

STAUNTON HAROLD,
LEICESTERSHIRE
& FOREMARK, DERBYSHIRE

TWO LAUDIAN GOTHIC CHURCHES NOW UNDER RESTORATION.

By *Louis Osman, B.A.(Arch.), F.R.I.B.A.*

“But this is the misery, 'tis superstition now-a-days for any man to come with more reverence into a church, than a tinker and his bitch into an ale-house.”

ARCHBISHOP LAUD.

WHILE the zealous Reformation reformers were busily destroying every link with the Mediaeval church the influence of classical and pagan art was spreading with increasing rapidity through England from France and Italy. The Commissioners of Edward VI had made a clean sweep of the plate from almost every church, while a furious Edict of Parliament had been made against pictures, altars, fonts, crosses, images, surplices and organs—“even the beauty of Cathedrals was somewhat defaced”. The dying embers of the Gothic tradition were smouldering on in country districts while Inigo Jones was making his first and second journeys to Italy.

“Where I applied myself to search out the ruins of those ancient buildings which, in despite of time itself and violence of barbarians are yet remaining.”

INIGO JONES: *Stonehenge Restored.*

In 1631 he was arranging the King's collection of Greek and Roman coins and building the great Tuscan “barn” St. Paul's, Covent Garden which was such a complete and assured break with the English tradition of ecclesiastical design.

The pagan foreign forms of the classical orders, however favoured for secular work at a time when county swains were thought

“To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
or with the tangles of Neæra's hair.”

must have appeared as yet another innovation. It is understandable that those who sought a middle course between Presbyterian and Papist and



FIG. 1

CHALICE AND PATEN FROM ST. JOHN'S, OXFORD :
No mark : c. 1615.

Photo : *The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths.*



FIG. 2

CIBORIUM FROM STAUNTON HAROLD PLATE :
Makers mark "Hound Sejant" 1654.

Photo : *Victoria and Albert Museum.*

to establish the continuity of the ancient usages of the church, should consciously have promoted the first "Gothic Revival". By about 1615 St. John's, the college of Archbishop Laud had commissioned a gothic chalice engraved with a crucifixion, and in 1620 Inigo Jones had prepared a Gothic model for the rebuilding of the Chapel of Lincoln's Inn. Also of St. John's, and sharing Laud's views, was the Rev. Christopher Wren, father of the architect, who succeeded his brother Matthew, later Bishop of Norwich and of Ely, as Dean of Windsor. It was into this high church atmosphere that the young Christopher Wren was born in 1632. It was from his uncle, Bishop Matthew Wren, that he was to obtain his first employment as an architect.

Almost Wren's contemporary, Sir Robert Shirley was born in 1630, son of the devoutly catholic Sir Henry Shirley of Staunton Harold, who had travelled abroad with Prince Henry, and of Lady Dorothy Devereux, the youngest daughter of the Earl of Essex. Sir Robert's uncle, Sir Thomas Shirley, was a great antiquarian, collector and lover of heraldry. Sir Henry died in 1633 and Sir Robert was brought up in the Protestant faith by his mother and by his Protestant uncle and guardian, the Earl of Essex, the Parliamentary leader.

Doubtless the young Sir Robert knew well the part that William Laud had played in the scandalous marriage of his aunt Lady Penelope Devereux after her divorce from Lord Rich, she having already borne several children to her future husband. As chaplain to the Earl of Devonshire Laud had, "serving my ambition and the sins of others", married the pair to the great displeasure of King James and to his own subsequent humiliation.

Staunchly loyal to the Crown, despite his guardian, and married in 1646, Sir Robert, with his young wife, was with the court at Oxford. Here during the winter of 1647-8 at St. John's he cannot but have come under the strong influence of Archbishop Laud, and here he made friendships which were to mould his views.¹

"fill me bowle of sack, and I'll carowse,
a health to y^e new prop of Shirley's howse.
Pledge me all Anti-Levellers and all yow
That will not only wo^{pp} the high shoe"².

¹ James Shirley, the poet, who claimed relationship, was also of St. John's. He wrote the words of Matthew Locke's masque "Cupid and Death" performed at Leicester Fields for the Portuguese ambassador in 1653, the year of the founding of Staunton Harold Church.

² A cant term for the Roundhead party.

On Sir Robert Shirley's lady, delivered of a son on the Sabbath day—the authors being seven members of St. John's.

During the following years Sir Robert was involved in a series of Royalist plots. He was in constant dispute with the Parliamentary forces and with the Council of State; on several occasions he was imprisoned in the Tower. During this time his house at Staunton Harold became a refuge for Anglican clergy and the future Archbishops of Canterbury and York were amongst those who sheltered there. In 1652 he was accused because of information that he "would not suffer any that acted for Parliament to live upon his lands". It was doubtless due to this that he was able, apparently unmolested, to commence the great work of building and equipping at his own charges a church which would embody his religious convictions expressed in the Laudian Gothic idiom at a time when church building was banned under penalties.¹

It was clearly Sir Robert's aim that everything should be of the best.² He founded his church in 1653 and already there existed one "Gothic" communion cup and cover.³ Sir Robert commissioned the remainder of the double set of silver gilt plate in the same pseudo gothic style.⁴ There is even an engraving of Our Lord, as the Good Shepherd, carrying a lamb on his shoulders on one of the cups.

No record has so far come to light of the architect of his intriguing building—perhaps not surprising in view of the illegality of its building—but quite clearly he was of great competence and decorative ability. There is an overall unity of structure, proportion and colour which reflects one single mind with a clear objective and which rules out the idea of a number of individual local craftsmen working to old fashioned rules. Presumably Sir Robert would have sought the best advice.

It is interesting to note that in November 1654 Sir Robert released to Matthew Wren, Bishop of Ely, certain tithes and lands originally belonging to the Church "On a secret trust for the good of the Church", so that it seems certain that he must have known Wren's nephew, the brilliant Christopher—then 22 and two years Sir Robert's junior; a M.A. of Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls who had already produced a spate

¹ "It being told them Sir Robert Shirley had built a church they directed an order in council to him to fit out a ship saying 'He that could afford to build a church could no doubt afford to equip a ship'."

² "And in case the church that I am now building at Staunton Harold, aforesaid, shall not be finished and perfected before my decease, then I doe give and bequeath so much money as my executor shall thinke convenient to finish and perfect the same, according to my intention."

Will of Sir Robert Shirley: November 1654.

³ Makers mark: R.B.: 1640.

⁴ A gold cup by the same maker, the only piece of gold plate of the commonwealth period, was sold at Christies in 1952, while the church of Thirkleby, Yorkshire, has just sold its pair of flagons, 1646, one to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the other to Temple Newsam, Leeds. Other church plate of Gothic form by the same Goldsmith are at Fulham Palace, Rochester, Gloucester, Pembroke and Jesus College, etc.

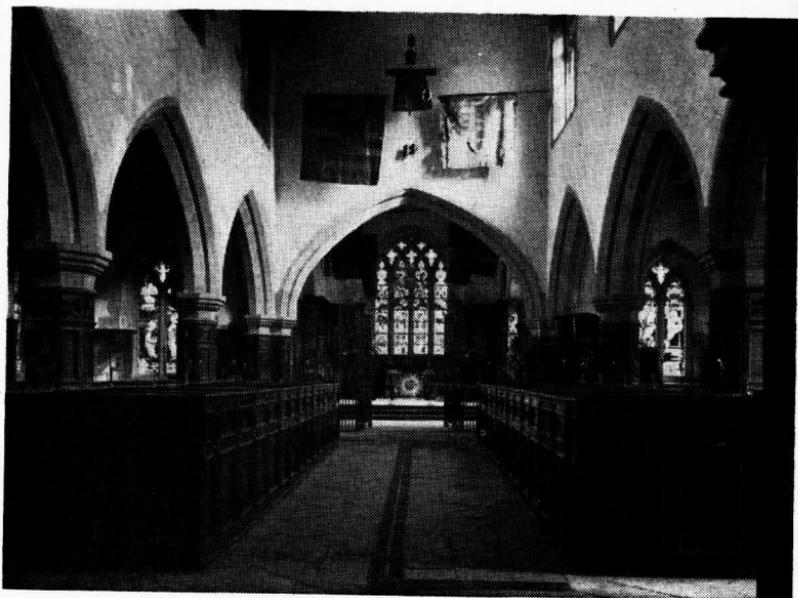


FIG. 3

THE NAVE LOOKING EAST :
This photograph was taken before completion of restoration.



FIG. 4

THE SCREEN AT THE ENTRANCE : 1663.
STAUNTON HAROLD.

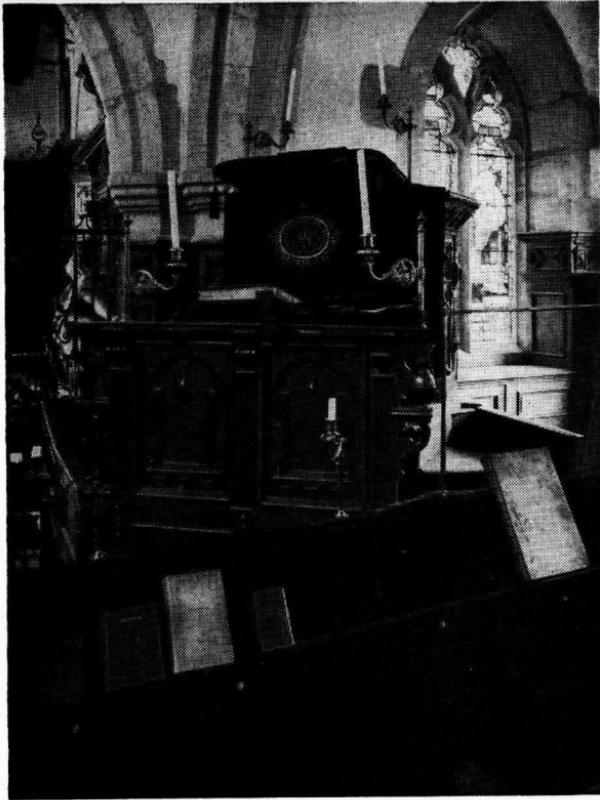


FIG. 5
THE PULPIT.



FIG. 6
PANNELLING ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHANCEL.

STAUNTON HAROLD.

of inventions including "new designs tending to strength, convenience and beauty in building."¹

In style Staunton Harold chapel derives mainly from 15th century models but there are inconsistencies: the curious wide spreading three centred pointed arches of the nave, the more correct "Decorated" windows of chancel and aisles and flat headed "Perpendicular" windows in the clerestory. By 1655 the nave had been roofed and the flattish barrel ceiling had been boarded throughout with oak boards. These were painted with a magnificent, spirited and colourful Creation, the antithesis of Puritanical plainness²: and certainly in those days, as now, curiously "modern" in feeling. It links—with its sepia and lemon yellow and white—with the green glass of the windows to produce a strong decorative and atmospheric effect—alas now ruined by the nineteenth-century insertion of crude and unrelated stained glass memorial windows, when the fine wrought iron saddle bars of these windows were also destroyed. Only in the east window was there glass decoration. This was stored after being taken out in the nineteenth century in the Hall until being smashed to pieces by the military during the last war—only a few small pieces surviving—showing an heraldic motif clearly contemporary with the Church. At this time the aisles had sloping moulded beams (as is seen today in the porch) unboarded. The chancel was not yet built.

Sir Robert died in the Tower "not without suspicion of poison" in November 1656, and further inconsistencies clearly resulted from the completion of the work by his trustees in accordance with the provisions of his will. Dr. Sheldon, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, preached at his funeral from Luke vii, verse 5, "He loved our country and hath built us a synagogue", and he also wrote the stirring and much quoted words of the inscription which was later to be carved over the door of the Church. A classical monument to Sir Robert is on the north wall of the chancel.

Sir Roberts executors faithfully carried out his instructions as we see from the account books which have recently come to light³ for 1658 to 1666. From these we can follow the subsequent course of the work, confirmation of which is clearly shown in the fabric. The conscious gothic revivalist design fades and the work takes on a more contemporary and vernacular style. During 1658 and 1659 woodwork, strangely similar to that of Inigo Jones at Lincoln's Inn, was being fixed. The Timber

¹ "After dinner I visited that miracle of youth Mr. Christopher Wren, nephew of the Bishop of Ely." John Evelyn: *Diary*, 11th September, 1654.

² Signed Samuel Kyrk pinxit: Zachary Kyrk pinxit: 1655. Nothing is known of these artists but a certain William Kirke of Branston, Leicestershire was bound to Edward Roberts, painter-stainer of London in 1675.

³ To be reproduced in the *Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries*, 1956/7.

screen at the chancel arch was being worked on by William Smith the joiner. This was replaced in the early 18th century by the present magnificent screen of wrought iron almost certainly by that great local smith Robert Bakewell. The present wooden screen dividing porch from Nave would exactly fit the chancel arch and the curious pediment now hanging precariously over the organ gallery would fit between it and the point of the chancel arch. Certainly the original wooden screen would have been of exactly similar design since we can see an exact parallel at the little church at Foremark in its original position and clearly by the same hand (as is the font cover and other woodwork). William Smith's final account for his woodwork at Staunton was settled in 1665.

The perimeter wall enclosing the church was also being carried out between 1658 and 1663.

In 1662 "Richard Shephard—Artifex" was completing the battlements of the east end and signing his name in large letters on the roof side of the parapet which carries the inscription

SIR ROBERT SHIRLEY BARONET: FOUNDER OF THIS CHURCH
ANNO DOMINI 1653 ON WHOSE SOUL: GOD HATH MERCY

In the clock chamber of the tower there are hinges formed of the intertwined letters R.S. but whether for Robert Shirley or Richard Shephard we do not know. The roof of the chancel was leaded and the aisles (see above) and the chancel were boarded like the nave, and "clouded" by a Mr. Lovett¹—work in imitation of the far superior nave roof completed seven years earlier. He also painted the King's Arms and the Ten Commandments, which unfortunately have disappeared—being paid a total of £87 os. od.

At the same time the walls and stonework were painted with "Spanish white" brought from London and presumably thought superior to the more usual local lime wash. The lead rainwater head and pipes were fixed,² terminating some three feet from the ground (as we see in Kipp's Engraving) presumably giving into the "lead cisterns" which Mr. Lovett gilded in 1663. William Smith was busy on joinery finishings with ironwork by the blacksmith Wilkins—the pulpit with a chest under it, the bell frame, seating and interesting and unusual communion table, the magnificent carved panels in the chancel, a cover for the font, the organ loft and screen.

Why Wilkins was paid for ironwork at the altar is not clear, since none now exists and the £3 4s. 5d. which he was paid would presumably

¹ Nothing is known by the Painter-stainers of Mr. Lovett. Sir Robert's great grandfather had married a Jane Lovett in 1556, bringing the Astwell estates to the family. Possibly therefore a relation.

² At a cost of £70.



FIG. 7
GOLD DAMASCENED HELMET.



FIG. 8
GAUNTLET: Greenwich period, Henry VIII.

not have covered altar rails. No sign exists of original altar rails which is curious in that they are so associated with Laud's name—but presumably none were required in this case for the protection of the altar, which was their original use.¹ Late in the nineteenth century the present garish window was inserted to replace the original with its heraldic glass (see above) and it was presumably at this time that the panelling behind the communion table was cut about and raised some fifteen inches and the "gradine" made of old timber added to accommodate the display of the whole double set of plate.

Finally at various times between 1663 and 1665 alterations were made at the door of the church. The present baroque screen with its carved angels, armorials of Shirley impaling Okeover and white marble panel (presumably with its inscription, since it cost £20) and new door, were added, a certain Greene being paid a shilling for "watching the Church while the doores were down."

This frontispiece was originally coloured and gilded as one would expect although no colouring is now visible, but scrapings from the recesses of the carving have revealed vermilion (presumably Okeover) and blue (presumably Shirley) and particles of gold leaf.

The famous inscription was composed by Archbishop Sheldon and runs:

"In the year: 1653
When all things sacred were throughout y^e nation
Either demollisht or profaned
Sr. Robert Shirley Barronet
Founded this Church
Whose singular praise it is
to haue done the best things in y^e worst times
and
hoped them in the most calamitous
The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

It was subsequently somewhat mutilated by being drilled for lead fillings to the beautifully written lettering but these have fortunately not survived. The work has been carefully supported (it was in danger of collapse), cleaned and the lettering regilded.

Finally before this batch of accounts end there is the paving between the church door and the entrance gates. There is no reference in these accounts to the magnificent little organ for which the organ loft was clearly built in 1663. There is a pretty painted silver and gilt false front with imitation pipes that was found during cleaning to have the initials I (or J) M and the date 1686 painted on it—there is no attempt at pseudo gothic in this front. The instrument itself is, however, of the greatest interest. It has a great number of softwood pipes and is certainly pre

¹ The present rails of poor neo-Gothic design and useless for the protection of the altar are an unfortunate 19th century addition.

1660. Whether it was of deliberately earlier type, or was in fact an earlier instrument from the Hall or original Chapel there is nothing to show,¹ but it has survived from the first half of the seventeenth century with its final qualities unaltered, despite the late 18th century restoration,² probably by Lincoln whose initials were found. Much was then rebuilt and the casework mutilated and partly replaced but luckily the original pipes survived.³ On this little organ at Staunton Harold, with its fresh, vigorous attack and pure quality of sound can be recreated the great compositions of the 16th and 17th century composers as they intended them to be heard.

Like the organ, the clock is of a type earlier than the mid-seventeenth century. It has yet to be examined fully, but again it will be interesting to establish whether it was deliberately archaic or earlier than the church itself.

Of a date earlier than the church are parts of the three sets of funerary achievements with crest, helmet, mantling, surcoat, shield, sword, gauntlet and banners which form such a decorative feature and so appropriately link with the antiquarian and heraldic interests of "Sir Robert the good" and his uncle Sir Thomas. There is a magnificent Greenwich gauntlet of the Henry VIII period and a gold damascened helmet.⁴ The banners are partly of the 18th century, but have been considerably repaired, repainted and overpainted. Parts have been restored upside down and some are mounted on curtain poles and broomsticks, now full of worms.

Neither the fine 18th century monuments, the magnificent wrought iron screen (which replaced the earlier wooden screen) nor the beautiful amethyst velvet embroidered hangings of Restoration form concern the present subject. The plan and general proportions of the church are however of great interest. It has been said that the completely square plan is classical in form—but there are many 15th or 16th century examples where nave and aisles together form a perfect square. Addleshaw and Etchells⁵ have commented on the curious parallel between the square plan and the late gothic examples from Spain but it is well worth comparing Staunton Harold with Wren's Ingestre in Staffordshire, built 1673-6. The plans are almost identical, the nave and aisles together being

¹ Mr. Mander of Bethnal Green who so lovingly restored this instrument during 1955 at the expense of the Dulverton Trust considers it possibly the work of Christian Schmidt—the uncle of the more celebrated Father Smith of the Restoration period.

² There must have been restoration of the chapel undertaken about 1775: a newspaper of that date was discovered in the chancel roof when the lead was stripped in 1953.

³ It was Laudian theory and practice to restore organs to churches. An organ was given to St. John's by Sir William Paddy in 1618, the maker is not known but it was looked after by Dallam: there may well be a connection with the Staunton Harold organ.

⁴ Beautifully restored by the Tower armouries.

⁵ *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship.*

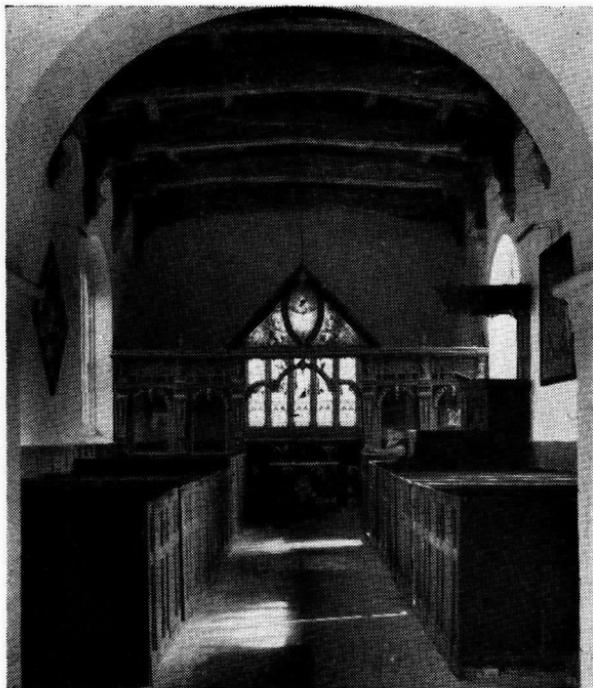


FIG. 9
FOREMARK : The Interior, looking East.



FIG. 10
FOREMARK CHURCH: East End.
Gates by Robert Bakewell, early 18th century.

approximately 40 feet square while the positioning of tower, screen, chancel, pulpit and the fenestration (including the differing windows of the clerestory noted above) are almost exactly reproduced. There is a similar parallel between the general mass and silhouette of the building. If one removes the pinnacles, buttresses and pointed windows from the former and substitutes urns, flat wall surfaces, columns and round headed windows one arrives at the latter, even to the accentuation of the door by a frontispiece with carving and inscribed tablet. Ingestre has also a set of Laudian gothic plate.¹ Certainly all this is a curious parallel though I know of no documentary evidence to link these two works.

"Item, I give to my couzin Leicester Burdett the somme of one hundred pounds to be disposed of as he shall think fit." *Will of Sir Robert Shirley.*

Now, Leicester Burdett's mother was of Foremark, some five miles from Staunton Harold across the Derbyshire border, and it was a Burdett who between 1660 and 1662 built a new church in his park at Foremark to replace the two ruined chapels of Foremark and Inglesby, gave land for a churchyard and provided a £20 stipend. Apparently he was not to be outdone by his late relative. Compared with Staunton Harold, Foremark is a modest affair. It had clearly influenced Sir Francis Burdett and it is quite clear from the evidence of the fabric that the same craftsmen worked on it. By 1662 the church was completed and fitted with wooden pews, a screen with doors,² seats for communicants around three sides of the chancel, a sacred table "decently framed of polished marble" (in fact the mensa is polished slate) a font and cover, pulpit in three stages, painted commandments boards and a greater and lesser bell. All these survive and this little church has come down to us complete in almost every detail, and in its form and arrangements represents a Restoration Gothic Church for the services of the 1662 Prayer Book. Surely at one time it must also have possessed a set of Laudian Gothic plate³ for use with the "blue carpet"⁴ of the altar.

In his recent strong and poetic B.B.C. appeal for funds to complete the restoration, Mr. John Betjeman said "we are deep in the England of three centuries ago. There are few churches in the country so little spoiled as this—none of this date, 1662, so complete in their furnishings."

¹ Dated 1676: makers mark I.B. above a crescent.

² Now missing—"Is your chancel divided from the nave or body of your church, with a partition of stone, boards, wainscot, grates or otherwise? Wherein is there a decent strong door to open and shut (as occasion serveth) with lock and key, to keep out boys, girls or irreverent men and women? and are dogs kept from coming to besoil or profane the Lord's table?"

RICHARD MONTAGUE, BISHOP OF NORWICH, 1638.

³ The present silver gilt plate consisting of a chalice, paten and ewer was given to the church by the Burdett family in 1771. Since writing this I have discovered that a silver communion cup and cover weighing 40 ounces did exist in 1685: Judging by its weight it must have been 'important', and compares with the Staunton Harold weights.

⁴ Inventory of 1685.