

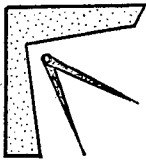
MASONS' MARKS

By the late F. A. GIRLING, F.S.A.

The mark of a Master Mason

The church at Rickinghall Superior is one of the few in Suffolk upon which the master mason has left his signature. Cautley¹ describes it as '... the finest mason's mark known to the writer, composed of square and compass'. It is incised on a stone in the south-west buttress of the tower (Fig. 27, *a*).

A comparable arrangement of square and compasses is to be seen on a carved oak spandrel at Halesworth, which forms part of the doorhead of a wide doorway into a yard on the north side of The Square (Fig. 27, *d*). They are carved on a shield which is surrounded by vine trails and bunches of grapes. The carving appears to date from the sixteenth century. Probably the house was that of a master mason or master carpenter.



a Rickinghall



b Uggeshall



c Walberswick



d Halesworth

FIG. 27.—Suffolk Masons' Marks.

Square and compasses are carved on the tomb of Hugues Libergier, master mason, at St. Nicaise, Reims, who died in 1263. At St. Ouen-de-Rouen, there are sepulchral slabs to the master masons or architects, Alexandre de Berneval who died in 1440, and Colin de Berneval. Both hold compasses and an architectural design.²

On the dexter spandrel of the same doorhead at Halesworth, there is a carved figure of a man in Tudor dress. He is dwarfed by the large scale of the stylised foliage and contorted stems, possibly of vines, which occupy most of the area of the spandrel.

Dr. Theodore Fisher³ suggested that the figure represents an

¹ H. Munro Cautley, F.S.A., *Suffolk Churches and their Treasures*, (1937).

² G. G. Coulton, *Art and the Reformation*, (1953).

³ Dr. Theodore Fisher, 'Carvings at Halesworth', *East Anglian Magazine*, vol. III, No. 5.

PLATE XXIX



a, Uggeshall.



b, Walberswick.
Suffolk Masons' Marks.

architect or a clerk of the works, and that the object he is carrying is a roll of architectural drawings. In the sixteenth century master masons and master carpenters acted as architects, in addition to doing the practical work of building.

The marks of a master mason and of his assistant

Beneath the west window of the tower of the church at Uggeshall, which appears to date from about 1500 or soon after, there is an inscription asking for prayers for the souls of the donor and his wife. At the end of the inscription there are two shields. On the first is incised a representation of a mason's axe together with an object which is probably a mason's hammer-axe. On the second shield there is a square and another hammer-axe (Fig. 27, *b*; Plate XXIX, *a*). It seems probable that when the master mason and his assistant had finished carving the inscription, they signed their work by placing their marks, within shields, at the end of it. Davies,⁴ quoting Koch, tells us that master masons were allowed to enclose their own sign within a shield. At St. Stephan's Vienna, the mark of the master mason, Anton Pilgrams, 1513, is enclosed within a shield.⁵

Salzman states that the axe and the hammer-axe formed the badge of the mason's craft.⁶ On the tomb of an unknown mason, *c.* 1423, at East Winch, Norfolk, the hammer-axe and square are carved in high relief. According to Coulton, the stone-axe or stone-hammer was almost as definite a badge of the mason as the square and compasses.⁷ An axe was used as a mason's mark at the church of St. Nicholas, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.⁸

A doubtful mason's mark

On a carved stone which originally formed part of the fifteenth century church at Walberswick,⁹ there is a device which might possibly be the mark of Richard Russell, who was the senior of the two masons who contracted for the building of the church tower in 1426.¹⁰ The design consists of a cross-saltire with bifid ends to the cross-pieces and two Gothic capital 'R's. These initial letters are of unusual form, but Mr. Leslie Dow and Mr. D. Charman confirm that they are probably 'R's (Fig. 27, *c*: Plate XXIX, *b*). The com-

⁴ H. W. Davies, *Devices of the Early Printers*, (1935).

⁵ A. Kieslinger, *Die Steine von St. Stephan*.

⁶ L. F. Salzman, F.S.A., *Building in England down to 1540*, (1952).

⁷ G. G. Coulton, *op. cit.*

⁸ C. J. Palmer, *The Perustration of Great Yarmouth*, vol. II, (1874).

⁹ The Rev. C. Chitty, M.A., 'Kessingland and Walberswick Church Towers', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, xxv, Part 2 (1950).

¹⁰ John Harvey, *English Mediaeval Architects*, (1954).

ination of two 'R's is rare in the fifteenth century. They could relate to Richard Russell, but perhaps this conjecture should be regarded rather as a possibility than as a probability.

The cross-saltire occurs in various personal marks, merchants' marks and masons' marks. A good example, with the initials I.A., is carved on a shield on a table tomb of an unknown man in the church at Hitchin, Hertfordshire.

At Bristol, Hudd¹¹ records the mark of Richard Lucas, butcher, 1446. This is a cross-saltire with a broad arrow and a Gothic small 'r'. On a bench-end at Kidlington, Oxfordshire, there is carved a cross-saltire with looped ends to the cross-pieces. In the centre is a Gothic capital 'T'. It probably stands for Thomas of Kidlington, Abbot of Osney, 1330-1373.¹²

¹¹ A. E. Hudd, F.S.A., 'Bristol Merchant Marks', *Proc. of the Clifton Antiquarian Club*, vol. vii, Part 2.

¹² Howard Freeborn, M.A., *St. Mary, Kidlington*.