

## William Byrd, Stonecutter and Mason

By MRS. J. C. COLE

‘WILLIAM BYRD, of Hallywell in the suburbs of Oxon, stonecutter, did in the latter end of this year [1657] find out the paynting or stayning of marble : a specimen of which he presented to the king after his restoration, as also to the queen, and in 1669 to Cosmo, prince of Tuscany, when in Oxon.’<sup>1</sup>

With these words Anthony Wood introduces us to William Byrd, and this passage is further reinforced by a significant entry in John Evelyn’s diary under the date 13 July 1654. Evelyn had gone to dine with Dr. Wilkins, the Warden of Wadham, who, ‘having been so abundantly civil as to present him with a transparent apiary of his own invention’, went on to show him ‘many artificial, mathematical and magical curiosities, a waywiser, a thermometer, a monstrous magnet, etc., most of them of his own and of that prodigious young scholar Mr. Christopher Wren’, ‘Who’, says Evelyn, ‘presented me with a piece of white marble which he had stained with a lively red, very deep, as beautiful as if it had been natural’. In these two passages, set side by side, we have, I think, a glimpse of the way in which William Byrd was occupying himself during the first difficult years after the Civil War when the mason’s trade was almost at a standstill, and also the probable origin of his early acquaintance with Wren.

Christopher Wren graduated from Wadham in 1653, and was attached to All Souls from 1653 to 1657. Between these two colleges we know that the yard of William Byrd was situated,<sup>2</sup> and the link is further strengthened by the fact that Byrd became college mason at Wadham at some date in or before 1656.<sup>3</sup> It seems hardly credible that in such circumstances Wren and Byrd should have been carrying on identical experiments unknown to one another, and indeed, bearing in mind the ‘prodigious genius’ of young Mr. Wren, it is not unlikely that he was the original instigator of Byrd’s discovery.

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Wood, *Life and Times*, ed. Clark, I, 241; cf. II, 160, 213. Byrd’s discovery made a considerable stir in local circles.

<sup>2</sup> Salter, *Surveys and Tokens* (O.H.S., LXXV), 296.

<sup>3</sup> Wadham College accounts. The entries are often ‘to the mason’ so that Byrd may have worked there before 1656. The actual dates when his name is mentioned are 1656, 1657 (twice), 1661-64 inclusive, 1669-75 inclusive. The Peisleys seem to have taken over the College work in 1692. They built the new building there in 1693-94. The gap in the entries for 1664-69 seems to show that Byrd’s yard was probably ‘full out’ on the Sheldonian.

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Who was William Byrd and whence did he come? The name Byrd or Bird<sup>4</sup> occurs fairly frequently in local 17th-century records. It belonged to a family of tradesmen to whom Byrd might well have been related, but, though the possibility must always be kept in mind as very probable, I have so far failed to find any definite connection, and it seems inevitable to extend our inquiries further afield. Mrs. Esdaile has suggested that William Byrd is the father of Francis. This, though attractive, hardly seems likely, since Vertue says that Francis told him he was born in London in 1667, at a time when we know that William Byrd was most certainly settled in Oxford, but it does perhaps suggest that Byrd had kinsmen in some of the City yards at that date, and this may later yield a clue to his identity.<sup>5</sup> There is another slight piece of evidence and one that leads to a different line of inquiry.

Let us go back for a few moments to the building of the Canterbury Quadrangle at St. John's College in 1632-36. Upon the failure of the local masons, Maud, Smith and Davis, and later of Hill, to fulfil their contracts, the harassed author of the accounts for the Quadrangle records how in 1634 he took horse and went to London 'to bargain with masons of all sorts'.<sup>6</sup> He returned with John Jackson and other craftsmen, including Robert White. Immediately upon their coming to Oxford, Jackson sent White to Chipping Campden to get additional masons, perhaps because White was himself a native of that town. White returned with, among others, two men, probably kinsmen of his own, Abraham White and his son Simon.<sup>7</sup> Abraham died just after the completion of the work on the Quadrangle at the end of 1636, but both Jackson and Simon White settled in Oxford and remained there till their death. Now the entry of Simon White's baptism in the Campden register in 1619 is of interest. He was christened Simon Byrd White.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Several Byrds occur in the Hanaster's books. John and Amy Byrd held property in Holywell in 1616 and 1629, and a Thomas Byrd signed the St. Cross registers as churchwarden in 1675. There was also a family of Byrd in St. Aldate's parish: see churchwardens' accounts and leases in the parish chest; some of these may well have been Byrd's kindred.

<sup>5</sup> Vertue's dates are confused, as Mrs. Esdaile points out, but even if we put Francis's birth back to 1655 we must presume that Byrd was then in Oxford. It is interesting, however, to remember that an Edward Bird and his mother worked for Wren as painters in many of the City churches and elsewhere, and that the name of the coppersmith who made the urn for the top of the Monument was Robert Bird. The name is, of course, a fairly common one.

<sup>6</sup> Cant. Quad. building accounts, among the College muniments.

<sup>7</sup> A Robert White occurs once, and once only, in the Campden registers. He had his son Robert christened in that church in 1634, the date of Robert's visit to Campden.

<sup>8</sup> Apart from Simon's christening, the name Byrd occurs three times in the registers, each time as godparent. A Thomas Byrd is twice godfather, in 1621 and 1630, and in 1622 a William Byrd acts in the same capacity. It does not seem that any of the Byrds lived in Campden. It is possible that this entry refers to William Byrd himself, since Simon White (later of fame as a Campden mason) acted as godfather to his cousin, Simon Byrd White, when only a year old, and it may have been customary for children to act as godparents.

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Whatever his origin, Mrs. Esdaile maintains that Byrd must at some time have had a London training since he can at will work in the pure tradition of the Mason's Company, and we may therefore suppose that he spent some years in one of the City yards.<sup>9</sup> The account books of Nicholas Stone show us how little work there was for a stonecutter during the Civil War, and it may even be that William Byrd was himself involved in the fighting, for he does not appear to have set up his yard in Oxford till after the establishment of the Protectorate and the return to more settled conditions.<sup>10</sup> The first definite fact that we know about him was that he paid his tax, according to the overseer's ratebooks for the parish of St. Peter-in-the-East, in the year 1652. He was then a married man, for we find the entry of his daughter's baptism in the register of St. Mary Magdalen in November of that year. She was christened Margaret. No further mention of the Byrd family occurs till 1667, when we find William occupying a tenement leased to John Holden, next the racket court at the corner of Smith Street—that is, behind and to the north of the octagon chapel, now part of Hertford College. He lived here with a wife, two children, a boarder and two journeymen, Thomas and Richard Wood, to whom he paid a wage of £8.<sup>11</sup> It is probable that at this time Byrd was quite a poor man, and this is borne out by the small payments made to him—as little sometimes as £2 at a time—in the Sheldonian Theatre building accounts.<sup>12</sup> The few remaining details of his private life are to be gathered either from the writings of Anthony Wood or the parish registers of St. Peter-in-the-East. He was still living in the same house next the racket court in 1671,<sup>13</sup> 1685<sup>14</sup> (Thomas Wood now lived next door), and on St. Luke's day 1687, when Wood tells us how some drunken young scholars broke the marble lying in front of his door.<sup>15</sup> We find him paying the poor rate in the overseer's book in 1669, and he continues to do so till 1690. It is recorded in a note against one of the entries for 1688 that he was now paying for the whole house. The third tax for the year 1690 was the last that Byrd paid, the fourth tax is marked 'not collected', and two years later the name of 'Mr. Piddington' has taken Byrd's place on the overseer's list. Margaret, Byrd's daughter, married in 1673 a Richard Bache of London and their infant son Byrd Bache

<sup>9</sup> See his monument to Bishop Brideoake in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and also the Wilmot monument in Wantage Church.

<sup>10</sup> After the battle of Worcester, fortifications were dug west of New College tower, disturbing several of the tenements there. As a consequence of this upheaval Byrd may have been able to acquire his yard.

<sup>11</sup> *Surveys and Tokens*, 296.

<sup>12</sup> See *Wren Soc.*, xix, 91 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Salter, *Oxford City Properties* (O.H.S., LXXXIII), 323. This is also borne out in the St. Peter-in-the-East churchwardens' accounts for that year.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Life and Times*, iv, 64.

was christened and buried in St. Peter's.<sup>16</sup> This marriage is of interest because the name is not very common, and we may therefore perhaps guess that Richard was some relation to William Bache who died in 1699. He was the king's locksmith and was often associated with Wren in his work.

William Byrd's wife Mary died in 1680, and in 1687 there is the rather curious entry of a marriage between William Byrd and Grace Keeble, both of this parish. If this is Byrd and not a son he must now have been an old man with only a few years to live, but nevertheless it seems a son, John, was born two years later.<sup>17</sup> The name Keeble does not occur in any 17th-century Oxford records known to me, with one exception. Among the All Souls Bursar's accounts is the record of a payment made to one 'Keeble White', for drawing the articles for building the Common Room in 1675. There was a family of 'Keebles' living at Hensington, near Bladon, and others in the Burford area, at this period,<sup>18</sup> and it may be that the bride's stock came from one of these stonemason's districts and that she was also a kinswoman of the Whites. In any case Byrd's son, if he had one, was not associated with the Holywell yard, for the family seem to have left the parish on Byrd's death, or more possibly before it, and no further entries connected with them occur in the records. William Byrd was one of the overseers for St. Peter's parish and signed the ratebooks there and also the churchwardens' accounts and a receipt, among the Queen's College archives, as churchwarden in 1677-78. During his term of office it is recorded that together with his fellow warden, John Betts, he repaired the church. His last signature is in the overseer's ratebook for 1689.<sup>19</sup>

Having outlined the main events of Byrd's private life, we will now return to the details of his career. Not very much evidence survives of his work before 1660. We know that he was college mason at Wadham and that he discovered the process of marble staining, but apart from this his only recorded commission (which may again have been influenced by Wren) was in 1659, when he carved the sundial for All Souls which is now on the wall of the Codrington Library.<sup>20</sup>

In the months succeeding the Restoration the Oxford masons must have been busy restoring the damage done during the Civil War and the Protectorate,<sup>21</sup> and it is therefore natural that the next piece of work on which we

<sup>16</sup> St. Peter-in-the-East registers. Some of the St. Peter's parish books relevant to Byrd's life are in the Bodleian Library (*Dep. d.16* and *Dep. b.8*).

<sup>17</sup> All Souls muniments.

<sup>18</sup> Woodstock parish registers, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Byrd's death is not mentioned in the register and I can find no trace of a will, but there is a record of a payment for the digging of a grave in St. Aldate's chancel for a Mr. Byrd in 1690, though there is no corresponding entry in the register. This possibility of a connection with the St. Aldate's Byrds should not be overlooked.

<sup>20</sup> All Souls Bursar's rolls.

<sup>21</sup> Wood, *Annals of the Univ.*, II, 648; churchwardens' accounts, 1677.

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find Byrd engaged is mending the king's arms over the Physic Garden gate.<sup>22</sup> Two years later he was briefed for a much more important undertaking.

John Fell, Dean of Christ Church, a noted High Churchman, was offended that so much secular business should still be carried on in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, and he so far worked upon the feelings of Archbishop Sheldon, a former Warden of All Souls, that Sheldon offered to the University a sufficient sum to build a theatre or senate house for the transaction of University business. All the arrangements for this undertaking were left in Fell's hands, and no more able lieutenant could have been found, while from Sheldon's own college was forthcoming an architect worthy of the subject. It was William Byrd whom Wren commissioned to make a model of the theatre and Wren himself was presented with a piece of plate 'for his pains about the business'.<sup>23</sup>

In 1662 the building began. The greatest enthusiasm was excited from the beginning over the project, and Byrd was fortunate in finding himself appointed 'carver to the theatre'.<sup>24</sup> Some of the Sheldonian accounts survive<sup>25</sup> and from them we have a very interesting list of his carvings there, which should, I fear, probably include the originals of the dilapidated row of 'Philosophers' or 'Emperors' now on the Sheldonian railings.<sup>26</sup>

During the years 1660-70 Byrd did many small pieces of work in the area round the new building. He carved the doorway leading from the north side of the Divinity School to the Sheldonian, and together with Simon White he made imposing and press stones for the University Press.<sup>27</sup> He also worked for Fell at Christ Church, where in 1665 we find him carving the royal arms on the bastion of the north buttress, and in 1663-64 he went to Winchester to repair for New College their founder's monument.<sup>28</sup>

In 1670 a much more distinguished commission came his way. In that year Dr. Richard Gardner undertook the charges for a fountain or basin

<sup>22</sup> Vice-Chancellor's accounts, 1661.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1662.

<sup>24</sup> He actually started work in 1664.

<sup>25</sup> MS. Bodl. 898. This is not the actual account book; see *Wren Soc.*, xix, *loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Even if these are Byrd's work it is nevertheless improbable that we have any of his original carving on these busts owing to the perishable nature of the stone. I have been told by an elderly Oxford woman that her father could remember as a young man helping to carve the last edition of the Emperors in a mason's yard in George Street. The faces were copied from those of the workmen in the yard. Von Uffenbach, writing in 1710, says, 'The other busts and decorations on the outer wall are so badly and so coarsely fashioned that I was astounded' (*Oxford in 1710*, ed. W. H. and W. J. C. Quarrell, p. 10). So the ancient opinion of them seems little better than the modern, but they may have been worn even when von Uffenbach saw them.

<sup>27</sup> Vice-Chancellor's accounts, 1669. In this instance the names of Simon White and William Byrd are coupled together in the same line which is very rare and looks as if they may have been sharing the commission. Jackson died in 1663 and it seems that the University, after two years' trial of the Piddingtons, handed over his work to Byrd. The same thing probably happened at Christ Church.

<sup>28</sup> Hiscock, *Ch. Ch. Miscellany*, 201 and New College Bursar's accounts roll, 1663/64.

to ornament the centre of Tom Quad, and put the matter into Byrd's hands. The statue took the form of a large rock, gilded and beautified with the celestial planets, and a fountain of water, conveyed through the centre of the rock by a pipe running through the mouth of the serpent. The whole structure cost Gardner upwards of £250, and an order in Chapter was made to keep the gift ever after repaired, though—alas for human intentions!—the serpent was replaced as early as 1695 by a statue of Mercury.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1660 and 1670 Byrd's activities seem sufficiently accounted for. He was working both as a carver and general mason and we can point to a fairly steady flow of commissions. There now comes something of a hiatus in his known work. Annual payments are made to him in the Wadham accounts between 1670-75, and he was working at New College in 1671, 1674-75, and again in 1676-77, when he did the carving on the panels of the Senior Common Room,<sup>30</sup> but no more important commissions can at present be attributed to these years.<sup>31</sup> This is the more noticeable because the Holywell yard was expanding, and by the end of the 1670s was to show itself capable of taking on important building operations, as well as of carrying on an ever-increasing trade in monumental masonry.

For this rapid expansion I think the growing capabilities of Thomas and Richard Wood must be partly responsible. No account of the Holywell yard can be complete without a further consideration of these two brothers whom we last saw as Byrd's journeymen in 1667, and it will be best perhaps to record here what is so far known of their lives. Of Thomas we know less personally and more of his work. He lived next to William Byrd, and had a wife, Alice, who continued in the same tenement long after Thomas's death.<sup>32</sup> They seem to have had no children and took in lodgers to help out their income.<sup>33</sup> Thomas Wood first appears in the Vice-Chancellor's accounts in 1676 when he laid the marble pavement in St. Mary's which had been given by Dr. Bathurst, and he also cut the Oriel College arms in Adam de Brome's chapel there.<sup>34</sup> In 1679 he carved the monument to Francis Junius set up in St. George's Chapel at Windsor, and in the same year embarked upon the building of the Ashmolean Museum.<sup>35</sup> We do not know the

<sup>29</sup> Hiscock, *op. cit.*, 202.

<sup>30</sup> He seems to have succeeded Simon White at New College. It is interesting to find him doing wood-carving in the Senior Common Room. The carving is illustrated in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *City of Oxford*, pl. 165.

<sup>31</sup> It is known that Thomas Wood repaired Wootton Church and we should probably look outside Oxford for work by Byrd's yard during these years.

<sup>32</sup> *Oxford City Properties*, 322.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, *Life and Times*, III, 213.

<sup>34</sup> Vice-Chancellor's accounts, 1676.

<sup>35</sup> Vice-Chancellor's accounts, 1679. Wood also repaired the conduit at Carfax.



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exact date of his death. He was still alive in 1693, but had died by 1695.<sup>36</sup>

Of Richard Wood's actual work we know nothing at all, unless Mr. Esdaile is right in attributing to him the Blake monument in the church of St. Peter-in-the-East, and the Noyes floor-slab in New College cloisters.<sup>37</sup> He lived at 46 Broad Street and attended the church of St. Mary Magdalen. He was churchwarden in 1682 and signed a deed as a feoffee there in 1696, when he is described as 'stonecutter'.<sup>38</sup> He died in 1700 and was survived by his widow, who made arrangements about his grave. He seems also to have been childless. Several of his signatures exist in the parish account books. He wrote a rather uneducated hand. Richard had a civic as well as a parochial career. In 1676 he was admitted as a freeman, and being too poor to pay the full fees he was admitted 'for doing as much work in the way of his trade as his brethren thought fit, for the office fees, and a leathern bucket and a bond of £40 to follow no other trade'. In 1684 he was chosen to fill up the common council, in 1686 he was bailiff, in 1687 senior bailiff, and mayor in 1694. He seems to have got some useful pickings in the way of building repairs from his various offices, and in 1696 he submitted a bill to the council for a sundial he had made on the South Bridge.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting that after Byrd's death, Wren was contracting with Wood for gravel for his building at Greenwich.

At first sight it seems curious that it was to Thomas Wood and not to William Byrd that the University entrusted the building of the Ashmolean, especially as it appears that Byrd did a preliminary survey of the site and allowed Wood to use his own technique of marble staining on a mantelpiece (now lost) within the building;<sup>40</sup> but Byrd was at this time negotiating another commission on which he embarked before the Ashmolean was finished. This was the Garden Quadrangle at New College.

Among the New College archives valuable material connected with the Garden Quadrangle survives, including an engraving of Byrd's original plan for the building, his later alterations, the articles of his contracts for the north and south blocks, and a personal letter from him to the Warden, dated December 1686. The building accounts are also preserved, and are entitled

<sup>36</sup> *Oxford City Properties*, 327.

<sup>37</sup> The subjects of both these memorials were lodgers who died in his house (see Wood, *Life and Times*, III, 213, and II, 479), so that this seems very probable.

<sup>38</sup> St. Mary Magdalen parish papers.

<sup>39</sup> Oxford City Council Acts under the appropriate years.

<sup>40</sup> Ashmolean building accounts (with the Vice-Chancellor's general accounts for the year 1679). It has been said that the design for the Ashmolean was Wren's, but this is unlikely. In the lavish decoration on the great east doorway and pediment we have presumably an example of Thomas Wood's carving. It differs in many significant details from Byrd's work.

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'The Account of the New Building in New College Oxon begun Jan. 31, 1681½ ended August 1685'.<sup>41</sup>

The Garden Quadrangle as we know it consists of four blocks of building forming a stepped quadrangle, open on the east side. Of these, the two inner blocks were built by William Byrd, and begun in February 1682,<sup>42</sup> those nearer the garden by the Townsends in 1700 and 1707 respectively.<sup>43</sup> Byrd's original plan was for a quadrangle with a pedimented block of building on the east side, through which there was to be access to the garden by an archway in the centre of the building (PL. VIII). This plan was later rejected in favour of the one which practically represents the building as we see it to-day (PL. IX). The south block was the first to be built. It was begun in January 1682, and the contract bound Byrd to finish it by Michaelmas Day 1683, at a total cost of £1,460. The articles for the north block are dated 12 April 1683, and refer to the line on the south side as 'almost finished'. The north block was to have been finished by 29 September 1684, at a cost of £1,683—but '*Dis aliter visum*', and the 'god' in this case was Sir Christopher Wren. In the autumn of 1683 Wren summoned Byrd to help in the building of the Great Palace at Winchester which the king was urgent with Wren to complete as soon as possible, and this was a summons which New College, with all its Winchester connections, must surely have listened to with sympathy.

Byrd's first contract at Winchester is dated November 1683, and his work there did not cease till the king's sudden death in 1685 put an end to the whole project. The building of Winchester Palace has been dealt with exhaustively in the Wren Society's publication (vol. VII, p. 11 ff.) where Byrd's contract is also published. He was one of only six contractors chosen by Wren to work upon that very important building, and his selection must have been a signal honour to crown his career.<sup>44</sup> He employed upon his work there 14 masons and 7 labourers, and his bill came to £37 a month, an imposing sum when we remember the Sheldonian accounts! He contracted for all the stone and mason's work along the front and inside of a section of the south wing.

Byrd was paid at Winchester for his work on the Palace, though the other masons preferred to be paid in London, and it seems clear that he was absent there for long stretches of time, while his contract at New College dragged on

<sup>41</sup> The first engraving mentioned at the beginning of the accounts is almost certainly the earlier of the two surviving in the New College Archives. It will be noticed that the plan is one that we should expect from Byrd, being adorned copiously with scrolls and flourishes reminiscent of his lettering. The decoration also pictured on the pediment of the elevation of the East block is like Byrd's work. He has drawn one of the buttresses on the North side carelessly and out of place.

<sup>42</sup> Wood, *Life and Times*, III, 5. The foundation stone was laid in February 1682.

<sup>43</sup> Roy. Comm. on Hist. Mon., *City of Oxford*, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> We recall that Wren, writing to Fell about the choice of Kempster for Tom Tower, remarked, 'He will promise little advantage to himself so he may have the honour of the work.'



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far past the original date. No payments were signed in person by him in the New College account book between August 1683 and October 1684. In the following December he signs again, and after that not until August 1685, when the second block was finished.<sup>45</sup>

Why did Byrd alter his original plan for the Garden Quadrangle? We do not know, but we can learn a little of the history of the whole transaction from a close study of the accounts. The first entry in the Building Account Book is for Michael Burghers' engraving of the plan, and permission for this expenditure is signed, not by Henry Beeston, but by his predecessor, Warden Nicholas. Beeston became Warden in November 1679, and the date of the first plan must therefore precede this event. Here, it seems, we have the explanation of Byrd's inability to undertake the contract for the Ashmolean.

Between 1679 and 1680 it is clear that various versions of the quadrangle were considered. Three elevations and four ground plans of this period survive, two endorsed in what appears to be Byrd's own handwriting. The discussion and alteration of these various plans must have lasted over a period of more than two years. Was the final decision influenced by some embryo design of Wren's for Winchester? One cannot say, but it seems not unlikely considering the close ties between Winchester and New College.

Like some of his predecessors, Byrd seems to have gone somewhat astray in his estimates for the new buildings and to have been gravely out of pocket in consequence. At the end of the accounts occurs this entry: 'Taken then from the building chest and given by the Society to Mr. Byrd, the sum of £10 in consideration of his poverty and pretended loss in our building.

*Mem.* At the same time Dr. Traffles gave him £10 to satisfy his importunity'.

All is clearly not well here, and the one letter of Byrd's which survives is a politely couched, but still insistent demand dated December 1686, for further payments for his work at New College. It is sad indeed that the history of the Garden Quadrangle should terminate on so unsatisfactory a note.

With Winchester and New College Byrd's work as a mason apparently ends. A few more monuments from his yard bear witness to his hand, but Byrd must have been growing old, and perhaps impoverished, and four years later he slips quietly out of the Oxford scene and from among the buildings that his skill had helped to decorate.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> These seem to be Byrd's signatures. His writing is educated, but old-fashioned.

<sup>46</sup> Byrd's yard seems to have passed in about 1692 to the Piddingtons. This is another well-known family of Oxford masons. As far as I can trace those members who concern us here I should list them as follows:

*Richard Piddington.* Son of Humphrey Piddington of Stanton St. John. Yeoman. Worked on the Cant. Quad. with William Badger and Thomas Robinson under Hill and afterwards under Jackson. He is probably the Piddington who worked with Badger on paving the passage of the Congregation House and pitching the gutters there in 1639-40 (Vice-Chancellor's accounts).

Apart from his building activities, the Holywell yard had early developed an important line in monumental masonry, and much of this side of Byrd's work has survived. There exist, so far as I know, only three signed monuments and one signed fragment from his hand<sup>47</sup> (PLS. X, XI), and only two more can be documented,<sup>48</sup> but from these examples and our general knowledge of Byrd's work, a very large group of monuments, both in Oxford and in the neighbourhood, has been ascribed to him.<sup>49</sup> Indeed the number is so large, and so constantly liable to increase in the light of further investigation, that it would be both unwise and tedious to attempt anything like a comprehensive list.

Byrd's monuments have been dealt with very fully by Mr. Esdaile. They fall into the usual types common to his period, large monuments, pilastered mural tablets, cartouche tablets, small unclassified tablets, big armorial floor-slabs and, as Mr. Esdaile points out, probably many small diamond-shaped floor-slabs of a type common in the district.<sup>50</sup> Of these far the most

*Anthony Piddington.* Presumably Richard's son, is mentioned once in the Sheldonian account-book. He worked at Oriel where he seems to have been college mason in 1657-58 and 1660-61 (Oriel College Bursar's accounts). He was succeeded there by his son Richard, who is mentioned in the Oriel accounts by name in 1689. William Byrd was commissioned to clean the new marble pavement in the chapel at Oriel in 1680 and again in 1681 and 1682 (perhaps at the suggestion of the Piddingtons). Byrd's place in the overseer's ratebook is taken by a Mr. Piddington in 1692, and this is probably the Mr. Piddington, a mason of Holywell, who died on 25 December 1724 worth £1,200. Mr. Esdaile has dealt in his B.Litt. thesis with some members of this family, and also their monuments. The Holywell yard descended from the Piddingtons to the Knowles who have now moved to the north side of Holywell.

<sup>47</sup> (1) The monument to Bishop Brideoake in St. George's Chapel at Windsor; (2) the Fettiplace monument in Swinbrook church; (3) the monument to Major Dunch at Pusey in Berkshire. The fragment bearing William Byrd's signature is that of a black marble cornice over the exterior of the south door (but within the porch) at Lydiard Tregoze church in Wiltshire. On the interior of the same wall is the remains of a monument to Sir Charles Pleydel of Midge Hall, erected in 1679; only the inscription panel survives, but this is characteristic of Byrd's yard and has the ligatured double L. It seems that here we may have the remains of a fourth signed monument.

<sup>48</sup> The Wilmot monument at Wantage and the armorial floor slab to the Smith family (now lost).

<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Esdaile and her son would also ascribe to Byrd monuments farther afield, the Lucy monument at Brecon and Sir John Knight's monument at Chawton in Hampshire. I have seen neither of these personally, but it is extremely likely that we must look for Byrd's work over a wider area. Commissions often came through recommendation, and as the members of a family scattered or inter-married, so orders might be received from entirely new districts.

<sup>50</sup> Mr. Esdaile has written very fully of Byrd's monuments in his B.Litt. thesis, and I am indebted to him for these categories and for much valuable material. Good specimens of the various types possibly attributable to Byrd's yard may be listed as follows:

*Large monuments.* The Blake monument at Cogges, near Witney; the Harcourt monument at Stanton Harcourt; and the Wenman monument at Witney.

*Pilastered mural tablets.* I feel doubtful about the attribution of any of these.

*Cartouche tablets.* The number of these is so great that it is hard to choose. Characteristic examples are the Wall tablet in Christ Church Cathedral, the William Guise in St. Michael at the North Gate, the Edward Man above the door of the ante-chapel at All Souls. Outside Oxford I might mention the Horde and Phillips tablets at Bampton, and Major Dunch's in Pusey Church.

*Small unclassified tablets.* Probably the Cheeke tablet in Corpus Christi cloisters.

*Armorial floor-slabs.* The Smith floor-slab shows that Byrd did this type of work and the Noyes in New College cloisters, which is most probably from his yard, supports this evidence.

*Small floor-slabs.* The Wenman floor-slabs at Witney, and many others.

## WILLIAM BYRD, STONECUTTER AND MASON

numerous and characteristic are the cartouche tablets, specimens of which exist in many of the college chapels and the churches of Oxford.

This is not the place to discuss Byrd's artistic abilities. Although his natural style is daring, lavish and often, it must be confessed, clumsy, showing 'an imagination greater than his powers', he can and does carve at times with restraint and in the pure City tradition.<sup>51</sup> He works whenever possible in alabaster, and, unlike his local contemporaries, practically always shuns the use of stone for monumental purposes.

At first Byrd's output of monuments was probably not large and only comparatively few can even tentatively be allotted to the years 1655-70. Between 1670 and 1680 we seem to have a greatly increased and growing output and between 1680 and 1690 numerically perhaps most of all.

One of the most distinctive and pleasing things about William Byrd's work is his lettering. He delights in ornate g's and Q's, abbreviated 'ands' and in a variety of scripts. Mr. Esdaile bases much of his argument for attributing monuments to the Holywell yard on the use by Byrd and his partners, the Woods, and by his successors, the Piddingtons, of the ligatured L and occasionally also the ligatured T, a fashion which occurred at times in the City yards but not usually after the middle of the century (see the double L in the Banks monument by John Stone in Christ Church Cathedral). I do not think this can be accepted as an entirely sound guide, since the double L occurs, for example, on the Walter's monument in St. Mary's, now known to be by the Townsends, and a ligatured double N such as Byrd also favours (e.g. *Johannis* Wall in Christ Church) is found on the Narborough monument there, also by them; but it is true that Byrd's yard seems to use the double L almost as a sort of signature.

One would have imagined that in his monumental work at any rate Byrd's marble staining would have come into its own, and it is therefore surprising to discover that no single stained marble monument from his hand exists, to my knowledge, in Oxford, and apparently only three in the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>52</sup> Fashion no doubt was against him in this matter, but when one recalls the enthusiasm which his original discovery provoked, mounting even into royal circles, it seems incredible that in practice it was so little patronized. Byrd, one suspects, must have felt some regret at this lack of appreciation on the part of his clients, and perhaps it is not altogether

<sup>51</sup> E.g. the Brideoake monument.

<sup>52</sup> The Blake monument at Cogges, near Witney (colours red, blue, green), the Barbara Horde at Bampton (red and green), and the monument to Major Dunch in Pusey church (red and green). Byrd does seem to use a little gold on other monuments, e.g. the Fynmore at North Hinksey (if this is his), but the gold is not stain.

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coincidence that makes him append his rare signature to Major Dunch's monument in Pusey church.<sup>53</sup>

The mention of Byrd's marble staining brings our thoughts back once more to his early days in Oxford and to his relations with Christopher Wren;<sup>54</sup> and we can reflect, as we end this brief and still inadequate account of his life and work, that whatever his faults as an artist, we can yet count it eternally to his credit that both at the beginning and end of his career he found favour in the sight of that great master, and that he is privileged to rank himself, however humbly, among those craftsmen by whom Wren's architectural triumphs were achieved.

### APPENDIX

The Chipping Campden registers begin in 1618. In them at that date we find two members of the mason family of White, John and Abraham. Both had sons called Simon, after an older Simon who also appears in the register. John's son became the Simon White of local fame who left his mason's mark on Campden Church, where his name occurs frequently in the contemporary churchwardens' accounts. He also built Alcester town hall. Abraham came to Oxford to work at St. John's, where his name is found in the building accounts, he died at the end of 1636, the year in which the Canterbury Quadrangle was finished. His son, Simon, worked with him there and afterwards under Jackson at B.N.C. He was also employed on St. Mary's porch, and his name occurs frequently in the Vice-Chancellor's accounts. The Northerne monument in St. Peter-le-Bailey is documented as his, and he possibly carved the Creede monument in Christ Church Cathedral. He lived in Broad Street and was New College mason till 1669-70, when he must have died.

The Campden registers are extremely interesting. William Hanks, who worked under Jackson at B.N.C., figures in them as well as his son Thomas. This family also settled in Oxford in St. Mary Magdalen parish, where Thomas's wife died in 1664, and a Nathaniel Hanks, mason, is mentioned in 1676. They were the masons who repaired Woodstock Church at that period.

### ADDENDUM

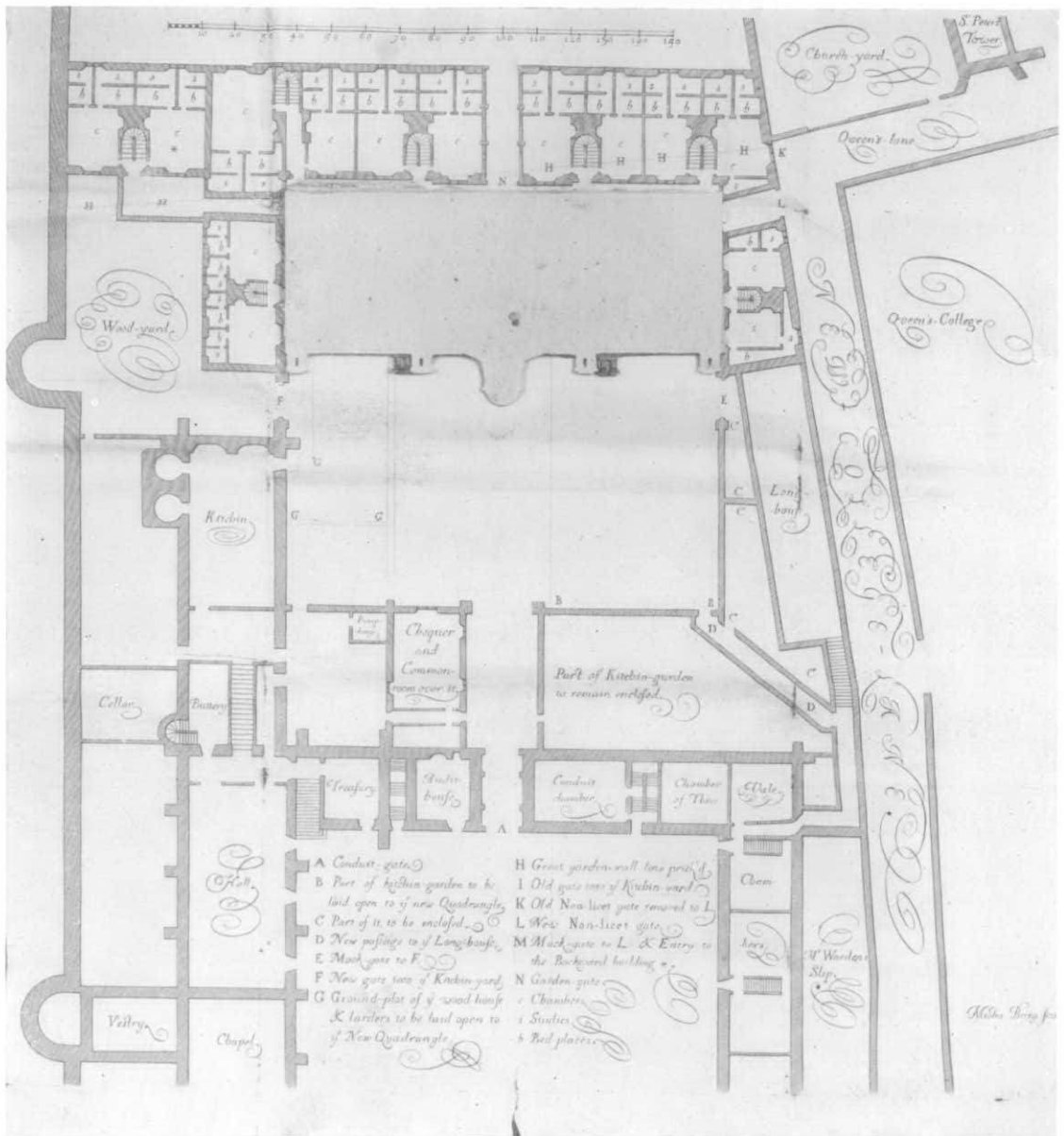
Since this paper went to press a document has come to light in the University Archives among the Chancellor's Court papers for 1681, giving details of a lawsuit in that year between Thomas Wood and Arthur Frogley, over the building of Cuddesdon Palace. William Byrd is called as a witness and states that he is then 57 years old, that he was born in St. Nicholas's parish in Gloucester, and had served eight years apprenticeship under Walter Nicholls, a mason there. He had lived in Oxford for 34 years and 'lately in Oxon. he built the Arch at New Coll. and Edmund Hall chappell'. Before that he had worked at 'several noble buildings' in different counties, not, unfortunately specified.

I hope to publish a fuller account of this case.

J.C.C.

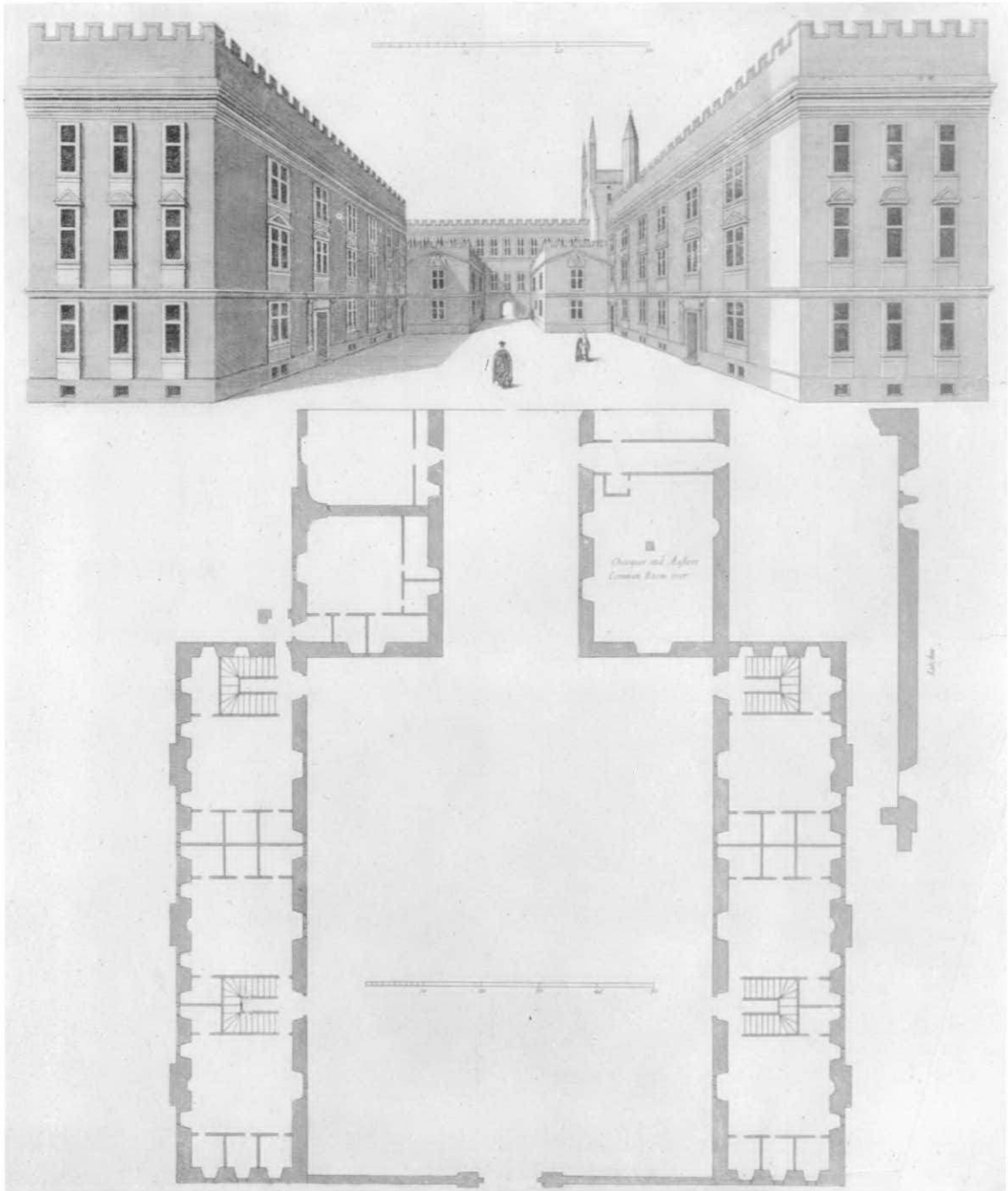
<sup>53</sup> The only other mention of his stained marble in use is on the fireplace (now lost) which Thomas Wood built in the Ashmolean.

<sup>54</sup> Wren, writing to Fell on the subject of choosing masons for Tom Tower, says, 'I cannot praise the Oxford Artists, though they have a good opinion of themselves', and it may be that he and Byrd fell out over some matter in the 'seventies, but resumed their friendship later.



BYRD'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR THE GARDEN QUADRANGLE AT NEW COLLEGE

By courtesy of the Warden and Fellows, New College



A LATER PLAN FOR THE GARDEN QUADRANGLE

*By courtesy of the Warden and Fellows, New College*





A



B

SIGNED MONUMENTS BY WILLIAM BYRD

- A. Monument to Bishop Brideoake, St. George's Chapel, Windsor
- B. Part of the Fettiplace monument, Swinbrook Church, Oxon.

Phh.: A. Mr. Edmund Esdaile

B. By courtesy of Mr. F. H. Crossley

COLE: WILLIAM BYRD



A



B



C

SIGNED MONUMENTS BY WILLIAM BYRD

- A. Monument to Major Dunch, Pusey Church, Berks.
- B. Signature on the Dunch monument.
- C. Signature on a fragment of a monument, Lydiard Tregoze church, Wilts.