

ART. VI.—*St. Mary's Church, Carlisle: Some Notes on its History, Fabric and Woodwork.* By C. G. BULMAN.

THE parish of St. Mary's, Carlisle, has, in the last few years, lost its separate identity, and has been combined with that of St. Paul's. It is only within recent months however that the actual church of St. Mary has been closed, and it is now disused. With its closing and the merging of its congregation with that of its neighbour, there comes to an end one of the longest chapters in the ecclesiastical history of our city.

The present time is therefore opportune for some description of the church, and particularly for some examination of the woodwork which it contains. To that end I have endeavoured to gather any information which might be of interest, and the results of these enquiries are embodied in this paper.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first deals with the congregation and fabric of the church; the second gives some description of the origin and date of the woodwork now in the church. This woodwork can claim a much greater degree of interest than can the actual building, and although some notes on this woodwork appeared in these *Transactions*, N.S. xvii, its real significance escaped notice. The questions which I have endeavoured to clear up are:—

- (1) What was the origin and date of the woodwork?
- (2) What was its original position in the Cathedral?
- (3) At what period was it ejected from the Cathedral and for what reason?

I think that it is now possible to answer all these questions.

However, to begin with the church. The building is of recent date, but it is well known that the congregation is of much greater antiquity and goes back far into the mediæval life of the city.

As in a large number of cathedral and monastic churches throughout the land, a body of parishioners had rights of worship in the great church and part of the building was set aside for them as their parish church. At Chester, for example, the parishioners of St. Oswald used the south transept of the abbey church and maintained their right to do so despite disputes with the monastic chapter. One of the results of this arrangement is visible in Chester Cathedral to-day, for the south transept had to be rebuilt on a very large scale to accommodate them, and it forms a striking contrast to the diminutive north transept which was left in its original condition.

A similar state of affairs prevailed at Carlisle. Probably from the very foundation of the Cathedral the two bodies had worshipped side by side; the Canons in their choir and transepts, and the parishioners of St. Mary in the western bays of the nave. In the original Norman church, the choir of the Canons occupied the crossing and two eastern bays of the nave, the remainder—the six western bays—would be reserved for the use of the parishioners and formed their parish church. This arrangement, which I feel certain was the original arrangement, survived the Reformation and Dissolution period, and no structural change took place until the Civil War in the seventeenth century. As is well known, after the siege of Carlisle by General Leslie in 1645 and its capture by him on behalf of the Parliamentary cause, the western bays of the nave were removed—the six bays comprising the church of St. Mary—and the parishioners were now homeless.

There being no alternative, it would appear that they were now allowed by the Dean and Chapter of the period to occupy the two remaining eastern bays of the

nave which had formerly been included in the part of the Cathedral occupied by the Canons. These were now divided off from the transepts by a wall across the western arch of the crossing, and into this small space the church and its fittings were crammed. This arrangement lasted for many years, until as lately as 1870 in fact.

It will appear from the foregoing that the church of St. Mary probably did not occupy the two eastern bays of the nave until *after* the destruction of the western bays. The reasons are:—

(1) We know that the choir of the Canons, in Norman times occupied the crossing and two eastern bays of the nave. During the thirteenth century the canons rebuilt their choir on a vastly larger scale and moved their stalls into it, but there could have been no advantage to be gained by removing the screen from the nave at the same time. There was, on the other hand, one serious disadvantage which would weigh against such a course, and this was the fact that the main entrance to the domestic buildings of the priory was situated in the first bay west of the crossing. It would surely be in the interests of the canons to preserve their screen in the nave and thus prevent the parishioners from encroaching upon their privacy.

(2) The sole result of such a proceeding would be to enlarge the area of St. Mary's Church, an increase for which there could be little justification considering that it already occupied six bays, a length of over a hundred feet, which was a large building for a parish church.

(3) When the destruction of the Cathedral buildings took place after the siege and occupation by the Scots in 1645, it was not the whole of the nave which was removed but only the six western bays, the two bays belonging to the Chapter being left intact. This suggests that some sort of wall or division existed at the time, possibly in its lower stages the remains of the old choir screen.

We get a glimpse of the old church as it was at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in Bishop Nicolson's Visitations. His note about the church is dated Sept. 24th, 1703, and runs as follows:

"This being onely the Remains of the Nave of the old Cathedral, has no distinct Quire-Part. Yet the Communion Table being placed in the most Eastern point, and in some sort distinguished from the rest, ought to have rails, which will not much embarrass the small Compass now left for the congregation. The Leads over the South Isle want mending, and so does the West Door into the Churchyard betwixt the Church and the Consistory Court, over the top whereof there's a hollow wall of loose stones."

In an old guide to the Cathedral, dated 1816, it says, "In 1813 the nave of the church, heretofore a blank space, but used for parochial purposes, was fitted up with neatness and elegance, separated from the internal part of the Cathedral, and made a more commodious place of worship for the parish of St. Mary."

This passage would appear to refer to certain internal alterations which were done at this time. About 1813-1814, the vicar and churchwardens applied for a faculty to erect galleries. The faculty was granted and galleries were placed over the north and south aisles and across the *east* end. The pulpit was moved to the west end and presumably the congregation sat facing west, although the altar seems to have kept its usual place against the east wall. The access to the galleries was by a staircase in the eastern bay of the north aisle.

It is interesting to note that this church of St. Mary in the Cathedral nave retained its ancient dedication when that of the Cathedral proper was changed at the Reformation to that of the "Holy and Undivided Trinity."

So the old church of St. Mary occupied its position in the fragmentary Cathedral nave for many years, cramped

and dark as it must have been. At last, however, in 1870 an entirely new departure was made. At this time some work of restoration to the interior of the Cathedral was in progress under the direction of Mr. Street, an eminent ecclesiastical architect of the day. It was decided to remove the parishioners from their church in the nave and to build them an entirely new one on a new site. On historical grounds it is to be regretted, perhaps, that this was done, especially in view of the long connection between the two bodies, the Chapter and the parish church, an association which as we have seen, went right back to the beginning of the church in Norman times. It might have been better if the money expended on the building of a new church had been devoted to the rebuilding, of some part at least of the demolished nave. Even if only one or two bays had been rebuilt it would not only have given the congregation much more room in their cramped quarters, but would have been a great architectural contribution to the fabric of the Cathedral as a whole, and a beginning which could have been followed up in later times, so as to restore to the Cathedral the nave which vanished in the middle of the seventeenth century.

On the other hand there can be no doubt whatever that it was a wonderful architectural improvement to the interior of the Cathedral to have the nave thrown open to the remainder of the building once more, and the somewhat unsightly pews removed from encumbering the ancient Norman pillars. Nor can the worshippers have felt very comfortable in their cramped, dark church, with all the fittings crammed into so small a space.

The present structure of St. Mary's was erected in the years 1869-70. Great difficulty was encountered in obtaining a suitable site in a central position, and it is extremely interesting to note that suggestions were made to erect the church in the Castle grounds. This suggestion might have been carried into effect but for the decided refusal of the Government to entertain the idea.

At last a site for it was obtained in the Abbey grounds near to the Castle Street entrance and the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Waldegrave on the 4th June, 1868, and the new church was consecrated by Bishop Goodwin on the 25th Jan., 1870. The total cost of the work exceeded £6000.

The building was designed by Mr. Ewan Christian, the architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who had restored the exterior of the Cathedral in the 1850's. In style it is an essay in the Early English and Geometrical Gothic styles, and by its height in comparison to its length, the apse at the east end and the slender "fleche" or spirelet, it betrays the Continental Gothic influence which was in favour with Church designers for a short period at that time. It is perhaps arguable whether it is an altogether successful venture in that style and it is certainly not in accordance with more modern ideas of suitability. The interior on the other hand, is handicapped by the lack of balance of light, for owing to the cramped nature of the site it is much hemmed in by buildings on its (ritual) east end, some of which actually abut on to the wall of the church. In consequence the long lancet windows of the apse, already obscured by the inferior stained glass of the period, are much darkened. It is not, on the whole, a very happy design.

However, with the disappearance of this congregation of St. Mary's there is broken a link which connects us with the early days of the church in Carlisle, and it is upon these grounds that it is to be regretted.

WOODWORK IN ST. MARY'S CHURCH, CARLISLE.

In 1916, the Control Board, which took over the public houses of Carlisle and the immediate neighbourhood on behalf of the Government, acquired also the local inn known as "The Wellington Hotel." This building contained a room which had been fitted up some time

previously with a quantity of old woodwork of an ecclesiastical nature and design. This woodwork was supposed to have come from the old St. Mary's Church, which previous to 1870 occupied the nave of the Cathedral, and to have been ejected therefrom at some previous date. As such it is described in these *Transactions*, n.s. xvii, but this is rather a misconception, for the woodwork was originally in the Cathedral itself and formed part of the choir fittings.

For its origin it is necessary to go back to the year 1764, for it was in this year that the Cathedral was subjected to one of those destructive "restorations" which did so much damage to Cathedrals all over England in the eighteenth century. It was during this restoration that the mediæval oak waggon-vault ceiling was destroyed, and a stucco groined ceiling in wood was erected. The value of this "restoration" can best be understood by a reference to Billings (*History of Carlisle Cathedral*, published 1840), who saw the Cathedral in its so-called restored state when engaged on his volume of drawings. He says:

"Perhaps the greatest work of destruction was the beautiful and unique oak ceiling of the choir in 1764, and erection in its place of the present plaster groined ceiling. The old ceiling was removed upon the pretence of its being rotten, but sufficient remains (covered by its successor) to prove the contrary; and the only conclusion we can arrive at is, that the officers of the Cathedral were grossly imposed upon by someone anxious to make a job. There is, however, some consolation in the fact that the present ceiling will be rotten long before the remains of its successor will exhibit any signs of decay, and there will be some chance of its being restored, particularly as the cost would be as little, or less, than any ceiling which could be devised."

"Instead of restoring that portion of the Cathedral

destroyed in the Civil Wars, and rendering it an ornament to the city, what has been the case during the last eighty years? The total destruction of the ancient fittings of the choir (Stalls excepted), and their being replaced by modern panelling and walls completely at variance with the architecture of the Cathedral, independent of their own extreme incongruity of design."

It is in this last paragraph that we find the origin of the woodwork under discussion, for the new fittings mentioned is the woodwork we see in St. Mary's church to-day.

Before this unfortunate restoration much of the ancient choir woodwork and fittings had survived the chances and neglect of the reformation and succeeding periods. But now the mediæval bishop's throne, the parclose screens between the columns of the choir arcades, and the high altar were all swept away. The loss of this woodwork is all the more deplorable when we realise that the screens discarded were of the type which still remain round St. Catherine's chapel to-day. In place of all this ancient woodwork was erected what Billings calls "the present barbarous masses of Gothic woodwork, viz. the Bishop's throne, the pulpit, altar and all the decorations of the choir." In place of the screens between the aisles and the choir proper was erected a high stone wall, covered to the choir side by a wooden arcade in the Gothic style of that period, and to the aisles by a coat of plaster. The old beautiful screens were removed to out-buildings and the greater portion lost or destroyed. Much as we may deplore the loss of all this woodwork we may be thankful that the ranges of stallwork were not also removed and destroyed.

We can now examine the reasons which led to these changes. No doubt the Cathedral fabric had arrived at a condition which demanded repair and attention. Such an overhaul becomes necessary from time to time and we are actually experiencing such a period to-day. In 1762

Charles Lyttleton was appointed to the See of Carlisle, and it would appear to be this Bishop who was instrumental in setting the restoration of his Cathedral on foot. Perhaps it may not be out of place here to append some notes on his life.

Bishop Lyttleton was the third son of Sir T. Lyttleton. He was born at Hagley, Worcester, in 1714, and educated at Eton and University College, Oxford, where he matriculated. He was called to the bar in 1738, but soon abandoned it for the Church, being ordained in 1742. Almost at once he was instituted to the rich Rectory of Alvechurch in his native county. Through family influence he was made chaplain to George II, in December 1747, and in June, 1748, he was installed as Dean of Exeter, and also collated to a prebendal stall in the same Cathedral. He was promoted to the See of Carlisle and consecrated in Whitehall Chapel on 21st March, 1762, but he did not hold the See for very long for he suffered from very indifferent health and died unmarried in London on the 2nd day of December, 1768.

Lyttleton was a well-known antiquarian of his day. He was elected F.R.S. in 1742 and F.S.A. in 1746, and in 1765 he was promoted to be president of the Society of Antiquaries. He was the author of many papers on antiquarian and architectural subjects, among them being remarks upon Exeter and Worcester Cathedrals.

There can be little doubt that it was through the efforts of this Bishop that the alterations to the Cathedral were taken in hand. We have seen that he had archaeological and architectural interests, and it is significant that the work was begun in 1764, only two years after his appointment to the See. The ancient woodwork and fittings were all swept away, and to take its place, new woodwork, designed in the "Gothic" of the day was inserted.

The same misguided zeal led to the destruction of the mediæval ceiling and its substitution by the lath and

plaster vault before mentioned. It may be that the Bishop's familiarity with the great churches of Worcester and Exeter, where there are fine stone vaults throughout, made him feel rather disappointed with his northern cathedral, and made him determined to "improve" it with a "vault" of some kind.

When the new choir fittings were decided upon, it became necessary to find an architect or someone capable of designing them, and the Bishop had not far to look. His own nephew was an amateur architect, and he it was who provided the designs for the Carlisle woodwork.

This man was Thomas Pitt, first Baron Camelford. He was born in Cornwall on the 3rd March, 1736, and was the only son of Thomas Pitt, Lord Warden of the Stannaries. William Pitt, the great Earl of Chatham, was his father's eldest brother, and his mother, Christian, was sister to Bishop Lyttleton. He sat in Parliament as member for old Sarum, and then for Okehampton. He was elevated to the peerage in 1784, and at intervals played an active part in politics. His elevation to the peerage as Baron Camelford was remarked as a proof of the influence of his cousin, the young William Pitt. Like his uncle, Bishop Lyttleton, he suffered from bad health and for a time lived in Italy. He died there in January, 1793, but was buried at Boconnoc in Cornwall.

Pitt was interested in architecture and like many gentlemen of the period he tried his hand at architectural composition. At his own mansion at Boconnoc he added a second wing from his own designs. In 1762 he was living at Twickenham, where he was neighbour to Horace Walpole, who recognised his skill in "Gothic" architecture, and went so far as to call him "my present architect." Pitt also built Camelford House in London. His "Gothic" designs for the choir fittings at Carlisle were done, as we have seen, at the instigation of his uncle, Bishop Lyttleton.

These then were the two men who were responsible for the fitting up of the Cathedral with new woodwork and fittings. Bishop Lyttleton, to whom the work in all probability owes its inception, and his nephew Thomas Pitt, who furnished the designs. There was another man however, who had an important part to play in the creation of this work, and this was the man who actually executed it.

He was a local man, Thomas Carlyle, and for a description of him, a passage from a small pamphlet, published in 1816, is here quoted.

“An operative artist, Mr. Thomas Carlyle, of singular abilities, was employed, who finished the Bishop's throne, altar-piece, pulpit, screens and pews, nearly all with his own hands, but with a design furnished by the Bishop's nephew, from which he could not safely depart. The suggestions of his own imagination were fettered, yet notwithstanding all these drawbacks, his work remains a rare instance of ingenuity and expertness in a provincial workman. This ingenious man, with abilities which would have adorned a higher station, has given many specimens in cabinet work indicative of original genius and is still living in Carlisle (1816), in his eighty-third year.”

I have not been able to establish the date of his death.

The new fittings included the Bishop's throne, new reredos, pulpit, communion-rails, box pews with tracery panelled fronts, and wooden arcading to the walling between the columns. There is an illustration in Billings' *Carlisle Cathedral*, showing the choir fitted up with this woodwork and also the plaster vault which was erected at the same time.

It is the remains of this eighteenth century woodwork which we can see to-day in St. Mary's church. An examination of the work is interesting and shows that

although the design is as far from the true spirit of genuine Gothic as can well be imagined, yet it is not without a certain merit of its own; the execution is quite creditable and still remains a tribute to Mr. Thomas Carlyle, that "local artist of singular abilities." It is interesting to note too that some effort has been made to make the new work harmonize with the mediæval work by copying details here and there. For example, the tracery panels to the front of the box pews had been copied from those on the front of the ancient stalls.

And so our Cathedral, with its Georgian "Gothic" fittings remained for almost a century, and then in its turn fell a victim to the "restorer." In the middle of last century renovations were set on foot with more understanding. The lath-and-plaster "vault" was removed and the ancient oak ceiling restored as Billings had prophesied. The "reredos" was removed and by some means found its way into Featherstone Castle in Northumberland, where I had an opportunity of viewing this relic some short time ago. It now serves the office of a sideboard or "buffet." It contains some genuine old panels of flamboyant design, very similar in style to the tracery panels in the screenwork to St. Catherine's chapel, and, no doubt, formed part originally of one of the parclose screens to the choir, removed at the time when the new woodwork was put in.

Then, later on, a clean sweep was made of all Bishop Lyttleton's woodwork. The pulpit was removed to Thursby Church where it can still be seen. The remainder I am informed, was stored for a time in the Fraternity crypt as so much lumber. Later on, Mr. Saul, the Chapter Clerk, had it removed to his house at Brunstock, where it was used for panelling and interior work. Upon his death it was sold by auction and was acquired by the owner of the Wellington Hotel, who had it fitted up in the room there called "The Baronial Hall." This was about the year

1906. But the old fittings were not destined to rest long in an atmosphere so entirely at variance with their ecclesiastical origin. In 1916 the Control Board took over the premises and removed the fittings to a brewery where they were stored for a time, and after that in a warehouse. Finally the Control Board authorities handed over the old woodwork to the Church authorities and it was made up with new woodwork and carving to fit it into St. Mary's Church. The work comprised a new reredos with canopy, panelling to the apse, screen and door to Vestry, Communion-rails, etc., and the remainder was disposed at the west end of the church to form a Baptistry. The carved pediments which ornamented the Georgian Bishop's throne can be seen in the Baptistry at the west end, and the carved ceiling to the throne, in the form of a wooden vault, now serves for the ceiling of the canopy in the reredos. Other pieces may be identified, the Communion-rails, the panels from the box pews, and the tracery panels from the front of these. The wooden arcading to the front of the throne can also be seen. The Vestry door contains the most valuable portion of the woodwork, for in it can be seen carved tracery panels of original mediæval workmanship similar to those in the screen to St. Catherine's Chapel in the Cathedral. This door was originally fitted up to stand between the choir stalls and Bishop Lyttleton's throne, and it formed the only access from the south aisle into the choir proper. Upon it stood the carved wooden pediment which is now to be seen at the west end of the church.

This woodwork in St. Mary's church should be examined carefully and sympathetically by those responsible for its disposal, for although we may regret that so much which would have been of real value to us was destroyed when these fittings were installed in the Cathedral, this Georgian "Gothic" has in its turn acquired a certain artistic interest and historical value, partly because of its

period and partly from its association with the famous family of Pitt, two of whose members are numbered among England's greatest statesmen.

If this woodwork is to be removed perhaps it is not too much to hope that some abiding place may be found for it where it may have a permanent home after the many chances and changes of its latter years.

A little of this woodwork still lingers in the Cathedral. The rails in front of the stalls of the Dean and the canons are part of the old communion-rails and an examination of the woodwork in the north transept, forming the fittings to the Consistory Court, betrays the same hand and probably dates from the same period.