CHAPTER 16

The Art of Making Memory: Epitaphs, Tables and Adages at Westminster Abbey

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In 1598 Paul Hentzner, a forty-year old Silesian lawyer, visited the sights of London.¹ Like many contemporaries and countless millions since, he visited the key attractions of the Tower of London, the royal palaces at Whitehall, Hampton Court, and Windsor, and St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey.² Famously, he saw Queen Elizabeth herself, then in the fortieth year of her reign. Many years later in Nuremberg in 1612, Hentzner published a Latin account of his travels. It devotes considerable attention to monuments in the churches as well as observations on the people, customs, and landscapes he encountered.

Why did Hentzner visit these sites? Protestantism was well-established in the realm, and, while some saints’ relics remained in their shrines, pilgrimage in its traditional sense was no longer possible. Hentzner did not seem to share the passion for itinerant collecting of England’s antiquaries. His interests were at the same time both broader and less systematic than theirs. He was not particularly interested in scholarship in the sense of the creation, recovery or preservation of knowledge in its literary and material forms. Instead, his aims appear to have been self-improvement, the expansion of horizons, and simple curiosity, aims he had sufficient means to fulfil. All this is remarkably close to what later generations would call tourism, a phenomenon that has received very little attention in early modern England prior to the vogue for the continental ‘Grand Tour’. Indeed, one of the great untold stories of Westminster

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² Hentzner’s itinerary in London was paralleled by Zdenkonius Brtnicensis, or “Baron Waldstein”, who recounted at length his visit in 1600 to Westminster Abbey, St Paul’s, the Tower, and the palace at Whitehall. See G. W. Groos, trans., The Diary of Baron Waldstein: A Traveller in Elizabethan England, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).
Abbey and other major London sites is how and when they became tourist attractions over a period of several hundred years.³

Although Hentzner may have been one of the first to publish something equivalent to modern travel-writing, his record demonstrates that his visits were facilitated by guides in ways not unfamiliar to the twenty-first century. Tourism was not a one-way phenomenon, but a practice in which Hentzner’s hosts were already well-versed. At the Tower of London, for example, his party was met by a guide who confiscated their weapons, then showed them rich fabrics, costumes, and armour from the royal collection housed therein. He was probably shown the tombs at Westminster Abbey by the ‘keeper of the monuments’, a small but significant role existing at least as early as 1561 when William Jenkinson was appointed chief verger by the Dean and Chapter and given the “custodie and oversight of the Tombes and monuments and of ye pictures of kings and quenes w[ith]in all ye saide church remaynyng”.⁴ The keeper of the monuments, who charged a fee, was frequently lampooned in verse, as in John Donne’s satire:

. . . Tis sweet to talke of Kings. At Westminster,
Said I, The man that keepes the Abbey tombes,
And for his price doth with who ever comes,
Of all our Harries, and our Edwards talke,
From King to King and all their kin can walke . . .⁵

Hentzner was precisely the sort of tourist for whom William Camden would shortly publish a pamphlet in Latin documenting the Abbey’s monuments, allowing perusal of the epitaphs at leisure, either before or after an actual visit, or instead of one.⁶

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⁴ Patent dated 28 February 1560 (1561), Westminster Abbey, Register v, fol. 33. It is possible that this appointment was related to Elizabeth’s Proclamation of 1560 against the defacement of funeral monuments.


⁶ William Camden, *Reges, reginae, nobiles et alii sepulti* . . . (London: excudebat J. G. Bollifantus, 1600). Camden’s guide was specifically mentioned by Waldstein in relation to the Abbey