

# Burford Priory

By WALTER H. GODFREY

(Read before the Society, February 8th, 1939)

WHOEVER founded the modest little hospital of St. John the Evangelist at Burford could hardly have foreseen the many interests, architectural and personal, that were to become attached to it under the name of Burford Priory.<sup>1</sup> It has experienced profound changes, it has survived at least two periods of long neglect, and now it has become a favourite and familiar example of an English home of especial beauty and charm. Even in the delightful town of Burford it is preeminent, and everyone who loves the pleasant stone architecture of the Cotswolds knows the Priory as an acknowledged masterpiece.

Before we examine the buildings which are visible to-day we must see what can be learned about the original institution which stood here, the remains of which exist to an undetermined degree within the fabric of the structure and beneath the soil.

The story of the mediaeval hospital as a social institution is a most engrossing one.<sup>2</sup> Everyone has heard of St. Cross, Winchester, and most people know that the great mediaeval hospitals of St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew in London are very early foundations. In England, in the Middle Ages, when the population was about four millions, the number of hospitals was close on 800. Some of these were richly endowed and fully equipped to help the poor traveller and the sick, and to extend aid to all in need. Others had but slender resources and their usefulness was too often limited by their means.

These hospitals, whether sponsored by private, monastic or municipal charity had often an independent constitution: they were, in fact, incorporated and had a common seal. The brethren and sisters were the staff serving under a Master or Prior, and sometimes they professed a mild monastic rule, based

<sup>1</sup> Burford Priory was rescued from its ruinous state in 1908 by Colonel Sales La Terriere, who renovated the main part of the house with the assistance of the builder, Mr. Samuel Groves of Milton-under-Wychwood. Mr. Emslie J. Horniman in 1912 reinstated the south wing, which had fallen to the ground, and in 1937 Commander Sir Archibald Southby, Bt., M.P., restored the chapel. Both the more recent restorations were carried out by Mr. Groves under the direction of Mr. Walter H. Godfrey, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., the author of this paper [Ed.].

<sup>2</sup> The subject has been well treated by Miss Rotha M. Clay in *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England* (London, 1909).

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usually on that of St. Augustine. This appears to have been the case at Burford, and here the hospital evidently got its present name from the fact that its head was sometimes called 'Prior.' The normal designation was 'the Hospital of St. John the Evangelist,' but as early as 1537 Nicholas Austen, late Abbot of Rewley, petitions Thomas Cromwell for 'a service called the Priory' in Burford 'the holder of which, one Mr. Cade, is very old and sickly.'<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cade was the last Master of the Hospital and also held the Vicarage. He is called in a lease of the time 'Master and Prior,' and it is quite likely that the latter title was the usual mode of address, although seldom used in documents.

Mr. Gretton (*op. cit.*) gives reasons for presuming that the Hospital was founded by William, Earl of Gloucester, grandson of Henry I and father of Isabella, King John's first wife. He was the founder of Keynsham Abbey, the endowments of which included Burford Rectory, but the Hospital was an independent foundation, having no connexion with the Abbey. The reason for its situation is clearer when we remember that the road from Oxford to the west of England used to pass through the centre of the town of Burford, and not on the ridge to the south as it does at the present day. Even so, its site seems somewhat retired, although its distance from the main road (Sheep Street) used to be less than it is now, for the road made a detour north towards the river Windrush. It is probable too that there was a gatehouse on the street to advertise its whereabouts.

If we are correct in ascribing the foundation to William, Earl of Gloucester, the Hospital was probably erected in his lifetime, that is before 1183. A very large proportion of the hospitals of the Middle Ages date back to the 12th century, and they were often built on a very generous scale even when their endowments were small. Much reliance was placed upon the donations of charitable folk in the neighbourhood and the Hospital at Burford received many grants of property and gifts of firewood, etc., in the 13th and 14th centuries.

The plan of the mediaeval hospital was based upon that of the monastic infirmary,<sup>2</sup> and its essential features were a hall and chapel with usually some sort of vestibule to the west of the hall to serve the purpose of a reception or waiting room. The hall and chapel were usually arranged very much like the nave and chancel of a normal parish church, the former having aisles in which the beds were ranged, and the centre portion being divided from the chapel by a screen. The most characteristic example of many left to us at the present day is perhaps

<sup>1</sup> See R. H. Gretton, *Burford Records*, where the quotations from documents will be found.

<sup>2</sup> Hospital plans have been published from time to time in the transactions of archaeological societies. Examples may be seen in Dollman's *Domestic Architecture*; Clapham and Godfrey's *Some Famous Buildings and their Story* (Abbot's Hospital, Guildford and its predecessors); and Godfrey's 'Some Medieval Hospitals of East Kent' in *Archaeol. Journ.*, LXXXVI (1929).



PLATE VI

VIEW OF BURFORD PRIORY PUBLISHED IN 1826  
(after Skelton, *Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, Bampton Hundred, pl. 3)



A

THE INTERIOR OF THE CHAPEL LOOKING S., BEFORE  
RECONSTRUCTION



B

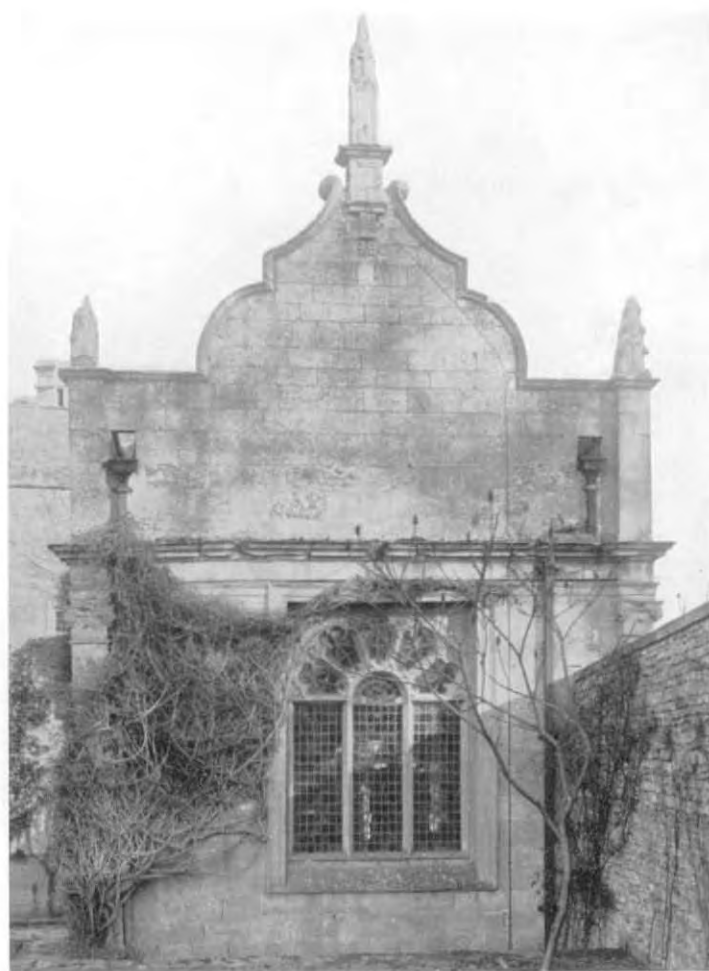
THE INTERIOR OF THE CHAPEL LOOKING N., BEFORE  
RECONSTRUCTION

*Phh. W. J. Butt, Ecurton-on-the-Water*



A

THE NORTH END OF THE CHAPEL, BEFORE  
REPAIR



B

THE SOUTH END OF THE CHAPEL, BEFORE  
REPAIR

*Phh. W. J. Butt, Bourton-on-the-Water*



A

THE PILASTER-CAPITAL AT THE NE. CORNER OF  
THE CHAPEL



B

THE WEST SIDE OF THE CHAPEL, BEFORE  
RECONSTRUCTION

*Phk. W. J. Butt, Bourton-on-the-Water*



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the Hospital of St. Mary, Chichester, where the nave of the infirmary hall is divided from the aisles by lofty oak posts, as it was in not a few parish churches before they were rebuilt in stone. The Chichester chapel has a beautiful contemporary screen, east of which are stalls for the hospital staff, the members of the community as opposed to the patients or inmates who occupied the hall. It is probable that generally the hall as well as the chapel was consecrated, the whole being correctly named God's House or Maison Dieu, and evidence of this appears at Dover, Coventry and elsewhere.

Beside the hospital buildings proper there were, according to the resources of the establishment, quarters for the Master, brethren and sisters, a common hall, a kitchen, etc., and subsidiary rooms and offices. A foundation like the Great Hospital at Norwich had its cloister and was in fact a miniature monastery.<sup>1</sup> Smaller hospitals had much less accommodation and the staff may have dined and slept in the infirmary hall itself.

We are not in a position to recover the original plan of the Hospital of St. John at Burford with any certainty. There remain, however, two beautiful arches of a late 13th century arcade with piers of quatrefoil plan which show that it must have been an interesting building. The arches themselves have been moved from their original site and re-erected as shown on the plan. Colonel Sales La Terriere, who moved them, says :

' I found it impossible to show the arches and columns *in situ* as I found them (half of them were buried in and used in the construction of a chimney-stack), so I got them out carefully, shortened the arches, and slightly blunted their pitch and re-erected them in the present hall, some 10 feet away from and parallel to their original position.'<sup>2</sup>

Their site was altered but not their direction and therefore we know the arcade went east and west. We cannot tell however how far it extended, nor whether it belonged to the hall or chapel. The two extreme piers are now built as responds, but they were originally free-standing piers of a longer arcade. Half of the next arch westwards is still hidden in the wall, as can be seen in a photograph in the possession of Mrs. La Terriere. I was told by Mr. E. J. Horniman that bases of additional piers are still under the turf in the front garden in line with the original position of the piers shown on the plan (FIG. 14). If this is true the arcade extended farther east. There is a long mediaeval wall, with the jambs of one doorway left, running north and south, which no doubt represents a range at right angles to the aisled building, but whether this wall was its eastern or western boundary is not clear, unless one takes the single

<sup>1</sup> For plan see Thomas Dinham Atkinson, *English Architecture*, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.*, xxxiv, 94-5.

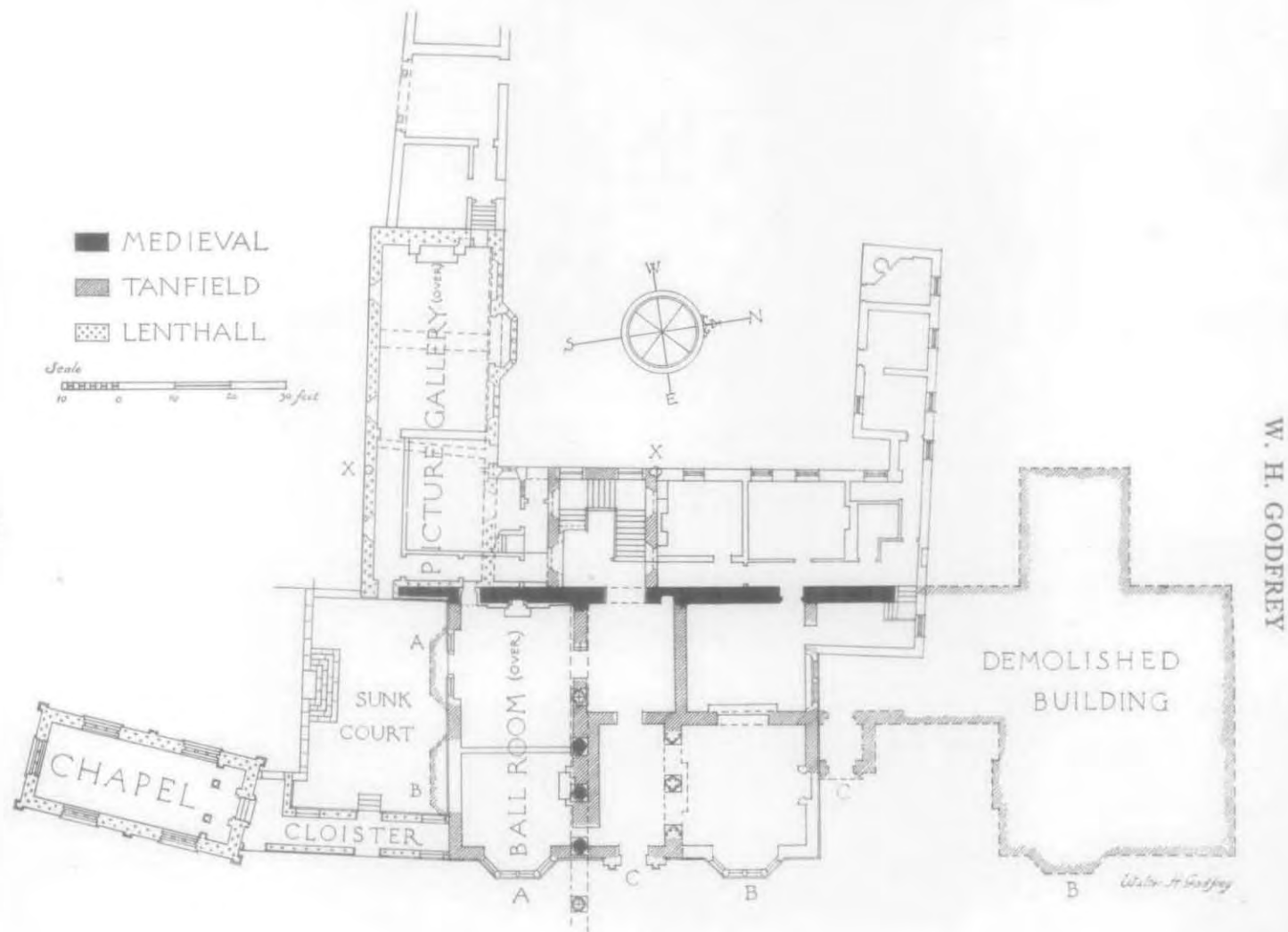


FIG. 14

Plan of the buildings of Burford Priory, showing the dates of construction of the earlier portions.



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evidence of the one remaining door, which suggests that the range was to the west of it. If the arcade belonged to the chapel, as has been generally supposed, it is probable that the western range was the hall, a conjecture not ruled out by its being at right angles to the chapel, since some examples of this arrangement exist. It is, however, much more likely that the arcade belongs to the hall. Aisled chapels were rare in hospitals, for there was seldom need for additional altars, and the aisles had a definite function in the hall for accommodating the beds and leaving the central space clear. Moreover the proportions of the arcade, even in its altered size, are large and suggest a bigger building than the chapel was likely to be. I should hazard the theory that this was the arcade of the north aisle, that the present library and dining-room represent the body of the hall and that the south aisle lay in the court. The original western wall may not be as long as shown in the plan. The problem will only be resolved by excavation, and the foundations of the east wall and of the chapel may yet be found beneath the lawn of the existing entrance court.

Fragments of mediaeval masonry have been discovered from time to time and two pier bases were found in the positions marked X on the plan. There was no evidence to show that either was *in situ*; they appear to have been re-used as convenient stones for foundations.

Little is known of the actual history of the Hospital. The appointment of the Masters or Priors pertained to the lords of the manor, and in course of time the office seems to have become a sinecure. Mr. Gretton has described how the borough of Burford gradually acquired or usurped the manorial rights and privileges, only to be forced to surrender them in 1621. By the middle of the 15th century the Corporation had assumed the patronage of the Hospital and leases of its property were made in the joint names of the Master and the Corporation. Its end came with the general dissolution of the religious houses by Henry VIII. The King, although he obtained parliamentary sanction for the confiscation of the hospitals as well as the monasteries, professed to have no intention of interfering with such charities as were properly administered, and a number in fact survived until the dissolution of the chantries by Edward VI. Henry's promises were, however, by no means invariably fulfilled, and the last Master, Thomas Cade, surrendered the property to the royal commissioners in 1538, and received a life pension of £3 6s. 8d. a year, which, according to Mr. Gretton, was about a quarter of the revenue. In extenuation of the King's action we may presume that in this case the Hospital had ceased to function long before its suppression.

In 1543 the Hospital was granted to Edward Harman, barber-surgeon, for his and his wife's lives. It seems doubtful whether he ever made Burford his residence. The tablet that he put up in Burford Church, the sculpture of which

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so curiously foreshadows some of the mannerisms of modern work, was erected in 1569, seven years before his death, and is less likely to have been intended to mark the place of interment than a thankoffering for his children and his fortune. The next owner of what now became known as the Priory was Sir Lawrence Tanfield who was destined to earn the title of enemy rather than friend of his native town. After purchasing the Priory he acquired the manor, and with the skill of a keen and not too scrupulous lawyer, he charged the Corporation with usurping the manorial privileges and wrung from them all that the citizens had most prided themselves in possessing. But this was not until 1617. The purchase of the Priory must have been made earlier than the birth of his daughter (the future Lady Falkland) which took place there in 1585. James I visited Tanfield at the Priory on his journey from Scotland on 9 September 1603 and stayed three nights, and in the March following the King knighted him. It is certain that the new house must have been complete before this, and that Tanfield raised his magnificent building before he bought the estate for which he had already planned the manor house.

For an idea of this Elizabethan house we must have recourse to the engraving of the east front in Skelton's *Antiquities of Oxfordshire* (PLATE VI), which shows a building more than twice the width of the present one. We recognise the porch in the centre of the main range, flanked by bold projecting wings, each having twin gables. The windows are in four stages, the gables are freely ornamented with finials and the chimney-stacks rise high above the roof, two external ones flanking the wings.

It is obvious that much alteration took place before the date at which the drawing was made (before 1809) and the design was materially changed in detail. We shall see later that the two bay windows had been removed to the position shown here from the south front, where they were original features in the long gallery or ball-room. Several of the other windows had been replaced in the 18th century and there is no clear indication of the hall, which should have belonged to a house of Elizabeth's reign. But I think we may accept the fabric as that built by Tanfield. Mr. Gretton has produced the theory that the wings had at first one gable each and that when the bay windows were moved, each wing was doubled, the addition being put on the north side in both cases, thus throwing the whole scheme out of symmetry. It is true that the positions chosen for the bays are not symmetrical and also that the porch does not appear to be perfectly in the centre, but the difference is not as much as he supposes. And if so large a re-modelling of the front had taken place in the middle of the 17th century, I am convinced that we should have witnessed a more decided alteration in style. Since Skelton's day the whole of this front has been taken down with the exception of the south wing. A northern extension has been built

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with the materials of the gable and bay window from the north wing, and the frontispiece of the porch has been re-erected between the two bays. The plan (FIG. 14) shows the change and how far the old extended front has been telescoped into the compact block of the present house. The stair projection is on the west, and I have ventured to show it duplicated in the plan.

What have we left of Tanfield's architecture? The three sections of the east front each show features altered in position: the bay window to the left, the porch, and the gable and bay to the right. The porch has been somewhat altered in re-erection, but retains the general scheme, a favourite one of the time, of superimposed orders, carried by single columns flanking doors and windows. The lowest order is Corinthian with plain shafts, but the entablature has been cut away for a modern doorhead. Above this is a plinth and a Caryatid order, with two grotesque figures that acted no doubt as supporters to the Tanfield arms. These latter have now given place to a panel with a Lenthall achievement. The next stage has fluted columns of the Composite order on pedestals, which formerly enclosed a three-light window with ornamental fan-traceried heads which are now to be seen above instead of below the entablature. Dwarf fluted pilasters carry the eye to a cornice and to panelled obelisks surmounted with balls, in a stage that should be the top one instead of the last but one. The old arrangement allowed of two three-light windows instead of one. The semi-circular pediment with its carved fan and the two side obelisks are as in the engraving, but the apex has been altered and made larger. Next we have the two gables, the southern one in its old position and the northern rebuilt, with their very simple adornments. Also there are the two bay windows moved from the south front, which in the drawing are fitted for sash windows but have since been restored to casements.

Inside the house there still exists Tanfield's ball-room or great chamber overlooking the garden to the south, with one of its two bay windows transferred to the east wall. All the work in this room, except its ceiling and its general proportions, is later than Tanfield, but it is not difficult to reconstruct its interior, which was no doubt panelled in oak and had a fireplace surmounted by the tall overmantel of the period. It was approached by the staircase which projected towards the west, and of which the walls remain, the stair having been reconstructed in the 18th century.

The plaster ceiling is an excellent example of its date and is modelled with a fine, firm white plaster which was probably introduced into the country by Italian craftsmen. But the design is essentially English, the radiating ribs drawn to moulded pendants being obviously a derivative of Tudor fan-vaulting. Each rib has a conventional running ornament inspired by the vine, and in the panels are floral patterns in relief, imparting their own texture to the ceiling.

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A somewhat distinctive feature is to be seen in the small bosses or drops at the minor intersections of the ribs.

Another charming relic of the old house is the chimneypiece in the hall, which, though of stone, recalls the texture of the ceiling just described. It is full of the poetry of the early Renaissance, and though, judged by academic standards, its proportions are all at fault, in some curious way this very fact makes it attractive. Its deep entablature has no heaviness, its Ionic pilasters and centre key-block are the excuse for the slender projections that break forward to the top of the cornice, and the whole is covered in low relief carving, with simple patterns, the motif of which is the English wild rose.

We now come to what is in many ways the most interesting period of the architecture of the Priory, when it was owned by William Lenthall. Opinion is by no means agreed on the character of the Speaker of the Long Parliament, and we may discern a similar absence of unanimity in the views expressed upon the style and workmanship of his building at Burford. Mr. Gretton is very frank in his dislike of Lenthall's work and considers it not only badly built but wholly lacking in dignity or beauty. The period of the Commonwealth has, however, a great attraction, for it saw the transition from the early to the late Renaissance. Its work shows an effort to reach an ideal, while yet the artist was but partly equipped for his task. It has, in fact, all the charm of work in which the idea outstrips the technical proficiency. Lenthall's builder had left behind him much of the detail and smallness of scale characteristic of design from Elizabeth to Charles I, but he was not prepared to accept the full Classical models of Inigo Jones or Christopher Wren. Halting between two opinions, he had to invent, and his designs have not only originality, but a flavour which is piquant and enticing.

Sir Lawrence Tanfield had died in 1625 and the Priory was left to his grandson, the second Lord Falkland. In 1637 he sold it to William Lenthall, who held it until his death in 1662, a period of 25 years.

In the old part of the house Lenthall's work is chiefly represented by his fireplaces. The bedroom fireplaces are characteristic mid 17th century designs, heavy in scale, with perhaps too much emphasis on the stone panels of which they are formed. The elaborate composition in the drawing-room is more interesting, and well shows the transition between two styles. The diagonal fluting to the columns is also to be seen in the chapel. The proportions of the entablature and scrolled pediment are well contrived and the coats of arms in their carved framework are cleverly placed. The abrupt ending of the centre pair of half columns is, however, a blemish and the niches, with their early type of shell heads, are too small for their position, although not unskillfully made out with carving around three sides. Most curious is the intrusion of the fireplace

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surround itself, which foreshadows a simple Georgian treatment. It is just possible that there has actually been some alteration in the design, but the carving on the upper and lower frieze is of mid 17th century character, and I incline to put the whole at one date. It was no doubt originally brightly coloured and gilded, an important factor in bringing the whole into unison.

The panelling of this room has been assigned to Lenthall, but this, I think, is most unlikely, as its character belongs much more certainly to the early 18th century. He may, however, have removed the bay windows from the south wall of the room to the north front, and inserted the two tall narrow windows in their place. The reason generally given for this alteration is his desire for more wall-space to hang the pictures of which he had a fine collection, including the much-discussed picture of Sir Thomas More and his descendants now in the National Portrait Gallery. It is quite a reasonable assumption, and this date is more probable for the change, since the windows would hardly have survived if the occasion had been a later removal. Lenthall appears, however, to have erected a new building to the west for the express purpose of a picture gallery and this in its restored form occupies the centre of the south front towards the garden. Before Mr. Horniman rebuilt it this building was roofless and little was left of its walls but the south-east angle. Happily there were portions of the fenestration left, and with the help of an early pencil drawing, Mr. Horniman and I were able to reconstruct the whole on the old foundations. The south front is, I believe, a faithful reproduction of Lenthall's design, with its six arched windows on the first floor and its three elliptical lights below. The arch moulds of the upper windows are carried on side pilasters, resting on moulded sills, and the arches have bold scrolled keystones, several of which are original. The elliptical windows are moulded and have a weather moulding or label following the upper half of the curve. The windows of the gallery are arranged in pairs and lit an upper room which measured 60 ft. by 20 ft. Internally, we had nothing to guide us, and the space was therefore disposed as was most convenient. In one room was fixed a beautiful late 18th century fireplace belonging to the house.

Lenthall's most important contribution to the Priory was his chapel (PLATES VII-IX, FIGS. 15-19), a building some 40 ft. long and 18 ft. wide, lying roughly north and south, and connected with the house by an arcaded and roofed passage. It had been suffered to drift into sad neglect, but Sir Archibald and Lady Southby have now repaired its damaged walls and refurnished it as nearly as possible to regain its first condition. At the end of 1937 it was re-consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford and the occasion was fittingly honoured by the presence of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. The work, which entailed the careful taking down and replacement of the stones







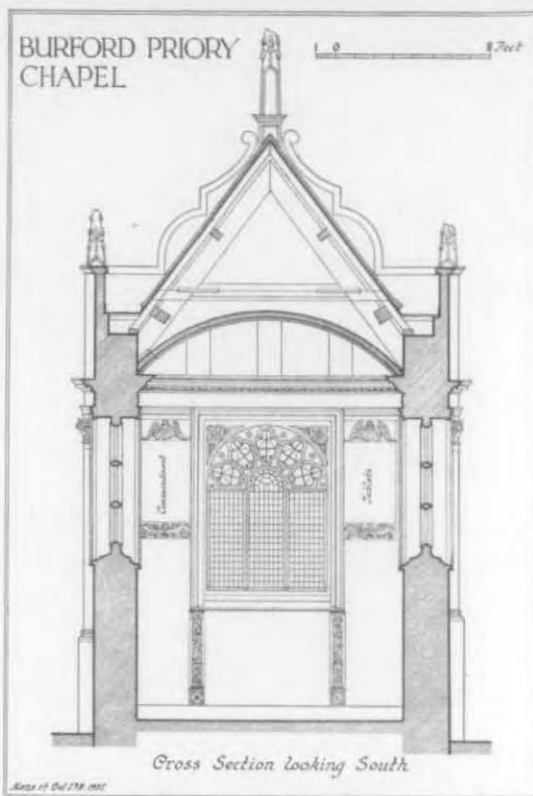


FIG. 17

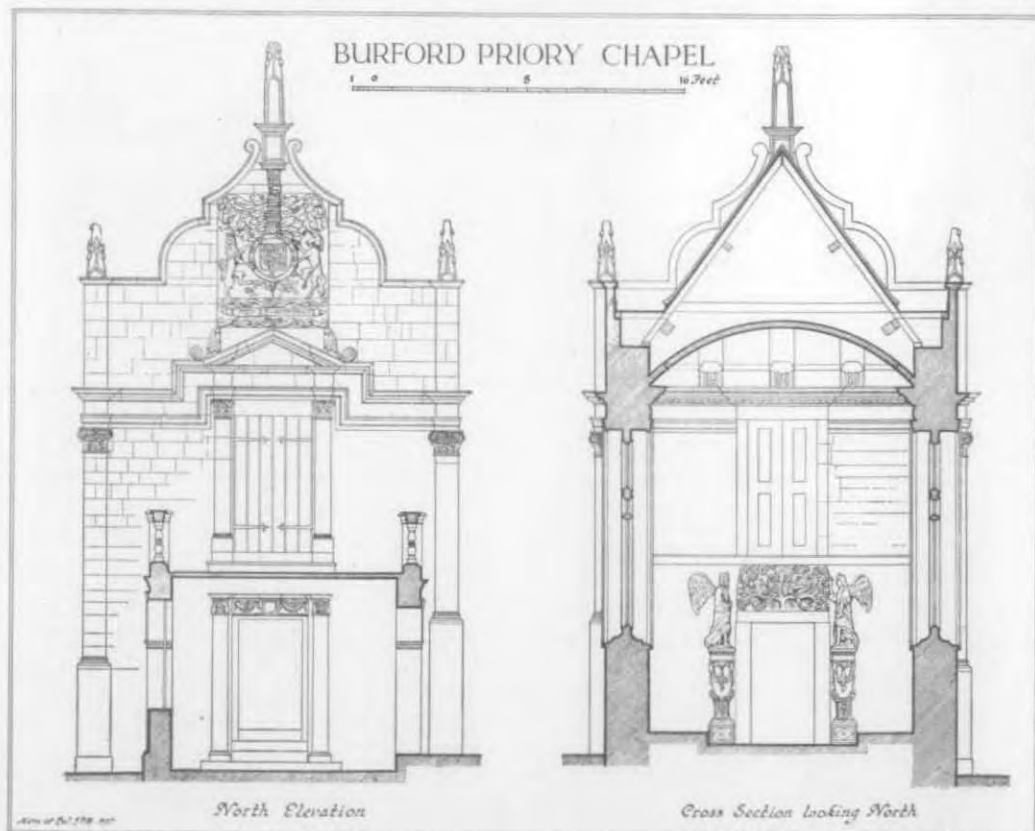


FIG. 18

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of the west wall, gave an excellent opportunity of studying the fabric. Moreover Sir Archibald Southby had a fine series of photographs taken before the work was started, to serve as permanent records of the building.

It is probable that the chapel was not begun much before the Restoration, and we know that in June 1662, some three months only before Lenthall's death,

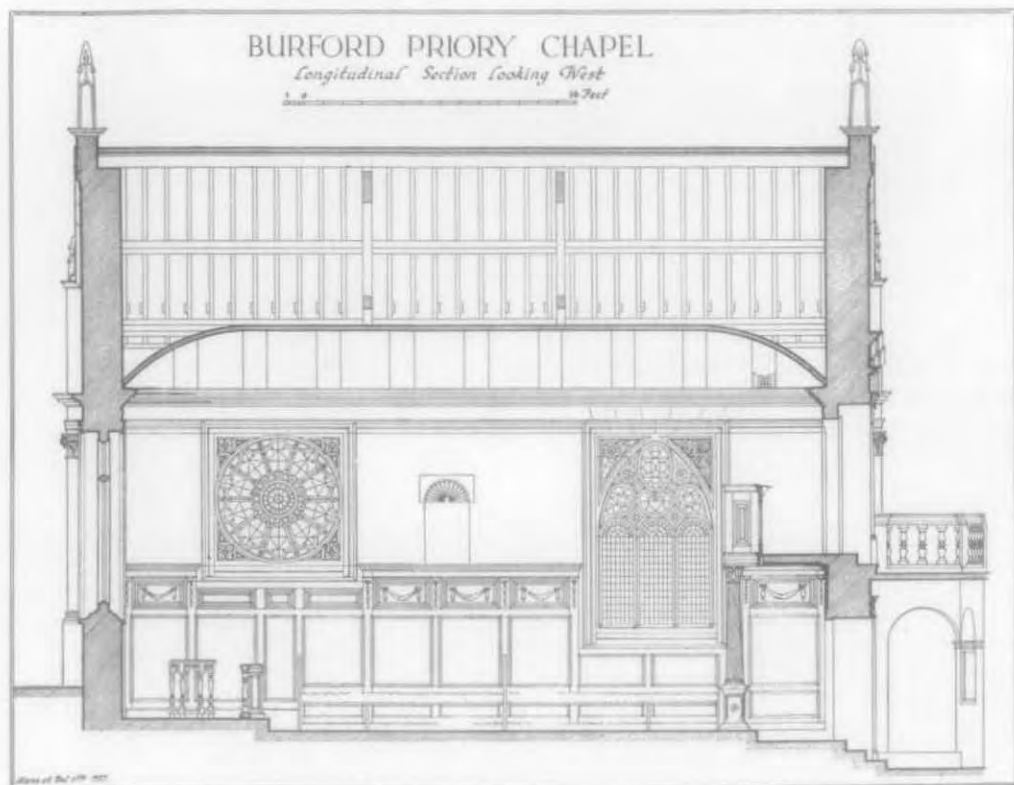


FIG. 19

the Bishop of Oxford was about to consecrate it. It is interesting not only because of the transition, already referred to, from the early to the late Renaissance, but also because of the admixture of Gothic motives with a Classical framework which makes its appearance so striking. The partial revival of Gothic forms in the middle of the 17th century is more common than is supposed and in Oxford they are familiar to all students. It was by no means confined to ecclesiastical buildings, as witness such a country house as Brambletye

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in Sussex. But in churches and chapels it was certainly considered proper to introduce a Gothic element, and examples can be found both of a slavish imitation of mediaeval forms and of a bold adaptation to Classical schemes and mouldings. Even Inigo Jones is thought to have diverged at times from Classical orthodoxy, as for instance at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, and perhaps at the closer parallel to Burford, the church of St. Catherine Cree in London.

But before we examine the chapel in detail a word should be said about the connecting way or cloister. It has been suggested that this may be earlier than Lenthall, but it is quite clearly of the same build as the picture-gallery range. The arched openings have similar moulded heads and panelled pilasters, and the central arches have the same characteristic scrolled keystones. The very charming balustrading to the parapet is perfectly in keeping with the date, and it is not at all unlikely that the parapet of the picture gallery was also similarly balustraded, although we have no definite evidence on the point. That the chapel itself was both designed and built by a different hand from the earlier Lenthall building is a fact that need not perplex us. It was no doubt a separate contract and reflects the personality and taste of its masons, as we shall see. The cloister walk is a utilitarian structure, built to connect the house and the chapel, and its plan is necessarily unsymmetrical because of the lay-out of these buildings. But its very modesty and the naïveté of its arrangement assist its functioning as a link between its more richly conceived neighbours, and it seems to draw to itself an added beauty, conferred on it by its happy setting. It forms not only a ground floor connexion between the buildings, but provides a communication on the first floor from the drawing-room to the galleried pew of the chapel, and above and below it required an extra bay projecting on the west to gain room to approach the centre of the chapel. It is a notable example of the good fortune that attends a straightforward purpose and unstudied effect.

With regard to the chapel itself it is sufficiently evident that the designer was chiefly occupied with the problem of the interior and that the external form was dictated by the internal requirements. Its inside measurements are  $35\frac{1}{2}$  ft. by  $13\frac{1}{2}$  ft., and it is of sufficient height to allow of the usual gallery or upper pew for the owners, the ground floor being used by the domestic staff. Surrounding the whole building at ceiling level (17 ft. above the floor) is a stone entablature with a bold cornice enriched with egg-and-tongue and leaf carving, a pulvinated frieze and a deep architrave. The upper half of the walls is of finely worked ashlar, and below this is coursed rubble, intended to be covered with wood panelling. The ceiling, which was originally of stone, followed a segmental curve, the ends being also curved to intersect with this low barrel vault. There is in existence a sketch made from memory in 1921 of the ceiling before its fall between 1860 and 1870. From this it appears that there was some carved work

over and above the main moulded ribs enriched with guilloche ornament. The original design could not be recovered, in its entirety and in the restoration of the ceiling we could follow only those springers of the ribs that remained *in situ* above the cornice. The restoration is in plaster.

The chapel is lighted by five windows, one over the altar and two on each side. All are enclosed in rectangular frames, formed by a section of the architrave of the main entablature above and by vertical sections of the same moulding at the sides. That over the altar is of three lights with a traceried head of half a rose window of five cusped and radiating lights. These lights are trefoil-shaped above and below, and between the upper heads are spandrels with carved paterae. The spandrels between the enclosing arch and the frame have large, square leaf ornament with triangular panels on either side. With its lead glazing the whole window presents an attractive scheme.

The two windows nearest the altar in the side walls are complete rose windows, having ten radiating double cusped lights surrounding a plain moulded circular light. The detail of the ornament and the setting of the windows are similar to that just described. These windows do not approach the mediaeval model so nearly as does the east window of St. Catherine Cree, London, where the spandrels are all pierced. Moreover, it might be said that the pattern is merely a development of a trefoil scallop or gadroon, were it not that the cusps seem to owe something to their Gothic prototypes. In the remaining two windows, however, there is a definite attempt to translate the lines of Gothic tracery into the Classical scheme. They have two-centred pointed heads enclosing the tracery over three lights, and the spandrels are filled with a circular rose and foliage which fill the space in the earlier manner. Yet here the assistance of cusping (except in the centre aperture) is disdained.

Between the two windows on the west side of the chapel is a niche of semi-circular plan, with a shell head, carefully worked in ashlar. Flanking the window over the altar are two tables of the Commandments, the upper part of an angel being carved above each, and a winged cherub's head and scrollwork below. Two short columns elaborately carved with spiral vine and thistle and having acanthus-leaved capitals stood under the window at the back of the altar (or more probably the Communion-table) and may have carried a shelf.

Towards the entrance are the spirally fluted columns on panelled pedestals that carry the gallery or upper floor. The capitals are Corinthian, with birds' heads rising from the foliage in place of volutes. There are entrances above and below, and flanking the latter two angels stand on tall pedestals, looking towards the representation of the Burning Bush over the doorway. The carving is both spirited and decorative, but it is curious that the pedestals are of an early

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Renaissance type. Lenthall's choice of subject suggests that his mind was occupied with the idea of deliverance from peril if not from servitude.

The restoration of the galleried pew was assisted by the drawing of the interior to which I have referred. It shows quite clearly a panelled front with projecting bays over the side pairs of columns, and I think this is likely to have been the old arrangement. With regard to the panelling, we were fortunately in possession of a section, with its mouldings and cornice beneath the gallery, and it was not difficult to restore it around the chapel walls. The upper panel had the outline of a festoon or swag still on the surface, and on the stile between the panels were the marks of a drop formed by a string of husks. The design is perhaps a little late for Lenthall but it is not impossible that it dates from the 17th century. The material was pine and the new work was therefore carried out in this wood.

Much of the arrangement of the old paving remains, the centre being of freestone squares laid diagonally, with small squares of dark marble at their intersections while that to the altar face is parallel with the walls. There are three steps up to the chapel at the entrance and an additional one under the gallery, the paving between them being also laid square with the walls. On each side of the chapel was an unpaved border edged with long stones, indicating, I think, that a boxed-in bench ran along the walls. This has been carried out in the restoration. The arrangement is to be seen on the plan of the chapel.

Having examined the interior of the chapel we can now see how its arrangements dictated the external design. A simple entablature runs round the building at the same height as that within, with a high coped wall carried above it to give the weight necessary to stabilise the vaulted ceiling. This upper band of masonry seems disproportionate to the body of the building when seen in elevation, but its aesthetic value is recognised at the gable ends, which would have lacked proper height without it. Angle pilasters and one intermediate pilaster in each side act as buttresses and divide the length of the building into two bays. There is no plinth to the walls themselves, but the pilasters are set on high pedestals, and their projection is maintained above the entablature, which breaks round them. They are crowned at the summit by crocketed finials,<sup>1</sup> which, apart from the windows, are the only features that suggest a Gothic inspiration. The windows are set in broad architraves and the length of the taller ones is emphasised by a projecting panel of stonework above the entablature, with a charmingly designed pediment over it filled with a scutcheon and attendant carving. The gables have a shaped outline to their moulded

<sup>1</sup> In the photograph (PLATE IX, B) of the west side in its unrestored state the central pilaster is without a finial, but it is certain that all six pilasters originally had finials (see Skelton's view, PLATE VI).



coping, which ends in two scrolls enclosing the panelled base of an elaborate finial. The base sets forward on a small console corbel, enriched with foliage. The upper and lower parts of the south wall are well contrasted, the upper reaching back to the past, and the lower (except for the window tracery) feeling out towards the future. The contrast can be further enforced by a closer inspection of the north-east pilaster-capital and entablature (PLATE IX, A). The handling of this capital seems exceptionally good when one considers the depth of this pilaster-buttress. It is the Composite order reduced to its simplest components with one band of acanthus leaves beneath the graceful Ionic volutes. The central ornament in the moulded abacus is frankly carved only on the face of a projecting stone and its counterpart on the return of the capital is merely silhouetted against the wall, and yet the deep projection thus gained gives vigour to the modelling. The fluting behind the acanthus and the ornament on the volutes are in excellent scale; the whole treatment, including the mouldings of cornice and architrave, shows an artistry of no mean order, and the mason is obviously at home with the Classical conventions.

Let us now look at the exterior of the windows. That above the altar shows no serious difference from its inner treatment, except that the spandrels between the arch and its architrave-frame omit the square-leaved flower and have instead a delicate band of ornament enclosing a plain triangular panel. The trefoil-ended radiating lights, with the paterae between, which proclaim their Classical parentage, stand out pleasantly on a sunlit day which brings out the beauty of the Oxfordshire stone. The rose-windows follow suit with the same treatment of the spandrels. That on the east side is tolerably complete and the design is a most satisfactory rendering of this type of window in Classical guise. It is very instructive to contrast it with the Norman wheel-window at a church like Barfreston in Kent, and see how differently the pre-Gothic and post-Gothic artist arrived at a similar effect. Both used the trefoil to give interest to the circular outline. The window looking west seems not to have been finished on the right-hand side, but the defect may be due to some former restoration.

The two tall windows, with the classicised form of tracery, look, I think, to more advantage from the outside. Both windows have some clever low-relief carving in the spandrels. That looking west has a harpy on the left, who is apparently the target of the archer on the right. The window looking east has two most effective dragons each successfully filling the space allotted to them. There seems even in this carving to be an attempt to preserve a balance between the two styles, the harpy and archer being clearly of a Classical type, and the dragons no less extracted from the Middle Ages.

The north (ceremonial 'west') end of the chapel has two doorways, one above the other. The upper one gives access to the gallery, and is approached by the



## BURFORD PRIORY

walk above the cloistered passage. In order to give height to this door the whole entablature is raised, and this is done by the most unorthodox method of mitring the cornice, frieze and architrave. The reason for this will be seen when we consider the panel of the royal arms above. The door case itself is well designed with Corinthian pilasters, pulvinated frieze and low pediment. The middle part of the wall is carefully designed in the later style, the upper part is of the earlier period still flavoured with mediaevalism, and curiously the lower door (at the ground level) is designed after the manner of Charles I far more than of Charles II. The pilaster capitals are formed of unusual banded foliage, and the frieze has a square panel flanked by swags, a normal type of the first half of the 17th century.

We can now consider the great royal coat of arms that again adorns the north gable. It has been taken for granted that this belongs to the Tanfield era and was put up in honour of James I, and on that assumption it was removed by Colonel La Terriere to a position on the house. It is true that the general treatment is less free and vigorous than the magnificent royal achievements carved by Grinling Gibbons and his school, but I think none the less that this royal coat was put up by Lenthall for Charles II. The bands of ornament enclosing the motto and the scrolls on each side of the pediment can be matched in Lenthall's work elsewhere. The carving seems also to be an essential part of the design of this façade, the unusual treatment of the main entablature forming an effective base for the whole superstructure. Tanfield would surely have contented himself with a much more modest and normal presentment of the arms if it had been his work, whereas Lenthall, after his part in the death of Charles I, was obviously bent on emphasizing his loyalty to his son, and went to this length to do it. Colonel La Terriere considered that the coat of arms was not a good fit, and that it showed signs of adaptation, but we must always take such evidence with caution. An achievement of this kind was probably ordered from a sculptor who did not see the actual building, and if his measurements were not quite accurate it does not mean that it was not intended for this place. In one important detail the coat of arms as replaced does not follow the original design. The two supporting scrolls that should be on the pediment were placed above the arms by Colonel La Terriere, and they still remain as altered, with his corbels carrying the carved stone. The rhythm of the design is not so obvious as when the scrolls were in their proper place (see FIG. 18).

The measured drawings (FIGS. 15-19) show the chapel in detail and display the scheme as the designer put it on paper. In the recent repair of the building the whole west side was taken down carefully and rebuilt stone for stone. It was the only way to prevent its further disintegration and ultimate fall.

Speaker Lenthall died on September 1, 1662, and was buried in Burford

Church, but no memorial has been found, not even the flat stone that he directed should be inscribed with the words 'vermis sum.' His son John was knighted by Charles II, who visited Burford in 1681. It is not necessary to my subject to follow the Lenthall ownership of the Priory further, except to refer to the beautiful Georgian stair, with its inlaid treads and landings and fine plaster ceiling, which was the work of John Lenthall, who died in 1763. The tall staircase windows are prominent features of the inner court, and the adjoining buildings to the left are of the same date.

At the turn of the century the Lenthall fortunes had declined and about 1808 or 1809 it was thought more economical to pull down part of the house than to keep the whole in repair. So occurred the telescoping of the building which we have noticed already, and the reduction of Tanfield's long Elizabethan front to some third of its size. This only put off the evil day, for the property was sold in 1828 and was neglected for the best part of a century, until the work of redeeming the building was begun by Colonel La Terriere in 1908.

The architectural history of Burford Priory derives its interest from the beautiful masoncraft of the Oxfordshire masons. They were not always as scientific in their constructional methods as we could wish, but they wrought with lively skill and inventiveness in winning beauty from the stone they quarried. The decay of masoncraft in the country generally is one of the things the lover of architecture most mourns, and this decay makes the preservation of the older work a matter of real national concern. To such buildings as Burford Priory posterity will have to turn if the art is not altogether to be lost.

NOTE.—Since the above was written, Mr. Arthur Oswald, in an illustrated article on Burford Priory in *Country Life* (10 June, 1939) has made the interesting suggestion that the 'picture gallery,' in the centre of the south front, and the cloister connecting the house with the chapel were probably erected after the Speaker's death by his son Sir John Lenthall. The close resemblance between the character of each and their purer classicism go far to support this view, although the cloister must have been intended from the first.