

# Grantham's Apple Cross ripe for reconsideration

*David Stocker*

At the recent conference on Medieval Grantham (held on 25th April 2009), the author of this note presented, to a somewhat surprised audience, the detailed reconstruction of an enormous monumental cross shaft, more than 6m in height (Figures 1 & 2). The cross is reconstructed on the basis of John Carter's detailed and measured drawings (now in the British Library), which he was commissioned to produce by the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1790. These drawings have been considered by historians and art-historians on several occasions subsequently (most recently by Craig 1995) but they have previously been thought part of an un-documented late-medieval chapel to the west of Grantham High Street, just north of the George Inn. The building itself, along with the room containing the sculpture and known as 'The Oratory', disappeared c 1800, and no trace of the stones drawn by Carter has yet come to light.

Our recent comprehensive review of documentary and topographical evidence relating to the building in which these highly decorated stone panels were discovered, strongly suggests that previous understandings have overlooked the point that they were certainly re-used at the location in which Carter found them. They were, it now seems clear, built into a house erected after the Restoration by the Rawlinsons, a family of undoubted Royalist recusants, though it is not yet possible to establish whether they were professed Roman Catholics. They were clearly attracted to the stones by their complex and sophisticated late-medieval iconography, and they purloined the stones in 1646, following the demolition of the Apple Cross by Parliamentary troops then garrisoned in the town.

The cross, reconstructed on paper by Dave Hopkins from the fragments drawn by Carter, has a tall base set upon a moulded and panelled sub-base, which is decorated with a scheme of sculpted roundels containing iconography related to the five wounds of Christ, the Holy Name, and other indicators of the cult of Corpus Christi. Saints Margaret, Catherine and John the Baptist are also prominent. Held within a block decorated with the symbols of the evangelists above the decorated base, stands a tall shaft of a distinctive local type decorated with figures (of apostles?) along all four edges, which itself supported a large 'lantern' head containing a sculpture representing the Holy Trinity (of *Gnadenstuhl* type).

The new study makes a case that the cross' iconography is related to the spectacular memorials to Bishop Oldham (died 1519) in Exeter cathedral and to the Kirkham family in St John's church Paignton (of perhaps c 1520). It is also related, now, to the elaborately decorated, though very badly damaged, font in St Wulfram's Grantham. The connecting thread between all these monuments, it is suggested, is Bishop Richard Fox of Winchester (1447/8–1528), who was born at Ropsley, a village some five miles to the east of Grantham, and who – in the great tradition of late-medieval prelates – founded a school (1517–28) in his own home town, from which students would progress to his newly-founded Oxford college (in this case Corpus Christi). It is suggested, then, that the newly reconstructed Apple Cross was evidently part of a suite of lavish gifts to Grantham, by its most famous son, which included not only the school but also the Apple Cross, the new font in St Wulfram's, and perhaps the redecoration of the Corpus Christi chapel in the north-east part of the same church.

Finally, it is now suggested that all three of these monumental gifts formed a single processional way from the town's oldest market place to the west of the churchyard, where the Apple Cross was erected, past the font inside the west door of St Wulfram's church and into the Corpus Christi chapel. This same route may have been followed by the town's Corpus Christi Day procession, organised by the town's Corpus Christi Guild, who may also have been responsible for electing the Alderman (or Mayor); an event which subsequently took place in the same chapel of the Corpus Christi.

The conference also considered important new research on Grantham by Glyn Coppack (religious houses), Philip Dixon (The development of St Wulfram's church and Inns on the Great North Road), Beryl Lott (Castlegate House and other secular buildings), John Maddison (St Wulfram's tower and spire), Dave Start (the development of the town) and Garry Taylor (The Angel Inn), and will be published along with further contributions, in a single volume (*Medieval Grantham*, edited by Dave Start and David Stocker), it is hoped in 2011.

*Fig 1*

*A reconstruction of the Apple Cross at Grantham*

*(Drawing by Dave Hopkins, copyright David Stocker and Heritage Lincolnshire).*

## ***Bibliography***

Tudor-Craig, P, 1995, 'Margaret Queen of Scotland, in Grantham, 8–9 July 1503' in B. Thompson (ed), *The Reign of Henry VII*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 5, 261–279

*David Stocker works in Research Strategy at English Heritage and is interested in medieval and landscape archaeology, on which he has published widely. Many of his larger projects have included church archaeology and his most recent book (*Summoning St Michael*, with Paul Everson, Oxford 2006) combines, landscape, architecture, liturgy and settlement studies. His next book (again with Paul Everson) deals with monastic landscapes and will be published in 2011*

### **Fig 2**

*Exploded view of the new Grantham Apple Cross reconstruction, showing suggested original locations for almost all of the sculpted panels drawn by John Carter in 1790 (Drawing by Dave Hopkins, copyright David Stocker and Heritage Lincolnshire).*