THE CHICHESTER CITY CROSS: A RECONSIDERATION

(Being the substance of a paper read to the Arundel Clerical Association)

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For every newcomer to Chichester, an object that from the first engages his interest and attention is the City Cross. I found myself examining it from each side in turn, soon discovering that it was a mistake to do this when crossing the road (even though it be on the "zebra"). I read the guide-books and the county histories on the subject, and especially the exhaustive paper[1] by Mr. Francis Steer, F.S.A., an old friend of many years. Here is a definitive history and description of the Cross, set out with meticulous accuracy, and none of it will I presume to reproduce here. For those who are interested, here are recorded with care all the armorials displayed, and all the architectural details of ogee and cusp and crocket. Here is an illustration of the Cross as it might have appeared in the days of its glory. Mr. Steer tells how Edward Story, Bishop of Chichester, who endowed and virtually refounded the Prebendal School, had completed the building of the Cross in 1501, and there is a photograph of the deed, granting it to the City authorities, which still survives. Bishop Story died the next year, and was buried beneath an altar-tomb to the north of the high altar in the Cathedral, where it is still to be seen.

Two things impressed me from the beginning. First, the extraordinary beauty of the Cross. This is not so apparent when it is viewed at close quarters in the full light of high noon; then the glaring bulls' eyes of the clock dials, the unsatisfactory and empty turret at the top—built, I suppose, to house a clock-bell—all the mutilations and the ill-conceived and ill-executed renewals and repairs are painfully obvious. But stand about 150 yards away, at dawn or at sunset on a bright day, and then, against a clear sky, you become aware of the grace and elegance of it, with the cluster of flying buttresses forming a crown, which, in such a situation and circumstances, is striking. I felt that here was a poem in stone; yet more than that, a sermon in that medium, and that Bishop Story had something to say when he built it. But perhaps I may return to the meaning of the crown presently.

Secondly, I was interested to know what was the connection, for such I felt there must surely be, between the Chichester Cross

[1] *Chichester Papers*, No. 1 (1955).

and the crown steeple of the church of St. Nicholas, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, since 1882 the cathedral of that Diocese. I do not know of any ancient buildings of similar construction in the south of England, other than the market crosses of Salisbury and Malmesbury,[1] and it may be remarked that these places and Chichester are not above 50 miles apart. The crown of the Poultry Cross at Salisbury is a modern reconstruction, but said to represent the original. The Cross itself has been stated to date from about 1377, but it is hardly to be believed that a cluster of flying buttresses could belong to the fourteenth century. "The date assigned to the Malmesbury Cross," wrote Mr. Aymer Vallance, "is 1490," which suggests that stylistic grounds rather than documentary evidence have been taken into consideration. Indeed, it is not impossible that both crowns derive from Chichester, for it was common form in mediaeval times for towns, and even country churches, to vie with one another and to copy each other's architectural efforts.[2] The crown steeple at Newcastle, covered with the coal-dust and grime of the industries of the Tyne, is a beautiful thing, and is stated to have been completed in 1448; the upturning of the crockets on the flying buttresses certainly suggest that Newcastle's crown is earlier than Chichester's. If you look at a photograph of it (Plate Ia), and place your hand over part of the tower below, you will see something not unlike the Chichester Cross (Plate II). There is no central column, but the cluster of flying buttresses, the pinnacles with their metal standards and vanes, the lierne vaulting of the lowest stage, all recall Chichester. Viewed from the top of the tower and beneath the delicate and splendid lantern, you wonder that so much can be held safely aloft by so little (Plate Ib).

Now, although Newcastle affords the only architectural crown in England of ancient date, save Chichester and its two companions, it is otherwise further north. For Newcastle is undoubtedly the father of the crown steeples of Scotland as Professor William Kelly of Aberdeen University has pointed out.[3] The Professor also knew Chichester, for he it was who designed the beautiful heraldic memorial to Cardinal Howard in the Fitzalan Chapel at Arundel;[4] but he did not seem to have found a possible connection between Chichester and Newcastle, which I will presently indicate. In Scotland, the crown steeples formerly at Haddington and Linlithgow have disappeared; but those at St. Giles's Cathedral, Edinburgh, and King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, remain. St. Giles's is a sad building, from which the heavy hand of the nineteenth-century

[1] Aymer Vallance, *Old Crosses and Lychgates* (1920), pp. 133, 137, Figs. 156-160.

[2] T. D. Atkinson, *Local Style in English Architecture* (1947), pp. 159-161, App. II, lists 35 instances of which evidence survives.

[3] *William Kelly* (Aberdeen University Studies No. 125), pp. 34-48.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 16 and Fig. 12.

restorer has scraped away as much of beauty and antiquity as that of the sixteenth-century reformer. But the crown (Plate III), with its eight arms as at Chichester, remains as it was, riding the sky as you stand on the North Bridge and gaze on the panorama, from the noble Castle along the Royal Mile to the ruined Chapel Royal at Holyrood. The Aberdeen crown (Plate IV) I know only from illustrations; it has only four arms, as at Newcastle, and is strong and rugged as befits the Granite City. It upholds, in turn, another and remarkable stone crown, realistic and unmistakably regal, but that is an addition made in the seventeenth century.

Such research as I have done on the subject is neither diligent nor extensive, and the conclusion I reach is far from certain; but I think there is a reasonably high probability attaching to it. Whence then came Edward Story before he was enthroned with great pomp in Chichester Cathedral in 1478? Mr. Steer says he was a Yorkshireman, and here he follows the article in the *Dict. of Nat. Biog.* In Newcastle Central Library is a copy of a huge, anonymous and privately-printed work on the Story family,[1] containing a great mass of very ill-digested material. The writer, indeed, gives a sketch pedigree, purporting to show the bishop's parentage and connections, claiming him to have been a native of Cumberland. But this pedigree is pure conjecture, and none of the earlier descents in it are capable of proof. What does emerge is that the original home of the Storys was, undoubtedly, Northumberland, although there were branches of the family which migrated to adjoining counties. Within a century of Edward Story's death, there was a family of some note established at Bishop Wearmouth, a few miles from Newcastle, and they bore a coat of arms identical with that carried by the bishop, but its grant is not recorded in the College of Arms. Story not only was, but still is, a common Northumberland name; the current telephone directory for the Newcastle area, covering half a volume, has as many Story or Storey entries as the London area comprised in four volumes. When I got out of a car at Chichester Cemetery for the first time, I heard the undertaker address the superintendent there as Mr. Storey; "your home is near Newcastle?" I said as I signed the book. He seemed taken aback, but pointed to a coloured drawing of Durham Cathedral I had not noticed hanging over his table. It is, I think, fair to assume that Edward Story knew Newcastle, was connected with those parts, and may well have seen in early manhood—he was born about 1422—the then novel and striking Newcastle crown in building. But, by the 1450s, he was a leading figure at Cambridge, becoming Head of his College, and for two short periods Chancellor of the University. Soon after this, he was a powerful personality at Court, and a close friend both of Edward IV and of his queen. It might then be thought that the scenes of his activities were confined to London and

[1] *Storeys of Old* (1920), attributed to R. E. K. Rigbye.

Cambridge. But in 1468 he was consecrated Bishop of Carlisle. If his register there had survived, which unhappily it has not, we would then know where he was on almost every day of his episcopate. One can hardly imagine so great a man spending very long in a spot so remote from the centre of the nation's life as Carlisle. There were, indeed, mediaeval bishops who never visited their sees, being even enthroned in their cathedrals by proxy. But a document in the P.R.O.,[1] the date of which may be 1469 or 1470, declares that Story had spent a year with Edward IV at York, and directs him to carry out certain urgent matters connected with Carlisle Castle, which the King had outlined to him by word of mouth. This places Story definitely, on that occasion at least, in that most delightfully situated of episcopal houses, Rose Castle. And if he was sent by his royal master from York to Carlisle on business connected with defence, he might very well have visited Newcastle on a similar errand.

Did Story ever see the Scottish crown steeples? It is known that he was employed several times on negotiations with the Scottish leaders. On 29 July 1474, Edward IV, then in London, issued a commission authorising the Bishop of Carlisle, the Bishop of Durham and other persons of quality to proceed to Edinburgh to negotiate a treaty of peace with James III, to be cemented by the marriage of their young children, Cecily and James, and affirming that safe conduct for them was assured. For such a journey, Story would have been unlikely to have travelled by the little-used West March; he would have passed from Rose Castle to Newcastle, meeting there his brother of Durham and the others, presently issuing from the walls of Berwick-on-Tweed through Haddington to Edinburgh, and thus casting his eye upon three of the new crown-steeples in turn.[2] But unhappily, if you consult in Rymer's *Foedera*[3] the treaty that was agreed, the one signature that is missing is that of the Bishop of Carlisle. Perhaps he was kept in bed by indisposition? But, alas, it is equally likely that he never went on the expedition at all.

All this is very tentative, and incapable of proof by the exact rules of the historian and the antiquary. But my argument, for which I feel the basis is sound, is this. It would be difficult to find two places in England farther apart than Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Chichester, and, if an idea was carried from one to the other, then the history and antecedents of Edward Story are such as to qualify

[1] Exchequer Warrants for Issue, box 75, pt. 3, No. 56. I am indebted to Dr. R. L. Storey for kindly supplying this reference.

[2] A possible anachronism here is not capable of proof. Of St. Giles's crown, *R. Comm. Anc. Mon. Scot.*, City of Edinburgh (1951), p. 30, states "it may be referred to about 1500." But Professor Kelly is more cautious and says "its exact date is not known, it was probably close upon the end of the fifteenth century."

[3] Vol. XI, pp. 814, 821, 825. Cf. *Rotuli Scotiae*, Vol. ii, pp. 443, 446.

a. Crown Steeple

b. Lantern from below

PLATE I. CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

(From photographs kindly supplied by the Editor of the Journal, *Newcastle-upon-Tyne)*

PLATE II. CHICHESTER CITY CROSS

(Block kindly lent by Chichester City Cou

PLATE III. ST. GILES'S CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH, CROWN STEEPLE

(From a photograph kindly supplied by H.M. Stationery Office, Edinburgh. Crown Copyright)

PLATE IV. KING'S COLLEGE, ABERDEEN, CROWN STEEPLE OF CHAPEL

(Block kindly lent by Aberdeen University Presi

Plate V. St. Dunstan's-in-the-East, London, Crown Steeple

(Block kindly lent by Aberdeen University Press)

him notably as the bearer of it.[1] We cannot enter into the working of the mind of a great mediaeval prelate. But we can imagine the old Bishop of Chichester in his Palace—for he is almost, if not fully, 80 years of age now—and in little over a year his love for his city will be made known when his Will is proved. Was there a wish, still unfulfilled, to build a crown somewhere, a wish born perhaps long years before in Rose Castle? His travelling days are over now, but there is still time. There is no central tower in his Cathedral on which to rear a crown. So in the centre of the city is placed the Market Cross, and it is only a little way for the old man to venture out to see it.

But there is still another stage in the journey of the idea to be mentioned. Not far from the Tower of London is the church of St. Dunstan in the East, and its steeple has survived the bombing (Plate V). It was rebuilt after the Great Fire by Sir Christopher Wren, the steeple being completed in 1699. It is quite unlike the steeples of any of the other City churches. The crown here has four arms, which support a tall and graceful spire, which in turn carries a ball and vane. There is an odd legend that the idea of this steeple was suggested by Sir Christopher's daughter, Jane; when the scaffolding was being removed, this young lady lay down on top of the tower waving her legs in the air, to assure the parishioners assembled below of the safety of the structure, they wondering exceedingly at her foolhardiness in risking death by the collapse of the masonry above her![2] More probable, however, is the tale that, when it was reported to Wren that many of his churches had been damaged by a great storm that broke over the City, he replied quietly, " Not St. Dunstan's, I am quite sure." It has been said that Wren drew his inspiration for this steeple from that of St. Mary-le-bow, Cheapside, destroyed in the Great Fire; others have noticed the resemblance to Newcastle. Whether Wren ever visited Newcastle I have not ascertained, but his life is so well documented that this should easily be determined. But Chichester he visited, for he restored, in 1694, the spire of the cathedral, when his ingenious " pendulum " was installed to counteract the effect of south-westerly gales.[3] The eyes of the great man, his cathedral business concluded, would not fail to have noted the City Cross. Anatomist and engineer that he was as well as architect, the construction and design of it could not fail to have interested him, and it may well be more than fancy to suppose that a resolve was born to base one of his London steeples

[1] The large and impressive brass in memory of Ernest Roland Wilberforce, described (as indeed might be Story) as " a wise Master builder," in the north choir aisle of Newcastle cathedral, is a modern reminder of a bishop connected with both cities. He was Bishop of Newcastle, 1882-1895, and of Chichester, 1895-1907.

[2] William Kent, F.S.A., *Encyclopaedia of London* (1937 ed.), p. 152.

[3] Martin S. Briggs, *Wren the Incomparable* (1953), pp. 139-140 and Fig. 18, where it is, however, observed that " this work is not mentioned in *Parentalia* or in the index of the Wren Society's twenty volumes."

on it. From Rose Castle to the City of London is a long journey; but if the route be by way of Newcastle, Haddington, Edinburgh[1] and Chichester, it is a long way indeed.

Now I venture to offer a few remarks on a matter connected with the Chichester Cross, which may be of more particular interest to such as ourselves. Is it the deliberate intention that the top of the Cross should represent a crown? And, if that is so, whose is the crown? I suspect that the learned antiquaries and experts would return a negative answer to this question. But I venture to think they may be wrong. I can imagine that it might be held that the cluster of flying buttresses at Chichester is only a variation on a theme, not uncommonly heard elsewhere, and that constructions of a somewhat similar nature can be quoted to support that view. There are, for instance, a number of church spires in the Midlands which are supported by flying buttresses; or which appear to be so, for they may be of decorative, rather than structural, value. And the slender spire or flèche, similarly surrounded, is not uncommon on the Continent, as at Antwerp Cathedral. But I do not believe that this is a true analogy. These buttresses either support, or appear to support, a central feature of importance, and it is on *this feature* that the emphasis is laid. And a similar comment may be made about the great buttressed lanterns on such towers as the (old) Coventry Cathedral and Boston "Stump." At Chichester the original feature at the top can only be conjectured, but there is no reason to suppose it to have been of any great size or height. Moreover, the central column, concealed within the crown, is there to uphold it. The effect of the crown is, of course, hopelessly spoilt by the intrusion of the later stone panels for the clock dials. But, if you look at an aerial photograph of central Chichester on a picture postcard, the crown appears very striking, and I believe that is the impression it was intended to convey from the first.

Of course one must be careful not to read a symbolism or meaning into some mediaeval form or style when such was never intended by its practitioners. In many a church guide-book, for instance, a cross-legged figure of a knight in armour is still referred to as the monument of "a crusader." The true explanation is clear when it is noticed that the fashion did not come into use until the Decorated period, and went out promptly with the Perpendicular style; the pose was obviously considered to be in harmony with the architectural trend, as evidenced in the interweaving tracery, later superseded by the long straight mullions, of the church windows; it has nothing to do with crusading.

But a crown which has neither wearer nor implication is a useless object. Professor Kelly considered that the crown steeples of Aberdeen and Edinburgh referred to the Scottish sovereigns.

[1] The nineteenth-century spire of Tolbooth St. John's church, Edinburgh, is stated to have been copied from Chichester cathedral. An instance of an idea travelling in the reverse direction?

There is, of course, no doubt whatever of this being the meaning of the smaller and uppermost crown, of the seventeenth century, at Aberdeen, which is entirely realistic. But Professor Kelly pointed out that, although King's College, founded in 1505, was dedicated to St. Mary, it came to be called King's College at an early stage, and the first principal, Hector Boece, described the stone arches—that is the *lower* steeple crown—as being " in the shape of an *imperial crown*, built with wonderful art." His book[1] was published in 1522, and his opinion is that of an elderly man, writing well before the Scottish Reformation, and less than twenty years after the crown was built. The Aberdeen and Edinburgh crowns are very similar, although the latter has eight arms and the former only four, and they may even have been built by the same masons. There can, therefore, hardly be any doubt that the Scottish crown steeples should put the beholder in mind of the crown of the Scottish Kings, who in their day were considered imperial within their own dominions.

But I find it hard to believe that the Newcastle crown, from which, by common consent, the Scottish crown steeples derive, refers in like manner to the crown of the English sovereigns; still less do I feel this when looking at the Chichester Cross. Both these crowns—for can they have a significance different from their Scottish counterparts?—have a more ethereal and spiritual quality. For my part, I am put in mind of a heavenly, rather than an earthly, crown. Look again at the Chichester crown, and notice the circle of niches which surrounds its base. Bishop Story's royal master, Edward IV, had long been dead when it was built, as were the bishop's political ambitions, and I do not believe the saints are upholding the crown of Henry VII. I have said that no one knows for certain what was the object which originally surmounted the cross, and I maintain that a guess that it was a seated figure of our Lord, perhaps on some kind of pedestal, is as reasonable and likely as the accepted view that it was a finial, or turret with other figures set in niches round it. Try removing, in your mind's eye, not only the turret, but also the top foot or two of the crown, of lighter-coloured stone, plainly indicating renewal, the ribs appearing to curve upwards too far; it is not then difficult to visualise a " Majesty " at the summit. And if the crown be that of the ascended and glorified Christ, then the supporting saints, whom the church reckoned to have gained a heavenly crown, and to share in the Beatific Vision, are in their fitting place. In mediaeval days, the symbol most commonly associated with our Lord was that of the figure of the crucified Redeemer. But the representation of Christ in glory and triumph was also common, both in painting and sculpture. The saints have been wrenched from their niches, but the bust of Charles I has taken their place; and not unsuitably;

[1] *Life of Bishop Elphinstone* (printed at Paris).

for, if anyone in the history of the Church of England gained a heavenly crown, it is surely the Royal Martyr. I cannot help thinking that the country folk, on a summer morning in the early sixteenth century, gathering to sell their produce under the shadow of the Cross, would have readily understood this interpretation; for them religion and life were more closely intertwined, and the world unseen nearer, and more real to, the working world, than they are to many people in these materialistic days. They would, furthermore, have been aware of the religious significance attached to the building by Story himself when he granted it to the city. Its secondary purpose was for " the socoure and Comfort of the poore peple there "; the primary that " the said Reverend Fader hath made [it] . . . yn thonor of god."

On lines far less pious than these, however, are the meditations of the motor drivers, who, until recently, queued to await the signal to proceed from the harassed policeman, the strain of whose position being such that his tour of duty was, I am told, limited to a single hour. They are conscious only of an obstruction to their passage, which many would hold to be a useless survival from the past, and ripe for removal in the interests of modern transport. Nevertheless, each of them must reduce his speed, and perhaps pause awhile, before he swivels around and continues on his way; but certainly he ponders not on the suggestion that, in the centre of this city, Christ has been proclaimed the King.