

## WOODWORK IN THE MINSTER

Talk by David Turner 17 September 2011

*THE WEST DOORS* are of uncertain date. Nikolaus Pevsner thought that they are probably 12th century, but others have suggested that they are contemporary with the North Doors – early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Whatever their actual date they are made of oak and have very beautiful medieval ironwork designs.

*THE NAVE ROOF* is not the original Norman roof. That was destroyed in the fire of 1711. After the fire the nave was given a roof with a lower pitch than the original and a flat ceiling. In 1879 the roof was replaced as part of Ewan Christian's restoration. The pitch of the outside roof was restored to its original level, and the oak wagon-roofed vault, which is more in keeping with the Norman building, was put in beneath it. The work was done by Mr Clipsham of Norwell at a cost of approximately £10,000. He overreached himself with the work, became bankrupt and died in penury.

*THE NORTH DOOR* is from very early in the 14th century. The tracery, which is carved from the solid wood, helps to date it. The design is of reticulated ogee, with a quadrefoil in each reticule; the style was at the height of popularity between c1270 and c1330.

*THE BREAD PEWS* in the south transept were tree-ring dated by Dr R.Laxton, who was responsible for the Tree Ring Dating Section of the Archaeological Department at the University of Nottingham. Three pieces of wood were tested; one dated from the late 12th century and two from the 17th, the latter matching the samples obtained from the north quire aisle roof which was replaced after the fire in 1711. This suggests damage by fire in 1711 and subsequent repair. They were probably originally in the quire or they would not have survived at all. The pews are made of oak and have poppy head carvings, one of which shows a human head.

*THE MISERICORDS* in the six stalls on the east side of the pulpitum are fine examples of 14th century carving. Three pieces were tree ring tested and produced dates between 1325 and 1350. Lady Pamela Wedgewood, Medieval Art Historian and member of the Minster's Fabric Committee dates them at 1340 because of the type of greenery used, the mid 14th century drapery, hairstyles, head-dresses etc, and similarities with the Luttrell Psalter of that date. The designs are carved from solid pieces of wood. They depict:

South side: (Bishop of Southwell) Two dryads with tails turning into foliage

South side: (Bishop of Sherwood) Green man with branches from mouth

South side: (Archdeacon of Nottingham) Samson breaking the jaw of a lion

North side: (Dean) Human head and hands, scaly body with a tail

which turns

into a branch and a feathered cloak

North side: (Assistant Bishop) A kneeling woman holding foliage

North side: (Archdeacon of Newark) A seated figure with a bough springing from the side

*THE CHOIR STALLS AND SCREENS* form part of Ewan Christian's restoration work. They were made and installed by Cornish and Gaymer, North Walsham, Norfolk (the firm which carried out most of the work in the quire) in 1886, and the superb carvings are the work of Charles Henry Simpson. The screens replaced the plaster screens which Bernasconi had installed at the beginning of the 19th century and were probably similar in design to the wooden screens which had been removed at that time, and pieces of which had been discovered in the roof of the Chapter House. The carvings show flowers, fruits, foliage, animals, dragons, birds, musical instruments and texts.

*THE AIRMENS' CHAPEL*, which has been in its present position since 1984, has been furnished over the years by the various RAF stations. The altar was made near Sheffield from wood taken from aircraft which crashed in World War I and was used in the Chapel at RAF Norton Woodseats until it was given to the Minster in 1919. The oak kneeling desk was made at RAF Cranwell in 1926, £20 having been collected there to pay for it. The Communion rail was made in the workshop at RAF Newton in 1984. The Triptych was painted by Hamish Moyle of the Little Gidding Community in 1988; it is inspired by Edith Sitwell's poem "Still falls the rain".

## ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND CRAFTSMEN

### *EWAN CHRISTIAN*

Ewan Christian was a Manxman by descent, but was born in London on 20 September 1814. On his 15th Birthday Ewan was articled to Mr Matthew Habershon, of Cavendish Square, and was quite soon admitted to the Architectural School of the Royal Academy. For a short time he worked in the office of Mr William Railton, who was later to become Architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission. In 1842 he moved to an office at 44 Bloomsbury Square and worked from there until he was appointed Architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1851; at that time he moved his office to the Commissioners' building at 10 Whitehall Place. In 1851 the Bishop of Lincoln asked him to report on the fabric of Southwell Minster (Southwell by that time having been transferred from the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York to the Bishop of Lincoln in 1841). He was to be the Minster's architect for the next 44 years. Unlike many Victorian architects Ewan Christian did not set out to make the building fashionable, but always made it clear in his reports that he aimed to restore it as it was originally built. We have much to thank him for. In 1874 Ewan Christian entered into partnership with his cousin, Joseph Henry Christian, and Mr C H Purdy, a former pupil and then his principal assistant. He was appointed President of the RIBA in 1884 and became a Royal Gold Medallist in 1887. On 16th February 1895 he caught a chill, developed erysipelas, lost consciousness and died on the 21st. He was

buried at Hampstead Cemetery four days later.

#### *W.D. CAROE*

William Douglas Caroe was appointed as architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission (and therefore to the Minster) following the death of Ewan Christian in 1895, and he remained in that post until his death in 1938. Much of the woodwork was made to his design: the organ casing, the cope chest, the choir stalls east of the Simpson stalls, the quire pulpit, the lower part of the screen to the pilgrims' Chapel and the reredos in St Oswald's Chapel are some examples.

The lower part of the screen to the Pilgrims' Chapel was made by Cornish and Gaymer, and when part of this was dismantled the following pencilled note was found: "This Screen was erected by G. Arterton and B. Hollis, May 1904 for Cornish & Gaymer, N. Walsham, Norfolk". The eastern four blocks of the choir stalls which were given by Canon Lewis and the Chapter in 1902 were also erected by Cornish and Gaymer.

The quire pulpit was made by Robinson of Bloomsbury. It was the gift of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and was dedicated by Bishop Ridding on 9th May 1897. It is made from teak and shows the Virgin and child, the baby being held on the right arm. The pulpit was subsequently much altered by Ronald Sims. It has an inscription which reads "In the beginning was the Word".

#### *BERNARD H. DOWLAND*

Dowland was Deputy Chief Architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and for 20 years before his retirement in 1970 he was in charge of maintenance and restoration in the Minster. He did much to the stone work (e.g. the gargoyles on the outside of the Chapter House, the saints' heads on the north side of the choir and the modern heads). He was also responsible for removing the ringers' gallery which had been installed by Christian, and replacing it with a fine oak floor in 1961. Unfortunately this proved to be unsafe and another floor was put above it in 1973.

#### *RONALD SIMS*

Sims was the next Architect to the Minster. He worked in an easily recognisable style, very rarely leaving a flat surface. Most of his designs were made and installed by Houghtons of York. They include the Bishops and Provosts boards at the west end of the nave, the inner porch to the north door, the paschal candle stand, the nave altar and chairs and the upper part of the screen to the Pilgrims' Chapel (this was delivered and fitted the day before the Queen came on Maundy Thursday 1984). The furniture in the chapel was also designed by Sims.

#### *MARTIN STANCLIFFE*

Stancliffe was the Minster Architect until replaced by Nicholas Rank in 2009. He was busy with stone work (especially the conservation of the Chapter House) and with the glass in the transepts. He designed the new choir stalls in the nave, but his crowning achievement was his conception of the re-glazing of the Great West Window, for which Patrick Reyntiens

did the designs.

### *CHARLES HENRY SIMPSON*

C H Simpson was born in 1856. He left school at the age of 14 .and was apprenticed to Cornish and Gaymer of North Walsham, Norfolk. He worked in many churches, especially in the County of Norfolk, and also in Durham and Norwich Cathedrals as well as Southwell Minster. He took a great pride in his work and the detail in his nature carvings is remarkable. Although there is greater diversity in Simpson's work, he mirrored many aspects of the carvings in the Chapter House (see the pigs eating acorns). The cartoons for these choir stalls were given to the Minster in 1934 on condition that they were not copied. Charles Simpson worked for Cornish and Gaymer for 65 years, and died in 1936.

### *ROBERT THOMSON*

Mousey Thompson was born in 1876. He was apprenticed as an engineer at Cleckheaton, but hated it and badgered his father into letting him join the family woodworking business, which he did when he was 20. Robert was influenced by the carvings in Ripon Cathedral which he saw as he travelled to and from Cleckheaton, and before 1910 he was undertaking church work. One day he was working with another carver, Charlie Barker, who murmured something about being "as poor as church mice". Robert promptly carved one; he believed this was in about 1919. Until 1930 all mice had front paws but these were left off after that because they tended to split. Each carver had his own style, and usually the craftsman producing an article carved his own mouse. Some mice are incised. Robert Thomson died in 1955, but the work goes on. The easiest ones to see are those on the Bishop's Throne, the nave altar rails, the high altar rails, the sanctuary furnishings, in St Thomas's Chapel (presently used as a clergy vestry and not therefore accessible) and, on Sundays, the quire hymn boards.

The Bishop's Throne was originally two pieces of furniture. The throne itself was a memorial to Bishop Moseley, and the kneeling desk was a memorial to Bishop Hoskyns. The two parts were joined in 1942, and in 1985, when Bishop Whinney arrived, they were altered by Ronald Sims to fit the space behind the high altar.

### *G. F. BODLEY*

George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907) designed the nave pulpit which was made by Ratty and Kent of Cambridge. The carvings depict Mary and Jesus in the centre panel, St Augustine to their left and St Paulinus to their right. On the far left there are carvings of King Edwin of York and his Queen, Ethelburga. The rose of York is prominent in the decorative work, especially in the tester board. The pulpit was dedicated in 1898 in memory of The Revd John Gordon and Frances Octavia his wife.

The War Memorial on the east wall of the south transept was also designed by Bodley, though added to after the Second World War. On either side of the memorial are the figures of St Martin (patron Saint of soldiers) and St Nicholas (patron saint of sailors). In 2011, work by local

researchers enabled two small panels to be added, carrying names omitted from the original boards.

### *ROBERT KIDDEY*

Robert Kiddey (1900-1984) was an art teacher at Newark Technical College and at the Magnus School. He carved the Flight into Egypt which hangs on the west wall of the south transept. It was given to the Minster by George Bennett in 1987. Kiddey has three important pieces in St **Mary's Newark. An exhibition of his drawings was held in Newark Town Hall** this summer.

### *ALAN COLEMAN*

Alan Coleman (1920-1998) carved the striking Madonna and Child which stands by the entrance to the south quire aisle. It was made for the Chapel at Kelham in 1952, and came to the Minster in 1974 when the Society of the Sacred Mission left the area.

### *PETER BALL*

Peter Ball was born in Coventry in 1943. He did not have a religious upbringing and he left school at 14 and went to Art College.

Subsequently he had many different jobs (factories, teaching etc) until his art work "took off". He has been married three times and lives in Newark, with a studio on the Welbeck Estate.

He has a great affection for Southwell Minster: it was the first church he ever visited at the age of 12 and it made a great impression on him. Peter uses all kinds of wood for his works - unseasoned, reused, driftwood, etc, and he says that the shape of a piece of wood meets him half way when he is working. He has works in several other cathedrals and churches as well as the Minster, but most of his secular pieces are of a more pagan nature.

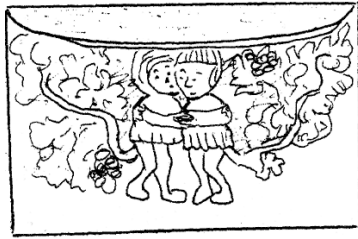
He has four sculptures on permanent display in the Minster, although others have been shown for short periods. They are:

The Christus Rex, Christ the King or Reigning Christ which was made in 1987. The body is carved from unseasoned elm and the arms from 18th century oak taken from Ossington. The whole thing is coated in copper with highlights of gold leaf. It weighs 7 cwt and is suspended by 4 wires and a safety line.

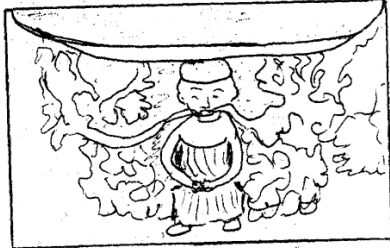
Christ the Light of the World stands in the south eastern transept chapel of the same name. That is also made from 18<sup>th</sup> century oak from the stable block at Ossington.

The Pieta (Mary holding the dead Jesus in her arms) is in the niche in the east wall of the south transept. This work was Peter's suggestion as a memorial to Pamela Irvine, of whom he was very fond, and was given by the Very Revd J. Murray Irvine.

Ecce Homo is a moveable piece! The wood (jarrah) is actually an old railway sleeper which Peter bought in Newark. The metalwork is pewter with copper sulphate, and the crown of thorns is made from barbed wire.



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Provost



SOUTH SIDE  
BISHOP OF SOUTHWELL

NORTH SIDE  
DEAN

BISHOP OF SHERWOOD

ASSISTANT BISHOP

ARCHDEACON OF NOTTINGHAM

ARCHDEACON OF NEWARK

Maple Dragon Ivy  
 Dragon lvy Hawthorn  
 Dragon Squirrel Vine  
 ? Millberry  
 South Side  
 Dog tooth oak top  
 VINE  
 Dragon Bracken Willow  
 Hawthorn IHS  
 Oak XPI  
 Flowers  
 ? Wild arum  
 Dragon  
 & GREEN MANES

