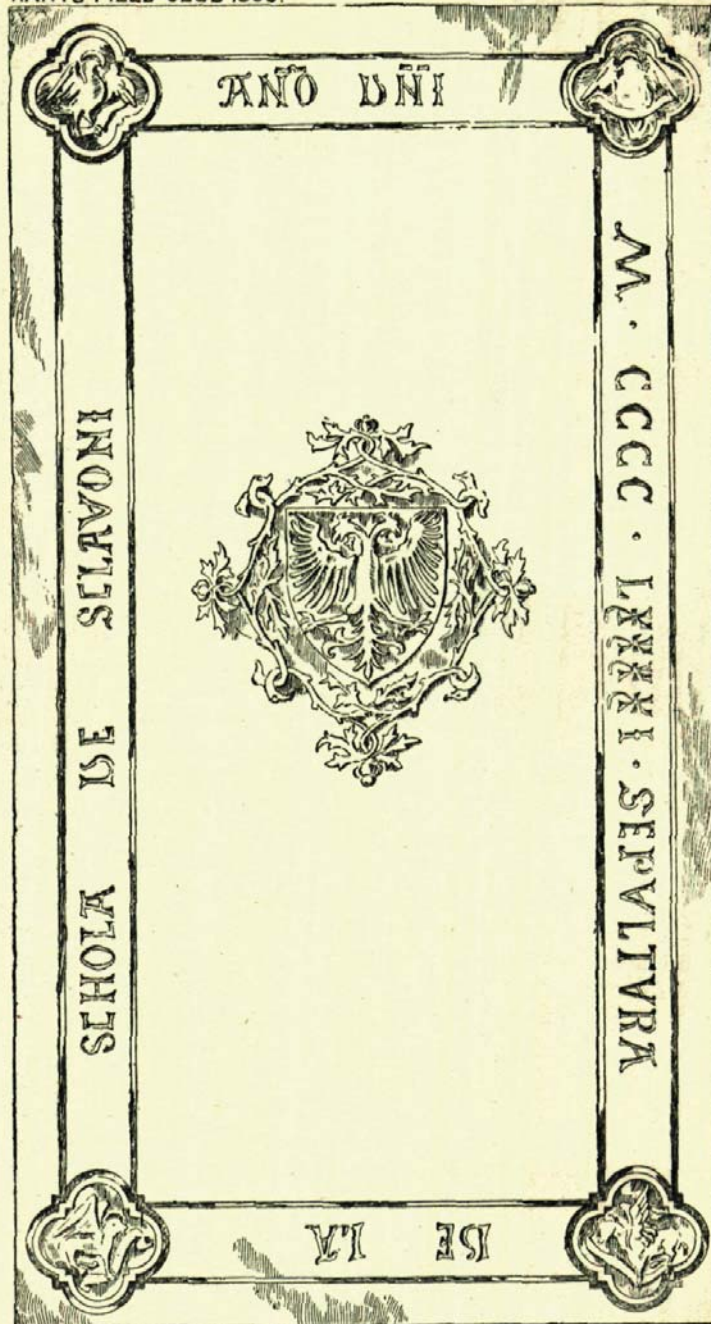


HANTS FIELD CLUB 1893.



N. CH. NISBETT Del.

INCISED TOMB STONE NORTH STONEHAM

THE SLAVONIAN TOMBSTONE AT NORTH STONEHAM.

*A Chapter in the History of the ancient Commerce of
Southampton.*

By the REV. G. W. MINNS, LL.B., F.S.A.

The curious and interesting inscribed slab in the church of North Stoneham has sorely puzzled antiquaries, and, until lately had for some time been hidden from view by the boarded floor which forms a dais for the choir stalls in the chancel of the church. During the past year (1893) the boards which cover the space have been made moveable, at the expense of the Hampshire Field Club, which has thus fulfilled one of its purposes, viz., "the preservation of objects of antiquity." The stone is now accessible to any who may pay a visit to the church, and it has been thought that a notice of its history may be of interest to explain the accompanying drawing by Mr. C. H. Norman Nisbett, from a rubbing of this ancient memorial of the commerce of Southampton.

When Mr. Duthy wrote his "Sketches of Hampshire" the stone was lying in the north aisle, probably its original position, as it is hardly likely that to strangers of little importance, there would be granted interment before the high altar; whereas the side aisle, with probably a chantry attached, would be a suitable place of burial for the aliens.

The stone, of a bluish grey colour, measures 6ft. 8in. by 3ft. 8in., and lies east and west. In the centre is a shield, surrounded by a floriated ornament, and charged with a two-

headed imperial eagle, displayed, sculptured in low relief. Around the edge, enclosed within lines, is the following inscription:—"SEPULTURA DE LA SCHOLA DE SCLAVONI ANO DNI MCCCCLXXXI," which, Mr. Duthy suggests, possibly indicates the burial place of a Slavonian named "De la Schole," but he wisely adds "the import of the inscription has not been ascertained."¹ At the corners, within quatrefoils, are the evangelistic emblems in the following order, commencing at the S.E. or right hand top corner. The Angel (St. Matthew), the winged Ox (St. Luke), the winged Lion (St. Mark), the Eagle (St. John). The letters of the inscription are of foreign character, while the "stump" foliage around the shield, Mr. Nisbett suggests, indicates Teutonic, possibly Flemish origin.

The language of the inscription is a mixture of Latin and Italian, and may be rendered "The tomb² of the Confraternity (*Schola*) of Slavonians, A.D. 1491." The meaning of *Schola* cannot be gathered from the modern use of the word, which, in the middle ages, was used to designate a religious society, guild, or confraternity, mostly of laymen associated together under the sanction and authority of the Church, for co-operation in good works, or mutual help in matters spiritual and temporal.³

Confraternities of this kind were especially numerous in Venice, then the head of the maritime commerce of the world, and the resort of many foreigners, for whom such Societies formed a national as well as a religious bond of union. Among those settled there and having *scuole* were Greeks (*Greci*), Germans (*Tedeschi*) and Slavonians (*Schiavoni*). These Slavonians were a hardy people from that part of Dalmatia which forms the Eastern seaboard of the Adriatic, including several islands, and known to the Greeks as Illyria. The Dalmatians gave much trouble to the

¹ *Sketches of Hampshire*, embracing the country adjacent to the river Itchen. By J. Duthy, 1839.

² *Sepultura* "tombeau, pierre tumulaire" (A.D. 1444), Maigne d'Arnis Lexicon Manuale.

³ At Venice, near the church of St. Roch, is the hall of the confraternity of the *Scuola di San Rocco*. The object of the confraternity is to bury the dead, and endow orphans. The Emperor of Austria is a member of the body." *Webb's Continental Ecclesiology*, 1848, p. 292.

Romans, but were reduced to subjection by Tiberius and formed part of the Empire. In the seventh century Dalmatia was invaded by swarms of Slavs, who erected an independent sovereignty. By treaty A.D. 812 it was assigned to the Eastern Empire, and in 1088 became annexed to the kingdom of Hungary. Zara, one of the most important towns on the coast, in 1202, came under the protection of Venice, which availed itself of the connection to bring the whole coast under subjection in 1301.

The Dalmatians were skilful sailors and noted pirates. The northern tribes, particularly the Liburnians, built swift vessels, and in classical times were devoted to piracy, for which their coast offered great advantages. Hence Virgil's description, *Æn.* i, 243 :—

"Illyricos penetrare sinus atque intima tutus
Regna Liburnorum."

They were numerous at Rome, where they were despised, and held menial offices. *Martial* i, 49.

"Procul horridus Liburnus, et querulus cliens."

It is probably from their old connection with Rome, Constantinople, and the kingdom of Hungary, that their successors the Slavonians assumed the imperial eagle as their device. Like their predecessors they were hardy mariners. Although engaged in the commerce of the republic to which their country had been subjected, their condition likewise appears to have been degraded. In 1451 an hospice was granted to poor Dalmatian sailors (*a' poveri marinai dalmati*)¹ in the Convent of St. John, at Venice, and an altar in the church was assigned for their use. The hospice fell into decay at the close of the fifteenth century, and a church—San Giorgio dei Schiavoni—which still exists, was erected on the site, about the middle of the sixteenth century, and their name is also preserved in the *Riva di Schiavoni*, still one of the most important quays in Venice.

In order to connect these hardy Slavonian sailors with Southampton we must realize the important position of our port as the chief southern harbour of England, while Venice was the great depôt of commerce for the East, having a

¹ *Venezia Artistica e Storica di Selvatico e Lazari*, 1852.

regular trade with the Levant, and by means of its galleys enjoyed the carrying trade of the known world. To Southampton came every year the "Venetian fleet,"¹ upon whose visit most important commercial interests depended. Laden with the produce of the East, to which were added wares of Italy, the vessels left Venice in company, trading at various ports in the Mediterranean, and passing the Straits of Gibraltar came up Channel, where they separated for a time, some of the vessels going to Flanders, others putting into the Channel ports, and the larger portion coming to Southampton² rather than London.

Some time would be spent in exchanging cargoes and making payments, which being done, they again reunited and set sail for Venice, from which they were absent for nearly a whole year. The nature of their commerce is described in one of the political songs of the period³

"The grete galeise of Venees and Florence
Be well laden with things of complacence,
Alle spicerye and of grocer's ware,
With swete wyne; all manner of chaffare."

Some of the articles of "chaffare" (*barter*), apes and japes (*follies*) and marmassettes tayed," were regarded as wasteful trifles, and a poor exchange for the solid commodities, cloth, wool and tin, which they received in return.

"Thus these galeise for this lykinge (*pleasing*) ware
And etynge ware, bere hens our best chaffare,
Clothe wolle and tynne."

Interesting particulars of the fleet will be found in the Calendars of State Papers (Venetian series.) The Venetians

¹ A charter of *inspeximus* and confirmation, dated by Henry VII., among other concessions, granted that the Mayor, Bailiffs, and Burgesses of Southampton, should have the said town to themselves at the autumn yearly rent of £200, to be paid yearly at the feast of St. Michael, *cum parva custuma aliquo anno ibidem ad summam ducentorum librorum attinget, aut cum aliquo naves vocatæ careches de Jene, aut cum aliquo naves vocatæ Galleys de Venecia ad portum ville predictæ cum mercandisiis suis quoquo anno venient ibidemque discarcabunt et escippabunt et recarcabunt.* MSS. of the Town of Southampton. Hist. MSS. Commission.

² An Act of Edward I., prohibiting the exportation of bullion, enumerates among the chief ports of England "Winchester, Portsmouth, Southampton, Hamble, &c." Lindsay's Hist. Merchant Shipping and Ancient Commerce, 1874. Vol. I, p. 407.

³ *Libelle of English Polycye in Political Songs*, Rolls Series, II. 73.

appear to have frequented this country at an earlier period than any other of the Italians. From Rymers "*Fœdera*" we learn that the "Flanders Galleys"—a merchant fleet—organised by the Venetian State, first sailed in 1317. It was under the direction of a Commodore. Each vessel had 30 archers on board. The galleys were manned by 180 *Slavonian oarsmen*. In 1323 we hear of a quarrel between the captains of five galleys of Venice and the town of Southampton. On the 16th April of the same year the King pardons the misconduct of five Venetian galleys at Southampton; the Venetians may therefore trade with England in safety¹

Trading privileges were also granted, and relations continued on the whole to be friendly, so that in the fifteenth century Southampton, with Bruges, had become the great centre of Venetian trade in the north of Europe. In the sixteenth century the commercial enterprise of England had greatly increased; our own ships ventured into the Mediterranean and beyond, and the Venetian fleet came to our shores for the last time in 1532². The prohibition of the export of wool in Henry VIII.'s time tended also to put a stop to the trade with Venice, although some few Venetian ships continued to visit Southampton, and one is recorded as being there in 11th of Elizabeth (1569.)³

The voyage of the "Venetian Fleet" was attended with dangers besides the perils of the sea. Their valuable cargoes exposed them to piratical violence. In 1488 the Flanders galleys, which left Antwerp for Southampton, were attacked by three English ships, off St. Helen's, and were commanded to strike sail. The galleys hove to, but finding mischief meant, the master blew his whistle and beat to quarter, and having killed eighteen English made his way into Southampton Water, pursued by the ships. A few years later (1495) we find the captain of the galleys and other Venetian subjects were seized in Southampton Harbour by French or Bretons.

¹ *Extracts relating to Maritime Affairs*, from Sir T. Duffus Hardy's Syllabus of Documents in Rymer's *Fœdera*.

² Gibbin's "*Industrial History of England*," p. 93.

³ Davies: "*History of Southampton*," p. 251.

What led the Slavonians to the church at North Stoneham and there to have their place of burial cannot definitely be determined. The affray with the people of Southampton in 1323, above referred to, would lead to the conclusion that the relations between the Venetian mariners and the town were not always of a friendly character. That the intercourse with the shore was limited we may infer from a decree of the Senate, 1439, which permitted the captain of the Flanders galleys to go ashore to hear mass at Sandwich or Southampton,¹ and that the foreigners were regarded with suspicion, is evident, since, in 1492, when the King's arsenal caught fire, a Venetian "*Ser*" *Filippo Morosini*, going in to see the fire, was suspected of having caused it, but was cleared.² It is possible, therefore, that a hostile or exclusive feeling may have made the people of Southampton unwilling to give burial to the foreigners, who therefore sought a place of sepulture at the village of North Stoneham. The dedication of the church to St. Nicholas, the patron of sailors, may also have attracted them thither. We must remember that the river Itchen at that time was much broader and navigable from the port of Northam (the old Southampton) as far as Alresford. Owing to the enterprise of Bishop Godfrey de Lucy³ (1189-1204), a water way had been made, favourable to commerce with Winchester, which, as we have seen, was then regarded as a port. At Swathling, by North Stoneham, the road to Salisbury, *via* Romsey, converged with other important highways, and it may be that here the galleys found a place for mooring.

¹ Calendar of State Papers (Venetian), quoted by Davies' Hist. Southampton, p. 251.

² Ibid., p. 476.

³ One of his first works was most wise and beneficent. It was to restore the navigation of the Itchen, not only from Southampton to Winchester, but also to the very head of the river. At Alresford he raised a great mole, by which he gathered the waters into a lake, now called "Alresford pond," draining thereby a vast quantity of marshy land, as well as furnishing a reservoir to supply the navigation. Milner's Winchester, I. 229.

King John's Charter allowing certain duties to be collected by the Bishop of Winchester, seems to imply considerable traffic by the river Itchen, since it speaks *de rebus venientibus ad Winton de mare vel descendantibus ad mare*.

It is said that some of the material of old St. Mary's church, Southampton, destroyed in the middle of the Sixteenth Century, found its way to North Stoneham, where there are some awkward architectural features, notably the east window, evidently an insertion of a late period. Possibly this slab may have been transferred thither from St. Mary's or the neighbouring chapel of St. Nicholas, which Leland saw decayed, on the occasion of his visit, and describes,¹ in 1546, as "a poor small thing yet standing at the east end of St. Mary Church, in the great cemetery, where there be many fair tombs of merchants of New Hampton." A few years later, and "the great Church of Our Lady" was itself a ruin. The people of Southampton, in 1549 or 1550, pulled down the church to remove from French cruisers the landmark of its lofty spire. Some of its stones may still be seen in the Deanery wall, and a part of the material was used in the construction of the public roads. In the Court Leet book it is ordered (1550) that "so much of the rubbish of St. Mary's Church should be carried away as would serve to make the highway from Bargate, and all East Street, down to the turning to the chantry."

Dr. J. Bullar² notices this stone as lying, in his time, in the "north aile" at North Stoneham, and says that the inscription has been submitted to antiquaries, in the "Gentleman's Magazine," but no elucidation has yet appeared."

The tombstone records no name, which would seem to imply that it commemorates a general interment, or common grave. Possibly some prevailing sickness had proved fatal to the Slavonian oarsmen, or some of their number may have been killed in an *émeute*, or by some other calamity. As to this we are unable to determine. We can, however, show under what circumstances, and with what object, these strangers visited our shores, and while the record of the rugged mariners from the Adriatic serves to recall the importance of Southampton as a commercial centre, four centuries ago, in connection with the East, we may hope

¹ Leland's Itinerary, iii. 105.

² "Companion in a tour round Southampton," by Dr. J. Bullar, 1819.

that our port has a still more important future in connection with the West and other ocean highways of the world.

The substance of the above was read, as a paper, to illustrate a rubbing of the stone, exhibited at the annual meeting of the H.F.C., held at Winchester, April 18th, 1893. Since then the Slavonian tomb has formed the subject of a communication to the Society of Antiquaries, by our President, the Dean of Winchester. Dr. Kitchin has doubtless thrown much additional light on the subject, but I have not had the advantage of knowing the result of his researches, which will be published in the Proceedings of the London Society.
