



THE CHOIR STALLS, WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

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Bishop Walkelin, kinsman of the Conqueror, began his great church at Winchester in the year 1079, and from that date onwards to 1555, when a chapel was erected to enshrine the remains of Stephen Gardiner, builders must have been almost continuously at work. But though Winchester is rich in varieties of architecture, it is poor in documentary evidence bearing upon the successive stages of building. The fine series of Obedientiary Rolls, edited by the late Dean Kitchin, gives a wealth of information about the life of S. Swithun's Priory, but next to nothing about the church ; we possess altogether only four rolls of the Custos Operum, and a single one of the Sacrist. It is therefore all the more delightful to find in the episcopal register of Henry Woodlock (1305-16), a letter written by him to John Salmon, bishop of Norwich (1299-1325), in the summer of 1308, which seems to fix that year as the precise date of the commencement of the famous choir stalls, and to give us the name of their chief craftsman in William Lyngwode, a tenant of the manor of Blofield in Norfolk, whom the Winchester bishop desires to be excused from doing suit to the manor court until such time as his work in the choir shall be completed. The original application was for William to be excused for a year from the ensuing Michaelmas, but as the ink of the letter is brown, and there is interlineated in black ink over the feast of S. Michael, *quousque dictum opus terminauerit*, it is reasonable to conclude that the stalls were not finished by Michaelmas, 1309, and the application was renewed, the registrar not troubling to make a second copy of the letter, but contenting himself with the addition of these words.

In the edition of Woodlock's register which I am preparing for the Canterbury and York Society, the Latin text of the letter will be printed ; here I give an English

rendering. I first knew of the document by finding a copy of it among the transcripts made by that laborious antiquary the late Mr. F. J. Baigent, which are preserved in our Cathedral Library. The original was not easy to discover, but eventually the first third of it came to light on a stray leaf bound in upside down at the end of the register, while the remainder is at the beginning of a *quaternus* or 'gathering' dealing with the bishop's private affairs and preceding the register proper. The letter ends *Dat' etc.*, but as it is included with other documents under the heading *m.ccc.octauo*, there is no doubt about the year.

Here is the letter :—

'Brother H., etc., to the worshipful Father in Christ, the Lord John, by the grace of God, bishop of Norwich : William of Lyngwode, carpenter, a tenant of your manor of Blofield, has already begun a piece of work belonging to his craft (*quoddam opus sue artis*) in the choir of our cathedral church of S. Swithun, Winchester, and his continual presence is needed for its satisfactory accomplishment. Relying upon your sincere friendship, we earnestly request, that so far as you fairly may, you will excuse the absence of your tenant from doing suit to your court for a year from the feast of S. Michael next ensuing, *until he has finished the said work,* and that you will give instructions to your steward and bailiffs not to disturb or trouble him in this behalf. In reply to this, write to us your wishes, and rest assured that we will fulfil them. May the Most High have you in his keeping and prolong your days. Given, etc.'

The date 1308 of this document is in close agreement with the opinions previously arrived at by experts. Mr. Francis Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches*, II, 29, suggests 1305 ; the Victoria County History of Hampshire V, 57 (C. R. Peers and H. Brakspear), gives the end of the 13th century ; my friend Mr. T. D. Atkinson, F.R.I.B.A., architectural surveyor to the Dean and Chapter, said, 'the last decade of the thirteenth or the first of the fourteenth' before he knew anything of this document.

** Interlineated at a later time.