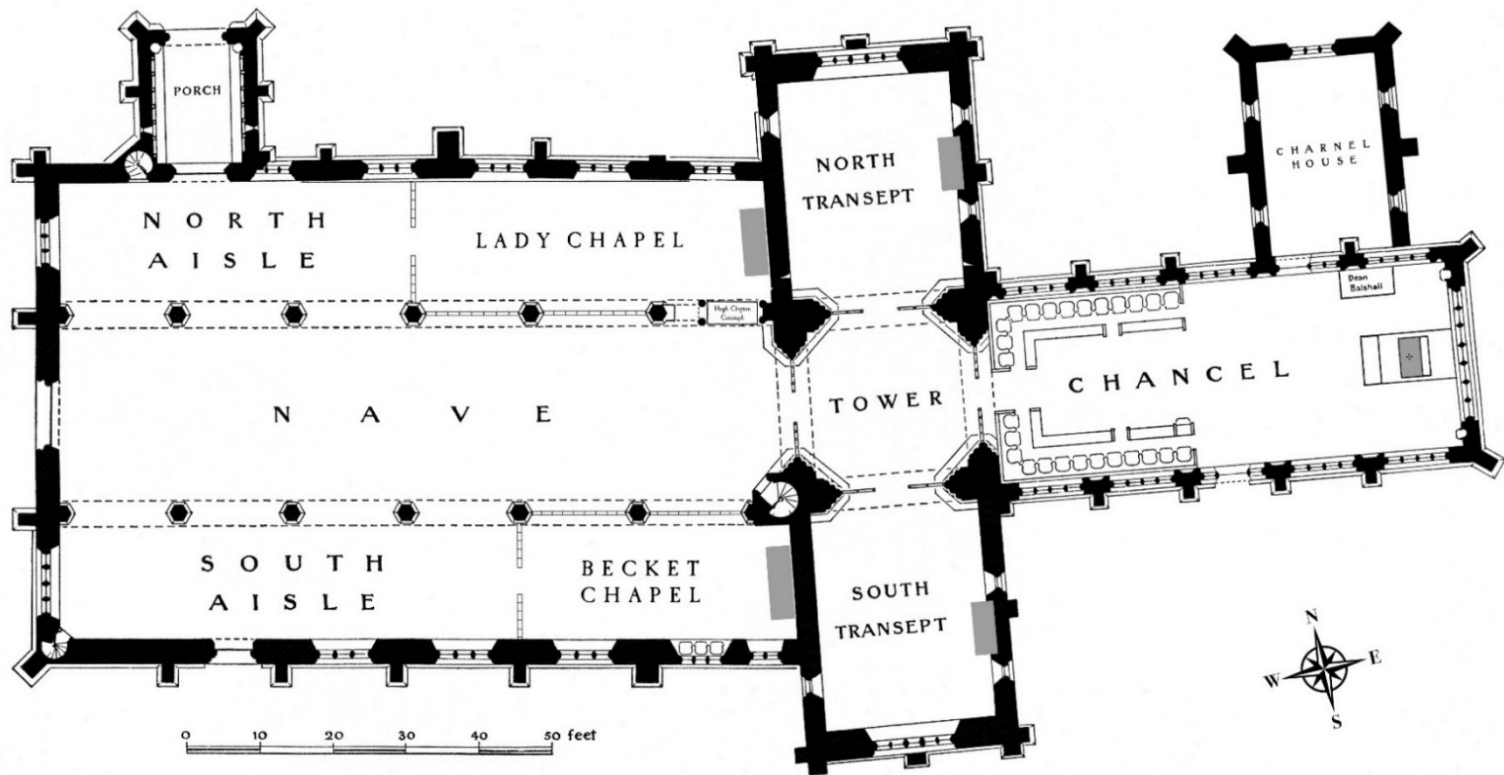


A photograph of Shakespeare's Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, during winter. The church features a prominent, tall, green-patina spire rising from a square tower with circular windows. The main body of the church is constructed from light-colored stone and has a long transept with a series of large, arched windows. The foreground is covered in a layer of snow, with several dark, conical evergreen shrubs and a few bare trees. The sky is a deep, clear blue.

# Exploring Shakespeare's Church

Edited by  
Lindsay and Sandra MacDonald



*Floor plan of Holy Trinity Church at the time of Shakespeare's birth in 1564, showing locations of the Lady Chapel, Becket Chapel and charnel house*

# Exploring Shakespeare's Church

**Insights into the history of  
Holy Trinity, Stratford-on-Avon**



Edited by  
Lindsay and Sandra MacDonald

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## Preface

This book has developed out of a public lecture series held at Holy Trinity Church in October 2019. Six speakers presented topics related to the history of the church, covering the period from C13 to C20. The aim was to show how aspects of the church and the town might have influenced William Shakespeare and his work. These included the medieval altars, saints and Guild records, the ecclesiastical College and the Catholic liturgy from before the Reformation, and thereafter the activities of the Bawdy Court, the English translation of the Bible, and the rise of Puritan thought. The centrepiece is Revd Dr Paul Edmondson's walk through the church in the company of Master Shakespeare himself!

The project was planned in tribute to the late Professor Ronnie Mulryne, who in 2013 organised a series of lectures in the chancel about the history and conservation of Holy Trinity. These were subsequently edited by him and published in *Holy Trinity Church: A Taste of History*. A second edition was published by the Friends of Shakespeare's Church in 2019, and this present book could be regarded as a companion volume.

The six speakers have expanded their lectures into chapters, and to these have been added two further chapters on the Lady Chapel and its successor, the Clopton Chapel. All have been peer-reviewed, carefully revised, annotated and comprehensively illustrated to ensure historical accuracy and a high standard of presentation.

We thank all of our authors for so generously contributing their time and expertise. We also thank the staff at the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (SCLA) for their kind assistance in providing digital images of various objects and documents in the collection. Special thanks go to local artist Janet Hall for her extensively-researched and beautiful paintings visualising the Lady Chapel and Becket Chapel in the north and south aisles respectively, at the height of their medieval splendour.

Lindsay and Sandra MacDonald (editors)

*Dedicated to the memory of  
Professor Ronnie Mulryne*

Now, God be praised, that to believing souls  
Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair!  
– *Henry VI, Part 2* (ii,1)

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*Sandstone carving of Thomas Balsall,  
Dean of the College of Priests 1485–1490,  
who built the new chancel at Holy Trinity*

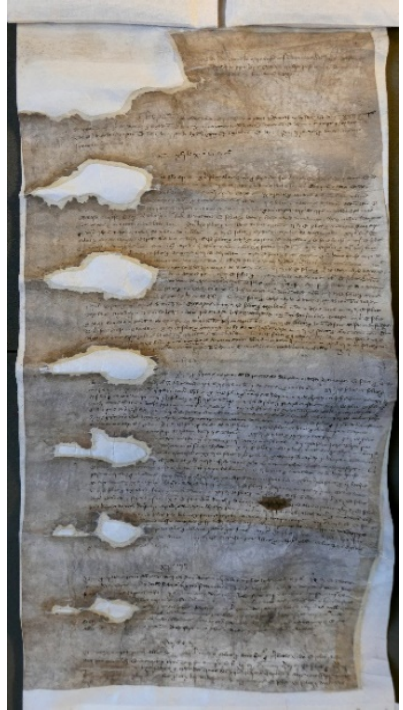


## Medieval Guild Records, Saints and the Holy Trinity Altars

Sandra MacDonald

The Collegiate Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon has a rich history that antedates its celebrated literary son, William Shakespeare, by several centuries, evidence of which can be found in surviving manuscripts dating back to mid-C13, curated by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Among them, the Masters' and Proctors' accounts of the religious Guild of the Holy Cross<sup>1</sup> provide much detail about expenditure on the Holy Trinity altars maintained and lit by the Guild and the generous bequests made by Guild members to those altars. The Guild was already in existence when it was granted a licence by the Bishop of Worcester to build an oratory and hospital in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1269/70. Although manuscripts date back to mid-C13, the earliest surviving Guild account is that of the Proctors, dated 1353–54; it records light-silver receipts, annual payments made by members to provide lights for the church and for the Guild's own chapel, but the first direct reference to its altars in Holy Trinity is later, in the 1408–1409 Proctors' account, which records 'a payment for making a "deske" in the Chapel of the Blessed [Mary], 2d for making a table for the "deske"' and '1d for washing the vestments of the Altar of St John'.



*Medieval Guild Proctors' account scroll 1478–79*

The first mention of an altar of the Holy Cross in the church follows in the Master's account of 1417–18. The 1434–35 Proctors' account illustrates the Guild's vast expenditure on providing lighting, mostly in the church rather than in the Guild Chapel, for its altars as well as the High Cross and the figures of the Blessed Mary and St John Baptist flanking it on the rood.<sup>2</sup> In addition to a reference to 'the beam' of St John Baptist in this account, there is a payment for washing vestments that confirms the continued existence of an altar to the Blessed Mary also at this date.

The amounts expended on the lighting are incomplete, but they come to £1.14.8½. The National Archives Medieval Currency Converter equates this to a sizeable 57 days' skilled labour at that time.<sup>3</sup> The price of wax varied over the two centuries covered by the Guild accounts, from 5d per lb at its cheapest to 8d at its most expensive, perhaps reflecting variations in quality. In 1468–69 the Guild purchased a staggering 98lb of wax, plus other materials, primarily for lighting the church and its altars, which included labour, torches and tapers etc. The bill came to £2.18.2½, the equivalent of 97 days' skilled labour: a substantial increase by comparison with 1434–35, without any variation in currency exchange rate.<sup>4</sup>

As well as the payment of light-silver and the purchase or repair of vessels, vestments, furniture and furnishings for the altars,<sup>5</sup> the accounts record the bequests of Guild members, sometimes to a single altar, as with the 4d left by Thomas Whytred for the altar of St John in 1434–35 and 12d left in 1440–41 by Matilda Baker to the altar of the Blessed Mary the Virgin; others left legacies to multiple altars: 12d each to the altars of the Holy Cross, the Blessed Mary and St John Baptist from John Ravys and from Hugh Salford in 1442–43; 6d from Geoffrey Couper to the three altars in 1447–48 and 20d from Edward Halle to the altar of the Blessed Mary and St John Baptist in 1455–56. Elsewhere, Hugh Clopton's 1496 will makes reference to the Lady Chapel, the history of which is explored in Chapter 2. The will states:<sup>6</sup>

If it fortune me to decesse upon Stratford upon Avon in the countie of Warr.  
or in that countrey than my body to be buried in the parish church of the same  
within the chapell of our Lady, betwene the altar of the same and the chapell  
of the Trinite next adjoynyng therunto ordeyned, [...]

This reference to ‘the chapell of the Trinite next adjoynnyng’ is disconcerting, located as it appears to have been in the position of the altar of the Holy Cross, which was also ‘Juxta’ the Chapel of the Blessed Mary, according to the 1466–67 Master’s account.

Mention of an altar of the Holy Trinity occurs only three times in the Guild accounts, in late C15. The first, perhaps significantly, is in the 1486–87 Master’s account of Hugh Clopton, made in his absence, in which John Kynges, Chaplain, leaves a legacy of 12d to the Altar of the Blessed Mary, 8d to the Altar of St John Baptist and 8d to the Altar of the Holy Trinity.



*Hugh Clopton window in the chancel of the Guild Chapel*

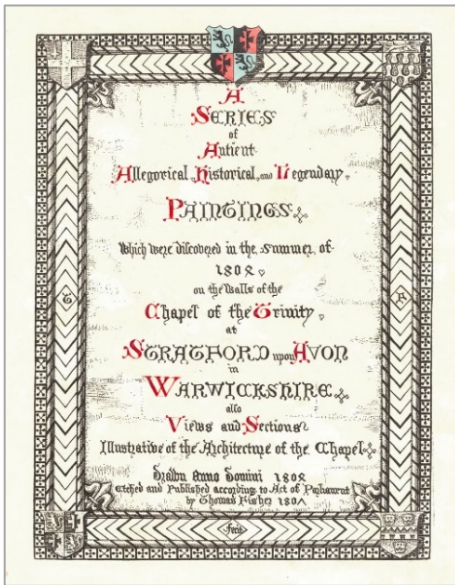
The 1498–99 Master’s account notes the payment of 3d ‘for the repair and “helyng” of the “Missal” of the Altar of the Holy Trinity’ and in the 1499–1500 Master’s account John James makes bequests of 6d to the Altar of the Blessed Mary, 8d to that of the Holy Trinity and 6d to that of St John Baptist. In addition, he makes a maddeningly unspecified bequest of 12d to ‘other altars’. This is the last reference in the Guild accounts to altars in the church. Elsewhere, in the Grants and Leases documents held by the Guild, the push for the name change is evident.

It’s perhaps no coincidence that in the counterpart of a lease, dated Lady Day, 25 March 1473, over 20 years before Hugh’s death, John Clopton, his father, is named as Master, John Hannys is listed as one of the aldermen and the Guild is referred to as: ‘the Gild of the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John Baptist of Stratford upon Auen’. Hannys (also called Handys, or Hands) was an influential figure, having been Master a record thirteen times between 1443 and 1468. He was also father of Thomas Hannys, who was Hugh Clopton’s mercer apprentice in London. (p.145)

Clopton's will marked an attempt to rename the Guild Chapel itself:

as of late I have bargained with oon Dowland and diverse other masons for the belding and setting up of the chapel of the Holy Trinitee within the Towne of Stratford upon Avon aforesaid.

He was successful to the extent that it was still being referred to as the 'Chapel of the Trinity' in C19.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Fisher gave it this name in the first edition in 1808 of his lithographs of the building's wall paintings. John Gough Nichols, however, hedged his bets in his 1838 publication of the Fisher drawings by calling it the 'Chapel of the Trinity: having belonged to the Gilde of the Holy Cross'.



*Title page of Fisher's lithographs (1808)*

A bond of obligation, dated 1 Apr 1536, designates it the Gild of the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Nativity of St John Baptist, but by July the following year, in another bond of obligation, the Gild of the Holy Trinity continues to thrive, but the Blessed Virgin and St John Baptist have been reduced to a mere etc. With the Reformation in the air, they have disappeared altogether in the last document of the Grants and Leases series to name the 'Gild of the Holy Trinity of Stratford', dated 1 Jan. 1538/9. It stands alone without its two companion saints.

There is documentary evidence of other Holy Trinity altars, un-associated with the guilds, about which little is known. In 1543, Thomas Atwode bequeathed 20d to the Jesus Altar in his will and local Stratford antiquarian Robert Bell Wheler, in his 1806 *History and Antiquities of Stratford upon Avon*, claims the existence of an altar to St Peter & St Paul and another to St



Andrew, but so far, substantiation of their existence has not been found in contemporary medieval sources; there is likewise scant evidence of an altar to St John Evangelist, mentioned by J. Harvey Bloom.<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, evidence for two other altars whose locations remain uncertain. Bequests to the Altar of St Katherine<sup>9</sup> can be found in the will of John Bedill in 1502, where he instructs his body to be buried before the altar and leaves 12d to it, in addition to 12d each to the altars of St Thomas and the Blessed Mary, plus 6s 8d to the High Altar. He also leaves an impressively generous £20 to the chaplain to celebrate mass at St Katherine's altar for four years, for his soul, and the souls of his parents and the faithful departed – a common request throughout the medieval period.<sup>10</sup>

The Bridge Book of 1524–1675 documents the activities of the Bridge Wardens, elected at the Bridge Ale to maintain the Clopton Bridge (built 1486/87). This they did out of an income derived from the annual Bridge Ale event and small property grants.<sup>11</sup> Pre-Reformation, this money also funded the annual St George and Dragon pageant (which was itself also a Bridge Wardens' fundraising event) and the maintenance of a St George's chapel in the church. This may have been an altar rather than an enclosed space, and like several of the other altars in the church, its exact location is uncertain.

The Becket Chapel, however, survives in its original position, if not its medieval splendour, in the south aisle of the nave, founded by John de Stratford in 1331. (p.42) Prof. Mulryne's comprehensive account of its history can be found in the book produced from the 2013 lectures organised by him; this current volume is based on the 2019 companion lecture series given in tribute to him.<sup>12</sup>



*God, the Blessed Mary and Blessed John Batista: Baptistry, Florence 1240–1300*

In addition to this evidence for the existence of the altars in Holy Trinity, from mid-C13 a collection of over 600 property and land grants and leases, held by the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, yields a great deal of information about the relationship of the guilds to Holy Trinity and its altars, and the medieval veneration of the saints whose feast days would have been celebrated at them.<sup>13</sup>

The first references occur very early in the sequence, c. 1260, in two grants in frankalmoign,<sup>14</sup> of property in Greenhill Street and Sheep Street, to 'God, the blessed Mary and the blessed John', where there is already what appears to be a single Guild of the Blessed Mary and Blessed John.



*Nativity of St John Baptist*  
*Domenico di Bartolo, Siena c.1420–40*

Given the nationwide popularity of St John Baptist at this time, the Blessed John is more likely to have been the Baptist than the Evangelist. It is also likely that since this guild had no separate guild chapel, its worship focused on a single altar, or two separate altars, possibly in the general location of the later Lady Chapel, in the north aisle of the nave at Holy Trinity.

Around the same date, a grant by Simon le Moddrimei confirms the popularity of St John Baptist; it

contains the first record of an annual part-payment in rent of a rose on 24 June, the Baptist's feast day. Again, c.1268, the grant of a small parcel of land by William Brayn to his son (also named William) requires the younger William to pay 2s 6d rent annually to the Blessed Mary and to give a rose to his father on the nativity of St John Baptist. This tradition was not confined to Stratford: there are records of it in Bristol, Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire and Northamptonshire.



The last reference to this custom among the Stratford documents is in a quitclaim of 1451, where the procedure has become a lot more elaborate: a whole bouquet of roses (putting one in mind of Interflora!) was to be delivered, ‘before the ninth hour, if demanded’, with ‘a penalty of 40 pence annually in default thereof’. (A quitclaim was the relinquishing of all rights to property, in this case extensive holdings, and the payment of roses was not necessarily demanded.)



The quitclaim of 1451 is notable also as a record of medieval locations still familiar to Stratford residents today, though with unfamiliar Middle English spellings and pronunciations: Oldestratford and Shottrey, le Hystrete or Heyestrete, Shepustrete, Walkerstrete (Chapel Lane) Swynestrete (Ely Street) le Middelrewe (formerly in the middle of Bridge Street) Wodestrete, Henleystrete, the street called Wyndesore and Churchestrete.

Payments in kind might put one in mind of peppercorn rents, and they were common too, with examples also found Derbyshire and Somerset. Pepper was an expensive spice, but single grain was worth little. That said, some landlords died with unpaid peppercorn rents owed by various tenants, amounting to a valuable 1lb or more in weight. There is only one such reference among the Stratford documents, where a token grain of pepper was paid as rent to the grantor, but a sizeable 10s was due to the landlord, the Bishop of Worcester.



Such traditions are reminiscent of our gifts of cards and roses on St Valentine’s day and eggs at Easter. The Easter egg tradition was well-established by the end of C13, when in 1290, Edward I distributed gifts of 450 eggs coated in gold leaf, medieval precursors of Fabergé’s creations. The Church also gave eggs to parishioners at Easter – nutritious gifts after the privations of Lent.





*A lover offers his heart to a lady wearing white gloves, in the C13 manuscript 'Roman de la Poire'.*

Payment in gloves was also widespread, often specified as white in colour: there are records of this practice in Bristol, Coventry, Devon, Essex and Lincolnshire. In Stratford, c.1275, in exchange for the grant of a piece of land by one Christiana, to Robert Le Messer, he is required to make an annual payment of '34<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. (chief rent) to the Bishop of Worcester [...] and to the said Christiana [...] a pair of gloves at Easter'. Rents of both peppercorns and gloves were due either at Easter, or at Christmas, again rooting them in the medieval liturgical calendar to which Holy Trinity was bound.

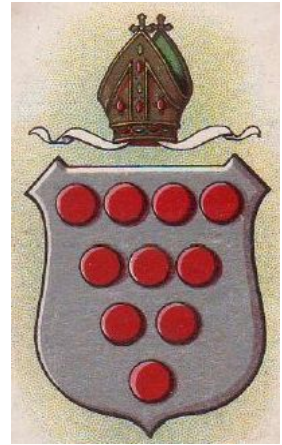
Moving away from liturgical associations to other intriguing customary rents demanded of lease-holders by their landlords, in 1296, Richard le Power of Clifford required Nicholas de Bradeweie and Agnes, his wife, to pay an annual rent of 5s for the term of their lives, plus two hens, the service of one man in autumn for one day, and two suits of court, in return for extensive acreage in and around Clifford-upon-Stoure and Stratford. Suits of court were not medieval high society fashion statements, but the requirement to serve as jurors in the manorial courts. Landlords frequently required their tenants to perform this function, and this tenant got away lightly. He only had to serve twice a year. Elsewhere the requirement was attendance at all sessions, which early in the period occurred every third week.

As has been noted, rents were also due to the Bishop of Worcester, who was Lord of the Manorial Lands of Stratford, the town having been laid out in burgage plots by Bishop John de Coutance at the end of C12. As such, the Bishop was entitled to the rents upon those plots and the buildings upon them, and he also had substantial land holdings in addition to the burgages. The amount of the rent due was largely dependent on size: from 2d for shops in Bridge Street to 10s for ten acres of land and pasture. Burgage sizes varied



across the country but in Stratford a burgage was 18x60m (57x197ft) and they could be subdivided; here, full burgage tenants were paying a modest 12d annually to the Bishop in rent.

Likewise, the Guild of the Holy Cross acted as a landlord, for instance in 1272 requiring a hefty 6s 6d (32 days' skilled labour) in rent from Geoffrey and Margery de Baginden for two messuages in the town.<sup>15</sup> Thus it gained its income not only from membership fees and annual payment by members of light silver<sup>16</sup> but also from property and land transactions. As already noted, much of the Guild's income was expended on the church and the altars it maintained there.



*Arms of the Diocese  
of Worcester*

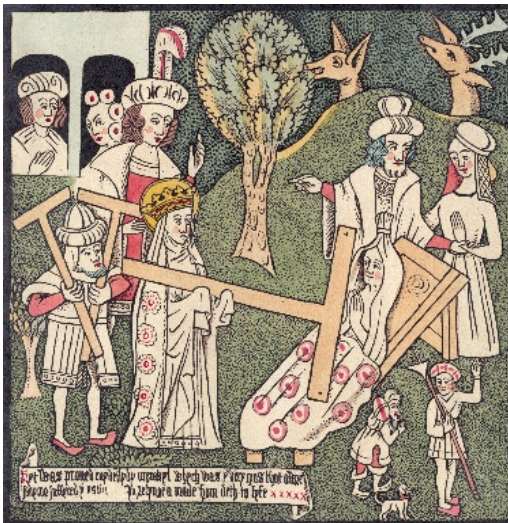
As early as 1260, parishioners were making grants to the guilds for the safety of their souls and the souls of their ancestors, which presupposes a profound belief in the cleansing fires of Purgatory – a doctrine reaffirmed by the Second Council of Lyons, convened in 1274, which used the teaching of Pope Innocent IV in its formal declaration on Purgatory.<sup>17</sup>

Thereafter in Stratford, there was a flurry of such grants and quitclaims to the benefit of the guilds, as with two in favour of the Guild of the Holy Cross and a further three to the Blessed Mary and her chaplain, all c.1275. At this time, the Guild of the Blessed Mary apparently did not include St John Baptist, and reference to a chaplain suggests that some kind of Lady Chapel may already have been in existence in Holy Trinity at this early date.

By 1292, however, a single Gild of the Blessed Mary and St John is the beneficiary of a quitclaim by Nicholas Coper, of all his right in a messuage in Stratford, but by 1324 there appears once again to have been a separation of the two Guilds, 'the Brethren of the Gild of St John Baptist of Stratford' being named as the recipients of a grant in frankalmoign by John Begelyn. By 1353, the Guild of the Holy Cross was collecting payments for light silver from its members, but until its amalgamation with the Guilds of the Blessed

Mary and St John Baptist in 1403–04, it is probable that these other two guilds were regarded as responsible for maintaining their own altars in the Church. The first reference in the Guild accounts to any expenditure on them was some five years later, in 1408–09.

Returning to the land and property transactions, at the end of C13 they begin to be dated, but in a form unfamiliar to us today. The first was witnessed on 'Friday before the feast of St George, 20 Edw. I' (18 Apr 1292) – St George's day is 23 April. This method of dating such documents demonstrates the importance of the liturgical year, central to worship at Holy Trinity and in the day-to-day negotiations of its parishioners. Were this still the case, a solicitor dating a document signed and witnessed on 8 June 2021 may have recorded it as 'Tuesday before the Feast of St Barnabas, 69 Eliz. II'. (St Barnabas' feast day is 11 June.)



*Guild Chapel wall painting:  
St Helena finds the True Cross*

Another feast day central in medieval Christianity and particularly to Holy Trinity parishioners who were members of the Guild of the Holy Cross, occurs in dated transactions in 1332 and 1362; the Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross (3 May) celebrated the reputed finding of the true cross by St Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, in Jerusalem, where she visited to excavate the Holy Sepulchre c.327 AD.

Likewise, the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross (14 Sept) was important. In celebration of the discovery of the Holy Cross, Constantine ordered the construction of churches at the site of the Holy Sepulchre and on Mount Calvary. Those

churches were dedicated on 13 and 14 Sept 335, and shortly thereafter the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross began to be celebrated on the latter date. The feast slowly spread from Jerusalem to other churches, until, by the year 720, the celebration was universal.<sup>18</sup>

The Blessed Virgin also features regularly in the dating of the Stratford grants and leases of this period, when, moving through the liturgical year, her several feast days were celebrated: the Annunciation, 25 March; the Assumption, 15 August; Nativity, 8 September; (Immaculate) Conception, 8 December, though this was a contentious issue in the medieval church, only gradually becoming accepted during C15; the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, 2 February, follows Immaculate Conception, and is still celebrated by Anglicans as Candlemas and the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

This practice of granting property and land to both private individuals and religious organisations and dating the documents according to the nearest feast day and the regnal year continued uninterrupted until late C15, demonstrating the close association between the secular and the sacred in the lives of Holy Trinity parishioners.

By 1488, the record of transactions was more succinct, witnesses having been dispensed with and the hall of the Gild instead being the location of their official endorsement. In June of that year, the traditional method of dating was still in use: ‘in the feast of the Nativity of St John Baptist, 3 Henry VII’ (24 June 1488) but by October a different method was beginning to replace it: ‘20 October, 4 Henry VII’ (1488) though the king’s regnal year, as here, continued to be used into the Reformation.<sup>19</sup> This dual system was still in operation a decade later, one document being dated ‘in the Feast of the Annunciation 13 Henry VII’ (25 March 1498) and another, ‘31 August 14 Henry VII’ (1498).



*Henry VII, reigned 1457–1509*



*Henry VIII, reigned 1509–47*

The last document in this series to revert to the traditional pattern is dated 'in the feast of St John Baptist, 36 Henry VIII' (24 Jun 1544) only some two-and-a-half years before the king's death on 28 January 1547. Despite the dismantling of much of the liturgical calendar during the Reformation in both England and parts of Europe, Luther endorsed the continued celebration of the nativity of St John Baptist because it was pure, and its celebration continued to be approved under both Henry and his son Edward VI. Thomas Becket met no such

favourable fate, perceived by Henry as a threat to kingly authority. The approval of St John Baptist, along with the retention of Marian feast days in the Protestant calendar, has implications for the possible survival of Holy Trinity's Lady Chapel and altar to St John Baptist, probably a secondary altar in that location. (p.30)

There is no record of when they were finally dismantled, but there is evidence elsewhere<sup>20</sup> of a gradual adoption of reformed worship, alongside pre-Reformation Roman Catholic liturgy, into the reign of Elizabeth I. The two Holy Trinity altars in question, along with others in the church, could have been targeted as early as the implementation, in 1546, of the December 1545 first Chantries Act, or with the suppression of the religious guilds, Stratford's in April 1548, following the second Chantries Act, passed on Christmas Eve 1547. The Guild by then had been renamed the Guild of the Holy Trinity, with no direct association in name with the Blessed Mary or St John Baptist, so their altars may have survived into the reign of Elizabeth and finally been dismantled as a result of her edict in 1559, requiring the defacing of all Catholic imagery (not, however, acted upon until 1563/4 in the Guild Chapel, by the Town Corporation, then its owner).

Considering the suppression of the Gild and confiscation of all its property and goods by the crown, it is instructive to look at what it was making in 1499–1500 from rent; that year, it collected £48.12.0d<sup>21</sup> from tenants of the properties it had acquired over the previous two-and-a-half centuries, again in familiar locations,<sup>22</sup> all confiscated by the crown in 1548.

Various names denoting trades occur in this document: John Baker, Richard Draper, Roger Carpenter, Thomas Couper, John Elys (possibly associated with the extraction of oil in Ely Street) Thomas Plasterer, Henry Hosyar, Vrinus Taylor, Richard Smyth. It should be noted, though, that by this date such surnames were no longer necessarily a direct indication of occupation.

Thomas Jolyffe is also mentioned. As Guild chaplain and schoolteacher, he had endowed the Guild with his considerable estate in 1482, for the benefit of the Guild's school that subsequently survived the Reformation to be re-named first as the King's School, then as King Edward School (KES).

The grants and leases under consideration span three centuries and the reigns of thirteen monarchs, from Henry III to Henry VIII, but only in the reign of Edward I is the first one dated: 'Friday before the feast of St George, 20 Edw. I' (18 April 1292) as already noted, with the last near the end of Henry VIII's reign: '4 March, 37 Henry VIII' (1545/6).



*Edward I, reigned 1272–1307*

Over that period feast days still familiar to Holy Trinity parishioners today are named, for example Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, All Souls, Trinity Sunday. Some saints still play a part in our worship and culture: Valentine, George and the other three patron saints of these islands, Andrew, David and Patrick, as well as Michael, who shares his feast day with All



Angels. The 84 saints' and other feast days referenced in the Stratford grants and leases were, we may presume, celebrated at the High Altar and the other medieval altars in Holy Trinity.

It is by no means a comprehensive list;<sup>23</sup> numerous others must also have been celebrated, among them, St Katherine (25 November, shared with St Clement the Pope, who takes precedence and is listed); the immensely popular St Ursula (21 October) with her 11,000 virgin martyrs; the Feast of the Transfiguration (6 August) probably excluded because it was only gradually introduced into the western liturgical calendar, the date being fixed in 1457, not long before the decline in dating of documents according to the calendar. This demonstrates that the list of saints evolved over the three centuries in question as feast days were added, and they were only noted incidentally in the property and land transactions, according to when each document happened to be drawn up.

Of the colourful saintly characters who found their way into Stratford's documents and the worship at Holy Trinity, some are illustrious, others are more obscure. There are three popes:



*Pope saints: Sylvester, Clement and Gregory*

and three archbishops (though Augustine is referred to as Bishop) plus four bishops:





*Archbishop saints: Edmund, Botolph and Augustine*



*Bishop saints: Aldelm, Cuthbert, Oswald and Wulfstan*

There are ever-popular martyr saints: Laurence and two favourite English martyr kings Kenelm and Edward, plus Vitus, appropriately to Stratford patron saint of actors, comedians and dancers, boiled in a cauldron with his tutor Modestus and governess Crescentia. Her name, however, is not linked with theirs in the Stratford documents:



*Martyr saints: Laurence, Kenelm, Edward and Vitus*

Lastly, the medieval Roman Catholic church had a special place in its collective clerical heart for virgin martyrs, whom they hoped would encourage pious young women into the novitiate. Though Ursula and her company of virgins are absent, others are celebrated:



*Virgin martyr saints: (top) Julia, Margaret, Faith and Scholastica;  
(bottom) Frideswide, Agnes, Agatha and Lucy*

In view of all that these contemporary medieval sources reveal about worship in Holy Trinity, it seems small wonder that the Guild of the Holy Cross spent so much on its altars, at which many of the feast days would have been celebrated. The building that has survived into C21 reveals little about its medieval ancestor, which was a vibrant, busy place, where worship was conducted in a blaze of colour and light. All of this was extinguished, along with profound beliefs and practices and many of its cherished saints, in the seismic religious turmoil precipitated by the English Reformation.

We do not know how far this iconoclastic zeal had made its mark on Holy Trinity when Shakespeare was a young parishioner, or whether he may himself have embraced the 'Old Faith'. (p.149) After all, Mary Tudor's attempts to reverse the ravages of the Protestant Reformation had ended with

the accession of Elizabeth I less than six years before his birth, and the religious turmoil precipitated by successive Tudor monarchs must have been fresh in the collective memory of the town. What is evident though, is that many of his plays are set against a backdrop of medieval Roman Catholicism in England and in Europe, which gave him licence to explore that world, to people it with clerics and nuns, and to make frequent references to the saints who had been venerated in the church of his baptism (see [Appendix A](#)).

## References/Notes

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- 1 Hardy, W.J., ed., *Stratford-on-Avon Corporation Records: The Guild Accounts 1353–1502* (Stratford-on-Avon Corp., 1886) <https://archive.org/details/stratfordonavonc00stra>
- 2 The rood was the carved wooden or stone image of Christ on the cross, mounted on top of the rood screen, which separated the nave from chancel. In Holy Trinity the medieval carved wooden rood screen survives, now relocated across entrance to the north transept.
- 3 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter> Caution should be exercised with conversion rates, which vary from source to source and can be misleading. The 2020 *per diem* skilled labour rate in Stratford is £270, which would make the 57 days' skilled labour equivalent to £15,390.
- 4 At current Stratford skilled labour rates, this 97 day period equates to £26,190. By comparison, Holy Trinity's annual expenditure on electricity and candles (excluding votive candles) 2018–19 totalled £4,770.48; votive candle donations were £8,106.
- 5 Hardy, *op. cit.*, account nos. 23, 31, 40, 45, 53, 61, 64–70, 78, 80, 89, 102
- 6 Halliwell, J.O., ed., *The Will of Sir Hugh Clopton* (London: Whittingham and Wilkins, 1865) <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015082138960>
- 7 Nichols, John Gough, *Ancient Paintings in Fresco discovered in 1804 on the Walls of the Chapel of the Trinity at Stratford-upon-Avon* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1838) containing drawings by Thomas Fisher.
- 8 Bloom, J. Harvey, *Shakespeare's Church* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1902) p.75. There are no references to St John Evangelist in the Guild accounts, and only one among all the grants and leases, in 1343/44, where William de Gorshawe makes a grant to the Proctors of the Guild of St John Baptist and St John Evangelist of the Church of Stratford – from which Bloom probably made the presumption of an altar to the Evangelist.
- 9 The altar was probably dedicated to the popular virgin martyr St Katherine of Alexandria, she of the Catherine wheel, who was beheaded, rather than to the mystic St Katherine of Sienna, who was also beheaded, but posthumously, having died of natural causes in Rome. Her devotees decapitated her body, along with a thumb, to sneak her head and digit past the Roman guard and install them as holy relics in the Basilica San Domenico in Siena, where they can still be seen today.
- 10 This £20 would have provided 666 days of skilled labour (National Archives Currency Converter): equating to c. £179,820 in 2020, according to current Stratford skilled labour

- rate of £270 *per diem*; even though currency conversion methods may vary, there is little doubt that this was a very generous bequest.
- 11 Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (SCLA) BRT2/1 Records of the Stratford-upon-Avon Bridgewardens, 1524–1675
  - 12 Mulryne, Ronnie, 'The Thomas Becket Chapel: its history and people', in Mulryne, Ronnie, ed., *Holy Trinity Church: A Taste of History*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Publishing Network, Ltd., 2019) pp.81-97
  - 13 SCLA BRT1/2 Guild of the Holy Cross: Grants and Leases, c. 1250–1546
  - 14 Grants in frankalmoign were given over in perpetuity to a religious organisation, in this case the said Guild.
  - 15 Messuage referred to a dwelling house, with the adjacent buildings and curtilage, and the adjoining lands appropriated to the use of the household (L. *mansio*, -onis, a dwelling, from which we get manse and mansion).
  - 16 Mairi Macdonald estimates that in early C15 the average lifetime membership fee was 20s (2020 equivalent: £13,500) per person and 10d light silver (2020 equivalent: £540). Macdonald, Mairi, 'The Guild of the Holy Cross and its Buildings', in Mulryne, J.R., ed., *The Guild and Guild Buildings of Shakespeare's Stratford* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) p.22
  - 17 *If those who are truly repentant die in charity before they have done sufficient penance for their sins of omission and commission, their souls are cleansed after death in purgatorial or cleansing punishments. The suffrages of the faithful on earth can be of great help in relieving these punishments, as, for instance, the Sacrifice of the Mass, prayers, almsgiving, and other religious deeds which, in the manner of the Church, the faithful are accustomed to offer for others of the faithful.*
  - 18 Caxton's 1483 *Golden Legend*, based on the 1260 *Legenda Sanctorum* compiled by Genoese Archbishop Jacobus de Voragine, was an invaluable hagiography circulated extensively in medieval Christian Europe, with over 900 manuscript copies still surviving; it was also the most frequently-printed book in Europe from 1470–1530, with two editions appearing each year during first five decades of printing in Europe; it was translated into numerous European languages and rivalled the Bible in popularity.
  - 19 Both are from the reign of Henry VII, 1488; the first is dated in his 3rd year, but the second is 4 Henry VII, because he had seized the crown from Richard III at the battle of Bosworth field on 22 August 1485, which began the first year of his reign. Likewise, Henry VII's date of accession was 22 August 1485, so the two 1498 dates given here span two regnal years.
  - 20 Buck, Katlin, *Anti-papist Legislation and Recusancy in Elizabethan England 1558–1603* (unpublished PhD thesis, Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University 2012) p.15
  - 21 2020 equivalent: £437,400
  - 22 Churchstrete; Shepustrete; Dedelane; Hystrete; Swynestrete; Rotherstrete; Grenehulstrete; Henleystrete; Bruggestrete; Wyndesore; Wodestrete; Middelrowe and Walkerstrete; Shoterey and Bruggetoun.
  - 23 See: <http://www.staffordsolutions.co.uk/themcs/calendar.htm> This C14 Roman Catholic liturgical calendar lists 81 feast days between the start of the year on 25 March and the end of April, making the number of 84 named over a period of two-and-a-half centuries in the Stratford documents seem insignificant by comparison.



# 2

## The Lady Chapel

Lindsay and Sandra MacDonald

### The Cult of the Blessed Virgin

In the Middle Ages, the veneration of Mary, mother of Jesus, grew to encompass all manner of devotions through prayer, pious acts, visual arts, poetry and music devoted to the *Beata Vergine Maria* (BVM). Belief in her miraculous conception of God the Son was the basis for calling Mary *Theotokos* (Mother of God) as adopted at the Council of Ephesus in 431. She was seen as the ‘new Eve’ in symmetry with Christ as the ‘new Adam’, from their joint participation in the redemption of humanity. By C8 there was a widespread



*Virgin and Child, c.1475*

acceptance of the Assumption of Mary, based on the tradition that Mary had died in the presence of the apostles and been placed in a tomb. When re-opened at the request of St Thomas, the tomb was found to be empty, and hence the apostles believed that she had been taken up into Heaven. Mary was elevated in medieval tradition to be Queen of Heaven (*Regina caeli*) bearing a crown of twelve stars as described in Revelation 12:1-5. Marian feast days included: Annunciation (March 25); Visitation (May 31); Assumption (August 15); Nativity of Mary (September 8); and Immaculate Conception<sup>1</sup> (December 8). These continue to be celebrated up to the present day in the Roman Catholic church.

Mary came to be regarded as the primary intercessor for the salvation of humankind. Almost every medieval church and cathedral in Europe had a chapel dedicated to ‘Our Lady’ and many cities placed themselves under her

protection. Miraculous healings took place, saints reported Marian apparitions, and their locations became places of pilgrimage. Veneration of the Blessed Virgin was encouraged by the church hierarchy, and images of Mary were ubiquitous. Approximately one third of all churches built in the period 1200–1500 throughout Europe were dedicated to Saint Mary. Even the calendar paid homage to Mary, because the first day of the year was Lady Day (March 25).

When Eton College was founded in 1440 by Henry VI, he dedicated it to Mary as ‘the College Roiall of Our Ladye of Eton besyde Windesore’. Much of the polyphonic music in the Eton Choirbook is addressed to Mary. The texts and rich musical settings were statements of allegiance to the woman chosen by God to bear his Son, transformed into the saint who might most potently act as mediator between God and man, assisting the soul in its quest for salvation and tipping the scales in its favour at the Day of Judgement. For example, the motet *Gaude Flore Virginali*, composed c.1480 by Hugh Kellyk, rejoices in mystical transcendent melisma. It contains the verses:

*Gaude splendens vas virtutum,  
Cuius pendens est ad nutum  
Tota caeli curia:  
Te benignam et felicem  
Jesu dignam genitricem  
Veneratur in gloria.*

Rejoice radiant vessel of goodness  
on whose assent hangs  
all the government of heaven:  
you the kind, the blessed,  
the worthy mother of Jesus,  
they venerate in glory.

*Gaude nexu voluntatis  
Et amplexu caritatis  
Iuncta sic Altissimo  
Ut ad votum consequaris  
Quicquid virgo postularis  
A Jesu dulcissimo.*

Rejoice that you are so united in will  
and the embrace of love  
with the Most High  
that you obtain the promise  
of whatever virgin prayer you make  
of your sweetest Jesus.

According to the original statutes of Eton College, members of the choir were to assemble each evening in the chapel before the image of the Virgin, and sing ‘in the best manner of which they have knowledge’ an antiphon in her honour. During Lent they were to perform the *Salve Regina*, for which the Choirbook offered a choice of fifteen different settings. While singing, they were surrounded by wall paintings depicting miracles of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>2</sup>





(left) Bronze seal matrix, late C14, dug up in the grounds of Stratford-upon-Avon College;  
(right) its impression in wax, showing a suppliant figure in clerical dress and with the hint of a tonsure, kneeling in prayer to the crowned Virgin holding the Christ child<sup>3</sup>

Images, especially of the Virgin and Child, were important to the medieval church as a means of explaining the scriptures. In C6, Pope Gregory I had defended the educational use of images as the *Biblia pauperum*, or ‘poor man’s Bible’, teaching the faith to those who could not read. Thomas Aquinas exalted images as aids for communicating with the divine, and argued that devotion shown to the material object ascends to the spiritual reality it represents. By late C15 the Augustinian Gottschalk Hollen could claim that people were led to piety: ‘through a picture more than through a sermon’. Such rhetoric provided a theological rebuttal to charges of idolatry, but for the ordinary man and woman it was often difficult to distinguish the icon from the abstraction, so that the images themselves became the focus of superstition and veneration. Visual representations proliferated in every form, but were seen as idolatrous by those who disapproved of the rituals and mistrusted Catholic motives. As the cult of saints, images and relics intensified, so too did the criticism that ultimately led to the Reformation and the destruction of so much of the pictorial representation. Erasmus was withering in his assessment of ritualistic medieval piety and advocated a return to the doctrine of the Greek scriptural sources.<sup>4</sup>

## Architectural Background

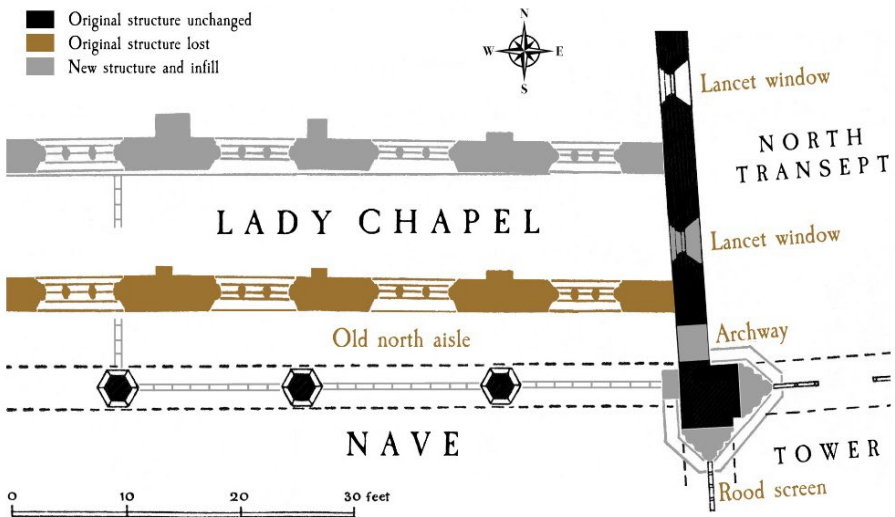
There is a traditional association of the north side of the church with devotion to the Blessed Virgin, as revealed by the widespread foundation of Lady Chapels. Although in the great English churches and cathedrals the Lady Chapel was usually located in an apse to the east of the chancel, there were plenty of precedents for locating it in an aisle adjacent to the nave. Canterbury Cathedral, for example, in addition to having the entire crypt dedicated to the Virgin, also had, since the days of Lanfranc, a chapel dedicated to her at the eastern end of the north aisle.

The Norman church of Holy Trinity seems to have had narrow aisles on both sides of the nave and the chancel (see [Appendix B](#)). In the early 1300s a project was undertaken to widen the north aisle to make space for a Lady Chapel. It was no doubt motivated by the intensification of devotion to the Virgin Mary in later medieval England and the pressure to house new Marian liturgies (in particular the daily morning Lady Mass and evening Salve service) in appropriate spaces.

It is uncertain whether influential local figures in Stratford championed this initiative. No contemporary evidence has been found for the involvement of any powerful individuals or family, but it clearly had the blessing of successive bishops of Worcester, after the Archbishop of Armagh first lent support to the project, in his indulgence of 1312/13 ([pp.24-26](#)). It is likely to have met with the subsequent approval of the de Stratford brothers, John and Robert, members of the prominent Hatton family, and Rectors of Holy Trinity, John in 1317–19 and Robert in 1319–34. They went on to become illustrious holders of office in both church and state.<sup>5</sup>

The north wall of the nave at Holy Trinity was moved outwards by 12 feet to create a space of approximately 48 by 18 feet for the Lady Chapel at the eastern end of the north aisle, as shown in the diagram opposite. Based on the style of the window tracery, it is likely that the widening of the aisle at first included only the first three bays, with the western end widened subsequently, perhaps as late as 1350.<sup>6</sup> At some stage the north door, with its ancient sanctuary knocker, was relocated to its current position.

In the north transept, both the inner lancet window and the archway through the west wall were filled, providing a broad wall at the eastern end of the north aisle, against which a substantial altar to St Mary could be built. A small opening in the archway seems to have been retained as a squint hole to enable the priest standing at the altar to see and coordinate with the priest officiating at the high altar in the chancel. Bloom claims that: ‘the whole area of the chapel was enclosed by an elaborate parclose (carved wooden screen) part of which now divides the chancel from the tower crossing’.<sup>7</sup>



*Structure of the north aisle before and after the modifications in the early 1300s; the aisle was widened from about 6 feet to 18 feet to accommodate the Lady Chapel.*

The addition and enlargement of chapels was a common feature of the growth of English parish churches in C13 and C14:

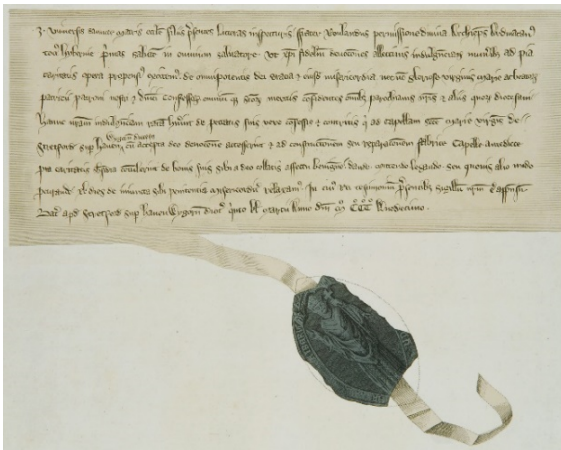
Sometimes they were erected by a wealthy individual; sometimes by one of the various town guilds; sometimes by the chief municipal guild which governed the town and was practically town council. No doubt every guild liked as far as possible to have attached to the old church what was in effect its own little church, where it could go in state, like modern Odd Fellows, and where deceased members of the guild could have masses said for the repose of their souls.<sup>8</sup>

## The Guild of the Holy Cross

In the medieval church of Holy Trinity, the Lady Chapel was maintained from early C15 by the Guild of the Holy Cross. The Guild was already in existence in Stratford in 1269/70, when the Bishop of Worcester, Godfrey Giffard, granted a licence to build an oratory and hospital, presumably on the site of the present Guild Chapel. Before its amalgamation with the Guild of the Holy Cross in 1403, the Guild of the Blessed Mary existed as a separate entity, with its own accounts and its own altar in Holy Trinity Church (see [Chapter 1](#)). The role of the Guild in the Lady Chapel is described in detail by Mairi Macdonald.<sup>9</sup>

The first mention of a Chaplain of the Blessed Mary is in a property grant c.1275, but it was not until February 1312/13 that there is evidence of a

chapel to the Blessed Virgin, when Rowland Jorse, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland, visited Stratford. He granted an indulgence, releasing from 40 days of enjoined penance those who piously contributed their goods towards the erection or repair of the fabric of the chapel of the Holy Mary the Virgin, of *Stretford upon Hauen*, in



*Indulgence granted by the Archbishop of Armagh, 1312, depicted by Thomas Fisher in 1807*

the diocese of Worcester, and who had confessed and repented of their sins.<sup>10</sup> The date of this indulgence is consistent with architectural opinion that the eastern end of the north aisle and the nave arcades also date from this time. The wording suggests that a Lady Chapel might already have been present there, perhaps in a narrower aisle. Alternatively, it may have been at the eastern end of the church, off the original chancel, or in the north transept.

The following year, in August 1314, Walter Maydenstun, Bishop of Worcester, granted a less generous 20 days' indulgence from penance, but with more extensive conditions:

to all who shall go to the Chapel of St Mary the Virgin of Stretford upon Abon within the diocese, and who shall contribute towards the construction or repairing of the Chapel, and who shall pray for the soule of Juliana, [the Bishop's mother] and of all the faithful dead and also for the tranquillity and peace of the King and the realm of England.<sup>11</sup>

This has echoes of the prayers still offered in the Anglican church, when we pray for the nation and the monarch, though usually we are not asked also to pray for the celebrant's or the bishop's mother!

This 1314 indulgence was issued in the reign of the ill-fated Edward II, at a time when he and the realm were in sore need of divine protection. Edward's army had been defeated by Robert the Bruce at the battle of Bannockburn, fought on 23-24 June – only six weeks or so before the 8 August date of the indulgence. The first war of Scottish Independence (begun in 1296 under Edward I) continued for 14 more years, precipitating widespread famine and blighting the whole of Edward II's reign. He was murdered on 27 September 1327 and the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton, which ended the war, wasn't signed until 12 May 1328, at the beginning of the reign of Edward III. Bruce became king and there followed a long and troubled history of relations between Scotland and England that still plagues us today.

The Lady Chapel continued to benefit from the attention of subsequent Bishops of Worcester into the second half of C14, when in September 1367 Bishop William Whittlesey granted a generous 40 days' indulgence:

to all who for the sake of pilgrimage, oblation or devotion with pious mind shall visit the image of the Blessed Virgin in the Parish Church of Stratford upon Abon and there with devout inclination of their bodies or heads say the Angelic Salutation 'Ave Maria' five times in honour of the five principal Joys of the same Blessed Virgin.<sup>12</sup>

The tone of this indulgence reflects a brief period of national peace and prosperity under Edward III, in an interval during the Hundred Years War.

In August 1381 Bishop Henry [Wakefield] granted forty days indulgence:<sup>13</sup>

to all those of his diocese who shall contribute towards the ornamentation of the altar to the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the parish church of Stratford and to the lighting of the same.

In this indulgence, there is no hint of the turmoil into which other parts of the country had been plunged that summer by the Great Revolt (latterly inappropriately termed the Peasants' Revolt) against a universally unpopular poll tax, raised by 14-year-old Richard II's government, to continue to finance the protracted and disastrous Hundred Years War against France. Mercifully for Stratford and the diocese of Worcester, they were very little affected by the widespread carnage and chaos suffered elsewhere.

Throughout C14, it is apparent that the Guild of St Mary received greater episcopal attention and favour than the Guild of the Holy Cross but, for reasons that remain obscure, in 1403 the two guilds amalgamated with that of St John the Baptist to form the Guild of the Holy Cross, the Blessed Mary and St John the Baptist. The Guild accounts following this amalgamation reveal that the Marian altar was an important focus of worship for Guild members, both 'bretheren' and 'sisteren'.<sup>14</sup> Legacies were left by members for the altar, and money was spent on lighting, provisions, washing and repairing vestments, as well as chests, chalices, etc.

In the Guild accounts for the year 1410, in the reign of Henry IV, we find:

wax bought for lighting before the image of St Mary; 13 lb of 'candels' for the Chaplains therewith to celebrate, 2s 2d ; 7 gallons of oil for the three lamps, 7d; 4 lb of wax for small tapers to burn before the image of St Mary, on festival days, 2s; making the same, 1d.

In 1430 6d was paid for making a chain (*pro legatione unius torcheti*) for the altar of the Holy Mary; and 7d for mending the locks of a chest of the Blessed Mary in the Chapel in the Church. In 1436 it is recorded that John Botiller, a 'vestment maker' of Warwick, was paid: 'for mending the vestments of the Altar of the Blessed Mary; mending books (*librorum*) of the said altar; mending a cope belonging to the said altar, etc.'



In 1459 there was an allowance of 24s 10d for purchase of a new chalice for the Altar of the Blessed Mary. An inventory of Guild goods in 1475 lists 60 items associated with their three altars in Holy Trinity, including copes, vestments, embroidered altar cloths, and painted cloths to be used at various seasons, many of which were for the Lady Chapel.<sup>15</sup>

Another image of Mary stood at the right side proper of the crucified Christ on the High Cross on the rood screen, with John the Baptist on the left side. The word ‘rood’ is derived from the Saxon *rode*, meaning ‘cross’. John the Baptist rather than John the Divine was prominent in regions involved with sheep and the wool trade because of his traditional association with leather, as shown by the former’s presence in the Guild triumvirate; in Holy Trinity there was also the association of his name with the Guild.



*The C15 rood screen in the Anglican church of St Mellanus, Mullion, Cornwall, was restored in 1925. The central figure of Christ crucified is flanked by Mary and John the Evangelist.*

The statue of Mary on the rood provided another locus of veneration, and all three statues were illuminated from below by beams of light, also maintained by the Guild. In 1411 the Guild accounts record payments for cleaning the images of the High Cross, Blessed Mary, St John the Baptist, and cleaning the rood-loft; also red lead and other colours, gold and oil, for painting the said images and rood-loft, with payment to the painter; and linen cloth for making *vestis* hanging before the High Cross in the time of Lent. The ancient wooden rood screen in Holy Trinity still exists and is now fitted across the archway from the crossing into the north transept. Traces of the original coloured paint may still be seen.

## Visual Appearance of the Lady Chapel

Financial support by the Guild for the Lady Chapel made possible the lavish equipping of the altar and provision of decoration and consumables (see [Chapter 1](#)). According to Bloom, Mary's image was placed at the back of the altar in the Lady Chapel, before which a light burned. The altar had a pair of latten candlesticks, a painted table, and its own chalice and a paten, missal, pyx and sanctus bell.<sup>16</sup> Candles burned at the altar day and night, with the wax paid for by 'light silver' offerings from the members of the Guild. The Lady Chapel was a highly visible focus of devotion and spiritual reassurance for the people of the town, as a counterpoint to the splendour of the St Thomas Becket Chapel in the south aisle.

By 1400 enthusiasm for the cult of the Virgin had penetrated lay society, and the Mary Mass became a vehicle of popular devotion, together with use of the Rosary as an aid to reciting daily prayers to the Virgin. As attendance increased in Lady Chapels, there was also greater impetus for Marian imagery, emphasising the Virgin as an individual with a personal history and miraculous powers, worthy of veneration in her own right. These images went beyond reminders of the Virgin and instead seemed to captivate their viewers by somehow representing her actual, physical presence. Hence statues were richly painted, decorated with jewels, either real or imitation, and were frequently dressed and crowned and adorned with jewellery.<sup>17</sup>

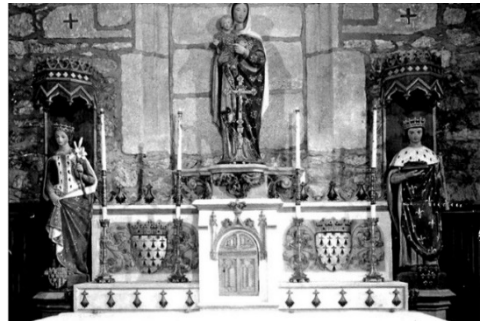
The people of the late Middle Ages, upon visiting a cathedral or any other richly ornamented church, felt themselves to be in an anteroom of Heaven. Torches and candelabra, candles, incense, hand-held bells for ringing during services, patens, monstrances, chalices, vestments, tapestries, drapes, altar cloths, and all other ritual objects clearly marked the contrast between the sacral sphere and the mundane environment beyond the church.<sup>18</sup>

An inventory in the Guild records of 1454 (reign of Henry VI) reveals the diversity and richness of the vestments and accessories provided for the Lady Chapel.<sup>19</sup> The list includes: eight sets of vestments for use at the Altar of Our Lady, variously in cloth of gold, silk and fustian in colours for all the liturgical seasons; a suit of black vestments for the priest, deacon and assistant deacon for use with the holy tomb (i.e. Easter sepulchre); coffers

for all the vestments; two chalices of silver and gold; six altar cloths and frontals in various colours; a mass book, psalter, crucifix, latten candlesticks, pewter cruets and towels for the altar. In addition, for the altar of St John the Baptist there were four more sets of vestments, one ‘of selke with pecokks of golde’, four altar cloths, and another chalice of silver and gold. For the rood altar there was a cloth having ‘a fruntell of blew with Kathryn wheles steynyd’, and a ‘candilstik of laton with a dowbul floure’. Many of these items also appear in the later inventory of 1475 transcribed by Bloom.<sup>15</sup>

At Salisbury Cathedral, an inventory from 1536 records the presence of an image of the Virgin in the Lady Chapel made of silver gilt, inlaid with precious stones. This costly object, weighing 50 ounces, was given to the church by Radulphus de Stratford, the treasurer (*thesaurarius*) in 1336.<sup>20</sup> He was the same Ralph de Stratford who in 1340 was elected Bishop of London, and later built the College in Stratford (p.43).

There is no description or drawing of the medieval Lady Chapel in Holy Trinity. We do not know whether there was a statue or a carving or a painting behind the altar, but we may assume from normal practice at the time that it was amply decorated. An idea of its possible appearance may be gained from the surviving medieval altar at the Chapel of Our Lady of Bongarant in Brittany, thought to date from C14. Undoubtedly there was a plenitude of visual imagery.



*Statue of the Virgin of Mercy at the Chapel of Our Lady of Bongarant, Sautron, Bretagne*

In general, Lady Chapels were distinctive in terms of both their architectural plans and the furnishing of their interiors. In addition to being the largest chapel of a church, the Lady Chapel also featured rich materials such as Purbeck marble. Elaborate ornamentation was applied to flooring, piers and capitals, window tracery, arcade moulding, roof bosses, and vaulting. Both

the quantity and quality of interior decoration, including the use of paint and gilding, contributed to their show of grandeur. This was apparent in statues, sculpture, reredos, altar front, clothing worn by the priests, light fittings, and candlestands. Marian iconography was also an important part of the décor in wall paintings, stained glass, tapestries, paintings, statues and figurines.<sup>21</sup>

The painting on the opposite page by local artist Janet Hall, shows how the Lady Chapel might have looked in 'ordinary time' (i.e. not Lent nor Advent nor a feast day) in the mid-1400s, based on our knowledge from Guild records and surviving physical evidence in the architecture of the church:

- the chapel occupies the three eastern bays of the north aisle;
- the tomb of Hugh Clopton has not yet been built in the first nave arch, nor has the clerestory been built above the nave;
- the Marian altar is in the centre of the wall at the eastern end, raised by three steps above floor level;
- the floor consists of flagstones with rush matting;
- a life-size statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary stands at the left end of the altar, i.e. in the north-eastern corner of the chapel;
- a squint hole through the top of the walled-up arch, to the right of the altar, enables the priest to see his senior colleague saying mass at the high altar in the chancel, to coordinate the elevation of the host (i.e. the 'sacring' or moment of transubstantiation);
- the stained and painted cloths hanging on the wall above depict: (left) the three Marys visiting the empty tomb; (right) coronation of the Virgin;
- the retablo behind the Lady altar is in the form of a triptych, with painted scenes of Mary's life;
- an aumbry is recessed into the wall for storing of altar vessels;
- a second altar to St John the Baptist is placed against the northern wall, beneath the second window, facing west (the supplicants face east);
- the reredos behind altar has a painting of St John in a camel-hair coat;
- worshippers kneel before St John's altar on a prie-dieu or hassock;
- the tonsured priest wears a chasuble and other vestments provided by the Guild of the Holy Cross;





*Painting by Janet Hall, visualising how the Lady Chapel might have looked in the late 1400s*

- green embroidered frontal cloths on the altars match the priest's dress;
- scenes from the life of Mary are painted on the walls, and decorative patterns on the nave pillars and arches;
- the chandelier above each altar contains many candles, producing a blaze of illumination; it is raised and lowered by a chain and pulley mechanism, supported by the main roof beams;
- light fittings ('torches') on pillars and walls hold additional candles;
- north-facing daylight is admitted through the stained-glass windows, hence the illumination is bluish and rather dim and diffuse;
- there are no clerestory windows above the nave as yet, hence the ambient light level is very low, especially above the windows;
- the air is thick with incense and smoke from all the candles and torches; the upper surfaces and ceiling are made darker by accumulation of soot;
- a wooden storage chest on the floor holds vestments and altar vessels.<sup>22</sup>
- a wooden chamber stands in the first nave arch for use as a sepulchre in the Easter pageant, possibly also used as a confessional booth;
- items on altar include the Vulgate Bible, Latin missal, patten, chalice;
- the roof beams slope downward to the left with rafters above (as now).

## The Reformation

Everything changed with the Reformation. The problem was that the veneration of the Blessed Virgin and the saints had become so bound up with imagery that the visual representations threatened to overshadow the spiritual elements. The symbols of devotion were rejected by those who perceived Catholicism as a cult, and the influence of the Pope as a malign foreign domination. Iconophilia came to be seen as idolatry, and the scepticism of Erasmus took hold in a tide of revolt all over northern



*German woodcut (1520) suggesting Catholic ridicule of iconoclasm*



Europe. From the mid-1520s Protestant mobs in the cities of Switzerland entered churches and cathedrals, pulled down statues and images of all kinds, and smashed or burned them.<sup>23</sup> Lady Chapels and their contents were prime targets of this destruction of idols; as the iconoclasts descended, Catholics pleaded in vain for their images to be spared.

In England, Henry VIII saw the ritual as a means by which Rome exercised control over the church and therefore it became a focus in his campaign to break free. In September 1538, Thomas Cromwell issued a set of injunctions targeting all ceremonies associated with the worship of saints at altars, shrines and chapels. From henceforth there were to be ‘no candles, tapers, or images of wax to be set before any image or picture’, thus quenching the lights that were financed by the guilds. Moreover the saints were to be omitted from the litany, the recitation of the rosary was forbidden, and the ringing of the Ave bell (angelus) was outlawed. All of these measures struck at the practices of the Roman church, especially in Lady chapels.<sup>24</sup>

In July 1547, the first year of his reign, Edward VI issued a set of Royal Injunctions to ensure that his father’s reforms were carried through. Injunction 28 required:

That they [every dean, archdeacon, master of collegiate church, master of hospital, and prebendary being priest] shall take away, utterly extinct and destroy all shrines, covering of shrines, all tables, candlesticks, trindles or rolls of wax, pictures, paintings, and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry, and superstition: so that there remain no memory of the same in walls, glass-windows, or elsewhere within their churches or houses.

Driven by anti-Catholic reformist dogma, chantry chapels and religious imagery of all sorts were swept away. All over England, images of Christ, Mary and the Saints were destroyed in statues, carvings, paintings, icons and windows. Candlesticks and church plate had to be melted down and sold, altars dismantled and replaced by plain tables, stained glass replaced by plain glass, and rood screens defaced or demolished. Wall paintings were whitewashed, relics were discarded or burned, and paintings of saints hidden in parishioners’ houses. As Martin Gorick put it in a sermon in 2006:<sup>25</sup>

Devotion involving saints and images became suspect, and they were taken away and destroyed as idolatrous. It seems strange to us today, but in the name of God it was decreed that every image of Jesus and his mother should be thrown out of this church or left mutilated and defaced.

The iconoclasm had devastating effects in Holy Trinity on both the Becket Chapel in the south aisle and the Lady Chapel in the north aisle. No definite date is known for the dismantling of the Holy Trinity altars. Possibly it was in 1538, after Henry issued the Becket proclamation, but he was specifically targeting Becket at that point. If the Dean of the College (Anthony Barker) was conscientious then all of the Holy Trinity altars should have been dismantled immediately. The Guild and the College were suppressed as a result of the Chantries Act, passed on 24 December 1547. It was not until April 1548 that the act was implemented in Stratford, so it is possible that the altars remained until then. But under both Henry VIII and Edward VI the feast days for Mary and the nativity and decollation of St John the Baptist continued to be celebrated, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, so their altars in Holy Trinity may have survived, as elsewhere in the country, into the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>26</sup>



*Defaced image of Mary on rood screen  
of St Helen's, Ranworth, Norfolk*

Yet on Edward VI's death in July 1553, Mary I ascended the throne and endeavoured to return everything to Roman practice. The Mass was restored, along with all the old trappings. Crosses and images were brought back, and altars rebuilt. Sadly there is no record of the Lady Chapel at this time. One can only assume that a makeshift altar may have been erected, and that some of the former vestments, altar cloths, images and chalices could be found, perhaps in the houses of the local Catholic families such as the Cloptons, where they might have been taken for safe keeping. This is known to have happened with another Catholic Clopton family at Holy Trinity Church in Long Melford, Suffolk.<sup>27</sup>

The Roman rites were finally abolished by the Act of Uniformity in June 1559, six months after Elizabeth's accession, enforcing use of the revised Book of Common Prayer, followed by a set of Injunctions for the 'suppression of superstition' and 'to plant true religion'. These formed the basis for visitations by royal commissioners throughout the whole country, renewing the Edwardine reforms. An English liturgy was established, all images in windows and walls were to be obliterated, and the cult of the saints and the dead was to be no more. Moreover, the commissioners were to search out and destroy all physical remnants of Catholic practice that had been removed from churches and concealed in homes or barns.<sup>28</sup> During the ensuing decades the screw was tightened by William Cecil and his Privy Council, especially after the ill-judged move by the Pope (Pius V) in 1570 to excommunicate Elizabeth and absolve English Catholics of their duty to the sovereign. This enabled the authorities to portray Catholics as traitors, and it was in this atmosphere of fearful covert worship that Shakespeare would have been immersed as a child.<sup>29</sup>

How shocking it must have been for the parishioners of Holy Trinity following the Reformation! All of the altars and their furnishings were removed; the decorated curtains, altar cloths and robes gone; the painted statues, gilded images and decorations destroyed; the broken spaces patched up; walls whitewashed; windows glazed with plain glass; and candles extinguished. Music was restricted to plain-chant rendering of text.<sup>30</sup> In Stratford, the College was closed, the priests dispersed, the chantry suppressed, and the chancel boarded off from the rest of the church.<sup>31</sup> The dismantled Lady Chapel now lay empty, ruinous, bare and glaringly white.

The cultural and spiritual impact on the town must have been even greater. Since time immemorial the saints and the Blessed Virgin had been embedded so deeply in everyone's consciousness that they were integral to daily life and faith. Without them, where could one turn in time of need? The interminably dull sermons and dour surroundings of the Protestants were a poor substitute for the emotional multisensory charge of the images, music, incense and ritual of the old medieval worship. Small wonder that some, branded as 'recusants', refused to attend the reformed church, while many

others became 'Church Papists', attending church in accordance with the law, while celebrating the Mass in private. It has been speculated that the majority of churchgoers in Stratford were of this sort.<sup>32</sup>

For two or three generations, many of the local population remained devout Catholics, resenting the new religion being forced upon them. Michael Wood concluded, from the silence of the Corporation records during the period of John Shakespeare's active tenure of municipal office (1556–1576) that the people of Stratford were steadfastly opposed to Elizabeth's Act of Supremacy (1558) and the religious practice it was designed to enforce.<sup>33</sup>

The Corporation records from the time of Shakespeare's childhood reveal most by what they *don't* say. They offer none of the tell-tale signs of precocious Protestant enthusiasm found in East Anglian towns, or even in neighbouring Coventry. There are no accounts of official hospitality towards visiting Protestant preachers, of anxious debates about church attendance or Sabbath-breaking, or of wheedling investigations of newcomers.

Indeed Stratford was slow to implement the Royal Injunctions of 1559; only three months before the birth of his son William, John Shakespeare himself, as one of the Corporation Chamberlains, recorded its belated expenditure of 2 shillings 'payd for defaysyng ymages in ye [Guild] chappell'.<sup>34</sup> William can therefore be considered to have grown up in an atmosphere of enduring Catholic faith amidst increasing oppression by the State. His schoolmaster during his formative years was Simon Hunt, who in 1575 went from Stratford via Douai to Rome, where he was ordained as a Jesuit priest.<sup>35</sup>

Shakespeare's plays are rich with allusions to scripture, though the nature of his personal faith remains unclear. Some commentators argue that his tone is not that of the authoritarian Puritan but of the Catholic sympathiser, with a respect for the 'Old Faith', Catholic clergy, particularly Franciscan friars, and for nuns. He pays tribute to the intercessory powers of the Virgin Mary, and her ever-readiness to bestow comfort and solace, for example in the counsel given in *The Tempest* (5.1.142–4) by Prospero to Alonso, who is inconsolable in the belief that he has lost his son: 'I rather think you have not sought her help; of whose soft grace, From the like loss I have her sovereign aid, and rest myself content.'

In general it can be said that Shakespeare shows an appreciative attitude toward the vestments, vessels, altars, images and rites of Catholicism, and for the Christian values embodied within them.<sup>36</sup>

In Holy Trinity Church today there is a small memento of former times in the little statue of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus, placed in the empty niche above the head of Hugh Clopton's tomb. This was presented to the church in the 1950s by St Gregory's Roman Catholic church in Stratford.<sup>37</sup> But in her isolation, Mary has an air of lonely melancholy, as if mourning the passing of so much former beauty and devotional fervour in her chapel. Below, on the marble slab, is a blue glass vase, in which there burns a solitary candle.



*Statuette of Mary above  
Hugh Clopton's empty tomb*

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# 3

## The College of Priests of Holy Trinity

Sylvia Gill

Since C17 the reputation of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church has been closely tied to that of William Shakespeare. For centuries prior to the playwright's life and fame, however, Holy Trinity had a status of its own – as a Collegiate church shaped by a relationship with politics and religion at the highest levels of national life.

By 26 April 1564, the date of William Shakespeare's baptism recorded in the register of Holy Trinity Church, the College of Priests that had served the church and parish was no more – it had been dissolved for 16 years: Shakespeare never knew it. Its previous existence would have been familiar to him, however, throughout his childhood years and beyond. Prior to William's birth, two (sadly short-lived) daughters, Joan and Margaret, had been born to his parents and recorded in Holy Trinity's register. Since the demise of the College, Roger Dyos, a former College priest, had served the parish first as its curate (1548–1553) and then as vicar (1553–1559). Furthermore, the site of the Becket chantry chapel, which had been the centre of worship for the College priests within Holy Trinity, must still have been known even though dismantled. Physical evidence of the College's life also remained in College House, the substantial former home of the priests, close to the church, which was later owned by the Combe family with whom Shakespeare was friends.

More significantly for everyday life, the issues surrounding the religious Reformation, which underlay the College's suppression, were still a source of tension in the England of Elizabeth I. Various Stratford residents, well known to William and his family, appear in surviving records demonstrating the conflict between the new religion adopted by the State and a lingering adherence to traditional Roman Catholic faith. Wives were prosecuted for not attending the now-Protestant church while their husbands showed a more conformist front as part of the increasingly Protestant town Corporation.<sup>1</sup>

Stories of William's father John secretly clinging to the old faith have continued for centuries, together with attempts to establish a link between his mother's Arden family (of Wilmcote) and Edward Arden (of Park Hall, near Birmingham) who was executed in 1583 for treasonous activities related to his Catholic faith.<sup>2</sup> From Shakespeare's birth to his burial, the history of Holy Trinity church, its Collegiate life and the tumultuous shift from one form of Christian faith to another exerted a profound influence on his life and work.

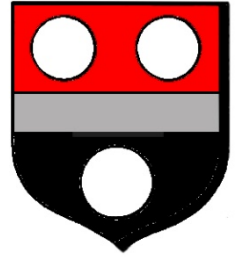
Holy Trinity owed its status as a Collegiate church to two things: John de Stratford, the most eminent member of a local wealthy family, and the doctrine of Purgatory which encouraged investment for the relief of souls after death. Belief in Purgatory as a staging post between Heaven and Hell had developed it into a 'diffuse yet terrifying place with enormous repercussions for the mentality and activities of late medieval parishioners'.<sup>3</sup> Torments suffered by souls in Purgatory matched those of Hell, graphically illustrated on the walls of the nearby Guild Chapel; from its Doom painting over the chancel arch parishioners knew what to expect.<sup>4</sup> In mitigation, a doctrine had developed that prayer and good works could provide remission from these terrors and speed souls Heaven-ward. Initially, soul prayers were offered privately by monks in their monasteries, but they became a feature of parish life as the religious culture of memorial prayers and chantries developed. A chantry was a perpetual foundation devoted to prayers for the dead and intended to last forever. It could be served by a single priest or more, in a dedicated chapel or at an altar, but quantity



*John de Stratford depicted as Archbishop of Canterbury (from a stained glass window in the Guild Chapel)*

mattered: each soul mass had a definite value before God, and they were cumulative: the more the better. Prayers for the soul were also bankable in life, meaning that, in common with similar foundations, those prayed for in John de Stratford's chantry included both the living and the dead.

Born about 1275, John de Stratford was educated in Oxford, becoming a Doctor of civil law, a member of Worcester Priory and, by 1317, rector of Holy Trinity. This was also the year when John first attended a royal council and from then onwards he served both church and state. These were the years of the Avignon papacy and John became Edward II's envoy to the curia there, returning in 1323 as the Pope's appointed Bishop of Winchester. This greatly displeased the King, who had a favourite of his own in mind, but John remained at the heart of government, continuing to serve into the reign of Edward III. In 1330 he was appointed Lord Chancellor, the first of three terms in that role over the next 10 years, and he travelled widely around the Kingdom and abroad.



*John de Stratford shield*

When he became Lord Chancellor, John de Stratford was about 55 years old and, doubtless aware of his own mortality at a time when the average lifespan was 30 years, his thoughts turned to the church in his home town in a way that reflected the mixture of religion and politics which was his life. Though not yet Archbishop of Canterbury (that came in 1333) John was fully aware of the delicate balancing act needed to manage both sides of his career. He had, after all, felt the wrath of Edward II on his papal appointment to the see of Winchester<sup>5</sup> and must have had expectations that Canterbury was his next step. He surely felt some affinity with his martyred predecessor Thomas à Becket: in fact, in 1340 at a time of crisis in his relationship with Edward III, contemporaries seriously thought he was trying to emulate him!<sup>6</sup> In April 1341 the King, claiming financial mismanagement, had Stratford tried for treason by Parliament. Fortunately, after the intercession of 'certain noblemen', they were reconciled and the King commanded that: 'the things touching the Arraignment of the archbishop [...] should be annulled and totally outed or laid aside, as such were neither reasonable or true'.<sup>7</sup>



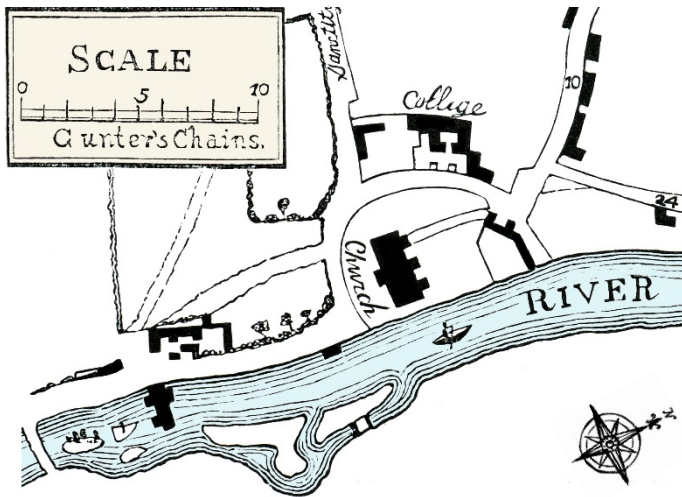
*John de Stratford's tomb  
in Canterbury Cathedral*

Be that as it may, in 1331, having refurbished the south aisle of Holy Trinity Church, John had dedicated a chapel at the east end of that aisle to St Thomas the Martyr for a chantry with five priests, one of whom would be senior and known as the Keeper. The right to establish a chantry institution such as this required royal assent and licence, as it rendered property free from taxation at the King's hands (hence the explicit name for such licences: *mortmain* 'dead hand'). An entry in the Calendar of Patent Rolls, dated 25 February 1331/32, confirmed the grant of a royal licence to John and the alienation (transfer of ownership and rights) of the manor of 'Inge' (*sic*) and a messuage in Stratford on Avon to the chaplain-keeper of the chantry.<sup>8</sup> This chaplain-keeper was to 'find' (appoint) four other chaplains to celebrate divine service with him daily to pray for the souls of John de Stratford, his family and ancestors: added to their prayers later were the souls of the King, the Bishop of Worcester and all their predecessors.

The maintenance of this foundation was of great importance to John de Stratford and his family. Over time, other lands and rents were added to the original endowment, as well as those from external benefactors. Nicholas de Dudley, the rector of Kingswinford in Staffordshire, gave 73 acres of land and a wood in Pensnett, where beneficiaries had rights to graze all manner of cattle except goats.<sup>9</sup> In 1337, John bought the advowson of Holy Trinity from the Bishop of Worcester: the College warden became the parish's rector, and he and the sub-warden appointed curates to Stratford, Luddington and Bishopston from among their brethren. Now, if not before, the College *was* the Church of Holy Trinity. Furthermore, in 1345 Pope Clement VI granted John de Stratford's chantry the papal recognition desirable for the



foundation's absolute security.<sup>10</sup> An adviser to the Crown until the end of his life, John de Stratford died in 1348 and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral. His alabaster effigy, although somewhat damaged, still lies there in a fine canopied tomb, in a prominent position on the south side of the choir, close to the site of Becket's martyrdom.<sup>11</sup> His will includes: 'Item, I bequeath to the chapel of St Thomas at Stratford the better gold cope and silk cope embroidered with images'.<sup>12</sup>



*Detail of map by Winter (1759) showing the College location north-west of church*

Support for the foundation in Holy Trinity continued to matter to the de Stratford family. Between 1345 and 1350 Ralph de Stratford, Bishop of London, possibly John's nephew and certainly a kinsman, acquired land close to the church.<sup>13</sup> The 1353–54 Guild accounts record that the Bishop of London was renting a house in *Bruggestret* (Bridge Street) while the construction project was underway.<sup>14</sup> Letters patent issued on 12 May 1350 conferred protection on the teams of carpenters, masons and servants engaged in building 'houses and other edifices for the habitation of the chaplains celebrating daily in the chapel of St Thomas the Martyr'.<sup>15</sup> This 'habitation' was a large stone house sited to the north-west of the church,

next to the churchyard.<sup>16</sup> The plan shown above, though of a much later date, is evidence of how substantial that new lodging was, providing the priests with individual chambers and a communal hall as well as the necessary domestic offices and outbuildings. The College House was both confirmation and promotion of the reputation of Holy Trinity Church as a prestigious religious foundation, a reputation which was further consolidated by royal recognition some 60 years later. In the first year of his reign (1413) the notably pious Henry V added to the endowments of the College. From this date, Holy Trinity was termed 'a Collegiate Church' and the next presentation of a warden, in 1423, saw Richard Praty installed as Dean of the Collegiate Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

The chantry chapel, dedicated to St Thomas, was an important destination for pilgrimage. The painting on the opposite page, based on documentary and surviving physical evidence, visualises how it may have appeared:

- depth to back wall recessed by 8 feet (now occupied by organ);
- light admitted through southern window (now behind organ case);
- altar top (mensa) of Purbeck marble (later buried, now on high altar);
- three steps up to altar (still there in 1806, according to R.B. Wheler);
- candles and Latin missal book open on altar (as per Guild altars);
- altar cloth embroidered with gold thread and jewels;
- reredos depicts Becket's brutal murder by four knights;
- painted statues: Our Lady of Pity left, St Dominic right (will of 1465);
- tall candle holders to increase sparkle and illumination;
- aumbry (cupboard) and piscina (wash-basin) set into walls;
- carved wooden screens between nave arches (left);
- squint hole through top of walled-up arch (as per North Transept);
- pattern of encaustic tiles on floor;
- gilded plaster bosses on ceiling (still there);
- three sedilia (seats) for priests (on right, now Victorian replicas);
- banners show the crests of town, Becket and John de Stratford;
- colourful painted decoration on walls, arches and pillars.



*Painting by Janet Hall, visualising how the St Thomas chantry chapel might have looked*

The chapel would have been in use for the canonical offices throughout the day, with masses chanted or sung by priests from the College. It would have been full of light and the sounds of voices and bells, and the smells of incense, wax and body odour. The laity, visitors and pilgrims were probably required to remain behind a barrier, where they could kneel to pray, light votive candles, give offerings and buy badges and trinkets.



*Seal of Stratford College: (left) bronze matrix and (right) wax impression; date late C14. Under a Gothic canopy with traceried side-canopies, the Trinity; at the bottom a shield of arms, on a fess three crosses crosslet. Legend, within pearly borders: 'Sigillu coe Collegii de Strettford ad cas'. The last phrase 'ad causas' means 'for current business'; hence this is not the official seal, which would have required the presence of numerous witnesses for the attestation of the deed on which it was used.*<sup>18</sup>

Everyday life within Holy Trinity was closely governed by the rules of its foundation and the practices of the Catholic church. There was the round of eight services to be held daily: pre-dawn Matins, then from dawn to nightfall: Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. The liturgy followed was probably that developed in Salisbury and commonly known as the *Use of Sarum* (Oxford's Bodleian Library has a C14 Sarum missal used



in Worcester diocese) and plainchant was the College's principal musical form. In 1516, the Dean, Ralph Collingwood, enhanced College worship and its music with the institution of a song school and the addition of four choirboys to the College's personnel. The choirboys were required to pray for Collingwood's soul, assist in church services, wait on the priests and read the Bible or other religious works aloud to them during mealtimes. They also attended the song school, taught by one of the College priests, to learn music and sing to the organ: no doubt they also developed their reading skills and perhaps their Latin grammar.<sup>19</sup>

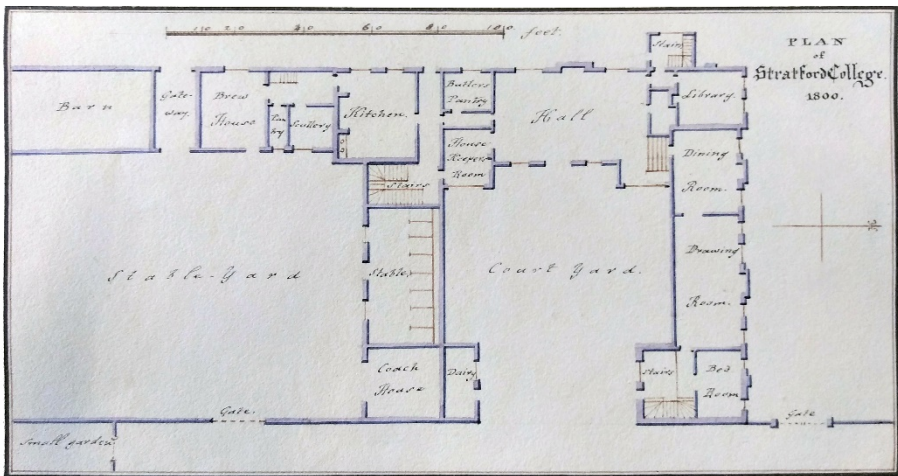
We could take the date of 1516, and Collingwood's confidence that his Church and faith were worth investing in, as the high point of the College's life. Its status in the town, as senior to its rival institution the Guild of the Holy Cross, had been confirmed by the Pope and the Bishop of Worcester in the previous century. It had both parochial and manorial duties – the latter from its property holdings and from its authority in law; it held the manor court two years out of three and was very close to marking 200 years in existence (see [Chapter 4](#)). Then, just one year later, Martin Luther published his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg and the entire Church throughout Europe began to rock a little. It took some time for this rocking to resonate fully with Henry VIII's dynastic and marital concerns, but from the late 1520s evangelical ideas and the desire for reformation began to impinge on the lives of institutions like the College. Stratford people would have heard of the iconoclasm in Worcester in 1529, when city crosses were defaced.<sup>20</sup> Later came the Act of Supremacy, whereby Henry replaced the Pope as Head of the Church in England, and all churchmen were forced to sign in agreement: the priests of the College did so in August 1534.<sup>21</sup> Soon after, in 1535, proclamations declared changes to the liturgy, physical removal from prayers and mass books of all mention of the Pope, and then a new bishop of Worcester, Hugh Latimer – evangelical and friend to Thomas Cromwell.<sup>22</sup>

Latimer took up residence in Worcester in 1537 and the College soon felt the Bishop's hand directly in October, when he finalised the removal of their conservative Dean, John Bell. Bell's replacement was the politically acceptable evangelical Anthony Barker – a career cleric in possession of



several benefices.<sup>23</sup> Further disturbance came with the royal proclamation in November 1538 which decanonised Thomas Becket and removed him from the liturgy. Becket was not: 'to be esteemed, named, reputed, nor called a saint [...] his images and pictures [...] shall be put down and avoided out of all churches, chapels and other places'.<sup>24</sup>

It is unclear what and when changes were made to the Becket Chapel in response to this edict, but with the determined Latimer as Bishop, the College priests must have been wary. As a contemporary Worcester chronicler noted: 'at that time God sent such lightning and thunder that all thereabouts thought the church would fall on them'; the College priests might well have agreed.<sup>25</sup>



*Ground plan of Stratford College, drawn by Saunders*

Latimer's term of office was dramatic but short-lived: Henry VIII changed his mind and began to rein back from reform.<sup>26</sup> In May 1539, the Act of Six Articles was put before Parliament, reflecting a return to traditional thinking on key issues, including the benefit of masses for souls in Purgatory. Latimer spoke against it in the House of Lords (sailing close to the flames perhaps) but the Act passed: Latimer resigned from Worcester and was replaced by the College's former Dean, John Bell. Then, in a matter of months, Thomas

Cromwell, reformer and friend to Latimer and Barker, was out of favour and sent to the scaffold.<sup>27</sup>

At this point, the College priests might have breathed a little more easily but, of course, it was never wise to feel comfortable around Henry VIII. By 1545, Henry's thoughts were once more of Reform: monasteries were gone, so chantries and colleges now had his attention. Henry's Act for the Dissolution of Chantries and Colleges was passed on Christmas Eve 1545 and a survey was commissioned to detail and value each institution. The objective on this occasion was not wholesale suppression, but voluntary dissolution with funds redirected, it was said, 'for the good of the commonwealth'. The Court of Augmentations was responsible for completing the survey in the early months of 1546, and the College was one of those surveyed. As with the monasteries, pensions were a tool to encourage surrender and awards depended on negotiation; but although the College dissolution process may have commenced in 1546, it was not yet completed when Henry died in January 1547. It is likely that the College 'kept calm and carried on' but knew that there would be no reprieve in the new reign. Edward VI's Act for the Dissolution of Colleges, Chantries and like institutions was passed on Christmas Eve 1547 and this time there was no equivocation – all memorial endowments were abolished, large and small, from Colleges to candles – and their property passed to the Crown.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the Court of Augmentations was now instructed to devise a single scale of pension awards, applicable to all redundant clergy, and to re-appoint them only where suppression would leave a parish without a vicar or curate (as would have happened here in Stratford).

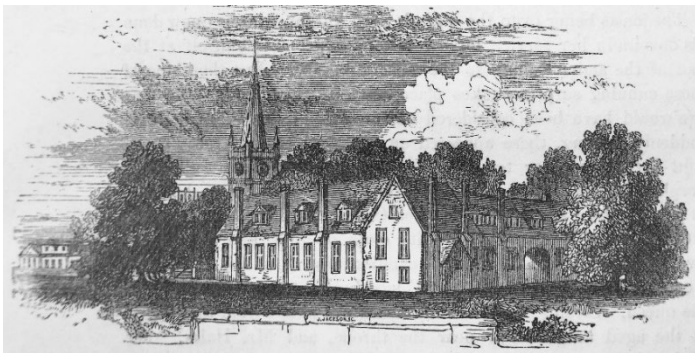
The surveys and later pension rolls provide details of all nine College members serving at its dissolution: Dean Anthony Barker Master of Arts; sub-dean Edward Alcocke (both aged 50); two curates, Roger Dyos and Robert Smart (both 40); John Endesdale (60); Thomas Clerke (38) a former Cistercian monk with a pension from Coombe Abbey, and three others, Richard Bedyll, Richard Burrows and John Calwaye.<sup>29</sup> All received pensions, except Dyos and Smart, who, in order to provide for the parish, were kept on as curates of Stratford and Luddington respectively.<sup>30</sup> Dyos was

subsequently appointed as Vicar of Stratford during the Catholic reign of Mary 1553–1558.<sup>31</sup> The College's four choirboys were also recorded: Thomas Perin aged 14; Thomas Ackerley, 13; William Allen and William Locke, both 12, together with the information that they had been in receipt of stipends of £1 each. For Perin and Allen these became pensions, perhaps an indication that they were already destined for the priesthood.<sup>32</sup>

With the College dissolved and its priests redundant, the priests' house and all College property was now 'in the King's hands', providing the Crown with assets and revenue it could exploit to advantage as sales and gifts. In September 1548, one sale included:

the manor of Ington, in the tenure of William Clopton [and] the meadow called Avon Meadow in tenure of the said Clopton, and all lands and liberties pertaining to the said manor, which belonged to the late College of Stratford.<sup>33</sup>

On 1 February 1550, all the land the College had held in Shottery was sold and in May 1553, so were former College tenements, gardens, closes and a dovehouse in Stratford itself.<sup>34</sup>



*View of Stratford College from the north-west, from a drawing by Wheler*

For the town, one significant beneficiary was John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who, having overthrown the Lord Protector Edward Seymour in 1549, received a large gift of property from the King in May 1550, including: 'the site of the late College of Stratford upon Avon [...] except the barns and granaries within the said site for storing the tithe grain and hay of the

College'.<sup>35</sup> This was just part of John Dudley's gains in Stratford, as the Bishop of Worcester was 'encouraged' into an unfavourable exchange of his Stratford manorial property with the now all-powerful Earl, consolidating his position in the county.<sup>36</sup>

The young King Edward VI died on 6 July 1553, just eight days after Stratford had received its charter of incorporation, and John Dudley, now Duke of Northumberland, attempted to secure the throne for Lady Jane Grey, wife of his son Guildford. He failed, and was executed for treason on 22 August; all his property reverted to the Crown, and Stratford's new Lord was Queen Mary. Part of an inventory of College property survives, possibly taken because of Northumberland's attainder for treason. Recording the contents of the College house, room by room, it detailed mainly 'old' furniture and fittings, but in the dining room was found 'a Bible in English' – a reminder of the choirboys reading aloud at mealtimes.<sup>37</sup>

There is also a rather poignant description of one room, called 'Sir Borows Chamber', which contained a bedstead with a press, a folding table, a chair and old wall hangings. 'Sir Borows' was surely Richard Burrowes, who, with his fellow priests, signed the Oath of Supremacy in 1534, was then listed in the 1535 Valor Ecclesiasticus (Henry VIII's survey of church property) and who, in 1538, was left a 'short gown' in a fellow priest's will.<sup>38</sup> In 1541 Burrowes

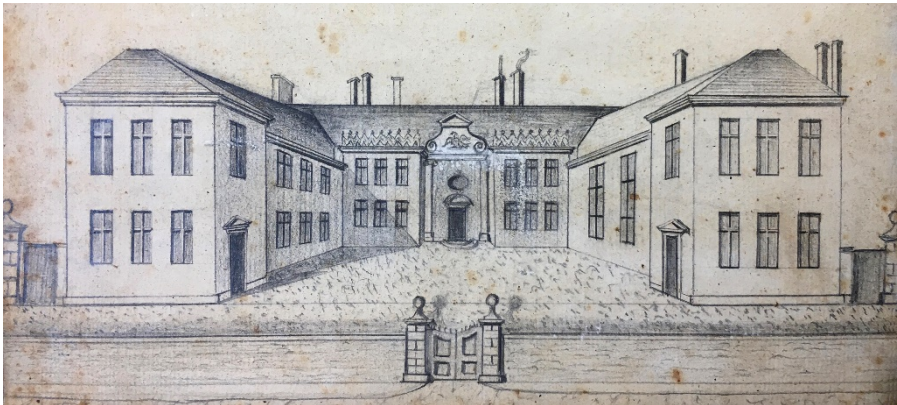


*Evocation of dining in the College Hall*

was said have been a witness to a scandal which erupted around the sub-dean, James Barker, when a woman was found in Barker's room; in 1544 he acted as an agent for Giles Coventry on his appointment as sub-dean after Barker's death.<sup>39</sup> Burrowes' 1548 pension award was £6 13s 4d and its payment regularly appears in records

of the Court of Augmentations for the following six years. In 1548, his chamber had been his for at least 14 years, so was he allowed to stay on until 1553 or possibly later? Unlikely perhaps, but evidently his name still clung to the room. Burrowes was still alive in 1556; he was named in Cardinal Pole's list of pensioners, when he would have had to appear in person or appoint a proxy to vouch for him – perhaps Thomas or William, the former choirboys who are also recorded.

The College House remained in royal hands and on Mary's death it passed to Elizabeth who leased it in 1575 to Richard Coningsby for 21 years. At some point it was leased to the Combe family and Thomas Combe was its resident. Both Thomas and his brother John were friends of William Shakespeare, both left him money in their wills and Shakespeare bequeathed his sword to Thomas's son (also Thomas) in 1616.<sup>40</sup> College House remained in hands linked to John Combe for just over 50 years. When Combe died childless in 1614, his nephew William inherited, and passed it to his nephew – another William – in 1666. From him, the house passed to the Clopton family via his daughter Martha's marriage to Edward Clopton, and then to Sir William Keyte of Ebrington, the husband of Edward's sister, Agnes.

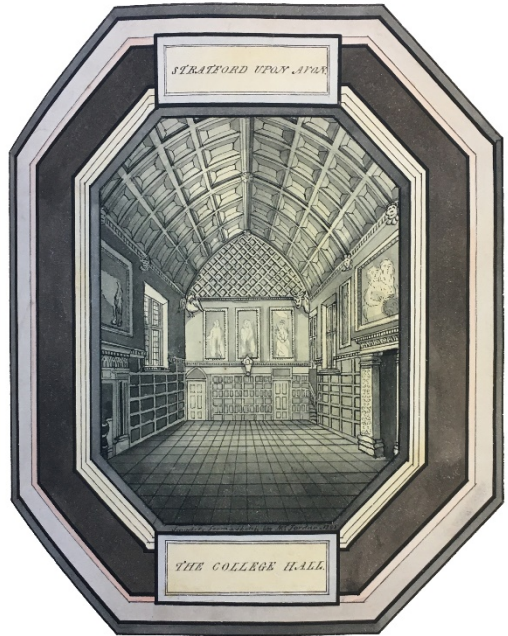


*Jordan's drawing of the College, around the time of the Jubilee (1769)*

In 1734, it passed to Agnes and William's son, Charles, who sold it to James Kendall in 1740; Kendall's widow, Jane, left it to her nephew, the Reverend



John Fullerton, in 1769. The year of Fullerton's inheritance was also the year of David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee, an event which unexpectedly touched the College House. Fullerton loaned the house to the town for use during the festival, but unfortunately, David Garrick's brother, George, was lodged there; he got drunk and abused the property, much to Fullerton's distress, which he expressed in a series of stiff letters to Stratford's town clerk, William Hunt.<sup>41</sup>



*The College Hall, drawn by Saunders, shortly before its demolition in 1799*

The final owner of the house was Edmund Battersbee, to whom Fullerton sold it in 1796. The Antiquarian, Robert Bell Wheler, described the house at this date as 'capacious, handsome and strong' and 'surrounded by extensive gardens and pleasure grounds'. The rooms of the north wing, which had housed Richard Burrowes and his fellows, had been converted into a dining room, drawing room and library, but the College hall still bore evidence of its religious roots, retaining the symbols of the four Evangelists, one in each corner of the panelled ceiling.<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately, Battersbee appreciated neither this handsome house nor its past and in 1799 had it 'razed to the ground',



*Edmund Battersbee*

apparently because it 'spoiled his view of the church'!<sup>43</sup> With Battersbee's action the College of Holy Trinity was finally, completely, at an end – chantry gone, priests gone, and buildings gone. But some things linger: we still have College Street and College Lane, and legal memory can be particularly tenacious. In 1934, a deed was drawn up conveying land in Old Stratford 'formerly [...] called the College Paddock [...] an appurtenance to a capital messuage or tenement called the College long since taken down'.<sup>44</sup> In College Lane one building remains, now a house, which is said by some to have been converted from the former barn of the College.

This present volume is a fitting memorial to Prof. Ronnie Mulryne who loved Holy Trinity and wrote about the Becket Chapel in 2014 in *A Taste of History*. Here we have recalled again the names of John and Ralph de Stratford, together with of some of the humbler priests and choirboys who sang their memorial masses – so while it might not count as forever, perhaps being remembered for nigh on 700 years counts for something and will continue to do so as long as 'Shakespeare's Church' is at the spiritual heart of his home town.



*House in College Lane, converted from one of the College outbuildings*

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## The Vicar of Stratford and his ‘Bawdy Court’

Robert Bearman

### The Peculiar Jurisdiction

From 1553 until well into C18, Stratford’s vicars claimed the right to preside over a court held in the town, to ensure observance in the parish of what were then deemed to be the church’s responsibilities. Some of these would not surprise us: for instance, the behaviour of vicars and curates, the maintenance of the church and churchyard, and the way in which church services were conducted. Further areas of concern – church attendance, observance of the Sabbath, the learning of the catechism, and the uttering of blasphemy – we can still accept as ‘church business’. Others, however, now seem to be quite outside the church’s jurisdiction: abuse, scandal and defamation; drunkenness; the oversight of school teachers and physicians; the proving of wills, and above all, sexual misconduct, leading to the nickname of ‘Bawdy Courts’ applied to them by contemporaries.

Not every parish incumbent had the right to hold a court of this kind. Exercising such authority was normally reserved to archbishops, bishops and archdeacons. But there were exceptions, namely a network of some 300 independent or semi-independent ‘peculiar’ as they were called, each with its own court, operating independently of the local bishop.

In pre-Reformation times, many of these peculiar jurisdictions were attached to religious foundations, in Stratford’s case the College of Priests which served the chantry chapel in the parish church (see [Chapter 3](#)). Richly endowed with extensive property in the town, including the parish tithes, the College was able to take over the management of the church as a collegiate establishment, under the direction of a Warden or Dean, and to exercise a peculiar jurisdiction independent of the bishop. Although Stratford’s College was suppressed at the Reformation, the newly-appointed vicar was later allowed, under a clause in the town’s charter of incorporation of 1553, the right to the peculiar jurisdiction the College had previously enjoyed, to the



exclusion of the Bishop of Worcester in whose diocese Stratford then lay.<sup>1</sup> This gave Stratford's ruling body a reason for defending the vicar's right, but there was a refinement: instead of an entirely independent jurisdiction, the vicar exercised his authority for only two years out of three, with the bishop taking over every third year.<sup>2</sup>



*Seal impressions of the Court of Peculiar Jurisdiction pre- and post-reformation:*  
(left) The episcopal figure appears to be Thomas Becket, patron saint of the chantry, as he wears the pallium over his robes. The inscription is: 'S'peculare Jurisdictione d'Streford sup Avane', and the workmanship is indicative of C15, perhaps the reign of Henry V. From *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, Vol VI, pp.141-43 (April 1847); (right) The legend is: SIGILLV REGIAE MAIESTATIS AD CAVSAS ECCLESIASTICAS and below the Tudor arms: PRO PECVLIARI IVRIS / DE STRATFORDE AP/ON AV/ON (STRST: SBT-2003-3/7)

For the details of what happened at these Peculiar Courts, we would normally turn to their Act Books. For Stratford, however, only three survive, one in a poor state covering the period 1590–1608 (with an odd entry for 1616); the second, in much better condition, covering the years 1622 to 1624; and the



third, badly faded, for the years 1633–34.<sup>3</sup> We also know that the court was held during the intervening periods as there are good runs of churchwardens' presentments to the court, filling the gaps between these three Act Books.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, references to the activities of the Peculiar Court before 1590 (the date of the first surviving Act Book) are thin on the ground, although the vicar from 1560 to 1569, John Bretchgirdle, did leave behind him a book of manuscript templates, including examples where he is styled:

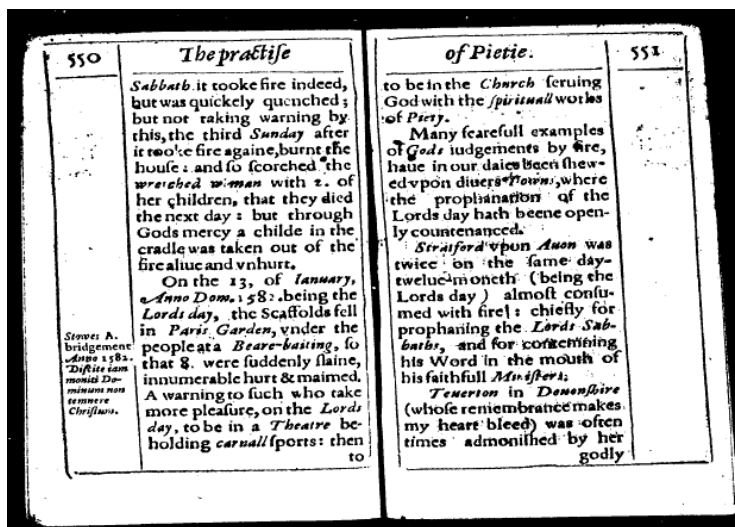
master of arts, perpetual vicar and ordinary of the peculiar jurisdiction of the parish church of Stratford upon Avon [...] late belonging to the suppressed College of Stratford-upon-Avon.<sup>5</sup>

### Appointment of Vicars

There was a shift of emphasis on the appointment of Richard Barton as vicar in February 1585. A few weeks after his arrival, the Stratford Corporation handed over to him 'the register book concerning the ecclesiastical jurisdiction',<sup>6</sup> an important piece of evidence, indicating both that the peculiar jurisdiction was recognised and that the Corporation, responsible, under the 1553 charter, for paying the vicar his salary and finding him accommodation, was concerned that Barton should take his responsibilities seriously. From this point there is much to support the idea that the vicar, and a significant body of Corporation members, were happy to co-operate in pushing Stratford in the direction of a 'godly town' in which the Peculiar Court could play an important part. It is only from 1584 that any churchwardens' presentments to the court survive, consistent with evidence from across the country that it took thirty years or so from the Reformation attack on the established church for its courts to recover their nerve.<sup>7</sup>

Barton certainly came up to scratch: a 'preacher of the word of God', in 1586 he was described as 'learned, zealous and godly and fit for the ministry: a happy age if our church were freight with many such'; and during his ministry, leading radicals – Andrew Boardman, Job Throckmorton and Thomas Cartwright – visited or preached in the town.<sup>8</sup> His successor, John Bramhall (1589–96) was of the same persuasion, a man of Puritan leanings, who in the 1590s is on record as leading a determined campaign against the

abuse of the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> His successor, Richard Byfield, was also a vigorous Puritan, and was eventually removed by the bishop despite the Corporation's appeals. So, when the first surviving register of the court's proceedings begins, in 1590, the promotion of a joint venture on the part of the Corporation and the vicar was evidently under way.



Page from Lewis Bayly's 'Practise of Pietie: Directing a Christian how to Walke', 1613 (3rd edition) interpreting the Stratford fires of 1594 and 1595 as retribution for 'prophaning the Lords Sabbaths'

On the other hand, Byfield's clash with the bishop is good evidence that the vicar's peculiar jurisdiction did not find favour with the ecclesiastical hierarchy – the opposite, in fact. From the start, there was a natural tendency for the bishop to resent the fact that his authority could only be properly exercised in one year out of three. On a more mundane level, the loss of fees due for the issuing of marriage licences and the proving of wills was also an irritant. In mid-C16, in the immediate wake of the Reformation, this may not have been a serious issue, but it certainly became one from the 1580s, when the more extreme Protestants began to attack the Elizabethan settlement itself, which had preserved, more or less intact, the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

There was also opposition from a less obvious quarter in the person of the quarrelsome Edward Greville, the titular lord of the manorial lands of Stratford, who made the peculiar jurisdiction one of the issues which found its way into the lively dispute between him and the Corporation over the town's privileges.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the Act Book records no formal proceedings between October 1595 and October 1600, suggesting that the establishment had joined forces to frustrate civic ambition and the vicar's independence. When Byfield, the father of two eminent Puritan ministers, revived the court in October 1600, the Corporation paid his expenses for visiting the bishop three times in 1600, on one occasion taking Richard Quiney, a prominent Corporation member, with him, to discuss the peculiar jurisdiction, along with 'our charter' (i.e. that of 1553, the basis of the vicar's claim to his privileged status). Corporation members made further treks, two in 1601 and one in 1602, but all to no avail. Byfield held his last court on 25 November 1602 and despite an appeal by the Corporation to the bishop to allow Byfield to preach at Easter 1605, he was excommunicated and the living sequestered in May. In June he was replaced by the more easy-going John Rogers.<sup>11</sup>

### **Influence of the Corporation**

Rogers held his first Peculiar Court in May 1606 and continued to do so, for two years out of three, until he was replaced in March 1619 by the more zealous Thomas Wilson. By a sleight of hand on the part of the Corporation's more extreme Protestants, Rogers was removed from his post and Wilson appointed over his head, leading to a riot in the town, instigated by the supporters of Rogers, during which Wilson and his Corporation backers were locked up in the chancel for their own safety.<sup>12</sup> These disturbances were used by the bishop once again to challenge the vicar's right to the peculiar jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup> The Chamberlain's account for 1620 records that members of the Corporation travelled to Worcester, Oxford and even London 'about the jurisdiction'. At stake, as with Byfield, was Wilson's disinclination to carry out his religious duties according to the 'discipline of the Church of England'. But this time the Corporation stood firm and, in the wake of the

bishop's criticisms of Wilson's behaviour, the Corporation issued a formal warrant that since his appointment, the vicar:

hath carried and behaved himself religiously curteously & peaceably towards all men and in the office of his ministrye without faction or schism and hath observed those rightes and cerrymonye appoynted by ecclesiastical cannons;

and this despite the fact that Wilson, more than once, had been excommunicated for his failure to recognise the bishop's superior jurisdiction. In December 1624, Wilson indignantly complained that the latest notice of his excommunication had been pinned to the door of his own church, and he refused to apply for absolution on the grounds this would imply recognition of the bishop's authority.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that a group of members of the Stratford Corporation, led by the likes of Richard Quiney and Daniel Baker, saw the vicar's court as an important element in the pursuit of a more Puritan agenda. There were other issues than religion at play, of course. The Corporation had over the years become increasingly concerned with maintaining good order in the town. Books of orders were produced and misdemeanours dealt with in the borough sessions, held from 1601, after a struggle with the lord of the manor. A court of record met fortnightly, then weekly after 1610, to settle business disputes,<sup>15</sup> which made for the good government of a market town. To this the church court added another dimension – the insistence that the townsfolk observe canon law in terms of their day-to-day behaviour, and in particular their sexual conduct.

Members of the Corporation also dominated the meetings of the parish vestry and saw to it that colleagues were chosen to serve as churchwardens, the men responsible for drawing up the lists of presentments to the court.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the vicar and sympathetic members of the Corporation were working hand in glove to advance policies which they believed were in the town's best interests. At that time there was no truly secular state, the assumption being that God's law had a recognised part to play in the promotion of harmony in local affairs. Such co-operation was also seen as a vital part of preserving local law and order. England had no standing army: law and order

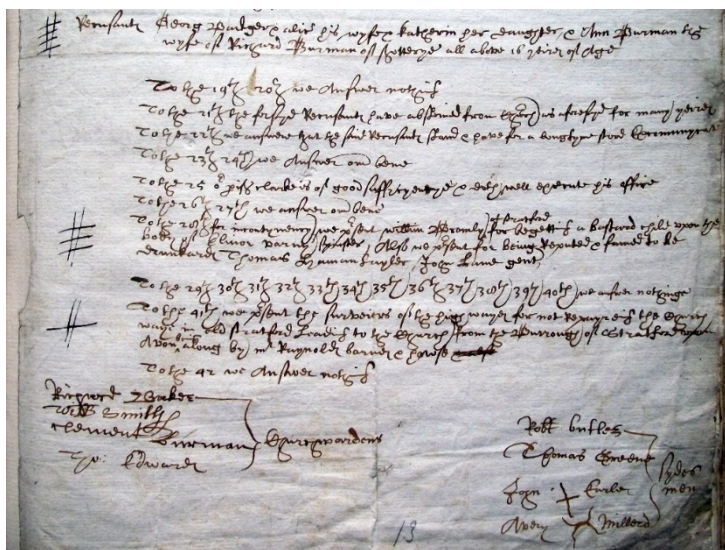
in the town depended, firstly, on four amateur constables with limited powers to bring unruly townsfolk to quarter sessions, and secondly on the churchwardens for reporting the townsfolk's moral lapses. All this was part and parcel of maintaining what was thought of as essential, not just for the town's moral welfare, but also for its prosperity and social harmony, highly desirable in the face of clearly inadequate resources to deal with any serious outbreak of disorder. On a similarly positive note, the court could operate to the benefit of those slandered or verbally abused, or inconvenienced by delays in the proving of wills.

### Court procedure

The legal procedures in these peculiar courts should have mirrored what took place in the diocesan or archdeacons' courts. In theory, cases that came before a church court were predominantly of two sorts: one to settle disputes between competing parties, known as an 'instance' case, brought 'at the instance' of one party against the other; the other, *ex officio*, i.e. within the judge's power to determine, simply by virtue of his office, having been brought to his attention by the churchwardens or by some other means. 'Instance' cases could be complicated and better settled in one of the higher courts – a good example is the one brought 'at the instance' of Susanna Hall, Shakespeare's daughter, in the bishop's court against John Lane for slander.

The basic procedure was for the vicar, during his two years out of three, to hold a visitation (in Wilson's time, at least, in May) and then for courts to be held for the remainder of the year, often on a monthly basis (and sometimes even in the minister's own house) to deal mainly with items raised at the visitation, but also extending to other offences committed in the meantime. The visitation was a solemn occasion, presided over by the vicar as judge. Alongside him sat the registrar, or notary public, with (in theory) sufficient knowledge of the law to advise on legal matters.<sup>17</sup> For the visitation, the churchwardens and sidesmen were called on to answer a series of questions on matters deemed relevant to the court's jurisdiction. A summary of these gives us a good idea of what was involved: not just the maintenance of the church and ensuring that it had the necessary copies of the Bible and other

religious texts, but also who was guilty of 'adultery, whoredom, incest, drunkenness, swearing, ribaldry, and uncleanness and wickedness of life'; who was absent from church on Sundays and holy days or from Holy Communion at Easter; who was guilty of 'rude and disorderly conduct' (even brawling, in the church and churchyard) breaking the Sabbath, blasphemy, libel, scandal-mongering, bigamy or irregular marriage.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the court would hear evidence about the failure to prove wills or to administer the estates of the deceased and whether all those practising as schoolmasters, physicians, surgeons and midwives were duly licensed. In Wilson's time, the churchwardens were asked around eighty of these questions, covering the duties of the clergy, the state of the church, and the behaviour of the laity.<sup>19</sup>



Part of the churchwardens' presentments submitted to the Peculiar Court held on 9 June 1619, signed by the four churchwardens (bottom left) and the four sidesmen, two of them by mark (bottom right). On this occasion they were responding to 42 questions, though to Questions 29-40 they replied: 'We answer nothing'.

The vicar, though presiding over the court, had no powers to fine or imprison delinquents. Those who came before him were liable to be charged fees for each stage of the process,<sup>20</sup> but the defendant, if found guilty, especially for



a lesser offence, could simply 'offer' to contribute a specified sum, usually for the relief of the poor. More serious was a sentence of public confession, almost exclusively reserved for moral lapses. Its precise form varied according to the seriousness of the offence, the most extreme requiring the offender, standing on a stool in the central aisle of the parish church, enveloped in a white sheet, to confess his or her sin in intimate detail. Sometimes this had to be repeated in the Guild Chapel and even in the market-place. The punishments could be watered down for the better off (usually the men involved) who were able to confess their sin to the officials only, often in the chapel at Bishopton – and without the white sheet – in return for a 'contribution' for the benefit of the poor. For less serious offences, the accused could initially be subjected to a minor version of excommunication for refusal to mend his or her ways, excluding the offender from services and sacraments of the church, until he/she produced evidence of a change of heart. If this failed, major excommunication could follow, excluding the offender from the 'communion of the faithful'. If observed by other parishioners, this could be serious – especially for someone in trade.

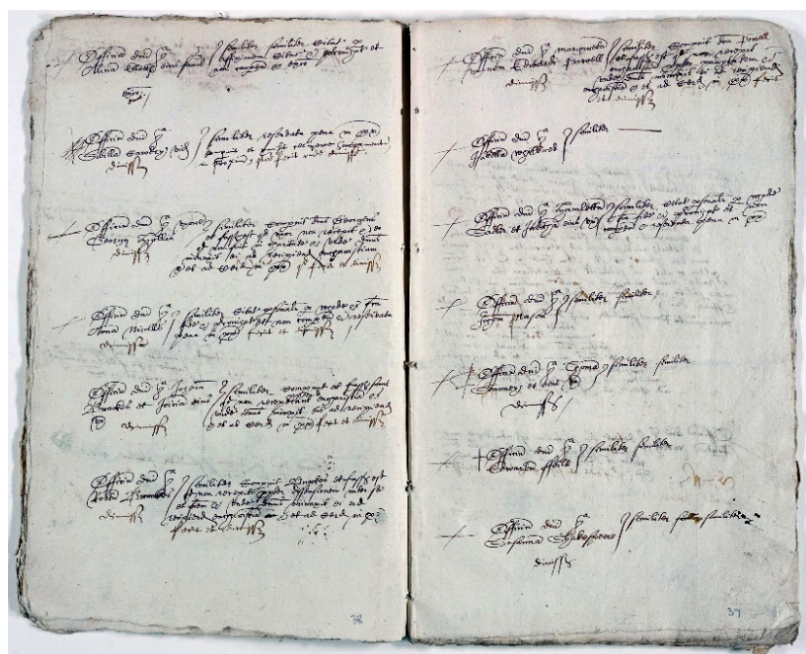
In some parishes we know that Peculiar Courts were held at the west end of the north aisle but there is no evidence to confirm that this was the custom in Stratford. It has been suggested that the court might instead have been held in the room over the north porch, though given the numbers of people involved, the smallness of the room (about 16 by 12 feet) the narrowness of the spiral stair, and the need for the court to make its presence generally known, this seems unlikely.



*Muniment room above the north porch*

## Church attendance

Some of the cases which came before the court we would still accept as the church's proper business. Under the Act of Uniformity of 1559, regular church attendance by all 'persons' was expected, enforced by a fine of 12 pence on those unable to offer a reasonable excuse. So, in October 1592, we find two Stratford sidesmen cited: 'that they levy not the 12d of such as absent themselves from the church'. In that year at least, then, the system was in operation. In fact, although it is unlikely that all Stratford's eligible townfolk (around 1,500) observed this rule on a regular basis, the number of presentations under this head formed only a tiny proportion of the cases. Perhaps, if occasional absentees generally paid up, punitive action would only have been taken in cases of persistent and obvious absenteeism.



Pages from the Peculiar Court Act Book, May 1606, recording sixteen of the twenty-one Stratford townfolk presented for not receiving communion the previous Easter; Susanna Shakespeare's name occurs at bottom right but the charge against her was dismissed.

Once people were in church their behaviour could be more easily managed. Joan Taunt, in 1590, was cited: 'that she useth not to stay in church in service time and sermon time'. She admitted that 'at her going out of the church' she was 'beckoning with her finger and laughing, also for swearing by the name of God'. As this verged on blasphemy she was told to perform public penance in church, but in her ordinary clothing, on the following Sunday.<sup>21</sup> In 1622 Thomas Court was also brought before the court 'for a common goer out of church in prayer and sermon time'; he was then excommunicated because: '[he] carried himself unreverently in the court and swore by God, and being admonished by the judge yet he would not desist from the same'.

The court could take a more tolerant line, however, especially if it involved men of the 'middling sort'. In 1622 Richard Baker, shoemaker, was cited for striking a boy during sermon time, but in defence he explained 'that the boy was playing and keeping a noise that he could not hear what the preacher said'; and when he refused to quieten down, he 'did give the said boy a little tap upon the head'.<sup>22</sup> The vicar, presiding as judge, was unable to condone physical retribution within his church, but made his real feelings clear when, on dismissing the complaint, he declared that in future such boys should be reported to the magistrates so that they 'may be whipped'.

As well as weekly church attendance (perhaps not always rigorously enforced) all those above the age of confirmation were required to receive communion three times a year, one of which had to be at Easter.<sup>23</sup> Those who refused to do so, 'recusants' for short, were suspected of harbouring Catholic tendencies, even extending to disloyalty to the crown. The charge of outright recusancy, however, only surfaces twice in Stratford's Act Books, against Thomas Taylor and Elizabeth his wife, and against 'the Lady Frekleton', both in 1624. More common was the less serious charge of not receiving the sacrament. The most striking incidence of this was a batch of twenty-one Stratfordians presented in May 1606 for failing to receive communion the previous Easter.<sup>24</sup> This was in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, uncovered the previous November, of particular concern to the Stratford authorities as one of the conspirators had taken a lease of nearby Clopton House. In fact, only a handful of those charged for non-reception were from families known

to have had persistent Catholic beliefs; and even they, though excommunicated, successfully petitioned for absolution at the subsequent court. A much larger number just promised to receive communion, and in a further three cases, including Shakespeare's daughter Susanna, the charge was simply dismissed. This, then, hardly ranks as the uncovering of a nest of dangerous conspirators. Instead, the whole affair may simply reflect an anxiety to be seen as a co-operative response to an event of some embarrassment to the local community.

### Other 'religious' offences

Blasphemers were taken to task. Elizabeth Wheeler, summoned on 1 October 1595 for brawling, abuse and not attending church, actually took to misbehaving in the court as well, shouting out, 'Gods wounds, a plague of God on you all: a fart of one's arse for you'. In 1624, Eleanor Silvester was cited 'for blaspheming the name of God in saying that God do dote and that God knew not what he did'. On admitting her guilt, she was ordered 'to repair to the parish church at the beginning of morning prayer and there to perform her penance'. Men could hope to get off with a lighter sentence. Stephen Lea, summoned on the same day for 'singing profane and filthy songs, scoffing and deriding of ministers and the profession of religion' was initially let off if he promised not to do the same again. Even when summoned to the next court on the same charge, having presumably re-offended, he was only required to 'repair to Mr Bailey, Master Alderman, and the churchwardens [...] at some convenient place [...] and there to confess before them'.<sup>25</sup>

A more common category of offence with religious overtones was the failure of the youth and other 'ignorant persons' to attend lessons 'in the Ten Commandments, the Articles of the Belief, and in the Lord's Prayer', delivered by the minister, who by canon law was required to 'diligently hear, instruct, and teach them the Catechism set forth in the Book of Common Prayer'.<sup>26</sup> Presentments to the local church court for not turning up for this instruction were quite common, at least in the 1620s. In October 1622, for instance, five men were summoned for not sending their children and servants 'to be catechised'.<sup>27</sup> In May 1624, three men were summoned to

ensure that they 'come diligently to be catechised every Sabbath day until they can answer the minister in the principles of the Christian religion'.<sup>28</sup>

Even more common were presentments for not properly observing the Sabbath and other feast days. This was based on the Fourth Commandment: 'Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy', though this was not enforced as severely as is sometimes supposed. The main concern was that nothing should interfere with church attendance and most presentations were simply of people who had opened shops on Sunday during the time of divine service. In 1590, Francis Smith, a well-to-do mercer, was warned to desist from selling his wares 'until evening prayer in Sundays and holy days are finished'. In 1592, Thomas Jones, a butcher, was told to wait until an hour after the end of the service before he could slaughter any animals. In most cases, simply keeping one's shop open in service-time was dealt with by a warning, so long as the offender turned up. John Tomlins, however, was excommunicated in 1592, when he behaved irreverently in court, saying to the vicar, 'Why may not I lie as well as you?'<sup>29</sup> As for working on saints' days, over twenty local husbandmen were cited in 1608 for 'working with their teams' on St Bartholomew's day, but all got away with small payments of one penny or two pence to the use of the poor.<sup>30</sup>

Other townsfolk were behaving far more inappropriately, but when in 1590 the vicar was instructing the churchwardens to be more conscientious, he required only collection of names of those attending alehouses or playing games 'in time of service or sermon'. In 1593, Ralph Lord was charged with encouraging six other men 'to eat and drink in his house in time of divine prayer and sermon time', whilst at the same court Robert Johnson, landlord of the White Lion, was accused of allowing people to play at cards 'in service time'.<sup>31</sup> In 1608 seven men were cited 'for drinking on the Sabbath in prayer time' and in 1622, Christopher Knight and five men and one woman were accused of 'being in alehouses on the Sabbath day in time of divine service and being absent from church'. In 1595 'playing quoits in time of divine service' was going on at the Bear in Bridge Street. In 1622 Thomas Canning



was accused: 'that he did play at ball on the Sabbath day; but that it was his first time he so did and doth promise that it shall be the last'.<sup>32</sup>

The most serious charge, in terms of the punishment handed out, involved four men, charged in 1622 with 'dancing the morris in evening prayer time on the feast day of Philip and Jacob'. Three of the offenders were required to appear in church the following Sunday, 'to confess [their] fault before the whole congregation and promise their amendment for henceforth'. But they failed to appear that Sunday: worse than that, they seem to have committed the offence again, leading to further instructions to at least two of the men, to perform public penance, 'after the reading of the gospel [...] in the middle aisle, that the congregation may take notice of it'.<sup>33</sup>

### More worldly matters

Other offences which came to the court's attention seem today less obviously connected with religious belief or behaviour in church. Four hundred years ago, however, church courts were still accepted as having an important part to play in the maintenance of neighbourly relations. For instance, around ten cases came before Stratford's peculiar court during the years covered by the Act Books, concerning issues of slander and defamation. Thomas Faux was cited in 1622 for 'scandalous speeches and slandering of Alice Brunt, calling her filthy whore'. His defence was that he had said this simply 'in his passion and being moved and abused by her'.<sup>34</sup>

Outright sexual offences – the only ones where the harshest penalty of public confession in church, clad in a white sheet, could be handed out – never formed an overwhelming proportion of the total number of cases, so the contemporary nickname of 'Bawdy Court' might at first seem rather unfair. What made sexual offences different was the punishment handed out, especially to the women. This was, of course, discriminatory – especially as the men, often of a higher social standing, frequently got away with a lighter penalty – but in early C17 society, with no social services as we understand them to act as a safety net, the fundamental concept of the family unit was taken as read. Sex within marriage was thus regarded as the norm if the social

fabric was not to be undermined. If children were not born into a stable economic relationship, both mothers and children could become a burden on the rates. Broken marriages might also have the same effect. The authorities were therefore anxious to identify fathers of 'bastard' children so that they could be made to provide some form of financial support. Despite the court's apparent obsession with the issue of sexual 'morality', which appears to us old-fashioned and unnecessarily intrusive, there is little evidence that in general terms, 'respectable' townsfolk at the time objected to this approach. Indeed, those who had to bear the cost of supporting the poor and desperate, saw the shaming of those who upset the accepted system as a necessary deterrent.

It was firstly necessary to establish that a marriage was lawful. What exactly this meant was in a state of flux in C16 society, but well before 1600 there was a growing acceptance that a 'valid' marriage required solemnisation in church. In 1606, Adrian Holder and his wife were initially cited for contracting an irregular marriage, and so had to produce a certificate, signed by the chancellor of the diocese, authorising the curate of nearby Atherstone to carry out the ceremony.<sup>35</sup>

In 1622, Michael Palmer and Jane, his wife, on their failure to produce a proper marriage certificate, were initially cited for 'incontinency before marriage' and could only get round the problem by performing penance before the bailiff, chief alderman, the curate and the churchwardens.<sup>36</sup> More interesting was the case in 1622 of Thomas Bridges and his wife, who were presented for marrying without banns or a licence. The case was apparently dismissed, however, when the bride's father, Philip Greene, appeared and explained that the marriage had taken place with the consent of both sets of parents (presumably the couple were under age).<sup>37</sup>

Sex between couples as yet unmarried could still be held against them, even if they subsequently wed. On 13 December 1622, Robert Johnson and Ann Crofts were presented for 'incontinency before marriage' and Robert was at first ordered to do penance in a sheet. On 13 January, the couple hastily married, and on 24 January, the vicar excused Robert the 'white sheet'

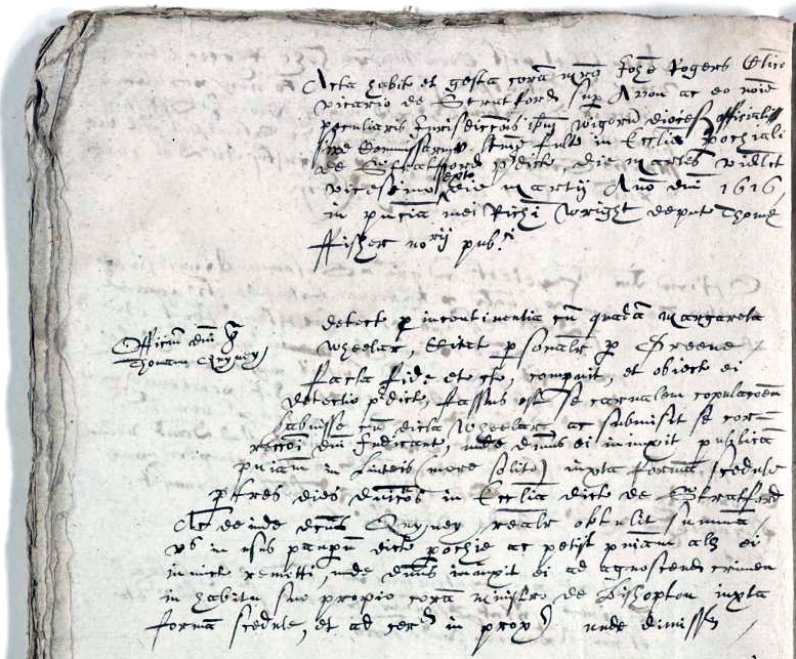
treatment, after he had requested absolution. But he did not get out of a public penance, standing 'on a form [...] in the middle ile just before the pulpitt', the only concession being that he could do this 'in his usual apparell'.<sup>38</sup>

More serious were intimate relationships that did not end in marriage, especially if the girl or woman had become pregnant. This was of as much concern to the local community, who often ended up, through the poor rate, supporting those who struggled to survive outside the family, as it was for any moral considerations. The case of Alice Atwood, a young widow, provides a good example of how the court dealt with such cases. By February 1607, she was alleged to have entered into a relationship with Bartholomew Parsons. Parsons went to the vicar's house, admitted he had got Alice pregnant, but promised to maintain the child – baptised as his 'bastard' a month later.<sup>39</sup> He was ordered to do public penance, clad in a white sheet, on two successive Sundays, but on proffering 10 shillings for the use of the poor, he was allowed to do his penance in his ordinary clothes, standing before the minister and churchwardens of Bishopton. In other words, the court could take a more tolerant line if sufficient monetary recompense was offered to offset any charge to the ratepayers.

Although the fathers of illegitimate children were almost invariably named, they did not always admit the offence. In 1606, Daniel Baker, son of the Puritan alderman, was, according to Ann Ward, 'the true and undoubted father of the child with which she has been pregnant'. She also said that he had promised to marry her. Nevertheless, Ann was sentenced to a public penance in church in a white sheet, whilst Baker, admitting the 'fame' but not the 'fact', was ordered to clear himself on the oath of six parishioners.<sup>40</sup>

Fathers of girls who became pregnant could also suffer. Agnes Phelps admitted that she was made pregnant by 'a certain John Burrows', implying he lived outside the parish and so beyond the court's jurisdiction. Agnes was sentenced to a 'white sheet' penance, and her father John was also summoned for 'receiving his pregnant daughter'.<sup>41</sup> Both father and daughter petitioned 'the favour of the court', however, and the penalties were suspended until the next court; they were apparently never imposed as nothing further is

heard. Elizabeth Mills was not so fortunate. In May 1622, she was cited for 'having a child unlawfully begotten' and cited Arthur Layton of Potters Hanley (in today's Stoke-on-Trent) as the father. As in Agnes Phelps' case, the court had no power to summon him from another parish, but Elizabeth was sentenced to perform public penance in a white sheet on pain of excommunication.<sup>42</sup>

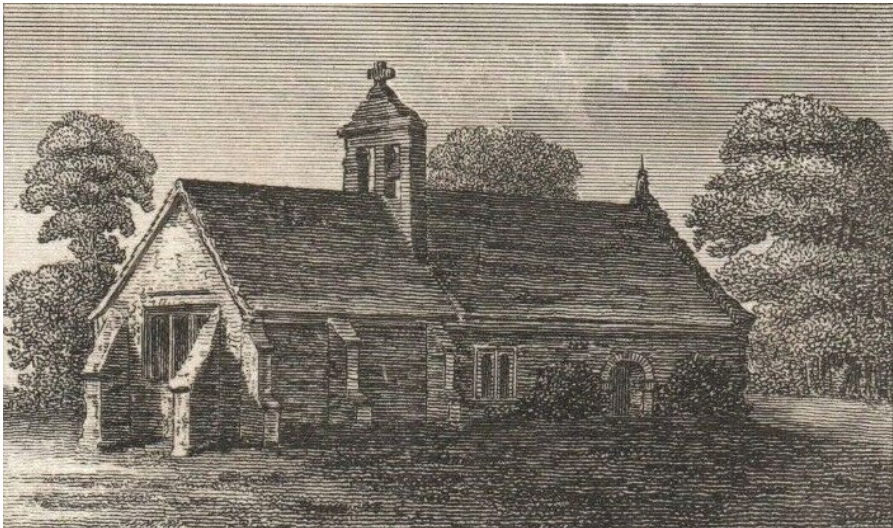


Entry in the Peculiar Court Act Book, 26 March 1616, arising out of the presentment of Thomas Quiney for: 'incontinencie with a certain Margaret Wheeler'

The best-known case of this sort was that brought on 26 March 1616 against Thomas Quiney, William Shakespeare's son-in-law, for 'incontinencie with a certain Margaret Wheeler'.<sup>43</sup> It is also one of the saddest, as both Margaret and the child she had been carrying had died just a few days before the citation. Quiney did turn up at court – unlike some alleged fathers who were excommunicated on their failure to appear – and, after his admission of guilt, was sentenced to the customary 'white sheet' treatment. On offering to pay

5 shillings to the use of the poor, he was instead allowed to confess his sin before the minister at Bishopton chapel. He did suffer in a different way, because his father-in-law then altered his will to ensure protection for his daughter should she survive Quiney into widowhood.

An accusation of adultery usually meant that one at least of the offending couple was married to someone else, although, when the term was used in Stratford's Act Books, this is not always clear. Paul Bartlett, for example, was certainly married, father of a succession of children in the early 1600s, but cited in 1606 for 'committing adultery with Margaret Price'.<sup>44</sup> He admitted that she had had a child by him, but claimed that he had agreed to maintain it. Though sentenced to a public 'white sheet' penance, he was allowed to perform penance in his ordinary attire before the minister and churchwardens at Bishopton, after offering 5 shillings to the poor.



*View of Bishopton Chapel, where more fortunate miscreants confessed their offences in comparative privacy (from a drawing by R.B. Wheler)*

Finally in this category, the case in the spring of 1624 of John Hemmings and Alice Court demonstrates that 'incontinence' could include frustrated attempts. Hemmings, by his own confession, admitted that he and Alice



'were in very unseemly & filthy manner conversant alone' in the Corporation's very Council chamber, when 'the door being fast locked or bolted', she 'did kiss and stroke him', whilst he 'had her upon the form in the chamber and took up her coats and was very unmannerly with her'. The original presentment then went on to explain that he could go no further, 'by reason of his age or inability although she consented thereto'. Either out of consideration for Hemmings' manhood or to put the blame on the woman, however, this last phrase was crossed out, and the citation ended instead with the remark that what had happened had still been done with 'her willing consent' and that 'the said John Hemmings & Elizabeth Court did to the utmost of their power attempt [...] to commit the crime of incontinency'.<sup>45</sup> Hemmings was initially ordered to:

repair to the church [...] and stand before the pulpit in the middle aisle [...] with a white sheet hanging down from his shoulders to his feet, holding a white rod in his hand and penitently to acknowledge his fault.

Elizabeth, similarly sentenced, just refused to turn up, was excommunicated, and then remained so despite further citations. Hemmings also proved reluctant to observe the ruling but, after reminders to comply, he does seem to have done so but only in his ordinary apparel.

## Summary

The vicar inherited from the Stratford College a right to hold a 'peculiar' church court. We know little about how vigorously vicars exercised their jurisdiction in the first thirty years after the grant of the charter. As a result, it was not until the appointment of Richard Barton as vicar, in 1585, that we can even be sure that the church court was regularly held.

In due course, civic leaders came to see the jurisdiction as an ally in a more general campaign to moderate behaviour in the community. Tempting though it may be to link the court's growing influence to the appointment of a series of increasingly zealous ministers, the wider community also accepted the idea of bringing the townsfolk into a general state of 'good behaviour'. Many of the offences which came before Stratford's court – failure to attend church, keeping shops open on Sunday, not being familiar with the catechism – indicate a reluctance by some to allow religious observance to dominate

their lives; but dealing with these offences did not depend solely on the zeal of the vicar. Instead, the court relied primarily on the willingness of the churchwardens, some of them senior Corporation members, to track down those deemed guilty of all manner of bad behaviour. In other words, the attitude of the Corporation was as important a factor as the vicar's personal views in upholding the authority of the peculiar court as a means of regulating behaviour in the interests of social harmony.

The effectiveness of the system depended ultimately on the willingness of the laity to draw up lists of presentations to the court. There is little to suggest that the townsfolk, or at least those of the 'middling sort', were not prepared to go along with a system which, though linked to an agenda designed to reflect the Puritan leanings of some of the town's civic leaders, also promoted social harmony and was in their interests as rate-payers. It discouraged anti-social behaviour – even to the extent of public shaming, which today might appear cruel and unfeeling. A body of 'god-fearing' men and women might seem anachronistic today, but the concept of a local community governed by 'good behaviour' is still not entirely out of fashion.

### Sources and further reading

An extended version of this essay, with full references, appears in *Warwickshire History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer 2021).

The proceedings of the court in action come principally from two surviving Act Books, covering the years 1590–1608 (with an odd entry for 1616) and 1622–24. They have been carefully calendared, with a useful introduction, by Brinkworth, E.R.C., *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford-upon-Avon* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1972) giving further details of all the cases mentioned here.

There are two important essays on religious issues affecting Stratford at the time, both by Ann Hughes: 'Religion and Society in Stratford-upon-Avon', in *Midland History*, Vol. 19 (1994) pp.58-84, and 'Building a Godly Town: Religious and Cultural Divisions in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1560–1640', in Bearman, Robert, ed., *The History of an English Borough: Stratford-upon-Avon 1196–1996* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997) pp.97-109.

For general background see: Ingram, Martin, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987); Houlbrooke, Ralph, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation, 1520–1570* (Oxford: OUP, 1979);

Hair, Paul, ed., *Before the Bawdy Court: selections from church court records* (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1972).

For the work of another local peculiar court, see: Gilkes, R.K. and Brinkworth, E.R.C., eds., *'The Bawdy Court' of Banbury*, Banbury Hist. Soc., Vol. 26 (1997).

## References

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- 1 *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 6 volumes, Dugdale Society, 1921–2011, i, p.18
- 2 For a similar post-Reformation situation, at Hartlebury, Worcs., see: Swanson, Robert and Guyatt, David, eds., 'The Visitation Court Book of Hartlebury', Worcs. Historical Society (2013) p.135
- 3 The first two are deposited at the Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC) in Maidstone (U269/22, 24) but are calendared in Brinkworth (1972) *op. cit.*, p.122; The third is at the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive in Stratford-upon-Avon (SCLA) BRU 15/13/103.
- 4 Principally a series of loose papers bound up later in a volume. SCLA ER 1/115
- 5 KHLC, U269/Q23 (microfilm at SCLA). One of them even records the appointment of a deputy, Christopher Allsopp alias Ashley, later vicar of Deddington and Fritwell, Oxon., and then vicar of Ribchester, Lancs.
- 6 *Minutes and Accounts*, iii, p.152
- 7 SCLA ER 1/115/1-2; Helmholz, R.H., *Roman Canon Law in Reformation England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) p.28
- 8 *Minutes and Accounts*, iv, pp.2, 16-17, 31
- 9 He was no doubt sympathetic to the views of a fellow minister, Lewis Bayly, who saw Stratford's town fires of 1594 and 1595 as a punishment by God for the desecration of the Sabbath: Bearman, Robert, 'Stratford's fires of 1594 and 1595 revisited', in *Midland History* (2000) pp.180-190
- 10 *Minutes and Accounts*, vi, pp.29-34, 136
- 11 *Ibid*, pp.46-47
- 12 Hughes, Ann, 'Religion and Society in Stratford-upon-Avon 1619–1638', in *Midland History* 19(1) (1994) pp.58-84
- 13 SCLA BRU4/1, pp.321-323
- 14 Hughes (1994) *op. cit.*, pp.67-68. Wilson continued to serve until the issue was settled, in Stratford's favour, in the Court of Arches.
- 15 These privileges were confirmed in the Corporation's second charter of 1610.
- 16 To protect the churchwardens, and the minister, from accusations of false presentments, Article 115 of the 1604 Canons safeguarded them from being sued in the church courts on the assumption that 'they did nothing therein of malice, but for the discharge of their consciences'.

- 17 Richard Williams in 1608, buried as 'scrivner' in 1613, followed by Thomas Fisher, d.1624
- 18 Articles 109–112 of the 1604 Canons
- 19 79 questions are listed in presentments of 1622. SCLA ER 1/115/18
- 20 Gilkes and Brinkworth (1997) *op. cit.*, p.47
- 21 Brinkworth (1972) *op. cit.*, p.122
- 22 Ibid, pp.149-50
- 23 Articles 21, 22, 113 of the 1604 Canons
- 24 Brinkworth (1972) *op. cit.*, pp.131-132
- 25 Ibid, pp.149, 152, 154
- 26 Article 59 of the 1604 Canons
- 27 Brinkworth (1972) *op. cit.*, pp.158-159
- 28 Ibid, p.163
- 29 Ibid, p.124
- 30 Ibid, pp.145, 155
- 31 Ibid, p.127
- 32 Ibid, pp.127, 149
- 33 Ibid, pp.150, 152-153, 155
- 34 Ibid, pp.151, 153
- 35 Ibid, p.130
- 36 Ibid, p.151
- 37 Ibid, p.121
- 38 Ibid, p.159
- 39 Ibid, p.135-136
- 40 Ibid, p.135-137. There is no record of the baptism of a child.
- 41 Ibid, p.138. Parental support of daughters in this sort of trouble was not acceptable.
- 42 Ibid, pp. 49, 152
- 43 Ibid, p.143
- 44 Ibid, p.132
- 45 SCLA ER 1/115/67; Brinkworth (1972) *op. cit.*, pp.169, 171. The churchwardens' more salacious remarks are not repeated in the Act Book.

## The Church that Shakespeare Knew

Paul Edmondson

Readers of this chapter have probably, like me, often imagined what it would be like to walk around Holy Trinity Church in Shakespeare's time. What we were to see would depend on the year the walk took place. The reforming spirit of Shakespeare's age meant that the life and indeed the fabric of parish churches were constantly shifting and changing. It was a time of on-going reform and constant, physical adaptation, especially during Elizabeth I's reign. Lack of church inventories, accounts and minute books contributes to the difficulty of our knowing what the church was like and how it changed during Shakespeare's lifetime.

I can imagine myself, however, standing alongside Master Shakespeare in the late summer of 1614. He is fifty years old. What would he and I have seen then that we can still see today, and what has vanished forever?

Master Shakespeare and I are standing in the chancel, facing the sanctuary, and looking at the tomb of his friend John Combe (born before 1561–1614) to the left. Combe, one of the wealthiest people in Stratford-upon-Avon, had lived at the College (p.52). He was buried on 12 July 1614. Combe had bequeathed Shakespeare £5; Shakespeare would bequeath John's nephew, Thomas, his sword. Stanley Wells has pointed out that Thomas would have been around the same age as Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, who died in 1596, a connection which makes Shakespeare's bequest of his sword especially resonant, and perhaps poignant.<sup>1</sup>

Did Shakespeare write an epitaph for John Combe? There is tradition that suggests he did:<sup>2</sup>

*An Extemporary Epitaph on John Combe, A Noted Usurer*  
*Ten in the hundred here lieth engraved;*  
*A hundred to ten his soul is ne'er saved.*  
*If anyone ask who lieth in this tomb,*  
*"O ho!" quoth the devil, "'tis my John-a-Combe".*



*The effigy of Shakespeare's friend, John Combe, buried in the chancel in July 1614*

This version of the epitaph is not on the tomb, so here are five points to consider in relation to it:

(i) The earliest reference to the epitaph (by Richard Brathwait in 1618) mentions that Combe's monument was 'caused to be built in his lifetime'. Combe oversaw the construction of the monument and approved it. Could the epitaph have been fixed to the tomb in order to offend or mock the wealthy Combe while he was living? It was a common practice to affix written, memorial inscriptions to tombs (that is what is happening when Claudio reads out his tribute to Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, 5.3). Evidently satire, if that's what the epitaph is, is for the living not the dead.

(ii) The epitaph reads like the kind of verse that is written *extempore*, especially since, as the Shakespeare scholar and historian E.K. Chambers observed in 1930, it draws on a commonplace joke about usurers.<sup>3</sup> The epitaph is therefore unexceptional, and its lack of originality suggests that



anyone might have written it. There is no indication in the epitaph or on the tomb that Shakespeare and Combe had actually been friends.

(iii) It seems unlikely that Shakespeare (or indeed any legatee to whom Combe bequeathed £5) would write such an epitaph about a deceased friend – unless the epitaph were written by Shakespeare as a needling joke for Combe during his lifetime, in a merry meeting. Shakespeare would not be named as the author until 1634, by Lieutenant Hammond, following his visit to the church.

(iv) It is almost inconceivable that any vicar would have allowed this epitaph to be displayed on a tomb. Combe left £30 to the poor of Stratford, and his actual epitaph records that he left: ‘Six pounds, thirteen shillings and four pence to buy ten gowns for the poor [...] and one hundred pounds to be lent unto fifteen poor tradesmen [...] more, he gave to the poor of Stratford twenty pounds’.<sup>4</sup>

(v) If Combe planned and oversaw the making of his own monument, could not Shakespeare have followed his friend’s example, and overseen his own, too? As a well-to-do gentleman of the town, Shakespeare, like other gentlemen of his time (as David Cressy notes): ‘anticipated interment inside the church itself [...] proximity to the altar and location within the chancel or aisle still mattered for social if not for theological reasons’.<sup>5</sup>

Mairi Macdonald plausibly suggests that Shakespeare’s bust had already been installed by May 1619 when the strongly puritan Thomas Wilson of Evesham took up the post of vicar; he is unlikely to have allowed such a colourful memorial to be installed,<sup>6</sup> and, we might add, the classical (and therefore non-Christian) literary sentiments inscribed upon it. But if Shakespeare did oversee the making of his own memorial bust, then it was installed three years before Wilson’s appointment. The recent groundbreaking research by Lena Orlin presents a convincing case that Shakespeare followed the example of his friend Combe, and demonstrates that the memorial bust is a life-portrait of Shakespeare.<sup>7</sup>



*Shakespeare is about to speak – in his 'life portrait'.*

As these considerations are running through my mind, I turn to seek a comment from Master Shakespeare, who smiles and opens his mouth as though he is about to speak – I even catch a glimpse of his teeth (which seem to be in fine condition) precisely the same kind of expression portrayed in his monument – but then he closes his eyes, momentarily, and nods.

Just in front and to the left of John Combe's tomb is that of the C15 vicar, Thomas Balsall. It is already badly damaged, chipped and ruined. It originally had a fine brass top, and was richly carved with scenes from the life of Christ, but these were defaced and destroyed, probably more than half a century ago. Two doors are visible in the chancel. The one on the north side (to our left) leads into the charnel house, with the damaged images of St Christopher on the top left of the door, and the resurrection of Jesus depicted on the top right. The door on the south side, to our right, was the one the priests had used during the time of the College.<sup>8</sup>

The damage inflicted on Balsall's tomb was part of the (more-or-less) wholesale destruction of the interior of English parish churches instigated by Edward VI from 1547. Most altars had been removed by 1550,<sup>9</sup> and even the reference to 'chalice' in the first *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549 was downgraded to 'cup' in the 1552 edition. The demolition of the altars meant the removal of altar-steps, a levelling-off of chancels.<sup>10</sup> It is most likely that the chancel in Holy Trinity Church was little used from around 1550 until James I's reign commenced in 1603. Everything the chancel represented

architecturally, especially the ‘weeping’ chancel in Holy Trinity symbolising the falling to one side of Jesus’ head on the cross, smacked of division between the clergy and the people, and was anathema to the Puritans.



*The damaged tomb of the C15 Dean of the College, Thomas Balsall*

The rood screen, which separated the chancel from the rest of the church clearly divided the priestly office from that of the people. For Shakespeare, and the people of his time, ordination had been repudiated as a sacrament, and the rood screen was a reminder of an older authority and notion of priesthood, an older faith that his own modern understanding now superseded, and tried to convince itself it no longer needed.

When the medieval rood screen was taken down following the Reformation, it was not discarded, but refitted across the arch on the other side of the crossing to block off the chancel.<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare’s coffin was all too soon to pass through the doors of the old screen as his body was taken to be buried in the chancel on 25 April 1616.



*Bare ruined chancel, looking west from the altar, painted in 1809 by Capt James Saunders. Note the plaster ceiling and medieval rood screen fitted across the arch into the crossing.*



The chancel in Holy Trinity had, like chancels elsewhere, once been a place of music, for a choir. Church organs were almost all gone by the 1560s; Edward VI had issued a national ban on them in the last year of his reign.<sup>12</sup> If choirs were to be used in worship, without an organ, then it was vital for the singers properly to enunciate every syllable. The new sensibility emphasised the primacy of the text at the expense of polyphony and melisma. But, without organ accompaniment, church music began to die out (unless it continued, unaccompanied). Shakespeare's sonnet published as number 73 in 1609, and probably written in the mid-1590s, includes the line: 'Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang'.<sup>13</sup> It is rich in meaning, and is sometimes read as referring to the ruined abbeys, destroyed under Henry VIII. Yet the line speaks very much to the experience of Holy Trinity Church, and of other parish churches up and down the land, with their abandoned if not ruinous chancels.

The installation of a monument like Combe's would have been unthinkable in Elizabeth I's reign, and is indicative of the spirit of reform having settled down more under James I. This new tomb for John Combe suggests that the chancel was beginning to be used again – at least for the occasional burial. But this part of the church is, in this late summer of 1614, in a poor state, 'bare, ruined'. Following the interment of John Combe in the chancel, Margaret Reynolds would be the next to be buried there in 1615 (though there is no monument for her). In 1618, the churchwardens would complain, 'our chancel is ruinous and out of repayre', before going on to name, if not shame, the men whom they believed were responsible for its



*Sedilia for priests in the sanctuary*

upkeep.<sup>14</sup> From 1617, there was a move to restore communion tables back into altars.<sup>15</sup> This was probably in the minds of the churchwardens and formed part of the scheme of reparations they sought for the chancel.



*Face of Jesus in the vernicle*

Shakespeare takes me over to the sedilia, the stone seats for the priests assisting with mass, on the south wall of the sanctuary, and gestures for me to lean into it and look up. There, on a vernicle, we see the face of Jesus, carved from the stone, which has somehow survived the destruction of images that has been taking place all over the country from the start of Edward VI's reign in 1547.

Perhaps it was too difficult to destroy; perhaps the iconoclasts, so intent on defacing Balsall's fine tomb did not look much further than that.

The stained glass from Balsall's time has all gone; some of the windows have been boarded up; a few have been replaced with clear glass. Some tiny fragments of medieval glass are just visible, high up in the south-east corner of the chancel. Originally, these were part of a larger design that depicted the mysteries of the rosary: parts of the first two of the glorious mysteries remain, the Resurrection and the Ascension into Heaven (look, there are Jesus's feet on a cloud). I begin to imagine what the rest of the stained-glass had looked like in the church – long since vanished, like that in the nearby Guild Chapel.



*Medieval stained glass fragments showing Jesus's feet on a cloud ascending*



Master Shakespeare mentions the beautiful stained glass windows of the oratory in the Guild Chapel that were removed in the summer of 1570, when he was six years old. A glazier was paid 33s 8d to get rid of these old, ‘idolatrous’ windows and to replace them with plain glass, to let in the pure light of God.<sup>16</sup> We do not know whether the stained glass windows in Holy Trinity were removed before or after those in the Guild Chapel.

I walk with Master Shakespeare over to the misericords. Thomas Balsall’s own misericord-stall echoes his tomb with the first three Greek characters of Jesus’s name, ‘IHS’. Some of the misericords date from early-to-mid C15. The medieval woodcarvers, working with individual pieces of black oak for each seat, vividly depicted the fashions and imaginations of their time.



*Misericord carvings: (left) C15 woman beating up a man; (right) scold's bridle*

A shrewish woman holds a man by the beard, beats him over the head with a frying pan, and tries to kick him in the crotch. She's wearing head attire from the 1430s. This comic scene pre-dates Punch and Judy (which would grow out of the Italian Commedia d'elle Arte tradition a century later) and seems rather to depict the biblical injunctions and warnings against wives who misbehave. For example, Ecclesiasticus 25:16-17: 'I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon, than to keep house with a wicked woman. The wickedness of a woman changeth her face, and darkeneth her countenance like sackcloth'.

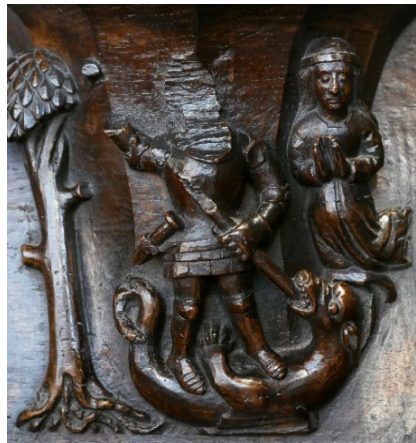
The misericords that represent women in scolds' bridles also bear out these kinds of biblical verses, adopted and literally applied as social control (Ecclesiasticus again, 28:25: 'weigh thy words in a balance, and make a door and bar for thy mouth').



*Misericord carvings: (left) A two-humped camel; (right) a naked woman riding a stag*

There are also various mythical beasts and foliage – all symbols of the incarnation. I notice a carved camel. Master Shakespeare smiles, recalling that he mentions camels in *Richard II* and *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* (3.2): 'Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel? By th' mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed.' The misericords were also the only place in town where a nude woman was depicted in a public work of art.

There is St George killing the dragon, a favourite saint of Europe. "I suppose, being born on 23 April, Master Shakespeare, you might have been called George?" He does not answer.



*A popular saint for Europe:  
a C15 St George*

And there is an ape, urinating into a flask, while another ape analyses the sample – probably not a favourite with Shakespeare’s son-in-law, John Hall, master of physicke, who regularly used uroscopy in his diagnoses.

I turn to look again over the chancel before we leave it. From 1549, altars had been regarded only as tables. Stone altars, such as the medieval altar here in Holy Trinity, were often removed and replaced by Communion tables or boards which, in defiant and symbolic contradiction to their east-facing predecessors, ran long-wise into the body of the church. We pass through the rood screen and notice the Communion Table in front of us – just beyond the crossing. As we walk towards it, Master Shakespeare gestures upwards and points out the Green Men: the face in foliage being an ancient symbol of the incarnation, appropriated from even more ancient pagan symbolism.



*Gilded 'green man' in groining of the south-east pillar of the crossing*

For at least four decades, services of Holy Communion were only required to be held at least three times a year (the usual Sunday service being Matins) so communion tables could, if necessary, be portable and temporarily placed. The church conference held at Hampton Court in 1604 produced the ‘Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical’, which included the requirement for ‘a decent communion table in every church’,<sup>17</sup> and moreover:

The same table shall from time to time be kept and repaired in sufficient and seemly manner and covered in time of divine service with a carpet of silk or other decent stuff, and with a fair linen cloth at the time of administration as becometh that table, and so stand, saving when the said holy communion is to be administered. At the same time the same shall be placed in so good sort within the church or chancel as thereby the minister may be more conveniently heard of the communicant in his prayer and ministration. And, that the Ten Commandments be set upon the east end of every church and

chapel where the people may best see and read the same and other sentences written upon the walls of the said churches and chapels in places convenient, and, likewise, that a convenient seat be made for the minister to read service in. All these to be done at the charge of the parish.

In April 1619, in their 'note of Church goods' the churchwardens list 'one carpett and a white cloth for communion table and a buckram bagge to put them in'.<sup>18</sup> In June, in their presentments made to the church's peculiar court in light of the arrival of their new vicar, Thomas Wilson, a 'Table and Frame' are noted (presumably a board and trestles).<sup>19</sup> These records suggest that Holy Trinity Church's communion table was easily portable.

The entry to the belfry is to our left. There were five bells during Shakespeare's time. In the 'Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical' of 1604, it was set down that bells should:<sup>20</sup>

not be rung superstitiously upon holy days or even abrogated by the Book of Common Prayer, nor at any other times, without good cause to be allowed by the minister of the place, and by themselves.

It is not surprising that a churchwardens' minute for 24 October 1617 reads: 'we were scited [reported] to Worcester because the church bells were oute of order' – probably from want of use.<sup>21</sup> One of the bells was recast that December at the cost of £4 12d, and there are several entries during the months following. The bells clearly needed a lot of attention in order to be made properly ringable again.



*Precious remnants of medieval wall-paintings on south side of the crossing*



The walls in the crossing and beyond are white-washed, though some of the old, medieval paintings are beginning to show through. On 15 December 1617, the churchwardens would pay the large sum of £3 19s 2d for the church to be white-washed again.<sup>22</sup> “Master Shakespeare, do you recall seeing any of the old, medieval paintings?” He smiles and momentarily closes his eyes. His late mother and father, and their friends and neighbours, had told him about them. They recalled saints’ days and feasts, and sometimes the kind of entertainments and pageants they used to see, like St George and the Dragon, which had been played in the town every Ascension Day for centuries – until 1562.<sup>23</sup> There were altars in Holy Trinity Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St John Baptist, The Holy Cross, St Katherine (of Alexandria or Siena), St Thomas Becket, and St George (see [Chapter 1](#)).



*Angel above a nave pillar*

Wall paintings in medieval times had been a great encouragement to parishioners who would come into the church and pray, and feel strengthened by the examples of the saints depicted in them. The paintings proclaimed the faith, told its stories and were part of the church’s fabric. Their drama vanished with them (though remnants of St Thomas Becket’s murder and St George killing the dragon are still faintly discernible in the Guild Chapel). The stone angels, which decorate the tops of the pillars in the nave, remain, and Master Shakespeare says he has known these since his childhood.

The pulpit stands in the middle of the crossing, prominently facing the congregation. There is its preaching cushion, and there the hour-glass. Sermons tended to last around an hour, which suggests that the congregations, as well as theatre audiences, were better listeners than they are today. A great church Bible of the ‘last translation’ (listed in the vestry accounts for 1619) rests on the pulpit cushion. It is the one commissioned by King James, and first published in 1611, a royal attempt to restore the unity

of God's word in every parish (see [Chapter 6](#)). The Holy Trinity Church copy is effectively an early reprint of the 1611 edition issued in 1613 with some press-variants. "Did you used to read from this bible, Master Shakespeare?", I ask, but I do not think he has heard me clearly. He pauses, and then replies, "Yes, we all read the Bible".

The minister's seat or stall is to one side of the pulpit. All of these items are mentioned in the churchwardens' presentment of 1619.<sup>24</sup> We do not know where our damaged, ancient font was situated (though it is mentioned, 'a Font of stone', in that same presentment of 1619). It was apparently removed for safe-keeping during a later period of iconoclasm. Simple basins, rather than fonts, were favoured in many churches and used in baptisms, for example, in Essex by 1564.<sup>25</sup> They tended to be placed alongside pulpits, since baptisms often followed sermons. 'A great flagon of pewter' was used to fill the font with water.<sup>26</sup>



*The damaged medieval font,  
now positioned in the chancel*

Alongside the pulpit, on the side walls of the crossing, nearest the nave, are displayed prominently the Ten Commandments. These are mentioned in the churchwardens' presentment of June 1619 as being 'set up in thest [the east] end of the Church'. The printer in London who had received the royal commission to print the Ten Commandments for all churches in the land was William Jaggard, who from 1615 also owned the monopoly for all the playbills printed in London, and who, by 1623, with the help of his son Isaac (for William himself was blind) would bring into print Master William Shakespeare's *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*, the book that has become known as the First Folio printing of Shakespeare's works.

To our right, as we face the great west window (which has clear glass) is what has become known as the Clopton Chapel. Hugh Clopton, who had built New Place, was, as it were, Master Shakespeare's domestic ancestor.



Like Combe, Clopton had a fine tomb built for himself, close to the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Since Hugh Clopton died in London, in 1496, his tomb in Stratford is, as far we know, empty (see [Chapter 8](#)).



*Descendants of the Hugh Clopton who built New Place (Shakespeare's family home from 1597): effigies of William (d.1592) and Anne (d.1596) Clopton*

The Lady Chapel, as it had been, was erased, probably by 1550. Around forty years later it became a memorial chapel for Hugh Clopton's great-great nephew, William (who died in April 1592) and his wife, Anne (who died in September 1596, the same year that Hamnet Shakespeare died, and not long before the Shakespeares moved into New Place). Their tomb, as we look at it, occupies the central place in the side chapel. Lena Orlin notes that it was moved to the north wall to make space for the more important tomb of George Carew, Baron Clopton and Earl of Totnes, and his wife, Joyce Carew, in the late 1630s.<sup>27</sup>

To our left are the remains or scars of the St Thomas Becket chapel. It was founded in 1331 by John de Stratford 'even though' by then, as Ronnie Mulryne writes, 'his responsibilities had taken him far from his home town'.<sup>28</sup> John de Stratford gave provision for a chantry chapel to St Thomas the Martyr to be installed and left provision for five priests to say masses for the souls of his brother, Robert, his parents, and his own. Later he made provision for more priests (taking the total to eleven). They lived in the

nearby College (see [Chapter 3](#)), built in 1553 by Ralph de Stratford, and thereby making the church known as the Collegiate Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. We can still see the ascent to the altar, although the altar itself was taken down by decree of Edward VI.<sup>29</sup>

The three stone seats, or sedilia, remain against the south wall, seats for the priests assisting at mass. These are topped with fine stone-work and were remarked on by the local antiquarian, John Jordan, in C18. The ones we see today were rebuilt in 1840, a Victorian replica of what used to be there. Any screens of either stone or wood – that separated this chantry chapel from the rest of the church – have long since been removed,



*Victorian replicas of the priests' sedilia in the former chantry chapel of St Thomas Becket*

and before Shakespeare was born. The space has since become a useful one in which the congregation can sit, close to the pulpit. But, as we look up, we see the star-like flower bosses in the ceiling that were too difficult, perhaps too dangerous (and too costly) for even the most enthusiastic iconoclast to remove.

Across the nave are the rows and boxes of pews. These were allotted according to social position. The bailiff's and Corporation's pew was next to the pew owned by the College on the north side.<sup>30</sup> Master Shakespeare recalls his father processing to church as an alderman and



*Gilded decorative bosses on ceiling of the Becket Chapel*

bailiff, and, as a boy, being allowed to sit with him occasionally in his special pew, with the Corporation, on the north side of the nave. Prominent houses had their own pews, and the pew for New Place was on the south side.<sup>31</sup> Master Shakespeare recalls how he, Anne, and Judith, in the spring of 1614, gave hospitality in New Place to a visiting preacher on behalf of the Corporation. He had come to preach one of the town's three annual sermons. The Chamberlain's Account records expenses of 20d, 'for one quart of sack and one quart of claret wine'.<sup>32</sup>

The churchwardens would collect pew rents; in some parishes pew plans survive with the names of hundreds of residents on them.<sup>33</sup> Men and the women sat separately. Everyone knew his or her place, and took it. Knowing your place, and taking the same place each time you went to church, enabled the church authorities easily to note absenteeism, and to follow it up. Some of the pews, perhaps the more prominent ones, were formed as boxes. On 29 October 1617, the churchwardens' accounts include eight shillings and fourpence for 'Lead, Nayles, & hinges for the seates'.<sup>34</sup> There was a gallery of seats on the north side of the church. The churchwardens would minute their intention to remove it on 18 April 1620.<sup>35</sup>



*Perhaps this damaged roundel in the porch used to depict the Holy Trinity.*

Shakespeare and I head towards the two-storey porch, built by the vicar, Thomas Balsall in the 1480s. The roundel of what was probably the Holy Trinity above us has been ruined by iconoclasts. The muniment (or document) room is upstairs, reached by a narrow, winding, stone stair. It is sometimes said that this is where the Stratford Bawdy Court met, the main arbitrator of moral and social behaviour (see [Chapter 4](#)). But the muniment room is small and

inaccessible for public court hearings. There is one surviving consistory or ecclesiastical court left visible today, in Chester Cathedral, which is much

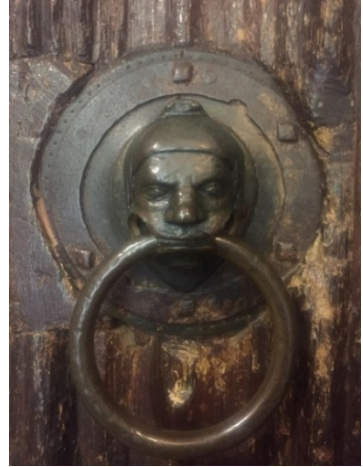
larger, more open, and on the ground-floor. Holy Trinity Church afforded several other possible locations for the Bawdy Court which would have made the hearings more public and easier to access: the north or south transepts, or even up in the chancel itself.



*Interior of the muniment room, above the porch, looking out along the avenue*

The porch was where the churchwardens would have been on the lookout for anyone who might need to appear before the Bawdy Court. Shakespeare's father and eight other townsmen appeared on a list for not attending church one Sunday in the spring of 1592, for example, 'for feare of process for debtte'.<sup>36</sup> I ask Master Shakespeare where in the church the Bawdy Court was located, but he looks down, a little sheepishly.

I notice the C13 sanctuary knocker (the sanctuary laws would not be repealed until 1623) and I follow him into the churchyard. There I notice the shorter, lead-covered wooden spire (replaced by the present one in 1762) as we walk around towards the river, on the north side of the building. We arrive at the charnel house, somewhere to put the bones from those graves that are being cleared for new burials. Tanners, who treated the hides of animals and made leather, tend to decay in the earth a little slower than non-tanners (as the gravedigger in *Hamlet* well knows). This is the kind of hearsay knowledge that Shakespeare learned from his father, who was himself a worker of leather, and had regular dealings with tanners. The charnel house (30 feet long and 15 feet wide) looks like the oldest part of the church, and dates from centuries before Thomas Balsall built the adjoining chancel in the 1480s. The local historian, Robert Bell Wheler, writing in 1806, not long after it was demolished, recalled that: '[its] pillars a little above the surface of the earth were each divided into three ribs, intersecting with each other, and closed up with unhewn stone'.<sup>37</sup>



*Survivor from C13: sanctuary knocker on the north door*

There was a room above it, accessible by stone steps, which was used for many years as the vicar's study. 'The minister's Studye over the bonehouse to be Repayred' is mentioned in the churchwardens' minutes for 18 April 1620.<sup>38</sup> The room, according to Wheler, had once been appointed to be used as a bed-chamber by up to four choristers. I start to wonder about the inscription on Shakespeare's own grave:

*Good frend for Iesus sake forbear  
To digge the dvst enclosed heare.  
Blese be ye man thyt spares thes stones,  
And cvrsed be he yt moves my bones.*





*Painting of the ancient charnel house, abutting the north side of Balsall's chancel*

If it indicates that he did not want to be exhumed and placed in the charnel house (perhaps the obvious, primary meaning of its curse) then it implies that buried gentlemen were not necessarily laid to rest entirely peacefully, even in the chancel. We learned through archaeological scanning in 2014 that Shakespeare was buried directly into the earth. He might have expected, not unreasonably, that he would eventually be dug up and be superseded by somebody else. Perhaps it was different for his friend John Combe with his grander

interment. I think, too, about how Hugh Clopton and John Combe oversaw the installation of their own graves and monuments inside the church. And almost certainly it seems to me now, as I stand out there, looking upon the charnel house, that Shakespeare followed their example – and that he made reasonable provision for his widow, Anne, to be buried next to him. But these are topics I cannot raise in late summer of 1614.

Master Shakespeare and I turn and walk back towards the main porch. As I look down the pathway, I notice a few graves marked with wooden crosses, and I realise that I can ask him where his son Hamnet (who died in 1596) and where his father (who died in 1601) and mother (who died in 1608) are buried. I turn to ask Master Shakespeare, but he has already gone back inside the church, and shut the door.



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- 11 Styles, Philip, 'The borough of Stratford-upon-Avon', in *Victoria County History of Warwickshire*, Vol. 3 (London: OUP, 1946) p.58 The former rood screen remained across the entrance to the chancel until the chancel was restored in 1835, when it was relocated as a partition in the middle of the north transept. Not until 1963 was it moved again to its present position across the entrance to the north transept.
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- 27 I acknowledge the expertise of Lena Orlin of Georgetown University for this insight into the (re)positioning of tombs in the Clopton Chapel.
- 28 Mulryne, Ronnie, 'The Thomas Becket Chapel: History and People', in Mulryne, Ronnie, ed., *A Taste for History: History and Conservation at Holy Trinity Church* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Friends of Shakespeare's Church, 2015) p.81
- 29 Wheeler, Robert Bell, *History and Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon* (London: J. Ward, 1806) p.37. The original Becket altar was discovered in 1889, buried under the floor. It is now the *mensa* of the high altar in the chancel.
- 30 Fripp, Edgar, *Shakespeare's Stratford* (Oxford: OUP, 1928) p.68
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Schoenbaum, S., *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*. (Oxford: OUP, 1987) p.280
- 33 Marsh, Christopher, 'Order and Place in England, 1580–1640: The View from the Pew', in *Journal of British Studies* 1(2005) p.9
- 34 Arbuthnot, *op. cit.*, p.6
- 35 Arbuthnot, *op. cit.*, p.13. The wording of the minute is ambiguous: 'Item the gallery now standing to be Removed to the north side of the church'. This could mean that an existing gallery was to be relocated. In his *History and Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon* (Stratford-upon-Avon: J. Ward, 1806) p.36, Robert Bell Wheeler noted: 'Here [in the North Aisle] is also a large gallery, erected at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century'. It was not taken down until 1883.
- 36 Schoenbaum, *op. cit.*, p.41
- 37 Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p.40
- 38 Arbuthnot, *op. cit.*, p.13

# 6

## The King James Bible

Lindsay MacDonald

### Previous English Translations

Martin Luther's achievement in 1522 of translating the Bible from Greek into German attracted the attention of Oxford scholar, William Tyndale. Inspired by the idea of making scripture accessible to the common man, he went to Wittenburg to learn the art of biblical translation from Luther himself. By 1526, Tyndale had completed an English translation of the New Testament, 700 pages in length. Three thousand copies were produced in the German town of Worms through the new technology of printing.



*William Tyndale, 1494 – 1536*

Tyndale's literary style was masterly: he communicated with remarkable clarity, generally avoiding Latin terms in favour of common English words, expressed in a conversational manner. He coined such phrases as: 'the powers that be'; 'my brother's keeper'; 'the salt of the earth' and 'a law unto themselves'. He introduced many words still in use today, such as: 'Jehovah', 'Passover', 'scapegoat' and 'atonement'. He provided an incentive for people to learn to read, so that they could understand the scriptures. More broadly, he stimulated development of the English language by the new words created to accommodate biblical ideas.

As Tyndale's New Testament flooded into England and circulated widely, the establishment reacted in panic. Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London, preached a sermon against it and arranged a public burning of all the copies he could seize. Thomas More was scathing. Cardinal Wolsey issued a decree

that all 'untrue translations' should be burned, and instructed the English ambassador to the Lowlands to act against any printers involved with the work. Yet the books continued to be produced and smuggled into England, and by the time of Tyndale's martyrdom, some 16,000 copies of his translation had entered the country.



*Tyndale's brutal execution – Woodcut in Foxe's Book of Martyrs (1563)*

Antipathy to Tyndale arose not only from *what* he said but also *how* he said it. He seems to have taken a deliberately confrontational stance. He advocated that the king of a country should be the head of that country's church, rather than the Pope, thus alienating the Catholic church. He famously said to a sceptical cleric: "Ere many years, I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost!", which

undermined the authority of the clergy. He favoured the views of Martin Luther, who proclaimed that ‘the church’ meant not the institution but all believers, which threatened the episcopacy. At last he was arrested by the authorities in Antwerp and publicly executed on 6 October, 1536. His final words, spoken ‘at the stake with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice’, were: “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes”.

Tyndale’s prayer was answered in a remarkably short time. In December 1534, a convocation of clergy in Canterbury had already petitioned the King for an English translation of Holy Scripture. With the encouragement of Thomas Cromwell, the first complete English Bible appeared as a quarto edition in 1535, edited by Miles Coverdale, who drew on five sources, principally Tyndale. At the same time, John Rogers, alias ‘Thomas Matthew’, continued the translation work of Tyndale and produced a complete English Bible in folio edition. In August 1537, only eight months after Tyndale’s death, Archbishop Cranmer succeeded in persuading Henry VIII to give his royal approval, and henceforth the title pages of both prominently bore the words: ‘Set forth with the Kinges most gracyous lycence’. It seems certain, however, that Henry did not realise their origins when he sanctioned them, because in addition to the New Testament the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) were taken verbatim from Tyndale’s translation. The nine historical books (Joshua through to 2 Chronicles) in the Matthew Bible were also from Tyndale.

Henry was finally persuaded to commission an English Bible with royal authority, and Coverdale was instructed to revise the Matthew Bible, by removing the marginal notes and re-ordering the books of the New Testament in canonical order. The ‘Great Bible’ of 1539, with its preface by Cranmer, was the result. Its title page depicted a benevolent King handing out Bibles to clergy and laity alike, each layer of society in turn delivering it to the layer below, while all the people cry out: *Vivat Rex* (May the King live). Henry issued an edict that all parishes should have:

one book of the Bible of the largest volume in English, and the same set up in some convenient place within the church that ye have care of, whereas your parishioners may most commodiously resort to the same and read it.



The irony is that the inspiration for the work, and the source of a great deal of its content, was none other than William Tyndale, who had been derided, persecuted, imprisoned and put to death for his efforts.

After the death of Edward VI in 1553, many English Protestants fled to Geneva from Mary Tudor's purge in her effort to return the country to Catholicism. Motivated by the Lutheran ideal that every Christian had a right to read and interpret the Bible, a group embarked on a new translation, starting with Tyndale's and amending it in the light of Protestant theology. The Geneva Bible was published in 1560 as a convenient quarto edition, with aids to individual study, including copious marginal notes. It was the first version to be divided into chapters and verses, plus illustrations, prefaces to the individual books, a commentary, a concordance and tables of Scriptural names. It was set in Roman typeface, making it much easier to read than earlier Bibles. The Geneva Bible was never forbidden by Queen Elizabeth's ministers, and during the period 1560–1630 it went through 160 editions and became the household Bible of the people.

Yet the Geneva Bible never found favour with the leaders of the Church of England, who felt threatened by the marginal notes with their Calvinist orientation. In response, Archbishop Parker arranged for a new translation, based on the Great Bible, with no controversial annotations, which was published in 1568 as the Bishops' Bible. It was the only major Bible of Elizabeth's reign with the official sanction of Church of England, intended for lectern use, but it was never a rival to the Geneva Bible: people would expect to hear one in church and to read the other at home.

An interesting copy of the Bishops' Bible is held in the archive of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.<sup>1</sup> It was printed in London in 1595 by Christopher Barker, the Queen's Printer. Stuck inside the front cover is a sketch of Luddington Church, for this was the Bible in use at the



*Sketch of old Luddington Church*



old church in Luddington for nearly 300 years, until it was donated to the SBT in 1878 by the Revd John Day Collis.

The other significant English translation of the Bible to appear during Elizabeth's reign was the Douai-Rheims Bible, which had its origins, like the Geneva Bible, in an exiled community of English scholars, in this case Catholics, who had left England on account of their religious beliefs. The translation was based on St Jerome's Latin rendering, following the Council of Trent's ruling that the Vulgate was the only valid biblical text. The translator, Gregory Martin, was motivated by what he regarded as the blatant dishonesty of the Protestant translators, particularly in the Geneva Bible, who made all kinds of improper interpretations of, and alterations to, the text in the furtherance of Protestant doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The New Testament section was published in Rheims, France, in 1582, in one volume with extensive commentary and notes. The Old Testament was published in two volumes twenty-seven years later in 1609 and 1610 by the University of Douai.

The Douai-Rheims Bible was created not for ordinary people to read but for priests to use as a polemical weapon, the explicit purpose being proclaimed on the 1582 title page:

With Arguments of the Bookes, and Chapters: Annotations: Tables: and other helps, for better understanding of the text: for discoverie of Corruptions in some late translations: and for clearing Controversies in Religion.

The resulting translation, therefore, was not always easy to read because it retained as much as possible of the traditional Latinate vocabulary and phraseology of the medieval Church.

Shakespeare drew on all three Bible translations, i.e. the Bishops', Geneva and Douai-Rheims (new testament) in quoting scripture in his plays. For example, in *All's Well that Ends Well* (4:5) the Clown says to Lafeu: "I am for the house with the narrow gate" alluding to Matthew 7:13, which in Protestant versions reads: 'Enter ye at the *straite* gate' whereas the Douai-Rheims version is: 'Enter ye by the *narrow* gate'. Shakespeare's dignified characters use scriptural truth in a way that is integrated with human experience and throws light upon it.<sup>2</sup>

## King James and the Translation Process

As he travelled south from Scotland to England to take up his throne in April 1603, James was met by a deputation of Puritan clergy, who presented a petition claiming the support of a thousand English clergy. It spoke of the abuses of the current ecclesiastical establishment and requested a gathering to examine the state of the church. James soon invited four leading Puritans



*James I: 'the wisest fool in Christendom'*

to meet him with a number of bishops in conference at Hampton Court in January 1604. He wanted to hear what the Puritans had to say, though he was not inclined to accede to their requests for reform. From his upbringing, he strongly supported the episcopacy, i.e. the governance of bishops. The Puritans were seeking to

establish a 'godly' society and they complained that a church with a hierarchy of clergy smacked of popery, and that the Book of Common Prayer seemed to be picked out of the Catholic missal. For them the salvation of the Church lay in equality, created by eliminating all the upper levels of clergy, together with a purified liturgy, along the Calvinist lines of Geneva.

Only when the Puritans called for a new Bible did James respond with alacrity. But whereas they had hoped that the Geneva Bible might be officially adopted, James seized the opportunity to create a new version, free of objectionable marginal notes. In his view, political and religious unity were to be achieved through the person of the monarch, by exercising his divine right to issue a single Bible with royal authority.<sup>3</sup>

The new translation was made possible by the revolution in learning that had taken place in Oxford and Cambridge during the 1500s, particularly in Greek. Humanist colleges, such as Corpus Christi in Oxford, provided the knowledge of disputation, languages, theology and textual scrutiny. The

translators came from varied backgrounds, with widely different opinions on doctrine. They drew on a wide range of Hebrew and Arabic sources, and paid attention to English idiom, as well as the style and metre of the translation. A team of about 50 scholars, chosen from ‘the best-learned in both universities’, was organised into six panels, or companies, with two each meeting in Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster. Each panel was allocated its own group of texts from either the Old or New Testament or the Apocrypha, with a brief to improve on previous English editions by translating from the original Hebrew and Greek. Their work was governed by a set of rules, which addressed three main issues: the use of earlier translations; the appearance and language of the new translation, and the organisation of the six companies. Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, oversaw the whole process.

The translators were to follow the text of the Bishops’ Bible wherever possible, substituting the words of another translation, such as Coverdale or Geneva, where it was deemed to ‘agree better with the text’. The established chapter divisions were to be retained, but with no contentious marginal notes, such as those in the Geneva version. Regarding language, the new translation should retain the familiar English forms of biblical names and the ‘old ecclesiastical words’, such as ‘Church’, rather than ‘Congregation’. Members of the companies worked individually on the allotted section of text, then met to confer and reach consensus. The agreed text was circulated to other companies, who were to send back any comments and alterations.

Marginal amendments made to a copy of the Bishops’ Bible (now conserved in the Bodleian Library) record the textual changes proposed by several of the companies of translators. Around a quarter of the proposed amendments were original to the translators, but three-quarters had been taken over from other English versions:<sup>4</sup>

The translators, for example, in revising the text of the synoptic Gospels in the Bishops’ Bible, owe about one-fourth of their revisions, each, to the Geneva and Rheims New Testaments. Another fourth of their work can be traced to the work of Tyndale and Coverdale. And the final fourth of their revisions is original to the translators themselves.

When the first stage of translation had been completed in 1608, the King called a General Meeting at Stationers' Hall in London. Two members of each company attended and spent a further two years in review and revision. When they met, one read the new translation, while the others held in their hands Bibles of other translations and if they found any fault they spoke, otherwise the reader continued. The final review committee's objective thus served to ensure that the work pleased the ear when read aloud.

The Bible was published in 1611, typeset and printed in London by Robert Barker, the King's Printer. The title page, engraved on a steel plate, depicted apostles and patriarchs: Moses and Aaron in niches on either side; Matthew and Mark at the sides above them and Luke and John below. Christ appeared symbolically in roundels above and below the title panel: as the Lamb of God, supported by Peter and James above, and below as the pelican who feeds her young with her own blood. Over all were God, denoted by the Hebrew letters of his name YHWH, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.



*Title page of the first edition of the  
King James Bible, 1611*

The KJB was never officially described as the 'Authorised Version' (unlike the Bishops' Bible) but began to be labelled in this way from about 1620 onwards. The King was not depicted on the title page but evoked in words: 'Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and revised, by his Maiesties Speciall Comandement'. The second page had a dedication to the King, followed by an extended translators' preface.

The printed format of the KJB consisted of 366 sheets of paper, each folded to yield two leaves or four printed pages, hence a total of 1464 pages, measuring 16 by 10½ inches (406 by 267 mm). No page numbers were included, but narrow ruled margins allowed space for occasional cross-references. There were no embedded illustrations beyond the title pages and front matter, apart from the decorated capital letter at the start of each chapter. The large folio size, layout of text in double columns and archaic ‘black letter’ type harkened back to the lectern bibles of the previous century, and were all in stark contrast to the readable Roman typeface and copious annotations of the Geneva edition. The combined formal effect of size, paper quality and strong type was one of authority and ‘ecclesiastical splendour’.

For every page of every edition the frame with 59 lines of lead type had to be set afresh in two columns enclosed within ruled lines. The early printings of the KJB inevitably contained many typographical errors, caused by the physically demanding nature of typesetting, re-use of the type in successive pages, and economising on the laborious task of proof-reading. The resulting pattern of errors thus provides a ‘fingerprint’ characteristic of each printing. For example, comparing the first printing and the reprint of 1613:

Exodus 28:11	1611: ‘hoops of the pillars’	1613: ‘hooks of the pillars’
Ruth 3:15	1611: ‘he went into the city’	1613: ‘she went into the city’
Psalms 119:161	1611: ‘Princes have persecuted’	1613: ‘Printers have persecuted’
Matthew 6:3	1611: ‘thy right doeth’	1613: ‘thy right hand doeth’
Matthew 26:36	1611: ‘Then cometh Jesus’	1613: ‘Then cometh Judas’

When it was published in 1611, the KJB received a surprisingly lukewarm reception. People who had grown up hearing the Bishops’ Bible in church and reading the Geneva Bible at home found it strange to the ear. As a new generation grew up hearing scripture read aloud from the KJB, however, it became familiar and was appreciated more. One of the proponents was John Donne, whose three folios of sermons did much to ingrain the authorised text in the nation’s consciousness. Puritans continued to use the Geneva Bible and remained suspicious of the KJB, because of its association with the King, especially in the ongoing dispute with Charles I, leading to the Civil War and the Commonwealth.



43 And he tooke it, and did eate before them.

44 And he said vnto them, These are the words which I spake vnto you, while I was yet with you, & all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, & in the Prophets, and in the Psalmes concerning me.

45 Then opened he their vnderstanding, that they might vnderstand the Scriptures,

46 And said vnto them, Thus it is written, & thus it behoued Christ to suffer, & to rise fro the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sinnes should be preached in his Name, among all nations, beginning

at Hierusalem.

48 And ye are witnesses of these things.

49 ¶ And behold, I send the promise of my Father vpon you: but tary ye in the city of Hierusalem, vntill ye be indued with power from on high.

50 ¶ And hec led them out as farre as to Bethanie, & he list vp his hands, and blessed them.

51 ¶ And it came to passe, while he blessed them, hec was parted from them, and caried vp into heauen.

52 And they worshipped him, & returned to Hierusalem, with great ioy:

53 And were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

\* Iohn 15.  
16. acts. 1.  
4.

\* Mat. 16.  
19. acts. 1.  
9.



## ¶ The Gospel according to S. Iohn.

### CHAP. I.

1 The Diuinitie, Humanity, and Office of Iesus Christ. 15 The testimonie of Iohn. 39 The calling of Andrew, Peter, &c.



In the beginning was the word, & the word was with God, and the word was God.

2 ¶ The same was in the beginning with God.

3 ¶ All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

5 And the light shineth in darknes, and the darknes comprehended it not.

6 ¶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was Iohn.

7 The same came for a witnesse, to beare witnesse of the light, that all men through him might beleue.

8 He was not that light, but was sent to beare witnesse of that light.

9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

10 Hec was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

11 He came vnto his owne, and his owne receiued him not.

12 But as many as receiued him, to them gaue hec power to become the sonnes of God, euen to them that beleue on his Name:

13 Which were borne, not of blood, nor of the wil of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 ¶ And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among vs ( & we beheld his glory, the glory as of the onely begotten of the Father) full of grace and trueth.

15 ¶ Iohn bare witnesse of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, he that cometh after me, is preferred before me, for he was before me.

16 And of his fulnesse haue all we receiued, and grace for grace.

17 For the Law was giuen by Moses, but grace and trueth came by Iesus Christ.

18 ¶ No man hath seene God at any time: the onely begotten Sonne, which is in the bosome of the Father, he hath declared him.

19 ¶ And this is the record of Iohn, when the Ielues sent Priests and Leuites from Hierusalem, to aske him, who art thou?

20 And he confessed, and denied not: but confessed, I am not the Christ.

I 3 21 And

¶ Or, the right or principle.

\* Mat. 1. 16.

\* Col. 1. 19.

\* 1. Iohn 4.  
13. 1. tim.  
6. 16.

\* Gen. 1. 1.

\* Col. 1. 16.

\* Matt. 3. 1.

\* Hebr. 1. 1.

After the Restoration, however, the Geneva Bible fell from favour and the KJB became one of the pillars of royal authority. It was reissued in 1660, with a new title page showing Charles II enthroned, and was followed in 1662 by a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer, in which, for the first time, the KJB text was incorporated into the lessons and liturgy.

Nothing did more to embed the language of the KJB into public consciousness than the libretto by Charles Jennens for Handel's *Messiah* (1741). Just as, 150 years after Shakespeare's death, David Garrick transformed him into a national cultural commodity with the Jubilee of 1769, so Jennens and Handel elevated the status of the KJB, nearly 150 years after its publication, into a national literary treasure.

### **The Language and Style of the KJB**

The literary skills of the fifty translators in six committees were formidable, and their collective achievement over six years was immense, yet for all that, approximately 85% of the KJB is the translation of Tyndale, and the work bears witness to his genius. Even when the KJB was first published, the language seemed archaic, because it adopted Tyndale's speech patterns of the 1520s. Examples are: the widespread use of 'thou' and 'thine'; verbs ending with -eth, such as 'cometh' or 'taketh'; and placing 'thereof' at the end of a phrase, as in 'a cubit shall be the length thereof'.

Having become familiar with the idiom of the KJB over the centuries, most people now praise its language. It contains memorable exhortations, such as: 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come' (Isaiah 60:1) and vivid warnings: 'It were better for him that a milstone were hanged about his necke, and that hee were drowned in the depth of the Sea' (Matthew 18:6) and grand visions: 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1).

Many of the distinctive features of the KJB style are attributable to the 'formal' approach of the translators, who were not concerned with producing a 'literary work', but rather a Bible that rendered the original Hebrew and Greek as accurately and literally as possible. For example, one of the most prominent features of biblical Hebrew is parataxis, i.e. placing of clauses side

by side, leading the KJB translators to use 'and' with much greater frequency than is normal in English. At the beginning of Genesis, it reads:

'In the beginning God created the heaven **and** the earth.  
**And** the earth was without form, **and** void; **and** darkness  
was upon the face of the deep. **And** the Spirit of God  
moved upon the face of the waters. **And** God said: Let  
there be light; **and** there was light.'

Another example of Hebraic English is the preference for 'noun + of + noun' instead of the possessive form. Thus in Mark 1:14 we find 'The Gospell of the kingdome of God' rather than 'God's kingdom's gospel'.

Variety is an essential feature of good prose rhythm, and one reason for the KJB's effectiveness is that it simultaneously tends towards, yet ultimately resists, regularity of the metre:

'Surely goodnes and mercie shall followe me all the daies of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.' (Psalm 23)

Here the rhythm consists mainly of a pattern of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed third (*anapest* form) but in some places one of the unstressed syllables is omitted (*iambic* form).

The KJB uses a vocabulary of only about 8,000 different words, but contains many neologisms, i.e. words and phrases that appeared for the first time, such as 'granddaughter', 'accurately', 'skewed', 'expansion', 'battering ram', 'bushy' of hair, 'lost sheep' of people, and 'cut short' of speakers. In comparison, David Crystal writes that Shakespeare's lexicon:<sup>5</sup>

was somewhere between 17,000 and 20,000 words – quite small by present-day standards, though probably much larger than his contemporaries. And the number of his lexical innovations, insofar as these can be identified reliably, is probably no more than 1700, fewer than half of which have remained in the language. No other author matches these impressive figures, but they contribute only a small element of the overall size of the English lexicon, which even in Early Modern English times was around 150,000.

Many of the phrases employed by the KJB evoke vivid images:

A man after his own heart (1 Sam 13:14)
Give up the ghost (Job 3:11)
Cast bread upon the water (Ecc 11:1)
Cast pearls before swine (Mat 7:6)
Two-edged sword (Heb 4:12)
Skin of his teeth (Job 19:20)
A law unto themselves (Rom 2:14)
A thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7)
In the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52)

Shakespeare would have been very familiar from childhood with the Geneva Bible, and also the Bishops' Bible, which he would have heard in church. Scholars have found connections to both in his works, particularly to the Genevan marginal notes.<sup>6</sup> His plays are full of biblical references. In *Richard III* (2.3) on news of the death of King Edward IV, a citizen says: "Woe to the land that's governed by a child", which is almost verbatim from Ecclesiastes 10:16: 'Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child'. But the statement in the play prefigures the villainy of the Duke of Gloucester. In *Measure for Measure* (3.1) Claudio, facing execution the following day, says to the disguised Duke: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die; and seeking death find life". This evokes the teaching of Jesus in Luke 17:33: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it".

There is no evidence that Shakespeare was involved in any way with the translation of the KJB. The myth that he was called in by the translators as a consultant 'to polish the language' is absurd; he would not have been asked (or have expected to be asked) to work on a project for which he was not properly qualified, or positioned. Yet he could not have been unaware of the KJB translation activity. As a member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and later The King's Men, he was regularly mixing with the Court, and the theatre at Blackfriars was less than half a mile from the Stationers' Hall where the collation and revision of the KJB translations was taking place.

## The Bible at Holy Trinity

Edwin Goadby, in his entertaining account in 1861 of a visit to Stratford, noted:<sup>7</sup>

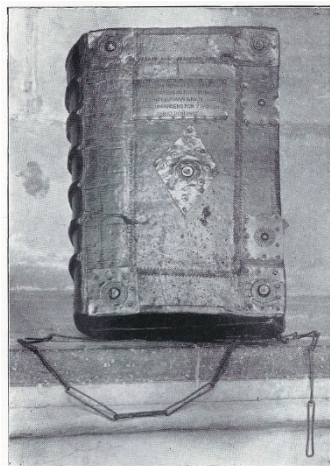
An ancient brass-embossed Bible, with its steel altar-chain attached, also lies on the table. Its interior is imperfect; but its binding will stand for centuries to come.

The picture in the church guide by Revd Arbuthnot confirms this impression of venerable ruggedness.<sup>8</sup>

The book was examined in 1995 as part of a NADFAS survey of all the objects in the church.<sup>9</sup> It was described as follows:

Full bound in brown leather over wooden boards. Two rows of blind tooling. Four brass plates of varying size (c. 6.5cm square) with a central raised boss surrounded by a rose design fixed to each corner with brass pins. To the centre of the bottom edge is fixed 1.4m of iron chain with 7.5cm links made of square section bar, several of which have been repaired by brazing. Both covers have two plates for clasps which are missing. Title page missing. The last four pages of the Book of Revelation are missing and replaced with hand-written gothic manuscript. Several pages repaired for tears, parts missing at foot. Worm holes in boards and several pages. h.43cm x w.29cm x d.14cm.

Inspection of the Bible today reveals that the binding is indeed very strong, although the exterior leather is split and cracking in places. The brass fittings are tarnished but not corroded. When the book is lying closed, the top cover is not horizontal but raised at an angle because the internal pages are slightly wrinkled and have expanded, causing the boards of both the front and back covers to become bowed.

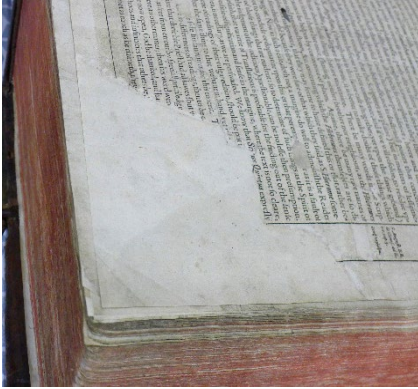


*The Holy Trinity Bible in 1905*



*Bowed front and back cover boards*

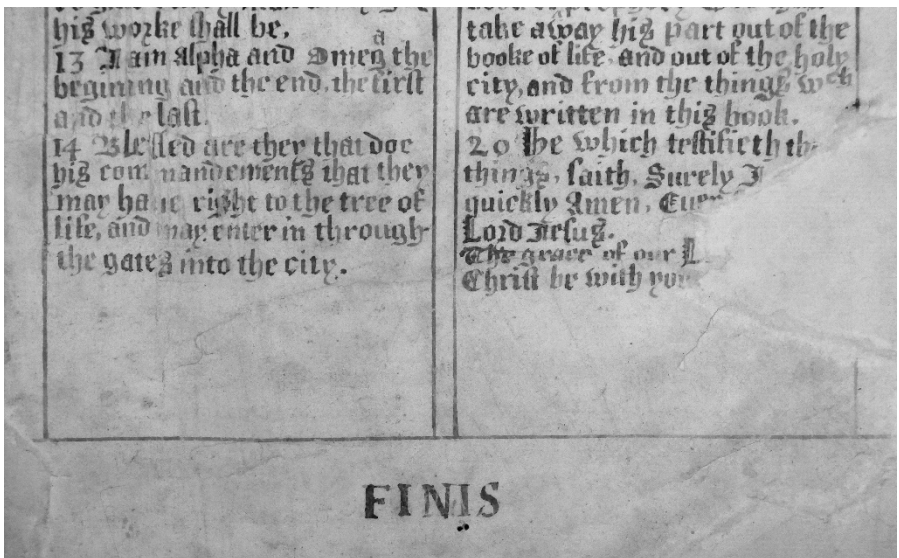




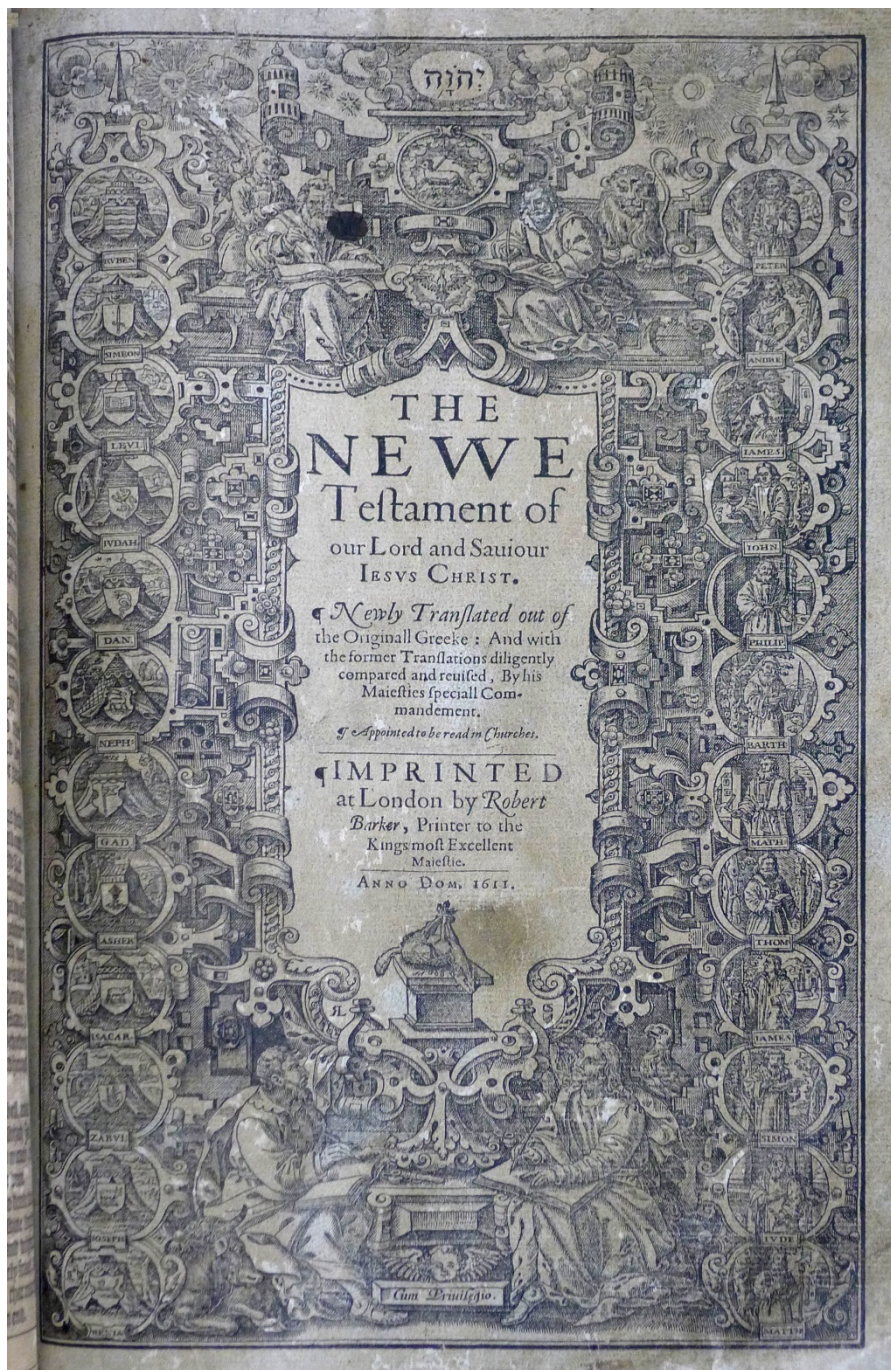
*Repair of damage to corner of first page*

The main title page is missing, likewise the dedication to the King, and the first extant page is entitled 'To The Reader'. The impression is that the original covers and a few outer pages from both front and back have in the past been violently torn off. The rebinding in 1695 included the restoration of some pages internally. The first few badly-torn pages were repaired by sticking both sides onto an interleaving sheet.

The last four pages of Revelation had at some time been written by hand, in a style and format to match the missing printed pages, but these surrogate pages had also been damaged and were repaired. The bookworm damage must have occurred after the rebinding, as the holes pass through the cover board as well as through the new facing sheets and internal pages.



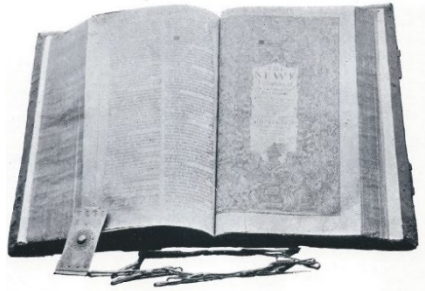
*Hand-written page at the end of Revelation, showing fading and damage*



Title page of the New Testament, showing the date 1611 and the discolouration



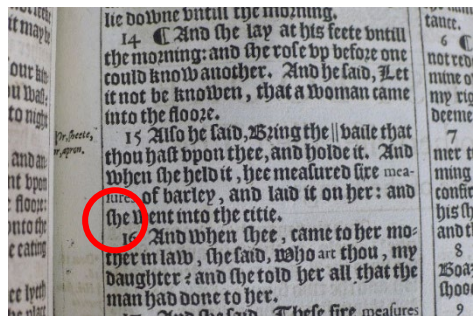
The double-page spread between the Old and New Testaments (last page of Apocrypha on left and title page of New Testament on right) is dark and discoloured, as if the Bible had lain open for a long time and these pages had suffered the combined effects of light damage and accumulation of dirt and carbon deposits from wax candles. This is confirmed by a photograph from 1902, which shows the Bible open at the very same place.<sup>10</sup> The title page of the New Testament is a woodcut indicating the 1611 edition printed in London by Robert Barker (the King's Printer). This page was retained unchanged in the 1613 edition.



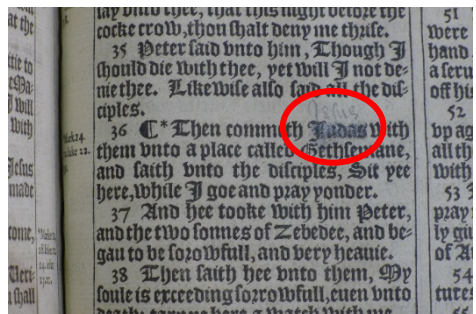
*Photograph of HT Bible in 1902, open at the start of the New Testament*

Based on analysis of typesetting errors, it would appear that this Bible was from the second printing of 1613 rather than the first of 1611. These two printings of the first edition are commonly distinguished by their rendering of Ruth 3:15; the first says: ‘**he** went into the city’, whereas the second has: ‘**she** went into the city’; these are known colloquially as the ‘He’ and ‘She’ Bibles.

In Matthew 26:36 there is a most unfortunate error: ‘Then commeth **Judas** with them’, when it should have said: ‘Then commeth **Jesus** with them’. Someone has scribbled over ‘Judas’ and in pencil above written ‘Jesus’.



*The text of Ruth 3:15, showing the word ‘she’*



*Matthew 26:36, showing erasure of Judas*

## Exploring Shakespeare's Church

An Edwardian postcard shows the display of the ancient broken font, the parish registers and the Bible in its wooden case by the west wall at the end of the north aisle (where the shop is now located).



Today the Bible is still in the same old mahogany display case with the sloping glass lid. Until recently it was located in the chancel, by the south door and in front of a radiator, sometimes directly illuminated by sunlight.



Because of concerns about the Bible's current situation and prospects for long-term preservation, a professional conservator was engaged in 2019 to examine it. Her report includes the following observations:<sup>11</sup>

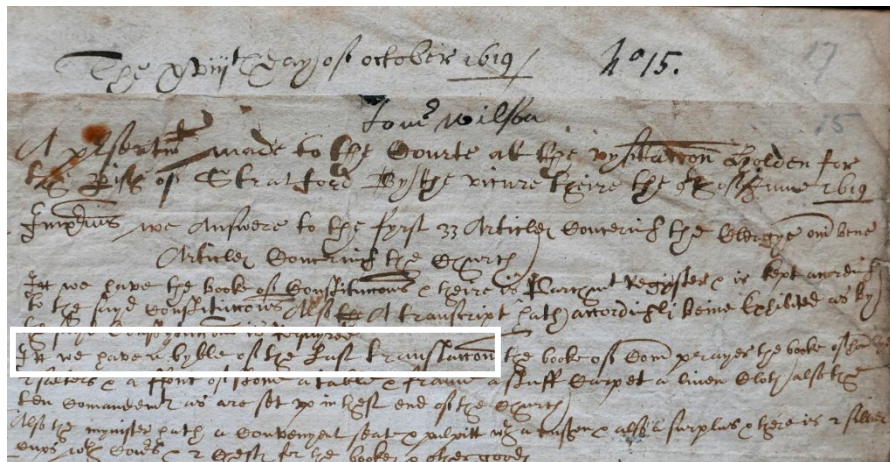
- the size and weight of the text block, combined with the additional handling complication of the chain, make this a vulnerable object;
- the main areas of concern are the left board, which is partially split, and discolouration of some leaves caused by historical water damage;
- permanent display of the volume open and repeated display of specific leaves will accelerate its deterioration and is not recommended;
- the glass-topped sloping table case is of an older and more traditional design, and does not meet current standards for the display of written and printed heritage materials.

She made three main recommendations:

1. provide a new display case of a higher standard to include UV filtering glass, locking mechanisms, low air exchange rate, and humidity control through silica gel cassettes;
2. support the Bible better when on display, using a custom-made Perspex cradle to maintain an angled position;
3. install a logging device to monitor exposure to light, heat and humidity, so that informed decisions can be taken on display duration for each opening.

Returning to the origin of this Bible, no record survives of its purchase or acquisition by Holy Trinity Church. The first apparent reference is in a short inventory of church goods in the Vestry Minute Book,<sup>12</sup> which includes 'one great Bible' handed over to the wardens on 30 April 1619. Five weeks later, at a visitation by the new vicar, Thomas Wilson, on 9 June 1619 the churchwardens confirmed that they had 'a byble of the Last Translacion', i.e. the King James version.<sup>13</sup> There is no evidence of an earlier English Bible having been in the church, such as the Great Bible or Bishops' Bible.





*Note by churchwardens on 9 June 1619. 'Item we have a byble of the Last Translation'*

Nothing of the early history of the book is known. No inventories (terriers) of church goods in C17 and C18 have survived. The one thing of which we can be certain is that it was re-bound in 1695, as attested by the brass plate attached to the cover. The inscription reads: 'William Wright & John Noble | Churchwardens for ye Burough | Stephen Burman & Rich Gibes | Churchwardens for ye Parish | Anno:Dom:1695'.

So was this the original book that was re-bound in 1695, or a replacement for an original that had been lost? We must assume that it was the original book that had been damaged and needed to be re-bound. During the English Civil War, over the period 1642–46, both Royalist and Parliamentary troops repeatedly passed through and were billeted in the town.<sup>14</sup> The



*Brass plate on cover of rebound Bible*

latter, in the Puritan cause, were ever ready to indulge in iconoclasm and would have had scant respect for anything associated with the King,

especially the title page and dedication to him in the front of the Bible. It is likely that substantial damage occurred at this time to many objects and fixtures within the church, such as the font and the Clopton monuments, although no documentary evidence has been found.

The church mythology suggests that our KJB is the very book from which Shakespeare might have heard the scriptures read in church, and might even have read,<sup>15</sup> if indeed he ever read anything out aloud in the church. The best we can say now is that this book was probably in use, chained to a lectern, in the church during the period 1613–16, coinciding with the last years of Shakespeare’s life when he was living at New Place.

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Wardens and Verger of Holy Trinity Church for providing access to the King James Bible for inspection. Thanks also to Dr Robert Bearman and Mairi Macdonald for assistance with historical aspects and guidance to the archival records.

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- 1 Luddington Bible (1595) 'Bishops Bible': Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (SCLA) SR Folio – 98/HOL
- 2 De Groot, John Henry, *The Shakespeares and "The Old Faith"* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946) pp.158-169
- 3 The divine right of kings is a doctrine of political legitimacy in a monarchy, in which a king is pre-ordained to inherit the crown before his birth. It asserts that a king is not accountable to any earthly authority, such as a parliament, because his right to rule is derived from God. The monarch is thus not subject to the will of his people, nor of the aristocracy, nor of any other estate of the realm. James I propounded the doctrine as a means of justifying the legitimacy of the Stuart dynasty, but it was significantly undermined in England by the execution of Charles I in 1649 and it virtually disappeared from English politics after the deposition of James II in the Glorious Revolution (1688–89).
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- 12 Arbuthnot, George *Vestry Minute Book 1617–1699* (transcription) (London: Bedford Press, 1890) p.10
- 13 SCLA ER1/115/13 Presentments made to the Stratford-upon-Avon Peculiar Court at the visitation by the new vicar, Thomas Wilson. 9 June 1619.
- 14 Tennant, Philip E., *The Civil War in Stratford-upon-Avon: Conflict and Community in South Warwickshire, 1642–1646* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1996) pp.96-97. At St Nicholas church in Alcester, a troop of Parliamentarian soldiers kept their horses in the church and used it for roasting sheep stolen from the country round about (pp.103-104). Following the siege and sacking of Compton Wynyates, the alabaster effigies of the Comptons in the nearby Church of St Mary Magdalene were vandalised and the church was wrecked (p.115). It is probable that in Holy Trinity damage occurred not only to the KJB but also to the Clopton and Carew monuments in the former Lady Chapel and to the brasses and carvings on the Balsall tomb in the chancel and to the old font.
- 15 Horsler, Val, Gorick, Martin and Edmondson, Paul, *Shakespeare's Church* (London: Third Millennium, 2010) p.112

## Puritans and the 1662 Act of Uniformity and Dissent

Mairi Macdonald

This chapter considers the changing times and challenges faced by men and women of differing religious convictions in Stratford-upon-Avon during mid-to-late C17. Definitions of the terms ‘Puritan’ and ‘Dissenter’ in this context are taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. ‘Puritan’ is defined in several ways, the first and preferred being:

A member of that party of English Protestants who regarded the reformation of the church under Elizabeth as incomplete, and called for its further ‘purification’ from unscriptural and corrupt forms and ceremonies retained from the unreformed church.

These are taken here to mean those who wished to reform the Anglican church from within. ‘Dissenter’ similarly, has several definitions, the most appropriate being a conflation: ‘one who dissents in matters of religious belief and worship and separates from the communion of the Established Church’. Both can be applied to those who from the Elizabethan settlement were unhappy with the structure and liturgy of the Anglican church, and equally to Catholics and those with more Presbyterian leanings. Neither concept was new in mid-C17, nor indeed did they mean the same thing at different times. Their use in this article is broad, and for convenience only.



*An English Puritan family in C16*

It is important to be aware that Puritanism doesn’t equal dissent and that the tenor of dissent or non-conformity changed over time: the Puritanism of the 1660s was quite unlike that of late C16 and early C17, and indeed of the 1650s under the Commonwealth.

## Thomas Wilson and the Corporation

The career of the early C17 vicar, Thomas Wilson, has been mentioned in Chapter 4. His appointment in May 1619 had provoked a riot at the church, because his opponents saw it as a Puritan plot, while his supporters claimed they were concerned with moral reformation. This led to a Star Chamber case, in which complaints were made about libellous verses circulating in the town that: 'presented Puritans as hypocritical busybodies, who pried into their neighbours' affairs in the name of godliness, but were really promoting their own avaricious ends'.<sup>1</sup>



*Seal matrix of the Peculiar Court, introduced by Thomas Wilson (reversed left-to-right for clarity)*

Wilson was disinclined to accept authority, especially that of the Bishop of Worcester. After a difficult meeting, the Bishop reported:<sup>2</sup>

I found him peremptory in his pretended absolute jurisdiction, labouring then by all means to shake off the jurisdiction of me his ordinary, when by his behaviour he seemed to me to labour by all means to governe the people and town of Stratford.

There is perhaps a hint of Wilson's attitude in the inclusion of his initials, now partly erased, below the figure of Justice in the seal matrix introduced in 1619 for the Peculiar Court<sup>3</sup> (see [Chapter 4](#)).

For the first years of his ministry in Stratford, however, Wilson enjoyed the active support of the majority of the Corporation, and, with their help, was able to exercise significant 'godly' influence in the town. From the later 1620s, however, the harmony between minister and Corporation began to wane. There was a long-running dispute over whether the income from the College estate belonged to the Corporation or the church. Wilson's stipend was reduced from £60 to £40 in July 1629: 'in respecte of certain suits and troubles put upon the company'.



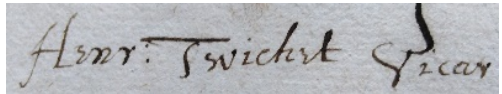
The breakdown in relations between Wilson and his previous allies was indicative of the instabilities and contradictions within Puritanism itself. In the words of Ann Hughes:

Puritanism did not involve particular, exclusive positions, but rather the holding of conventional Protestant positions in an especially zealous and committed form. It offered an elevated sense of the minister's role and worth, and encouraged activism amongst the laity. Its sanction of zealous moral reformation could command broad support at times of social tension, but could easily get out of hand and provoke division and disorder. At Stratford by the 1630s, lay and clerical notions of Puritanism slipped apart, and the balance between order and disorder had shifted.<sup>4</sup>

Following Wilson's death in 1638, representations were made to the Town Corporation, which nominated Robert Harris of Hanwell, near Banbury, who had been a regular preacher in Stratford since 1629.<sup>5</sup> There were individual applications from two Puritan candidates, Thomas Warmstrey, vicar of Whitchurch, and John Salisbury, vicar of Clifford Chambers. The Crown nominated Henry Twitchet, vicar of Haddon, Hertfordshire, who was duly appointed and took up his post in 1640.<sup>6</sup> The Corporation was initially enthusiastic, undertaking extensive renovations of the vicarage.<sup>7</sup>

### The Civil War and Commonwealth

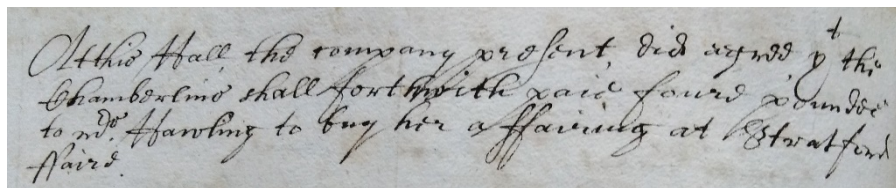
Twitchet seems to have had cordial relations with the Puritan schoolmaster, John Trapp. Both collected for fire victims in 1640, and each contributed £5 to an appeal for 'King and Parliament' in 1642.<sup>8</sup> Twitchet was also a collector of donations 'towards the relieve of the distressed Protestants of Ireland' in the same year.<sup>9</sup> Tensions after the battle of Edgehill, however, increased divisions between townspeople supporting Royalist and Parliamentary causes. While Twitchet and the Royalist bailiff, John Woolmer, were accused of 'betraying the towne' by approving the billeting of Royalist soldiers,<sup>10</sup> Trapp signed the Solemn League & Covenant in 1643.<sup>11</sup>

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, textured paper. The signature reads "Henry Twitchet Vicar" in a cursive script. The word "Henry" is written in a larger, more prominent hand, while "Twitchet" and "Vicar" are written in a smaller, more compact hand.

In February 1643 a skirmish outside Stratford between Royalist troops who had been billeted in the town and Parliamentary troops from Warwick led to

the occupation of the town by the soldiers of the Warwick garrison, and the blowing up of the Town Hall. Twitchet took fright and fled to the Royalist army, where he remained as chaplain until 1646, while also serving Haddon. In that year he was obliged to sign a surrender of the vicarage, so that the Corporation 'maie the better procure soe Godlie, able and learned Minister to supplie the place of Vicar in Stratford'.<sup>12</sup> This was confirmed in February 1647 and a new vicar appointed. Twitchet retired back to his Hertfordshire parish, where he died in 1659.

During Twitchet's absence, his place had been filled by his curate, William Hawling, who clearly enjoyed the trust and respect of the Corporation: in September 1643 it was agreed that the rent for his lodging with Widow Bellamy should be paid; he was given a £5 gratuity in 1646, and in September 1644 the Corporation had agreed that £4 should be paid to Mrs Hawling 'to buy her a Fairing at Stratford Faire'.<sup>13</sup> There is no indication in the records as to why he was not appointed to the vacancy at Stratford but he left in 1647 to become Vicar of Broxbourne, Herts., the advowson of which belonged to Richard Lucy of Charlecote.<sup>14</sup>

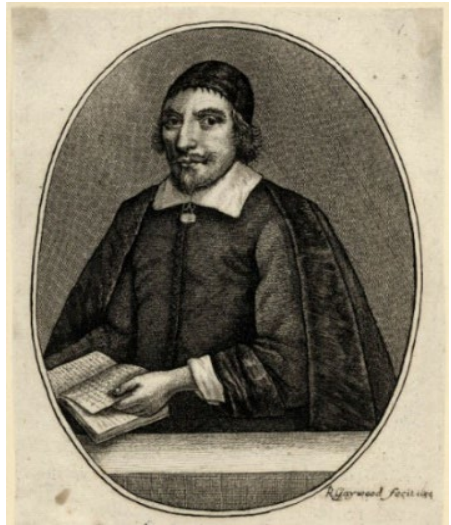
A photograph of a handwritten entry from a Corporation minute book. The text is written in a cursive script on aged, slightly discolored paper. It reads: 'At this Hall the company present, did agree y<sup>t</sup> the Chamberlaine shall forthwith paye fourd pounde to m<sup>r</sup>. Hawling to buy her a fairing at Stratford faire.' The ink is dark, and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the 17th century.

*Extract from Corporation minute book, to buy a Fairing for Mrs Hawling*

The new incumbent was more congenial to both Corporation and schoolmaster than Twitchet: Alexander Beane was born in Norfolk in 1614 and educated at Caius College, Cambridge. Appointed vicar of Highworth, Wilts., in 1646, he was instituted to Stratford in February 1648, burying his wife, Mary, there only six weeks later. In November 1649 he married again, at Alveston, his wife being Mary, daughter of Francis Ainge of Stratford. There is another, more intriguing, register entry relating to the baptism on 26 February 1650 of 'Alexander Beane Gent., pastor'. It has been suggested that Beane may have had Baptist leanings, and felt, for some reason at this time,

the need to reaffirm his original infant baptism, although it was against such radical groups that he had witnessed in *The Warwickshire Ministers' Testimony* in 1648.<sup>15</sup> Beane was vicar during the final upheavals of the civil wars and years of the Commonwealth, and seems to have been respected by those in authority. In October 1648 the Corporation granted him £10 'in lieu of his extraordinary paines for want of an Assistant Minister since his first coming to Towne'.

Beane was supported in his ministry by the schoolmaster, John Trapp.<sup>16</sup> In 1636 Trapp had been appointed to the vicarage of Weston on Avon, and in 1644 to Welford, but he was driven out by Royalists and fled to the protection of the Parliamentary garrison at Warwick Castle, where he served as chaplain until able to return in 1646. By 1652 he had transferred the mastership of Stratford school to his son-in-law Robert Dale, when the Corporation awarded 'the usual new year gratuity' to 'the scoolemaster'. His appointment is not recorded, but there are gaps of several months throughout the period.<sup>17</sup>



John Trapp, schoolmaster

In 1648 Beane and Trapp, with many others, signed *The Warwickshire Ministers' Testimony* which was, in essence, a manifesto calling for a Presbyterian government as 'that most agreeable to Jesus Christ as revealed in scripture'. It lamented England's slowness to accept this notion, and the opposition of some. It also declared a devoted adherence to the Solemn League and Covenant, and opposed general toleration. From this date, the lists of those presented to the Corporation for not attending church include names later identified as Quakers and Independents, despite the fact that in 1650 Parliament abolished the Act of Uniformity, requiring such attendance.<sup>18</sup>

## Puritans in Stratford Wills

Wilson, Beane and Trapp are all mentioned in wills surviving from the period, although not Twitchet, and references demonstrate esteem and trust on the part of the testators, several of whom clearly had Puritan leanings. In 1623 Francis Smith, a mercer, left £5 per annum for a weekday sermon:

duringe the abode and continuance of Master Wilson now vicar and preacher of gods word in Stratford aforesaid to begin when the said Master Wilson Thinketh fitt and convenient. And further my will is that the said five pounds shall continew yerely to bee payd after the departure of the said Master Wilson from Stratford soe longe as the Bayliffe and Burgesses thereof will further add for the supply and mayntenance of Sufficient honest and able minister for the performance of the same lecture and not otherwise.<sup>19</sup>

In 1635 Michael Smart of Luddington left 20s to his 'lovinge friend Master John Trappe (whome I desire to preach my funeral sermon)'.

In addition to his teaching role, Trapp was also curate at Luddington.<sup>20</sup> In 1655 Richard Quiney of London left £5 to 'Master Beanee Minister of God's Word att Stratford' and a further 'fortie shillings for his paines to be taken in preaching my funerall Sermon'.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Combe, brother of the staunchly Puritan William, of the College, left 20s to be paid to a 'learned preacher' to preach twice a year in the church, while William Lyndon in 1670 specified that his funeral sermon was to be preached out of Micah 6:5.<sup>22</sup> The use of 'minister' rather than 'vicar' may be a guide to religious leanings in wills, but must be considered with care. Other Stratfordian wills that might be considered as exhibiting Puritan leanings are those of John Sadler, citizen and grocer in London, John Richardson and Henry Smith. Sadler, who was Richard Quiney's brother-in-law, left money in 1658 for the repair of a house for the minister in Martins Brandon, a plantation in Virginia, which he owned jointly with Adrian Quiney, Richard's brother; in 1677 John Richardson alias Loach left money to his son Thomas in New England and in 1685 Henry Smith left £50 to his niece Frances Child, 'whether she bee in New England or elsewhere'.<sup>23</sup> Residence or interests in America do not prove Puritan leanings, but they are worth considering.<sup>24</sup>

Those whose religious feelings left them unable to conform were regularly presented to the Quarter Sessions for non-attendance at church from 1648. Before the Restoration they can often be identified as either Quakers or, outside Stratford where they were not active until the late C17, Baptists, both radical groups which had been growing since the 1640s. Humphrey Wood and his wife were first presented in 1648. In 1636 Humphrey had married Dorothy Beddome, a surname subsequently well-known in Baptist history, and they continued to be presented until 1664.<sup>25</sup> Others presented include Thomas Jackman, the wife of William Jackman, Simon Horne, and various members of the Smith and Edwards families. A case brought in the Quarter Sessions in 1665 definitely identifies the Jackman family as Quakers (p.133). The list may also have included Church of England loyalists and Catholics unable to accept Beane's ministry but the scope of this article does not admit of a more detailed investigation.

All this Hall the Company have ordered the  
Chamberlyne too pay too Mr Alexander Beane Thirtene  
pounds sixe shillings eyght pence for his preaching  
amongst us till St Bartholomew last past and also  
too pay hime sixe pounds Thirtene shillings fowre  
pence moore as a gratuity from the Chamber provided  
hee leave the house wherin hee now Liveth peacably  
too the disposing of this Company and give satisfaction  
for the money of it. Inforced about.

*Extract from Corporation minute book, making reference to dismissal of Alexander Beane*

On 3 September 1662 the Corporation minute book records:<sup>26</sup>

the Companye have ordred the Chamberlyne too pay too Mr Alexander Beane Thirtene pownds sixe shillings eyght pence for his preaching amongst us till St Bartholomew last past and also to pay hime sixe pownds Thirtene shillings fowre pence moore as a gratuetie from the Chamber provided hee leave the house wherin hee now Liveth peacably too the desposing of this Company.



This brings us to what is popularly, if mistakenly, called The Ejectment.<sup>27</sup>



*King Charles II, c. 1660*

In 1660, before returning to England, Charles II issued the Declaration of Breda, which promised freedom of conscience for differences of opinion on matters of religion, so long as they did not disrupt the kingdom. As with the advent of James VI & I in 1603, people hoped that they would now be able to worship as and where they pleased, but between 1661 and 1665 a raft of legislation was introduced to repress nonconformism and ensure the supremacy of the Anglican church. First came the

Corporation Act of 1661 which required all municipal officials, in addition to taking the Oath of Supremacy, to take Anglican communion and formally reject the Solemn League and Covenant. The effect of this was to exclude staunch nonconformists from public office. It does not immediately seem to have affected members of, or candidates for, the Corporation (although the minutes have gaps) but from 1668 onwards there is a small but significant number of leading townsmen (Richard Smart, Edward Smith, ironmonger, Thomas Edwards, Joseph Smith) who either refuse to take the oath of renunciation and are fined, or ask for time to consider before submitting. The minutes for 8 April 1685 record that Joshua Edwards, applying to become free of the Shoemakers Company, was a Dissenter but: 'for sume time since hath Conformed'.<sup>28</sup> William Hunt, on the other hand, absolutely refused to take the relevant oaths and declarations, which is not surprising in light of the fact that his house would be licenced for Presbyterian worship in 1689.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Act of Uniformity**

It was the Act of Uniformity in 1662, however, which led to what is properly known as The Bartholomean Ejectments of 1662. This Act prescribed the form of public prayers, administration of sacraments, and other rites of the Established Church, according to those detailed in the newly re-issued *Book*

*of Common Prayer*. Adherence to this was required in order to hold any office in government or the church. It also explicitly required episcopal ordination for all ministers, deacons and priests, something which had been abolished during the Commonwealth.<sup>30</sup>

Clergy were given until St Bartholomew's Day (24 August) 1662 to subscribe or resign their livings. The date was chosen to prevent ministers from receiving the half-yearly tithes due on that day, but can also perhaps be seen as a reference to the infamous massacre of Protestants in 1572 in Paris on the same date. Over 2,000 clergy refused and were expelled from their cures. Although there had already existed ministers outside the Established Church, most notably Baptists, this expulsion created a notion of wider non-conformity, with a substantial section of English society now excluded from public affairs for the next century-and-a-half.<sup>31</sup>

Into this group of ejected clergy fell Alexander Beane, John Trapp and William Hawling (although these last two subsequently conformed). Others with Stratford connections were Nathaniel and Richard Byfield, the sons of Stratford's late C16 vicar, who both lost their livings. Likewise Samuel Fisher, son of Abraham of Stratford, and Thomas Gunn, son of Thomas, lost their livings in Cheshire and Kent respectively. Henry Butler, vicar of St Nicholas, Warwick, who was also ejected, had married Frances Brook, née Trapp, in 1657, and moved to Stratford, where he was buried in November 1662 as: 'Mr Henry Butler, minester'. Clergy in surrounding parishes who conformed, despite a Puritan outlook, were Thomas Dugard of Barford, John Dowley of Alveston, Timothy Kirke of Exhall and Wixford.

The government was aware of the many displaced clergy and dissatisfied parishioners, and regarded them as a threat to the stability of an as yet fragile regime. Alexander Beane was known to be continuing to preach to his followers, and was harassed in so doing. In 1719 Edmund Calamy, compiling his biographies of ousted ministers, described what ensued:<sup>32</sup>

A studious man and a solid preacher; who at home and abroad was highly esteemed for his judicious, useful sermons. He was indeed one of the most celebrated Preachers in the County. His labours in this place had been so great and successful that he could ill be spared. He was turn'd out in 1662, but soon

after, preaching privately, was disturb'd; and endeavouring to secure himself by flight, took a surfeit and quickly dy'd.

Infuriatingly, there is a gap in the burial register for Stratford between March and November 1663, which is almost certainly the period when Beane died, as it has not been possible to locate his burial anywhere else. Two of his sons subsequently became Anglican clergymen.

Fear of dissenting gatherings resulted in the Conventicle Act of 1664 which forbade conventicles (meetings for unauthorised worship) of more than five people who were not members of the same family, and was expressly designed to prevent organised worship by dissenting groups. This was followed in 1665 by the Five Mile Act, by which nonconformist ministers were forbidden from coming within five miles of incorporated towns or the place of their former livings. They were also forbidden to teach in schools.

As a result of the laws passed after 1661, dissent was thus forced underground in Stratford, while the parish had a new vicar. John Ward is one of the better known of Stratford's clergy, mainly for the seventeen notebooks he kept, sometimes described as diaries, more accurately commonplace books. Born in Northamptonshire in 1629, his father had been an active Royalist. Educated at Oxford, he acquired an interest in medicine from his apothecary landlord, Stephen Toone. After graduation, he moved to London to study anatomy and female diseases, 'so as to be ready att them when I come into the country'. At this date bishops could grant licences to practice medicine, and a vicar with an added accomplishment would be an asset to a community. Appointed to Stratford from Dorsington in 1662, Ward was clearly a conforming Anglican, but his notes show him to have had a great toleration of those who did not agree. Charles Severn, editing extracts from the notebooks, wrote:

The testimony borne by Mr Ward in favour of non-conformist ministers, who suffered joyfully the loss of all things for the cause of religious freedom, cannot but be deemed highly interesting, coming from a clergyman of the Church of England, whose education would have tended to prejudice against them a mind less candid than his own.<sup>33</sup>

Ward, from his own words, seems to have inclined to a simpler form of worship: ‘We never read that the apostles ever kneeld down to Christ in their ordinarie prayers, whilst he was here on earth’, and ‘bowing to the altar was never injoined by canon or rubrick, and is no ceremonie of the church.’

He also had tolerant things to say about Dissenters: “Most parish ministers deserted the people in the plague; but the non-conformists stuck to them and therefore will not bee easily forsaken by them”; and “I have latitude of charitie for those that dissent from mee, if they bee not seducing imposters, or turbulent incendiaries”.

Ward had no time for Quakers, however, whom he regarded as dangerous revolutionaries for their refusal to swear oaths or bear arms in the militia. At a more civic level they refused to pay tithes or church rates, did not uncover in church and refused to use clergy of the Established Church for marriage or burial, which led to excommunication: ‘Several levellers settled into Quakers. The late unhappy times had piled up such materials as itt was easie for the Quakers to arise as the scumme of all’; and ‘Other books doe gratifie a man with some knowledg or some good notion or other, but soe doe not the Quakers’ books, which are flat and dully written’.

It is clear from official records that there were several Quakers in Stratford, some of whom suffered for their beliefs. A book published in 1753 records that on 14th October 1661:

Samuel Hatton, William Hilkington, Elizabeth Kitchen and Susan Ward were taken at a Meeting, and orderd to be whipt as Vagrants though their Habitations were well known not to be far off. Two others Simon Horne and William Jakeman, being Townsmen, and taken at the same Meeting, were committed to prison.

The account further records that Jackman and others were committed to prison by writs of *Excommunicato Capiendo*.<sup>34</sup> In 1665, Thomas Evetts petitioned the Quarter Session for the cancellation of his apprenticeship, complaining that his master, William Jackman, tailor, could not teach him his trade: ‘for his said master is a Quaker and lies in gaol upon excommunication for not repairing to church to hear divine service’.<sup>35</sup>

## Meeting for Worship

Despite John Ward's apparently tolerant attitude, presentations to the sessions for non-attendance at service in Holy Trinity did not diminish: 166 names were presented between 1664 and 1687, but only twenty surnames occur, including those of Mrs Beane, who was living in Henley Street, and members of the Trapp family. The majority appear to be of the 'middling sort': maltsters, smiths, shoemakers, ironmongers, with one or two more prosperous, such as William Hunt, a woollen draper, and, interestingly, the majority of them lived in Wood Street.

The fact that a percentage of those presented were 'wife of', might simply be that wives couldn't be fined and therefore attended meetings on their husbands' behalf. Or it may be that their husbands, possibly hoping for civic prominence, kept their options open, although in the case of the Jackman wives, their husbands were probably already in prison. It was not possible, until early C19, for nonconformists to hold civic office or attend university, and it would have been a hard decision to exclude oneself from the management of the town.

Where did Dissenters meet? Until James II's Declaration of Indulgence in 1687 and the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689, dissenting places of worship are not easily ascertained (despite a period of toleration between 1672 and 1675) as they could be raided and those present arrested. Early official surveys are generally unreliable, although it is known that in 1669 there was an unauthorised conventicle in the house of Philip Edwards, shoemaker, and that there was a Quaker meeting in Alcester and a Baptist congregation in Henley.

From 1689, however, more information is available as houses could be licenced for dissenting service. In that year two were presented in Stratford by Presbyterians: the house of William Hunt, woollen draper in Church Street, and that of Joseph Smith, ironmonger. By 1690 they were reported to have laid out £10 in equipping their meeting place where Joseph Porter, head of the dissenting academy at Alcester, preached twice a month, as did his successor, John Letherland.



Numbers were growing and by 1714 a licence was issued for a 'New house lately erected in Rother Street', more fully described in a trust deed of 1722 as 'sixty feet by sixty feet'. This site remained the main Presbyterian, later Congregational, place of worship until the present church, now United Reformed, was built in Rother Street in 1880. Similarly, in 1689, the Quakers registered the house of Richard Bromley, in 1723 the dwelling of Joshua Edwards and in 1732 the old hop room at the Kings Arms (8-9 High Street).



*The Old Meeting House in Rother Street, built in 1714, from a print in the United Reformed Church. The view is across the market place from the top of Ely Street, with Mason's Court on the far left. The meeting house/chapel is the tall building behind.*

Meanwhile, the Established Church tried to adapt itself to these changes.<sup>36</sup> John Ward died in 1681 and was replaced briefly by his curate at Bishopton, Josiah Simcox, who had been elected schoolmaster in 1669. He died after only six months, at the early age of 37, and was replaced by John Trapp, son of the earlier noted schoolmaster, and vicar of Welford and Weston.<sup>37</sup> Given his parentage, Trapp was probably inclined to maintain friendly relations with the Dissenters in his parish, as did his successor, Richard Croft.<sup>38</sup>

In C18 the Established Church was to face another movement arising out of what might be termed 'Puritan principles', which led to the birth of Methodism. But from late C17 in Stratford, despite occasional clashes of individual personalities and religious orientations, of which there were several, Anglicans and nonconformists have largely focused on their community rather than their differences.

## References/Notes

Several works have been used extensively and not separately credited: Barber, Alexander, *A Church of the Ejection, Stratford* (Stratford-on-Avon: Rother Street Congregational Church, 1912, revised 1942); Harris, Maureen E., '*Schismatical People*': *conflict between Clergy and Laity in Warwickshire, 1660–1720* (University of Leicester: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2015); Mathews, A.G., *Calamy Revised* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); Salter, J.L., *Warwickshire Clergy, 1660–1714* (University of Birmingham: Unpublished PhD thesis, 1975) Part 2, clerical biographies; Hughes, Ann, 'Religious and Cultural Divisions, 1560–1640', in Bearman, R., ed., *The History of an English Borough, 1196–1996* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1996). Grateful thanks are due to the peer reviewers of this article who not only suggested some relevant amendments, but also picked up infelicities of grammar. Any subsequent errors of fact or grammar are mine alone.

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- 1 Hughes, Ann, 'Religion and Society in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1619–1638', in *Midland History*, vol. XIX, (1994) pp.58-84
  - 2 Ibid, p.65
  - 3 Wooden seal matrix, with handle, of the Court of Peculiar Jurisdiction of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1619. The seal is a pointed oval measuring 2½ by 2 inches; in the centre is the figure of 'IVSTICE' with sword and balance and, below, the arms of the borough of Stratford. About the border is the legend SIGILLIS PECVLARIS IVRISDICONS DE STRATFORD SVPER AVON 1619. Object in museum of Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (SCLA) SBT 2003-3/12
  - 4 Hughes (1994) *op. cit.*, p.71
  - 5 'Yt is ordered That Mr Baker Mr Ainge Mr Mounteford & Mr Duppa shall goe to the lord of Middlesex to desire his honor to give way that Mr Harris may be our Vicar if we can agree with him'; Corporation Minutes 12 September 1639. SCLA BRU2/3, p.175
  - 6 Born in Watford, c.1602, MA from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, 1626; Rector of Haddon, 1639: Venn, J.A., *Alumni Cantabrigienses*; 'Part 1; from the earliest times to 1751', 4 vols, (Cambridge: CUP, 1922–27)
  - 7 From 1611 premises within the grammar school site had been used as the vicarage. It was rebuilt in 1702 and is now the Headmaster's house.

- 8 SCLA BRU15/17/2, 108
- 9 The National Archives (TNA) SP28/183/6, 3-10
- 10 SCLA BRU2/3, p.209
- 11 An agreement by which the Scots agreed to support the English Parliamentarians in their disputes with the Royalists, and pledged to work for a civil and religious union of England, Scotland and Ireland under a Presbyterian parliamentary system; accepted by the Church of Scotland in August 1643, and by the English Parliament and Westminster Assembly in September.
- 12 Tennant, Philip, *The Civil War in Stratford-upon-Avon* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1996) p.150
- 13 SCLA BRU2/3, pp.265,220,235
- 14 Ejected from Broxbourne in 1662, he subsequently conformed, becoming vicar of Great Amwell, Herts., where he died in 1683. See: Mathews, *op. cit.*, p.254
- 15 I am grateful to Adrian Waters for this insight, and for further information about early Baptist history.
- 16 John Trapp (1601–1669) became usher at the school in Stratford in 1622 and Master in 1624. A notable biblical scholar, the Puritan Doctor John Hall described him as: ‘second to none for manifest piety and learning’; Wells, Greg, *John Hall, Master of Physicke: a Casebook from Shakespeare’s Stratford* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020) p. 277. Trapp’s commentaries on various books of the Bible, such as: *Theologia theologiae, the true treasure; or A treasury of holy truths, touching Gods word, and God the word. Digg’d up, and drawn out of that incomparable mine of unsearchable mystery, Heb. I. 1, 2, 3. Wherein the divinity of the holy Scriptures is asserted, and applied* (London: George Badger, 1641) are notable examples of Puritan exegesis: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2004) vol.55, pp.224-225
- 17 SCLA BRU 2/3, p.357
- 18 Between 1649 and 1660, under the Commonwealth and Protectorate, bishops were abolished and a Presbyterian structure of church government was introduced. The 39 Articles were replaced by the Westminster Confession, and the *Book of Common Prayer* by the Directory of Public Worship. It has been estimated, however, that at least a quarter of all clergy refused to conform to the changes.
- 19 TNA PROB 11/145/744
- 20 Worcestershire Archaeology and Archives Service (WAAS) WRO 008.7 1649/147
- 21 TNA PROB 11/261/23
- 22 TNA PROB 11/266/232; PROB 11/342/47; ‘He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.’ Micah 6:8, *King James Bible*, 1611
- 23 Sadler, TNA PROB 11/286/4; Richardson, SCLA BRT3/2, f.45v; Smith, TNA PROB 11/386/392
- 24 Maryland, on the other hand, settled by English émigrés in 1634, was a colony with strong Catholic connections.
- 25 John Beddome, and his more famous son Benjamin, were notable preachers, John being minister of the Baptist congregation in Henley-in-Arden. Benjamin was also a prolific hymn writer. Given the names, it is quite possible that John was the son of another

- Benjamin who was baptised in Holy Trinity on 23 May 1647, and that Dorothy was an aunt or cousin. Again, I am grateful to Adrian Waters for the Baptist importance of the name Beddome.
- 26 SCLA BRU 2/4, p.69
- 27 Clerical ejections had taken place at various times during the Civil Wars. In the 1640s loyalist or scandalous Royalist clergy were ejected, John Trapp benefitting from such an event at Welford.
- 28 SCLA BRU 2/4, p.516
- 29 SCLA BRU 2/4, pp. 535,577,578. A warrant for distraint was issued in June 1690, p.589
- 30 Originally published in 1549, after the break with Rome, it contained complete forms of service for daily and Sunday worship in English, together with the Sacraments, and tables of daily readings throughout the year. Revisions and reforms of the contents took place in 1552 in 1604. Abolished during the Commonwealth, another revision was issued in 1662, and is still in use today
- 31 The Conventicle and Five Mile Acts were repealed in 1812, and the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828. In practice many Dissenters had to wait until the 1835 Municipal Reform Act to hold office.
- 32 Despite Calamy's assertion, no sermons by Beane have been found in print, unlike so many notable preachers in C17.
- 33 Severn, Charles, *Diary of the Rev. John Ward, A.M, Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, extending it from 1648 to 1679* (London: H. Colburn,1839). The original notebooks, with transcripts, are in the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, ref. Folger MS V.a. 284-289.
- 34 Bess, Joseph, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People called Quakers* (London: Luke Hinde, 1753) p.764
- 35 Ratliff, S.C. and Johnson, H.C., eds., *Orders made at Quarter Sessions Easter, 1665 to Epiphany 1674*, Warwick County Records, vol. 5 (1939) p.15
- 36 The late C17 / early C18 clashes on both religious and personal matters between clergy, individuals and the Corporation, deserve more consideration than can be given here. Nationally there were tensions in the succeeding decades: the 'Glorious Revolution', resulting in the deposition of James II and accession of William III and Mary, itself led to the Non-Juring crisis of 1689/90 when several bishops and many clergy refused to swear allegiance to the new monarchs and were replaced by more Low/Broad Church clergy. Political and religious crises would continue to play a part in both national and local affairs.
- 37 Josiah Simcox was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity, but most of the ledger stones were covered during the restoration work of the 1830s. There is a ledger stone for John Trapp in the south aisle, recording his burial on 5 July 1685 at the age of 48.
- 38 Richard Croft was Vicar of Holy Trinity from 1684 until his death on 9 April 1701. His burial is entered in the Holy Trinity register, with an accompanying annotation that he was buried in the Chapel of the Guild. He was buried close to the altar and his ledger stone remained there until the renovation of the chapel in 1959. Its location was recorded by R.B. Wheler in 1806, W.S. Brassington in 1896 and J.H. Bloom in 1902.

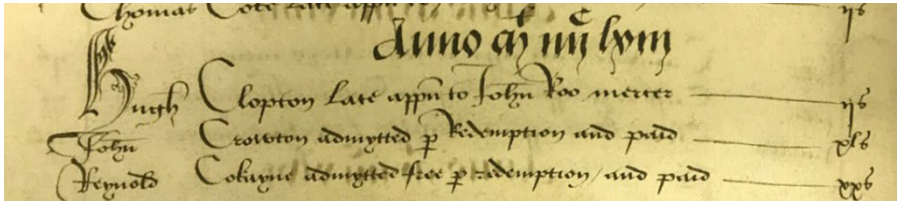
## The Clopton Chapel

Lindsay MacDonald

Chapter 2 has described the medieval Lady Chapel at the eastern end of the north aisle in Holy Trinity church. In the 1490s the building of Hugh Clopton's tomb produced a significant change in the structure of the chapel. Following the destruction caused by the Reformation, the Lady Chapel was steadily transformed into the Clopton Chapel, a kind of family mausoleum.

### Hugh Clopton

Hugh Clopton was the second son of John and Agnes Clopton, born c.1440 at Clopton House, where the family had been settled since 1228 (reign of Henry III).<sup>1</sup> In 1456 he became an apprentice mercer, and entered into the Freedom (i.e. became a member of the Mercers' Company) in 1463.



*Detail of the Register of the Mercers' Company for the year 1463, showing the admission of 'Hugh Clopton late app[rentice] to John Roo mercer'*

Hugh spent all of his working life based in London as a Mercer, trading in silk and linen cloth and luxury goods, and became a rich man. He took on a series of apprentices, travelled on the Continent, and acted as a representative of the Company in negotiations with the City of London and the King. He rose to be Warden in 1478–79 and again 1484–85. Throughout his working life he had dealings with William Caxton: both were Mercers and both were Merchant Adventurers. Both had lived in the same house,<sup>2</sup> albeit at different times, and they collaborated while Caxton was Governor of the English Nation at Bruges,<sup>3</sup> from 1465 to 1470, in the reign of Edward IV, before Caxton returned to London to set up his printing press in Westminster.<sup>4</sup>



The final decade of Clopton's life, however, was blighted by a scandal. In 1484, while Warden of the Mercers, and an Alderman, he was sent by the King (Richard III) as an envoy to the Duke of Burgundy to negotiate over 'restraint of trade'. Afterwards he was caught breaking the embargo by trying to import over £3000 worth of mercery goods into England.<sup>5</sup> The matter was repeatedly discussed over a six-month period from November 1484 by the Court of the Mercers. At the conclusion it is recorded:<sup>6</sup>

Where the said ij Aldermen haue so spoken with the said Hugh and reporteth hym for a sad man and as discretely disposed as any man may be [...] How be it as he sheweth that unkyndnes to hym shewede in this mater hath ben more grevous to hym than the losse of muche mony, and that in his conciens he knoweth not he hath offended, yitt for to haue the favour & love of the Felishipp he is right well greable for theire pleasure to submytt & obey hym unto theire Rule & Jugement &c.

At last on 9 April 1485 the Assembly of the Mercers came to a judgement:<sup>7</sup>

For the whiche it is nowe condiscended & agreed that the said Hugh as an offendour in the premysses shall gyffe unto the Wardens for & to the behove of the felishipp a hallyng of Arras for to henge the Hall rounde aboute in our halle at sent Thomas with the bankers &xxij Cusshyns thereunto accordyng.

This was a humiliation for Hugh Clopton, whose behaviour in his senior position should have been above reproach, and the consequent blot on his reputation was possibly the reason he was not knighted.<sup>8</sup> Although he was elected Sheriff of London in 1486, and Master of the Mercers Company in 1487, his attention from the mid-1480s onward turned increasingly to Stratford and to 'good works'. He served *in absentia* as Master of the Guild of the Holy Cross in Stratford in 1486–87 and again in 1487–88.<sup>9</sup> Seeking to establish a lasting legacy, he paid out huge amounts for improvements to the chapel, the church and the town. In the words of Leland in 1543, he 'newly reedified' the 'right goodly chappell in a faire strete toward the southe ende of the towne dedicate to the Trinitie', and 'buldid also by the north syde of this chapel a praty howse of brike and tymbar', and 'converted a great peace of sumptuous new bridge and large of stone'.<sup>10</sup> Stow says that Clopton also 'glazed the Chauncell of the Parish Church'.<sup>11</sup> In addition he may have paid for building of the north porch of Holy Trinity, which dates from 1485–90, during Thomas Balsall's tenure as Dean.<sup>12</sup>

His focus on the projects in Stratford was such that when in October 1491 he was elected Mayor of London, he was away in Stratford and the Mercers had to beg him to return to take up the office. They sent out a mounted welcoming party of 24 Freemen of the Company to escort him into the city.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas yesterday the full honorable Hugh Clopton, Alderman, at Yelde Hall chosen to be Mayre of this Citie of London &c. And for that he is nowe in Warwikshire, to whom divers parsones ben sent with knowledge, that notwithstanding for the more worsshipp both of this Citie & also of oure felishipp the parsones next after named ben desired for to ryde & to mete the said Maister Clopton withyn viij or x myle of this Citie & so to com rydyng yn with hym &c.



*The empty tomb of Hugh Clopton, looking from the nave towards the Lady Chapel*

Having neither wife nor children, Hugh bequeathed money in his will to a remarkable range of people and institutions. But his misdemeanour of breaking the ordinance on trade, 12 years earlier, still weighed on his mind:<sup>14</sup>

Item, I bequeith to the chambur of London in recompence for disobediaunce of myne othe that I shulde have observed and did not, or ellis mysused, summa x.li. Item, likewise I bequeith to the comen boxe of the felushipp of the mercery for disobediaunce or ordinaunce broken, x.li. Item, I bequeith to the felishipp of the aventurars resident in Zeland Braband or Flaunders for disobediaunce or ordinaunce broken v.li. Flemmysh. Item, I bequeith to the Tresory of the felishipp of the Staple at Caleys for disobediaunce and ordinaunce broken x. marc.

### Hugh Clopton's Tomb

The tomb chest of Hugh Clopton was installed in the Lady Chapel before his death in 1496, under the eastern-most arch of the north aisle; the associated parclose screen effectively separates off the chapel from the nave. The tomb is constructed of freestone and is ornamented with panels enclosing shields.<sup>15</sup> It is covered by a large slab of dark grey Purbeck marble, without effigy or inscription, of dimensions 90x32 inches (230x80 cm). At its eastern end is a niche with a plinth for a statuette of height c.60 cm. The tomb is believed to be empty, and has been described by many authors as a cenotaph or sarcophagus. Four octagonal pillars support an arched stone canopy, with two further pillars forming an arched opening at the western end, all surmounted by an intricately carved cornice. Clopton had amassed a great fortune as a mercer and been Mayor of London in 1492. His will, preserved in the National Archives,<sup>16</sup> makes clear his devotion to Mary:<sup>17</sup>

Furst, I bequeth and recomende my soule to Almighty God my maker and redemer to the moost glorious Virgyne his moder, our Lady Sainte Mary, and to all the holy companye of heven, and my body to be buried in the chapell of Sainte Kateryne in the parish church of Saint Margarettes in Lothbury in the citee of London, yf God dispose for me to decesse in London afore-saide, or within xx myles of the same. And if it fortune me to decesse upon Stratford upon Avon in the countie of Warr. or in that countrey then my body to be buried in the parish church of the same within the chapell of our Lady,<sup>18</sup> betwene the altar of the same and the chapell of the Trinite next adjoynnyng therunto ordeyned, and tombed after the discrecion of myne executours.

In the event, he died in London, and his body was therefore laid to rest in the parish church of St Margaret, Lothbury, presumably in a similar tomb (sadly destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666).<sup>19</sup>



*Heraldic shields on the screen above Hugh Clopton's tomb*

In the spandrels of the four corners of the canopy in Holy Trinity are heraldic shields associated with Hugh Clopton and his trade: the family arms (Cokefield quartering Clopton); City of London; Staple of Calais; Company of Mercers.<sup>20</sup> The emblem of the Mercers is described as follows:<sup>21</sup> 'As now painted it is Argent, a demi-virgin gules, crowned or, her hair sable issuant from clouds of the second'. The earliest record of the secular Mercer Maiden is a seal impression from 1425,<sup>22</sup> but it is likely that the Mercers, the pre-eminent of all the medieval livery companies, were originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and adopted the iconography of the Queen of Heaven.<sup>23</sup>

It was often the case that such highly ornamented tombs were constructed before the death of the benefactor, and could serve as a powerful *memento mori* to be a very conspicuous reminder of death and the need for expiation of wrongdoing.<sup>24</sup> In his will, Hugh requested not only a sung requiem mass in the church of his burial every day for a month after his death, but also:

[...] that a good honest prest shall be ordeyned by myne executours to serve within the church there as my body shal be buried by the space of xx yeres [...] to say thries every weke during the said xx yeres placebo and dirige with comendacions.

His expectation was thus for 3,120 soul-masses to be delivered, spoken or sung, three times per week over the ensuing 20 years.



*Parclose screen and tomb of Hugh Clopton, looking from the Lady Chapel across the nave*

In contrast to the Becket Chapel on the other side of the nave, this was to be not a perpetual chantry but the focus of prolonged prayer for Clopton's soul in Purgatory. Robert Bell Wheler described the installation as an 'altar tomb'.<sup>25</sup> Cook classified such a structure as a 'stone-cage' chapel, which he defined as: 'a miniature building, generally rectangular in plan, erected between two piers of a choir or nave arcade, and consisting of an enclosure made by stone screens rising to a height of 8 feet or more'.<sup>26</sup> Fifty-six such cage chapels have been identified in England, of which forty-one are still extant, mostly in monastic or collegiate churches of perpendicular style.<sup>27</sup> The site of Clopton's tomb in such a prime location, between the altar of the Lady Chapel and the adjacent Chapel of the Trinity, is an indication of his great influence as a benefactor to the church and indeed to the whole town.

Hugh Clopton's will, dated a week before his death, left money to a multitude of religious institutions and persons, all enjoined to pray for his immortal



soul.<sup>28</sup> He provided for the rebuilding of the nave and tower of the Guild Chapel and contributed to a new stone bridge over the Avon, both of which still stand as his monuments.<sup>29</sup> He bequeathed 100 marks to ‘xx pouer maydens of good name and fame dwelling in the towne’, and 100 pounds ‘to be distributed among pouer householders within the towne’. He also left 50 pounds ‘to the new making of the crosse ile in the parish church’. The term ‘crosse ile’ has generally been taken to mean the transepts, but no rebuilding of the transepts seems to have occurred at that time.<sup>30,31</sup>

Recent investigation has supported Jordan’s opinion that the re-roofing of the transepts did not take place until 1595.<sup>32</sup> What was happening instead around 1500 was a substantial modification to the church nave, under the direction of Ralph Collingwood, Dean of the College from 1491 to 1518. The nave arcades, with north and south aisles previously widened in the period 1310 to 1330 (p.22) were left intact and a clerestory was added with a new roof, large lantern windows and a grand traceried west window.<sup>33</sup> It is possible that the Clopton bequest, together with a similar bequest made by his executor Thomas Hannys in 1502, were diverted toward the substantial cost of this project. Hannys was also a native of Stratford and had been Clopton’s apprentice as a Mercer.

### **William and Anne Clopton**

The Clopton family had always been devout in faith. Hugh’s elder brother, Thomas, had built an oratory in Clopton Manor and afterwards a ‘fair chapel’, for which he obtained a licence in 1474 from Pope Sixtus IV to celebrate divine service.<sup>34,35</sup> As late as 1605, after the infamous Gunpowder Plot, various ‘Popish relics’ were discovered when the house, which had been rented by one of the conspirators, was searched by the bailiff.<sup>36</sup>

When the attic chamber, formerly the chapel, was being redecorated in 1885, several black-letter inscriptions were found.<sup>37</sup> Most were sentences from the Bible. One imparted the solemn injunction: ‘Whether you rise yearlye or goe to bed late, Remember Christ Jesus who died for your sake’. But these were surely Puritan exhortations, painted over the earlier Catholic imagery.

William Clopton senior (d.1560) is said to have been the 'champion of the Catholic party' in the region, pitched against the Protestant William Lucy (d.1551) of Charlecote.<sup>38</sup> He had served the table of Queen Mary with wafers at the feast that followed her coronation on 1 October 1553, receiving as his fee: 'all the instruments as well of silver or other metal for making of the same wafers, and also all the napkins and other profits thereunto appertaining'. He must have been mortified by the transition of power from Mary to Elizabeth in 1558 and the jeopardy in which it would place his family.



*The chest tomb of William and Anne Clopton*

William Clopton junior, who succeeded his father at the age of 22, was known all his life as a Papist.<sup>39</sup> He and his wife Anne were cited in March 1592 by the Commissioners for Recusancy in Warwickshire, for: 'not comminge Moonthly to the Church'.<sup>40</sup> By the end of 1592, however, the commissioners could report: 'Mrs Clapton the Wyfe of William Clapton Esquier now Deade [bur. 15 April], presented thear [Stratford] for a Recusant before our first certificate [...] was mistaken & goeth now to the Churche'.<sup>41</sup>



*William and Anne lie contentedly side by side, with the gilded dove between their heads.*

Lena Orlin believes that the chest tomb of William and Anne Clopton was first placed centrally in the chapel, in around 1600, then later moved into the corner against the north and east walls. Mounted above them on the wall is a frieze with all of their seven children, three of whom had died in infancy and are shown wrapped in swaddling bands.<sup>42</sup> At that time the window was walled up, so it would have been a dark and sombre space.<sup>43</sup> Beneath the floor was the Clopton family vault,<sup>44,45</sup> in which the unfortunate Charlotte Clopton is said to have been buried alive in 1564, when plague visited the neighbourhood. The lurid story may have been an inspiration to Shakespeare for Juliet's fear of being 'stifled in the vault' in *Romeo and Juliet* (4.3).<sup>46</sup>

The alabaster figures of William and Anne lie recumbent on their tomb. In their hands they hold missals with ornate covers, and both have double rings on the first and third fingers of both hands. He is in full armour, with his head

resting on his helmet, on the crest of which is a gilded dove holding a barrel. One theory has it as a rebus (clop + tun) derived from 'colombe' in French for a male dove and 'tun' for a large barrel.<sup>47</sup>



*(left) Gilded dove with tun on crest of helmet; (right) missals with hands in prayer*

Anne Clopton has a triple-banded gold torque about her neck, a voluminous ruff, and a pomander at her breast. Pomanders, metal spheres that opened into four segments, sometimes with a figure of the Virgin Mary or a saint inside, could be filled with amber or musk and could be attached to paternosters.<sup>48</sup> Anne wears a full-length gown and around her waist a long golden rosary chain, to the end of which, near her feet, is attached a medallion or locket, also with a dove on a tun. The dove was adopted by Catholic recusants in the Elizabethan period as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, alongside its more obvious association with the Holy Spirit.



*Crest of Clopton arms in wall panel: dove on tun on helmet*

Such symbolism was promoted by Henry Garnet, a Jesuit superior in England from 1586 until 1606, when he was executed for his alleged role in the Gunpowder Plot. In his book, *The Societie of the Rosary*, Garnet set the image of the Virgin within the milieu of recusant England. The importance of her protection was emphasised, and he advised that it was the duty of every Catholic to continue to pray to the Virgin in a world where her role was being aggressively suppressed.<sup>49</sup> The book included an alternative way of saying the rosary,



in which each mystery was entitled a ‘contemplation’, accompanied by an extensive meditation. When it reaches the final mysteries, the language of the Song of Songs becomes interspersed with the Ave Marias. The effect is reminiscent of the dreamlike spiritual transcendence evoked by the melismatic choral music of the previous century (p.20).

Arise, make haste my love, my dove, my beautifull and come. *Ave Maria.*  
 For now the winter is past, the showre is gone, and ceased. *Ave Maria.*  
 Shew me thy face let thy voice sound in my eares. *Ave Maria.*  
 For thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely. *Ave Maria.*



(left) Medallion on chain at Anne’s ankles; (right) enlarged view of medallion

There is a widely-held view that Shakespeare inclined to the Catholic faith, or was at least sympathetic to it. Certainly both his parents came from staunchly Catholic families.<sup>50</sup> Chesterton perceived ‘the figure of Mary’ in many of Shakespeare’s heroines, noting her greeting by the angel (Luke 1:28) as ‘full of grace’ – the translation in the Douai-Rheims Bible (1582) of *gratia plena* in the Vulgate. The word ‘grace’ is often used as an attribute of his leading ladies, for example Rosalind in *As You Like It* (3.2) or Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (3.1) or Luciana in *Comedy of Errors* (3.2).<sup>51</sup> Some commentators have suggested that throughout Shakespeare’s career he drew attention in his writing to the plight of Catholic England and pleaded with the Puritan-leaning authorities for resolution. They claim that through coded references, metaphors and allusions he recalled the purity of the old faith, the injustice of its repression, and the social dangers of a divided populace.<sup>52</sup>



In the centre of the long side panel on William and Anne's tomb, facing the chapel, is a shield with their ancestral arms of Cokefield impaling Griffeth, enclosed by the motto: *Vincit qui Patitur* ('He conquers who suffers'). This is suggestive of faith in the face of unrelenting persecution of Catholics by William Cecil throughout the reign of Elizabeth.<sup>53</sup>



*Motto on William and Anne's tomb: Vincit qui Partitur (He conquers who suffers).*

The tomb of William and Anne Clopton was 'repaired and beautified' by their daughter Joyce, almost certainly when the panels were removed and the chest was pushed into the corner in order to make room for the Carew monument. It is telling that her note is on the panel itself, probably inscribed during the process: 'The right honourable Dame Joyce, Countess of Totnes, their eldest daughter caused their monument to be repaired and beautified anno 1630'. The side and end panels were already hanging on the wall before Dugdale visited, because he drew them in their current position.<sup>54</sup>

### The Carew Monument

Joyce was the elder surviving daughter of William and Anne, and co-heiress to the Clopton estates. She was baptised on 17 September 1562, written in the register as 'Gieza filia Gulielmi Clopton de Clopton'.<sup>55</sup> At an early age she is said to have been appointed a Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth, being 'remarkable for her virtues'. She may have been introduced to the Queen at the Kenilworth pageant in July 1575. J.C.M. Bellew claims that Joyce continued at court as a Lady in Waiting to Elizabeth throughout her reign, and then throughout the reign of Queen Anne, wife of James I.<sup>56</sup>

At the age of 17, Joyce met George Carew, aged 25, son of the Protestant Dean of Windsor, and they married without her father's knowledge or consent. Indeed the father, William, was determined that she would marry

none but a Catholic. According to a colourful anecdote she escaped from Clopton House at night by jumping out of a window onto a feather mattress, and going thence with her beloved to Holy Trinity Church, where they were married on 31 May 1580, recorded in the register as ‘Georg Caroo & Mrs Jeys Claptonne’.<sup>57</sup> Her father was furious and intended to disinherit her, but upon meeting the young husband found him to be: ‘a man of superior genius and fine address, which qualifications so effectually recommended him to his favour that he was reconciled, and settled his estate at Clopton, which was considerable, upon him and his daughter’.<sup>58</sup>



*Joyce Carew, Countess of Totnes,  
as depicted in the wall panel*

Joyce had chosen well, and they were happily married for nearly 50 years.

George enjoyed a long and honourable military career, with service mostly in Ireland. He was knighted in 1585 and promoted in 1590 to the post of Irish Privy Councillor and in 1601 to President of Munster. In legal documents at the beginning of the reign of James I, he is styled ‘Vice Chamberlain to the Queen’.<sup>59</sup> In 1606 he was made a Baron, with the title Lord Carew of Clopton, and in 1610 was appointed the first High Steward of the Borough of Stratford.<sup>60</sup> Charles I, on his accession to the throne in 1625, at once elevated him to Earl of Totnes, ‘on account of his great reputation and meritorious exploits’.<sup>61</sup>

George Carew died in March 1629, aged 73, and his remains were brought from London, ‘with the funereal pomp suitable to his high station’, and were interred either in a plain tomb chest or in the family vault below the chapel.<sup>62</sup> Joyce died seven years later and was placed with him in the tomb chest.



*George Carew, Earl of Totnes, c.1625*

The grand and elaborate canopied Carew monument is fitted into a recessed opening in the east wall of the chapel, in the probable location of the former Lady altar.<sup>63</sup> The effigies of George and Joyce lie side-by-side on top of the tomb. On the front panel of the tomb is a display of cannon, cannonballs, barrels of gunpowder, flags and a musket. This can be explained by his position as Master of the Ordnance for James I, but the irony is that the front panel of what was once the altar to the Blessed Virgin now appears to be a bombastic glorification of war. To

quote Martin Gorick: 'The statue of Mary, a feminine symbol of holiness, humility and hospitality was thrown out as idolatrous – and, in her place, we now have even bigger graven images, this time distinctly masculine symbols of wealth, power and military strength'.<sup>64</sup>

A plaque alongside the Carew monument notes, with touching affection, that nearby is interred Mistress Amy Smith, who:

[...] attended upon the Right Hon. Joyce, Ladie Carew, Countesse of Totnes, as her wateing gentlewoman ye space of 40 yeares together being very desirous in her life tyme that after her death she might be laid in this Church of Stratford where her lady ye sayd Countesse also her selfe intended to be buried. Accordinglie to fulfill her request & for her so long trew & faithfull servis ye said Right Hon. Countesse as an evident token of her affection towards her not onlely caused her body to be brought from Nonsuch heither & here honorably buried but also did cause this monument and superscription to be erected in a grateful memorie of her whome she had found so good a servant.





*The grand monument to George and Joyce Carew*





*Joyce and George Carew lie in prayerful but rather anxious expectation.*

Shakespeare must have known Joyce, who was only 19 months his senior. It is possible that as a child his parents might have taken him to Mass in the chapel at Clopton House, which is about 20 minutes' walk (1.3 miles) from the birthplace in Henley Street. Perhaps he was given access to Hugh Clopton's books in the library there. Later he may have seen Joyce at court.

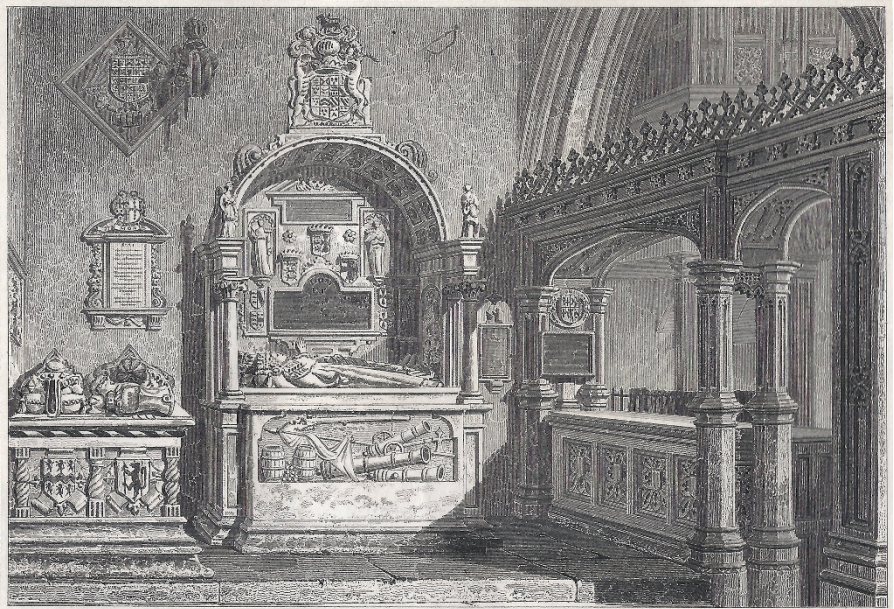
The chapel also contains memorials to later Cloptons, and associated hatchments hang on the wall of the north aisle. Another plaque notes that, in 1714, Sir John Clopton caused the monuments: 'to be repaired and beautified', presumably to restore damage done by Parliamentary troops during the English Civil War. John Clopton was knighted by Charles II as 'a person of eminent loyalty, and of great interest in his Country'. He was a Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire from 1660 until his death in 1719 and, from 1665, also a Justice of the Peace. He sat as an MP for Warwick in 1679 and was Recorder of Stratford from 1684 to 1709.



## In Modern Times

For the remainder of C18 and well into C19, the chapel seems to have remained unchanged. An engraving of 1824 shows all the Clopton tombs as they are today, except that the niche at the eastern end above Hugh Clopton's tomb is covered by the plaque to Thomas and Eglantine Clopton (now on the wall to the left of the canopy).<sup>65</sup>

The steps were formed from large blocks of stone and were closer to the east wall, only a few inches from the base of the tomb of William and Anne. These may have been the original steps up to the altar in the Lady Chapel, as the top surface is level with the base of Hugh Clopton's tomb. Note that all of the illumination is coming from the clerestory windows (upper right) and none from the adjacent window on the left, which was walled up. At this time there were also wooden galleries above four arches of both the north and south aisles, built in 1620 and 1754 respectively (not taken down until 1883).



*Engraving of the Clopton Chapel by J. Le Keux in 1824*

By the late 1800s a waist-high wooden balustrade, in the same decorative style as the pews in the nave, had been fixed along the edge of the raised floor, in line with the central canopy pillar. This delineated the area of the chapel but allowed a clear view of the tombs when looking east along the north aisle. A photograph from 1890 shows that the lower section of the window now contained plain glass, flooding the chapel with light. New stained glass panels depicting Faith, Hope and Charity were installed in 1901. Note also the gas light fitting on the stone canopy above Hugh Clopton's tomb! It was replaced by electric lighting in 1908.



*Victorian lantern slide of the Clopton Chapel c.1890*

In 1905 the Churchwardens granted permission to Revd Francis Hodgson (then Rural Dean of North Kinton and later rector of Clifford Chambers) to erect a high wooden screen separating the Lady Chapel from the North Aisle.

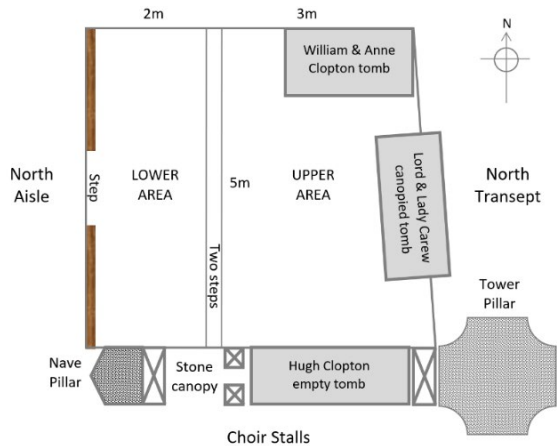
His father, Sir Arthur Hodgson, had purchased Clopton House in 1872, and evidently regarded himself as inheritor of all the rights and privileges of the Clopton estate, though he was no relation.<sup>66</sup> As part of the refurbishment of the Clopton Chapel, the wooden balustrade was removed and two new stone steps were laid across the full width of



*Hodgson's wooden screen in front of the Clopton Chapel*

the chapel. A simple free-standing wooden rail was placed on the top step, and an elaborately carved wooden screen fitted from the wall across to the second pillar, two metres to the west of the steps. This enclosure effectively created a private seating area within the chapel for the Hodgson family.<sup>67</sup>

The floor area of the Clopton Chapel is now approximately 16 ft (5 m) square. At the entrance gate through the wooden screen there is one step up from the nave floor to the lower area of the chapel, which is 6'6" (2 m) wide, then two further steps to the upper area where all the Clopton tombs are located. This is 9'6" (3 m) in width, increasing on the nave side with the oblique angle of the transept wall.



## Exploring Shakespeare's Church

The arrival of Revd William Gardner Melville as vicar in 1908 affirmed the high church orientation of Holy Trinity, at a time when the Anglo-Catholic movement was strong. A postcard from the period shows an altar table positioned directly in front of the Carew monument. The enlarged detail reveals that it was dressed with a lace cloth, on which were placed two candlesticks, two vases of flowers, an open Bible, and a framed icon of the Madonna and Child. Clearly at this time there was a concerted effort to reintroduce devotion to Mary within the chapel.



*(left) Postcard of Clopton Chapel in 1912, within Hodgson's screened-off area;  
(right) Enlarged detail showing the altar setting with icon, flowers and candles*

Mary has regained a presence in Anglicanism, through the C19 and C20 liturgical renewals, notably the Oxford Movement and the National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham. In most Anglican prayer books, she is again mentioned by name in the liturgy. Ancient feasts associated with Mary, such as the Annunciation (Lady Day) and the Assumption, are widely celebrated.

Hodgson's wooden screen, fixed onto the step of the lower area of the chapel, remains in the same position to the present day. Because of its height, in combination with the stone canopy above Hugh Clopton's empty tomb, it has the effect of enclosing the space and discouraging entry by worshippers and visitors alike, leaving the Cloptons to rest in peace.



## References/Notes

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speculates that Hugh Clopton may have had copies of Caxton's books in New Place.
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- 8 Since the time of Robert Bell Wheler, c.1800, Hugh Clopton has frequently been referred to as Sir Hugh, but there is no evidence that he was ever knighted. Not to be confused with Sir Hugh Clopton (1671–1751) who was knighted by George I.
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- 11 Stow, John, *A Summarie of the Chronicles of England* (London: Richard Bradocke, 1598) p.206. In his *History and Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon* (Stratford-upon-Avon: J. Ward, 1806) pp.38-39, R.B. Wheler cites Stow and notes that the windows in the chancel 'were originally adorned with painted glass, the subjects taken from holy writ'.
- 12 Horsler, Val, Gorick, Martin and Edmondson, Paul, *Shakespeare's Church: A parish for the world* (London: Third Millennium, 2010) p.59
- 13 Lyell and Watney, *op. cit.*, pp.220-221
- 14 Halliwell, James O., *The Will of Sir Hugh Clopton, of New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1496* (London: Whittingham and Wilkins, 1865) pp.20-21
- 15 Bloom, J. Harvey, *Shakespeare's Church* (London: Unwin, 1902) p.155. The arms on the four shields on the spandrels leave no doubt that the tomb was intended for Hugh Clopton.
- 16 *Will of Hugh Clopton, Mercer and Alderman of Saint Margaret Lothbury, City of London* (1496) Prerogative Court of Canterbury PROB 11/11/66, The National Archives, Kew.
- 17 Halliwell, *op. cit.*, pp.7-8
- 18 It is inferred from Hugh Clopton's will that the Lady Chapel was in the north aisle.
- 19 Stowe, John, *A Survey of London* (London: John Windet, 1603) p.106
- 20 Three of these coats of arms, namely the City of London, Staple of Calais, and Clopton family, appear on the shields held in pairs by angels above the entrance to the porch of



- the Guild Chapel, which was also built by the bequest from Hugh Clopton's will. The fourth coat of arms there is of the town of Stratford, with three leopard heads.
- 21 Bloom (1902) *op. cit.*, p.155. The heraldic blazon of the arms granted in 1634 is: 'Gules, a demi-virgin couped below the shoulders, issuing from clouds, all proper, vested, or, crowned, with an Eastern crown of the last, her hair dishevelled and wreathed round the temples with roses of the second; all within an orle of clouds proper'.
- 22 Sutton, Anne F., *I Sing of a Maiden: The Story of the Maiden of the Mercers' Company* (London: The Mercers' Company, 1998) pp.9-11
- 23 Keene, Derek, 'The Mercers and their Hall before the Great Fire', in Imray, J., *The Mercers' Hall* (London: London Topographical Society, 1991) pp.12-13
- 24 Roffey, Simon, *Chantry Chapels and Medieval Strategies for the Afterlife* (Stroud: History Press, 2008) p.72
- 25 Wheler, *op. cit.*, p.41
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- 28 Macdonald, Mairi R., 'Clopton, Hugh (c.1440–1496) merchant, mayor of London, and civil benefactor', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: OUP, 2004)
- 29 Medieval wills often left money to secular purposes, such as repairing roads and building bridges. See: Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) pp.367-368. The wording in Clopton's will is: 'I bequeth to the repaying and amending of perilous briggis and wayes within the space of x miles of Stratford-upon-Avon'. From Leland's time he has been credited with paying for the building of Clopton Bridge but there is no contemporary record to prove it, and it is possible that construction had already commenced during Clopton's lifetime. Wheler *op. cit.*, p.110 says that it was built in reign of Henry VII, so 1485 or later.
- 30 Bloom, J. Harvey, *Medieval Stratford, a Topographical Essay* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Herald Press, 1915) p.22
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- 33 Knowles, E.H., 'An Architectural Account of the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity', in Neil, S., *The Home of Shakespeare Described* (Warwick: H.T. Cooke, 1862) pp.75-80
- 34 Ireland, Samuel, *Picturesque Views on the Upper, Or Warwickshire Avon: From Its Sources at Naseby to Its Junction with the Severn at Tewkesbury* (London: Faulder and Egerton, 1795) pp.205-206
- 35 Lee, *op. cit.*, p.24
- 36 The inventory (SCLA ER27/14) of items confiscated by the bailiff includes: 'one Challice with a cover of Silver and gilte, a Little Silver Bell, a silver and gilte Crucifix, a

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- Crosse of Copper with the picture of Christ upon it, an Altar stone, two white Surplices', etc. Bearman, Robert, *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-Upon-Avon 1553–1621*, Vol. VI (Oxford: F. Hall for Dugdale Society, 2011) pp.370-374
- 37 Winter, William, *Gray Days and Gold in England and Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1896) p.40. The verse is from John Weever's *Funeral Monuments* (1631)
- 38 Savage, Richard, *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-Upon-Avon 1553–1621*, Vol. I (Oxford: F. Hall for Dugdale Society, 1921) pp.lviii-lix
- 39 Styles, *op. cit.*, p.46
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- 41 Ibid, p.162
- 42 Lena Orlin (private communication) suggests that this frieze and the smaller panel above it were originally the side and end panels of the tomb chest. It is similar to the tomb chest for Sir Fulke and Lady Elizabeth Greville in the church of St Nicholas, Alcester.
- 43 Wheler, *op. cit.*, p.36. It was not until the 1890s that glass was returned to the window, with a jumble of medieval fragments in the upper panels. This was followed in 1902 by the figures of Faith, Hope and Charity in the lower panels, donated by Sir Arthur Hodgson in memory of his wife Eliza.
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- 45 Brailsford, William, 'The Clopton Monuments at Stratford-on-Avon', in *The Antiquary*, 5 (1882) pp.206-208
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- 47 Bloom (1902) *op. cit.*, p.163
- 48 Robinson, Katelynn, 'The anchoress and the heart's nose: The importance of smell to medieval women religious', in *Magistra*, 19(2) (2013) pp.41-64. The term 'pectoral' indicates the physical relationship people felt they had with these jewels, carried close to the pectus, i.e. the chest or heart. Any good smells, and particularly the scents of perfumes, spices, or flowers, could be and often were connected with God, holy works, and the odour of sanctity. Musk, cloves and myrrh were believed to provide protection against the plague and commonly placed in pomanders in late medieval Europe.
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- 55 Savage, Richard, ed., *Registers of Stratford-on-Avon: Baptisms* (London: PRS, 1897) p.6
- 56 Bellew, *op. cit.*, pp.164-165
- 57 Savage, Richard, ed., *Registers of Stratford-on-Avon: Marriages* (London: PRS, 1898) p.9
- 58 Saunders papers SCLA ER1/117/27, reproduced in Fox, Levi, ed., *Correspondence of the Reverend Joseph Greene*, Dugdale Society Vol. 23 (London: HMSO, 1965) pp.180-182
- 59 See, for example, Deed of Sale, dated 19 March 1603/4, SCLA ER3/290
- 60 Fox, Levi, *The Borough Town of Stratford upon Avon* (Norwich: Jarrold, 1953) p.101
- 61 Wheler, *op. cit.*, p.159
- 62 George died on 27 March and was buried 2 May 1629, recorded in the church's Burial Register as 'George Lord Carew'. It is not clear whether at that time his body was placed in the vault or in a plain tomb chest. In 1630 Joyce set about re-arranging the chapel, moving her parents' tomb chest into the corner and commissioning the grand Carew monument against the east wall, where she was buried alongside her husband on 28 Jan 1636/7, recorded in the Register as 'Joyce Dame Countesse of Totneyes'.
- 63 Odgers, David, *Final report on conservation of monuments in Clopton Chapel* (Report to Holy Trinity Church, 2013) During the work, part of the alabaster below the lower black panel, just above the effigy of George Carew, was found to be sagging. When the left side of the frame was removed, a lot of rubble was found in the space formerly occupied by the altar, which had put pressure on the lower area of the panel and forced it forward.
- 64 Horsler et al., *op. cit.*, p.47
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- 66 See the rambling anecdotes by Arthur Hodgson in 'Clopton and the Cloptons', in *Journal of the British Archaeological Association: First Series*, 32(2) (1876) pp.238-242
- 67 The document (SCLA DR243/49) reads: 'We the Churchwardens for the time being whose duty it is to seat the Congregation worshipping therein hereby consent to such screen being erected about seven feet in advance of the old boundary of that part of the Lady Chapel known as the Clopton Chapel and we hereby consent as a matter of privilege but not right to Mr Hodgson and his family occupying the additional space which shall be so enclosed'. The arrangement lapsed following the death of Revd Francis Hodgson in 1930 and the sale of the Clopton estate.

## Appendix A – Saints in the Shakespeare canon

There are numerous references to saints in the Shakespeare canon, notwithstanding the post-Reformation expunging of many of them from the newly revised Anglican liturgy. They were, however, not so easily erased from the memory of those who had grown up and worshipped in the Catholic faith, and who no doubt shared these memories with their children and grandchildren. Shakespeare confidently evokes the names of many saints who had been purged from the liturgy and their altars dismantled in churches and cathedrals, including Holy Trinity in Stratford. This suggests a more than passing interest in, and a greater knowledge of, Catholic hagiography than might have been expected of an ostensibly Protestant, Elizabethan writer, who was working under an increasingly oppressive regime with which he could hardly avoid coming into contact. In view of his high profile as a leading dramatist it is perhaps surprising that, despite making reference in the majority of his plays to so many Catholic saints, he escaped censure for their inclusion.

The 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) is our most reliable guide to the saints approved by the Anglican church, of which the 1558 Act of Supremacy had made Elizabeth I Supreme Governor. It provides collects and Bible readings for the major feast days of Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Whitsun (Pentecost); it also celebrates the Massacre of the Holy Innocents, the Circumcision of the Lord, Epiphany, The Purification of the Virgin (now Candlemas/Presentation of the Lord) the Annunciation, All Saints and Trinity Sunday (of particular significance for Holy Trinity church).

It recognises, however, only those saints recorded in Scripture, likewise according them their own feast days, collects and the Bible readings in which they are named: saints Andrew, Thomas the Apostle, **Stephen, John, Paul**, Matthias, Mark, **Philip & Jacob**, Barnabas, John the Baptist, **Peter, James**, Bartholomew, Matthew, **Michael** and all Angels, Luke and Simon & Jude.

From this list, Shakespeare chose eight (in bold above) for inclusion in his work, but he also drew on the extensive body of Catholic saints rejected by

the Anglican communion, which were no doubt still familiar to parishioners in Stratford, London and nationwide – even to powerful clerics like Archbishops Edmund Grindal and John Whitgift, who were attempting to purge Anglican Christian worship of its idolatrous Catholic heritage.

Some of the feast days of the Blessed Virgin remained in the liturgical calendar, but the rosary had been dispensed with; Shakespeare nevertheless refers to it in *Henry VI, Part 2* (1.3.44) and *Henry VI, Part 3* (2.1.159); Catholic Palmers also make an appearance, with Helen in disguise as a pilgrim in 3.5 of *All's Well That Ends Well*. Pilgrimage is used as a motif in *Romeo and Juliet*, the name of Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan having become synonymous with pilgrimage before his death in 1584 and canonisation during Shakespeare's lifetime in 1610. If one accepts that the name Romeo is derived from the archbishop's surname and that the character therefore styles himself a pilgrim in his first exchange with Juliet in 1.5, this suggests that Shakespeare was at least aware of the activities of contemporary Catholic prelates in Europe, if not sympathetic to their religious fervour.

There are allusions to the feasts of St George, notably in *Henry V* and several other Histories, and to St Valentine, both of whom have survived into popular culture today, despite their being excluded from the 1559 BCP. Shakespeare records locations and churches that bore, and in some cases still do bear, the names of saints. He also gives voice to a persistent belief in sainthood and its relevance, in both pre-Reformation Catholic worship and daily life, by the inclusion of saints as innominate entities in several plays and in Sonnet 144.

There is not room here to attempt any interpretation of Shakespeare's attitude to the saints, either as a concept or as he refers to them in individual plays, but the list on the opposite page gives some insight into the frequency with which these saintly individuals find their way into the canon: certainly a testimony to England's Catholic past, but how far such references can be taken as evidence of his own personal faith remains a matter of conjecture. All references below are taken from the Folger Shakespeare Library: [https://shakespeare.folger.edu/search/?search\\_text=Saint](https://shakespeare.folger.edu/search/?search_text=Saint)



**The Blessed Mary:** *Henry VIII* (5.2.34); *Richard II* (2.1.35); *Henry VI, Part 2* (1.3.44); *Henry VI, Part 3* (2.1.159); *Coriolanus* (5.3.46).

**St George:** *Henry V* (3.1.1 & 5.2.204); *Henry VI, Part 1* (1.1.151, 4.2.42, 4.6.1); *Henry VI, Part 3* (4.2.6, 5.1.113); *Richard II* (1.3.84); *Richard III* (5.3.250, 306, 369); *King John* (2.1.297); *Love's Labor's Lost* (5.2.686); *Taming of the Shrew* (2.1.250).

**Patron saints and Biblical figures:** St Patrick: *Hamlet* (1.5.152); St David: *Henry V* (4.1.56, 4.7.103, 5.1.1); St Peter: *Much Ado About Nothing* (2.1.43) *Othello* (4.2.103); St James (Jaques): *Taming of the Shrew* (3.2.81); *All's Well That Ends Well* (3.4.4, 4.3.49, 5.3.56, 110); St John: *Richard III* (1.1.142); St Paul: *Richard III* (1.2.37, 40, 3.4.75); St Stephen: *Titus Andronicus* (4.4.45); St Anne: *Taming of the Shrew* (1.1.260); *Twelfth Night* (2.3.116).

**Other saints:** St Valentine: *Hamlet* (4.5.51); *Midsummer Night's Dream* (4.1.144); St Francis: *All's Well That Ends Well* (3.5.38); *Romeo and Juliet* (2.3.69, 5.3.121) St Nicholas: *Henry IV, Part 1* (2.1.6, 68); *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (3.1.301); St Katherine, St Martin, St Philip & St Michael: *Henry VI, Part 1* (1.2.99, 132, 143, 4.7.61); St Jerome: *Taming of the Shrew* (IND.1.9); St Charity: *Hamlet* (4.5.62); St Denis: *Henry V* (5.2.186); *Henry VI, Part 1* (1.6.17, 3.2.18); St Crispin: *Henry V* (4.3.21); St Alban: *Henry VI, Part 2* (2.1.70, 97, 121, 139); St Magnus: *Henry VI, Part 2* (4.8.1) St Clare: *Measure for Measure* (1.4.3); St Gregory: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (4.2.88).

**Palmers and pilgrims:** *All's Well That Ends Well* (3.5.32-120, 4.3.39); *As you Like It* (3.2.127); *Henry IV, Part 1* (1.2.130); *Henry VI, Part 1* (2.5.115); *Henry VI, Part 2* (5.1.88); *King Lear* (5.3.217); *Lucrece*, 758, 785, 960; *Measure for Measure* (2.1.37); *Merchant of Venice* (1.1.126); *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1.1.67); *Othello* (1.3.149); *Richard II* (1.3.46, 232, 269, 2.1.161, 3.3.148); *Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.104, 108, 112, 113, 4.5.49); *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (2.7.9, 24); Sonnets 7, 27.

**Locations and churches:** St Albans: *Henry VI, Part 2* (1.2.58, 84, 1.4.59, 2.1.149, 2.2.167, 4.2.11, 5.2.67, 5.3.29); *Henry VI, Part 3* (2.1.106, 2.2.103, 3.2.1); *Richard III* (1.3.131); St Magnus Corner: *Henry VI, Part 2* (4.8.1); St George's field: *Henry VI, Part 2* (5.1.45); St Katherine's churchyard: *Henry VI, Part 1* (1.2.99); St Asaph: *Henry VIII* (SD 2.4.0); St Mary's Chapel: *King John* (2.1.561); St Edmundsbury: *King John* (4.3.11, 5.4.11); St Colme's inch: *MacBeth* (1.2.68); St Peter's church: *Romeo and Juliet* (3.5.121, 154); St Luke's church: *Taming of the Shrew* (4.4.89, 101); bells of St Bennet: *Twelfth Night* (5.1.33); St Gregory's well: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (4.2.88).

**Innominate saints:** *All's Well That Ends Well* (5.3.118); *Comedy of Errors* (4.4.58, 3.2.1); *Henry VI, Part 2* (1.3.44); *Henry VIII* (5.4.65); *Measure for Measure* (2.2.156, 198); *Othello* (2.1.122); *Richard II* (3.3.148); *Richard III* (4.4.63, 5.3.250); *Romeo and Juliet* (1.5.108, 112, 116); *Timon of Athens* (5.1.48); *Measure for Measure* (4.2.189); *Merchant of Venice* (1.2.127); *Richard III* (1.3.344); Sonnet 144.



*St George, an enduring saint in popular culture, drawn by Thomas Fisher in 1804 from a medieval wall-painting in the Guild chapel, c.1500*

## Appendix B – The early architecture of Holy Trinity

There is very little documentary evidence for the church prior to 1300, so all that follows is conjecture, based on typical practice of the period. Nothing visible remains of the Saxon monastery on the site on the west bank of the Avon. The church was most likely a wooden structure, in a group of buildings serving the needs of the monks.<sup>1</sup> The manor house was a few hundred yards away, somewhere near where The Other Place theatre is now.

After the Conquest, all the lands around Stratford were granted to the Bishop of Worcester, and a Norman chancel, tower and transepts were built over the Saxon foundations beside the river, aligned with the original structure. Later a new nave was added, in better alignment with the direction of Jerusalem, its axis turned by  $4.6^\circ$  toward the south relative to the earlier structure.

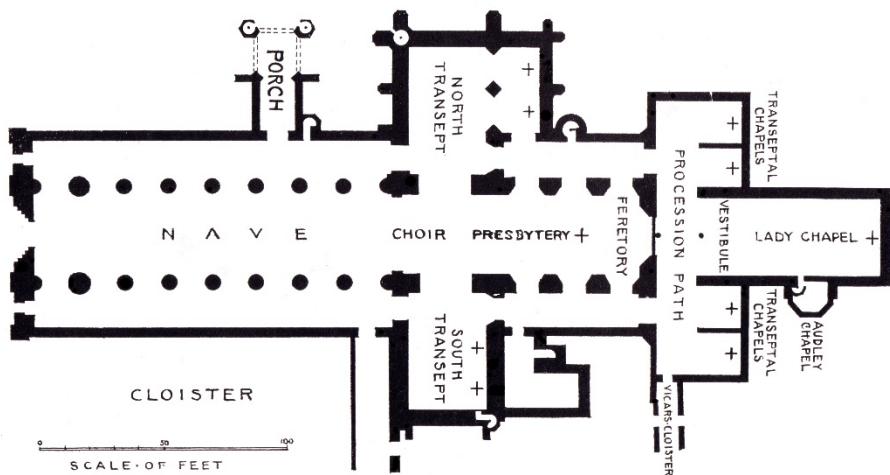
During C12, stylistic changes occurred to differentiate English ecclesiastical architecture from its continental counterparts. The area of the church most affected was the eastern portion, i.e. the quire and sanctuary, which were under the control of the clergy and the location of most of the worship. This was especially true of cathedral churches and important monastic churches, where liturgical demands, such as providing for processions, pilgrims, additional chapels and altars, were more keenly felt.

One of the key design themes of early medieval churches was the processional path around the church interior. Bond describes the scenario:<sup>2</sup>

In every church, great and small, there was a Sunday procession. In a village church this would pass into the open air, weather permitting, by the north door, and then pass along the centre of the churchyard round the east end of the church, re-entering by the south door: it may be that some churchyard paths still retain the route of the ancient Sunday procession. [...] The procession always left the choir by its north door, and marched along the ambulatory all round the chancel, making a station at each altar and singing anthems, while the celebrant aspersed the altar. After passing round the chancel, the procession would pass into the transepts, hallowing the altars there, and then down the south aisle of the nave as far as the west door. Next turning to the right again, it passed to the font in the centre of the western bays of the nave; then it passed up the nave, and while the celebrant aspersed

the altar at the foot of the Choir screen, commonly known as the Fabric altar, the principal station was made.

The architectural design therefore included an ambulatory around the back of the high altar in the sanctuary. The eastern ends of churches took on a more traditional Anglo-Saxon form, i.e. the square termination of the building instead of the semi-circular apses popular on the Continent. The ambulatory around the sanctuary and the projecting chapels also became rectangular. The result was to create a spacious and rectilinear style unique to English Gothic architecture.<sup>3</sup> An example is found at Hereford Cathedral, where the rounded apses at the eastern end of the C12 structure were replaced in C13 by rectangular chapels, shown in the plan below, while retaining the procession path. Holy Trinity, although smaller (overall length 200 ft vs 350 ft at Hereford) must have been similar in layout.



*Plan of Hereford Cathedral c.1220, showing the rectilinear eastern end*

The Norman church of Holy Trinity seems to have had narrow aisles on either side of both the nave and chancel, with arches through the west and east walls of both transepts. There was a narrow aisle on the north side of the old nave, which opened into the north transept through an arch, the remains of which can still be seen. A similar arch opened from the transept into a

north chancel aisle. The transepts were lit by two narrow windows on each side, eight in total, of which six survive. By the early 1200s the church was a cruciform building in stone, with a central tower and transepts, and a nave and quire both with narrow side aisles. What later became the chancel house was part of this structure, perhaps used as a chapter house or side chapel.

The usual means of increasing the floor space in a church was to build an aisle or aisles to the nave. Where only one aisle was needed, it was generally erected on the north side, so as not to encroach on the parish cemetery, which normally lay to the south of the church. From the end of C13 the addition of aisles was predominant above all else in the development of the parish church plan. The earliest were merely narrow passages, often only 6 ft wide, but in C14 they reached 14 ft and were in some cases as wide as the nave.<sup>4</sup>

The sequence of rebuilding at Holy Trinity in C14, to accommodate the Lady Chapel and Becket Chapel, was: (a) reconstruction and strengthening of the tower 1305–1310; (b) widening of nave, with new arcades, and of north aisle 1310–1320; (c) rebuilding of south aisle 1330–1350. The two nave arcades are of one date and detail, except that the southern was spaced differently with regard to the projecting stair-turret of the tower. Variations in style of the windows suggest that the widening of both aisles continued up to 1350.<sup>5</sup>

It is unclear how long the processional paths remained. At some point the decision was taken to fill the archways. At any rate, apertures were retained through the tops of the arches in both transepts as squints for viewing of the high altar in the centre of the old quire. Only when Balsall rebuilt a new chancel, without side aisles, in the 1480s was the procession path closed and the chapels in the nave aisles became more like compartments than corridors.

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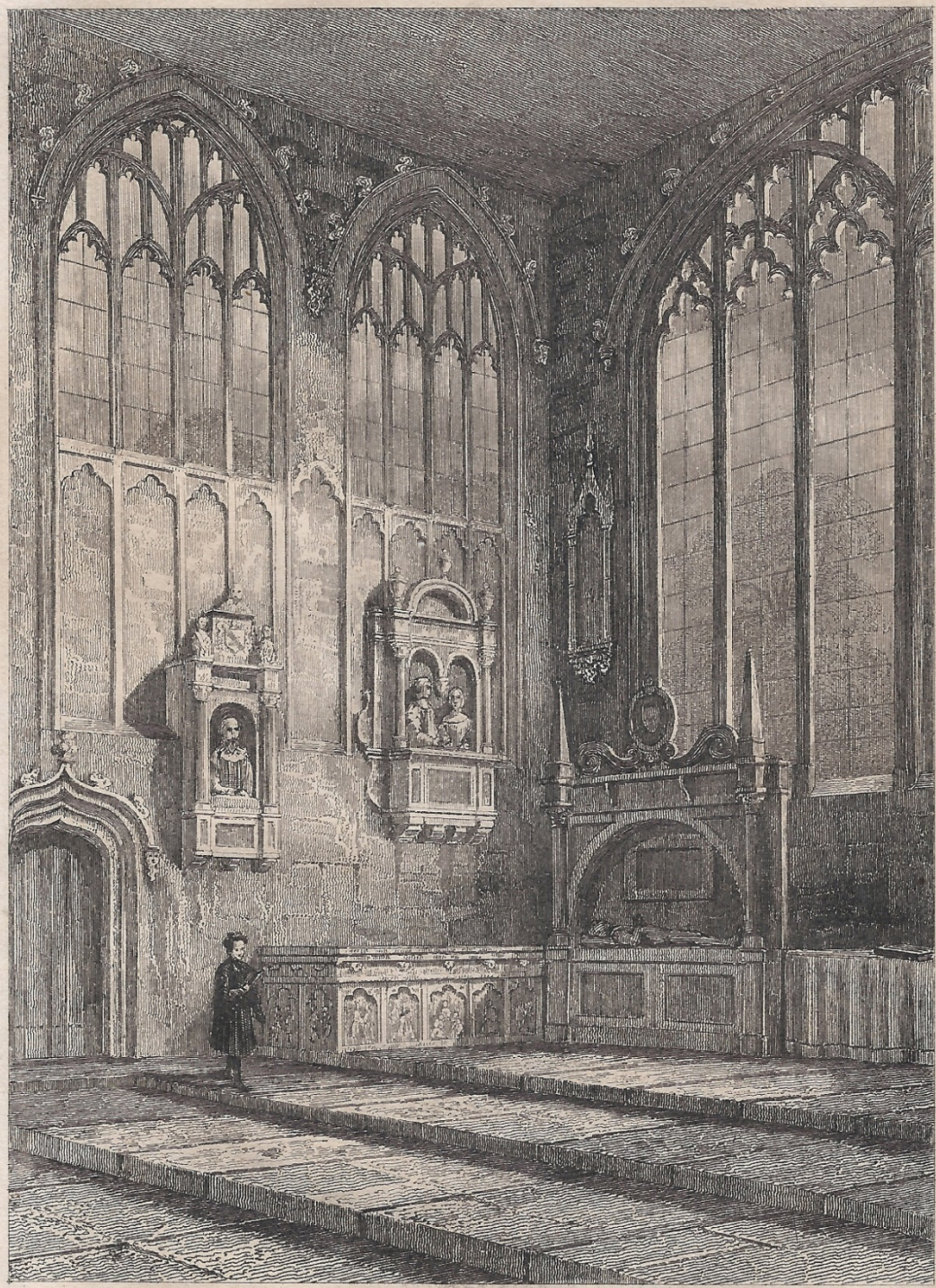
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- 166 Drawing by Thomas Fisher, 1804, published in London in 1807, Plate XVII
- 168 Bond, Francis, *An Introduction to English Church Architecture*, Vol. 1, p.129  
(inside back cover) Engraving 'Tombeau de Schakspeare' (Paris: Didot Frères, 1830)





*The chancel in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing the plaster ceiling, plain glass windows, solid wall behind the Shakespeare monument, empty statue niche on the east wall, and stepped stone floor*



# Exploring Shakespeare's Church

## Insights into the history of Holy Trinity, Stratford-on-Avon

Shakespeare's enduring association with the church of his baptism and burial is at the heart of our exploration of Holy Trinity church.

We begin with the pre-Reformation involvement of the Guild of the Holy Cross and the College of Priests in the development of its liturgy and worship, notably in the much-loved Lady Chapel and in the richly-endowed St Thomas Becket chantry chapel, which became a focus of veneration for generations of pilgrims. Revd Dr Paul Edmondson then makes a tour of the building in the company of Master Shakespeare himself. Thereafter we discuss the Bawdy Court, the church's 'she edition' of the 1611 King James Bible, and the increasing influence of the Puritan movement on both church and town. We conclude with the history of the Clopton Chapel from its medieval origins to its presence in Holy Trinity today. The eight chapters offer lavishly-illustrated and authoritative insights into one of England's most famous, beautiful and historically significant parish churches.