

AN EARLY GEORGIAN TABLE IN THE  
CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS, LITTLE HORWOOD,  
BUCKS.

[BY H. CLIFFORD SMITH, M.A., F.S.A.]

Lovers of antiquity have many causes to regret the work of the church restorers of the 19th century. So thoroughly was this "restoration" carried out, and so strong the feeling against anything that savoured in particular of the 18th century, that almost every vestige of the church furniture and fittings of the period has been swept bodily away, and it is by chance only if objects of the kind have occasionally been left undisturbed. Moveable furniture thus alienated from the church during the course of "restoration" was usually disposed of by the contractor. Sometimes it found its way in to the parsonage, and disappeared on the death or departure of the incumbent. Cases in which such furniture has been allowed to remain as a "fixture" are probably rare; but I have lately had the good fortune to come across an instance of the kind in a vicarage in Buckinghamshire.

During a recent visit to Little Horwood the Vicar of the parish, Rev. L. G. P. Liesching, was kind enough to invite me into his vicarage to see a table which he found there when he assumed the living a year or two ago, and which he understood had belonged to the church, and had on some occasion been moved from it. The table proved to be none other than a small and sumptuous specimen of early Georgian furniture in the form of a carved and gilt side-table, of a rare type, dating from about the year 1720. The table is 3ft. high, 3ft. 4in. wide, and 1ft. 10in. deep. On the top is a slab of white marble resting on a frame carved on the front and sides; above is an egg and tongue moulding and a band of shallow dentils; in the middle is a bold key pattern with a bead and billet moulding below; and under this is a scrolled border with plumes, the front centring in a shell. It is supported on four



EARLY GEORGIAN TABLE IN LITTLE HORWOOD CHURCH.

cabriolet-shaped legs in the form of terminal female figures; the scrolls behind the shoulders end in whorls with acanthus below; the fronts, which terminate in scrolls, are decorated with pendant husks. The gilding, of which the ornamental parts are slightly burnished and the background granulated, is the original, though somewhat worn, and the marble top is the old one.

There can be little doubt that the table was removed from the church during the drastic alterations which the chancel underwent in 1889. Mr. C. E. Keyser, writing in the "Archæological Journal" in 1893, says: "The Church of St. Nicholas, Little Horwood, is situated about 2½ miles from Winslow, and has recently been carefully restored. . . . The chancel, which had previously been much churchwardenized, has been greatly improved." No record exists of the actual position of the table in the chancel, but it is believed to have been used either as an altar-table or as a credence to place the elements on before consecration. There is no evidence to show that it was made for one or other purpose, and it is more than likely that a vicar of the early eighteenth century pointed out to the lay rector his need, which the latter supplied from his own house. I have consulted the Vicar as to whether the Churchwardens' Accounts or the Vestry Minutes contain any entry to that effect, but he is unable to furnish me with any information on the subject. A hiatus occurs in the list of vicars between the year 1709, when Samuel Foster resigned the living, and 1754, when Purchase Denchfield is found in possession of it. But the rectors of that date were the family of Adams: their residence, the Rectory (now Horwood House), was acquired about 1660 by John Adams, whose great-grandson is mentioned as living there in 1734. The house passed successively into the possession of Sir Stephen Langston, High Sheriff for Bucks in 1788 and 1796, and of Philip Dauncey, on the death of whose widow in 1911 it was purchased by the present owner, Mr. F. A. Denny, by whom it was re-built.

Gilt furniture, of which this table is a striking example, made of soft wood, carved and heavily gilt on a gesso (*i.e.* plaster) ground, was in chief vogue

during the reign of George I. (1714-1727). Carved and gilt console or side tables with marble tops were a prominent feature of the reception rooms of rich town and country houses at this period, and usually occupied the space between the windows, while above, though not forming part of them, were often hung tall mirrors mounted in richly-carved and gilt frames of similar design. This type of gilt furniture, remaining as it did in fashion for a comparatively short time, and being confined to a limited patronage, is naturally now of considerable rarity, and is eagerly sought for by collectors.

The Little Horwood table offers an interesting comparison with an altar-table, dating from the same decade, in the Parish Church of Rye, in Sussex. This magnificent table is of solid mahogany sumptuously carved. Like that at Little Horwood, it is entirely secular in design, and is carved with the lion mask and lion paw which were then the most fashionable motives for mahogany furniture. But the winged cherubs, though used both for ecclesiastical and domestic decoration, which are combined on the front with wheatears and grapes, have presumably a religious significance, and tend to show that this table was made for the church, and was the gift of a wealthy citizen. It is illustrated in "Country Life," Vol. XXIX., p. 856.

It is satisfactory to be able to state that the fine and valuable example of old English gilt furniture thus alienated for upwards of a quarter of a century from the service of the church has, with the consent of the Vicar and with the assistance of the Lay Rector, Mr. F. A. Denny, been replaced in the chancel of Little Horwood Church.