CIRENCESTER PARISH CHURCH

– *An account of its History & Architecture*

by

CANON ROWLAND E. HILL, M.A.
VICAR OF CIRENCESTER 1962-1978



Published by "The Friends of Cirencester Parish Church"



The Parish Church – south facade

CIRENCESTER PARISH CHURCH of St. John the Baptist

An account of its History & Architecture

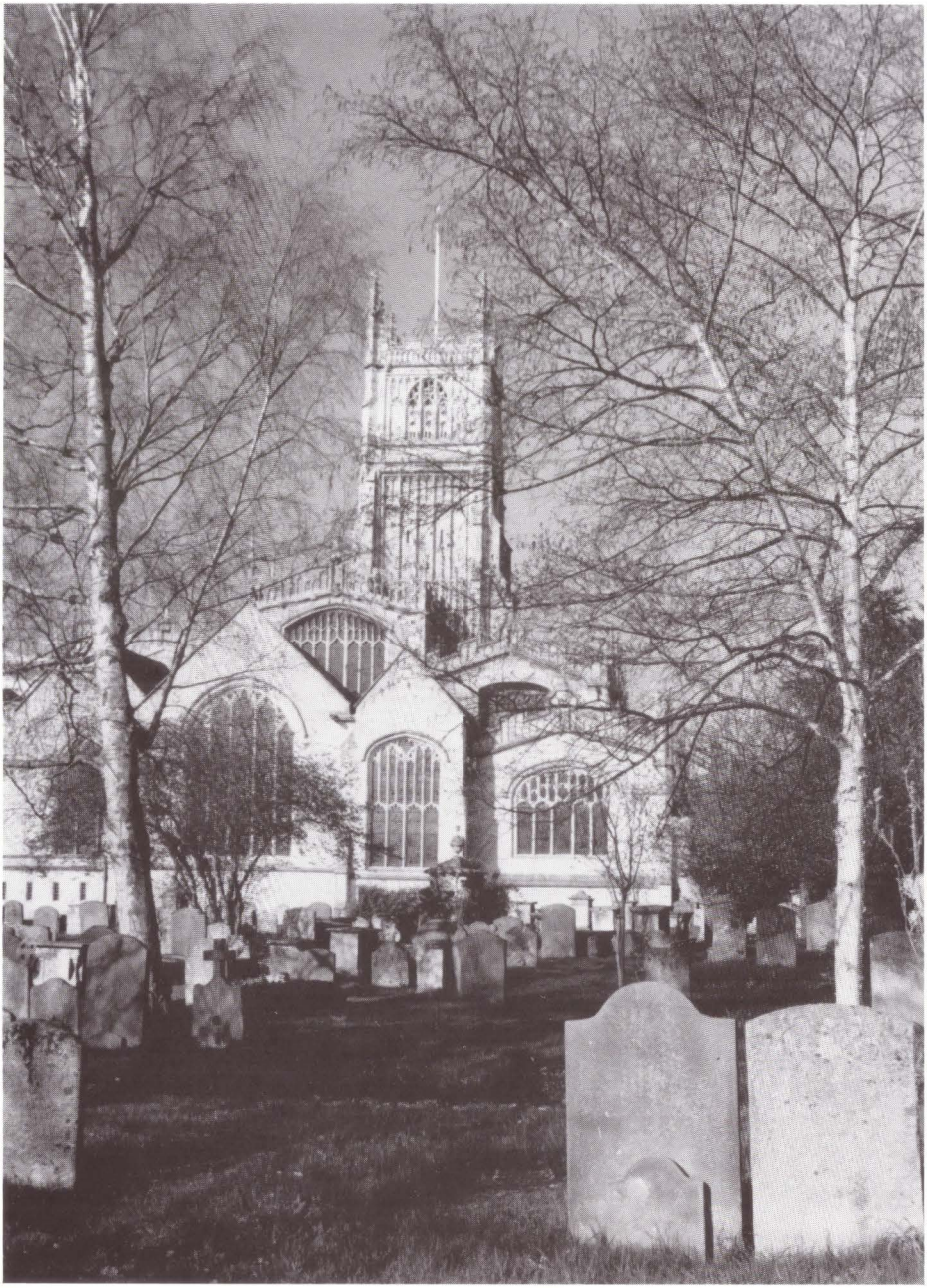
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Front cover from a painting by Margaret Trowell on a wall panel under the Tower
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The Parish Church from the churchyard

FOREWORD

THIS short account makes no claim to be a work of scholarship. It represents the sum of what I have learnt about the church from books, from what I have been told and from what I have observed for myself. I have quoted no authorities because it would be impossible now to disentangle the sources of my information, or their relative reliability. I hope I have made no blunders; but my object has been to present not an academic treatise but a living picture.

I have had in mind a two-fold purpose. First, to provide for church-watchers and any others who care to spend time in the church a layman's account of its history and of the features of interest to be observed. For this reason I have dealt with each part of the church separately, so that any one using the book can make a complete study of one part at a time.

Secondly, I have tried to bring out both the continuity and the variety of church life down the centuries. The vision of God and of the Christian life has varied widely over the ages and the building has been adapted at each stage to serve the insights, aspirations, needs and prejudices of the day. In this "ever-rolling stream" of worshippers we now have our place. If our building efforts have to be directed of necessity chiefly to conservation we must remember that the essential continuity of the church lies in its faith and worship. The purpose of the church building is to provide an inspirational setting for this as each generation understands it, while preserving as far as possible the heritage of the past.

My hope is that this booklet will help those who read it to feel that the maintenance both of the worship and of the building is our duty and our joy.

R.E.H.
January 1981



The Chancel

1. THE CHANCEL

We start at the east end, in the *Chancel,* which is the oldest part of the church. It is immediately obvious that it neither matches nor fits the rest of the church, and there are historical reasons for this. As originally built in about 1115, it was both narrower and shorter than it is now and was centred on a much smaller Norman chancel arch. In about 1180 it was widened on the south side only, thus being thrown out of centre with the arch and with the nave. At the same time the arches on the south side were opened. The original columns remain and the eastern one is in fact of Roman origin. Presumably it was found somewhere in the town and incorporated. Some sixty years later the chancel was lengthened by one bay, with a three-light east window. But the lighting was inadequate and in about 1300 the east window was extended to five lights and new windows were opened in the north and south walls each side of the altar. Later in that century clerestory windows were made in the north wall and the chancel arch was widened and heightened to its present size.

In about 1420 the arcade was opened in the north wall of the chancel. The upper part of the wall was under-pinned while the work was done, with the curious result that the upper part of the wall is older than the columns and arches supporting it. The chancel must at this time have had more light than at any time in its history; subsequent developments, as we shall see, reduced one by one most of the gains which had been made.

But these developments were not in the chancel itself, which remains now substantially as it was in the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, as we shall see, the nave was completely rebuilt to its present magnificent proportions, but the chancel remained untouched. This was because the chancel was the property of the Rector (who was in fact the Abbot) and could not be interfered with. The nave belonged to the people and they could rebuild it as gloriously as their wealth and piety prompted. The result is that the chancel though interesting historically is inadequate both in size and architecture to match the nave. This is the over-riding argument for keeping the chancel screen, in spite of the practical problems which it creates (slightly lessened since it was lowered to the level of the nave floor instead of being on the chancel step). The nave and the chancel would each spoil the effect of the other if they were seen as a single entity.

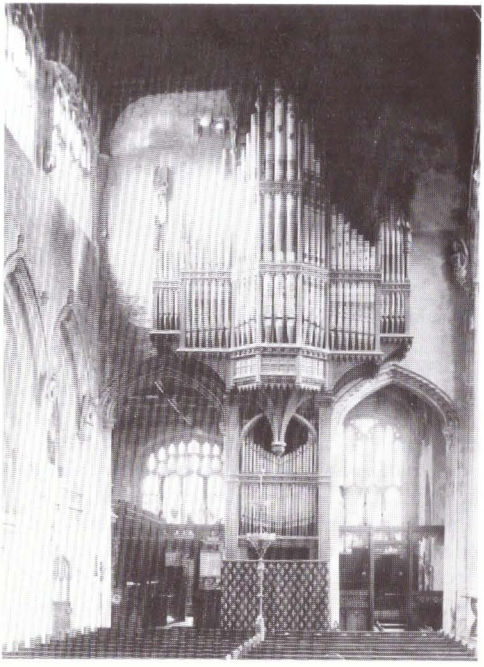
The east window is filled with fifteenth century glass some of which has been collected here from other parts of the church. The angels bearing shields with the Garstang crest and merchant's mark were originally in the window of the Garstang Chapel. At the bottom of the window near the centre the Devil is featured with horns and a sort of bull's head. Canon Sutch used to draw a moral from the fact that you can only see him from a distance: as you approach the altar he disappears. The three unidentified female saints in the centre and the kneeling figures below them (members of the Langley family) were originally in the north aisle of Siddington church. How they came to Cirencester is uncertain. A guide book of 1905 says flatly that they were purchased; a notice in Siddington church (if it is still there) suggests that they were purloined and ought to be returned; another account claims that they were rescued from a builder's yard in which they had been abandoned. What is certain is that the window at Siddington which they once filled is now entirely blocked by the organ, so there would be little point in returning them, and the acrimony which existed in the last century concerning them has long since died down.

The very fine mahogany altar rails were made in 1753 and bear the names of the churchwardens of the time. They have had a curious history. At the time of the great restoration in 1865 by Sir George Gilbert



The organ in position over the Chancel screen in the 17th century. (From a sketch – artist unknown)

Note the gallery in the south aisle.



The organ after restoration in 1865, in position at the east end of the north aisle. (From an old photograph)

N.B. The Garstang chapel is shown erected in the Lady chapel. (See page 13)

Scott they were discarded in favour of brass ones more in keeping with the taste of the time. In about 1900 they were found at the premises of Messrs. Gardiners in Dyer Street, part used as a balustrade and the rest in a shed in the builder's yard at the back. They were brought back and restored in their former position. They are in fact rather uncomfortably high and can present problems if a communicant of small stature happens to kneel immediately in front of one of the posts of the gates. Perhaps that is why they were removed, but it is good that they have been restored to their proper use.

The sanctuary was also re-designed by Gilbert Scott and we should scarcely recognize it now if we saw it as he transformed it. The fine carved stone reredos designed by his son was surmounted by an ornate gable which hid the lower part of the east window; the floor was of brightly coloured encaustic tiles and the walls painted with a design of fleur-de-lys. The sedilia under the window on the south side were surmounted by a carved canopy. The two great brass chandeliers now in the nave hung each side of the altar. No doubt the intention behind all this elaboration was to emphasize the prime importance in the church of the high altar and to compensate for the architectural plainness of the chancel compared with the nave. But the result was too fussy for later tastes and soon after the turn of the century the walls had been painted white once more, the gable over the reredos had been removed and the canopies over the sedilia had been taken down and stored in the shed in the church yard. In 1977 they went up in smoke when the shed was burnt down. The proximity to the east window made the position intolerably draughty for the chandeliers which were re-hung in their present position in the east bay of the nave, and the brightly coloured tiles on the floor were discreetly covered with carpet. In 1970 the altar was raised by an additional step so that it could be better seen from the nave and so the chancel assumed the appearance now familiar to us. The two black standard candlesticks were designed by Sir Ninian Comper in the thirties and the two great silver candlesticks on the altar were given in 1949 by Frances Kenyon.

The organ (always a problem in churches which were not designed to contain one) has passed through many vicissitudes. In the seventeenth century, it was built on top of the chancel screen, blocking the chancel arch. It was reached by a circular stair in the thickness of the wall from St. Catherine's chapel and the blocked up doorway which led to the organ loft can be seen on the north wall of the chancel. At the restoration in 1865 it was removed and a home was found in the Town Hall for the panelling which surrounded the organ loft. The organ was placed temporarily at the west end of the north aisle and then more permanently at the east end above the arches leading into the two chapels, blocking the high east window. There are photographs of it in this position but apparently it was not satisfactory, being probably too remote from the choir. It was worked by water-power and there is a story that the tank burst during Mattins and nearly drowned the congregation! Anyway, it was decided to move it and after much deliberation it was rebuilt in its present position, filling up much of what was St. John's Chapel (now the choir vestry) and blocking up the western arch of the chancel arcade. The organ was entirely re-constructed by Willis, a handsome carved case was provided surmounted by winged angels, and the pipes were brightly painted, to represent (as has been unkindly suggested) Christmas crackers! Whether the move was a success acoustically has been debated ever since. The organ is now too near the choir and too far from the congregation, but there is no ideal place for it. The church was not designed to have an organ at all! What is certain is that a great deal of light was lost to the chancel by the blocking of the arch and this was aggravated when the choir organ in 1908 was placed on a screen in the corresponding arch on the north side, blocking that too. Old photographs show how much more daylight there was in the chancel previously; mainly (surprisingly) from the clerestory window in the nave over the Garstang Chapel.

2. ST. CATHERINE'S CHAPEL

ST. CATHERINE'S CHAPEL began as the north aisle of the chancel, from which it was presumably separated by a low Norman arcade. The small round arch which now leads into the Lady Chapel was originally an outside doorway leading to the Abbey. From an early stage it became a chapel dedicated to no less than four saints, St. Catherine, St. Christopher, St. Nicholas and St. Anthony, of whom St. Catherine seems to have been the senior partner. The chapel then extended only to where the altar rails are now, and it had a steep gabled ceiling springing from the ridge which can be seen above the arches. Where the four altars were is uncertain, but that of St. Catherine was presumably at the east end and that of St. Nicholas probably against the stone screen on the north side, with his statue on a plinth above.

In about 1420, as already recorded, the present arcade between the chapel and the chancel was opened.

In 1450, by the gift of Bishop John Chedworth, founder of the Grammar School, the chapel was extended to its present length, thus blocking out the window on the north wall of the chancel. The arcade between St. Catherine's and the Lady Chapel was rebuilt but leaving the altar



St. Catherine's Chapel

of St. Nicholas intact and the low steep-pitched roof.

The "squints" are interesting: openings in the walls giving a view of the altars on the other side. Every priest had to celebrate Mass every day and they did so simultaneously in the parish church at the different altars. The squints or hagioscopes enabled them to keep together in the service. The priest at the High Altar presumably set the pace; the one at St. Nicholas' altar had a line of vision to him and in turn could be seen from St. Catherine's altar, from the Lady Chapel and from the Trinity Chapel. If you stand where St. Nicholas' altar was, you see clearly the purpose which the squints served.

The walls, after the taste of the time, were brightly coloured with a design of pomegranates on a red background, on which were superimposed scenes from the lives of the saints to whom the chapel was dedicated. It was the Puritans who took strong objection to mural paintings of every sort and covered them with whitewash. At the restoration of the church in 1865 part of the wall was stripped to see if any colour remained. An area of the north wall was comparatively good with a figure of St. Christopher carrying the Child across the river, and a female saint from an earlier painting was revealed under the red. On the south wall the colour had degenerated much further but a figure of St. Catherine can just be made out, with her Wheel beside her. It was not thought worth while to investigate further.

Then, according to the accepted history, in 1508 John Hakeborne, the last abbot but one, gave the beautiful fan-vaulted ceiling. The walls were raised to take it, which blocked the clerestory windows of the chancel, and the eastern window must have been rebuilt at the same time to its present proportions. The coloured boss in the eastern bay carries the royal arms of Henry VII; in the next are those of the Prince of Wales, later Henry VIII; and in the fourth appear the initals J. H., the date 1508 and a mitre. The abbott was not actually a bishop, but Cirencester was a "mitred abbey" and conferred equivalent rank.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries St. Catherine's chapel seems to have fallen out of use and to strengthen the wall between it and the Lady Chapel, which was apparently showing signs of being unequal to the weight of the fan vaulting, the arcade was blocked up and made again into a solid wall. (More light was thus lost to the chancel). In the great nineteenth century restoration the arcade was re-opened and the sanctuary step extended and re-paved in black and white marble. A number of commemorative stones which has been in the floor of the sanctuary of the high altar were moved to other parts of the church to make room for the bright encaustic tiles already mentioned. Among them were the very terse memorials to the Harrison family, placed on the middle step. "J. H. 1753" is Joseph Harrison, who was Curate (in effect the acting incumbent) for over sixty years. "C. H. 1733" was his wife. The east window is a memorial given by the Cripps family, one of whom is also commemorated in a tablet on the south wall. In 1905 the beautiful rerodos, the figures for which were carved in Oberammergau, was given by the Zachary family, wine merchants in Gosditch Street, in memory of three sons who died young in distant parts, two of them as missionary priests.

The coloured altar frontals were hand-made at the same time by ladies of the congregation. The white one is the work of Lady Bathurst who died in her nineties in 1965.

Gilbert Scott had put a tiled floor except in the sanctuary, but in the 1950's the present stone floor was substituted, vastly improving the appearance of the chapel, and new seating was provided. The chandelier was found much battered in a loft, and repaired and hung in the sanctuary. Its origin is not known. At about the same time the aumbry in the north wall of the sanctuary, where the Reserved Sacrament is kept, was beautified by a gilded door and by a gilded canopy over the perpetually burning light which marks its presence. Door and canopy were designed by Robert Potter.

(*Additional Note:* I have given the accepted

account of the fan-vaulted ceiling found in all the histories and apparently attested by the inscription on the ceiling itself. If there is also any evidence to the same effect which is near-contemporary, then that must settle the matter. But I do not know of any and judging purely on the evidence of what we see, I feel increasingly doubtful. The ceiling is in fact too long for the chapel so that the western bay of the fan vaulting is cut off by the end wall. It is also perhaps slightly too narrow for the chapel; and, most significant, both fans and arches have been left sticking out from the wall, roughly and unevenly cut off. It seems to me inconceivable that if the work had been designed for the chapel it would have been done so clumsily and left with such an unfinished appearance with neither corbel nor shaft to support it.

My guess therefore would be that John Hakeborne gave the ceiling in 1508 not to the Parish Church at all but to the Abbey; and that at the demolition of the Abbey some forty years later the townspeople rescued the ceiling for the beautification of their parish church since it was found to fit (near enough) St. Catherine's chapel. It seems to me likely that the recumbent figure of Richard Osborne, a purser to the Abbey, also originally lay in the Abbey, as well as the much older headless priest under the arcade. I would also guess that the odd assortment of carved blocks, which make up the bases of the recesses to the north and south of the altar and the low parapet between the chapels, were also brought from the debris of the Abbey. But this is only speculation.

The more authoritative view of the fan-vaulted ceiling is that it was indeed given by Bishop Hakeborne in 1508 as part of a more extensive scheme which was never completed. This would account for the poor fit and the unfinished appearance. The impending fate of the Abbey perhaps put an end to further work.

The Lady Chapel



3. THE LADY CHAPEL

PASSING through the small round-headed arch already mentioned we enter the Lady Chapel, which was added in about 1240 at the time of the first rebuilding of the nave. Beneath the floor was the charnel house, where dead bodies or bones were laid. What the chapel looked like then we can only guess, since it was entirely rebuilt in about 1450, at the same time that St. Catherine's chapel was being lengthened and the arcade between them opened. It was given the handsome carved ceiling which we see. The wood carvers were apparently left to add what ornamentation they liked in the angles against the wall. They are all quite sober and orthodox, except the third one on the north wall. Here we find what one might describe as the earliest known "Tom and Jerry": a cat and mouse confront each other from opposite sides of a corn-sheaf. The wall over the arcade was covered with mural paintings, of which the western part has been uncovered. It shows a Judgment with a cartload of lost souls being thrust down into the mouth of hell by the devil with a pitchfork. But time has denied us much of the detail.

On the north side of the sanctuary stands the Bridges Tomb, which is the best feature of the chapel. Humphrey and his wife, who died in 1598 and 1620 respectively, lie together in the centre fully dressed, he in lawyers' robes. The details of their dress are carved in stone with marvellous accuracy of detail; one feels that the likenesses are also very true to life, he with a grave but kindly expression, she with a face full of humour and a twinkle in her eye. At either end kneel two sons, also lawyers, both of whom however died young, before their mother. In front are six daughters holding prayer books and three babies who died in infancy.

Opposite, just outside the altar rails, is the tomb of Thomas Master of the Abbey House who died in 1661. He is said to have been concerned in the plans to restore Charles II to the throne. Dressed in what one might describe as a classical négligé he reclines with an air of languid disdain on one elbow, an open book unread upon his knee. It makes an interesting contrast of styles with the detailed and sympathetic realism of the Bridges tomb.

In about 1820 the western half of the north wall collapsed and had to be rebuilt, fortunately without affecting the eastern window and the Bridges tomb. In about 1865 the chapel was refloored with the best preserved of the tombstones from the floor of the nave, including the brasses now protected by the carpet. A problem of the time was to provide enough seating in the nave to compensate for the removal of the galleries. To make more room for pews, the screen of the Garstang Chapel was moved into the Lady Chapel where it served to make a choir vestry in the north west corner, both St. Catherine's and St. John's chapels on either side of the chancel being also filled with pews facing inwards. But when the organ was moved to its present position in 1897, what remained of the floor space in St. John's Chapel was turned into the choir vestry and the screen was returned to its proper place.

The Font which now stands at the west end of the chapel is of Renaissance style and was brought at the end of the seventeenth century to replace the ancient font in the nave, which was thrown out. It was placed at the crossing, but in 1865, when the old font was brought back, the new one was put at the west end of St. Catherine's Chapel. Finally, it was moved into the Lady Chapel in 1949.

Like the paving stones, the tablets on the wall were also collected here from other parts of the church and fill the west wall in rather a clutter. There are monuments to other members of the Master family and one to Samuel Rudder, the historian of Gloucestershire. The glass in the window beside the Bridges tomb was collected together from fragments in other parts of the

church and set here in 1905. The two large figures on either side have been reconstructed very satisfactorily, but the figure of Christ in the centre has been given an unfortunately furtive look and would have been better left frankly fragmentary.

The altar was narrower and the beautiful frontal was made for it by the Sisters of Bethany, an Anglican order of nuns specializing in embroidery, with only the panels of flower decoration. But the total effect was still unsatisfactory and in about 1950 Mr. Dykes Bower the architect was called in. He advised a wider altar with riddel posts round it with bright curtains. It is whispered that he had in fact designed these for Tewkesbury Abbey which refused to accept them, so that he was glad to find a home for them. However that may be they certainly gave dignity to the chapel. Extensions were fitted to the altar and the frontal was returned to the Sisters of Bethany with a request to devise means of extending it by some two and a half feet. This they did with great ingenuity and skill by cutting it up into nine vertical sections, to which the pattern lent itself, and inserting between each and at the ends an embroidered black strip some three inches wide. The result was most successful, but a drawback to the whole effect was that the hard red of the curtains killed the delicate colours of the frontal, and the curtain enclosing the altar at the north end hid part of the Bridges tomb. So in 1974 the two front riddel posts were removed, with the side curtains, leaving a straight screen behind the altar, and a curtain of a neutral shade was substituted throwing the altar frontal into prominence.

Between the windows on the north wall hangs a picture of the Madonna in the finest needlework. This was the work of Lady Bathurst in about 1910 and was designed for the centre of an altar frontal. But it proved unsuitable so she had it framed to hang in her own house. The Latin inscription QUANQUAM CARITAS MAGNA MATRIS, DEI MAIOR EST* was devised by one of her sons at Eton. She had asked him to consult his tutor as to a suitable Latin quotation, but being too shy to do so he supplied one of his own composition. Just before her death she gave the picture to the church.

*"Though the love of the mother is great, that of God is greater".

The Trinity Chapel seen from the nave



4. THE TRINITY CHAPEL

In 1430 The Trinity Chapel was added to the (Early English) nave, connected to it by an arcade opened in the north wall. The donors were Sir Richard Dixton and Sir William Prelatte, whose memorial brasses are in the chapel. They were in the household of Richard Duke of York, a cousin (a generation later) of Richard II; and a figure of their patron, of which only the head now remains, set in a circle of blue glass, appears in the east window. The Weavers Company of the town was also associated in the founding of the chapel, and still retains an interest in it.

In about 1380 King Richard II had visited Cirencester with his queen Anne of Bohemia. She had founded a Chantry, whose altar stood at the east end of the north aisle of the nave, for a daily Mass to be said for the souls of the Kings and Queens of England. This altar was now moved into the Trinity Chapel and the daily masses continued there until all chantries were abolished by Edward VI a century later. One of the chantry priests who served this altar was Ralph Parsons, who died in 1478. His memorial brass, much worn, is on the step of the chancel behind the altar; but more interesting, the cope which he wore is still preserved in remarkably good condition in a glass case under the south-west window of the nave. At a later date it was cut up and squared to make a pulpit fall and this has made it easier to preserve. It has a design of six-winged seraphs (from Isaiah VI) and pomegranates and is a wonderful piece of work with the primitive needles at their disposal more than five hundred years ago.

Six winged seraphs seem to have been a popular motif as they are also found in the tracery windows of this chapel and elsewhere in the Church. While we are speaking of the glass it may be mentioned here that while the glass in the tracery is fifteenth century, that in the main panels is of course Victorian. They show a selection of saints highly stylized, quite pleasing in general effect but reaching near absurdity where St. Stephen's martydom is indicated by a single round stone carefully balanced on the top of his head.

At the apex of each window on both sides of the chapel is found the Yorkist badge of the falcon and fetterlock, so no opportunity was lost of declaring where the loyalties of the founders lay. Between the windows are shield-bearing winged angels, later repeated in the nave above each column, but coats of arms adorn only a few of those in the chapel.

The beautifully carved ceiling of the chapel is described in an earlier guide as "unsurpassed". Unfortunately, little direct light reaches it except on a summer evening when the setting sun shines in through the west window. The floor was paved with stone, carrying several memorial brasses now gathered on the step at the east end. One of these, that of Sir Richard Dixton, was originally below the second window from the east, and his coat of arms which still survives painted on the wall above marks the spot.

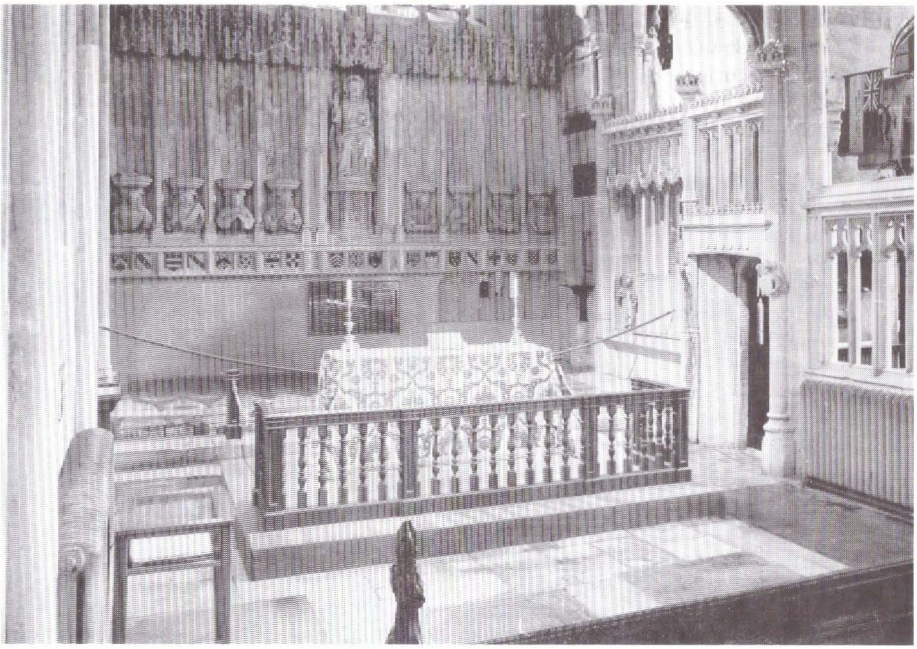
After the Reformation the chapel seems to have fallen into disuse, and in the 18th century it was used to house a massive timber staircase leading to the gallery which had been built on the north side of the nave. A print hanging in the vestry gives an excellent picture of the chapel as it appeared then, though the venerable figure seen proceeding towards the foot of the stairs is of somewhat Lilliputian proportions. Besides showing the staircase, it gives also a clear picture of the east end as it was then. The east wall was covered with plaster which must have been of considerable depth since it left no trace of any canopied niches on the east wall. The figures which stood in them had no doubt already been destroyed in the Reformation.

In the screen between the chapel and the nave is a narrow opening with the original door. The steps below it are deeply worn, possibly because it was used for access to the

The Trinity Chapel – an engraving showing the staircase leading to the gallery of the 18th century



The Trinity Chapel interior – note the 'squint' behind the right hand candle.



stairs up to the gallery. Beside the door is a singularly attractive stone carving of the head of a rather bucolic-looking boy taken as a model for a shield-bearing angel. Was he a son of one of the stone masons?

Then came Gilbert Scott's restoration. The staircase and the gallery to which it led were removed and the chapel was treated as an annexe to the nave with the pews facing southwards through the screen. The paving stones carrying brasses were placed on a "pace" or step built up at the east end. The gaps left were not filled but a wooden floor was built over the whole area, raising the level by about eight inches, to give a better view into the nave.

The east wall was stripped of plaster and the niches uncovered and restored. The figure of Christ was carved to fill the centre and a row of heads (all bearing a strong family resemblance!) to form the bases for statues in the niches, though these were in fact left empty. Below the niches is a row of shields bearing the quarterings of the Danvers family who were Lords of the Manor in the days of Elizabeth I and James I. These have been re-touched but they are in fact painted over an earlier set of bearings perhaps connected with the founders.

One of the curiosities of the chapel was a painting on the north wall at the extreme east end showing the martyrdom of Saint Erasmus, which had somehow avoided the fate of other murals in the church. The saint was seen lying on a bed of nails with a serene expression on his face, while his entrails are being drawn out on a winch. A number of people look on, including a nobleman on horseback. The scene is said to have been in Germany, but little is known about the Saint or why he should have been depicted here. In the 18th century, the figure was inexplicably confused with St. Thomas à Becket. Why, it is difficult to see; we know how Thomas died and it was not like that! But we find the chapel sometimes referred to incorrectly as St. Thomas' chapel; though whether this arose from the identification of the martyr with St. Thomas or whether the martyr was thought to be St. Thomas because the chapel already bore that name it is impossible to say. In any case there seems to be no justification for bestowing the name of St. Thomas on either Saint or chapel.

The mural is no longer there since the Hon. Georgina Bathurst by whose gift the restoration of the East end of the chapel was carried out took exception to it and had it scraped off. But a print of it survives and now hangs where the mural used to be; ironically the Hon. Georgina's memorial is immediately beneath.

There are a number of Bathurst memorials in the chapel, which also contained the Bathurst "faculty pew" now by permission removed. The most interesting are busts of the first Earl and Countess by Nollekens. The Earl died in 1776. Also at the east end there is the Bathurst burial vault, where a number of the family rest. There is no access to it except by lifting one of the paving stones, marked by a cross, just inside the small door. All these associations have led to the chapel sometimes being called "the Bathurst Chapel" but this is incorrect. A perusal of the monuments will show that many others besides have had their part through the centuries in building, adapting, restoring and beautifying the Trinity Chapel.

The chapel remained with the same arrangement of seating long after the need for it had passed, until in 1974 as a memorial to William Parry Cripps it was restored to its proper use. An altar, given in memory of Harold Winstone, was set on a wooden platform in front of the "pace" with the brasses; the wooden floor was removed and paved in stone at the original level. Several interesting memorial slabs were uncovered which had been lost for more than a century. Most of the pews were removed, four being left facing the altar. The altar rails were purchased from St. Mary's Church, Lambeth, which is now demolished. They were designed by Randoll Blacking in the 1920's and with a little adaptation proved entirely suitable for the chapel. They were given as a memorial to Ronald Sutch, vicar of Cirencester 1942-1962. The Credence Table was also made out of the same material from St. Mary's Lambeth and is the gift of the

Weavers Company.

So the wheel has come full circle and the Trinity Chapel is restored to its proper use, the Eucharist being celebrated there at least once a week.

Cirencester Parish Church showing the buttressed Tower and south porch beneath the 'Town Hall'



5. THE TOWER

UNTIL THE END of the fourteenth century so far as we know the church had no tower. But in 1400 the town had a windfall arising out of the turbulent politics of the time.

In 1399 Richard II was deposed by his cousin Henry Bolingbroke, who became King Henry IV. Richard was imprisoned in Pontefract Castle (where subsequently he was murdered). In 1400 the Earls of Kent and Salisbury made an attempt to remove Henry and restore Richard to the throne. They passed through Cirencester on their way to Windsor where they hoped to find King Henry and capture him. But by the time they reached Windsor the King had moved to the safety of London, so the Earls returned to Cirencester and attempted to persuade the townspeople to join their rebellion. Perhaps they relied on the previous associations of Richard with the town. But the townspeople far from supporting them arrested the two earls and imprisoned them in the church. The earls' supporters in reprisal set fire to houses in Gloucester Street and this so enraged the townspeople that next day they took the earls from the church and beheaded them in the Market Place. They then sent the heads to King Henry. Their leader in this enterprise was a wool merchant called Reginald Spycer, whose memorial brass (together with four wives) is now in the Trinity Chapel. As a reward for their loyalty the King allowed them to keep the treasure which the earls had collected to pay their followers. A large sum of money thus came into the possession of the town and with it they built the Tower.

This was built on to the west end of the Early English nave with its lower roof line, to which the tower was perhaps better proportioned. The mark of the original roof with its steep gable can be clearly seen over the tower arch at the west end of the nave. When it was half built the foundations appeared insecure, so they built two great spur buttresses to steady it.

The western walls of the two aisles were rebuilt to incorporate the buttresses as can most clearly be seen from outside. The end of the south aisle seems to have been refaced on the inside when the nave was rebuilt in 1530, but the north aisle still shows the original work.

It had been intended to surmount the tower with a spire and the squinches (masonry built across the corners of the tower) to support it can be seen in the bell chamber. But they apparently decided that it would be foolhardy to proceed with it and they were undoubtedly well advised.

From outside the tower is seen to be richly decorated in its upper storeys and to become progressively plainer in the lower courses. The west doorway has little ornamentation except the arms of Henry IV and of the Abbey of Cirencester in the spandrels. This is because until the nineteenth century the tower was closely surrounded by houses on all three sides so that only the upper part was exposed to view.

In the eighteenth century a timber floor was built at the base of the great west window and to it the seating of the nave was carried on steps up from the crossing. The holes into which were inserted the beams supporting the floor can be seen, filled with new stone when the galleries were removed. In the space under the floor it is said that the town fire-engine was housed, ready to be trundled out through the west door when emergency arose.

In a corner under the tower stands a small moveable organ, the gift of a parishioner in 1984. With 5 speaking stops it includes some early 19th century pipework and is useful in accompanying choral music at the west end of the church.

On the south wall has recently been placed a list of the clergy who have served the church since the dissolution of the Abbey.* To compile such a list was far more difficult

*See Appendix

than might have been expected. Up to 1539 the Abbot was also rector of the parish church. When the Abbey was dissolved, the advowson, or right of presentation to the living, passed to the King, who sold it to a family called Tresham, and it subsequently seems to have been lost. So the first vicar, William Philips, who held the living from 1539 to 1558, was followed by a succession of curates licensed by the bishop to officiate: no fewer than eleven in the next forty-two years. Then things became more stable, but even Joseph Harrison who served the parish church for no less then 63 years was not officially "perpetual" curate. Only in 1778 was the position regularized and a vicar, or perpetual curate, officially inducted and instituted.

We are indebted to Mrs. Freda Ratcliffe for doing the research needed to draw up the list, and to the Friends of the church for commissioning the work and for presenting the handsomely framed roll of names.

Opposite, on the north wall, hangs a set of pictures showing the history of the church. They were painted by Margaret Trowell whose husband was assistant curate in 1958. They are beautifully designed and painted in the mediaeval style and show the key developments in the church's history.

The tower contains a full peal of twelve bells, besides a tolling bell. It is claimed to be the oldest ring of twelve bells in the country — some say in the world, but this seems unlikely and would be hard to establish.

6. THE NAVE

(a) Norman — Early English — Decorated

THE FIRST church on this site was built in 1120 to replace the old Saxon church which was demolished to make room for the Abbey. Nothing is left of its nave, but it probably had narrow north and south aisles and extended roughly to where the font is now. In the eastern wall of the south aisle there can be seen the traces of a small round-headed arch. This perhaps led through to a south choir aisle; if so, when the chancel was widened in about 1180 the arch was blocked up. It now contains the safe which houses the Boleyn Cup. When the wall was being excavated in 1964 to receive the safe, the workmen came upon a well preserved painting of the Madonna and Child holding an apple, on plaster, some eighteen inches into the thickness of the wall. Unfortunately it was badly broken by the drill and rapidly disintegrated. Obviously the arch can only have been filled to half the thickness of the wall and the recess so formed was used to make a shrine. It was probably blocked up fully at the re-building of the nave in the 16th Century.*

In about 1240 the Norman nave was demolished and a new one was built in the Early English style with pointed arches and narrow lancet windows. It had the same floor dimensions as the present nave — a very wide building for that period. None of it now survives, but the bases of the arches leading to the Lady and St. Catherine's Chapels, with "water holding" mouldings which are peculiar to that period, were built then. The line of its roof can be seen over the

*Some authorities believe that the original Norman Church was cruciform, in which case perhaps the width of the transepts determined the width of the Early English nave. In that case, the blocked up window high on the west wall of the south aisle could have been a window into the transept. The little round arch would then always have been for a shrine in the wall.

See also p. 29.



The Nave

tower arch and in the west wall of the north aisle.

In 1400-1415 the tower was added at the west end and the west walls of the aisles were re-built to incorporate the buttresses of the tower above the large Decorated windows.

This was followed in about 1440 by the setting up of the chantry *chapel of St. Edmund of Canterbury* to contain the tomb of Henry Garstang. He was a wool merchant who had come to Cirencester from Lancashire, and his coat of arms and merchant's mark can be seen in the east window of the church and over the nave pillar facing the chapel, as well as over his tomb. The two eastern windows on the south wall were rebuilt in Decorated style and the chapel was enclosed by a very fine carved screen of Irish oak, on which the arms (three lozenges) and merchants' mark again appear.

In 1942 the chapel was re-furnished as a memorial to the youngest son of Canon Lewis Westmacott, vicar of Cirencester 1922-1940. Memorial tablets to other members of the family and to Canon Westmacott himself are on the wall.

The Pulpit is of about the same period as the Garstang Chapel and is one of the few pre-Reformation pulpits surviving. It is of the "wine-glass" shape, standing on a slender shaft, and the elaborately carved open stone work is unique. It looks now much as it did originally, the colour and gilding having been retouched in 1865; but it has passed through various modifications in the intervening years as will be mentioned in due course.

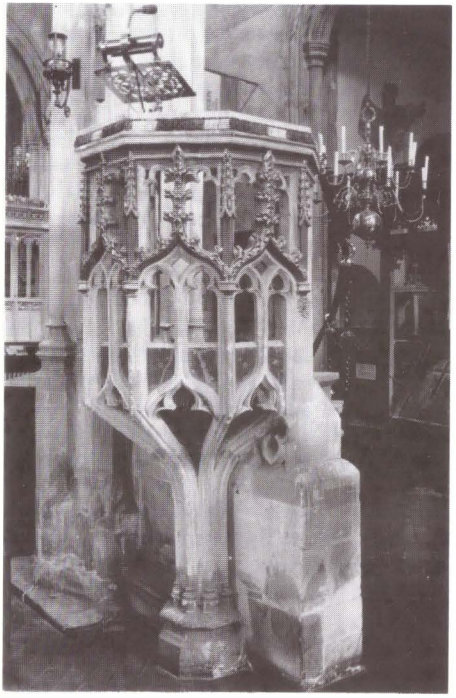
The Font dates from the fourteenth century and has met with mixed fortune. In the seventeenth century it was discarded in favour of the small Renaissance font now in the Lady Chapel; and for two hundred years it served as a flower-pot in the Abbey gardens. This accounts for its very weather-beaten state. In 1865 it was brought back to the church and placed almost between the pillars in the second bay of the north aisle, presumably in order to leave as much floor space as possible available for pews. But it is a highly inconvenient place for practical use and it would be good if one day it could be moved to the centre, and the western end of the north aisle be properly furnished as a baptistery.

Scott also mounted the font on steep steps of grey marble containing fossils of primitive shell fish. Though curious these are not really in keeping with the font and are positively dangerous in use, especially if any water is splashed on them. Perhaps if the font were ever moved it could be given a more suitable stone base.

(b) The 16th Century

Between 1515 and 1530 the nave was demolished and entirely rebuilt in the Late Perpendicular style. All that was left of the old nave was the west end of the two aisles and the eastern part of the south wall, all of which had been rebuilt about a hundred years earlier. On the north side the arcade of the Trinity Chapel and the north porch were left undisturbed. All else was swept away, though some of the old materials were used again in the floor and at the base of some of the pillars.

When the work was in progress the church must have presented a strange sight; at the west end the tower and its buttresses standing alone; to the east the chancel and chapels still intact; and between, a great void. But the builders had a great vision of a lofty building with soaring columns, flooded with light. Wealthy families and merchants contributed handsomely to the project and were rewarded by having their coats of arms or merchants' marks emblazoned on shields held by winged angels over the capital of every pillar. Above the arches they added a lofty triforium with wide clerestory windows, and a noble east window above the chancel arch. The wall of the triforium was given additional interest by a line of small unpainted stone shields carved with the Emblems of the Passion — seamless robe, crown of thorns, hammers and nails, pincers and so on. The ceiling with its flat pitched gable was set fifty seven feet above the floor and the chancel arch was rebuilt to match the bases and mouldings of the pillars in the nave. Wide windows reaching almost to the



The Pulpit

roof and capped by the flattest of arches gave the effect of a "wall of glass" and filled the church with light.

High up in the chancel arch was placed a Rood Loft on which was mounted the figure of Christ on the Cross with St. John and the Virgin Mary on either side. Access was by a spiral staircase in the thickness of the wall from St. Catherine's chapel, and the narrow doorway which gave entry to the loft can be seen blocked up on the north side of the arch, facing down the nave. But after only some twenty-five years, in the reign of Edward VI, all Roods were removed by order and so this important feature of the new nave was lost. It was three hundred and fifty years later, at the beginning of the present century, that the elaborately carved cross was hung to fill the arch once more.

Close inspection reveals some curious features of the nave. The pillars on either side are not quite square with each other, as anyone discovers who tries to arrange the pews strictly in line on each side of the centre aisle. The bases of the pillars west of the crossing rest on heavy carved stone slabs of a much earlier date; and the base of the second pillar from the east on the south side is different from all the others, being left with a square top instead of being tapered. It appears in fact to consist of a single great stone and it has been suggested that it was originally a millstone, and has been cut down from its original circular shape to a hexagon to conform to its new rôle.

The building of the nave constituted one of the last flowerings of the Perpendicular Gothic style. The Reformation marked a complete re-direction of architectural enterprise from ecclesiastical to domestic building, and the characteristic legacy of Elizabethan times and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (in spite of St. Paul's and many other Wren churches) is the great mansions which sprang up all over the land. In Cirencester church the developments of this period though dramatic were utilitarian in scope and intention and often at variance

with the artistic purpose of the design. For this reason they were all swept away at the great restoration of 1865 so that the nave looks now much as it was originally intended. Nevertheless, the innovations of the intervening period are of great interest and deserve to be recorded; and all the more because they have disappeared.

(c) The 17th and 18th Centuries

After the destruction of the Abbey the Town became progressively poorer and the vision which had inspired the building of the nave was lost. Early in the seventeenth century a wall about five feet high was built right across the nave, on a line about where the font now stands, and the space behind the wall was left empty as a general meeting place for the townspeople, the west doors being presumably kept open. An item in the churchwardens' accounts of the period shows that a man was paid a shilling to keep "beggars, children and dogs" quiet behind the wall during the times of divine service; with a recommendation that boys who created a disturbance were to be locked into the tower staircase until after the service, when they could be released and chastized by the churchwardens.

In about 1635 the church had fallen into so dilapidated a state that an appeal was made to Archbishop Laud, who no doubt knew the church well since he had formerly been Dean of Gloucester. The appeal was made in the form of a letter written in the name of the church itself bewailing its state. With the Archbishop's encouragement an effort was made to repair it and altar rails which had previously been lacking were provided.

In the Civil War the town was Cromwellian but was captured for the King by Prince Rupert. One of the casualties of the battle was a clothier named Hodgkinson Paine, a memorial brass to whom, with verses making puns upon his name, is now upon the south wall. The church itself however suffered little damage though it was used to house prisoners, and the ancient glass is recorded still to have been intact at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

After the Restoration in 1660 church life seems to have grown much stronger; the wall across the church was removed and when the floor space even so proved insufficient, galleries were built along the walls as need arose. An organ was built on a gallery above the chancel screen, filling the chancel arch. Access to it was gained from the steps which had formerly led from St. Catherine's chapel to the Rood Loft, a new opening being made from them through the north wall of the chancel.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the process was complete, and we should have difficulty in recognizing the church as it appeared then. A gallery ran along the north wall, blocking the arcade of the Trinity Chapel, which was itself largely taken up with a heavy oak staircase leading into the gallery. In this gallery was the Bathurst family pew. It is recorded that some time after the battle of Waterloo the Duke of Wellington came to stay with the Earl and that when the pair of them entered the pew on the Sunday morning all the congregation rose and cheered. It is appropriate that at the place where the pew was there hangs now the old colours of the Gloucestershire Regiment which were actually carried at the battle.

In the centre aisle, west of a line joining the north and south doors the pews were built up in tiers like a theatre to the level of the bottom of the west window in the tower, and in front of them was placed a small renaissance font to replace the old one.

Another gallery ran along the south wall of the church, blocking the great south windows and partly obscuring the west window of the aisle. Entrance to this was through a small door in the wall above the south door, where its outline can still be seen, and spiral staircases led up to it from doors on each side of the south door through what is now the kitchen of the Town Hall.

The nave was seated with high box pews which were fashionable at that period, and to give the preacher sufficient height to see both into the the pews and into galleries a wooden top deck was added to the pulpit. An hour-glass was placed beside the pulpit for the benefit of the preacher and perhaps the encouragement of the congregation, though

it is recorded that as the sand ran out they held their breath to see whether he would bring his sermon to an end or turn the glass over and embark upon a further period. The glass remains, but modern preachers are not expected to use it.

As a result of all this the church must have presented a quite appallingly congested appearance. But that it was needed is shown by a story recently discovered in a magazine of about 1780, recording a "panic in Cirencester church". Apparently a stone pinnacle from the centre aisle fell with a great crash upon the roof of the south aisle during morning service. In spite of the efforts of the preacher to calm them the congregation thought the church was collapsing and made a mad rush for the doors, some jumping over the side of the gallery. Incredibly, everyone got out safely with the exception of one unfortunate person stabbed by a bayonet. (What was anybody in church doing with that?) But the interesting thing is that the article says that the congregation numbered about twelve hundred. They really did need all those galleries.

In about 1700 the original stained glass in the windows of the nave is known to have been largely intact. A hundred years later it had nearly all disappeared, seemingly as a result of neglect. The gallery in front of it may have increased considerably the risk of damage. There is a story (a myth?) that the broken glass was collected over the years in wooden chests and housed at a builder's yard and there forgotten. When Oakley Hall was being built the contents of the chests, unrecognized, were used along with other rubble to make up the level of the ground beside the old railway, preparatory to it being planted with trees. Perhaps archaeologists in the far distant future will discover it there.

However that may be, the remaining glass in the windows was taken out in about 1800 and re-set in the great West Window under the Tower. The panels were in fact slightly too narrow for the lights of that window and extra glass had to be inserted. So it remained until 1939, when the glass again had to be removed partly as a war-time safety measure and partly because re-leading had become necessary. After the war, it was returned to a window in the south aisle where it had originally belonged, and the west window was filled with clear glass to send more light into the centre.

In 1714 and 1726 respectively the *Blue and Yellow schools* were founded by Mrs. Rebecca Powell and have borne her name ever since, though the money mostly came from a former husband William Georges. In 1876 the two charity schools were amalgamated and became a church day-school but the traditional uniforms are still worn on special occasions. The early origin of the school and its long association with the church are attested by the memorial tablet to Rebecca and two husbands on the east wall of the south aisle and by the curiously adult figure of a boy in the Blue School uniform now on the south wall. Originally, he stood in the porch to beg funds for the schools, above the stone "mushroom" beside the steps.

From this period date also the *royal coats of arms* which decorate the east end of the north and south aisles, though it is only recently that they have been restored to view. Their history is curious. The arms of George II painted on canvas and mounted on a wooden frame were found much dilapidated and blackened with dirt in the store-room over the Town Hall. It was decided to clean and reframe the painting and restore it to its probable former position at the east end of the south aisle. But it was then found that the wooden backing had in fact carried the arms of Charles II and it was found possible to restore these too. The work was done with great patience and skill by Mrs. Phillippa Jefferies. They were then mounted on the corresponding wall in the north aisle.

To go back to the beginning of the story, in 1660 at the Restoration it was enacted that all churches should display the royal arms. At the time of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 it was ordered that all Stuart coats of arms should be destroyed and those of George II substituted. But at Cirencester perhaps as an economy (or to hedge their bet?) they had the Hanoverian

arms painted on canvas and fixed over those of Charles II. At the refurnishing of the church in 1865 it was for some reason decided not to rehang them but the church now has the distinction of displaying the very rare armorial bearings of Charles II as well as those of George II.

(d) Gilbert Scott and after

By the mid-nineteenth century it was clear that a major structural overhaul was necessary and as in the case of most of the cathedrals and large parish churches of the country Sir George Gilbert Scott was called in to direct the work. The first preparatory step was taken with the building in 1856 of Holy Trinity, Watermoor to Scott's design; and between 1865-67 a complete restoration of the Parish Church to something like its original state was undertaken. All the galleries and the tiers of seats rising to the tower window were cleared away, together with the high box pews, and the organ was removed from the chancel arch, so that once again the height and breadth of the church made their impact. But besides this, basic structural work was needed. Numbers of people had been buried under the floor and many of the paving stones were also gravestones; and the effect had been to weaken seriously the foundations of the pillars. All the floor therefore was taken up and any remains were exhumed and reburied in the churchyard. The foundations of the pillars were then reinforced. Most of the paving stones were probably too worn or broken to be used again; the best of them were used to re-floor the Lady Chapel, and the brasses were collected in the Trinity Chapel. Memorial plaques from stones not used again were collected and mounted on the south wall.

The nave aisles were re-paved with red tiles instead of stone — Gilbert Scott's only real mistake — with wooden floors beneath the pews, and the opportunity was taken to provide the church for the first time with a heating system.

Even with the building of Watermoor Church seating accommodation remained a problem and every foot of space available was used. The width of the passage ways along the walls and outside the pillars was reduced to a minimum, leaving them inconveniently narrow, while the pews in the side aisles were made some twenty-five feet long, all in one piece. The pews themselves are made of oak and of considerable weight, though the open backs save them from looking too ponderous. There is one ancient pew-end beside the pillar nearest to the south door and the rest were copied from that. Further seating, as already mentioned, took the place of the Garstang Chapel and filled the space in front of the screens.

The chancel screen was left by the removal of the organ loft without a canopy and at the same height as the screens of the chapels. Scott had recommended the addition of a carved canopy under the chancel arch and an elaborate one was mounted upon it at the original height. But it looked too ponderous at so low a level and in about 1900 the height of the screen was raised by three feet by the insertion of new timber in the uprights. The work was done with great skill and is only visible on close inspection. The result is a very handsome screen, the lower part of which is fifteenth century and the upper part modern.

The church has been fortunate both in the fact that so many of the *windows* were left with clear glass and in the quality of the modern stained glass which was inserted. The handsome window over the chancel arch and the west window of the north aisle are by Hardman. The latter is a memorial to Canon Powell, to whom the church owes much since it was he who as Vicar had both the vision and the courage to embark on the great work of restoration. The window at the east end of the north aisle, high over the entrance to the Lady Chapel is by Kemp. But the most modern and the most interesting is the window by Eastman at the west end of the south aisle which was given by the Croome family in the 1920's. Its colours are too strong to tone with the ancient glass beside it on the south wall but that cannot be blamed on the artist since at that time the ancient glass was still in the window of the

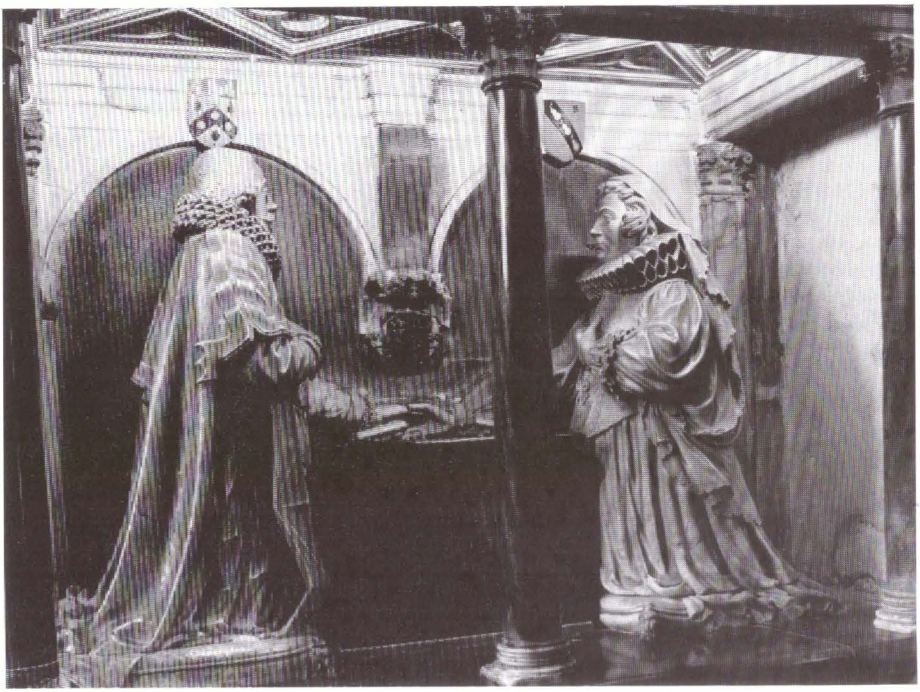
tower and taken by itself the window looks very well. But the Croome family were critical of the figure of the Child as showing too great a muscular development for his age, and when the artist declined to modify it they recorded their reservations in a tiny inscription on a diamond shaped pane of glass near the bottom of the centre panel. It states (discreetly in Latin) that the window commemorates the departed "parum feliciter" — not too happily.

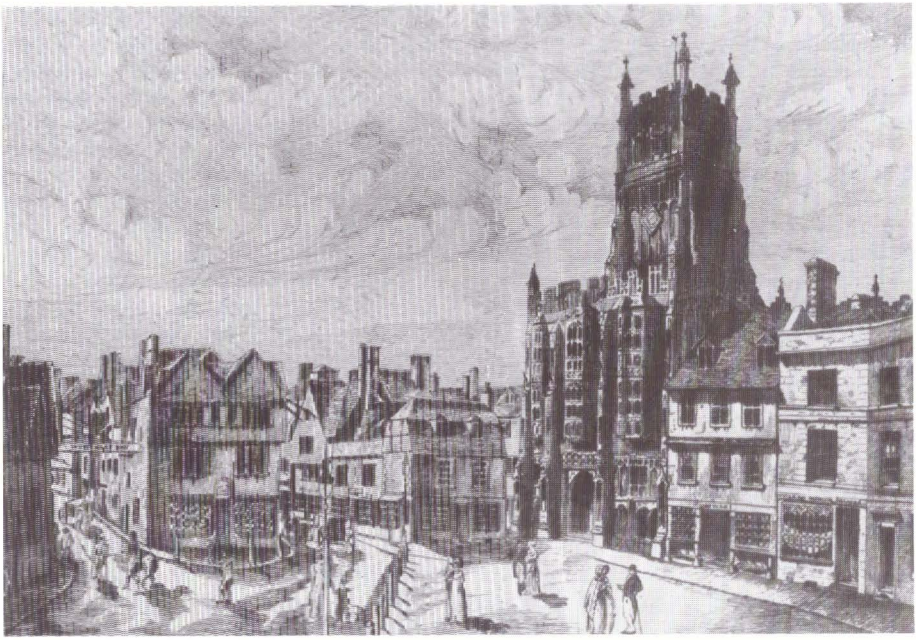
A word should be said about the *memorial tablets* on the walls. Many of them are not in their original position, since Scott moved them freely, and was particularly anxious to clear any out of the chancel. But whether as originally sited or not they contain much of interest and would make a rewarding study, though long sight or field-glasses would be needed to read some. By far the most moving is a single tablet under the north west window containing separate memorials to two sons of the Selfe family, who were clothiers in the town. Both died probably through an epidemic, the younger in 1758 at the age of fifteen, the elder the following year at the age of nineteen. The inscriptions are written in Latin, a language unequalled for conveying intensity of feeling in the fewest possible words. The sculptor was apparently an amateur who knew no Latin: there are mistakes and corrections and sometimes he runs out of space before he has finished his line. Yet the tablets convey an impression of two boys of singular talent and charm, deeply loved and mourned.

The chandeliers (as already mentioned) previously hung in the sanctuary, but were moved to their present position in about 1900. They are inscribed with the date 1701 and the names of the churchwardens of that year. They are surmounted by the double-headed eagle, and were probably made in Austria, or possibly in Russia, and imported through the Baltic ports and Bristol.†

The Boleyn Cup the church's greatest treasure, is housed in a special safe in the east wall given as a memorial to Col. W. A. Chester Master who died in 1963. It was made for Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, in 1535, two years before her execution. The cover is surmounted by her personal badge of a falcon holding a sceptre with a rose tree. From her it passed to her daughter Queen Elizabeth I who gave it to her physician Dr. Richard Master. He had acquired the lands of the Abbey and gave the cup to the parish church. For many years because of its value it was kept in the bank and only shown on special occasions, so it is good that it can now be on permanent display. It is made of silver gilt, beautifully chased and is one of the few pre- Reformation silver treasures surviving.

†*Note:* Other authorities state that they are copies of Flemish brass made by John Spooner of Bristol and not made in Austria or Russia.





7. CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

THIS WAS made in about 1350 by widening the south chancel aisle and raising the roof. A three-light east window was made, roughly matching the design of the east window of the chancel, and a fine entrance arch opened on the south aisle of the nave. Why the chapel was dedicated to St. John the Baptist when he was already the patron saint of the whole church is a puzzle.

It is difficult now to imagine what the chapel looked like when properly furnished, before it was half filled with the organ and turned into the choir vestry. There was then of course no door leading into a clergy vestry beyond, and no outside door in the south wall. The position of the altar can perhaps be determined by the direction of the squint to give a view to the high altar. If so, it must have stood well forward from the east wall and have been raised on a step. The chapel does not seem to have housed any memorials or tombs; when the handsome tomb of George Monox, Sheriff of London in the time of Charles I, with his wife and two daughters, was placed here it must clearly have fallen out of use as a chapel. But the tomb deserves better than to be something of an obstruction in a congested vestry, and the recent provision of an interior light, though it makes some amends, cannot enable it to be seen to real advantage.

Over the arch can be seen the blocked up outline of a small window. This and the great thickness of the wall have led some to think that this was at some time the west wall of a small tower, but there can be no certainty on this point.* The moulding of the arch is supported by corbels in the shape of a man's head and shoulders. That on the south side is ancient, with curiously small arms; that on the north is a reconstruction. The western side of the wall is painted with the Plantagenet badge and the arch has traces of a coloured pattern.

In Gilbert Scott's restoration the chapel was refloored with handsome tiles matching those of the chancel and was seated with pews facing into the chancel. These were removed when the organ was built and it became a choir vestry. The windows were filled with very good quality stained glass depicting scenes from the life of John the Baptist, thus recalling the original purpose of the chapel. These windows are a memorial to members of the Lawrence family, descended from William Lawrence who died in 1837 and was for fifty years a surgeon in the town.

The clergy vestry beyond was constructed early in the twentieth century. Previously there had been only a very small vestry with a lean-to roof and a door leading into the sanctuary. The new vestry was built to the full width of the chapel and with a flat roof so that it should not cut the line of the east window. A wide door was made from what had now become the choir vestry and the choir were also given access to their vestry by an outside door opened in the south wall.

*See footnote on page 20.

Opposite:

Part of the tomb of George Monox and his family

The Market Place — from an engraving of 1805

IMPORTANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

c. 300	First church in Roman town of Corinium.
577	Church and town burnt by Saxons.
c. 700	Saxon church built, some 80 yards N.E. of the present church.
1117	Henry I founded Augustinian Abbey of St. Mary. Saxon church demolished. Norman church built on the present site.
1176	Abbey church and monastic buildings consecrated in the presence of Henry II.
1180	Chancel widened to the south and arches opened to south side.
1235-50	Nave rebuilt in Early English style. Extension of chancel to present length. Lady Chapel built and south chancel aisle rebuilt as St. John the Baptist's Chapel.
c. 1350	Chancel arch widened and heightened to present form.
1400	Tower built in Perpendicular style.
1430	Trinity Chapel and North Porch begun.
1450	Lady Chapel rebuilt in present form, also the pulpit.
1500	Great South Porch built.
1508	Walls of St. Catherine's Chapel raised and rich fan-vaulting presented by Abbot Hakeborne.
1515-30	Great rebuilding of the Nave in its present late Perpendicular style with Rood Screen and Loft.
1539-40	Abbey dissolved and demolished by Henry VIII – Parish Church remained.
1642	Townsmen attack Lord Chandos when executing commission of array on behalf of Charles I – First bloodshed in Civil War.
1643	Town captured by Royalists under Prince Rupert. Many townsmen imprisoned in Church – then marched to Oxford to obtain Royal Pardon from Charles I.
c. 1750	Construction of galleries in north and south aisles.
1769	Present Communion Rails made.
1831-3	Restoration of South Porch.
1865-7	Complete restoration under Sir Gilbert Scott with removal of eighteenth century galleries.
1905	Reredos carved in Oberammergau erected in Catherine Chapel.
1908	Further restoration of South Porch.
1965-	Restoration of roofs and fabric.
1974	Renewal of mullions and tracery of south aisle windows.
1981	South Porch parapet reconstructed.
1982	Repairs to north facade masonry.
1983	Repairs to Vestry roof.

Measurements:

Length: internal – 110 feet; external – 180 feet.
Width of Nave and Aisles with Trinity Chapel – 104 feet.
Height of Tower to weathercock – 162 feet.
Height of Nave, internal – 57 feet.



Photo: Bryan R. Berkeley A.R.P.S.

APPENDIX

The Garstang Chapel and marriage chest

This chantry chapel which dates from the early part of the fifteenth century was originally dedicated to St. Edmund of Canterbury. Henry Garstang whose arms are above the recess on the south wall, died in 1464 and made several bequests to the church. He willed that he should be buried in the chapel and the recess is his tomb.

The chapel is now known as the Garstang Chapel, although for a time it was probably the chapel of the Fraternity of Jesus and was known in the 16th century as the Jesus Chapel. The recess now houses an oak chest dated 1539. It is unusual at that date for Arabic numerals to be used. It is likely that this is a marriage chest and from the coat of arms belonged to a member of the George family who came from Baunton and whose patent dates from 1528.

The family were prominent in the life of the town for two centuries and the same coat can be seen above the altar on the east wall of the chapel. When the S was added to the family name is not known. William George's widow, Rebecca, made a bequest in 1722 which endowed a charity school in the town and a charitable foundation bearing her first married name of Powell still benefits schools in the town.

The chest is well preserved and still has much of its original pigment. Its history between 1539 and 1979 is unknown. It was found being used for storage in the Vicarage when it was in Sheep Street. It is appropriate that the chest has found its home near the memorial to one of the family which owned it.

Michael W. Ingram
Jan. 1993

Page 17: Correction
The cross referred to is in fact a crown or coronet cut in the stone sealing the Bathurst vault.



From an old print – source unknown