii, sequ. *Ibid*, fo. 85.

^c Itm lego ad edificationem novi Campanil' in Monasterio p'd'ct' qui'que libras. *Testam. Thomæ Eden*; dat. 4 Sept. 1495; prob' 20 Maii anno sequ. *Reg'm Pye*, fo. 44. Itm, I bequeath to the bylding of the new Stepyll w'tin the said Monastery, vj^s. viij^d. *Testam. Gul Legat*; dat. 4 Julii, 1500; prob. die Lunæ, p'x' post festum exalt' S. Crucis. *Ibid*, fo. 100.