

A NOTE ON
THE BAROQUE CHOIR-STALLS FROM THE CARTHUSIAN MONASTERY
OF BUXHEIM, NEAR MEMMINGEN, BAVARIA, NOW IN THE CHAPEL
OF ST. SAVIOUR'S HOSPITAL, OSNABURGH STREET, LONDON

By A. R. DUFTY

The baroque woodwork in the Chapel of St. Saviour's Hospital, Osnaburgh Street, London, which was seen by this Institute at its Autumn Meeting in 1947 (*Arch. Journ.*, ciii, 197), was made for the Carthusian Monastery at Buxheim in Bavaria, and was in the monks' choir there until sold in 1880.

Before discussing the stalls in detail it may be of general interest to say something about Buxheim and its monastery. The village is some three miles east of Memmingen, on the banks of the Iller, no great distance from the Swiss and Austrian frontiers, and about 40 miles south-west of Augsburg. There was a religious community there in the twelfth century, and by 1238 there is evidence that shows it to have been a collegiate establishment of canons with a provost (*Stiftspropst*) at its head, attached to Augsburg.

During the fourteenth century Buxheim passed into the lordship of the von Eisenburghs, and in 1402 the last provost, Heinrich von Ellerbach, bought it from him. In the same year the Bishop of Augsburg and von Ellerbach presented the property to the Carthusians.

There followed a period of intensive building, and by 1512 the monastic layout was largely completed, apart from some administrative buildings subsequently added.

It remained a Carthusian monastery until, in 1809, the community was secularized. The site and buildings were declared national property, and the State sold them to the family of von Waldbott-Bassenheim. In 1880 the owner, Count Hugo von Waldbott-Bassenheim, disposed of much of the contents, including the library and these choir stalls.

In spite, however, of secularization, Buxheim, alone of the Carthusian monasteries previously in Germany, retains its conventual layout comparatively unchanged, and in this context, before turning from the general historical background to the subject of the woodwork, it is pleasant to recall a saying current among the Carthusians in the sixteenth century, that whoever wishes to see an excellent prior and a zealous community need only go to Buxheim.

The Stalls: The initial stage of building at the monastery was over by 1512, and it was not until nearly 200 years later that extensive renovations were begun, and Dominikus Johann B. Zimmerman remodelled the library and church, completed in 1710 and 1712 respectively. But evidently money was spent on the furnishings of the church in the meantime, to judge by the magnificent early baroque high altar still at Buxheim, which is of 1630. The stalls are later than this, but the two dates hitherto suggested for them differ by half a century, 1650 and 1700.

It is necessary, then, in the absence of documentary evidence, though that may well come to light when research is again possible in South Germany, to arrive at an approximation of date on stylistic grounds.

In comparison with the high altar at Buxheim and woodwork of about 1650 in other Bavarian churches, the choir-stalls are more sophisticated and assured in design and execution. Moreover, examination of them reveals a number of decorative features which are suggestive of a period as late as the end of the century. In particular there is the late treatment of the carved representation of folds of drapery in some panels and, again, the excessive use of the mitre in the framing of others. Generally, amidst the profusion of carved foliage, notably in the cresting, there appear those deft twists and incisive curves in the design which seem to presage the rococo of the eighteenth century.

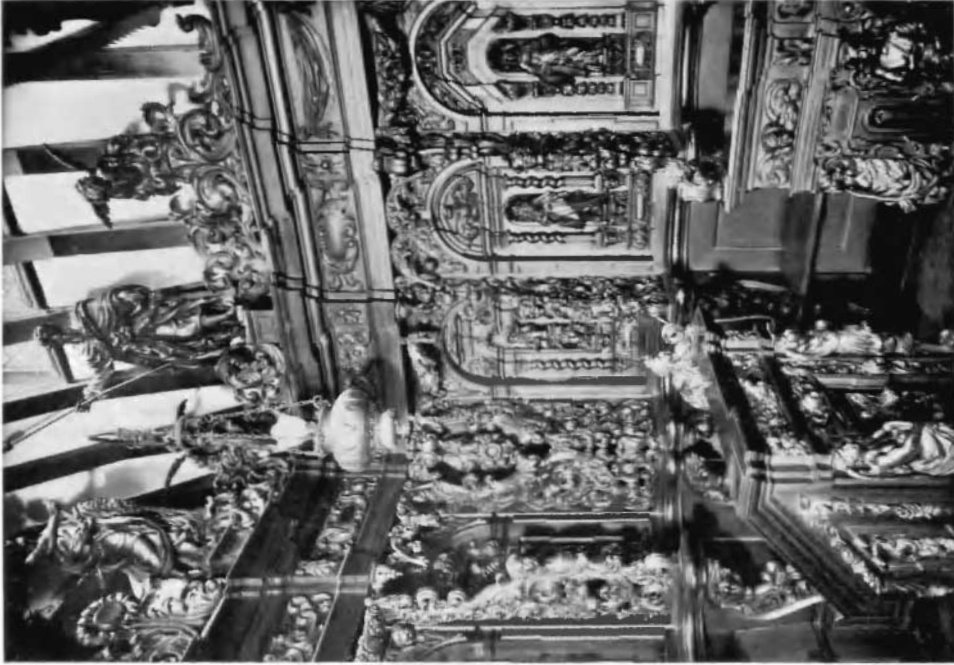
Direct comparison, too, with the carving of dateable small provincial high altars, supports the later date; but perhaps the most instructive comparison is with the choir-stalls in the abbey church at Waldsassen in north Bavaria. There, evidently, alternative schemes were considered, for a series of sketch designs for the stalls was prepared by the Jesuit brother Johann Hormann in 1688, while the stalls actually erected in 1696 were to a different design. What is of interest is that each scheme, both that on paper and that in being, has points of similarity with the Buxheim woodwork.

Hormann uses the motif of a cherub's head with wings erect within a much-mitred panel occurring on the Buxheim doors and prayer desks, whereas the 1696 stalls contain a profusion of the spiny acanthus foliage combined with free-standing figures of the Apostles seen on the top of the Buxheim stalls. In other respects the design differs essentially.

This accumulation of evidence does support a date towards the end of the seventeenth century for the stalls, and inclines one to accept the convolutions in the foliation in the panels over the archway of the altar-screen as in fact the carved date, 1691. Even allowing for the eccentricities of baroque, there seems no other explanation for the particular asymmetry there is in the design within the panels; the treatment of the figure 1 is familiar in Renaissance work, while the present truncated appearance of the 6 is due to part of the loop being broken off.

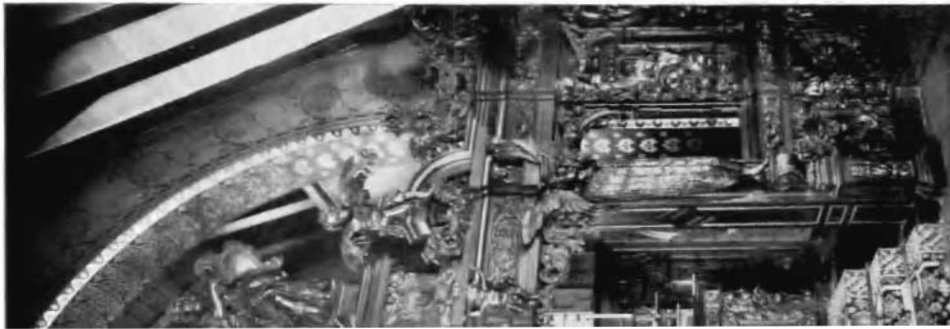
The recent vicissitudes of the stalls, before they came to St. Saviour's, are of interest. After their sale from the monastery in 1880, they were bought by Jansenists in Holland. In 1886 they were in the hands of a dealer, M. Handelaar, in Brussels. They were next sent to London, and were sold by Bonhams of Oxford Street on September 1st, 1886, when they were purchased for this chapel by Sir Henry Palmer. Some time before, Sir Henry's wife, Dame Palmer, a friend of Dr. Pusey, had established this small Hospital here.

It remains to describe briefly the general arrangement of the stalls. A considerable amount of alteration and adaptation was necessary to fit them into their present position. Before, there were thirteen stalls on the south side, twelve on the north and six on the west. Eighteen were kept intact, the rest were cut up to form the other furnishings of the Chapel. The niche in the back of each stall contains the figure of either a Hermit or Founder of a Religious Order; the additional figures of Our Lord and the Virgin now on the altar-screen were originally behind the two principal stalls. On pedestals over the stalls are large figures of



b. N.W. CORNER OF STALLS

ST. SAVIOUR'S, OSNABURGH STREET
Copyright N.B.R.



GREEN



ST. SAVIOUR'S, OSNABURGH STREET, LONDON
WEST DOOR, WITH ADJACENT STALLS, AND MISCELLANEOUS CARVINGS ABOVE
Copyright N.B.R.

the Twelve Apostles, and against the north wall are those of Aaron, Moses, Melchisedech and David, which originally crowned the west range of stalls.

On the altar-screen seraphim stand on either side of the archway: above, flanking the date panels, are emblems of the Seasons, and on the pedestal in the pediment are the Four Living Creatures of Revelation holding a shield inscribed 'Jahweh'; on the pediment are two cherubim carrying scrolls with the words 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth', and at the top St. Michael holding a shield with the words 'Quis ut Deus'.

On the desks by the west door are figures of Carthusian monks reclining in attitudes of contemplation. On the west wall, above the stalls, amongst a miscellaneous collection of fragments and figures of angels, including a modern Italian text and lattice work, is a cartouche carved and pierced with initials, so far unidentified.