

Entrance to Consistory Court, Chester Cathedral

Frank Simpson, Photo.



Chester Cathedral: the Jacobean Work

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(Read 16th October, 1904)

IT has often been said that one of the greatest interests attaching to this (as to many another) Cathedral is the history which it contains in the various styles of architecture which are to be found, and the record thus given of the efforts of church builders at different periods. In this respect the older edifices will have the advantage over that which is so soon to crown the adjacent City of Liverpool, which, in its massive grandeur, is the conception of two distinguished architects of the present day, bringing to it, with their individual genius, their accurate knowledge of similar buildings elsewhere.

Small though the dimensions of our Cathedral are, it is as rich as any in this history. We have sufficient remains of Norman work to tell us what S. Anselm's Church was like. We have, in the Lady Chapel and Chapter House (with its vestibule) exquisite examples of Early English work. As we examine Choir and Nave and Transept, we can see specimens of the designs of the builders of other periods, Decorated, Transitional, and Perpendicular; and cannot but be thankful

that the one age did not (possibly for lack of means) absolutely sweep away all traces of preceding ones.

In previous visits to the Cathedral, we have drawn more particular attention to these various styles, or to some of the interesting details of the work, as it has been handed down to us. We will now look at the Jacobean work—a somewhat unusual feature in an English Cathedral. We have, it is true, but little to show; but it is something to have even that little. We have the Consistory Court, with its stone screen separating it from the South Aisle, and its fittings—which, so far as I know, are absolutely unique. We have, in the dilapidated Chapel at the north-west, further traces of decorative work, and also an addition or Chancel of the date of Archbishop Laud. Some remains of the woodwork are to be found in the raised seats for the Dean and Chapter at the east end of the Chapter House. And there is Bishop Moreton's Font, recently restored to a position very near to that which it originally occupied. A few monuments or tablets, and other things of varying interest, and belonging to this period, complete the list.

A word or two as to the style and character of the work, taken from "Early Renaissance Architecture in England," may prove a fitting introduction to what I have to say:—

"Just as the literature of the period, as it became more in accordance with rule, lost half its originality, and more than half its fascination, so Renaissance architecture, as it passed from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean and so to succeeding phases, became more homogeneous, more scholarly, more true to its classical origin; and yet, withal, lost vitality in the process. The full meaning of that great century, which stretched from the divorce of Henry VIII. to the accession of

Charles I., cannot be grasped unless it is always borne in mind that not only was a new style supplanting an old one, but that it was doing so at a time when the originality and richness of men's minds were at their height."

A succinct description of the character of Jacobean architecture may not be easy. It was part of the long period in England when the revival of Italian classic architecture was superseding gradually the deeply ingrained national Gothic or Mediæval style. This was a very gradual invasion, and Gothic died hard. Tracery failed, and the round arch took the place of the pointed; and classic orders, columns, and balusters, the places of small arcades, &c.; and the mouldings changed in character, and, like all Renaissance work, became planted-on ornaments, instead of being legitimately decorated constructive features in the solid.

We, in England, are fortunate in possessing, in our great London Cathedral of S. Paul's, the most noble specimen of this style, though of a somewhat later date. "It is not only one of the most wonderful and beautiful things in architecture, but it speaks to us of the greater liberty of life and thought brought about by the Renaissance. It is a great triumph; the work of one architect, Sir Christopher Wren; of one master-mason, Strong; and completed during the rule of one bishop, Dr. Henry Compton."

But we must turn to the very humble traces which our own Cathedral furnishes. Most of these we owe to Bishop Bridgeman, who was consecrated on Sunday, May 9th, 1619. He held the See until Episcopacy was suspended by the Commonwealth; and died about 1652, and was buried at Kinnerley, in Shropshire. Like some other Bishops of Chester, he held the Rectory of Wigan

in commendam, in conjunction with the Bishopric, as the See was very poorly endowed. In Canon Bridgeman's "History of the Church and Manor of Wigan," we have many particulars of his life given to us; and we learn how, both at Wigan and Chester, he was a great church builder. Some extracts from a MS. in the University Library at Cambridge, referring to his work here, will not be out of place. The heading of the MS. (which bears the names and authority of Sir William Dawes, Bishop of Chester, and Prebendary Fogg, son of the Dean) is: "The Estate of the Diocese of Chester, in the time of the Right Reverend Father in God John Bridgeman, Lord Bishop of Chester." Certain paragraphs refer to the repairs and improvements which he executed in "the Pallace of the Bishop in Chester, which was in great decay";¹ and to these we need not refer particularly, but pass to those connected with the Cathedral, numbered 5 and 6. They run as follows:—

"In the Cathedral (which being built with red stone and not finisht was of the same colour within as it is without) he bestowed £20 to have it washed all over withinside; within it also he built a fair new pulpit, at the west end of the Body of the great Church; and boughte wainscot seats and other forms for the people to set there; and then removed the Sunday Sermons from S. Oswald's (where the Mayor of Chester, claiming a parish and usurping chief authority in that Church, had displaced the pulpit and the seats of the Dean and Prebends) first into Quire, where he caused the Stalls to be fairly painted, and some of them guilt, and thence into the Body of the Cathedral."

No. 6. ". . . . He built the Bishop's Stall in the Quire A^o 1635; and a fair new Pulpit right over against it in A^o 1637; and gilded the Organs in the Cathedral, and made a new set of pipes in it. He raised the steps towards the

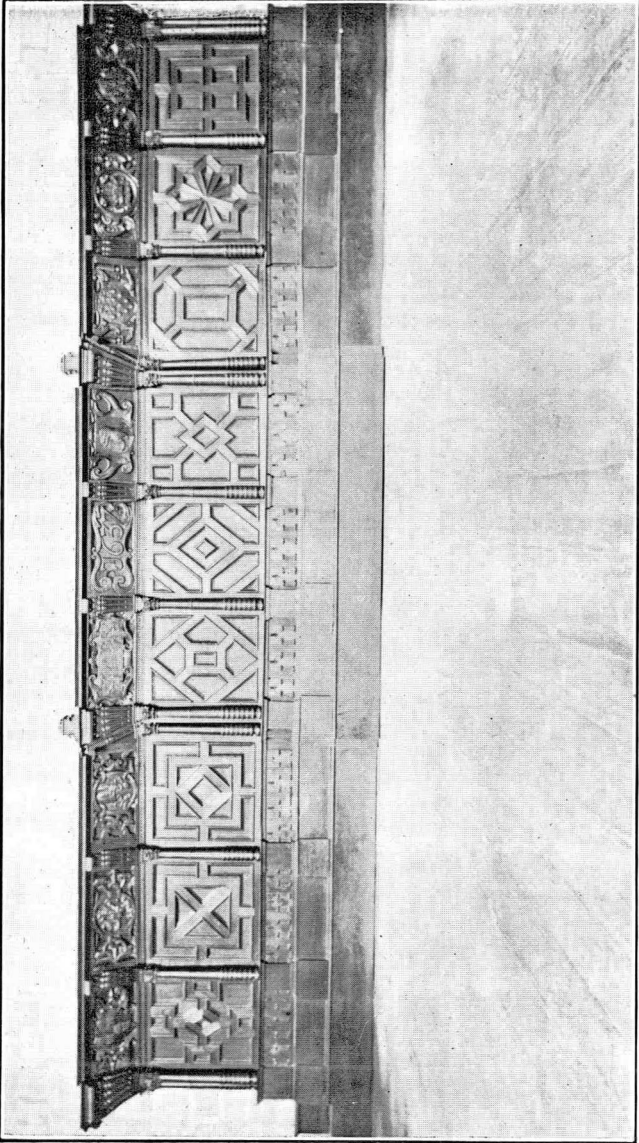
¹ On December 13th, 1650, the Bishop's Palace, with all the furniture, was sold to Robert Maller and William Richardson for £1,059.

Communion Table, and made the wall and partition there, and tooke in the two highest pillars at the end of it, to enlarge the Quire; and he glazed the east window over it with the story of the Annunciation, Nativity, Circumcision, and Presentation of our Saviour; and built two lofts behind the north and south sides of the Quire; and the partition between the body of the Cathedral and St. Oswald's Church. And he made a fair seat at the south side of St. Oswald's Church, under the great south window, and three stories, the highest whereof was for the Bishop, the Dean and Chapter, and Chancellor, to sett in; and the middle seat for the Quire and Consistorians to sett in; the lowest for the Choristers and Scholars, with others belonging to the Church and Churchmen.² He erected a Font at the west end of the Church; and whereas the stone windows of the Church were so eaten out with antiquity and weather as most of them were in danger of falling, and one of them did fall down directly over the Pulpit in the Quire, about half an houre after the sermon, which (had it fallen a little sooner ere the people had gone out of ye Church) would have slayne many men and women. He made new stone windows almost about all the Quire, and in other places of the Cathedral he put in new stanches of stone; as he did in the Pallace windows, where he floored or planched five rooms with bords, and wainscotted and benched the two windows in the stone chamber; and made wainscot portals for the Abbot's chamber (since termed the nursery) the chamber over the Chappell."

We naturally ask what traces are left of these works of this devoted church repairer. We may congratulate ourselves that the whitewash, on which £20 was spent, has disappeared, and that the windows of the Choir,

² The word "consistorians" is rather remarkable. In the new English Dictionary these meanings are given: (1) "Occupiers of a fixed spot," illustrated by a quotation from *Nashe's Lenten Stufe*: "The Consistorians or settled standers of Yarmouth"; (2) "A member of the Roman Emperor's Council," with a quotation from *Holland, Ann. Marcell.*, 1607: "The Prefect and the Consistorians were inclosed within the compass of the wals." Here it would seem to mean the Officers of the Choir, who were accustomed to sit together.

and elsewhere, were preserved at that time from further decay. The paint too (and gilding), has gone from our beautiful Stalls—again no matter for regret—though it is possible that this treatment may have had some effect in preserving the wood. The extension of the Choir two bays eastward, we learn, was due to Bishop Bridgeman; but the coloured glass which he inserted in the east window of the Choir has vanished; and we cannot (according to Mr. Kempe) even attribute the head of the Virgin, now preserved in the Chapter House, to that period. The canopy erected over the Bishop's Throne is no longer in the Cathedral; but a portion of it may be seen in the Canon's residence, in a piece of furniture constructed out of it for Canon Eaton (who obtained it from Dean Anson), and bequeathed by his widow to the Dean and Chapter. The remains of the "fine new pulpit" will be found in the seats at the east end of the Chapter House. The Bishop's arms, with the date 1637, will be found upon them; and the panneling, characteristic of the period, is very interesting. Of the fair seat, with its three stories, erected in S. Oswald's, we have, so far as I am aware, no certain trace remaining. It may have been removed at a subsequent date to the Consistory Court, to form the seat for the Chancellor and his assessors. I may remark, in passing, that sharp controversy arose about the seats in S. Oswald's, and the action of the Mayor (Nicholas Ince) with reference to them. A Commission to rearrange them had been issued by the Bishop, on 3rd September, 1624. On the 24th October, 1626, the Bishop finds that the Mayor (on the strength of this Commission) had altered the seats, to the injury of the Cathedral Clergy and Quire; the pulpit had been moved, and in the midst of the seat in front of it



Seat formed out of Bishop Bridgman's Pulpit

Frank Simpson, Photo.

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sat the Mayor, the Bishop being shouldered to the end thereof. This usurpation of sovereign authority by the Mayor led to the removal of the sermon (originally preached in S. Oswald's) first to the Quire and then to the Nave. Litigation ensued, which was finally settled in favour of the ecclesiastical authorities in August 1637, when the Archbishop of York sent to the Bishop of Chester a copy of an Order of the Lords of the Star-Chamber and the Judges to that effect. Eventually, I may say, the sermon was restored to S. Oswald's.

The following allusion to the Pulpit (from a contemporary writer in *King's Vale Royal*), will not be out of place :—

“Lately, the lower end of the broad Ile is graced with the beginning of such a monument as may, to our posterity, be of more fame and worth than all the rest of the fabric, if either the Rt. Rev. Father Dr. John Bridgeman, the now Lord Bishop, or his successors do finish that preaching place which his Lordship has already begun, with as fair a Pulpit of carved work in wainscot as I have anywhere seen. . . . His Lordship is persuaded that such goodly spacious buildings of our forefathers should not serve only for idle walks for our feet, and gazing objects for our eyes, but for the service of the great King of Heaven and Earth.”

Some of us will regret that this fair Pulpit was dismantled, and would fain have seen it in the broad aisle (though not at the lower end thereof), where those large congregations gather on Sunday evenings, all through the year. And though we are glad that the two lofts behind the north and south sides of the Quire (doubtless pews, and not extended galleries) have vanished, the wainscotting might well have been preserved, to find a place in some other portion of the Cathedral.

Full though the account of Bishop Bridgeman's work in this MS. may seem to be, it was not apparently complete. I find no mention in it of the stone-screen which separates the Consistory Court from the South Aisle of the Cathedral; nor yet of the fittings of the Court. Yet both may, undoubtedly, be ascribed to him. On the former is the date 1636; and on the latter his coat of arms;³ so that there is no question about the matter. Until the foundation of the See of Chester, in 1541, there would, of course, be no Consistory Court in Chester. When the Abbey Church became the Cathedral of the new See, it would seem that the Lady Chapel was converted into the Bishop's Consistory Court. It was here, at any rate, that George Marsh was tried and condemned to death, in 1554, when George Cotes was Bishop.

In the life of Bishop Bridgeman, from which I have quoted, there is an allusion to this original position of the Court, in the following passage:—

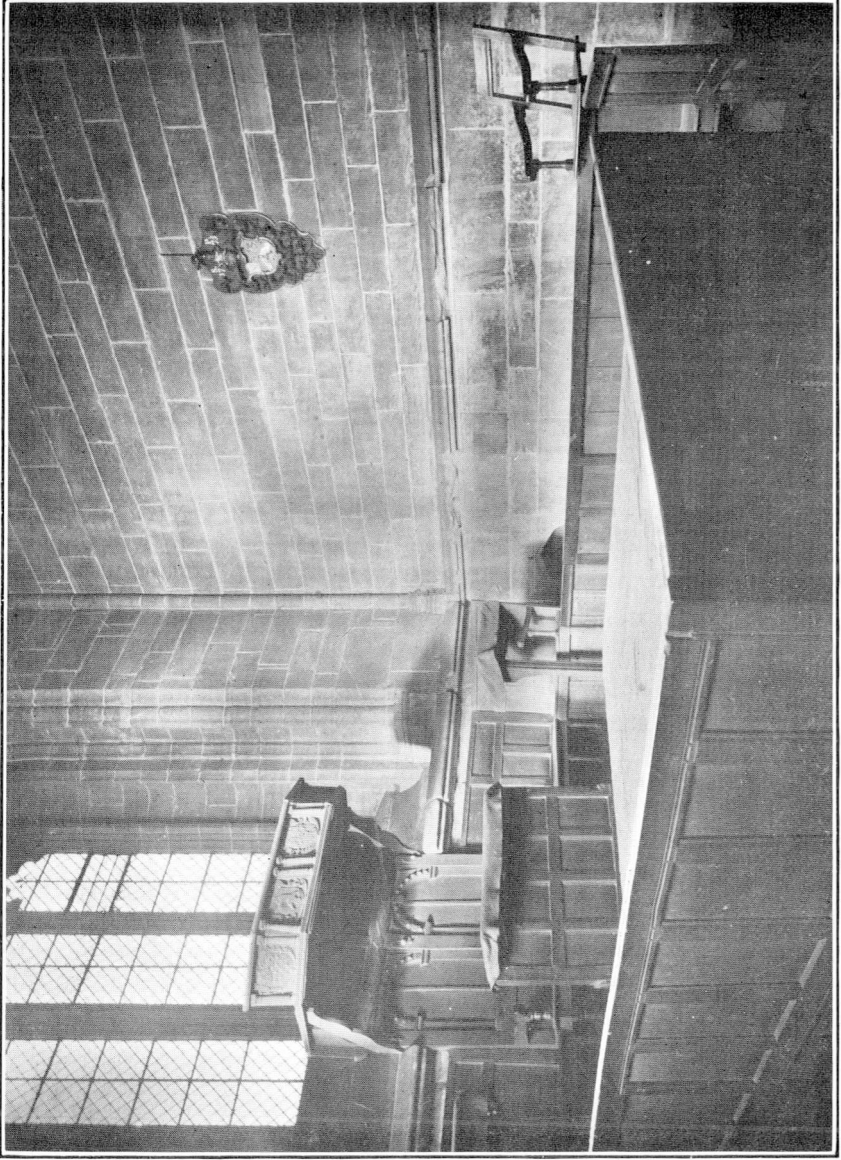
“Mrs. Bridgeman died 25th May, 1636, and was buried 30th May, in the Cathedral, under the arch between the two highest pillars at the east end of the Church, next to the *old* Consistory Court, which is now called our Lady's Chapel.”

Whether the Court was moved to its present position by Bishop Bridgeman, or before his time, I am not able to say; but its present arrangement, and its separation from the body of the Church are, as we have seen, due to him. Some may perhaps be struck with the fact

³ *On screen of Consistory Court.*

Cathedral side. Arms of Bridgeman family: sable, ten plates (four, three, two, and one); on a chief argent a lion passant, ermines.

Court side. Arms of Mainwaring of Peover: argent, two bars gules, quartering azure six garbs, or.



Interior of Consistory Court, Chester Cathedral

Frank Simpson, Photo.

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that a portion of the Church is devoted to the purposes of a Court, Ecclesiastical though that Court may be. But this is not uncommon, and the same feature will be found in some other Cathedrals. For instance, the Consistory Court is now held in the Cathedral at—

Carlisle	- -	In the North Transept, where panelling and a long desk are to be found, the rails across the Transept having been removed a few years ago
Durham	- -	In the Galilee Chapel
Chichester	- -	Over the Sacristy, west side of the South Transept
Hereford	- -	In the South Transept
Lichfield	- -	In the South Transept
Llandaff	- -	At the east end of the south Choir Aisle
Peterborough	- -	In the east aisle of the North Transept
Ripon	- -	At the west end of the north aisle of the Nave
Winchester	- -	Over western bay of the north aisle of the Nave

And this list may not be exhaustive.

In Holy Trinity Church, at Coventry, is a place at the west end on the north side which is called the Archdeacon's Court, although it is not arranged in any way with seats. It shows, at any rate, what it is used for.⁴

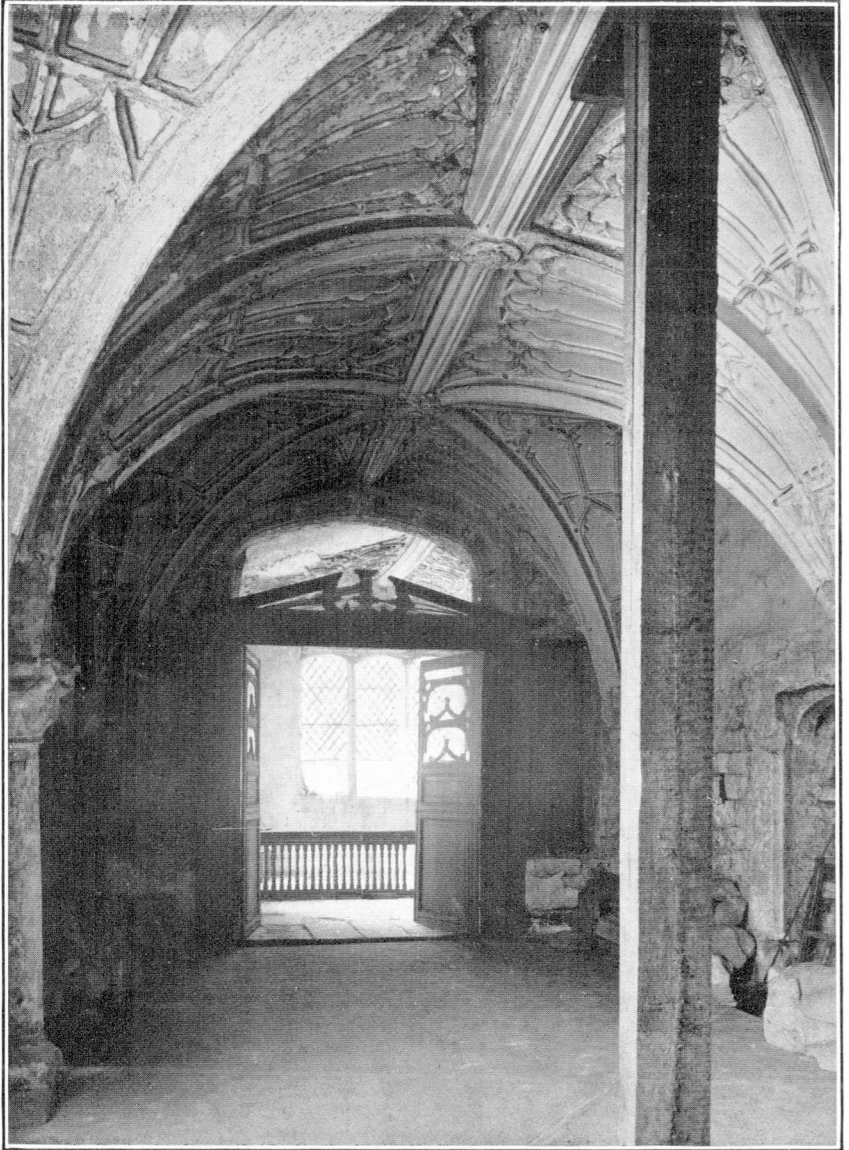
⁴ The Archdeacon still holds his Visitation Court there, for the admission of churchwardens to office, receiving presentments, and for other archidiaconal business; but it is not used for any other official purpose. Similarly, at Hawarden, when it was a Peculiar, the Dean or official held his Court for granting faculties, &c., in the Church.

Of our own Court, our learned Chancellor (Dr. Espin), writes to me thus :--

"I do not know of any other Court which has preserved its ancient character as ours has. I suspect that some, perhaps many, of the Consistory Courts in the older Dioceses have been dismantled. . . . By way of illustration. Some years ago, when Bishop Hobhouse was Chancellor of the Diocese of Lichfield, I went to stay with him. He told me that he had been touring about in the West of England; and, amongst other places, had lionised Gloucester Cathedral. Having been taken round by the Verger, he asked next to see the Consistory Court. The Verger had never heard of it, and said there was no such place there. Hobhouse insisted; and, after some altercation, an old Verger was sent for, who had retired on a pension, and was mouldering away somewhere hard by. He did remember, but said that the Court had never been used for many years, in fact, not since 1856. When Hobhouse was taken to the place, he found that all the fittings had been cleared away, and it was made a receptacle for coals and lumber. Alas, for the old ecclesiastical judicature of England! I believe the ancient 'Alma Curia de Arcubus' (Court of Arches) is now a cheesemonger's warehouse."

As has been already said, the fittings of our Consistory Court are probably unique. The Chancellor's seat, with its canopy;⁵ the court-space or enclosure, with its seat around the table; and, specially, the perched-up seat for the witness, are very noteworthy. The latter looks

⁵ Some think that the Canopy has been brought from some other place, as it is, apparently, not perfect, and covered a larger area, though it may have only been re-arranged in its present position. It *may* have been over "the fair seat, at the south side of S. Oswald's Church." At any rate, it belongs to the period we are considering. On the north side the back panel has been cut away; and, of course, there may have been others beyond it. But *this* bears the following letters: ^{EDM}_{CAN} I have no doubt that this refers to Edmund Mainwaring, LL.D., who is styled by Sir Peter Leycester, "Chancellor of Chester in 1642," though his patent is not in the office. It shows that the seat was intended for the Chancellor, either in the Court or elsewhere, and is, to my mind, an argument in favour of its having been originally constructed for the position it now occupies.



Interior of North-west Chapel, Chester Cathedral

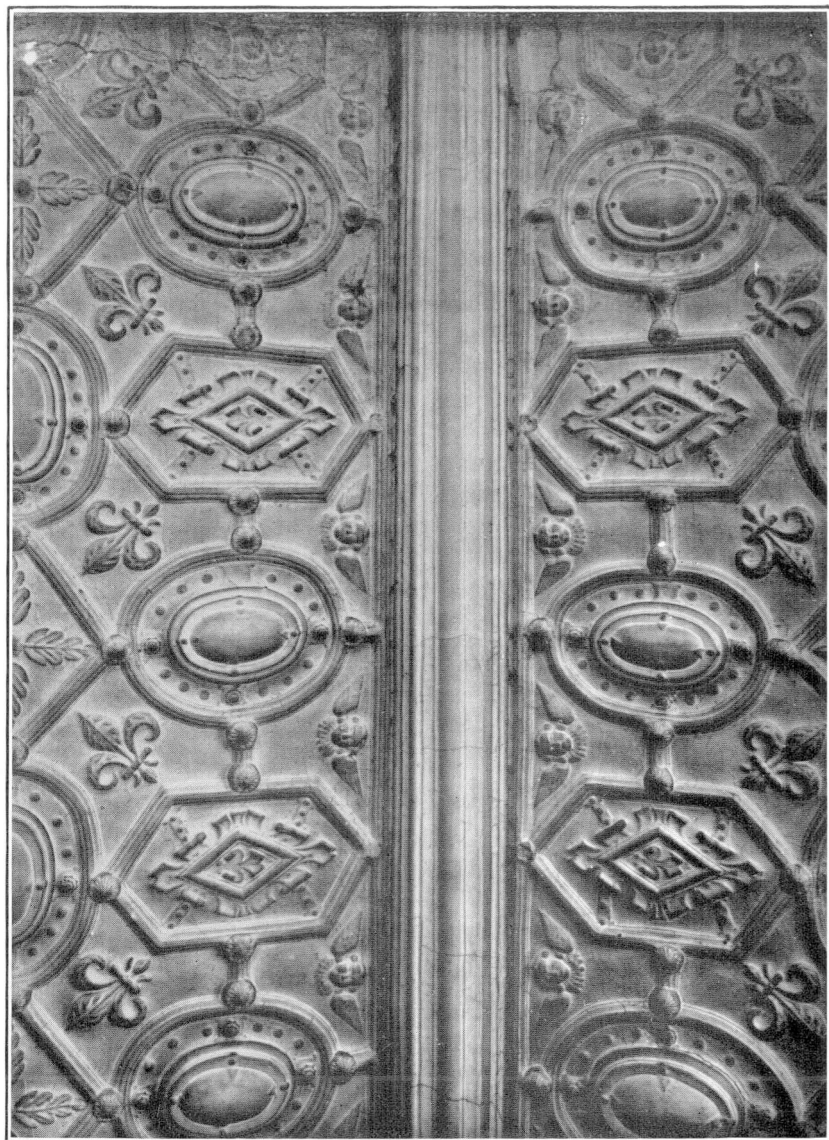
so uncomfortable that it seems more fit for the defendant (perhaps a notorious evil-doer) in some ecclesiastical suit than for the witness, who certainly would be well-placed there for examination, both oral and personal. The appearance of the woodwork might no doubt be much improved by a thorough and careful cleaning; whilst the discarded Jacobean panelling in other parts of the Cathedral, now dispersed, might have found an appropriate resting place in casing the walls. This, however, is only my humble suggestion.

We turn now to the disused and dilapidated Chapel, which, though not *in* the Cathedral, is an integral part of it. Originally the Abbot's private chapel, it contains some beautiful remains of Norman architecture, notably in the doorway (now a window into the Baptistery), which led into the room which eventually became the Bishop's study. The Norman groining has been plastered over at a later date, nails being driven into the stone for it to adhere to. This plaster has been ornamented with architectural designs; but this is of an earlier period than that we are considering. But the small chancel-like addition, built over the Cloister, has, undoubtedly, Jacobean ornamentation; and, knowing how much Bishop Bridgeman did for the Palace, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he decorated it, especially as there is none of his successors who seems likely to have done it.⁶ It forms a distinct little Chapel, separated by a close wooden screen from the original building, and would, probably, be sufficient for ordinary and family use. Its dimensions are 14 feet square; whilst the larger and original Norman Chapel is 41 feet by 15 feet. As has been said, it is in a dilapidated condition. The

⁶ The fabric may have been constructed in the time of some earlier Bishop; perhaps soon after the See was founded.

screen has lost some of its ornaments and mouldings ; the seating (which is plain and severe in its character) is imperfect ; and the raised desk on the south side (presumably for the Bishop) has become dislodged ; whilst the altar rails are less elaborate than usual. There are no other fittings, as the altar and other furniture have disappeared. But on the south side there is a curious arrangement, the stone mullion of a window into the Cathedral being pierced so as to form (as it seems to me) a hagioscope for the person sitting there. The western door has been made to harmonize with the work of that period, in shape and design. It led into the garden. A rough woodcut in Hanshall's "History of Cheshire" seems to indicate this, for though it does not give the door, it represents the Chapel as standing out distinctly from the adjoining house, and the ground outside as on the level of the Chapel floor. Moreover, the doorway is seen now from the outside, although the soil has been removed, so that it is now at a very considerable height above the ground. The beautiful Norman door on the south side of the Chapel was, no doubt, treated in a similar manner and plastered over, so as to make it conform to the other surroundings of the interior. It is now fitted with glass, as a window, thus giving borrowed light to the Baptistery ; but it seems, from the shafts and capitals, to have been built as a door, and would lead into the Abbot's room, which was thus actually in the Church itself.

We come now to the Font, which is placed on the steps at the west end of the Cathedral. An old print of the Nave represents it as being on a lower landing of the steps, with the inscription on the south wall. Perhaps it may be well to mention here, that "in August 1683, James, Duke of Monmouth, visited Chester,



Ceiling at East end of North-west Chapel, Chester Cathedral

and gave countenance to riotous assemblies and tumultuous mobs. These furiously forced the doors of the Cathedral Church; destroyed most of the painted glass; and beat to pieces the baptismal font." A new font was therefore required, the history of which is given on the tablet placed on the adjacent wall. It runs thus:—"Lateritium hic olim invenit Baptisterium Infans Gulielmus Moreton. Marmoreum idem instituit Episcopus Kildarensis Anno Domini 1687." The translation is:—"William Moreton, as an infant, found here of old a Font of brick: as Bishop of Kildare he has rendered the same into marble. In the year of our Lord 1687."

This William Moreton was born at Chester in 1641. He was the eldest son of Edward Moreton, Prebendary of Chester, and Rector of Tattenhall and Barrow. He received these appointments in 1637, on the application of Archbishop Laud, who wrote on his behalf to Bishop Bridgeman, on September 28th of that year. The preferments had become vacant on the death of the Bishop's son, Dove Bridgeman, at the early age of 28½ years, having held the appointments three years. Edward Moreton's wife was a relative of the Archbishop's, being, according to Ormerod, his niece; according to Canon Bridgeman, his first cousin. Dr. Moreton became Rector of Sephton in 1639; under the Commonwealth his property was sequestrated, but at the Restoration, he was reinstated in his benefices. He died February 28th, 1664-5. His son, William, the donor of the font, matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1660, and took his B.A. degree in 1664, and his M.A. in 1667. He was Rector of Churchill, in Worcester Diocese; and in 1677 accompanied James, Duke of Ormonde, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, as chaplain. On the 22nd December in that

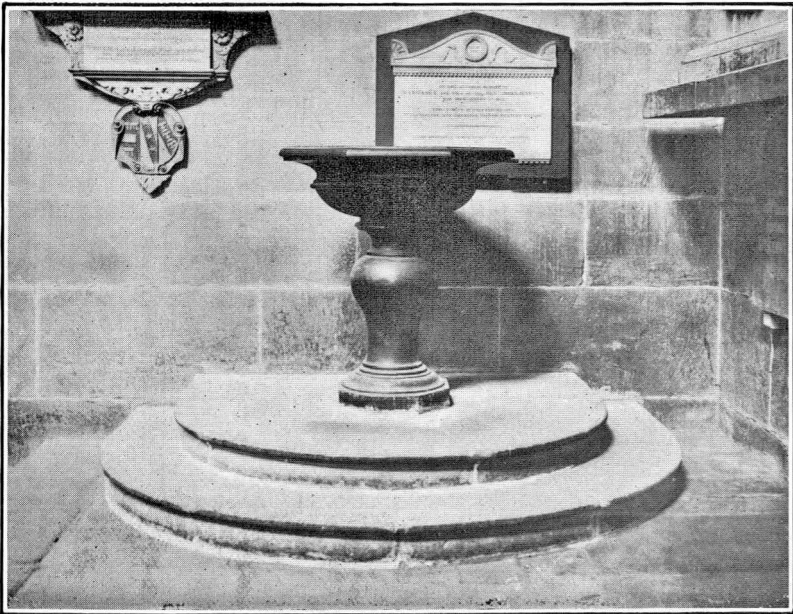
year he was made Dean of Christ Church, Dublin; and on February 13th, 1682, became Bishop of Kildare, being then in his forty-second year. He was translated to Meath on September 18th, 1705, and died 21st November, 1715, being buried in Christ Church Cathedral. His portrait hangs in the hall of Christ Church, Oxford.

It will have been observed that, in the record which has been quoted, we are told that Bishop Bridgeman "erected a font at the west end of the Church." Was this to take the place of the poor and mean font in which Bishop Moreton was baptized, in 1641? and was this the one "beat to pieces" by the Duke of Monmouth's rioters? or are two fonts alluded to: one in the Cathedral, and the other in S. Oswald's? I do not know how such questions can be decisively answered. We *do* know, however, that this marble font, was presented by Bishop Moreton of Kildare, in 1687. It is of classical shape and design, like many other fonts of that period. The one in S. Paul's Cathedral (which would, probably, be a few years later) is of a similar character, though much larger and more elaborate. The pedestal is, of course, more solid, and the basin itself is not plain, but fluted.

Whilst it is interesting to possess this specimen of Jacobean ecclesiastical architecture, with the history which attaches to it, we look with much greater satisfaction at the magnificent font in the adjoining Baptistery, given by Earl Egerton, though we do not know from what ruined Church in the Romagna it was brought to Venice. That font is of the Ravenna type, and of the sixth or seventh century.



Jacobean Lantern, Chester Cathedral



Bishop Moreton's Font, A.D. 1687, Chester Cathedral

Some relics of Jacobean ornamentation may be seen on the pedestal of the Lectern, in the Nave. The eagle is declared to be of pre-Reformation date, and is thus somewhat remarkable. The larger and, possibly, heavy pediment upon which it was placed (and which may have been part of Bishop Bridgeman's work in embellishing the Cathedral) was cut down some years ago, by Canon Tarver (I am told), and the more simple one constructed. Some fragments of the decorative work seem to have been retained, but not enough for us to conclude what the original one was like, though, possibly, some present may be able to recall it.

One other remnant of these times is to be seen in the Canon's vestry. It is an elegant lantern. When the fall of a portion of a pinnacle of the North Transept necessitated the restoration of the roof of the Chapter House, and the thorough repair of the groining, there was found in the triforium or walk before the windows a crumpled-up and shapeless mass of tin. It was carefully examined, under the direction of Sir Arthur Blomfield. The crown by which it is surmounted was almost perfect; some of the ribs at the side had been broken off and had disappeared; but with skilful handling and treatment its original shape and purpose was disclosed, and it was repaired as you see it now. Traces of gilding on the tin showed how it had been decorated in former times. There were no remains of glass or other transparent substance; but Sir Arthur decided that horn ought to be inserted, as at the time when it was first made glass could not have been made of that convex character, but was always perfectly flat.⁷

⁷ In the Churchwardens' Accounts of S. Mary-on-the-Hill, in 1543-44, *ijjd.* were paid for "new hornys to the launtn" (lantern).

With all this care and thought bestowed upon it, we may reasonably suppose that this interesting article is now in the same condition as when it was first designed and made. We can only form conjectures as to the position it then occupied. My own surmise (to which I am led by the place where it was discovered) is that it probably hung in the vestibule to the Chapter House, and not in the Chapter House itself, where it would require a much longer chain to suspend it, and where it would be difficult to replenish the candles and to light them. It now hangs (simply that it may be seen by visitors) in the Canon's vestry; and when the years have passed on, and the dust of ages resting upon it has toned down the at present rather showy gilding, it will be even more attractive than it is at present.

I do not propose to turn your attention at any length to the Jacobean monuments which are to be found in the Cathedral, as this, with the personal and other history attaching to them, would be a study in itself. We have, indeed, nothing so interesting (I might almost say colossal) as those which are to be found in Chelsea Old Church, with which I was much struck a fortnight ago. But many of them naturally appeal to families in the City and in the County, as part of their own history. We may, however, note that on the Mainwaring monument, at the west end, Edmund Mainwaring is described (wrongly, according to Ormerod) as "Chancellor of the County Palatine of Chester," and not of the Diocese. The monument to Sub-Dean William Bispham (who died in 1685, at the age of eighty-eight), in the north aisle of the Choir, was restored by one of his descendants, William Bispham of New York, in 1888. It is interesting as showing

how wood was used in conjunction with stone; and no doubt there are other instances of this.

The interesting monument to Robert Bennet, Draper, who died in 1614, is entirely of wood, and is painted and gilded. There is also one of the date of 1607, to Thomas Greene, Merchant, with effigies of himself and his two wives (one of whom was a Brascey), one on either side of him.

The Jacobean work in the Cathedral may seem but small and meagre. I trust, however, it has not been altogether dull and unprofitable to have turned your attention to it. If any are led to a fuller appreciation of our grand old Mother Church, with its varied and chequered history written in its stones, and with the story of so many successive builders handed down to us in the work they have left behind them, I shall be well repaid.

