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Author: Frederic W. Woodhouse

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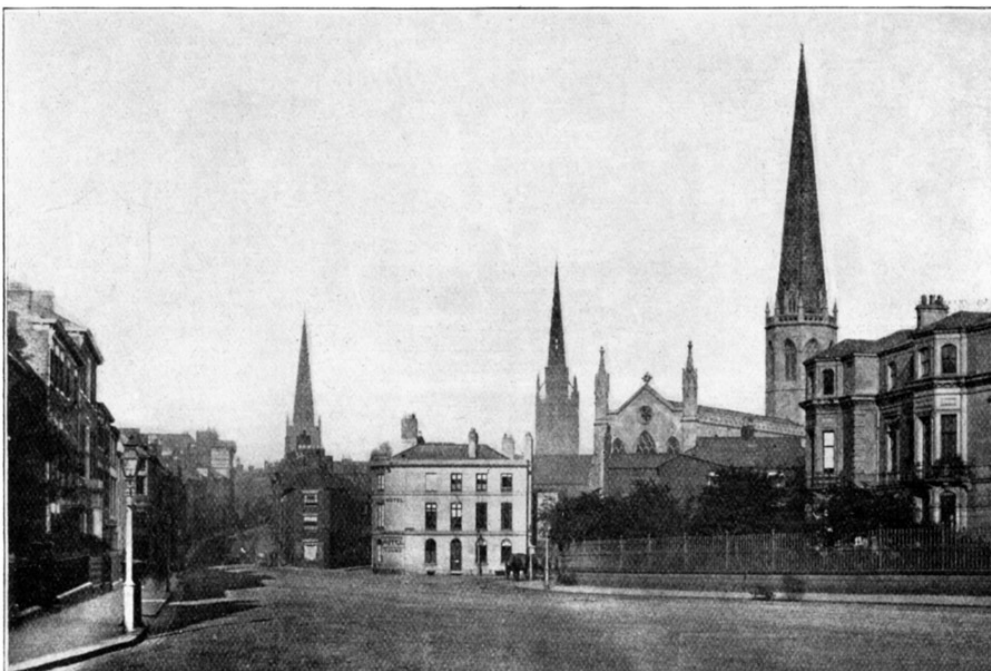
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Inconsistent hyphenation in the original document has been preserved.



COVENTRY, THE THREE SPIRES.

THE CHURCHES OF COVENTRY

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE
CITY & ITS MEDIEVAL
REMAINS

BY
FREDERIC W. WOODHOUSE

WITH XL ILLUSTRATIONS



ARMS OF COVENTRY

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vii

PREFACE

The principal authorities for the history of Coventry and its churches have been Dugdale's "Antiquities of Warwickshire" and the "Illustrated Papers and the History and Antiquities of the City of Coventry," by Thomas Sharp, edited by W.G. Fretton (1871). Besides these the many papers by Mr. Fretton in the Transactions of the Birmingham and Midland Institute and other Societies, and the "History and Antiquities of Coventry" by Benjamin Poole (1870) have been the main sources of historical information. The Author is, however, responsible for the architectural opinions and descriptions, which are mainly the outcome of a lifelong acquaintance with the city and its buildings, fortified by several weeks of study and investigation recently undertaken.

He desires to acknowledge his deep obligations to the Vicars of the several churches for leave to examine, measure and photograph the buildings in their charge; to Mr. J. Oldrid Scott for the loan of drawings of St. Michael's; to Mr. A. Brown, Librarian of the Coventry Public Library for advice and help in making use of the store of topographical material under his care; to Mr. Owen, Verger of St. Michael's and Mr. Chapman, Verger of Holy Trinity, for help in various directions, and to Mr. Wilfred Sims for his energy and care in taking most of the photographs required for illustration.

The other illustrations are reproduced from drawings made by the author.

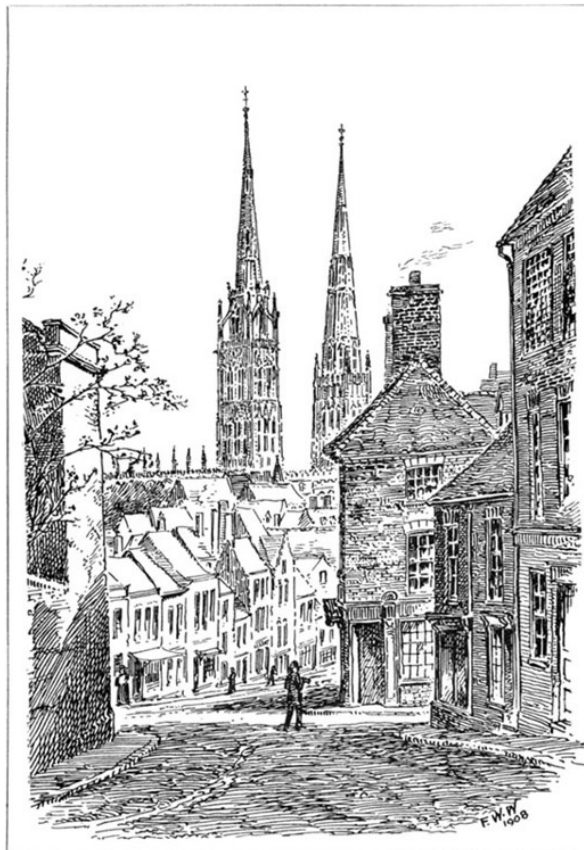
CONTENTS

	PAGE
MONASTERY AND CITY	3
THE RUINS OF THE PRIORY AND CATHEDRAL CHURCH	16
ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH:	
CHAPTER I. HISTORY OF THE CHURCH	21
CHAPTER II. THE EXTERIOR	29
CHAPTER III. THE INTERIOR	41
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH:	
CHAPTER I. HISTORY OF THE CHURCH	61
CHAPTER II. THE EXTERIOR	65
CHAPTER III. THE INTERIOR	69
ST. JOHN BAPTIST'S CHURCH	79
THE GREY FRIARS' CONVENT (CHRIST CHURCH)	91
THE WHITE FRIARS	94
ST. MARY HALL	96
THE CARTHUSIAN MONASTERY	99

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
COVENTRY, THE THREE SPIRES	<i>Frontispiece</i>
ARMS OF THE TOWN	<i>Title-page</i>
VIEW FROM THE TOP OF BISHOP STREET	2
COOK STREET GATE	7
SEAL OF THE PRIORY	15
WEST END OF THE PRIORY CHURCH	16
REMAINS OF THE NORTH-WEST TOWER IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	17
ST. MICHAEL'S FROM THE NORTH	20
ST. MICHAEL'S FROM THE NORTH-WEST	28
INTERIOR OF THE TOWER FROM BELOW	31
THE WEST PORCH	33
SOUTH PORCH FROM ST. MARY HALL	34
SOUTH-WEST DOORWAY	35
INTERIOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S FROM THE WEST	40
TOWER ARCH	42
BAY OF NAVE, NORTH SIDE	43
INTERIOR FROM THE SOUTH DOOR	45
THE CHOIR FROM ST. LAWRENCE'S CHAPEL	46
POPPY HEAD, LADY CHAPEL	48
MISERERE, LADY CHAPEL	48
CHEST IN NORTH AISLE	50
THE NETHERMYL TOMB	51
THE SWILLINGTON TOMB	54
ALMS-BOX	56
HOLY TRINITY FROM THE NORTH (ABOUT 1850)	60
PLAN OF TRINITY CHURCH	66

INTERIOR OF HOLY TRINITY, FROM THE WEST	68
NORTH SIDE OF NAVE—EASTERN BAYS	71
PULPIT	73
ARCHWAY BETWEEN THE NORTH PORCH AND ST. THOMAS'S CHAPEL	74
ALMS-BOX	77
CHURCH OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST	80
PLAN	85
INTERIOR	87
CLEARSTORY WINDOWS	88
THE SPIRE OF CHRIST CHURCH	92
GREY FRIARS' CHURCH (PLAN OF CROSSING)	93
ST. MARY HALL	96
PLAN	98
PLAN OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH	<i>At End</i>



VIEW FROM THE TOP OF BISHOP STREET.

[ToList](#)

CHURCHES OF COVENTRY

The opening words of Sir William Dugdale's account of Coventry assert that it is a city "remarkable for antiquity, charters, rights and privileges, and favours shown by monarchs." Though this handbook is primarily concerned with a feature of the city he does not here mention—its magnificent buildings—the history of these is bound up with that of the city. The connection of its great parish churches with the everyday life of the people, though commonly on a narrower stage, is more intimate than is that of a cathedral or an abbey church, but it is to be remembered that without its Monastery Coventry might never have been more than a village or small market town.

We cannot expect the records of a parish church to be as full and complete as those of a cathedral, always in touch through its bishops with the political life of the country and enjoying the services of numerous officials; or as those of a monastery, with its leisured chroniclers ever patiently recording the annals of their house, the doings of its abbots, the dealings of their house with mother church and the outside world, and all its internal life and affairs. In the case of Coventry, the unusual fulness of its city archives, the accounts and records of its guilds and companies, and the close connection of these with the church supplies us with a larger body of information than is often at the disposal of the historian of a parish church. As therefore, in narrating the story of a cathedral some account of the Diocese and its Bishops has been given, so, before describing the churches of Coventry, we shall give in outline the history of the city which for 700 years gave its name to a bishop and of the great monastery whose church was for 400 years his seat.

Though Dugdale says that it is remarkable for antiquity, Coventry as a city has no early history comparable with that of such places as York, Canterbury, Exeter, or Colchester, while its modern history is mainly a record of fluctuating trade and the rise and decline of new industries. But through all its Mediæval period, from the eleventh century down to the Reformation, with an expiring flicker of energy in the seventeenth, there is no lack of life and colour, and its story touches every side of the national life, political, religious, and domestic. The only evidence of extreme antiquity produced by Dugdale is the suffix of its name, for "*tre* is British, and signifieth the same that *villa* in Latin doth;" while the first part may be derived from the convent or from a supposed ancient name, Cune, for the Sherborne brook.

The first date we have is 1016, when Canute invaded Mercia, burning and laying waste its towns and settlements, including a house of nuns at Coventry founded by the Virgin St. Osburg in 670, and ruled over by her.^[1]

But there is no sure starting-point until the foundation of the monastery by Earl Leofric and the Countess Godiva, the church being dedicated by Edsi, Archbishop of Canterbury, in honour of God, the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, St. Osburg, and All Saints on 4th October, 1043. Leofwin, who was first abbot with twenty-four monks under his rule, ten years after became Bishop of Lichfield. The original endowment by Leofric, consisted of a half of Coventry^[2] with fifteen lordships in Warwickshire and nine in other counties, making it (says Roger de Hoveden) the wealthiest monastery of the period. Besides this the pious Godiva gave all the gold and silver which she had to make crosses, images, and other adornments for the church and its services. The well-known legend of her ride through Coventry first appears in the pages of Matthew of Westminster in the early fourteenth century. The Charter of Exemption from Tolls is not in existence, and the story of Peeping Tom is the embroidery of the prurient age (1678), in which the pageant was instituted. In a window of Trinity Church figures of Leofric and Godiva were set up about the time of Richard II, the Earl holding in his right hand a Charter with these words written thereon:

I Luriche for the Love of thee
Doe make Coventre Toll-free.

Abbot Leofwin was succeeded in 1053 by Leofric, nephew of the great earl; and he by a second Leofwin, who died in 1095. The first Norman bishop of Lichfield had, in compliance with the decision of a Synod (1075) in London fixing bishops' seats in large towns, removed his to St. John's, Chester. But his successor, Robert de Lymesey—whose greed appears to have been notable in a greedy age—having the king's permission to farm the monastic revenues until the appointment of a new abbot, held it for seven years, and then, in 1102, removed his stool to Coventry. Five of his successors were bishops of Coventry only, then the style changed to Coventry and Lichfield, and so remained till 1661, when (in consequence of the disloyalty of Coventry and the sufferings of Lichfield in the royal cause) the order was reversed!

In 1836 the archdeaconry of Coventry was annexed to Worcester and its name disappeared from the title, and now it is probable that Coventry will soon again give her name to a See without dividing the honour. For the joint episcopal history the reader must be referred to the handbook in this series on Lichfield Cathedral. In this place will only be given that of the Monastery as such, and specially in connection with its "appropriated" parish churches and the City in which it stood. That history is not essentially different from that of other monasteries. Though its connection with the See and the rival claims and antagonisms of the respective Chapters produced a plentiful crop of serious quarrels, its relations with the townsfolk were free from such violent episodes as occurred at Bury St. Edmunds or St. Albans. The Chapter of Lichfield consisted of secular priests (Lymesey and his next successor were married men), while the Monastery, though freed by pope and king from any episcopal or justiciary power and with the right of electing its own abbot, was, like all monastic bodies, always jealous of the encroachments of bishops, and regarded secular priests as inferior in every respect. The opinion

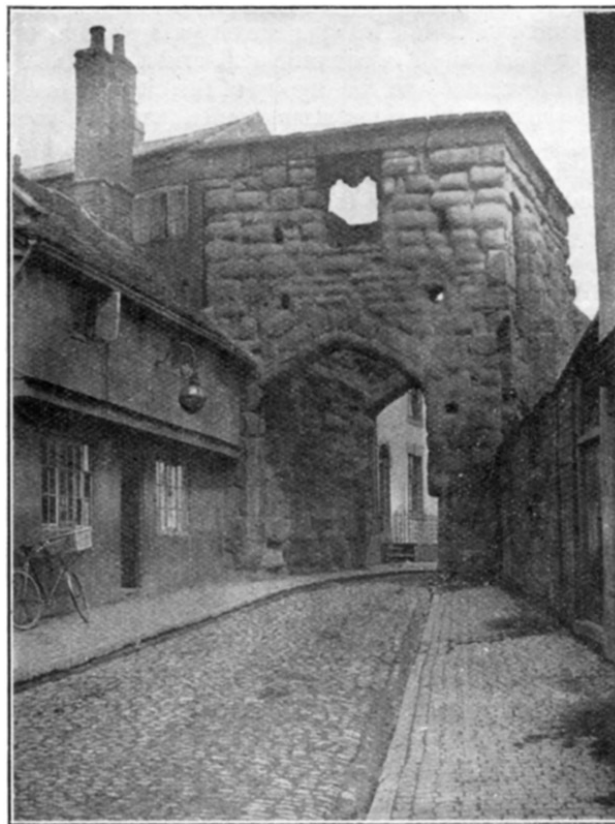
of the laity who saw both sides may be gathered from Chaucer's picture of a "poore Persoun of a toun." He knew well enough how the revenue, which should have gone to the parish, its parson and its poor, went to fill the coffers of rich abbeys, to build enormous churches and furnish them sumptuously, to provide retinues of lazy knights for the train of abbot or bishop, and to prosecute lawsuits in the papal courts.

But when bishop and abbot were one and the same, the monks still claimed the right of election, and so for generations the history of the diocese is a tale of strife and bickering, and how it was that pope, king or archbishop did not perceive that it was a case of hopeless incompatibility of temper, or, perceiving it, did not dissolve the union or get it dissolved is difficult to see. Probably the injury done to religion weighed but lightly against vested interests and the power of the purse. The Monastery was, however, as Dugdale says, "the chief occasion of all the succeeding wealth and honour that accrued to Coventry"; for though the original Nunnery may have been planted in an existing settlement, or have attracted one about it, the greater wealth of the Abbey, its right to hold markets, and all its own varied requirements would quickly increase and bring prosperity to such a township, as it did at Bury St. Edmunds, Burton-on-Trent and many another.

In the thirteenth century the priory was in financial straits, through being fined by Henry III for disobedience. Later, however, he granted further privileges to the monks, among them that of embodying the merchants in a Gild. In 1340 Edward III granted this privilege to the City. From an early period the manufacture of cloth and caps and bonnets was the principal trade of Coventry, and though Leland says, "the town rose by making of cloth and caps, which now decaying, the glory of the City also decayeth," it was only destroyed by the French wars of the seventeenth century. But in 1377, when only eighteen towns in the kingdom had more than 3,000 inhabitants, and York, the second city, had only 11,000, Coventry was fourth with 7,000. Just one hundred years later 3,000 died here of the plague, one of many visitations of that terrible scourge. At the Suppression it had risen to 15,000, and soon after fell to 3,000, through loss of trade for "want of such concourse of people that numerously resorted thither before that fatal Dissolution."

But if the town grew apace so did the Monastery. Thus, when in 1244 Earl Hugh died childless his sisters divided his estates and Coventry fell to Cecily, wife of Roger de Montalt. Six years later the Monastery lent him a large sum to take him to the Holy Land, and received from him the lordship of Coventry (excepting the Manor House and Park of Cheylesmore) and the advowson of St. Michael's and its dependent chapels, thus becoming the landlords of nearly the whole of Coventry.

7



COOK STREET GATE.

ToList

Civic powers grew with the growth of trade. Before 1218 a fair of eight days had been granted to the Priory, and later another of six days, to be held in the earl's half of the town about the Feast of Holy Trinity. In 1285 a patent from the king is addressed to the burgesses and true men to levy tolls for paving the town; one in 1328 for tolls for inclosing the city with walls and gates, while in 1344 the city was given a corporation, with mayor, bailiffs, a common seal, and a prison. As the municipal importance and the dignity of the city increased, the desire for their visible signs strengthened, and so, in 1355, work was begun on the walls, Newgate (on the London

8

Road) being the first gate to be built. Such undertakings proceeded slowly, and nine years later the royal permission was obtained to levy a tax for their construction, "the lands and goods of all ecclesiastical persons excepted."

Twice afterwards we hear of licence being granted by Richard II to dig stone in Cheylesmore Park, first for Grey Friars Gate, and later for Spon Gate, "near his Chapel of Babelake." The walls so built were of imposing extent and dimensions, being three yards in breadth, two and a quarter miles in circumference, and having thirty-two towers and twelve gates.^[3] Nehemiah Wharton, a Parliamentary officer in 1642, reports of the city that it is:

Environed with a wall co-equal, if not exceedinge, that of London, for breadth and height; and with gates and battlements, magnificent churches and stately streets and abundant fountains of water; altogether a place very sweetly situate and where there is no stint of venison.

To return to the monastic history. We have seen how, in the mid-thirteenth century the Monastery had become the landlord of the city; shortly before this it had been so impoverished with ceaseless quarrels with the King and the Lichfield Chapter, involving costly appeals to Rome, that the Prior was reduced to asking the hospitality of the monks of Derley for some of the brethren. A period of prosperity followed and many benefactions flowed in, including the gift of various churches by the king. It was after twenty-six years of quarrelling that the Pope, in 1224, had appointed to the bishopric Walter de Stavenby, an able and learned man. During his episcopacy the friars made their appearance in England, and by him the Franciscans were introduced at Lichfield, while at Coventry Ranulph, Earl of Chester, gave them land in Cheylesmore on which to build their oratory and house.

They were not generally welcomed by the monks. A Benedictine laments their first appearance thus "Oh shame! oh worse than shame! oh barbarous pestilence! the Minor Brethren are come into England!" and at Bury they were obliged to build outside a mile radius from the Abbey. The parish priests also soon found out that they were undersold in the exercise of their spiritual offices and although no doubt many badly needed awakening they were not, on that account, the more likely to welcome the intruders.

Another innovation, affecting the fortunes of the parish priest, had its beginning under the rule of Bishop Stavenby though its greatest development occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was the foundation of Chantries designed primarily for the maintenance of a priest or priests to say mass daily or otherwise for the soul's health of the founder, his family and forbears. The earliest we hear of are one at Lincoln, and one at Hatherton in Coventry Archdeaconry while the Bishop himself endowed one in Lichfield Cathedral. Many were perpetual endowments (£5 per annum being the average stipend), others were temporary, according to the means of those who paid for the masses—for a term of years or for a fixed number of masses. Although chantry priests were often required to give regular help in the church services or taught such scholars as came to them or served outlying chapelries, the system permitted a great number to live on occasional engagements and was doubtless productive of abuses. Chaucer tells us that his poor parson was not such an one as

... left his sheep encumbered in the mire,
And ran unto London, unto Saint Poul's,
To seekë him a chantery for souls.

The number of chantries in the different cathedrals varied very greatly, Lichfield had eighty-seven, St. Paul's thirty-seven, York only three. Monks' churches had few or none while in town churches they were numerous, London having one hundred and eighty, York forty-two, Coventry at least fifteen besides the twelve gild priests of the chapel of Babelake. Most were founded in connection with an existing altar, some had a special altar, at Winchester, Tewkesbury and elsewhere they were enclosed in screens between the pillars of the nave, or a special chapel was added to the church.

It was in the thirteenth century also (1267) that the monastery obtained the grant of a Merchants' Guild; with all the privileges thereto belonging, the earliest of those which contributed so much to the renown of Coventry. These were Benefit Societies, insuring help to the "Brethren and sistren" in old age, sickness or poverty, securing to them the services of the church after death and in all cases established on a strictly religious basis and placed under the protection of a Saint, or of the Holy Trinity. The regulation and protection of trade interests, generally aiming at monopoly and the exclusion of outsiders, were later developments. But without doubt they were public-spirited bodies according to their lights, maintaining schools (as at Stratford-on-Avon) hospitals and almshouses, and giving freely on all occasions of public importance. By pageants too, they contributed to the happiness and amusement of the people as well as by the presentation of Mysteries and Moralities, to their instruction and edification. But in the eyes of the Reformers, or of grasping courtiers, all this went for nothing when weighed against the heinous offence of supporting chaplains to pray for deceased members and so (6 Edward VI) they were suppressed along with the chantries, and their property confiscated, "the very meanest and most inexcusable of the plunderings which threw discredit on the Reformation."

Here, the city bought back everything which had belonged to the Trinity and Corpus Christi Gilds, with various almshouses and the possessions of the majority of the Chantries; while previously at the Dissolution it had bought the abbey-orchard, and mill, and the house and church of the Grey Friars.

In 1340 Edward III granted Licence to the Coventry men to form a Merchants' Guild with leave "to make chantries, bestow alms, do other works of piety and constitute ordinances touching the

same." This was St. Mary's Gild. Two years later that of St. John Baptist was formed and a year later that of St. Katherine, the three being united into the Trinity Gild before 1359. Of the chapel (now St. John's church) begun in 1344 by the St. John's Gild and the "fair and stately structure for their feasts and meetings called St Mary Hall" built in 1394 by the united Gilds more will be said later (p. 81 and p. 97). The end of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth brought to Coventry a full share in the events and movements of the time. In 1396 the duel between Hereford and Norfolk was to have taken place on Gosford Green (adjoining the city) and Richard II made the fatal mistake of banishing both combatants. At the Priory in 1404 Henry IV held his Parliament known, from the fact that no lawyers were summoned to it, as the "Parliamentum Indocorum." Setting itself in opposition to ecclesiastics, it proposed to supply the King's needs by taxing church-property. As in the matter of the city walls, the church contrived to avoid bearing its share of the public burdens and the chronicler ends thus: "Much ado there was; but to conclude, the worthy Archbishop (viz. Tho. Arundell) standing stoutly for the good of the Church, preserved it at that time from the storm impending." One branch of his argument is noteworthy, that as the confiscation of the alien priories had not enriched the King by half a mark (courtiers having extorted or begged them out of his hands), so it would be were he to confiscate the temporalities of the monasteries. Henry VIII had reason to acknowledge the fulfilment of the prophecy.

11

Soon after this, in 1423, Coventry showed its sympathy for Lollardry when John Grace an anchorite friar came out of his cell and preached for five days in the "lyttell parke." He was opposed by the prior of St. Mary's and by a Grey Friar who however were attacked and nearly killed by the mob.

The royal visits which earned for Coventry the title which it still bears as its motto 'Camera principis' were frequent in this century. In 1436 we hear of Henry VI being there, and in 1450 he was the guest of the monastery and after hearing mass at St. Michael's Church presented to it for an altar-hanging the robe of gold tissue he was wearing. The record in the Corporation Leet book is interesting enough to quote:

The King, then abydeng stille in the seide Priory, upon Mich'as even sent the clerke of his closet to the Churche of Sent Michel to make redy ther hys clossette, seying that the Kyng on Mich'as day wolde go on p'cession and also her ther hygh masse. The Meyre and his counsell, remembrengh him in this mater, specially avysed hem to pray the Byshoppe of Wynchester to say hygh masse afore the Kyng. The Byshoppe so to do agreed withe alle hys herte; and, agayne the Kynges comeng to Sent Michel Churche, the Meyre and his Peres, cladde in skarlet gowns, wenton unto the Kynges Chambar durre, ther abydeng the Kynges comeng. The Meyre then and his peres, doeng to the Kyng due obeysaunse ... toke his mase and bere it afore the Kyng all his said bredurn goeng afore the Meyre til he com to Sent Michels and brought the Kyng to his closette. Then the seyde Byshoppe, in his pontificals arayde, with all the prestes and clerkes of the seyde Churche and of Bablake, withe copes apareld, wenton in p'cession abowte the churchyarde; the Kyng devowtely, with many odur lordes, followed the seyde p'cession bare-hedded, cladde in a gowne of gold tissu, furred with a furre of marturn sabull; the Meyre bereng the mase afore the Kyng as he didde afore, tille he com agayne to his closette. Att the whyche masse when the Kyng had offered and his lordes also, he sende the lorde Bemond, his chamburlen, to the Meyre, seying to him, "hit is the Kynges wille that ye and your bredurn com and offer;" and so they didde; and when masse was don, the Meyre and his peres brought on the Kyng to his chambur in lyke wyse as they fet hym, save only that the Meyre with his mase went afore the Kyng till he com withe in his chambur, his seyde bredurn abydeng atte the chambur durre till the Meyre cam ageyne. And at evensong tyme the same day, the Kyng, ... sende the seyde gowne and furre that he were when he went in p'cession, and gaf hit frely to God and to Sent Michell, insomuch that non of the that broughte the gowne wolde take no reward in no wyse.

12

In 1451 he made the city with the villages and hamlets within its liberties into a county "distinct and altogether separate from the county of Warwick for ever," and in 1453 the King and Queen again visited the Priory. Perhaps out of gratitude for all this royal favour, Coventry adhered to the Lancastrian cause and in 1459 was chosen as the meeting place for the "Parliamentum Diabolicum," so called from the number of attainders passed against the Yorkists. The year 1467 however saw Edward IV and his Queen keeping their Christmas here, while less than two years later her father and brother were beheaded on Gosford Green (Aug. 1469).

After the king's landing at Holderness in 1471 the king-maker, declining a contest, occupied the town for the Lancastrians, and Edward passing on to London soon after turned and defeated the earl at Barnet. After Tewkesbury Edward paid the city another visit, and in return for its disloyalty seized its liberties and franchises, and only restored them for a fine of 500 marks. Royal visits still continued. Richard III came in 1483 to see the plays at the Feast of Corpus Christi; in 1485 Henry VII stayed at the mayor's house after his victory at Bosworth Field; and in 1487 kept St. George's Day at the Monastery, when the Prior at the service cursed, by "bell, book, and candle," all who should question the king's right to the throne. The importance of the Gilds is shown by the king and queen being made a brother and sister of the Trinity Gild; and the part that pageantry played in the lives of all men is seen in the many occasions on which kings and princes came hither to be entertained, not only with the plays "acted by the Grey Friars" but those in which the "hard-handed men" of, for instance, the Gild of the Sheremen and Tailors, "toil'd their unbreathed memories" in setting forth such subjects as the Birth of Christ and the Murder of the Innocents. But although Henry VIII himself was received in 1511 with pageantry and stayed at the Priory, royal favours and monastic hospitality availed neither men nor buildings when the Dissolution came. On 15th January, 1539, Thomas Camswell, the last Prior of St. Mary's, surrendered. "The Prior," reported Dr. London, the king's commissioner, "is a sad, honest priest as his neighbours do report him, and is a Bachelor of Divinity. He gave his house unto the

13

king's grace willingly and so in like manner did all his brethren." The Doctor asks for good pensions for the dispossessed, not on the plea of justice but so that "others perceiving that these men be liberally handled will with better will not only surrender their houses, but also leave the same in the better state to the King's use."

The yearly revenue had been certified in the valuation at £731 19s. 5d. Deducting a Fee-Ferme rent to the Crown, reserved by Roger de Montalt, and other annual payments, the clear remainder was £499 7s. 4d. Bishop Rowland Lee, writing to "my singular good Lord Cromwell," implies that he had a promise from him to spare the church. "My good Lord," he says, "help me and the City both in this and that the church may stand, whereby I may keep my name, and the City have commodity and ease to their desire, which shall follow if by your goodness it might be brought to a collegiate church, as Lichfield, and so that fair City shall have a perpetual comfort of the same, as knoweth the Holy Trinity, who preserve your Lordship in honour to your heart's comfort."

But his entreaties, and those of the mayor and corporation, were all in vain, the church and monastic buildings were dismantled and destroyed piecemeal, and like so many other magnificent structures became a mere quarry for mean buildings and the mending of roads.

14

The site having been granted by Henry VIII to two gentlemen named Combes and Stansfield, passed soon into the hands of John Hales, the founder of the Free School, and in Elizabeth's reign was purchased by the Corporation.

The changes in religious opinion of the successive sovereigns were felt here by many poor victims. Seven persons were burnt in 1519 for having in their possession the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed in English, and for refusing to obey the Pope or his agents, opinions and acts that would have been counted meritorious twenty years later. In 1555 Queen Mary burnt three Protestants in the old quarry in Little Park—Laurence Saunders, a well-known preacher, Robert Glover, M.A., and Cornelius Bongey.

Ten years after this Queen Elizabeth's visit was the occasion of much pageantry and performing of plays by the Tanners', Drapers', Smiths', and Weavers' Companies, and in 1575 the men of Coventry gave their play of "Hock Tuesday" before her at Kenilworth Castle. In 1566 Queen Mary of Scots was in ward here, in the mayoress' parlour, and in 1569 at the Bull Inn.

Coming down to the opening of the Civil War we find that a few days before the raising of his standard at Nottingham Charles summoned the city to admit him with three hundred cavaliers, and received for answer that it was quite ready to receive his Majesty with no more than two hundred. Whereupon he retired in displeasure, and reappeared some days later with the threat to lay the city in ruins if it should persist in its disloyalty. The townsfolk being in no mind to receive a garrison, the King planted cannon against Newgate and broke down the gates but was met with a fierce musquetry fire from the walls, followed up by a vigorous sally, in which the citizens did much execution and took two cannon.

To prevent the like happening again, the walls were in 1662 breached in many places and made incapable of defence. Just one hundred years later New-gate was taken down, and others followed from time to time, until now there are left only the remains of two of the lesser ones—Cook Street Gate, a crumbling shell (p. 7), and the adjacent Swanswell or Priory Gate, blocked up and used as a dwelling.

In 1771 was finally destroyed the famous Cross which had been built, 1541-3, by Sir William Hollis, once Lord Mayor of London, who came of a Coventry family. It was described by Dugdale as "one of the chief things wherein this City most glories, which for workmanship and beauty is inferior to none in England." A few relics of it exist in St. Mary Hall, a statue of Henry VI, and, in the oriel, two smaller figures. So too does the very interesting contract for its building, which shows how much was left to the craftsman's pride in his work and how little he was trammelled by conditions, save that the work was to be "finished in all points, as well in imagery work, pictures, and finials, according to the due form and proportion of the Cross at Abingdon."

15

Another building, which was destroyed in 1820, was the Pilgrims' Rest, a fine timbered house of three storeys, "supposed," as the inscription upon it records, "to have been the hostel or inn for the maintenance and entertainment of the palmers and other visitors to the Priory." Some pieces of carved work were patched together in the windows of the inn built on its site and there remain.

The modern history of Coventry, consisting of the ordinary events and vicissitudes of civic life and the changes and fluctuations in its trades, apart from that of its parish churches which is elsewhere given, does not come within the scope of this handbook.



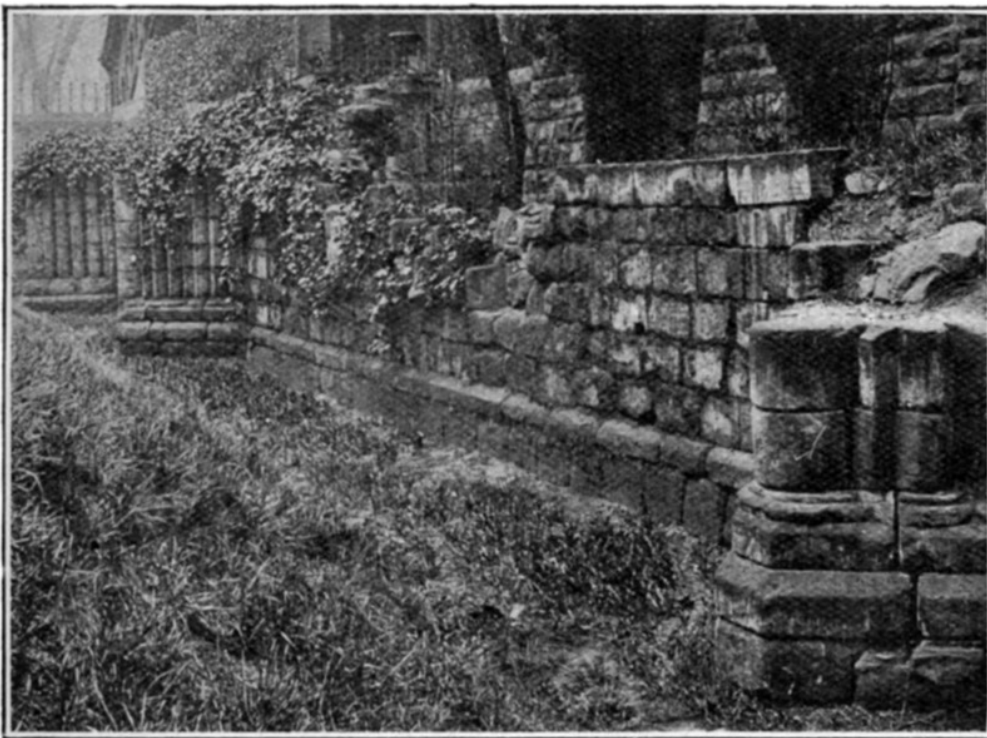
SEAL OF THE PRIORY.

[ToList](#)

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] St. Osburg's name is not found in the Calendar. As at the Dissolution the Cathedral possessed relics of St. Osborne, including his head in copper and gilt, these saints may be identical.
- [2] Earl Street and Bishop Street are still principal streets in either half of the town.
- [3] The walls of London were about three and a quarter miles long (including the river front), with ten or eleven gates; those of York three miles, of Chester hardly two.

16



INTERIOR OF THE WEST END OF THE PRIORY CHURCH.

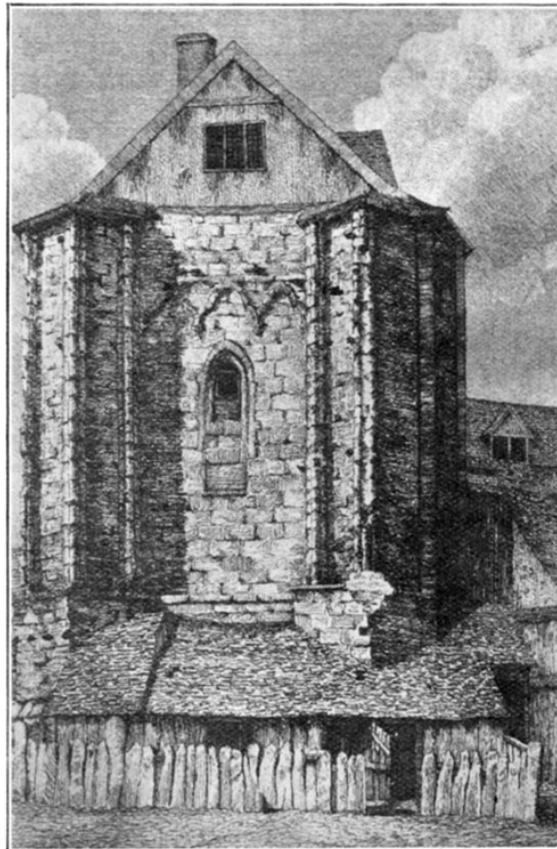
[ToList](#)

The Priory buildings and grounds covered a large area to the North of the two parish churches on the gentle slope descending to the little river Sherbourne, Priory Row forming its southern boundary.

The church occupied the South-West portion of this site, extending about 400 feet from the excavated west end to a point a little beyond the narrow lane called Hill Top. The excavation shows that the church stood on a sloping site, the floor level being some ten feet lower than that of Trinity Church. It was cruciform, with two western towers and a central one, and is believed to have had three spires similar to those of Lichfield but probably earlier in point of date. On the substructure of the North-West Tower now stands the house of the *mistress* of the Girls' Blue Coat School. The interior of the West end to a height of 5 to 8 feet, with the responds of the nave arcades and of the tower arches, is visible and in good condition. The beginning of the turret stair in the South-West tower is exposed, but the basement of the house unfortunately occupies the lower part of the northern one. The exterior of this is however easily accessible from an enclosure known as the Wood Yard, the much decayed spreading plinth and a few feet of walling above it not having been destroyed. Above this, grievous damage has been perpetrated by the casing and complete obliteration of the mouldings and arcading which remained. The towers were placed outside the line of the aisles as at Wells, the total width of the West front, 145 feet, being nearly the same in both cases. There are still indications of the position of the great west door, but the height of the inner plinth shows that there was always a descent of several steps into the church. At the south transept where was "the Minster durra that openeth to the Trinite Churchyarde," the descent must have been considerable. The remains show that the nave dated from the first half of the thirteenth century, while fragments of wall near the site of the transept with indications of lancet window openings are probably a little earlier than the west end.

17

18



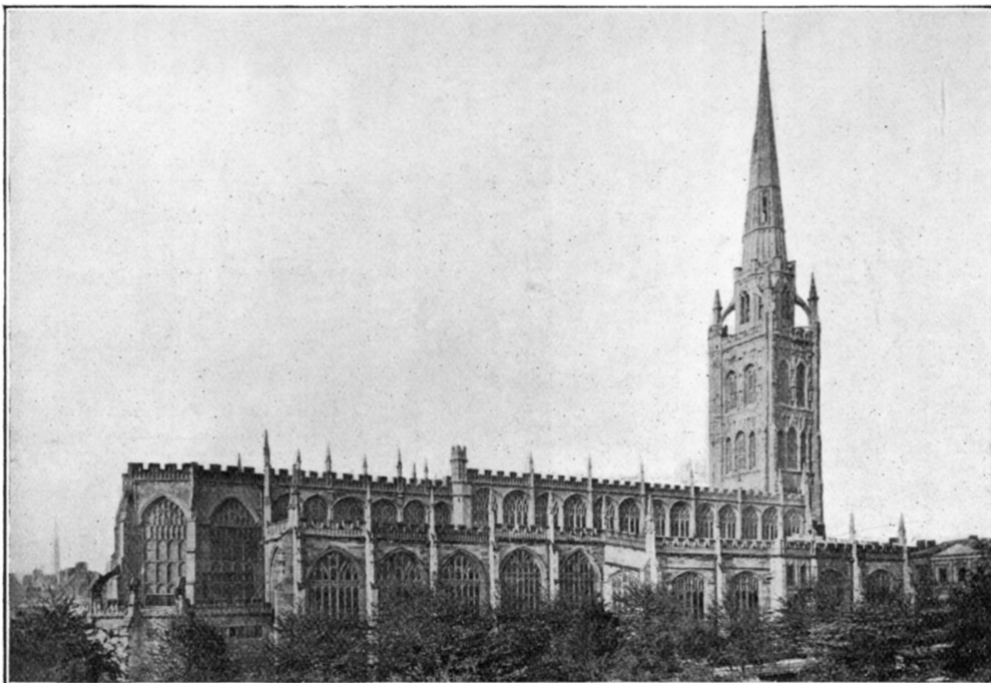
REMAINS OF THE N.W. TOWER (IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY).

ToList

Whether the church of Leofric and Godiva, dedicated in 1043, had survived wholly or in part until this time cannot be known, but, judging from the history of most other great monastic churches and from the known wealth of the monastery, it may almost be taken for granted that the Norman bishops and priors rebuilt much if not all. Some relics of Norman work have been found but the covering of the site with roads, graves and houses precludes the systematic exploration and survey which alone could solve this question and make clear the outlines of the plan of the whole establishment.

The entrance to some wine-cellars in Priory Row gives access to the old pavement level of part of the choir and transept. From the fact that a brick vault forms the roof the cellars have often been looked upon as the crypt of the church but this is erroneous; the vault is a later insertion and if any crypt exists it lies below this level. To the east of the cathedral was the Bishop's Palace, the gardens of it extending over the detached burial ground of St. Michael's to the east of Priory Street. The grandeur of this assemblage of buildings grouping, with the spires of the churches behind and rising so magnificently above the houses of the city can best be realized by going to the top of Bishop Street whence may be obtained the finest view of the two spires that remain (see p. 2).

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH



ST. MICHAEL'S FROM THE NORTH.

[ToList](#)

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

CHAPTER I

[ToC](#)

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The early history of St. Michael's Church is very obscure. The fact that Domesday mentions no parish churches proves nothing. There can be little doubt that one at least existed. Though we have an earlier record of St. Michael's it is commonly held that Trinity is the elder foundation.

Of St. Michael's the first notice we have is when Ranulph, Earl of Chester, in the days of Stephen, about 1150, granted the "Chapel" of St. Michael to Laurence, Prior, and the Convent of St. Mary, "being satisfied by the testimony of divers persons, as well Clergy as Laity, that it was

their right." Fourteen dependent chapels in the neighbourhood or within a few miles went with it and the number of these dependencies is held to show that it was "a primitive Saxon parish and of considerable importance." In 1192 Ranulph Blundeville, grandson of the former Ranulph, gave tithe of his lands and rents in Coventry and bound his officers under pain of a grievous curse to make due payment.

In the early thirteenth century a dispute arose between Bishop Geoffrey de Muschamp and the Priory as to the right of presentation, the Bishop claiming on the ground of being Abbot as well as Bishop. This was settled in 1241 by the Priory renouncing its claim in consideration of receiving a share of the income but in 1248 an exchange was effected, the Priory giving the advowsons of Ryton and Bubbenhall⁴¹ (not far from Coventry) for St. Michael and its chapels and engaging to provide proper secular priests with competent support. In 1260 the church was appropriated to the monastery together with Holy Trinity and its chapels and although in the arrangement of 1248 twenty-four marks (£16) had been assigned to the vicarage, in 1291 we find the priory receiving fifty marks and paying the vicar eight and a half.

Since 1537 the patronage has with that of Trinity, been exercised by the Crown.

The internal evidence of the date of the building is given in the description of the fabric. Of external evidence in the shape of records or deeds we have very little. Tradition says that there was once a brass tablet in the church bearing the following lines:

William and Adam built the Tower,
Ann and Mary built the Spire;
William and Adam built the Church,
Ann and Mary built the Choir.

Now we know that William and Adam Botoner, who were each Mayor thrice between 1358 and 1385, built the tower, spending upon it £100 a year for twenty-two years, but what foundation there is for the other statements cannot now be determined. The tower was in building from 1373 to 1394, and the choir is contemporary with it, the nave was in building from 1432 to 1450, and the spire was begun in 1430. As William was Mayor in 1358 it can hardly have been less than one hundred years after his birth that both nave and spire were begun. It is however, likely that other members of the family (if not he, by bequest) contributed largely to the general building fund.

Much of the history of a parish church is concerned with its internal economy but even the records of this are not quite trivial for they enlighten us on many points wherein we are rightly curious. We are, for instance, constantly reminded, as Dr. Gasquet points out in "Mediaeval Parish Life," that "religious life permeated society in the Middle Ages, particularly in the fifteenth century, through the minor confraternities" or guilds.

Thus the Drapers' Guild made itself responsible not only for the upkeep of the Lady Chapel but also for the lights always burning on the Rood-loft, every Master paying four pence for each "prentys" and every "Jurneman" four pence. The cost of lights formed a serious item in church expenditure, needing the rent of houses and lands for their maintenance. Guy de Tyllbrooke, vicar in the late thirteenth century, gave all his lands and buildings on the south side of the church to maintain a light before the high altar, day and night, for ever, "and all persons who shall convert this gift to any other use directly or indirectly shall incur the malediction of Almighty God, the Blessed Virgin, St. Michael and All Saints."

Royal visits to the church have been noticed in the history of the priory and city, especially that in 1450 which was apparently intended to mark the completion of the church. Reference has also been made to the plays and pageants with which such visitors were entertained. The site for the performance of the cycle of Corpus Christi plays was the churchyard on the north of St. Michael's. Queen Margaret, whose visits were so frequent that the city acquired the fanciful title of "the Queen's Bower" came over from Kenilworth on the Eve of the Feast in 1456, "at which time she would not be met, but privily to see the play there on the morrow and she saw then all the pageants played save Doomsday, which might not be played for lack of day and she was lodged at Richard Wood's the Grocer."

There is evident reference to the dedication of the church in the pageant of the "Nine Orders of Angels" shown before Henry VIII and Queen Catherine in 1510 (p. 47).

The history of the church since the Reformation has been not unlike that of a vast number of others. Fanatic destruction, followed by tasteless and incongruous innovations, and these again by "restorations" sometimes as destructive, sometimes as tasteless, and nearly always feeble; such is their common history. In 1569 even the Register books were destroyed because they contained marks of popery, while from 1576 onward a want of repair is plainly suggested by frequent items of expenditure for catching the staves (starlings) in the church, at one time for a net, at another for "a bowe and bolts and lyme." In 1611 James I addressed a strongly worded letter to the Mayor and Corporation and the Vicar requiring them to reform the practice of receiving the Holy Sacrament standing or sitting instead of kneeling, "As we our Self in our person do carefully perform it." Whereupon the Bishop wrote that he "felt persuaded that there were not above seven of any note who did not conform themselves" to the church ordinances; while the Vicar said he "did not know of *half seven* of any note but do the like."

A Puritanical writer in 1635 thus mentions the changed position of the Communion Table, which had formerly stood away from the east wall: "The Communion Table was altered which cost a great deal of money; and that which is worst of all, three stepps made to go to the Comm'n Table altar fashion—God grant it continueth not long." Even the font, given by John Cross, mayor,

in 1394, had to give place in 1645 to something less offensive to Puritan feeling, and in the same year the brass eagle, given in 1359 by William Botoner, was "sold by order of vestry for 5*d.* the lb., 8*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*" The rehangng of the bells in 1674 led to the destruction of the beautiful groined vault within the tower, and the year 1764 saw the completion of a series of galleries all round the church. Throughout all this destruction and desecration the citizens happily retained their pride in the great steeple, and by constant attention and rebuildngs contrived to preserve it when negligence might have caused its ruin. The scrupulous care given to such work is well shown by items in an account for repairs, of date 1580:

Payed to George Aster for poyntyng ye steple	£ 7	2	8
Payed for 3 quarter and a halfe of lyme		13	4
Payed for egges		8	4
Payed for glovers pecis, woode & tallowe, abowte the lyme		5	6
Payed for a load sand			7½
Payed for 4 stryke of mawlte and gryndyng		7	8½
Payd for 6 gallons of worte more		2	0
Payd for gatherynge of slates & oyster shelles			3¼
Payd to Cookson for the cradle and 3 other pulleesses		5	8

The glovers' snippings were for making size, which, with the eggs, malt and wort were used in place of water for tempering the mortar. Lightning seriously damaged the spire in 1655 and 1694, in the former case causing much injury to the nave roof by falling stone. In 1793 Wyatt, the architect responsible for so much destruction of Mediæval work in various cathedrals, advised that a timber framework to carry the bells should be built up within the tower from the ground and that the tower arch should be bricked up. All this has been changed since 1885, the bells now hang (but are not pealed) in the octagon, the chimes and clock are in the chamber below, the arch is opened and the groining restored.

All galleries had been taken down in 1849 and the present seats, giving room for near 2,500 persons, introduced, while the incongruous wall-arcading in the apse was soon after added. At the same period many important sepulchral monuments, probably stigmatized as "excrescences," were taken down and removed to other parts of the church.

25

Five years after this the exterior of the aisle walls was recased with the same friable sandstone. In 1860 the reredos was erected, the subjects of the panels being the sacrifices of Abel, Noah, Melchisedec, and Abraham, and the Last Supper. To the latest restoration, which included entire recasing of tower and spire, clearstories and chancel, the new sacristy at the south east, and other work, Mr. George Woodcock, a Coventry citizen, gave £10,500, and the sum of £39,500 was raised and expended, the re-opening taking place on 22nd April, 1890.

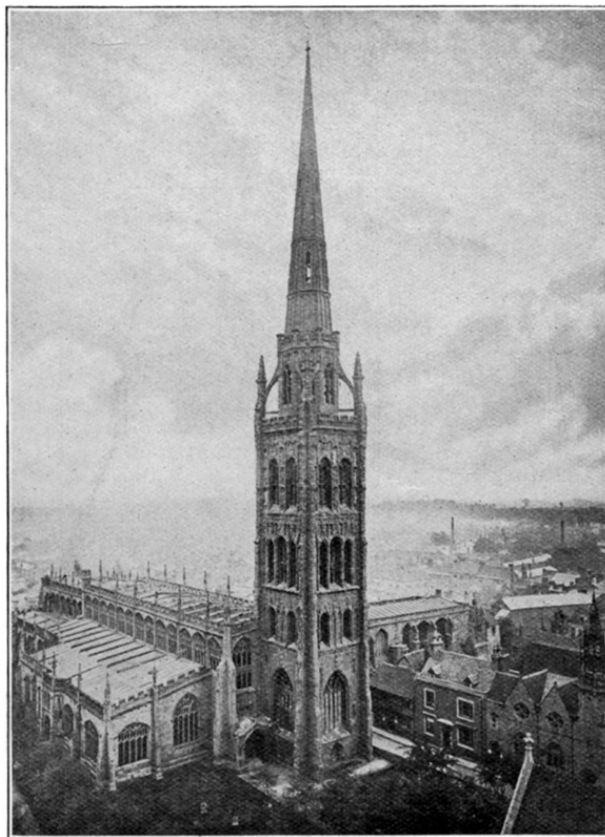
In 1850 a dispute of considerable public interest with regard to the levying of the church rate between the vicar and the wardens and overseers was decided in the Court of Queen's Bench. An Act of Parliament of 1780 had empowered the wardens to levy a rate in lieu of tithe for the stipend of the vicar, to produce not less than £280 nor more than £300. The wardens having ever since allowed their powers to remain in abeyance, the vicar claimed the right to make the rate as his predecessors had done. Lord Campbell and three other judges were however unanimous in giving judgement against him.

The latest event in the history of the church is probably the most important. It has now been constituted a pro-cathedral for the proposed Diocese of Warwickshire, and a Capitular body has been formed. The statutes were promulgated by the Bishop of Worcester on the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, 1908. The Chapter now consists of twenty-four members:—the Bishop, the Vicar of St. Michael's (Rev. Prof. J.H.B. Masterman), the Archdeacon of Coventry, the Chancellor of the Diocese, ten priest canons and ten lay canons, with provision for the admission of a future second archdeacon. There are resemblances here to the constitution of the Southwark Chapter, consisting of four clerical and four lay canons, but at Coventry some of the lay canons are elective and for fixed periods. Doubtless the immense increase of population in the county, especially in this part (Birmingham is already a separate diocese), demands further oversight and much strenuous church work, and doubtless, too, the same religious enthusiasm which brought into existence the beautiful structures of Coventry's golden age will be able to meet the demand and cope with the new problems and aspirations of the present day. But the archaeologist trembles to think what may be done should the attempt be made to transform a building planned on the simplest parish-church lines into the semblance of a cathedral. It cannot be successful, and the original character of the church is but too likely to be sacrificed in the attempt.

26

FOOTNOTES:

[4] These have ever since remained prebends of Lichfield.



ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH.

[ToList](#)

CHAPTER II

[ToC](#)

THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

The church is built on a site descending towards the east, so that the chancel floor is more than twelve feet above the present street level. The narrow street on the south, Bayley Lane, gives us a succession of picturesque partial views but no general one, while on the north the rather formal avenue dividing the churchyard obscures much of the structure. On the whole, the most comprehensive prospect is to be had from the north-east, at the lower end of Priory Row. But no general point of view is needed, external or internal, to enable us to understand the plan or arrangement, which is almost as simple in form as a village church.

The typical English church plan consists of a nave with aisles, a long unaisled chancel with square east end, porches or doors on north and south, and a western tower, and this, save for its apsidal east end, but amplified by accretions in the form of chapels belonging to the many Gilds of the city, is the plan of St. Michael's.

In no part, however, do we find the chapels so set as to produce a pseudo-cruciform plan.

Before the latest restoration the walls were entirely of the local red sandstone, very similar in quality and appearance to that of which Chester Cathedral was built, and the extent of its decay, especially on the tower, was as grievous. Hardly a piece of external moulding or carving preserved its original profile or form, and some of the tower buttresses had lost so large a proportion of their substance not far above ground that they appeared to hang to the walls rather than support them. All save the aisles, which were refaced in the sixties, have now been cased with Runcorn Stone nearly the same in colour and much harder in texture.

The special glory of the church is its **steeple**. No doubt intentionally its height of 300 feet is practically equal to the length of the church. Only one other parish church, Louth in Lincolnshire,

has a steeple as high as this, and those of only two English cathedrals, Salisbury and Norwich, exceed it.

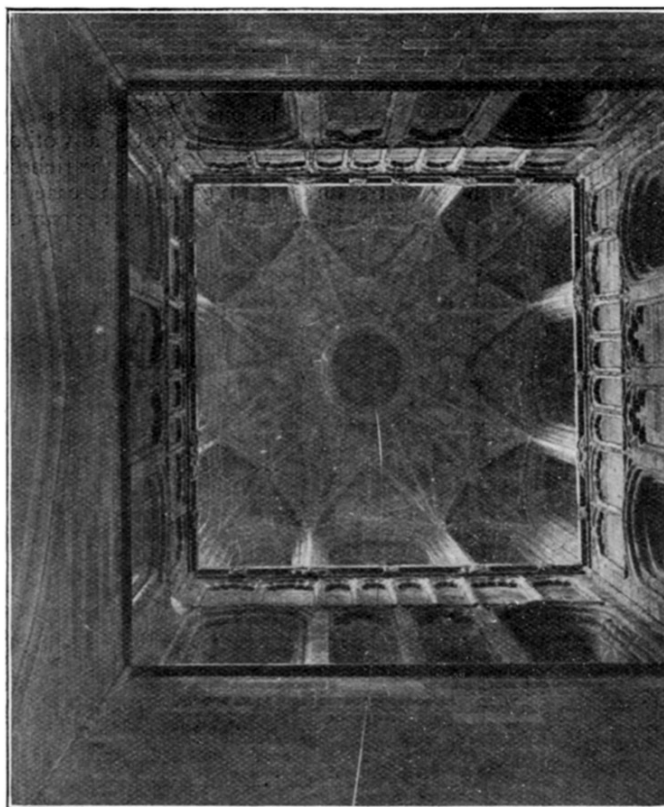
There is, however, an essential difference to be noted in the position of these spires, those of the cathedrals at the centre, the crowning point in the composition, those of the parish churches at the west end, springing sheer from the ground. While the former have a more intimate relation to the building the latter have an almost independent existence in keeping with the theory which regards them more as symbols of municipal pride and power than as expressions of spiritual aspiration.

But however mixed the motives for their erection, religious forms and symbolism governed the design. Thus we have here three principal divisions—tower, octagon, spire, and nine stories or stages in all, six belonging to the tower and octagon, and three to the spire. Then in its dimensions we find that the total height is 300 feet,^[5] the plan (exclusive of buttresses) is 30 feet square, while in its proportions the number 30 is interwoven, so to speak, with a simple arithmetical progression of heights in each story. Thus it is 30 feet from the ground to the spring of the lowest five-light windows, 30 feet again to the spring of the single-light windows, 27 feet more to the spring of the grouped windows above, and another 30 to the spring of the belfry windows. Thence it is 15 feet to the cornice below the battlements. The remainder is divided into a series of 20 feet heights, two twenties from cornice to top of parapet of octagon, 20 in each of the two decorated stages of the spire, 20 to centre of the upper spire-lights, three twenties to the finial. If we look at the stories as marked by the string-courses below the windows we find 50 feet given to the door and great window and then 20, 30, and 40 feet stages, reaching to the top of the parapet. The reader will have noticed the interposition of a 27 feet space among the thirties, and the reason for this is worth explaining.

It is now known that the tower could not be built in line with the centre of the proposed new nave because of the existence of a filled-in pit or quarry at its north-west angle. But the builder was rash enough to build the north-west buttresses beyond the edge of the old excavation and resting on the looser material. The consequences might have been foreseen. By the time the building had reached the grouped windows the settlement or sinking was considerable and an effort was made to remedy it, first by reducing the height of this (the weakest story), by one yard and next by starting the courses level once more. Five hundred years later and we find that whereas the sinking is 7½ inches near the ground level it is only 4 inches at the windows, plainly showing that it had sunk 3½ inches before the remedy was applied and four inches since. The writer is informed by the architect (Mr. J. Oldrid Scott) that all this angle was so full of rents and cracks that (coupled with the decay of the stone, especially in the buttresses) it was surprising that the whole had not fallen. A curious disregard of what we look on as a natural sentiment is to be noted in this connection, for the builders used a quantity of fine sepulchral slabs from the churchyard as filling for the foundations.

31

32



INTERIOR OF THE TOWER FROM BELOW.

ToList

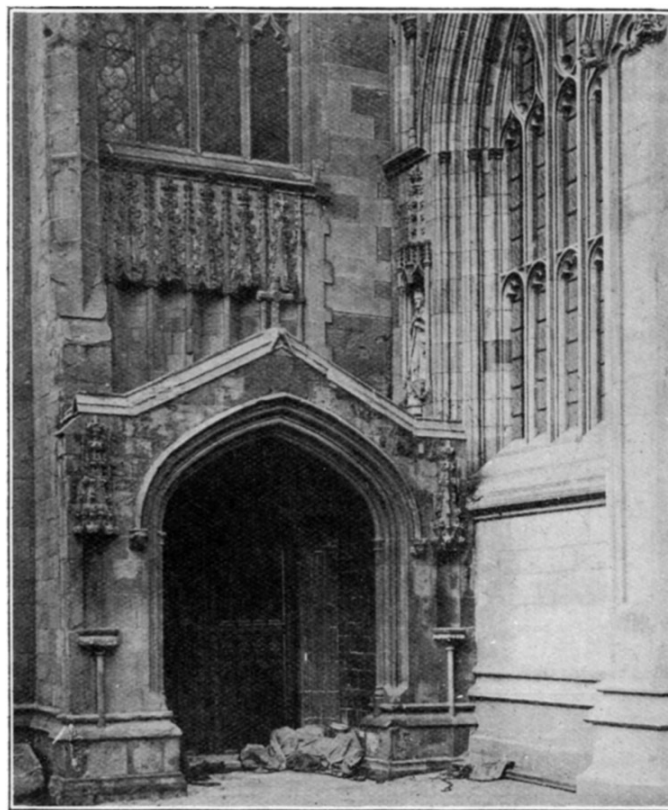
In magnificence of design the tower exceeds that of any other parish church in England, the uppermost story being the richest in detail. The variety of treatment and gradual increase in elaboration of the upper stories is admirable, the larger expanses of wall in the lower giving the necessary effect of stability to the whole. The **west door** is very insignificant, and might perhaps,

with advantage to the composition, have been left out. It has the only four-centred arch in the whole. On each side of the great windows are niches with (restored) figures of saints and benefactors, twelve in all, including Earl Leofric and his famous wife, the Botoners and several kings. Sculpture appears again on the belfry stage. On the west and north sides the niches are in three tiers of three on either hand of the tall louvred windows, but on the south and east sides one tier is absorbed by the stair turret. All these have been renewed, but the remains of some of those which were taken down can now be seen in the crypt, and the one which is best preserved, by a happy coincidence the patron saint, is now placed within the church.

The octagon, which connects so finely the tower and spire, has four two-light windows on the cardinal sides, the other sides having blank panelling of similar design. Its parapet has square pinnacles, intended to carry seated figures. From each of the great tower pinnacles two ogee-shaped flying buttresses spring to the near angles of the octagon. A recent writer criticizes these as too flimsy in effect, but the fact that they are in pairs obviates this defect from most points of view. The walls of the octagon are $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick at the base, but, as the inner slope of the spire begins at the level of the window transoms, the thickness at its parapet is more than 3 feet. The greater weight in this part corrects any tendency in the spire to push outwards the upright walls of the octagon; so well has it done this that no artificial helps, such as iron stays or bands, have been found necessary to add to its stability. Though so slender in appearance, its stonework is thicker than that of many later spires, for whereas Kettering is 14 inches thick for the first 10 feet and only 6 inches above, while Louth decreases from 10 to 5, St. Michael's diminishes from 17 to 11. The inclination from the upright of its sides is very slight, less than that of most others; Chichester having an angle of $7\frac{1}{2}^\circ$, Kettering 6° , Louth 5° , St. Michael's $4\frac{1}{2}^\circ$.

33

34



THE WEST PORCH.

ToList

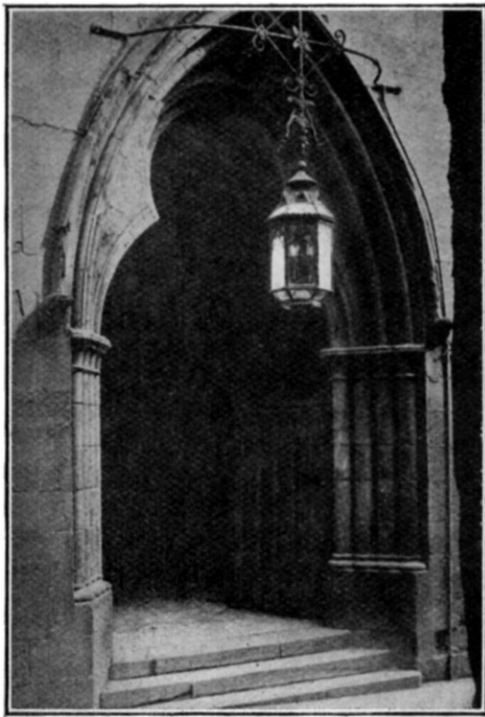
The decoration of the spire is admirably designed in relation to the slenderness of the tower, and its own height above the eye. The first stage is panelled so as not to present too great a contrast to the octagon, and the next is also panelled and has narrow canopied slits on alternate sides, with four thin buttress-like projections on each face. These provide the slight entasis to the outline which is found in so many spires, as it is in classic columns, and is designed to correct the appearance of hollowness which would occur in so long a straight line. The upper two-thirds of the spire has triple angle rolls, and, just halfway in the total height, are eight canopied panels of which four are pierced. The beauty of the steeple and its pre-eminence among those belonging to parish churches (even if such a reservation be necessary) sufficiently justifies the length of this description.

The oldest existing part of the church is the large **south porch**, almost facing the entrance to St. Mary Hall. The date of this is not later than 1300. Each jamb of the outside arch has four external and two internal attached shafts; the pointed arch is deeply moulded, while the arch rising from the fourth shaft is of round-headed trefoil form. The ceiling is vaulted with diagonal and intermediate ribs, and has the appearance of having been added rather later.

A doorway on its east side led to the Cappers' Chapel and there is a chamber over the porch for centuries appropriated to the meetings of the Cappers' Company. The present chapel and chamber are contemporary with the nave.

35

The external wall of the Dyers' Chapel (now the Baptistery) is canted so as not to block the



SOUTH PORCH, FROM ST. MARY HALL.

Lane, St. Mary Hall having been already built. Passing east, the road dips gradually and gives this end of the church a more imposing elevation. After the Cappers' Chapel, there is only a single aisle forming the Mercers' Chapel and extending as far as the Presbytery. A door here, made in 1750, is opposite to the Drapers' Hall. The apse is now encircled with a series of sacristies divided into five chambers and spanned by flying buttresses. The first two bays on the south were built at the last restoration the vestry then removed not being part of the original design. Beneath them on the ground level is the engine-room pertaining to the organ. Though sometimes spoken of as an Ambulatory its position on a lower level, its original want of connection with the south side and above all the need for sacristies in so large a church dispose of the idea.

36

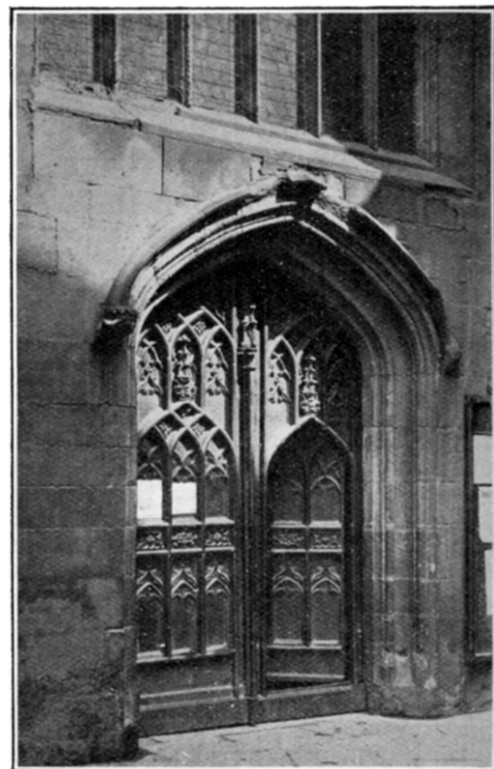
Some have thought that the apsidal Lady Chapel of Lichfield Cathedral built about fifty years earlier suggested an apsidal termination in the design of Coventry, but a certain difficulty in the way of the designer may have led him to adopt this solution. The normal Perpendicular east end had one large window, but owing to the great width of this chancel the proportions of such a one would have been nearly square, and the spring of the arch have been very low. A few years later and the depressed four-centred arch might have been adopted but, fortunately, its time was not yet.

ToList

The plans of the apses of Lichfield and Coventry differ in the angle at which the sides are inclined to the chord of the apse, the former having the usual angle of 45° , the latter one of more than 60° . Externally this is not so pleasant as the more "commonplace" form, the great dissimilarity of the several angles being unsatisfactory and the third side too quickly lost to view, but within the church these points are not noticed.

So little time elapsed between the building of the choir and nave that we find no marked difference of style as we proceed westward along either flank of the church. The **Lady Chapel**, known as the Drapers' Chapel, from its use and maintenance by that Gild, occupies the three bays of the North chancel aisle. From its elevation above the ground it was often spoken of as the "Chapel on the Mount," Capella Beatæ Mariæ de Monte. All the four windows are of seven lights, the three northern having a somewhat unusual transom band of fourteen quatrefoils, at the spring of the arch. The two windows of St. Lawrence's Chapel have a transom across the lights and a band of seven quatrefoils at the spring.

The buttresses of the Lady Chapel are rather richer in design than those of St. Lawrence's Chapel. The lower level of its parapet indicates some difference of date. The plan of this part of the church presents problems which bear on those connected with the rest of the church (p. 44). Beneath St. Lawrence's Chapel and extending under the north aisle westward are two crypts, entrance to them being by two doors from the churchyard, their position is shown on the general plan. It will be seen that the western one is of two aisles, each of three bays, while the eastern is only one bay in length. The entrance to the western was at first in the middle bay but this was blocked when the Girdlers' Chapel was built. That the eastern crypt was added later, and the present Lady Chapel later still is shown by the presence of windows in the east wall of both parts and other indications. But while the history of the church shows that the original Lady Chapel and crypt or charnel-house, were built soon after 1300, the present superstructures belong to a time about one hundred years later. Now as the western crypt may be safely assigned to the earlier date the Lady Chapel doubtless stood over it and flanked the old chancel of the church, in its normal position in fact as the existing one is now. But a point which remains to be explained is that the walls of the crypt are parallel to the line of the new chancel and not to the line of the old or new naves. It seems certain therefore that the inclination of the new chancel is a simple perpetuation of the old arrangement, and if not, the position of the crypt is hard to account for.



SOUTH-WEST DOORWAY.

37

ToList

It is generally supposed that these crypts were used as Mortuary Chapels and the eastern one has in fact a piscina and aumbry, showing that there was once an altar. But for some centuries they served as a charnel-house, and are so called in a papal grant of Indulgences. In 1640 there is an entry in the church accounts of five shillings for "cleansing the charnel-house and laying the bones and sculles in order."

They now contain fragments that have been removed or discovered in the course of various restorations. A small Norman scalloped capital, another of Early English workmanship and a voussoir showing the Norman zig-zag or chevron are interesting relics of structures earlier than anything now existing, while a number of the decayed statues from the tower find here a dark and damp repose very different from the airy outlook enjoyed by them for five centuries. It will be seen that they are near life size and are executed in a gray sandstone which has stood the weather much better than the red. The outer north aisle containing the Girdlers' Chapel on the east and the Smiths' or St. Andrew's Chapel on the west of the porch, is plainly of later date. The windows have depressed, distinctly four-centred arches, and in 1730 their five lights had simply cusped heads, the mullions running up to the architrave.

The **north porch** has only a slight projection. Above the four-centred arch are two two-light canopied windows opening into the church. The soffit of the doorway is panelled. On the west side where is now a canopied niche was formerly an external pulpit reached from within by the staircase which leads to the roof. It is shown in the 1730 view. On the east side are two odd little flying buttresses, intended apparently to repeat the inclined surface of the other side. The two north aisles are fortunately not carried westward so far as the nave, which projects a half bay beyond them and so prevents the otherwise unrelieved flatness of this part. The most effective of the porches is that on the west front, just north of the tower. It appears to have been built after the nave was finished, and may have been added expressly to provide a more dignified entrance to the church when Henry VI came in state in 1451, for it faces directly up the nave. The groining with cusped panels and numerous bosses has escaped restoration. The five niches above the porch are statueless, and so are those on the porch front. May they long continue so! The doors are largely original and are finely panelled and carved.

38

FOOTNOTES:

- [5] At the last restoration the height was reduced to 298 feet.

40



INTERIOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S FROM THE WEST.

ToList

41

CHAPTER III

ToC

THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

From within the door by which the church is usually entered, that near the south-west angle, we obtain an overpowering impression of the special characteristic of the interior, its spaciousness, for it is here more than 100 feet wide and the east window is nearly 240 feet distant.

The **nave**, which is 37 feet 6 inches wide in the clear, is wider than that of many cathedrals, and much exceeds that of most parish churches, the widest (Worstead) given in Brandon's "Parish Churches" being 29 feet. Boston alone exceeds it by about 3 feet. While the ordinary aisle width ranges from 10 to 14 feet, the north aisle here is 23 feet, the outer north and the south being each 17 feet. The total internal length is 265 feet, exclusive of the sacristy; Boston, the only larger one, being 284 feet, while very few exceed 200 feet, and most are far smaller. The greatest internal width is 120 feet; Manchester, a double-aisled collegiate church, is about the same, and York Minster is 106 feet. Finally, the area is about 22,800 square feet, probably greater than that of any other English parish church, indeed, St. Nicholas, Yarmouth, is the only one which pretends to rivalry in this respect. Size is, of course, only one element in the impressiveness of a building, and may even be neutralized by the treatment (as, for instance, in the Duomo of Florence and St. Peter's, Rome, by increasing the size of its parts rather than multiplying them), but these few comparisons will help the visitor to judge how far this element colours his appreciation of the whole. As an illustration of mediæval methods of church building, it is interesting to trace the growth of the structure with the help of the few historical notices already given and the evidence of the building itself. The subject is full of difficulties, and the writer does not hope to solve them conclusively, but to put before the reader the main points which have to be considered before forming a judgement.

Both historic and structural evidence agree that there was an existing smaller church when the tower was built in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, that the choir and apse were either contemporary, or begun a few years earlier, and that the nave was built between 1434 and 1450. The south porch and the west crypt (beneath the original Lady Chapel) are almost contemporary (p. 34), belonging to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Now the axis of the tower is parallel to the axis and walls of the nave, while the centre line of the choir is deflected towards the north

42



TOWER ARCH.

about 7°. Notwithstanding this, however, owing to the tower not being central with the nave, the axis of the choir, if prolonged, runs directly to the centre of the tower arch, as may easily be seen by anyone who stands there and looks along the ridge of the choir roof. (*See dotted line on Plan.*)

Next we see above the **tower arch** the mark of the old nave roof and the old north wall of the nave. These show that the south wall stood where the present one does, and the low-pitched fourteenth century roof-line suggests incidentally this alternative: *either* a clearstory had been added to the nave before the building of the new chancel or tower was in contemplation, *or*, when the huge tower was built it was felt necessary to raise the nave roof so as to lessen the disproportion. But, if we adopt the latter alternative we must accept too the improbability that this expense should have been incurred when the inadequacy of the old narrow nave of 15½ feet compared with a chancel of 33 feet must have been so obvious. This is one of the difficult questions.

Then it is held by some that the axis of the old nave and chancel was in line with that of the present choir; but the south porch, built more than one hundred years before the new nave, is at right angles with it which would hardly have been the case had the two naves not been on the same lines.

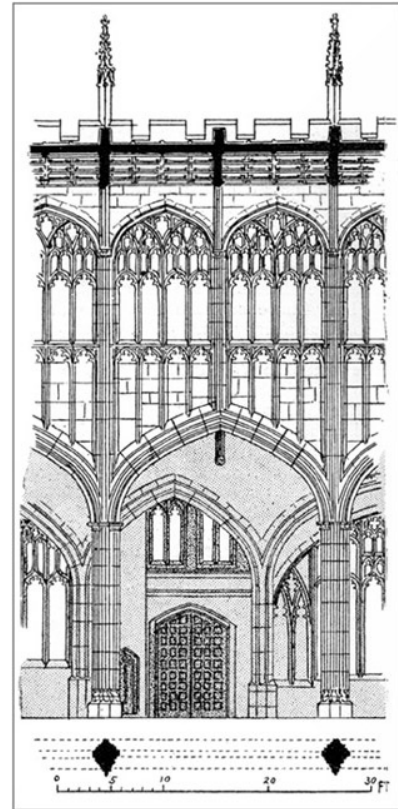
Needless to say the old east end could scarcely have extended beyond the present

nave, so that the new chancel was probably built without disturbing the old church. The position of the older Lady Chapel supports this view, while its bearing towards the north, as already pointed out, indicates that the deflection of the new chancel is simply copied from the older one.

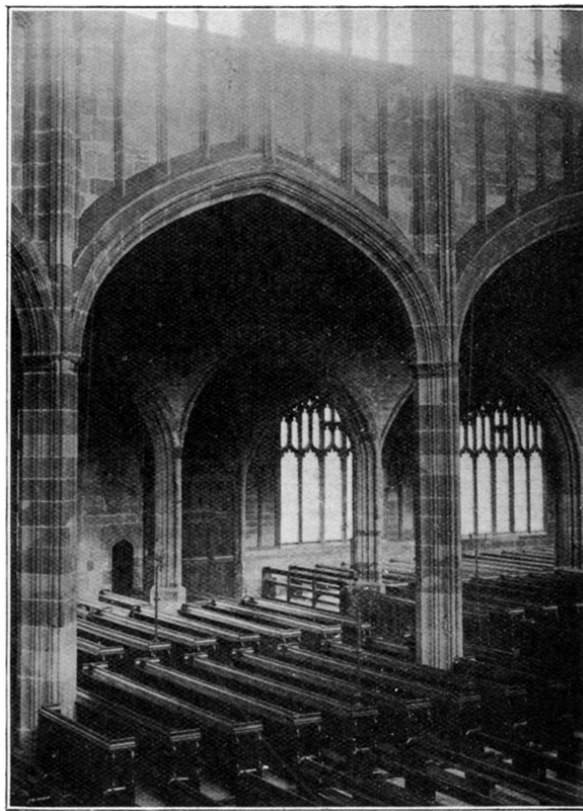
The position of the south porch proves also that the south aisle was as wide as the present one, while the fact that it was wider than the nave shows that it was almost certainly not designed at the same time.

The nave is of six bays and is 54 feet high at the centre, while each arch is 20 feet wide in the clear. The piers are slender, but, owing to the depth of the panelling above the arches and the large size of the windows, the weight upon them is reduced to a minimum. Shafts carried up from the ground support the roof brackets, and there are intermediate ones over the centre of each arch. The clearstory windows of four lights each are in pairs, and the mullions are carried down to form panelling and finish on the backs of the arches, which recede in two sloping faces and form a somewhat unusual feature in the treatment of the wall surface. The detail of the piers and arches is rather weak, even for Perpendicular work.

The **chancel** is about 93 feet long, and in height and width is 4 or 5 feet less than the corresponding nave measurements. Its width further diminishes by about 3½ feet in the length of the three bays. The omission of a chancel arch is a step towards the ideal simplicity of the late Perpendicular churches (*e.g.*, St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich), running from east to west without break, but the large rood piers and reduced width and height of chancel make the pause demanded in so long a church. The step at this point is of oak, and is probably the original sill of the rood screen. The large figures of SS. Peter and Paul were placed on the piers in 1861. Of the three arches which open on either hand the centre one is widest, having four-light windows, instead of three-light, over it. The panelling beneath the clearstory is richer than that in the nave. The five four-light windows of the apse are lofty and divided by two transoms, but the design is somewhat commonplace. The glass of the middle three is a memorial to Queen Adelaide, dated 1853. The other two are filled with fragments of the ancient stained glass of the church (p. 56).

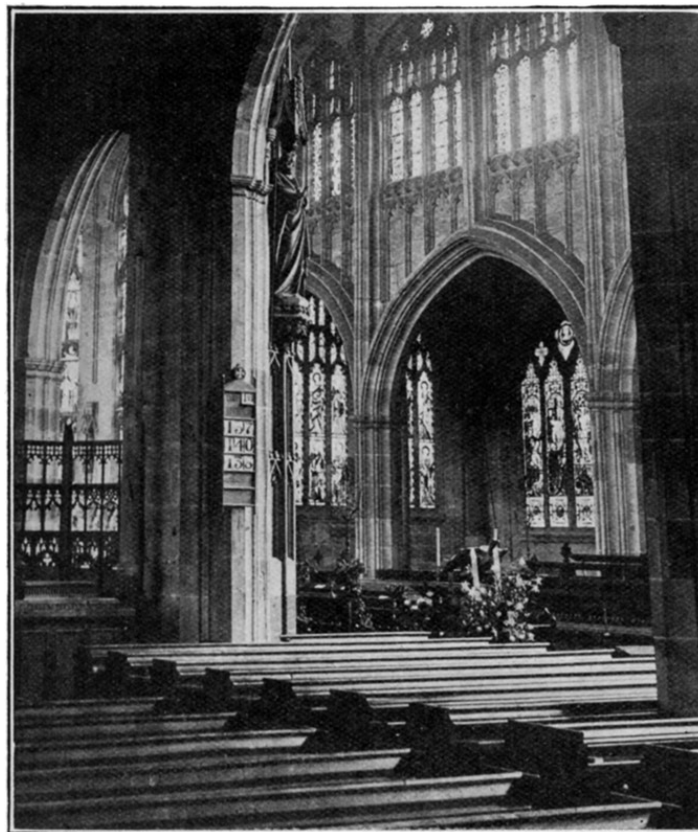


BAY OF NAVE, NORTH SIDE.



INTERIOR FROM THE SOUTH DOOR.

[To List](#)



THE CHOIR FROM ST. LAWRENCE'S CHAPEL.

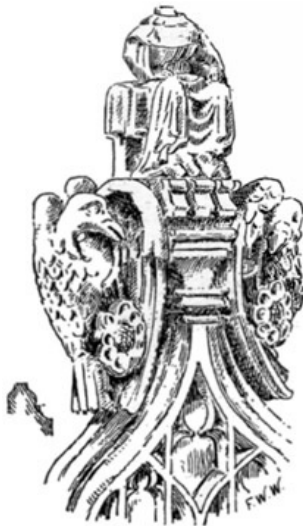
[To List](#)

The roof is very similar to that of the nave. Both are of very low pitch, with tie-beams supported by curved brackets. There are two longitudinal beams (purlins) on each side, and each division of the roof made by these main timbers is sub-divided by mouldings into panels, all the intersections and angles being decorated by carved bosses or pateræ, with angels upon the tie-beams. Where the roofs of nave and chancel join there is a cove to connect the two levels; and on the tie-beam above this was found a Latin inscription, giving the attributes and powers of the nine choirs of angels forming the hierarchy of Heaven. Translated it is as follows:

SERAPHIMS burn in love of God.
CHERUBIMS possess all knowledge.
THRONES, of them is judgement.

DOMINIONS preside over angelic spirits.
 VIRTUES effect miracles.
 POWERS have rule over demons.
 PRINCIPALITIES protect good men.
 ARCHANGELS are set over states.
 ANGELS are the messengers of the Lord.

Bare and shorn as it is of its ancient magnificence, St. Michael's is in its structure a monument of the importance and wealth of the Gilds. Many of them built or maintained chapels and altars, adding largely to the already spacious proportions given to the main structure by the munificence of a few rich citizens. That in 1491 there were eleven altars we know from the will of Thomas Bradmedow, directing that eleven torches, price 2s. 4d., be given every Good Friday, one to every altar. Besides the High Altar there were those of Our Lady, Jesus, Holy Trinity, St. John, St. Anne, St. Katherine, St. Thomas, St. Andrew, St. Lawrence, All Saints.



POPPY HEAD, LADY CHAPEL.

The application to the **Lady Chapel** of the present name, the "Drapers' Chapel," is probably subsequent to 1518, when John Haddon, a draper, provided by will for the support of a priest, "to sing in the Chapell of our Ladye in the Church of Saint Mychell." But long ere this, by an instrument dated from St. John Lateran, A.D. 1300, eighth year of Pope Boniface, Indulgences for forty days were granted for all persons coming to confess before her altar in St. Michael's Church on the Nativity, Conception, Annunciation and Assumption of the glorious Virgin Mary. Also 700 Indulgences for 720 days were granted for building "the Chapple and Charnell house of St. Michael, Coventry." The Drapers' Company was responsible for other things than the priest's stipend as this extract from their Rules shows: "1534. Ev'y mastur shall pay toward ye makyng clene of oure Lady Chapell in saynt Mychell's church and strawyng ye setus [seats] wt rusches in somer and pease strawe in wyntur, everyone yerely 2d."



A MISERERE, LADY CHAPEL.

The piers at the chancel entrance contain the staircases leading to the roofs and formerly to the rood loft. The screen on the west side of the chapel was put together from fragments brought together from various parts of the church. Against it, and on the south side, are fifteen of the ancient stalls. Several admirable ends and elbows remain, and some of the twelve ancient Misereres are of special interest. Three represent scenes from the popular mediæval allegory of "the Dance of Death."

The centre groups are: (1) a death bed, (2) a kneeling man being deprived of his shirt and a cripple waiting to receive it (?), and (3) a very well-expressed burial scene. The side groups in each show Death leading by the hand personages of various ranks, including a pope. Of the others, Satan in chains, the General Resurrection, and a delicately executed Tree of Jesse are the best.

Several monuments formerly in this chapel are now elsewhere in the church. A memorial to the Hon. F.W. Hood, killed in battle in 1814, is by Chantry. On the north wall is a brass plate bearing the following inscription:

Here lyeth M^r Thomas Bond, Draper, sometime Mayor of this Cittie and founder of the Hospitall of Bablake, who gave divers lands and tenements for the maintenance of ten poore men so long as the world shall endure and a woman to looke to them with many other good guifts; and died the XVIII day of March in the yeare of our Lord God MDVI.

The **Communion Table** is a fine example of early seventeenth century work, and outside the screen is a very beautiful oak chest, believed to date from the time of Henry VII. From the Lady Chapel we pass into that of St. Laurence. Its two windows are filled with glass to the memory of past mayors. The dates, 1860 and 1862, sufficiently suggest their artistic merit. Several old monuments are upon the north wall, one of 1648 with an extravagant inscription to Thomas Purefoy, a boy of nine; another to Mrs. Bathona Frodsham, a daughter of the John Hales who bought so much monastic property, and founded the Grammar School. The tomb of his first wife, Frideswede, near which he was buried, may be seen in the Dugdale view near the north porch.

The outer north aisle contained the Girdlers' Chapel. The arcade which divides the aisles shows the consummation of the process which converted columns into piers by the omission of capitals and bases and the continuation of the mouldings from pier into arch.

The altar was below the eastern window, the piscina (restored) stands on the south side.

The Company has been long extinct and no documents exist. We know, however, that Haye's Chantry was founded by a Girdler in 1390, for a Mass to be sung daily at All Saints' altar, and may therefore conclude that it was in this chapel.

In the two western bays of the same aisle was St. Andrew's Chapel, supported and probably

founded by the Smiths' Company. The first notice of its existence occurs in 1449, but as this part was not built until 1500 it was perhaps originally in the adjoining aisle. The window tracery is modern. The panelling within the internal arches and between the windows should be noted. The floor near the wall is partly paved with much worn ancient tiles.



CHEST IN NORTH AISLE.

ToList

Several large monuments have been brought hither from the Drapers' Chapel. An altar tomb of black marble is to the memory of Sir Thomas Berkeley, only son of Henry, Lord Berkeley, who died in 1611; another of 1640, to William Stanley, Master of the Merchant Taylors' Company of London and a benefactor of St. Bartholomew's Hospital and of his native city, Coventry. While these are ponderous and unlovely that of Julian Nethermyl, at the west end of the principal north aisle, is a work of interest and much beauty. It is an altar tomb with a sculptured panel on one end and one side, the other end and side having been next to walls. It is of interest as an early example of the Italian style then finding its way into England, and an example so free from Gothic influence that there can be little doubt that a foreign craftsman was employed upon it. On the centre of the long panel is a mutilated crucifix, and a brief inscription with a shield of arms beneath. On either hand kneel Julian Nethermyl and his wife, with five sons behind him and five daughters behind her. A cherub at each end pushes aside a curtain. The group of sons is well treated, the variations in pose and dress show the hand of one who was accustomed to study composition, and the result is very different from the formal repetition of equal or lessening figures usual on mediæval brasses and Elizabethan tombs. The Latin inscription is partly illegible, translated it runs:

50

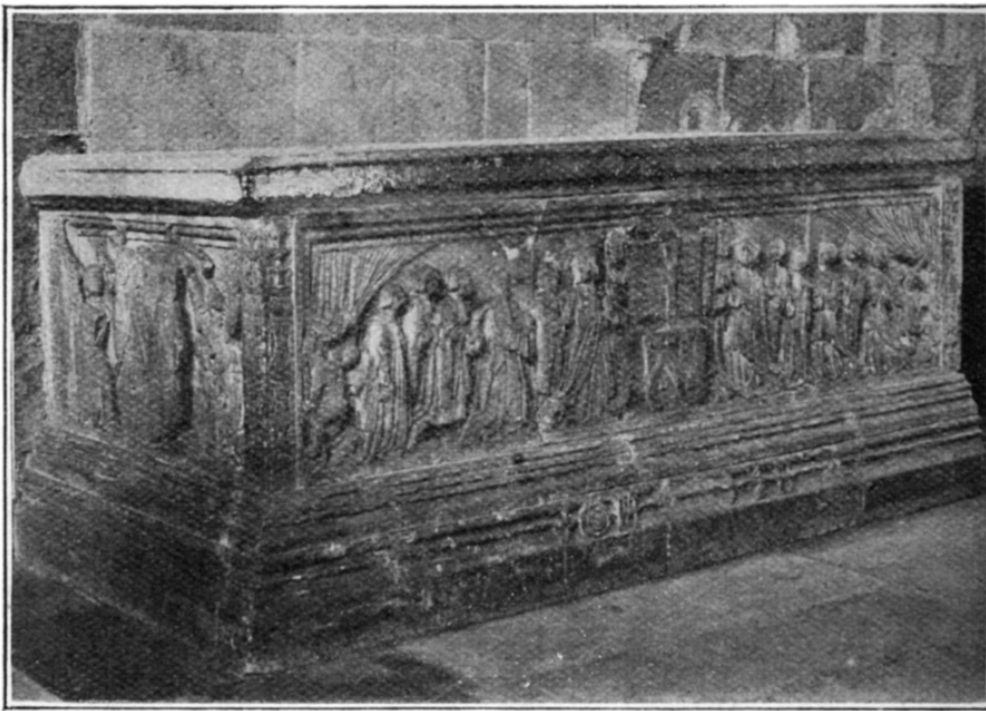
Here lies Julian Nethermyl, Draper, formerly Mayor of this City, who died the 11th day of the month of April in the year of our Lord 1539 and also Joan his wife, to whose souls God be propitious. Amen.

A small brass on the wall to the memory of Mary Hinton, wife of a vicar, who died in 1594, represents her kneeling at a faldstool, and facing a row of four swaddled infants laid upon the floor.

51

Near by is the old Purbeck marble font, said to have been given by John Cross, Mayor, in 1394.

As, however, the form, material, and shallow decoration are all quite consistent with a thirteenth-century date there can be little doubt that this one is the predecessor of that given by John Cross, which was condemned and removed by the Puritans as superstitious. A small brass, bearing a shield with four crosses, the ancient merchant mark, is fixed upon it.



THE NETHERMYL TOMB.

ToList

Beyond the west door is the north-east buttress of the tower, strengthened by a mass of masonry, part of which formed part of the old nave wall. The tower arch is high and very narrow, owing to the narrowness of the old nave. The interior of the tower is very effective, both from the height, which is almost 100 feet to the crown of the vault, and the beautiful lighting of the upper stages. Each of the large windows of the ground story is set in a recessed arch, and between the two lantern stages is a range of panelling. The vertical lines of the various stages are not continuous, a want of regularity, which would probably not have occurred had it been built a century later. Upon the floor of the tower are two small brasses, which mark respectively the centre of the tower and the point below the apex of the spire, showing that the spire has an inclination of 3 feet 6 inches towards the north-west. On the walls of the tower two very large brasses record the names of the Vicars of the church since 1242, and of the Bishops in whose Dioceses Coventry has been included from the earliest times. Of the latter, four were Bishops of Mercia, twenty-seven of Lichfield, six of Coventry, thirty-three of Coventry and Lichfield, thirteen of Lichfield and Coventry, four of Worcester, and two Bishops-Suffragan of Coventry.

52

The south aisle is 6 feet narrower than the north at the west end, but its want of parallelism adds 7 feet to its width at its far eastern end.

The south-west doorway has its original doors, though these have been subjected to restoration. The first chapel on the south side belonged to the Dyers' Company. When the principal trade of Coventry was the manufacture of woollen and worsted stuffs and the production of a special blue thread, so excellent that it gave rise to a proverbial expression, "he is true Coventry Blue", the Dyers were an important Company.^[6] A chantry known as Tale's was probably attached to this chapel, as the salary of the priest, £5 6s. 8d., was paid by the Dyers' Company of London. An upper chamber for the priest existed as late as 1607; the floor corbels still remain. A large marble monument (removed hither from the chancel) has medallion portraits of two ladies—Dame Mary Bridgeman and Mrs. Eliza Samwell. The former with her husband, Sir Orlando (Lord Keeper of the Great Seal under Charles II), both died in 1701. The latter, dying in 1724, "ordered this monument to be erected as a remembrance of their great and loving friendship."

The Chapel is now the **Baptistry**. A large eighteenth-century marble font was removed to the Lady Chapel and a new Gothic one put in its place, so that there are now three in the church.

The south porch (1300) is the earliest part of the existing church. The inner doors appear to be of the early sixteenth century, the outer, though old, are of much later date and are not part of the original scheme. On the wall on each side of the inner doors are brasses of some interest. That on the right hand has a curious epitaph which runs thus:

53

Here lies the body of Capt^d Gervase Scrope, of the family of Scropes, of Bolton in the County of York, who departed this life the 26 of August, Anno Dni 1705, aged 66.

An Epitaph, written by himself, in the agony and dolorous paines of the gout and dyed soon after.

Here lyes an old toss'd Tennis Ball
Was racketted, from spring to fall,
With so much heat and so much hast,
Time's arm for shame grew tyred at last.
Four kings in camps he truly served.

And from his loyalty ne'er swerved,
 Father ruin'd and son slighted,
 And from the Crown ne'er requited.
 Loss of estate, relations, blood,
 Was too well known, but did no good;
 With long Campaigns and paines oth' gout
 He cou'd no longer hold it out.
 Always a restless life he led,
 Never at quiet till quite dead.
 He marry'd in his later days,
 One who exceeds the common praise
 But wanting breath still to make known
 Her true affection and his own,
 Death kindly came, all wants supplied
 By giving rest—which life deny'd.

The other brass, of 1609, has a portrait of Ann Sewell in Jacobean costume, kneeling, with an epitaph in which she is described as "a worthy stirrer up of others to all holy virtues."

A doorway leads to a priest's chamber over the porch, sometimes incorrectly spoken of as the Cappers' Chapel. It is still used for the annual meeting of the Company, but is inaccessible to the public.

The next chapel eastwards is St. Thomas', belonging until 1629 to the Cappers' and Feltmakers' Company. In 1531 they were associated in its maintenance with the Woollen Cardmakers who had founded it in 1467 and had after declined in importance. Leland, as we have seen records also the decay of the Cappers' industry. A large eighteenth-century monument conceals the original doorway from the porch. The eastern part of the south aisle as far as the screen formed another chapel as the dilapidated piscina in the south wall shows. The organ is now placed in the first bay of the chancel aisle, the whole aisle having once formed the Mercers' Chapel.

54



THE SWILLINGTON TOMB.

ToList

Where the altar once stood are now steps descending to the sacristies. On the right of the window is the statue of St. Michael brought hither from the tower (p. 32). The finely carved corbel on which it stands was discovered among rubbish in the recess below. Three altar tombs now stand against the south wall. The eastern has the recumbent effigies of Elizabeth Swillington and her two husbands. The inscription (translated) runs: "Pray for the soul of Elizabeth Swillington, widow, late the wife of Ralph Swillington, Attorney General of our Lord King Henry VIII, Recorder of the city of Coventry, formerly the wife of Thomas Essex Esq: which said Elizabeth died A.D. 15..." She died after 1543. The side and ends have arcaded panelling containing shields of arms. At the west end is a realistic representation of the Five Wounds. The effigy of Thomas Essex is in armour, that of the Recorder in official robe and chain. The head of each rests on a helmet, and the lady wears the "pedimental" headdress of Tudor fashion. The arcading is purely Renaissance in detail though the general treatment is mediæval. The figures are in dignified repose, wholly free from the later affectations of the Elizabethan school yet evidently individual portraits. The second tomb dates from 1640. The top is far too heavy for the little Ionic pilasters below.

55

The third, traditionally called Wade's tomb, probably belongs to John Wayd, a Mercer, who

lived in Coventry in 1557, but no inscription remains.

There are seven shields of arms on the side, nearly all defaced, a motto "Ryen saunce travayle," and nine images in low relief which present quaint studies of early sixteenth-century costume.

The matrices of brasses are still visible in several parts of the church. Sir James Harrington, writing in the reign of James I, tells a curious story of their loss:

The pavement of Coventry church is almost all tombstones, and some very ancient, but there came in a zealous fellow with a counterfeit commission, that for avoiding superstition, hath not left one pennyworth nor penny breadth of brass upon all the tombs, of all the inscriptions, which had been many and costly.

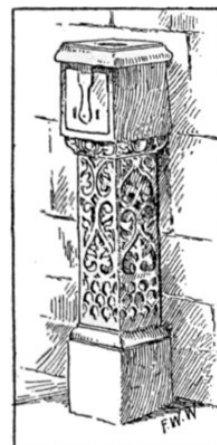
The last monument that need be mentioned is upon the wall over "Wade's tomb." Twenty-six verses of eulogy follow these opening lines:

An Elegicall epitaph, made upon the death of that mirror of women Ann Newdigate; Lady Skeffington, wife of that true moaneing turtle Sir Richard Skeffington, Kt., and consecrated to her eternal memorie by the unfeigned lover of her vertues, Willm. Bulstrode, Knight. (She died in 1637, aged 29).

The present organ was built by Henry Willis and erected in 1887. It is a four-manual and pedal instrument and has fifty-three stops.

The old organ on which Handel played more than once, stood on a raised platform at the west end. It was the work of Thomas Swarbrick of Warwick, a German by birth, in 1733. He also built those of Trinity Church, St. Mary, Warwick, Lichfield, St. Saviour Southwark, Stratford-on-Avon, and Amsterdam.

The best of the ancient glass now remaining has been collected into two windows, one on either side of the apse. Much was brought from the clearstory where six windows on the south and all save one on the north side still have panels made up of a mosaic of fragments with portions here and there of which the subject is intelligible. From what remains in the tracery we may gather that there was a row of eight angel figures filling the spaces immediately over the lights. Some of these or similar ones, are now in the apse. They are represented as covered with feathers and standing on wheels and each holds a scroll over the head with inscriptions in very contracted Latin. A few less fragmentary pieces may be found, *e.g.*, in the north window, Judas giving the traitor's kiss, in the north clearstory the arms of Trenton and Stafford, mentioned and figured by Dugdale, in the south, the figure of a man in a red gown kneeling with a scroll inscribed "deo gracias" and over his head "groc(er) de london"—doubtless a donor. Of modern glass there is a great amount but little worth mentioning save on account of the persons commemorated. One window in the Lady Chapel is a memorial of the Prince Consort and one in the Mercers' Chapel is of interest as a deserved memorial to Thomas Sharp the Antiquary to whose labours all later historians of the city are so deeply indebted. He died in 1841.



ALMS-BOX.

56

ToList

The pulpit is of brass and wrought iron, the work of Frank Skidmore a native of Coventry who made also the choir screen of Hereford Cathedral and the metal work of the Albert Memorial at Kensington. It was placed here in 1869. The bells, ten in number, now hang in the octagon. They were cast in 1774 and weigh nearly seven tons. The first peal was hung in 1429 and a clock existed in 1467. In 1496 an Order of Leet ordained that "all manner of persons that will have the bells to ring after the decease of any of their friends, shall pay for a peal ringing with all the bells, 2s. and with four bells, 16*d.*, and three bells 4*d.*"

The six bells were cast into eight in 1674 and the present tenth has the same inscription as the heaviest of the old peal:

I am and have been call'd the common bell
To ring, when fire breaks out, to tell.

The chimes, which existed as early as 1465, were restored in 1895, after a silence of ten years, in memory of Lieut.-Col. Francis William Newdigate. Electric lighting has been introduced throughout the church.

57

FOOTNOTES:

- [6] See Fuller's "Worthies of England." In 1428 an Act of Leet ordered that no person should dye any wool or cloth with "a deceitful colour called Masters or Medleys brought into Coventry by a Frenchman."



HOLY TRINITY FROM THE NORTH.
From a lithograph—about 1850.

ToList

61

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

CHAPTER I

ToC

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Although the first mention of this church which the indefatigable Dugdale could find was its appropriation to the priory in 1259-1260, it is tolerably certain that its foundation was much earlier. As before said, it is reputed to be older than St. Michael's and its position close to the monastery suggests that it had been built, as often happened, for the parishioners by the monks who disliked their intrusion within the priory church. The appropriation at this time may have been rather of the nature of a confirmation of the rights of the priory than the institution of a new condition of things. As, in 1391, the chancel had to be rebuilt being "ruinated and decayed" we may conclude that it was probably older than the present north porch which is certainly not later than 1259. It was at the same time lengthened by twenty-four feet, the convent giving one hundred shillings per annum for eight years and six trees, the parishioners finding all other material and workmanship. The convent and parish also agreed to support and keep it in repair at their joint charges.

From 1298, when Henry de Harenhale was appointed, the list of vicars is complete, but in a cartulary of the priory mention is made of Ralph de Sowe, vicar of Trinity, as giving a tenement in Well Street, for the celebration of his anniversary.

There are but few landmarks in its history, and dates affecting the structure can generally be assigned by internal evidence alone. The nave arcades had already been rebuilt before the chancel was touched, and a piece of work of the same period is to be seen in the five-light Decorated window, in the Consistory Court which now opens into the large chamber over the porch. We have no record of the building of the clearstory and roof of the nave. The

62

resemblances between this clearstory, and that of St. John's chancel, raise the question of priority. The fuller development at St. John's of the peculiar treatment of the angles points to its being a little later but probably both fall within the second and third quarters of the fifteenth century.

For a church of this size the chapels, altars and chantries were very numerous, there being probably fifteen altars in all. In 1522 the establishment of clergy consisted of a vicar, eleven parochial priests and two chantry priests. Dugdale enumerates six chantries so that it is evident that here as often elsewhere some of the parochial priests derived the whole or a part of their support from their performance of the duties of chantry priests.

Many chantry priests on the other hand had other duties and took part in other services than the daily mass for which the chantry was founded.

So much that is of interest in the religious life of the period is connected with the chantries that it is worth while recording some of the scattered notices that have come down to us.

To begin with the Chapel of Our Lady, the earliest mention we have of it is in 1364 while in 1392 the Corpus Christi Gild endowed a priest there to sing mass for the good estate of Richard II, Anne his queen, and the whole realm of England, to be called St. Mary's priest. The indenture sets forth that "he is to be at Divine service on Sundays and double Feasts in the chancel and at Matins, Hours, Masses, Evensong, Compline and other offices used in the said church and also daily at *Salve* in our Lady's Chapel unless hindered by reasonable cause." The records of the Dissolution of the Chantries show how much town property must have been held by them, while from these and other sources we learn the extent of their belongings in tenements, messuages, rent charges and the like. Thus in 1454 Emot Dowte gave several tenements to this altar and in 1492 Richard Clyff "late parson of St. George in London," left a house in Well St. to the church "to the intent that the mass of Our Lady may be observed the better." In 1558 (the year of Elizabeth's accession) William Hyndeman, alderman and butcher, directs that his body be buried in the Lady Chapel "as aldermen are wont to be buried, towards the charges whereof I give twenty nobles to be levied of my quick cattle and if it be too little then I will that Sybil my wife shall lay down 20s. more." He also orders an obit to be kept after the death of his wife "yearly for ever;" a form of words that must surely have sounded unreal after the changes of the last two reigns.

63

Percey's chantry again, which Dugdale considered the oldest (though he does not give the date) was endowed in 1350 with six messuages, one shop, six acres of land and 40s. rent, all lying in Coventry, to which in 1407 William Botoner and others, added a messuage and twenty-four acres of land in the city for another priest.

Then the chantry of the Holy Cross (1357) founded for two priests to sing daily a mass for the good estate before death and for the souls after of the royal family, and for the founders and the members of the Fraternity of the Holy Cross, was endowed with seven messuages, fourteen shops and sixteen acres of land in the city.

Dugdale enumerates also four others, Cellet's, Corpus Christi, Lodynton's and Allesley's, to which should probably be added Marler's, assigned by him to St. Michael's. The first two are doubtless the same foundation, for in 1329 land and tenements were granted to the priest of Corpus Christi Chapel for the health of the soul of William Celet and others.

It was almost certainly situated in the south transept, on the upper level over the vaulted passage. The position of Lodynton's chantry (1393) is not known; Allesley's, founded in the reign of Edward I, was sung at St. Thomas's altar.

Richard Marler stipulates in his will that his priest is to have the "stypend or wagis of nyne marks by yere so long as he shall be of good and prestly conversacyon and demeanor, wt' a p'vyso that yf the seyde prest be ffounde otherwise, after monyc'on and reasonable warnyng to hym geven, he to be removed."

Much of the later history of the church relates to the destruction of its fittings and furniture or to restorations almost as grievous. In 1560 2s. 6d. was paid for taking down the carving about the high altar, while the Mayor bought the panelling of the altar for 33s. 4d., the veil for 5s., the "thing that the sacrament was in over the altar 1s.," the "peyre [pair of candlesticks?] that was upon the altar 5d." Perhaps he thought that all these things would be wanted again ere long. In 1547 a quantity of costly vestments and banners had been sold and we find in the accounts a number of such items as these: "Sold the 6 day of Jennery 5 copps of red teyssew to Mr. Roghers, now mayre (and 4 other persons) pryce of the sayd copps, 10l. To Bawden Desseld one cope of red velvet, 5l. Mr. Schewyll a grene velvet cope, 30s."

64

But before Mary's death we have a lengthy inventory of copes, vestments, albs, banners and the like, some of which may have come back to the church from the buyers at the sale eleven years before.

The church must have looked like a builder's yard in 1643 when the Committee and Council of War pulled down divers houses outside Bishop's and Spon Gates and stacked the materials here, while the changes of government are indicated by the payment in 1647 of 3s. 6d. "to Hopes for defacing the King's Arms" and in 1660 of 6s. to "Hope for the King's Arms."

Five years after this the spire, which had caused much anxiety and expense for many years, was blown down in a gale, falling across the chancel and causing much destruction. All was restored and the spire rebuilt in three years. Reference has been made to the existence of a vaulted passage through the south transept. This was made necessary by the position of an

ancient building known as Jesus Hall which adjoined the transept and thus blocked the way from "the Butchery" in this direction. The Hall had probably been long used as the residence of the priests attached to the church but nothing is known of its origin. It was destroyed in 1742. Only in 1834, when the exterior of the church was recased was the passage blocked and the floor of the upper chapel removed.

The Register records the marriage of Sarah Kemble with William Siddons on 25th November, 1773.

CHAPTER II

THE EXTERIOR OF THE CHURCH

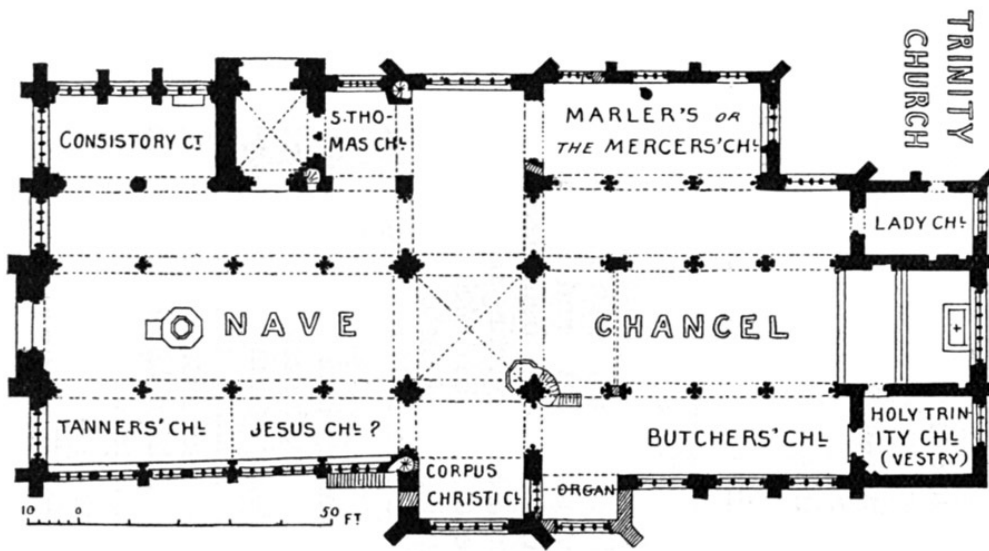
The church of Holy Trinity loses much, in popular estimation at least, by its nearness to St. Michael's. It invites comparison of the most obvious sort. It is not nearly so large and its spire is not so high, these facts alone are sufficient to account for the popular view. Fuller, in his "Worthies" says of the two churches, "How clearly would they have shined if set at competent distance! Whereas now, such their Vicinity, that the Archangel eclipseth the Trinity."

The plan is quite unlike that of its neighbour, being cruciform, with a central tower, a short nave, and a chancel distinctly longer than the nave. On the south both nave and chancel have a single aisle, the transept projecting beyond it and there is a vestry at the east end. On the north there is a similar aisle with a Lady Chapel at the east corresponding to the Vestry, but a large porch and several chapels fill up the spaces so that the transept does not in plan project.

Looking at the exterior as a whole it may be said that the more moderate length (194 feet), the central spire, 230 feet high, and the transepts unite in forming a more satisfactory composition than the long body and immense western steeple of St. Michael's. There however, the superiority ceases for the frequent "recasings" and restorations have left hardly a stone of the exterior that has not been renewed again and again, and the dates of these operations, 1786, 1826, 1843, sufficiently suggest the degree of knowledge and feeling likely to be manifested in the work.

Probably most of the structure was first built of the same friable red sandstone as its greater neighbour. Much of the recasing has been executed in a rather harder gray sandstone, but the tower and spire are still red.

The tower above the roofs, is of two stages, the upper, or bell chamber, and the lower or lantern opening into the church. Below this are small windows with the lines of the old high-pitched roof visible above the present transept roofs, but in the nave and chancel the lines of the old roofs are now within the church, the clearstory having since been added. Each face of the tower is divided, apart from the narrow angle buttresses, into six vertical divisions separated by thin projections of buttress form. On the south and west the stair turret absorbs one of the outer divisions. Each division is curved in plan in a curious way, which may be the perpetuation of a feature of the original design, but was more probably introduced or modified by the person who recased the tower in 1826. That there was sculpture we know, for in 1709 ten shillings was paid for taking the images down from the steeple. The smallness of the sum indicates that they were few in number, and if they occupied similar positions to those on the belfry stage of St. Michael's, and the structure was as decayed as was the tower of that church it is probable that the cutting away of the niches may have suggested the curving of the surfaces especially as the tower would be thereby lightened. As it is we cannot be certain of much else than that there were vertical divisions serving to emphasize the impression of height and that the openings were in the same positions as now.



PLAN OF TRINITY CHURCH.

ToList

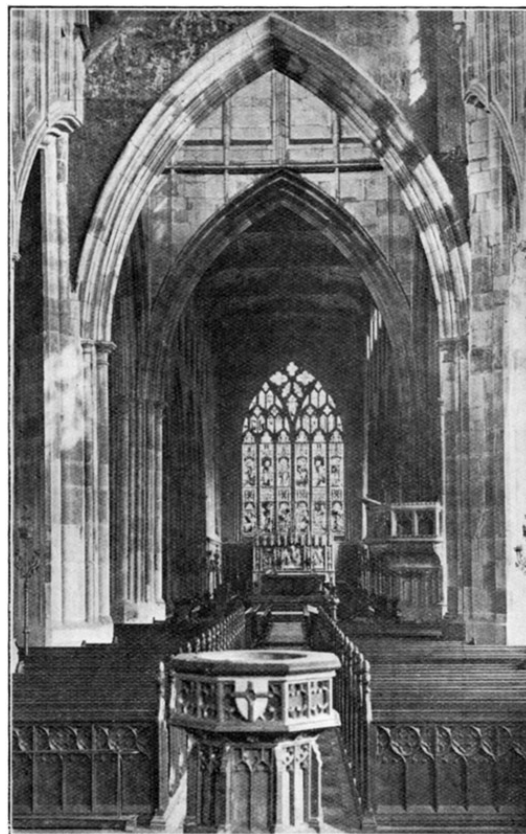
The spire blown down in 1665 had been in the previous ninety years five times repaired and repointed. We cannot now say whether the original design was at all closely followed in the rebuilding, but its present likeness to St. Michael's suggests doubts. The lowest stage which takes the place of the octagon and may be an intentional imitation of it, has almost upright sides with two-light windows on the cardinal faces and panelled ones on the oblique sides, while the remaining stages correspond in number and partly in design with those of St. Michael's.

67

In 1855 it was considered that the bells endangered the safety of the tower, and after recasting by Mears of London they were rehung in a timber campanile in the north churchyard. Even now they cannot be pealed.

The deplorable refacings have left few features of interest on the outside. Were Gothic architecture still a living and not merely imitative and academic art, one would welcome a complete renewal of all outside work—not an imagined harking back to the work of the fifteenth century but showing the lapse of the centuries from the fifteenth to the twentieth as clearly as does the north porch the change from the thirteenth to the fifteenth.

68



INTERIOR OF HOLY TRINITY, FROM THE WEST.

ToList

CHAPTER III

THE INTERIOR

It is with a feeling of expectation followed by one of relief that we pass within the church, for restoration has there rarely the same excuse for its devastations as the action of wind and weather on the exterior too generously gives it, and this church is no exception to the general rule.

The clearing away of galleries, the provision of new seating and the renewal of much window tracery have been the principal changes, the greatest loss being the destruction of the Corpus Christi Chapel. The nave is of moderate width and consists of only four bays, the eastern arches being narrower and made to abut against the tower after the manner of flying buttresses. The columns are clusters of four large filleted shafts separated by small ones while the bases are high and evidently meant to be seen above the benches. The caps are shallow and very simple, while the shafts of each pier reappear as part of the arch moulding.

The arcade as a whole is remarkably strong and dignified, it would perhaps have gained by the addition of a bay in length. In the absence of precise records it may be assigned to the second quarter of the fourteenth century or a little later. Above the tower arch can still be seen, beneath the painting and plaster, the marks of the older steep roof. The nave of Stratford-on-Avon Church has points of resemblance to this. There too we have a fourteenth-century arcade (but much simpler) with a fifteenth-century panelled wall and clearstory above, and the panelling comes down on to the backs of the arches in a similar though somewhat simpler manner.

Owing to the inequality of the eastern arches there is, in the position of the windows and roof principals a curious disregard of the lines of the piers and the centres of arches. There are eight equal bays in the roof and each corresponds to two two-light windows. It is interesting to compare the design of this clearstory with that of St. Michael's. It has more solidity to accord with the more vigorous arcade though the treatment of the panelling is similar. The height from the arch to the roof is much less in proportion, but the sills of the windows are kept lower and the heads are square. The form of the windows is perhaps determined in part by the desire for more space for stained glass, but it is also the logical outcome of the space afforded by the level lines of a wooden roof just as the use of the pointed window follows from the use of pointed vaulting. The treatment of the angles after the manner of the thirteenth century "shouldered" lintel in order to take off the harshness of the rectangular form and to give a better bearing for the lintels is noteworthy and should be compared with the more developed forms at St. John's Church.

70

Above the tower arch is a painting of the Last Judgement, discovered in 1831. It is now so much darkened that very little can be made out. The following is a description of its appearance before 1860: In the centre is the Saviour clothed in crimson and seated on a rainbow. Below are the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist with the twelve Apostles arranged on each hand. Two angels sound the summons to Judgement, and on the right of our Saviour, steps lead to a portico over which three angels look down on the scene and others welcome a pope who has just passed St. Peter. On the Saviour's left are doomed spirits being conveyed by devils in various ways and in ludicrous attitudes to the place of torment, represented in the usual manner by the gaping mouth of a monster, vomiting flames of fire. A large painting of a crucifix, with a priest kneeling beside it and angels flying above, was discovered at the same time on the north side of the Chancel but was too much mutilated to be thought worthy of preservation.

The **roofs** throughout are of low pitch, and almost all resemble one another in design. Those of the nave, chancel, archdeacon's chapel (on the west of the north porch) and transepts are divided by their principal timbers into large panels, which are again subdivided by mouldings upon the boarded ceiling. At all angles and intersections there are carved leaves, and stars in relief adorn each panel. All these roofs are painted in accordance, it is said, with existing indications of the original colouring. The ground is blue, the mouldings red and white, the stars and carving are gilt. The nave roof spandrels, above the tie-beams, have large painted figures of angels, supporting between them shields emblazoned with the instruments of the Passion. These are also said to be reproductions, but it appears likely that time had left much to the imagination of their restorer.

72



NORTH SIDE OF NAVE, EASTERN BAYS.

ToList

Nevertheless, the whole effect of the roofs is harmonious, a result apparently obtained by the use of a blue far removed from the ultramarine tint too often employed.

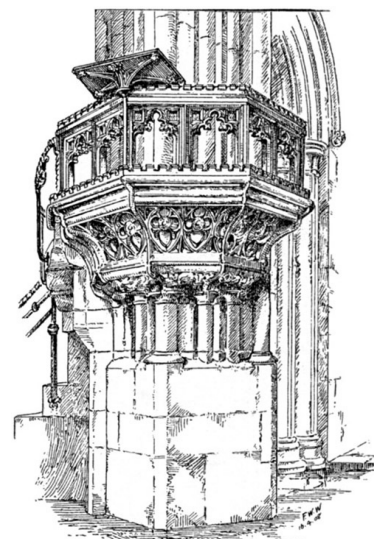
Since the removal of the ringing floor, in 1855, the lantern stage of the tower has been once more visible from the church. A wooden vaulted ceiling was at the same time inserted where a stone one had originally been built or intended.

The **chancel** is dark owing to the small clearstory windows, the low outer north aisle, and the concealment of a south window by the organ. At the first pier east of the tower came the rood-screen, and on the south side (in the aisle) the door to it may be seen at a height above the floor. Access must have been by steep steps against the wall, or from the top of another screen across the aisle. The church accounts of the year 1560 tell us what it cost to remove:

Paid for taking down ye rode and Marie and John	4s. 4d.
Paid to ye carpenter for pullyng down ye rode lofft	4s. 8d.

On the east side of the tower wall can be seen the line of the original roof, showing the height before the rebuilding in 1391. Although there is space for larger windows the aisle roof prevented their sills being brought lower. The west arch of the south arcade has been forced out of shape by the pressure of the tower piers and arches; certainly the piers, which are little more than 4 feet square, seem slender enough for the support of so lofty a steeple.

Attached to this south-east tower pier is the stone pulpit, one of the two special glories of the church, the other being the brass eagle. The pulpit is either contemporary with the pier or nearly so. There is apparently some difference in the texture and colour of the stone, but as it is probable that a finer-grained stone would be chosen for work of this character, this need not imply a difference of date. It was, however, probably added at the same time as the nave clearstory. The authors of "English Church Furniture" assign it to 1470.^[7] Before 1833 (when restored by Rickman) it had been hidden from sight by woodwork and a clerk's desk at a lower level. The lower part is boldly corbelled out and the junction of the octagon with the pier shafts is well managed, but the upper open-panelled part is rather too definitely cut off from the lower by the battlemented cornice. Very few examples of this class of pulpit exist in England, and none equal in importance.



PULPIT.

73

ToList

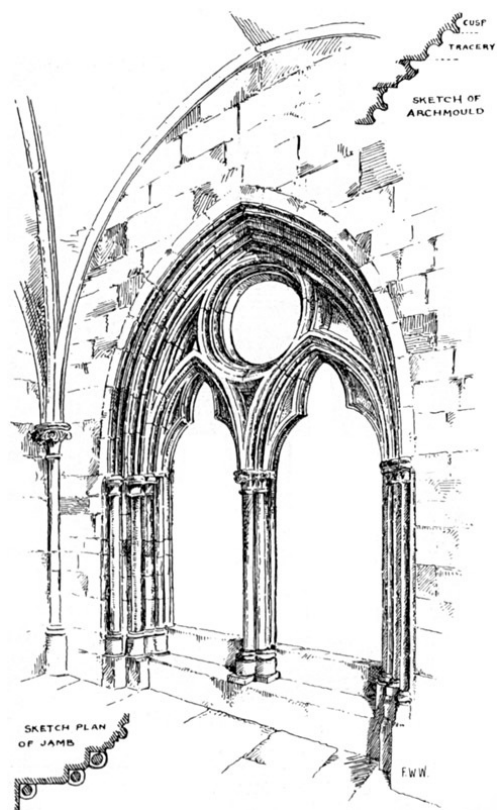
The eagle **lectern** is a magnificent example of brass casting. It is generally attributed to the late fifteenth century. This eagle narrowly escaped being sold by the Puritans for old brass, as

happened to that of St. Michael's. It closely resembles one belonging to St. Nicholas' Chapel, Lynn, save that the latter is not equal in refinement of detail and proportion, and the bird is less vigorous in pose and modelling. In 1560 there was "paid for skowring ye Egle and candell styckes, 10*d.*," and "for mending of ye Egle's tayle, 16*d.*"

At least nine chapels and fifteen altars are known to have existed in the church. The present choir vestry on the north side was the Lady Chapel. A simple piscina on the south side, about a foot above the present floor, shows that the old floor level was much lower.

The **north aisle** is lofty and has a clearstory of three windows over the arcade. In the outer aisle was located Marler's, or the Mercers', Chapel, founded in 1537, and beneath it is a crypt or charnel house, now closed save for small ventilating openings.

The black oak roof of low pitch has the panels of the western bay only richly carved with vine leaves and grapes. Its date is, perhaps, as late as the foundation of the chantry. The piscina is in the north wall.



ARCHWAY BETWEEN THE NORTH PORCH AND ST. THOMAS'S CHAPEL.

West of the north transept is **St. Thomas's Chapel**. Dugdale says that Allesley's chantry was founded in the time of Edward I, at the altar of St. Thomas the Martyr, "in a chapel near adjoining to the church porch." The chapel is certainly older, for the beautiful double doorway from the porch is not later than mid-thirteenth century. The outer doorway of the porch was rebuilt in the fifteenth century. The inner one, with a finely moulded arch with angle shafts and the vault with simple diagonal ribs carried on shafts, is of the early thirteenth century. It is to be regretted that this fine porch is not better seen. Signs of the puzzling reconstructions that have occurred in this part are visible in the aisle wall. Two lancet windows high up are of the same date as the porch, and are blocked by the chamber since constructed above St. Thomas's Chapel, and parts of other window jambs are seen at different levels.

The Archdeacon's Chapel or consistory court, to the west of the porch, is now one of the most interesting parts of the church.

It is divided from the north aisle by two lofty arches with an octagonal column. The original dedication is not known, but in 1588 it was already used as an Ecclesiastical Court, and the next year a bishop's seat was made for use in it. In the south-west angle is a tall, narrow recess, once closed by a door. Lockers of this description were constructed for the safe keeping of the shaft of the processional cross, and for the staves of banners. On the east side the roof now cuts across the head of a window of reticulated tracery of the early fourteenth century. Most of the monuments

have been brought hither from various parts of the church; only two or three are of general interest. A late Perpendicular canopied tomb, rudely carved and badly fitted together, stands against the north wall, but there is nothing to show whom it commemorates. On the east wall is the monument of Dr. Philemon Holland, with a long Latin epitaph. Fuller says of him: "he was the translator general in his age, so that those books alone of his turning into English will make a country gentleman a competent library for historians." Born at Chelmsford in 1551 he settled at Coventry in 1595, was usher and then master of St. John's Free School for twenty-eight years, and died in 1636 in his eighty-fifth year. During his usher-ship Dugdale was a pupil of the school.

An engraved brass to John Whithead, who died in 1597, is interesting for the sake of the costumes of himself and his two wives. Three stone coffins have also been deposited here, and two sheets of lead from the roof recording, in fine bold lettering, the repairs executed in 1660 and 1728. In the middle window on the north side are the only remaining fragments of ancient glass. As late as 1779 there were "portraits" of Earl Leofric and the Countess, and also, it is said, a smaller figure of the lady in a yellow dress on a white horse. Part of a small figure holding a spray of leaves and part of a galloping horse are pointed out as the remains of this. To the writer the figure appears to be clearly that of a man, and the horse and rider's leg not to have belonged to it.

The modern stained glass is very unequal in character, and some is very poor indeed. The windows at the west, especially one in memory of Mr. Wm. Chater, a late organist, may be regarded as exceptions. There are still, fortunately, many which are not filled with pious memorials.

The **font** is the original pre-Reformation one of the fifteenth century, which was removed by the Puritans in 1645 (though devoid of sculpture) and brought back after the Restoration. It stands on three steps, is panelled on bowl and stem, and rather brilliantly adorned with gold and colour.

The south aisle was no doubt divided into two chapels, that on the west belonging to the Barkers' or Tanners' Gild. A small piscina against the south wall indicates the position of its altar. The wall below the windows is recessed so as to form a seat the whole length of the aisle.

The **south transept**, containing the Corpus Christi and Cellet's chantries, has lost its original character completely. The piscina, high up on the south wall, shows that the floor level was some 9 feet above that of the church. The reason for this has been already explained. The organ chamber is quite modern. The best authorities place the chapel of the Butchers' Gild in the south aisle of the chancel, but do not say to whom the eastern chapel in the nave aisle belonged. It is known that there was a Jesus Chapel, and, in view of the proximity of Jesus Hall, it is believed by some that this was its position.

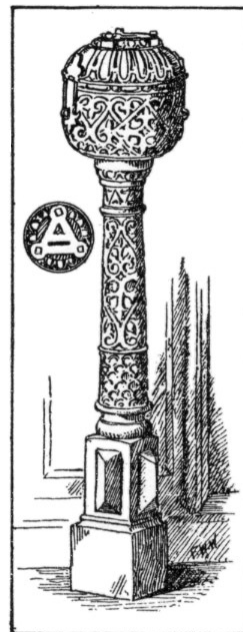
The present clergy vestry is a fine room, having an excellent dark oak roof with heavy beams and well carved bosses at the intersections of the timbers. The Royal Arms over the fireplace were painted there in 1632. Although usual, the placing of the king's arms in churches was not compulsory until the Restoration; few earlier now remain, and this placing of them in the vestry rather than the body of the church is suggestive of a compromise between opposing factions. A portrait of Walter Farquhar Hook, Vicar from 1828-37 and afterwards Dean of Chichester is hung here.

It seems probable that this was a chapel, perhaps that of the Holy Trinity, to whom an altar was dedicated.

The history, as traced in the church accounts, of the various organs used in the church gives some idea of the fluctuations of opinion as to the propriety of their use. In 1526 John Howe and John Climmove, citizens and organ makers of London, contracted to provide, for £30, "a peir of Organs w^t vij stopps, ov'r and besides the two Towers of cases, of the pitche of doble Eff, and w^t xxvij pleyn keyes, xix musiks, xlvj cases of Tynn and xiiij cases of wood, w^t two Starrs and the image of the Trinite on the topp of the sayed orgayns." In 1570 the "payer of balowes" were sold, and in 1583 the pipes, "wayeng eleven score and thirteen pounds, went for fourpence half-farthing the pound." In 1632 a new one was obtained but its life was short, for in 1641 the Puritan party caused it to be sold "for the best advantage."

Once more, in 1684, another was purchased from Mr. Robert Hay wood of the City of Bath for £100; then, in 1732, Thomas Swarbrick of Warwick built one for £600, for which a gallery was erected across the nave.

In 1855 this gave place to a new one by Foster and Andrews of Hull, costing £800; and this was rebuilt by Messrs. Hill and Son in 1900.



ALMS-BOX.

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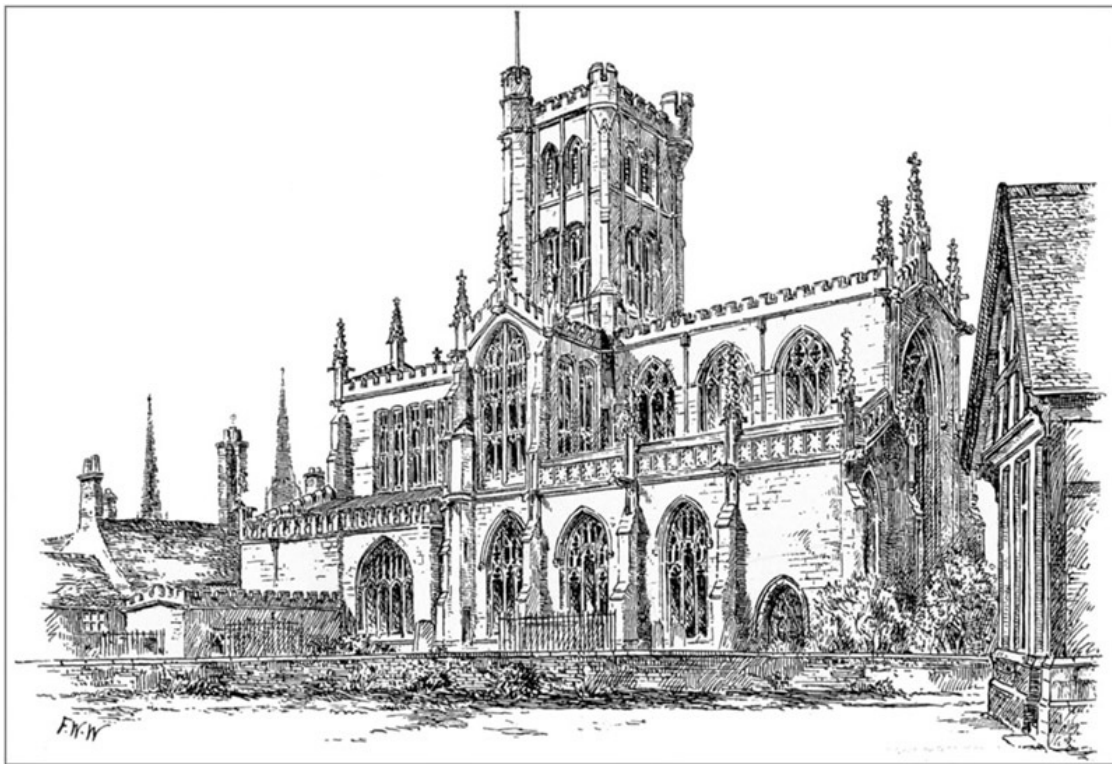
77

78

FOOTNOTES:

[7] "English Church Furniture." (Antiquary series.) J.C. Cox and A. Harvey.

80



CHURCH OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST, FROM BOND'S HOSPITAL.

ToList

81

ST. JOHN BAPTIST'S CHURCH

ToC

The church of St. John Baptist has a history quite different from that of the other parish churches and is specially interesting as a building belonging to a very limited class, namely, Collegiate Churches owned by a Gild. Though Dugdale says that the "first and most antient of the Gilds here was founded in the 14th Ed. III (1340)" it is probable that, as in other places, religious gilds had for long existed here and that the royal license or Charter of this date was like that of Stratford-on-Avon in 1332, really a reconstitution or confirmation of the Gild's rights, privileges and possessions.

This earliest one was known as the Merchant or St. Mary's Gild and its first ordinances provided that "the brethren and sisteren of the gild shall find as many chaplains as the means of the gild can well afford." Then in 1342 that of St. John Baptist and in 1343 that of St. Katharine was founded. The former at once founded a chantry of six priests to sing mass daily in the churches of St. Michael and the Trinity for "the souls of the King's progenitors and for the good estate of the King, Queen Isabella his mother, Queen Philippa his Consort and their children" and others, besides the members of the Gild. In 1344 this Gild, desiring to have a building for its exclusive use, received from Queen Isabella a small piece of land called Babbalak on which to build a chapel in honour of God and St. John, two priests being required to sing masses daily for the souls "of her dear lord Edward," John, Earl of Cornwall and others. Did she seek to satisfy her conscience thus for the woes she had brought upon her *dear lord*? The site thus given measured 117 feet from north to south and about 40 feet from east to west giving room for the chancel only of the present church, this being dedicated in 1350. But in 1357 William Walsheman, valet to the Queen and now her sub-bailiff in Coventry gave further land, added a new aisle and increased the number of priests while the Black Prince in 1359 gave a small plot on which, perhaps, the tower and transept now stand. Within the next ten years Walsheman and Christiana his wife gave to the Gild certain tenements, called the "Drapery," in the city to build a chapel in honour of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John, and St. Katharine "within the Chapel of Bablake." William Wolfe, mayor in 1375, is mentioned as a "great helper" in the work at the church, the original nave and aisles being probably built at this time, and some reconstruction of the choir. Records are wanting of the subsequent alterations which gave it its present form. The north clearstory of the nave shows the original design while that of the choir and the south side of the nave belong to the fifteenth century as do the tower and the cruciform arrangement of the building. Leland's "Itinerary" gives the following description: "There is also a Collegiate Church at Bablake, hard within the West Gate (Spon Gate) alias Bablake Gate, dedicated to St. John.... It is of the foundation of the Burgesses and there is a great Privilege, Gild or Fraternity. In this College is

82

now a Master and eight ministers and lately twelve ministers." Stowe adds that there were twelve singing men and extant deeds mention "Babbelake Hall" in which the warden and priests lived.

Many interesting entries of expenditure are to be found in the gild accounts showing how the Eve of St. John (Midsummer Eve) and other festivals were celebrated before the suppression of the gilds by Edward VI. In 1541 we have the following (the spelling is somewhat modernized):

Expenses on Midsummer Even and on the day,—Item, 2 doz. & a half cakes, 2s. 6d.; spice cakes, 12d.; a cest' ale and 4 gals. 4s.; 2 gals. claret wine 16d.; 2 gals. malmsey, 2s. 8d.; 2 gals. muskedell 2s. 8d.; to Mr. Mayor 3s. 4d.; the Mayor to offer, 8d.; to priests, clerks and children, 2s. 4d.; the waits, 6s. 8d.; to poor people 6s. 8d.; to the cross-bearers and torch-bearers, 8d.; the bellman, 4d.; the hire of pots, 4d.; boughs, rushes and sweeping, 8d.; a woman 2 days to cleanse the house, 4d.; half a hundred 3d. nails, 1½d.; half a pound of sugar, 4½d.; to the crossbearer and torchbearer for St. George Day, Holy Rood Day, Shire Thursday and Whit Sunday, 12d.; to 2 children for the same days, 6d. Summa (total) 38s. 2d.

That these anniversaries and wakes led to much unseemly revelling we have evidence that cannot be gainsaid. The Trinity Gild decided in 1542

83

that no obite, drynkyng or com'en assemblie, from henceforth shall be had or used at Babalake, except onelie on Trinitie even and on the day, which shall be used as it hath been in tymes past. And that also the P'sts of Babelack shall say *dirige* on midsum' even and likewise masse of *requiem* on the morrowe, as they have used to doo. And that the Meire shall not come down thether to *dirige* ov(er) night for dyv's considerac'ons and other great busynes they used. And on the morowe thei to go thether to masse and brekefast, as thei have used to doo.

Dugdale quotes from an old MS. an interesting passage bearing on this question:

"And ye shall understond and know how the Evyns were furst found in old tyme. In the beginning of holi Chirche, it was so that the pepull cam to the Chirche with candellys brennyng and wold *Wake* and come with light toward nyght to the Chirch to their devociions; and afterwards they fell to lecherie and songs, daunces, harping, piping and also to glotony and sinne and so turned the holinesse to cursaydnesse; wherefore holi faders ordeined the pepull to leve that *waking* and to fast the Evyn. But it is called *Vigilia*, that is *Waking* in English and it is called the Evyn, for at Evyn they were wont to come to Chirche."

In 1362 Queen Isabella helped to procure from the bishop a licence for one Robert de Worthin, priest, to become an anchorite and to inhabit a hermitage attached to the north aisle of the chancel. Traces of the foundations of this have been found on the site of the modern vestry.

When the college was suppressed in 1548 the King granted to the mayor, bailiffs and corporation, on their petition, the church and its appurtenances in Free Burgage for ever on payment of 1d., per annum and gave them "all the rents, revenues and profits of the said church."

But these gifts were not sufficient to support the church and its services, so that the latter were irregular and repairs were neglected. In 1608 Mayor Hancox procured the delivery of a Saturday lecture "for the better fitting of the people for the Sabbath." In 1641 Simon Norton, alderman, left property to his son Thomas, on trust, the condition being that if at any time St. John's should become a parish church, he or his heirs should pay £13 6s. 8d. to the minister out of rents of lands in Coundon, and also the tithes of lands in Clifton.

84

Prisoners from the Scottish army being quartered on the city in 1647, many were confined in this church and wrought much damage and desecration. From this time services were only occasionally held, until 1734, when an Act of Parliament was obtained making it a Parish Church, appointing a district to it and enabling the Master and Usher of the Free Grammar School to be Rector and Lecturer of the church. The mayor, bailiffs, and commonalty were made patrons, but in 1835, these arrangements having failed to work satisfactorily, the patronage was transferred to trustees who acted as managers of the school and in 1864 the lectureship was abolished, the rectory was severed from the office of Head Master and the Trustees of the school were charged with a payment of £200 per annum towards the stipend of the Rector. In 1874 the advowson was sold to a private person. A great deal of restoration, justifiable and otherwise, has taken place, the decay of the local sandstone having made large repairs necessary. In 1861 much renewal of the external stone work was carried out. Unfortunately shortsighted ideas of economy led to the use of the same poor stone and much has recently had to be done over again, this time with the harder Runcorn stone used also at St. Michael's. The interior was restored in 1875, galleries erected in 1735 and 1838, and high pews were removed, the floor, which had been raised three feet, lowered, the lantern stage of the tower opened up by removing a ringing floor and a light iron gallery above the tower arches provided for the ringers. The original groined ceiling has thus been made visible from below.

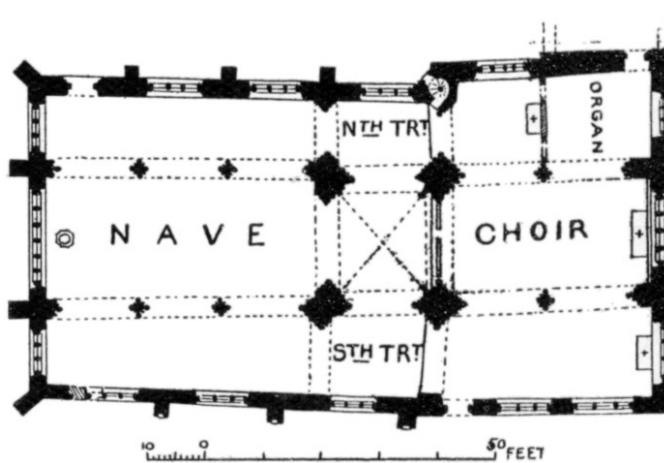
THE EXTERIOR

Although small in area compared with the other churches, both exterior and interior give an impression of size and dignity which does not belong to many much larger buildings. In the exterior this is no doubt due to the pseudo-cruciform arrangement, the bold central tower and the height of the main roof, which would have appeared even greater had the roadways not been so much raised.

85

The **tower** is in two stages, a lofty lantern story having two transomed two-light windows on each face and a shorter upper one having smaller windows without transoms and a battlemented parapet. Large skeleton clock-dials disfigure the windows of this story. Narrow buttress strips on either side and between the windows run through and serve to connect the stories. The north-east angle has an octagonal stair turret carried up above the parapet. The other angles have narrow buttresses running up to circular bartizans boldly corbelled out from the battlements. This is an extremely unusual feature in ecclesiastical architecture but is common on fortified structures. Of the City gates, Gosford Gate had machicolated ones but not Spon Gate adjacent to the church.

The spacing of the windows and buttresses of the south aisle and the position of the large transept window show how the later changes were effected. The three windows and the buttresses with niches and canopies almost certainly belong to the part built by Walsheman after 1357. The two in the chancel aisle are recent insertions. The doorway at the south-west corner occupies the position where indications showed that an original door had existed. There is also a small priest's doorway of which the jambs are ancient. The clearstory was restored in 1861 "from sufficiently clear indications" in the remains of the original windows. The whole of this part is worthy of careful study and should be compared with the



ST. JOHN BAPTIST.

ToList

corresponding parts of Trinity Church. Everywhere we see signs of individual thought and design mainly directed to softening the rigidity of the horizontal lines of the square-headed and transomed "Perpendicular" windows. The method of cusping the drop-arch and the varied treatment of these in nave, choir and transepts are noteworthy while the little quatrefoil at the intersection of mullion and transom is a really happy innovation. The flying buttress over the south aisle restores a feature of the old building which had disappeared. Of the variously panelled and battlemented parapets, of nave, chancel and aisles a view of 1864 gives no visible hint. As the report of Sir (then Mr.) G.G. Scott in 1856 specifies as desirable the "renewing all the parapets according to the portions of the original which remain," we can only hope (but with no sense of certainty) that these parts are faithfully reproduced.

86

The limited site on which the chancel was built (only 40 feet deep) caused the builders to omit any buttresses or other projections at the east end. The east window was renewed in 1861 but the proportions are not good and it is said that one light was suppressed although the old sill remained intact.

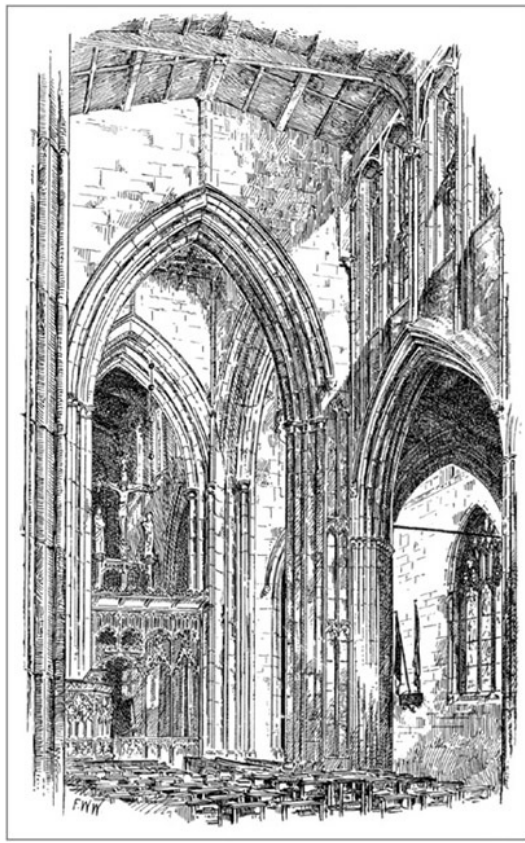
The west end has a large six-light window with two transoms. It was restored in 1841 and is said to be a precise reproduction of the original design. On the gable above it is a large niched pinnacle which appears to be an "unauthorized" addition.

While the north aisle is later than the south, the clearstory, as has been said is earlier, being of late Decorated date with large three-light windows of reticulated tracery. The north transept is more consistent in style than the south. The large four-light window is peculiar in design. It has one transom and the tracery is brought down much below the spring of the arch. The centre mullion is very solid, coming forward almost to the wall face both inside and out and running up to the apex of the arch. The clearstory windows in both transepts are similar in general design to those of the south clearstory of the nave but with variations suggesting a rather later date. A very effective view of the north side can be had from the quadrangle of Bond's Hospital, though here too it loses on account of the depressed site in which it lies.

THE INTERIOR

The interior is not less impressive for its size than the exterior, Sir G.G. Scott even saying that he knew of no interior more beautiful than St. John's.

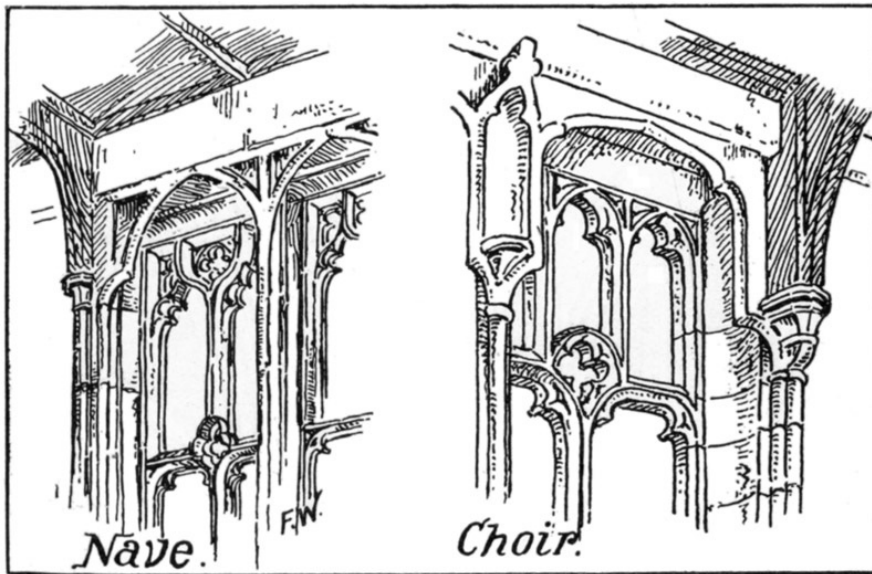
87



INTERIOR, ST. JOHN BAPTIST.

ToList

88



CLEARSTORY WINDOWS.

ToList

All at least will agree that there is something about it striking and dignified which is obviously not concerned with mere size, is largely independent of elaboration of detail and may therefore be safely attributed to its satisfactory proportions and broad effects of light and shade. Its plan is quite simple consisting of a nave and choir with north and south aisles, a transept not projecting beyond the aisles at either end and a central tower. Yet, although it is more or less oblong as a whole, there is hardly a right angle or two parallel walls throughout the church. In most cases these discrepancies are not apparent, nor do they appear likely to have been intended to produce a studied effect. Thus a diminution in width towards the east (as at Manchester) may be expected to add to the apparent length, but here the south aisles of both nave and chancel expand instead of contracting. By standing within either transept and looking up at the roof the want of parallelism of the walls and other irregularities are plainly seen. The nave has only three bays, the arches being rather lofty and the arch mouldings of the characteristic shallowness of the period. The south-west pier had to be rebuilt on account of settlement and there are signs of it in the south-east arch next the tower. The name Bablake is said to have been derived from a pond or conduit near by and the site may have been swampy, thus affecting the foundations. The district is even now liable to flooding from the Sherborne (or Shireburn) stream and as late as January 1900 the waters rose over five feet within the church as a brass plate at the west end testifies.

89

The graceful treatment of the windows of the nave and choir clearstories is shown in the illustration. Comparing these with the clearstory of Trinity nave (p. 71) questions of priority arise. If not designed by the same mind the influence of one on the other is easily seen. On the whole the greater rigidity of treatment and the anxiety to increase the area of glass in the Trinity windows suggest that the date is rather later and that the designs did not spring from the same brain. The roof is very simple, the curved brackets springing from the shafts which run down to the arches below. The wall is deeply recessed beneath the windows. The north windows, however, are continued down in plain panels, but this only makes more apparent the fact that they are not placed centrally over the arches.

The north aisle has a doorway and two north windows. The windows are of good Perpendicular design, and the mullions are continued down the wall below, forming panels. The lowered sill and recess probably formed a convenient retable to an altar against the wall. The west window preserves some fragments of glass dated 1532. There is an obliterated inscription and small etched figures—among them an acolyte carrying a cross, one of those whose services are mentioned in the accounts after this wise: "to the crosebeirer and torchebeirer, for Seynt George day, hollieroode day, shire thuresday and Whit Sunday, 12*d.*; to 2 childern for the same dayes 6*d.*"

The south aisle of the nave, including the lower part of the transept, is doubtless the aisle erected for the Gild by William Walsheman in 1357. The two windows are not central with the nave arches, and the third is not in the centre of the transept. Their tracery is somewhat peculiar in design and refined in detail, and has the transitional character one would expect from its date. There are signs on the face of each western tower pier of the altars which once stood there, probably those of the Trinity and St. Katharine, which are known to have existed.

The eastern piers of the tower are later than the western, and very unlike them in plan. A bold and ingenious treatment of the vaulting shaft of the tower groining is used on these piers; on the western ones the shafts stop upon the ends of the hood moulding.

90

The choir is now closed by a screen carrying a large rood carved in oak. Like St. Michael's, but to a smaller extent, the axis of the choir inclines to the north. Whether symbolic, or only a part of what may be described as the studied irregularity of the whole building it is hard to say. The column on each side of the choir is later than the east respond and also later than the west tower pier, but corresponds with the east tower pier. The deep panelling beneath the windows must have been carried out when the clearstories were constructed in the fifteenth century.

The south aisle of the choir, the original chapel of the patron saint, is now fitted up and used as a morning chapel. The piscina still remains in the south wall, and there is a trace of the old altar visible on the wall.

The east end of the north aisle is now the organ chamber, and was originally the Lady Chapel. The base of the altar still exists, and so does the piscina in the south wall.

In connection with these or other altars we hear of a payment of 22*d.*, in 1474, for painting a cloth for the image of St. John Baptist, and in 1462 sums of 40*s.* and 7*s.* were paid to a sculptor of Burton-on-Trent for an alabaster statue of the Virgin and a base for it.

At the foot of the south-west tower-pier are some decayed but interesting ancient tiles. The new ones have been copied from them.

The vicissitudes in the church's fortunes have left little for us to see that is not part and parcel of the structure.

That there were "orgaynes" as early as 1461 we know from entries in the city records giving the cost at different times of wire, glue, nails, thread, etc., for the reparation of them, while a payment of 2*d.* for "a string" suggests that they were a combination of wind and string stops, similar to the 1733 organ of St. Michael's as built by Thomas Swarbrick. In 1519 the Prior bought the "metell of ye old orgayns in bablake" for 9*s.* 10*d.*, but doubtless the new one disappeared in the troublous times that followed. A new one has recently been set up.

The pulpit is of stone and quite new, and the font, erected in 1843, is a copy of that of St. Edward's, Cambridge.

There are five bells, the inscriptions on them being as follows:

91

- 1st. Henrycus Bagley. M.C. Fecit 1676.
- 2nd. Pack & Chapman. London 1778. Richard Eaton, Churchwarden.
- 3rd. Henric Dodenhale, Fecit. M.C.E.I.C.R.I.
- 4th. (Illegible.) Probably of the end of fifteenth century.
- 5th. I ring at six to let men know
When to and from their work to go.

Neglect and decay it has been seen had provided only too plausible excuses for restoration. In 1858 the church had a narrow escape from a worse fate, for it was proposed to extend it in some direction, and the architect suggested the lengthening of the north transept and the addition of a new north aisle. Probably lack of funds alone prevented the carrying out of a proposal which would have completely spoilt the proportions of this beautiful interior.

THE GREY FRIARS' CONVENT

CHRIST CHURCH

The third of the "three tall spires," albeit nothing else remains of the church to which it belonged, deserves that some notice should be given of it and of the men who reared it.



THE SPIRE OF CHRIST CHURCH.

In 1234, eleven years after their first coming into England, the Franciscan Friars are heard of at Coventry, Ranulph, Earl of Chester, having granted them land for their oratory, and the Sheriff of Warwickshire, on behalf of the King, giving them shingles from the woods of Kenilworth wherewith to cover it. In 1359 the Black Prince, then owner of the Manor and Park of Cheylesmore, just outside the walls of the city and adjacent to their convent, granted them so much stone from his quarry there, "as they should have occasion to use about their buildings and walls," and probably at this time the church, of which Christ Church spire is a remnant, was built.

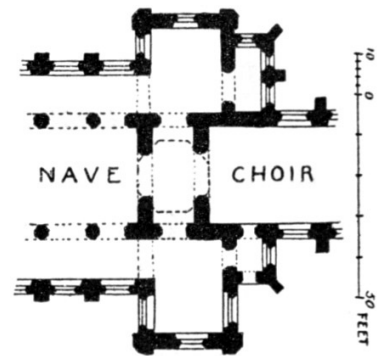
At the same time he gave them "liberty to have a postern into the Park to carry out any of their convent that should be diseased."

92

The house was surrendered to the King in 1539, the warden and ten brethren being compelled to sign a humiliating document, in which they professed to "profoundly consider that the perfection of Christian living doth not consist in dumb ceremonies, wearing of a grey coat, disguising ourself after strange fashions, ducking, nodding and becking, in girding our selves with a girdle full of knots and other like Papisticall ceremonies."

It is certain at least that they had no accumulated wealth. Whatever they had received had been distributed for the advantage of the Church or the poor. At their suppression they

had neither lands, tenements, nor other possessions, save their church and house and the land these stood on. The site was granted to the city and the buildings thrown down, only the spire with its supporting walls and arches being allowed to stand until 1829, when it was incorporated with the new nave of Christ Church from the designs of Rickman, to whom we are indebted for the first comprehensive and systematic account of English Mediæval architecture. The work shows how imperfectly in those days even a genuine admirer of Mediæval Art understood its spirit. Unfortunately the tower and spire were recased with new stone, and the original character of the work largely disappeared. The total height is 204 feet, exclusive of the vane. The plan of the old church was interesting, especially in the arrangement of the crossing. The short transepts had little real relation to choir or nave, which were almost completely separated from one another, the nave being intended for the use of the public.



GREY FRIARS' CHURCH (CROSSING).

ToList

93

The narrowing of the tower from east to west, and the insertion of secondary north and south arches to carry the slender octagonal tower is unusual and ingenious. The whole length was 250 feet, and the transepts were 96 feet from north to south. The nave and choir differed little in length.

The connection of the Franciscans with the production of the Mysteries, or sacred plays, should not pass unnoticed. Dugdale, who had spoken with eye witnesses, thus alludes to the subject:

Before the suppression of the Monasteries this City was very famous for the Pageants that were played therein upon Corpus Christi-day; which occasioning very great confluence of people thither from far and near, was of no small benefit thereto; which Pageants being acted with mighty State and Reverence by the Friars of this House, had Theatres for the several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels and drawn to all the eminent parts of the City for the better advantage of spectators; and contained the story of the Old and New Testament, composed in the old English Rithme, as appeareth by an ancient MS. intituled, *Ludus Corporis Christi, or Ludus Coventriæ.*

Along with a number that were performed by the city companies they are still to be seen in the British Museum. We know that the Friars presented them as late as 1492, when Henry VII was present with his Queen to see the plays "acted by the Grey Friars."

No remains exist of the domestic buildings of the Friary. The well-known Ford's Hospital hard by is often called Grey Friars' Hospital, but this arises merely from the situation. It was founded in 1529 by Mr. William Ford of Coventry, Merchant of the Staple, for five men and one woman, but is now inhabited by women only. It is an exceptionally beautiful example of Tudor timber construction in perfect condition.

94

THE WHITE FRIARS

ToC

The Carmelite or White Friars were, says Dugdale, fixed in Coventry in 1343 by Sir John Poultney who had been four times Lord Mayor of London. Although their buildings were ornate and extensive, their revenue apart from oblations amounted to only £3 6s. 8d. per annum and the whole came to less than £8. At the Dissolution the house and its revenues came eventually to John Hales, Clerk of the Hanaper to Henry VIII. Having amassed a great estate in monastery and chantry lands, Hales founded the Free School in Coventry, the Church of the White Friars being at first used for the purpose. Later, he made of the Friary a dwelling and removed the school to St. John's Hospital, granted to him by the king in 1545. Part of the church of the Hospital still exists at the foot of Bishop Street, but the school has been removed to new buildings in the Warwick Road.

Of the buildings of the White Friars there are considerable remains incorporated with the Union Workhouse at the top of Much Park Street. The east walk of the cloister, 150 feet in length, has a fine groined roof of the fifteenth century. A range of vaulted apartments runs alongside the cloister on the east side, divided midway by the vestibule to the Chapter House now destroyed. The upper story above the cloister and the range of rooms was, we may assume, the friars' Dormitory. A huge fireplace and a bay window are part of John Hales' reconstruction. The gateway to the south-west corner of the cloister remains, and the outer gate of the precincts may still be seen in Much Park Street.

95

96



ST. MARY HALL.

ToList

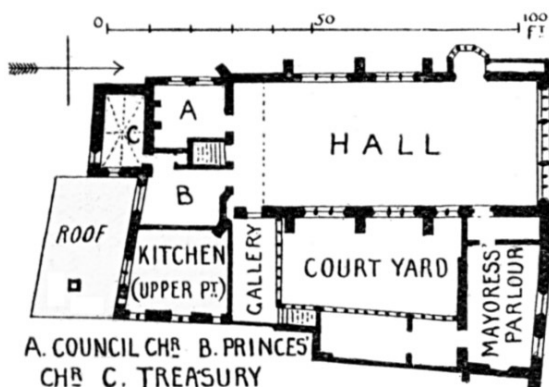
97

ST. MARY HALL

ToC

The Gilds were so important a part of the religious and social life of the city that it is imperative that some notice of their hall, which stands in suggestive proximity to the churches, should be given. St. Mary Hall, opposite the south side of St. Michael's is one of the most complete and beautiful examples of a fifteenth-century town dwelling now remaining in England. It originally belonged to the Gilds of Holy Trinity and Our Lady to which were united at a later time those of St. Katharine and St. John Baptist, the oldest to be founded. By the fine groined gateway we enter the courtyard, on the south side of which is the kitchen, probably the hall of an older structure of the first half of the fourteenth century, the present hall and its undercroft on the west side having been built between 1394 and 1414. On the east side is the entrance to the staircase leading to a gallery from which the hall is entered. At this end is the Minstrels' Gallery and beneath it are three doorways, the centre one leading to the kitchens below, that on the right to the old Council Chamber, that on the left to a smaller room known as the Princes' Chamber. From the Council Chamber is reached the stone-groined Treasury, now used for the safe keeping of muniments and records. It forms the first floor of a low tower.

The hall, 70 feet by 30 feet, is of five bays, with the usual dais and oriel window at the far end from the entrance.



The nine-light window over the dais has its original glass, made, it is believed, by the John Thornton of Coventry who is known as the maker of the east window of York Minster. The upper part has numerous coats of arms of kings, cities, and princes, while the nine lights are filled with "portraits of several kings in their surcotes," William I, Richard I, Henry III, IV, V, VI, King Arthur, the Emperor Constantine, and another unnamed. The windows on either side of the hall have suffered grievously. Those on the west (left) were deprived of their heraldry and portraits in 1785. In those on the east new glass with poor imitations of the ancient series of figures and

98

replaced with cement. The inscriptions were copied with care, but "the ornamentation was followed without any very fastidious copying of the uncouth ancient style"! [8] The timber roof is of low pitch, with traceried spandrels above the tie-beams. Angels playing on a variety of instruments are placed at the centre of each tie-beam and there is much good carving of foliage and animals at the intersections of the timbers. The most famous adornment of the hall is the tapestry behind the dais. The following views as to its origin and subject are those of George Scharf the antiquary. It is of Flemish design but probably of English manufacture, is woven, not embroidered, and was made in the early sixteenth century for the place it occupies, its compartments corresponding with those of the window. It is in six compartments in two rows. The upper central has a figure of Justice, an insertion probably in the place of Christ, angels with the instruments of the Passion being on either side. The lower central represents the Assumption of the Virgin in presence of the apostles. The upper left in order from the centre has eleven saints, SS. John Baptist, Matthias (?), Paul, Adrian, Peter, George, Andrew, No. 8(?), Bartholomew, Simon, Thaddeus. The corresponding female saints on the right are SS. Katherine, Barbara, Dorothy, Mary Magdalen, No. 5 (?), Margaret, Agnes, Gertrude of Nivelles, Anne, Apollonia.

The lower left has a king kneeling at a prie-dieu on which is his crown and an open book. A cardinal kneels behind him but there is no other ecclesiastic among the seventeen courtiers standing behind. In the opposite compartment is a queen kneeling with a number of ladies, among whom are two in monastic dress. Although the work belongs to the reign of Henry VII, the king and queen are almost certainly Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou.

99

On the walls are portraits of later sovereigns from William III to George IV, that of George III being by Lawrence. The Mayoress' Parlour opening from the dais has been drastically restored. It contains portraits of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I, and four benefactors to the city, John Hales, founder of the Free School, Sir Thomas White, Thomas Jesson and Christopher Davenport.

FOOTNOTES:

- [8] "Coventry: its History and Antiquities," B. Poole, 1870.

THE CARTHUSIAN MONASTERY

ToC

Little remains of this monastery which stood on the south side and not far from the city. The Order settled in Coventry in 1381 only ten years after the foundation of the London Charterhouse. At the Dissolution the Prior and brethren, ten in all, did not emulate the heroism of the London monks and were fortunate enough to obtain pensions instead of martyrdom. Some trifling remains exist incorporated in a modern mansion, and a wall of the garden shows the position of doors which led to the isolated cells of the monks. The Botoners had given freely to the building of the church and cloisters of which Richard II laid the first stone in 1385 and afterwards largely endowed "on condition that they should find and maintain within the precinct of their house, twelve poor scholars from seven years old till they accomplished the age of seventeen years, there to pray for the good estate of him the said King and of his Consort, during this life, and for the health of their souls after death."

100

101

INDEX

Abbots of Coventry, [4](#).
Alms-boxes, [56](#), [77](#).
Apse, [36](#).

Bells, [56](#), [91](#).
Benefactors of Coventry, [99](#).
Botoner, William and Adam, [22](#).

Carthusian Monastery, [99](#).
Chantries, Foundation of, [9](#).
Christ Church, [91](#).
City, History of, [1-15](#).
Cross, [15](#).

Dissolution of Monasteries, [13](#).
Duel, Hereford and Norfolk, [11](#).

Evens or Wakes, [83](#).

Fonts, [51](#), [76](#).
Ford's Hospital, [94](#).
Friars, Coming of, [8](#).

Grey Friars Convent (Christ Church):
 History, [94](#).
 Plan of Crossing, [93](#).
 Suppression, [92](#).
Gilds, [6](#), [10](#).
Glass, Ancient, [56](#), [75](#), [89](#).
Godiva and Leofric, [4](#), [75](#).

Hales, John, [14](#), [94](#).
Hermitage, [83](#).
Hospital, Ford's, [94](#).
Hospital, St. John's, [94](#).

Lollards, [11](#).

Martyrs, [14](#).
Midsummer Eve, [82](#).
Misereres, [48](#).
Monastery, History, [1-15](#).
Monastery Ruins, [16-18](#).

Orders of Angels, [47](#).
Organ, [55](#), [77](#), [90](#).

Pageants and Plays, [13](#), [14](#), [93](#).
Parliamentum Indoctorum, [11](#).
Parliamentum Diabolicum, [12](#).
Persecution, [14](#).
Pilgrims' Rest or Guest House, [15](#).
Priory, Ruins, [16-18](#).

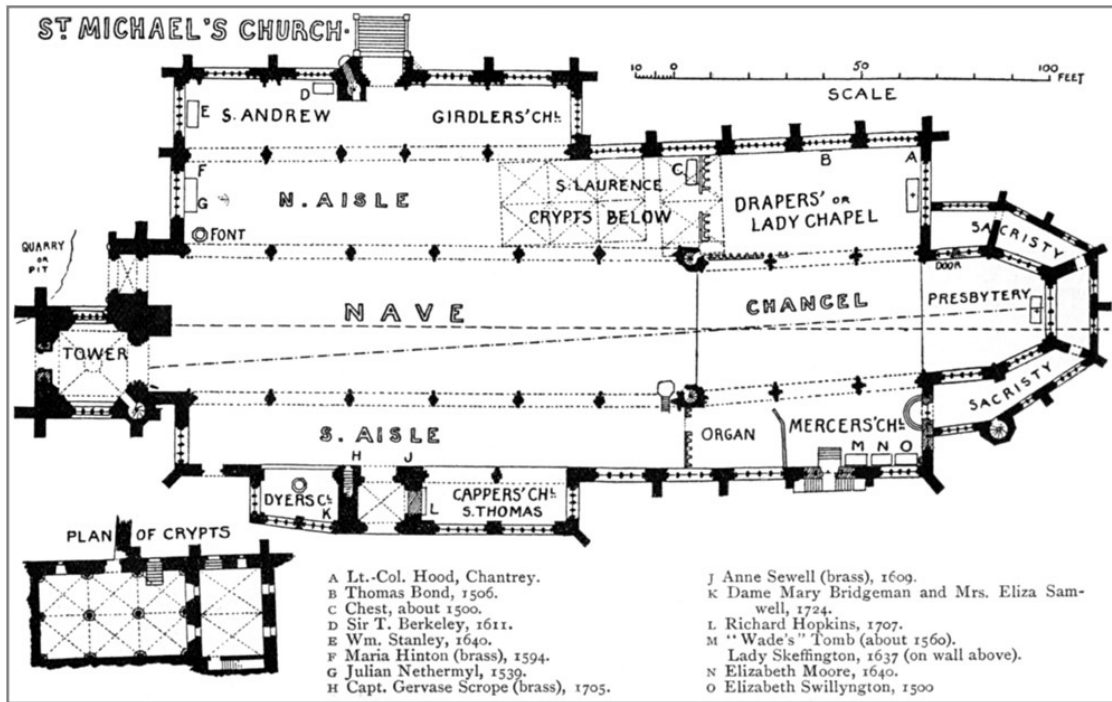
Royal visits:
 Henry VI, [11](#), [12](#).
 Margaret, [23](#).
 Edward IV, [12](#).
 Richard III, [13](#).
 Henry VII, [13](#).
 Henry VIII, [13](#).
 Elizabeth, [14](#).
 Mary Queen of Scots, [14](#).
 Charles I, [14](#).

St. John Baptist Church:
 History, [81](#).
 Exterior, [84](#).

Interior, 86.
Bells, 91.
Clearstory windows, 85.
Collegiate foundation, 81.
Glass, ancient, 89.
Organ, 90.
St. Mary Hall:
Glass, ancient, 97.
Plan, 98.
Portraits, 99.
Tapestry, 98.
St. Michael's Church:
History, 21-26.
Exterior, 29.
Interior, 41.
Apse, 36.
Bells, 56.
Brasses, 51, 55.
Chapels:
Cappers', 53.
Drapers' or Lady, 36, 47.
Dyers', 52.
Mercers, 54.
Chapter, Constitution of, 25.
Chest, 50.
Crypt, 36.
Font, 51.
Glass, ancient, 56.
Old church, position of, 42.
Organ, 55.
Porch, south, 34.
Proportions of Steeple, 30.
Pulpit, 56.
Spire, 32.
Tombs:
Berkeley, 49.
Bond, 49.
Nethermyl, 50.
Skeffington, 55.
Swillington, 54.
Wade's, 55.

Trinity Church:
History, 61.
Exterior, 65.
Interior, 69.
Chapels:
Archdeacon's, 75.
Butchers', 76.
Corpus Christi, 76.
Marler's, 73.
St. Thomas's, 74.
Clearstory, 69.
Font, 76.
Glass, ancient, 75.
Lectern, Eagle, 73.
Organ, 77.
Plan, 66.
Pulpit, 72.
Spire, 66.
Tombs:
Philemon Holland, 75.
Whithead (Brass), 75.

White Friars' Convent, 94.



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