

The Montagus and the great West Doors of Bath Abbey

by Tony Pratt¹



Fig. 1 The West Doors of Bath Abbey ²

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The West Doors of Bath Abbey are of heraldic and historical significance as well as being wonderful to see. Inside the Abbey a plaque notes that "*Sir Henry Montagu, L(ord) C(hief) J(ustice)*"³ *erected the great West Doors*"⁴ in memory of his brother Bishop James Montagu. They are adorned with elaborate carvings of three versions of the Montagu arms - the generic family arms, those of Bishop Montagu and those that appear to be of his brother Walter. There are problems for the herald and the historian with two of these, which this paper will attempt to address.

The Montagu arms are "*Quarterly 1 & 4 Montagu Argent, three lozenges conjoined in a fesse gules within a bordure sable; 2 & 3 Monthemer an eagle displayed vert beaked and membered gules*"⁵ i.e.

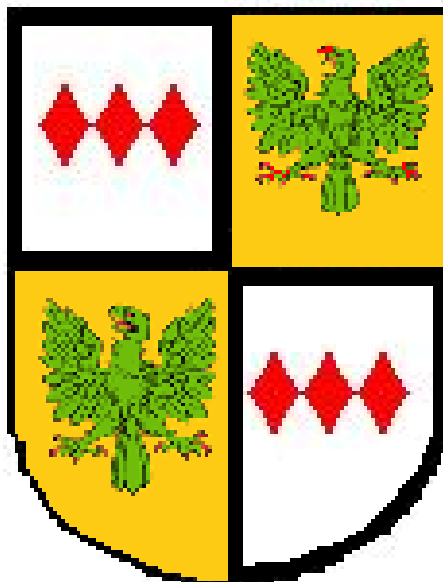


Fig. 2 Arms of the Montagu family

It has been noted that the Montagu arms

either with or without the bordure sable, were borne by the Montacutes, Earls of Salisbury. John de Montacute, 2nd son

³ Chief Justice of the King's Bench between 1616 and 1621

⁴ Plaque on the north side of Bishop Montagu's tomb, Bath Abbey

⁵ Brocklebank, Rev GR (1968) *The Heraldry of the Church of St Cyriac, Lacock* Uffington press p22

of the 1st Earl of Salisbury, married the heiress of Monthermer and they appear, with the bordure sable on his tomb in Salisbury Cathedral⁶. He died 1389/90, since which time all succeeding Montacutes, and on questionable authority the Montagus, have quartered the arms of Monthermer⁷

The arms are seen in a number of places in the Abbey, most prominently on the West Doors



Fig. 3 Montagu arms on the West Doors

⁶ Brocklebank, Rev GR (1968) *The Heraldry of the Church of St. Cyriac in Lacock* The Uffington Press comments that "this tomb, in the 4th bay of the nave north side has three plain stone cots with no trace of colour - 1 plain Montacute, 2 Montacute impaling Monthermer and 3 Montacute quartering Monthermer. It is stated on the tomb that John " fought at Crecy and died 1390"

⁷ Kite, E (1899) *Wilts Notes and Queries* Vol 3 p173 fn1

but also on the ceiling of the Nave



Fig. 4 Montagu arms in the Nave, Bath Abbey

The arms on the north side of the doors are those of Bishop James Montagu.

James Montagu was the son of Edward Montagu of Boughton, Northamptonshire, and Elizabeth Harrington. He was born in about 1570 and was a graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge. In 1595 he laid the foundation stone of Sidney Sussex College, founded by his maternal great aunt, Frances Sydney countess of Sussex. He was the College's first Master between 1596 and 1609⁸. In 1603 he became dean of the Chapel Royal and dean of Lichfield.

⁸ Venn, J & Venn, JA (1924) *Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900* part 1 vol iii p201

In 1604 he was made Dean of Worcester and Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1608, where he remained until his translation to the See of Winchester in 1616.

It was while Bishop of Bath and Wells that James started the custom that, every year at Christmas, a sprig of the Glastonbury Thorn is cut by the Church of England incumbent and sent to the Queen, which still continues. Montagu first sent a sprig to Queen Anne of Denmark, James I's queen consort ⁹, which dates the custom to between 1603 and 1617 ¹⁰.

James was responsible for effectively completing the renovation of Bath Abbey. The Abbey was in need of renovation after the Dissolution. In January 1539 Bath Priory was surrendered to Henry VIII's commissioners by Prior Holloway, after which it was offered to the City for the sum of

500 marks which were refused whereupon all the glass iron and lead belonging to it were sold to merchants the skeleton only of the building being left standing which with the monastery were purchased by Humphrey Collis in 1542 ¹¹

by which time much had fallen down. The first repairs were carried out in 1572 ¹² when the eastern end was weatherproofed. Queen Elizabeth allowed the citizens of Bath to raise money towards the work and a subscription towards completing the restoration was set up by the Queen's lord chamberlain ¹³. He was followed by Walter Callcut of

⁹ Houghton, B (2006) *Haunted Spaces* p87

¹⁰ The dates respectively of James and Anne's Coronation and Montagu's death.

¹¹ *Saturday Magazine* vol X p301 11th March 1837 Bath Reference Library ref SP A5 10B69

¹² Dougdale *Monasticon Anglican* (1819 edition) vol VI p261 "*Bath Monastery*" repairs by Peter Chapman

¹³ Thomas (Radcliffe), 3rd earl of Sussex

Williamscot, Oxfordshire ¹⁴. After this there was a pause in the repairs until William, Lord Burleigh and his steward Thomas Bellot ¹⁵ continued the work. They completed the restoration of the Choir and the abbey was reconsecrated and dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, after which various people repaired the side aisles and the transepts. The west parts of the Nave were uncovered in 1609 and were repaired by Bishop James "and was followed by divers noblemen and gentlemen ¹⁶".

It would appear that James gave £1000 for the renovation, paid in annual installments of £100 pounds from 1602, and so before the remains of the Nave were uncovered. The receipt for the final payment is held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford ¹⁷

¹⁴ It is also recorded that Callcut "left bequests for the poor of Banbury in the sixteenth century" [Guppy, HB (1890) *Homes of Family Names in Great Britain* p330-1989 ed]

¹⁵ Burleigh was Lord High treasurer to Queen Elizabeth I, and Thomas Bellot was also steward of her household as well as lord Burleigh's. [*The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge* (1835) vol III p22]

¹⁶ Dougdale *Monasticon Anglican* (1819 edition) vol VI p261 "Bath Monastery repairs" by Peter Chapman

¹⁷ b25 Bodleian Library, transcribed from a negative photocopy in Hunt Collection vol 1 p57 in Bath References Library Special Collection.

25 Octobris 1611

Receved this day and yeare aforesaid of the right reverend ffather in God James Bishop of Bath and Welles the sum of One Hundred Poundes of Lawfull money of England in full paymente of the sum of One Thousand Poundes of Lawfull money by him given towards the redeyfyinge of the church of St Peter and Paule in the City of Bath aforesaid herewithwee saie the sum of One Thousand Poundes to the use aforesaid in witntnes whereof wee have hereunto put or handes and the seale of this City the daie and yeare first above written Thomas Power Maior

The donor of the copy, AE Ruse, made a pencilled note that *Power was mayor in 1602 and it would seem that Montagu's gift... [was] made before he became bishop of Bath and Wells*

The concern of this paper, however, is the doors of the Abbey and the arms upon them. There are a number of reasons to think that the doors as now seen are not as originally paid for by Sir Henry Montagu.

The upper arms on the door display *differences*, those of the bishop the annulet of the fifth son, which is correct as James was "*filius quintogenitus*"¹⁸ of his father Edward.



Fig. 5 Close up of Montagu arms on Bath Abbey doors

However the arms on the right have a crescent. This is the difference of the second son and would relate the arms to Henry Montagu's brother Walter, who was the second son, and indeed this is the view currently held.

It is known that the doors were "beautified" by Henry to, it has been said, *honour his brothers James and Walter*¹⁹ but the contention that the

¹⁸ Memorial plaque on the south side of Bishop James' tomb, Bath Abbey

¹⁹ *Tabard Diamond Jubilee Issue An heraldic Walking Tour of Bath* (2008) no 16,p10
Bath Heraldic Society ISSN 0307-5397

memorial is to Walter appears to be solely based on the difference seen today relating to him. Walter was apparently born in 1565, married Anne Morgan at Boughton in 1593 and *probably* died in 1615²⁰. This is only two years before the "beautification" of the doors, which may be an explanation.

It is *possible* that the doors did not originally bear any arms at all; in his *History from Marble* (c 1670), Dingley recorded the inscriptions in Bath Abbey. He noted²¹ that

The West Doors or Folding Gates of this Church of Curious artifice carry on the inside the Inscription concerning the Donor thus in Pannels

and included a rendering of the inscription :

THESE DOORS WERE BEAUTIFIED	OUTSIDE AND INSIDE	AT THE CHARGES OF	SIR HENRY MONTAGUE KNIGHT	LORD CHIEF JUSTICE	OF THE KINGS BENCH
ANNO DOMINI M D C XVII					

Fig. 6 Copy of Dingley's record of the inscription on the inside of Bath Abbey doors

It is noted that the date of this inscription is 1617. It is important that this inscription was seen on the *inside* of the doors - when the Camden Society published *History from Marble* it was made clear that the inscription was "*faded or painted over*" and it is certainly not visible now²². Henry is given as "Knight" because he was not created Baron Montagu until 1620. It is significant that Dingley makes no mention of

²⁰ [http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/MONTAGUE.htm#Walter MONTAGUE \(Sir\)1](http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/MONTAGUE.htm#Walter%20MONTAGUE%20(Sir)1)

²¹ Dingley *History from Marble* Vol I Camden Soc 1868 illustration on p xxvi

²² Dingley *History from Marble* *ibid*

any carvings on the outside of the doors, as he certainly would have had they been present - Dingley never missed an opportunity to illustrate arms in his work. The fact that the outside of the doors were "beautified" does not necessarily imply they were carved with the Arms.

The current *interior* of the doors are very different from the front - the panelling that is clear in Dingley's sketch is very evident but no trace of the inscription remains, as noted above.

There are numerous images of the West Front of the Abbey held in the Bath Library collections. The earliest apparently reliable image is dated 1683 but unfortunately the doors are standing open and their faces cannot be seen ²³. There is an earlier image, from Dugdale's *Monasticon* ²⁴ which shows the doors as being plain on the outside. There are concerns that this is not an accurate representation, however, as the interest here was to show the sculptures, and indeed almost none of the features on the west face of the Abbey are as they are seen now ²⁵, and the fact that the door is shown as plain is not to be relied upon.

In a picture of 1793 ²⁶ there is something on the doors but it does not look like the arms we see today but in an illustration of 1798 the arms are clearly visible ²⁷. In that year the Society of Antiquaries published an

²³ By Nicholas Hawksmoor (1666-1736) sketchbook in the RIBA Library V&A, copy of picture from Bath Chronicle & Herald Jan 26 1952 Image Reference 25749 Collection Reference A5 / 49 online at <http://www.bathintime.co.uk/image.php?id=379303>

²⁴ Image Reference 12628 Collection Reference LP A5 10B 50 Bath Libraries at <http://www.bathintime.co.uk/image.php?id=199973>

²⁵ Note that this is not the picture of the West Doors found in the 1819 edition of *Monasticon* which is a plate drawn in 1815 by John Coney.

²⁶ Published Jan 26 1793. This version has the pinnacles. Image Reference 25768 Collection Reference Hunt Vol I p47 10B 61 / 62 Bath Libraries at <http://www.bathintime.co.uk/image.php?id=379346>

²⁷ Plate VI from *Some Account of the Abbey Church of Bath. Illustrations of the Plans, Elevations, and Sections of that Building. Engraved by James Basire from Drawings made by Mr John Carter, Architect.* Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 23rd April 1798 at <http://www.bathintime.co.uk/image.php?id=15588>

accurate survey of Bath Abbey and one of the illustrations shows the West Front . The accuracy of this image is believed to be very high, given that this was a scale plan drawing of the Abbey and such small details as the lettering of the Garter motto around James' arms are clearly shown.



Fig. 7 Enlargement of the central part of the doors 1798 ²⁸

From this drawing it is clear that the arrangement of the carvings on the door was the same as today but that they were not entirely the same; the *differences* in the two upper arms seen today are not shown, circles being in these positions. It is possible, of course, that this is an artefact of the process of turning a drawing into an engraving and then printing it. However it is also possible that this is a representation of the annulet that is properly James' difference and shows that all three arms were his.

²⁸ Copyright to www.bathintime.co.uk - Bath Central Library Collection and reproduced with their permission

There are questions, however, about the Bishop's arms themselves. There are many examples of them on his tomb



Fig. 8 Arms on Bishop Montagu's tomb

and these have been attributed to Bath Priory, "a red shield with a sword along one diagonal intersecting a pair of keys silver and gold along the other"²⁹.

However there is considerable doubt that these *are* the arms of Bath Priory. In 1676 Anthony à Wood noted the arms of the priory and See in one of the windows of a chapel attached to the south side of St James' church in Bath and said that

²⁹ Ede, J (1996) *Heraldry in Bath Abbey* p1

"They are Az two keys indorsed in bend the upper argent the lower or enfiled with a sword in bend sinister"³⁰

These arms can be dated to at least the end of the fifteenth century³¹. They appear in Prior Cantalow's lovely stained glass window in St Catherine's church, located in the eponymous hamlet four miles north east of Bath. The arms in the window are given in Colinson's 18th century survey of Somerset as *"the arms of the abbey viz a St Peter's key crossed with a sword"*³².



Fig 9, Arms of Bath Priory 1499 from St Catherine's church, St Catherine, Bath

³⁰ Hick, EM (1913) *The Cathedral Church of SS Peter and Paul in the City of Bath commonly called Bath Abbey* p40

³¹ Pevsner N (1957) *Buildings of England* no vol or page number, excerpt in Bath Reference Library *Local Studies Pack - St Catherine* transcribes the inscription on the window *"Orate pro anima decani Johannis Cantlow quondam prioris (qui) hanc cancellam fieri fecit anno domini 1499"*

³² Collinson, J (1791) *The History and Antiquities of Somerset - Katherine or St Katherine* [sic] no page numbers, excerpt in Bath Reference Library *Local Studies Pack - St Katherine*

These are not the Priors arms (they appear in the south window ³³) but are those of Bath priory.

So it is almost certain that the arms on Bishop Montagu's tomb are those of Winchester, which was his seat when he died in 1617.



Fig 10 Arms of the See of Winchester

It is noteworthy that the arrangement of the gold and silver keys are here, in Winchester, reversed from that seen in Bath with the gold on top but

Whether the keys are in bend or in bend sinister³⁴ the one which lies above the blade of the sword (be it higher or lower than the other) is the golden one.³⁵

³³ Fig 11 Arms of Prior Cantlow, St Catherine's Church, St Catherine



³⁴ *Bend* is the diagonal going from top left to bottom right of the shield, *bend sinister* goes top right to bottom left. *Sinister* items are deemed of lesser status than *dexter* ones.

It is difficult to see in Fig. 9 whether this is the case in St Catherine's or not.

Bishop Montagu seems to have used the arms described above, but instead of impaling them with the *saltire*³⁶ of Wells in the ordinary manner he incorporated Bath by placing the keys and sword on the dexter and sinister, respectively, of the *saltire* of Wells.



Fig 13 Bishop Montagu's arms for the See of Bath and Wells

³⁵ Woodward, J (1894) *Ecclesiastical Heraldry* W&K Johnson, London & Edinburgh p74

³⁶ The use of a *saltire* is entirely correct; Wells Cathedral is dedicated to St Andrew, whose cross it is albeit his would be either *argent* or *blanc*. The *saltire* used in the current arms of the See are "*saltire quartered or and argent*",

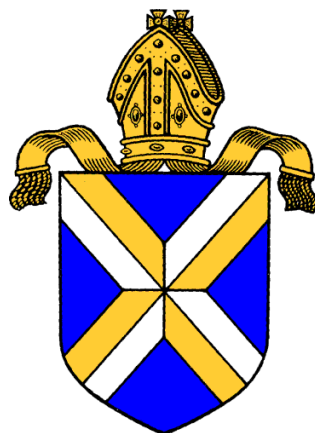


Fig 12 Current arms of the see of Bath and Wells

It has been said the he evidently "*wished to express in heraldic language the pre-eminence of Wells over Bath*" ³⁷ but this would have been more evident if he had quartered the arms and placed those of Bath on the sinister side, the arms seen in Fig 13 give equal importance to Bath and Wells, the only pre eminence is that of the keys of St Peter to the sword of St Paul, and St. Peter was seen as the more important saint.

The arms carved onto the West Door do not, of course, have any colour but they do show this arrangement of keys and sword, with them laying along the relevant diagonals but this makes the sword in *bend* and the keys in *bend sinister*, the reverse of the Priory and early Abbey arms and of Winchester



Fig .14 Arms of Bishop Montagu on the West Doors today

This is somewhat surprising for doors said to have been made by the Bishop's brother, who presumably knew the arms of his See very well. Interestingly this is not the only place where this arrangement is found; Woodward records that at Winchester

Bishop Waynflete's ³⁸ [1447-1486] seals have a shield charged with a sword in *bend* and with a key or keys in *bend sinister*.

³⁷ Woodward, J (1894) *Ecclesiastical Heraldry* W&K Johnson, London & Edinburgh p177

³⁸ Bishop of Winchester 1447-1468, so roughly contemporary to Prior Cantlow at Bath

*In the hall of New College oxford is a similar shield in painted glass with a field of azure this may possibly be of earlier date than Wayneflete's seal but the tincture of the field is, so far as I am aware, unique*³⁹

Well, maybe not unique. Similar arms are used by the Abbey today. The date of the change to these arms is uncertain, even if those on the door do not show the colour, although the current arms are "*certainly recorded in the 19th century*"⁴⁰. It is noted, however, that the current arms do not follow the convention, seen above, that the sword lying over the keys is *or*.



Fig. 15 Current arms of Bath Abbey⁴¹

That these arms pre-date the nineteenth century and even be original to the doors, is shown by an engraving made in the late eighteenth century

³⁹ Woodward, J (1894) *Ecclesiastical Heraldry* W&K Johnson, London & Edinburgh p75

⁴⁰ Ede, J (1996) *Heraldry in Bath Abbey* p1

⁴¹ From the gowns worn by the Abbey guides



Fig. 16 Bishops James' arms from 1798 engraving ⁴²

There is, however, an important difference between the 1798 engraving and the current doors. Beneath the arms runs part of the first line of Psalm 113 "*Ecce quam bonum, et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*" ["Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity" ⁴³] which would seem to be a very good quotation for doors commemorating one brother by another. The doors do not exhibit the entire line, however.

⁴² Copyright to www.bathintime.co.uk - Bath Central Library Collection

⁴³ Translation available from many sources but in this case from Reynolds, JEIA (1978) *The Works of the Right Rev John England* p215



Fig 17 Inscription on doors 1789 ⁴⁴

The engraving clearly shows that it stops after the word "*jucundum*", presumably because of lack of space, and refers to the rest of the (well known at least at the time) line by "*etc*". The description of the doors in the Society of Antiquaries book confirms that

*under the two upper shields, on a label is the inscription
'ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum etc'* ⁴⁵

Even a cursory glance at the current doors, however, will make it clear that in the current inscription "*jucundum*" is followed by "*est*", the Latin for "*is*" which would fit better with the wording of the psalm but not with what is seen earlier.

⁴⁴ Copyright www.bathintime.co.uk - Bath Central Library Collection

⁴⁵ *Some Account of the Abbey Church of Bath. Illustrations of the Plans, Elevations, and Sections of that Building. Engraved by James Basire from Drawings made by Mr John Carter, Architect. Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 23rd April 1798* in Collections Hunt vol 1 Bath Library



Fig. 18 The current inscription

Once again this might be the result of another error in the engraving. However there are multiple records of the inscription, by authors as diverse and respected as John Britton ⁴⁶ and Charles Dickens ⁴⁷, which all record it as ending with "etc". This suggests strongly that the engraving is accurate and that the engravings now seen on the doors are not the originals.

When, then, were the changes made? This is not certain but literary references continue to refer to "etc" until about 1875. It is worth noting, however, that this date cannot be supported strongly as re-issues of books are often not revised.

It is unknown exactly how often or when the doors have been modified but it is known that in 1883 there was a very large and important restoration of the Abbey, carried out under the supervision Bath City Architect GP Manners ⁴⁸, when the main West Doors

⁴⁶ Britton, J (1829) *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* p22

⁴⁷ *All the Year Round* 1875 vol 14 p826

⁴⁸ Hylson-Smith, K (1988) *Bath Abbey : A History* Friends of Bath Abbey p164

*were repaired and renewed at the expence [sic] of the Corporation by Mr. James Jones of this city in a manner most creditable to that able sculptor*⁴⁹

This might point the finger at the Victorian period for the changes; the record of Victorian church 'restorers' is, alas, appallingly bad when it comes to sensitivity to historical accuracy, or indeed anything else.

There have been other renovations, of course; Sir Gerge Gilbert Scott carried out the "*greatest face lift for two hundred and fifty years*"⁵⁰ between 1864-74 but work on the west front was curtailed because the funds dried up and this was not worked on until 1895. There is no record that the doors were worked on then. There were "*important works to conserve, improve and enlarge the church buildings... in the twentieth century*"⁵¹ and the whole building, the outside and the inside were thoroughly renovated and cleaned under the Bath Abbey 2000 banner when the doors were cleaned at this time.

To return to the heraldry yon the doors; it is unclear why the difference of a crescent was used on the right hand arms. If the annulet of Bishop James, which was previously seen there (in the 1798 illustration), was not used it is possible that the restorers meant to use the arms of Henry Montagu, the donor. His arms correctly have a mullet, a five pointed, star, for difference, not the crescent seen on the door.

Henry Montagu used the correct difference in his lifetime; on the memorial to his father, in Weekley parish church in Northamptonshire, Henry's arms clearly show a mullet

⁴⁹ Peach, REM (1887) (ed) *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey* by John Britton, p 44 fn 2 but probably taken from an original article in the Bath Chronicle 10 Dec 1883 p3 ref: Hunt collection vol 1 (2) p47

⁵⁰ Hylson-Smith, K (1988) *ibid* p174

⁵¹ Hylson-Smith, K (1988) *ibid* p180



Fig. 19 Arms of Henry Montagu on the tomb his father, Weekley church

Bath is not the only place where a (possible) mullet is today seen as a crescent. Henry Montagu's son, Bishop James' nephew, was also named James. He was the founder of the Wiltshire line of Montagus who lived at Lackham between Chippenham and Lacock. There is a memorial to James, and his wife Mary Baynard, in St Cyriac's Church, Lacock, which naturally includes the arms of James of Lackham.

When Dingley compiled his survey of church monuments in England ⁵² he noted that this monument bore the difference ⁵³ of "*Montagu, with a mullet, quartering Monthermer*", which is correct as James was Henry Montagu's third son. The memorial now (2010), however, and despite being faded, very clearly shows a *crescent*. It is noteworthy that neither of the other Montagu arms shown on memorials in St Cyriac's shows a difference.

⁵² Died 1695

⁵³ Dingley *History from Marble* Cambden Soc 1868 p153



Fig. 20 Arms of James Montagu and Mary Baynard in St Cyriac's, Lacock with the centre section enlarged

The Lackham Aisle was refurbished, in this case by another owner of Lackham one Henry Berney Caldwell, in 1862 and it seems likely that the change to the memorial was made at this time. However that is some 20 years before the refurbishment of Bath Abbey in 1883 and it is hard to see why Mr Jones, if he were responsible, would have followed the example from Lacock. Does this point to one of the later restorations being responsible for the changes seen on the doors? Whatever is the case the fact, that there is a local example where an expected mullet has been changed to a crescent, lends credence to the idea that the same thing could, and did, happen at Bath Abbey.

In conclusion there is no direct evidence that the arms seen on the great West Doors of Bath Abbey were put there by Henry Montagu. Although not impossible there is some evidence that they post date the erection of the doors. It is certain that the current details are not those recorded at the end of the eighteenth century but the date of the changes is not certain. Hopefully further research will answer the questions raised in this paper.