

# THE LESSER CHAPELS OF CHESHIRE

## PART II

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### THE CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST WITHOUT THE NORTHGATE, CHESTER

(Little St. John)

**I**MMEDIATELY without the Northgate of the city stands the Chester Blue Coat School. This building, erected in 1717, stands on the site of the ancient Hospital of St. John the Baptist, founded by Ranulf Blundeville,<sup>(1)</sup> the greatest of all the Norman earls of Chester, at the end of the twelfth century "for the sustentation of poore and sillie persons". The Hospital possessed three chaplains to say Mass daily, and kept thirteen beds suitably clothed and maintained to receive thirteen poor men of the city, each of the latter receiving daily, a loaf of bread, a dish of pottage, half a gallon of competent ale, and a piece of fish or flesh as the day required. The founder directed that one lamp be sustained "at masse in the hospitall everie daie for a light, and the same lampe before the feeble everie night throughout the year". This rich provision for body and soul does not seem to have been properly maintained, for in 1241 an enquiry was held about the hospital. Twelve citizens of Chester attended the "inquisition", before which the founder's views were laid. Henry III confirmed the terms of the Hospital's foundation, and Edward I, as earl of Chester, after another enquiry, later gave the keeping of the Hospital to the prior of Birkenhead and his successors. The earl of Chester was henceforward to be advocate of the foundation.

The revenues of the Hospital were drawn from scattered possessions. The enquiry of 1316 reported the revenue of the Hospital to be as follows:

Endowment from the Exchequer of Chester	£ 4 11 0
Rents in Chester	£13 13 10
A carucate of land at the Hulmehouses [in Great Boughton]	£ 2 0 0
The like at the Moss [in Allerton] co. Lancs.	£ 2 0 0
Half carucate on the Cleyes [Handbridge]	£ 1 0 0
Salthouse in Nantwich	£ 0 13 4
A dry rent in Pensby	£ 0 13 4
Part of the tithes of Aston-in-Hopedale	£ 6 13 4

<sup>(1)</sup> Harleian MS. 2159, f. 104. The earl originally gave the Hospital and lands to God, St. Mary and All Saints. The dedication to St. John the Baptist must have been made at a later date.

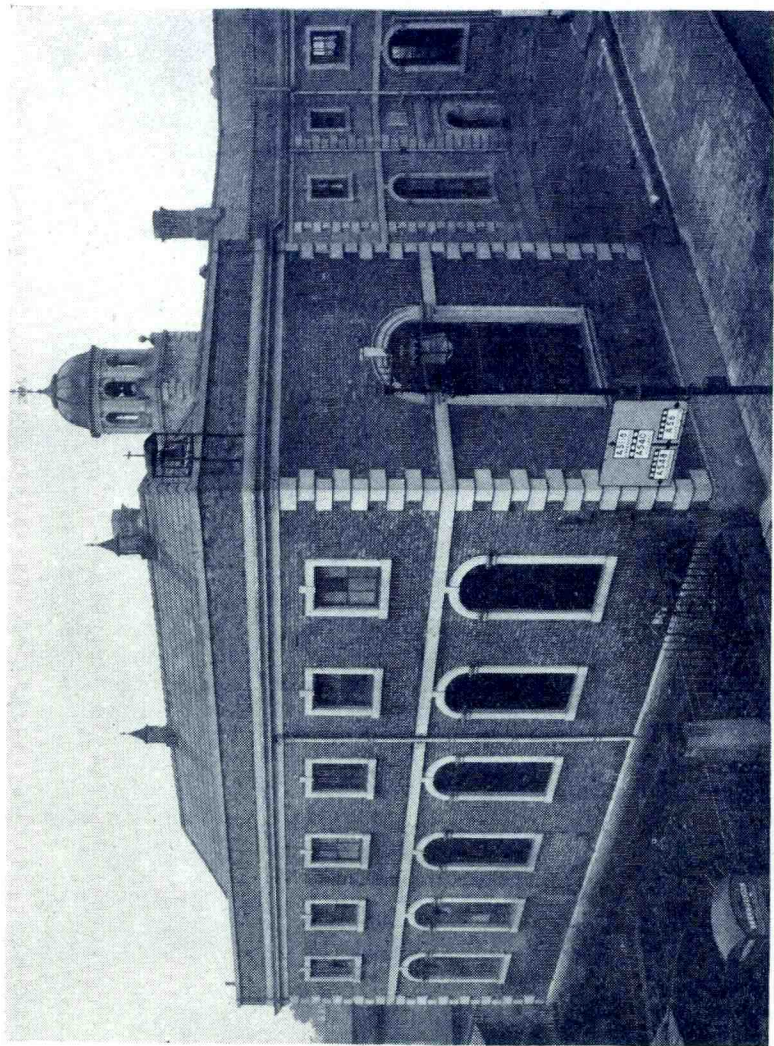


PLATE 6 : LITTLE ST. JOHN, CHESTER.  
Exterior from the south-east.



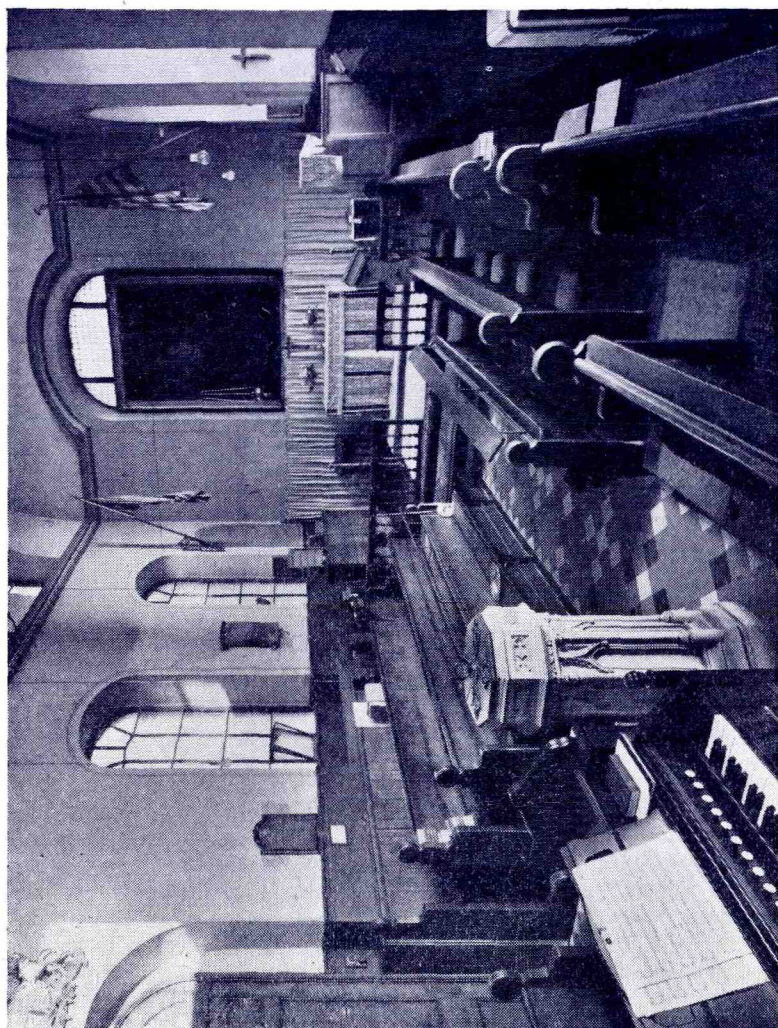


PLATE 7 : LITTLE ST. JOHN, CHESTER. INTERIOR LOOKING EAST.

Possibly because of falling revenues, the prior of Birkenhead failed to maintain the Hospital to the satisfaction of the city of Chester, and in 1340 it was reputed to be irregularly governed. On 28 June of the following year the affairs of the Hospital were taken out of the hands of the priory, and on 15 September 1341<sup>(2)</sup> a jury established misrule and neglect, and the king, as earl of Chester, appointed Richard de Wilton as the new warden. The hospital had its own seal, a large oval representing St. John the Baptist under the discipline of the wilderness, which was represented by a scourge of thistles in the hands of angels. On the left arm is a round shield charged with an *Agnus Dei*.

Henry V granted the master, brethren, and sisters of the Hospital and their tenants an acquittance from all juries, offices, and recognizances, and from all customs, assises of bread and ale, suits of courts and ameracements throughout the County of Chester.<sup>(3)</sup> According to the version in Harleian MS. 2159, "These men and tenants of the hospital who were not of the guild merchant of the city or sworn freemen, were quit of service on juries, sessions and inquisitions or of appearance at the city or county courts of Chester and Flint, and they were also free from murage, stallage, passage, tolls, watches, customs, pontage, mizes, 'tolcisterne' assises of bread, ale and flesh, 'succkinge' and stuth; and also from suit to the county, hundred, pentice and portmote courts. The hospital was to have the ameracements in all courts of its men and tenants to be levied by its own bailiffs". At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, the Hospital of St. John the Baptist escaped suppression possibly because it was under the king's patronage, and in 1540 Walter Buckler was appointed warden. During the Civil War, to quote Harleian MS. 2159 again, the hospital and its tall chapel served as a vantage point from which to attack the loyal city during its siege, and during the ensuing conflict the buildings were demolished. Cromwell subsequently granted the site and lands to Chester Corporation, which still holds the charter by which mayors were appointed the masters and keepers for the time being. After the Restoration, Charles II assumed control of the Corporation and its affairs, and granted the site and lands of St. John's Hospital to Colonel John Whitley, their mayor for life, who rebuilt the hospital and chapel before his death in 1679. Roger Whitley's daughter, Lady Mainwaring, and her husband held the property until the death of the latter in 1702 when it reverted to the Corporation. Some difficulty was experienced at the time in retrieving the holding.

A good deal of confusion appears to exist with regard to the appearances and status of the former chapel of Little St. John. This is possibly so because in his *Notitia Cestriensis* Gastrell included under the title "Little St. John's" a seventeenth-century description

<sup>(2)</sup> Chester Plea Roll 52, M 19. Also see Harl. MS. 2159, f. 98.

<sup>(3)</sup> G. Ormerod, *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 2nd ed. (1882), Vol. I, p. 351, and Returns of Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty.



of the old cathedral church of St. John in Chester.<sup>(4)</sup> Though Gastrell himself did not appear to be confused—he comments, “but all this more probably belongs to St. John Baptist”—the juxtaposition of the two descriptions was unnecessary and liable to confuse readers.

During the eighteenth century the incumbent of Little St. John used to act as chaplain for the Northgate prison. Prisoners who were condemned to death used to receive Holy Communion in the church before their execution. Before it was rebuilt in the Doric style by Thomas Harrison in 1809, the old gate house and prison, according to a drawing by Randle Holme, was a ponderous erection of many periods, dating in part possibly from Roman times. A curious three-gabled building had been built over the mediaeval gate-way. Beneath were grim dungeons in which were confined prisoners under sentence of death. Simpson says these cells were some thirty feet below the level of the street, the only ventilation being by pipes communicating with the road above, and John Hughes, writing in 1856, enlarged upon the horrors of torture and excessively close imprisonment associated with the prison.<sup>(5)</sup> John Howard, the philanthropist and prison reformer, visited Northgate in 1787, and reported, “In the city gaol the convicts and prisoners for trial were severely ironed by the neck, hands, waist and feet, and chained to the floor; and at night to their beds, in the horrid dungeon. Here was the first iron glove I have seen in England, which though not yet used, shews the severity of the gaolor’s disposition”. When the cutting of the Ellesmere and Chester Canal in 1779 separated the prison from the Hospital of St. John, the prisoners for a number of years received their last Communion in the gaol, but in 1793 Chester Corporation spent £20 on building “a stone arch over the canal from the Northgate Garden to the Blue Coat Hospital with an iron rail thereon” so that condemned prisoners could visit the chapel. The arch, the Bridge of Sighs, still survives. (See Plate 8).

The Blue Coat School was established in Chester at the suggestion of the bishop, Dr. Stratford, in 1700, and after some delay the present buildings were completed in 1717. They are constructed of brick in Flemish bond elaborated with stone facings and cornices, and form three sides of a quadrangle, which until recently was enclosed by iron railings and a pair of handsome arched gates. The early eighteenth-century annual printed reports of the Blue Coat School were illustrated with an interesting engraving, showing the building elaborated with a parapet of turned stone balusters. It must, however, be considered very doubtful if this architectural feature was ever carried into effect, as the existing exterior of the fabric with its plain parapet gives every indication of having been set up in its present form at the time of the original building in 1717.<sup>(6)</sup>

<sup>(4)</sup> F. Gastrell, *Notitia Cestriensis*, Chetham Society, Vol. VIII, O.S., pp. 102, 103.

<sup>(5)</sup> F. Simpson, *The Walls of Chester* (1910), pp. 26-7.

T. Hughes, *The Stranger’s Handbook to Chester* (1856), p. 99.

<sup>(6)</sup> See also the illustration in Dr. Foote Gower’s *Sketch of the Materials for a new and complete History of Cheshire*, 1800, Plate 5.



PLATE 8 : LITTLE ST. JOHN, CHESTER.  
BRIDGE OF SIGHS.



The interior furnishings survived in their original form until the whole establishment including the chapel came under the jurisdiction of the City Municipal Charities Trustees in 1852. Two years later the building was restored to conform with the tastes of the day, which resulted in the interior of the chapel acquiring early Victorian appearance. This occurred during the chaplaincy of Frederick Forde. Some time previously the affairs of the School and the property had given cause for anxiety, and in 1842 a solution was sought in the court of chancery, when the attorney general propounded an elaborate, but altogether unworkable scheme for the administration of the Blue Coat charity estates.<sup>(7)</sup>

One of the attorney general's proposals to be rejected was that "of rebuilding or enlarging the present chapel". After many years of unsatisfactory litigation the affairs of the Hospital appear to have been settled in 1848 after the lord chancellor upheld the findings of the master of the rolls, who had declared in 1842 that all the properties of the Hospital were subject to a trust. Under the new administration the trustees were soon in a position to publish a statement of affairs revealing reasonable prosperity and well being. According to their report for the year 1850, the total receipts were £810 2s. 5d. with expenditure for the same period £770 18s. 0d.<sup>(8)</sup> At this period John Edwards, the master, had in his care thirty-two Blue Coat boys, who were taught, boarded, clothed and lodged in the house, and sixty day scholars, who received instruction only and were distinguished from the boarders by their green caps. At the age of fourteen all the boys were required to leave school "and go to situations as apprentices, clerks, etc". This state of affairs was very different from the rule printed in the eighteenth-century reports dealing with the good order and government of the Blue Coat School, which required the

<sup>(7)</sup> The Chancery Commissioners prepared a full report in 1835. It is a valuable survey of the Hospital's long existence.

<sup>(8)</sup> In a letter dated 16 October 1951, from Blunham Rectory, near Bedford, the Rev. T. C. Teape-Fugard wrote:

"About 1842, the revenue of the Hospital was about £600; there were six almshouses, and in them six poor women received 1/1 per week each.

"It is interesting to note that the scheme [proposed by the attorney general] states that the chapel is to be consecrated. Bishop Gastrell's *Notitia Cestriensis* states that it was. To settle the issue I applied for a faculty for certain changes; a faculty can only be granted for consecrated buildings. The diocesan Chancellor proved that a faculty had been granted in the nineteenth century, and granted mine on the 4th day of May 1936. This is important as proposals have been made recently for the chapel building to serve as a kitchen and a furniture repository.

"The status of Little St. John is not easy to determine, it is not a parish church, but the church of an extra-parochial precinct, like the cathedral. It is an incumbency and cure of souls: its parson has a freehold, and is on the Rural Dean's Commission as one of the city churches. Part of the priest's pay is from Church Commissioners—old Queen Anne's Bounty, as an incumbent. It has always been the chapel of the hospital of St. John, but it has always been open to the public. The members of St. John's Hospital had seats of right, and the Blue Coat School seats of grace in the church. As a consecrated building it is under the jurisdiction of the Bishop and his Chancellor. The present boundaries of the church's precinct appear to be unknown. Thomas Helsby quotes a population return for 1871 as follows:—

Little St. John Extra Parochial Precinct:			
Inhabited Houses.	Families.	Uninhabited.	
70	76	1	
		Males.	Females.
		162	251

In the rural dean's visitation made on 30 July 1923, Canon Bennett recorded: "The position of this Church is peculiar, and it is not clear how precisely it should be designated. It is not a parish church; yet it is one of the city churches, and described as such in the Schedule of the Rural Dean's Commission. It is not a Chapelry; yet it is the chapel serving the ancient foundation of the Hospital of St. John. It forms a part (apparently an integral part constructively) of the block of buildings occupied and owned by the governors of the Blue Coat School; yet it has no official connexion, direct or indirect, with that institution".

master "to avoid teaching the Boys anything that may set them above the condition of sailors or servants, and to train them up in such a manner as may render them most useful to the public". (See Appendix.)

As may be expected, when the interior of the chapel was "restored" in 1854, all the original furniture was thrown out, yet despite the intrusion of Victorian ideas the chapel still possesses dignity and charm. The proportions of the building are basically good, and the fine round-headed windows are typical of the period. Four windows, uniformly spaced in the south wall, look on to the city wall and the Northgate, two in the north wall look into the forecourt, and the large east window is almost entirely obliterated by a large oil painting, "The Flight into Egypt" after Murillo, which serves as an altar piece. It is the gift of the Rev. T. C. Teape-Fugard, M.A., Chaplain of Little St. John from 1932 to 1948.<sup>(9)</sup> The ceiling of the chapel is coved and pierced with dormer windows, each placed immediately above the main lights. Of the existing furniture, the Holy Table is partially old, having curious pilaster-style wall legs. The turned altar rails are particularly successful considering they were obtained from Trentham Hall, Staffordshire, where originally they served an entirely different purpose. They were given by the sisters of St. John's Hospital, after being set together in accordance with designs prepared by Mr. J. C. Dewhurst, and on completion, the rails were dedicated on 4 July 1937 by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Norman Tubbs, D.D., then archdeacon and until May 1953 dean of Chester. The Royal Arms over the north door were set up in the same year. The improvised and unsatisfactory bell cote at the east end accommodates the small ship's bell from S.S. *Galeka* given in 1919, by Sir Owen Phillips, shipowner, later Lord Kysant.<sup>(10)</sup> Possibly the most interesting piece of furniture in the chapel is a long-handled copper collecting pan bearing the inscription "St. John's Chapel 1795". This, I believe, was rescued a few years ago from a local antique shop. No marriages are solemnised in the chapel, but at least during this century many infants have been baptised there. It is in this chapel that funeral services for almspeople are customarily held, and at some period, possibly before 1717, burials must have taken place within the building, for when excavating for the instalment of heating apparatus towards the end of last century, the workmen unearthed several skeletons.<sup>(11)</sup>

<sup>(9)</sup> The Rev. T. C. Teape-Fugard writes, "While I was incumbent, the oak altar rails were added, the sanctuary enlarged, and a simple sedilia set there. I gave the simple pulpit, and bought from Sir E. Naylor-Leyland the altar piece, 'The Flight into Egypt', which I presented to the church. The King's Arms were set over the door. The use of the Eucharistic Vestments was resumed in 1936 after a gap of twenty years. I was glad to restore a sanctuary lamp to Little St. John's; when I think of the Sisters of St. John's Hospital still coming to church to receive the Bread of Life after 800 years, I know that, in spite of the changes of the years, Earl Ranulf's lamp still burns".

<sup>(10)</sup> The hospital clock strikes the hours on a bell hung in a cupola situated in the centre of the roof ridging. The bell is inscribed "Come away make no delay 1716", and was cast by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester.

<sup>(11)</sup> R. Stewart-Brown, in *The Hospital of St. John at Chester*, drew attention to "an early (undated) agreement between the abbot of Chester and the brethren of the hospital that all the latter's servants wearing secular garb should pay tithes and offerings to the mother church of St. Werburgh. The gardener, butler, prior's groom and the women in attendance at the hospital on the sick, were exempted unless any of them also engaged in trade or business, when they were



The chapel plate<sup>(12)</sup> is exceptionally fine and well preserved. The oldest vessel is a large chalice of 1641, bearing the inscription "The Gift of John Thomason, Alderman and Justice of the peace, to the Chappell Belonging to the Hospitall of St. John the Baptist without the Northgate in the City of Chester 1717". There is a cup of 1781 embellished with lovers' knots and floral garland decoration, which renders it unsuitable for use as a chalice; the cup bears no inscription and its origin is unknown. The small credence paten of 1716 is inscribed near the rim, "The Gift of Mrs. Alice Thomason Wid. to the new chappell belonging to the Hospitall of St. John Bapt. without the Northgate in the City of Chester 1717". The larger credence paten, *circa* 1730, is inscribed "The Gift of John Graham, LL.M., Incumbent to the Chapel of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Chester, A.D. 1864". The flagon bears an inscription reading, "The gift of Geo. Brydges Granville Esq. to the Chapel of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Chester, A.D. 1840". Previous to the presentation of this gift the Corporation of Chester lent one of their flagons; the resolution of the City Council dated 26 March 1801 reads "that the Silver Ewer the gift of Roger Whitley Esq. to this Incorporation be taken out of the Mayor's Chest and sent from time to time for the use of Little St. John in administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper".

The following is an incomplete list of a few incumbents, perpetual curates, and priests in charge, who have maintained services at the chapel within comparatively recent times:—

- C.1864 John Graham, LL.M.  
 C.1870 Frederick Forde, M.A.  
 C.1886–1916 J. L. Bedford.

Revived the Eucharistic vestments at Little St. John's in the face of some opposition. His two servants did much embroidery for the church, some of which remains. He was buried in his vestments.

- 1916–1924 F. G. Wright, D.D.  
 Ex-army chaplain possessing an American Doctor of Divinity degree. Maintained a full rota of services and built up a large congregation.  
 1924–1932 E. P. Alexander, M.A.  
 1932–1948 T. C. W. C. Teape-Fugard, M.A.  
 1948 Canon J. Beddow. Vicar of St. Oswald and Priest in charge of Little St. John's.

to pay tithes from their outside profits to the church. Strangers and wayfarers might receive the sacraments in the hospital church so long as this did not prejudice the rightful parishioners of the mother church to which everyone staying at the hospital, not as servants, in secular dress, must pay their tithes. (Chartulary of Chester Abbey, II, 299.) Both St. Werburgh's and St. John's are parties to another arrangement, made between 1198 and 1208 with the hospital, that the brethren should have a graveyard and rights of burial, but only for the poor who died in the hospital and the brethren and sisters who had worn its habit while in good health and for at least eight days. On breach of this agreement and after three warnings the privilege of burial was to be forfeited. All the brethren were to undertake to this effect before assuming their garb. This, and somewhat similar agreements (Chartulary of Chester Abbey, II 299–201), with the nuns of Chester and the friars preacher of St. Nicholas, were designed to prevent evasion of the profitable burial rights of the great churches by the reception of persons on their death-beds into the hospital and the other houses mentioned, whereby fees and mortuary legacies were frequently secured".

<sup>(12)</sup> The Royal Commissioners, when making their survey at Chester in May 1553, left with John Levesey the chaplain of "The Hospital of St. John's without the Northgate", a chalice and paten of silver gilt weighing ten ounces, one bell in the steeple, four table cloths, and all the books in use. The other church possessions comprising copes, vestments, etc. were of such small value they were given unto the poor.

## APPENDIX

RULES FOR THE GOOD ORDER AND GOVERNMENT  
OF THE BLUE COAT CHARITY SCHOOL IN CHESTER, 1784

## Relating to the MASTER

1. That on a Vacancy of a Master, a general Meeting of the Trustees be appointed for supplying the same.
2. That every Benefactor of Ten Pounds, or Subscriber of Twenty Shillings per Annum, be admitted to vote at the Election of a Master.
3. That all Elections be by Ballot, and all Questions decided by a Majority of Votes then present, which shall be taken by Ballot, if required.
4. That the Master of the Church of England, as by law established, of sober Life and Conversation, and capable of instructing the Boys in Spelling, Reading, Writing, Vulgar Arithmetick, Navigation, and also in the Principles of the Christian Religion.
5. That the Master do daily attend the said School from Lady-Day to Michaelmas, from Seven o'Clock in the Morning to eleven, and from one o'Clock in the afternoon to five; and from Michaelmas to Lady-Day, from eight o'Clock in the Morning to eleven, and from one o'Clock to four in the Afternoon; and that he keeps the boys diligently to their Duty, during the Hours of schooling.
6. That he teach the boys true spelling of words and make them mind their Stops, and bring them to pronounce and read distinctly without a Tone.
7. That he make it his principal Care to teach the boys to read the Bible; to instruct them in the Principles of the Christian Religion, according to the Doctrine of the Church of England; and that he hear them their Cateschism twice in every week, expounding the same once in every Month.
8. That he teach the Boys those Doctrines and Principles of Religion, which are in their Nature most useful in the Course of a private Life.
9. That he never fail reading Prayers in the School Morning and Evening, and that he likewise teach the Boys to say grace before and after Meat, and to repeat the Lord's Prayer every Night going to Bed, and at their rising in the Morning.
10. That twice on every Sunday in the Year the Boys go in procession, accompanied by their Master to and from the Parish Churches; and that he take care their Behaviour, during Divine Service, be in all respects decent; and this Duty to be performed in such a Manner that they may be seen in every Parish Church in the City, once in every Quarter and that (accompanied by him) they go duly to Prayers at the Chapel adjoining to their School on every Tuesday and Thursday throughout the whole Year, and likewise on every Law Holiday.
11. That he take particular Care of the Manners and Behaviour of the Boys, not to suffer them to play at any Games of Chance, and by all proper Methods, discourage Vice, such as lying, cursing, swearing, and profaning the Lord's Day, &c. putting them often in Mind, and obliging them to get by Heart, such Part of the Holy Scripture where those Things are forbid, and where Christians are commanded to be faithful and obedient to their Masters, diligent in their Business, and quiet peaceable Men.
12. That he suffer not the Boys to stroll and ramble about the Town at undue Hours and that none of them be allowed (without his Leave) to go out of the Courtyard after eight o'Clock at Night from Lady-day to Michaelmas, and not after five from Michaelmas to Lady-day, and that they do not at any time appear beyond the Iron Gates without their Caps and Bands.
13. That he avoid teaching the Boys any Thing that may set them above the Condition of Sailors or Servants, and to train them up in such a Manner as may render them most useful to the Public.



14. That he take Care the Boys Apartment be kept clean and sweet, and that they make their own Beds every morning; and that the Boys be washed and combed before they come to School, and that they likewise keep their Books clean.

### Relating to the BOYS

1. That no Boy but of sound Health, and not under the age of Ten Years nor above twelve be admitted to this Charity-School, and that a Certificate of his Age under the Hands of the Minister and Church-Wardens, be produced at his Admission; and that he be discharged at the End of four years from that time, and such Vacancy filled up in the following Manner: That any two Subscribers of Ten shillings per Annum next in Rotation, shall have the Nomination of one Boy in their due Course, which Rotation will be taken as the Subscribers stand in the Seniority upon the list; That a Subscriber of Twenty shillings or a Benefactor of Ten or Twenty Pounds, shall have the Nomination of one Boy in due Rotation: That a Benefactor of Forty Pounds, or a Subscriber of 40s. be allowed two Boys; and so in Proportion for every additional Benefaction of Twenty Pounds, or Subscription of Twenty Shilling; so that no Benefactor or Subscriber be allowed to nominate more than one boy in any one Year.

2. That at the Expiration of the said four Years, the sum of Three Pounds be given to each Boy at his Dismission as an Apprentice Fee to the Sea, Husbandry, or any Trade or Occupation that may be thought most useful to the Public, provided, on examination by the Trustees then present, he is found to have made a competent Progress in Reading, Writing, Casting Accounts, and Navigation.

3. That in the case of Disobedience, or want of due subordination to their Master, they shall be punished in such a Manner as he shall think proper to inflict; but if guilty of any immoral, or notorious Breach of Duty, such as Stealing, &c. the Master to lay the same before the Trustees, or the Treasurers, that the Punishment may be the more Exemplary.

4. That to encourage a Spirit of Emulation in the Boys, four annual Prizes of Five Shillings each be given at Christmas, to such of them as shall be found on Examination to excell in Spelling, Reading, Writing, and Accounts; to be disposed of in the following manner viz.: To the Boy who shall spell best the first Year's standing, in the School, Five Shillings; to the Boy who shall read best in the second Year, Five shillings; to the Boy who shall write the best Hand, the third Year, Five Shillings; to him who shall have made the greatest Proficiency in Navigation and Accounts, the fourth and last Year, the like Premium of Five Shillings.

### CHURCH OF ST. OLAVE, CHESTER

**S**TANDING forlorn and neglected on an elevated site on the east side of Lower Bridge Street, Chester, the little building, which for centuries was the ancient church of the parish of St. Olave, has now reached such an advanced state of decay that little can be done to restore it to any semblance of its former status. Ormerod, writing in 1819, described it as "a low mean building", and all through the centuries it appears to have been the unwanted Cinderella of the city's churches. Its early history is lost in obscurity. Poole, writing in 1815, advanced the theory that the church was first built "in the time of Olavus, a king of the



PLATE 9 : ST. OLAVE'S, CHESTER.  
EXTERIOR FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.



Norwegians, who flourished a few reigns before the Norman Conquest,<sup>(1)</sup> and assisted the English against Canute the Dane". Certainly the name infers a foundation in Danish times. It is probable that the dedication was conferred in memory of St. Olaf, a converted Christian king of Norway, who, after assisting the English in their opposition to Danish dominion, returned in 1030 to his native land and was there slain by his subjects.<sup>(2)</sup> He was subsequently canonised. There are many other churches in England dedicated to this saint. London has no less than four.

In 1722 Bishop Gastrell referred to the building and parish as follows:

"St. Olave's <sup>(3)</sup> certif.[ied] £1.00.00, viz. for Surp.[lice] fees. Here is no provision at all for a Minister, and of the Church be in some tolerable repair, it is not fit for any public Service, nor is any performed besides Baptism and Buriall. The Minister of St. Michael's takes care of this parish at present, viz. 1722, and has done soe for 20 y[ears] past.	Augm. N. 85. Fam. 85. ... 54. Pap. 00. Diss. 00.
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B[ishop] of Chester, Patron.

In the copy of an old Court Roll, 13 R. 2, the Advowson of St. Olave's is mentioned among other Advowsons belong[ing] to [the] Ab[bey] of St. Werburgh. Pres. B[ook] D[ean and] Ch. p. 161, and th<sup>t</sup> a Clerk was Institut[ed] and induct[ed] upon [the] present[ation] of [the] Abbey, in [the] time of K[ing] John. Ib. p. 163.

*Ricardus Pincerna*<sup>(4)</sup> *dedit ecclesiam S<sup>ti</sup> Olavi et terrā juxta ecclesiam*, w<sup>th</sup> gift was confirmed by Rich<sup>d</sup>, Earl of Chester, an[no] 119, temp. R. Hen. I.

No mention of this Church in Instit[ution] B<sup>e</sup>.

An. 1661, Mr. Vaudrey, Patron, who sold it to Mr. Haney of Chester. MS. Hulm 95.1.11.

2 Wardens, 2 Assistants.

Curate licensed to St. Olave's an. 1693, v[ide] Subs. B[ook]. Curate licensed to St. Michael's and St. Olave's, an. 1694. *Ib*.

Augmented an. 1723 with £200; £100 was given by S<sup>r</sup> Thomas Hanmer, out of Mrs. Barton's money; £50 given by S<sup>r</sup> Rich. Grosvenor; the other £50 Raised by the Parish. The Church was then in good repair.

By Mr. Mather £10 to the poor, and £10 by Mr. Cotton, in the hands of the Parish. Severall other Charities have been by former Churchwardens mispent or Charities lost."

Ormerod confirmed that the church was given by Richard Pincerna, in the time of Richard, earl of Chester, to the abbey of St. Werburgh. Pincerna's charter of 1119 confirmed this gift together with another gift of land adjoining the church, and two enclosures in the city market place. In Ormerod's day the building varied

<sup>(1)</sup> St. Olave's is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey, but this by no means proves its non-existence.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3s., IV, 18. The little church of St. Olave tells its own tale of Chester's trade with the Norsemen of Dublin, and the Irish Coast, and perhaps more distant lands. Bringing their small ships up to the discharging wharf by the bridge over the Dee, these hardy mariners and their kinsfolk would settle for longer or shorter periods close by, perhaps in the narrow alley that still runs beside the church, and they would there erect the shrine of the Norse king and saint.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Notitia Cestriensis*, edited by F. R. Raines, Chetham Society (1845), Vol. VIII, pp. 109-11.

<sup>(4)</sup> Ancestor of the Butlers of Bewey, lords of Warrington, and of the earls of Ormonde, and Brecknock. This family traces its descent from the great feudal house of Walter, Theodore Walter having assumed, according to various pedigrees, the name of Boteler, *Pincerna*, from his office of Butler of Ireland. He married Maud, sister of Thomas à Becket, archbishop of Canterbury. The ancient crest of the Butlers was a man kneeling on the left knee, and holding a cup in his right hand.

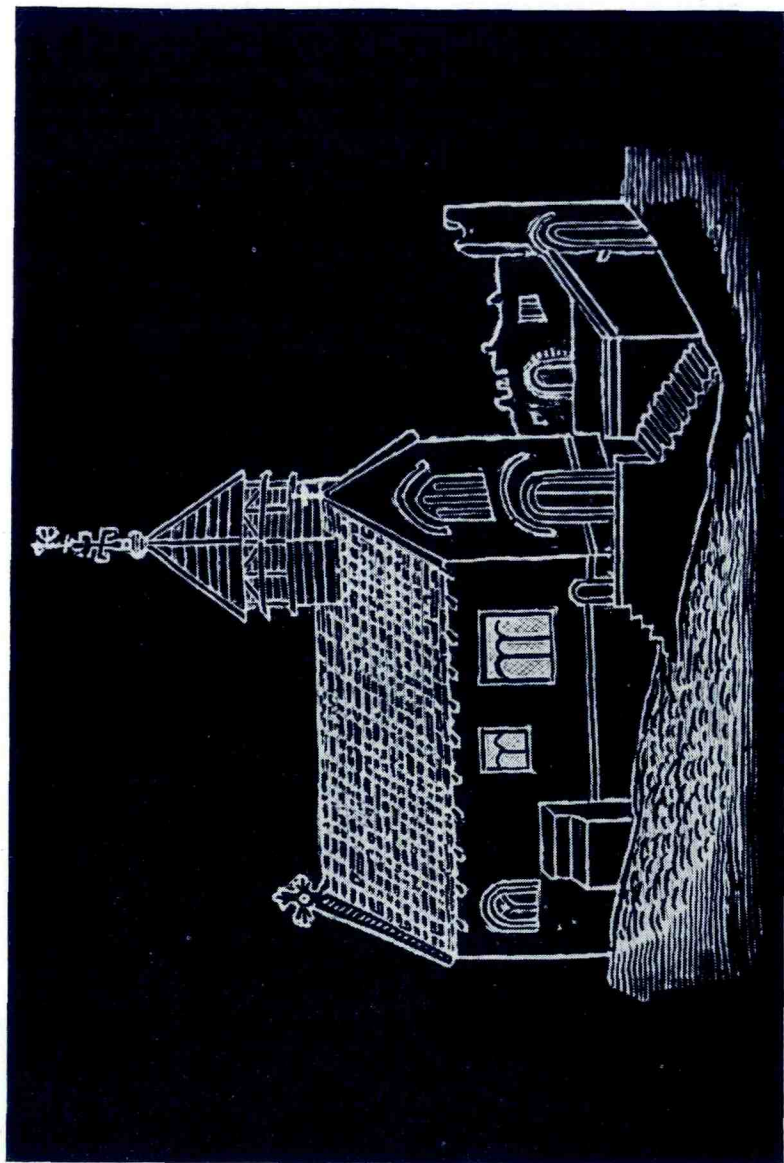


PLATE 10 : ST. OLAVE'S, CHESTER.

From a drawing made by Randle Holme about 1660. Harleian MS. 2073, f. 39.



very little in general appearance from the drawing made by Randle Holme about 1660.<sup>(5)</sup> (See Plate 10.)

Finance was an ever present problem with the church through the ages, possibly because of the smallness of the parish. As early as 1394-5, according to Thomas Helsby, a decree of the bishop stated that "the fruits of the church were not sufficient for the sustentation of the Rectors", and it was therefore ordered to be incorporated with the church of St. Mary on the Hill. The episcopal registers of Lichfield, however, disclose that the church acquired a separate existence again in 1434, and that no less than seven rectors were presented from 1434 to 1459. Little is known of the affairs of the church after that until Roger Gorst signed the registers and those of St. Michael in 1628-9. The Civil Wars brought disuse again, and the Restoration did nothing to improve St. Olave's fortunes. In 1700-1 a brief was issued for the repair of the fabric, and in 1726 the church funds were augmented by Queen Anne's Bounty. With the help of small parochial contributions the church struggled on until 11 July 1839, when by an order in council it ceased to have a separate existence, and became part of the parish of St. Michael.<sup>(6)</sup>

In 1815 the interesting guide to Chester published by T. Poole refers to the church as containing "nothing worthy of note; the building itself is a paltry structure, and the small church-yard in a most disgusting and disgraceful state. . . . There are two bells. Many small charitable bequests of five and ten pounds to the poor have been sunk in the erection of a gallery; the parish pays interest for the money". Joseph Hemingway, who lived at 44 Nicholas Street, Chester, and knew the city and church well, writing sometime before 1831, observed, "The church is a low miserable building of red stone. . . . In 1802 a new wooden steeple (not much better than a pigeon-cote) was built, covered with lead, the old one was covered with slates. In the year 1819, the inside of the church, which till then was in an unseemly condition, was painted and cleaned, under the direction of the Rev. G. Pearson, then Vicar, and has now a clean and comely appearance. In 1821, the population of the Parish was only 587". In the *Gazetteer* of Francis White & Co. published in 1860 the building was referred to as "a small neat structure, undergoing considerable repairs, after the designs of Mr. James Harrison, and will shortly be opened as a public school for the education of the poor children belonging to the parish". In 1882 Thomas Helsby and in 1907 Stanley Ball<sup>(7)</sup> both referred to the building as being used as a free school.

The building, built entirely of sandstone, is small, decayed, and

<sup>(5)</sup> *Cheshire Sheaf*, XVIII, 99, and 3s., XVI, 13. In the original drawing by Holme of the church of St. Olave, Chester (Harl. MS. 2073, f. 39) there is written above the ruinous building on the south—"the ruins of Paris Hall". This note has not been included in reproductions of Holme's sketch. This denotes that the hall in question stood on the plot of ground to the south of the church. It was a large building and is generally referred to as Paris's Place or Hawarden's Hall. The owners were important people and much about the house has been included at various dates in the *Cheshire Sheaf*.

<sup>(6)</sup> *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3s., XVIII, 88; XX, 11; XXXI, 37; XLIV, 20; XLV, 14.

<sup>(7)</sup> T. S. Ball, *Church Plate of the City of Chester*, 1907.

of doubtful age. Much of it possibly dates from early mediaeval times. At some period the church was extended eastwards, for the string which protrudes a little below window level on three sides of the older building is not continued into the later addition. The bell cote, and the west doorway with three-light windows above, were renewed last century, and a good deal of restoration is also discernable in the masonry of the western gable. A simple weather vane surmounting the stone bell cote and dated 1802 is no doubt part of the erection referred to by Hemingway. The roof is comparatively new, and a wretchedly poor follow-on to the mediaeval one which formerly existed. It is constructed without any distinguishing architectural feature, and reveals the abject poverty of the parish which permitted such a poor example to be erected in a cathedral city, whose ancient churches possess some of the finest mediaeval carved timber roofs in existence. The north wall of the church forms part of the boundary of a narrow lane, and as this is too narrow to permit of a footpath the crumbling sandstone masonry has been further damaged by abrasions from passing vehicles. The small shallow doorway shown on Randle Holmes's drawing is still there but walled in, as indeed it may have been about the year 1660, when the Chester antiquary made his sketch of the building. In his day the shallow forecourt at the west end of the church was approached by two flights of steps, one leading directly into Lower Bridge Street, and the other terminating in the narrow lane. Probably in an attempt to make this thoroughfare wider, the steps were removed early last century as the forecourt is now reached by a short flight of steps placed at right angles to the former approach. The large two-stepped buttress placed against the north wall shown in Randle Holme's drawing has also disappeared.

The tiny graveyard, which extends the length of the south wall, but is barely fourteen feet in width, leads on to a small enclosure overlooking Lower Bridge Street, at the west end of the enclosure. This ground must have been used and re-used hundreds of times in its long history for burials, and we can well understand the alarm felt by Joseph Hemingway when writing in 1831 of the scantiness of burial grounds. "What renders their enlargement impracticable is that they are mostly surrounded on every side by dense buildings. In all our church-yards there is scarcely a square yard of land that has not been tenanted by the dead, whose flesh and bones still remain undecayed. There is something in this state of things that shocks the firmest mind, and excites an ardent wish that this evil should be remedied." After much delay Chester General Cemetery was opened in 1851, and the difficulty of interring in the crowded city churchyards overcome.

After such a varied existence, particularly with the many changes which occurred at St. Olave's last century, and again during recent years when the building served as a wardens' centre during the war, it is not surprising that the interior bears little resemblance to a church.



The walls are plainly plastered, and the flaking whitewash reveals faint indications of the texts which at some comparatively recent period were placed on their surface. There is no furniture beyond a decayed Victorian font, placed in the south-west corner. This seems to have been used for christening at the time the building was being used as a free school. Mr. Robert Johnson, a former warden of St. Michael's, affirms that he was baptized at St. Olave's in 1887, and that occasional services were still held in the building until early this century.

The benefaction boards grouped around the west door are unreadable, but among the mural and wall tablets are memorials to Joseph Dale and his wife Catherine, who died the one in 1814 and the other in 1849, to Mary Ann Willoughby, who died in 1832, and to three infants, Loretta Maria Gardner, Mary Wardle, and S. M. Iremonger, as well as the following inscriptions on the north and south walls respectively:

Sacred to the memory of Ann. wife of Thomas Townshend ESQ. The Daughter of George Mainwaring Esq. of Brombrow, by Ann Walcot Of the ancient Family of Walcot, of Walcot in the County of Salop.

This excellent Person was so amiable in all the Relations of Life, and so accomplished in Its Duties, as if her whole Attention had been engaged here, and she was so conversant with Heaven, and the offices of a devout life, as if she was a stranger upon Earth, and had an Interest only in Futurity,

She died in the Bloom of her years August, 22<sup>th</sup> 1774,

No one ever better exemplified the words of the apocryphal scripture, "that Honourable,

Age is not that which standeth in Length of Days, Nor that is measured by numbers of years,

But that wisdom is the Gray Hairs unto men and an unspotted Life is Old Age,"

Mary Daughter of Henry Hesketh of Chester the second beloved wife of Thomas Townshend ESQ.

Departed this Life Sept. 21. 1801.

Aged 56 years.

Also the above Thomas Townshend ESQ.

Who departed this Life May 27th 1882.

Aged 84 years.

#### SACRED

To the Memory of Thomas Corles

Formly of the City of Dublin,

But Late of the City of Chester,

Merchant who departed this Life

the 8th day of April 1788 Aetat 60.

Also of

Margaret his Wife who died on the 26th March 1790 Aetat 60.

This monument is erected by

their Nephew William Corles,

as a Tribute of his Affection and Gratitude.

## SACRED

To the Memory of William Corles  
Of the City of Chester, Merchant,  
Who closed an Honest and estimable Life,  
On the 14th day of Feb. 1784 Aetat 52.

Also of

Helena His Wife, who followed him,  
deservedly Lamented on the 14th day of Feb. 1799.  
Aetat 56. Filial Reverence and affection,  
has erected this Tablet of their Memories.

The registers date from 1611 and are now preserved in the vestry safe at St. Michael's church, together with a fine silver ewer inscribed "The gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Booth, Daughter of Nathaniell Booth of Mottram Andrew in the County of Chester Esq. to St. Olave's church in Chester 1728.

Various proposals for employing the church to some useful purpose have been advanced recently. Is it too much to hope that some day the fabric of the old church may again serve the diocese? If used as a muniment room for diocesan records it could well become the repository of a rich heritage of ancient registers, wardens' accounts, and documents of national importance.

## CHAPEL OF ST. JAMES, WOODHEAD

**SITUATED** on the rugged hillside above the old high road<sup>(1)</sup> from Stockport to Sheffield, Woodhead Chapel is one of the smallest and most isolated in the diocese of Chester. The valley is hemmed in by gaunt hills, and Woodhead parish at the north-eastern extremity of the county is almost within hailing distance of the neighbouring counties of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Derbyshire. The little chapel is reached by a rough road constructed to the west side of the building; a short but steeper road leads up from the south side. In the Longdendale valley below the chapel are the great reservoirs of Manchester Corporation, and although this great watershed has many visitors in the summer, the towering hills in the winter months are bleak and inhospitable. Canon Raines, writing in 1845, referred to the chapel as "a very humble and primitive structure, in a sterile neighbourhood, amongst moors immeasurably long", and many other writers have drawn attention to the exposed area where the scattered hill farmers lead a spartan existence.

The chapel was originally built in 1487 by Sir Edmund Shaa or Shaw, a native of Dukinfield, a small town near to Woodhead possessing a church which was then a chapel of ease to Stockport.

<sup>(1)</sup> This long arm of Cheshire stretching into the Pennines was the old salt road, and it was to save tolls that it was preserved as a part of the county. The road was called the Saltersford Turnpike. A particularly dangerous fork in the road from Manchester to Sheffield here is marked by a black milestone with a white skull and crossbones.



Migrating to London he prospered as a goldsmith, and along with his brother, Dr. Ralph Shaa, was active in establishing Richard III on the throne. In spite of this, Sir Edmund retained his position as court jeweller to Henry VII as he had been to the two preceding monarchs. In his will, after reciting how he wished his *Obit* to be annually remembered, he stated, "I will have two honest priests, one of them to sing his mass and say his other divine service in a chapel that I have made in Longdendale [referred to in another part of the will as Woodhead Chapel] in the county of Chester; and to pray especially for my soul, and for the souls of my father and mother . . . and the other to celebrate divine service at one of the altars in Stockport Church, and that the same cunning priest keep a Grammar school continually in the said town of Stockport". Sir Edmund Shaa died 20 April 1487, just a month after making his will, and was buried according to his directions in the "Church of St. Thomas of Acres" in London. He was the Lord Mayor of London mentioned in Shakespeare's "Richard III".

At the Reformation Sir Edmund Shaw's chantry chapel at Woodhead was seised of the king, and, as noted by Earwaker,<sup>(2)</sup> the following return appeared in the Chantry Roll for Cheshire taken in 1548.

"Woodhede in Londondale; the stipendary in the seyde church, Hugh [Guy?] Sylvester, of th'age of 1 yeres [50 years], incumbent,<sup>(3)</sup> the yerely value payd in redy money by the Goldsmiths of London, iiii<sup>l</sup> vj<sup>s</sup> viii<sup>d</sup>. Plate and Jewells none, Goodes and Ornaments none, Lead and bells none".

Earwaker goes on to state that in the following year the bailiff acknowledged receipt of £4. 6. 8 from Woodhead "for a certain annual rent paid by the Goldsmiths of London at the feast of St. Martin, annually". Although deprived of its endowments, the chapel was certainly being used in the early seventeenth century. During the Commonwealth an attempt was made to add to its meagre income of thirty shillings, but two years after the Restoration the chapel was described as "now in decay". "Soon after this time it was probably repaired and once more used; and about the middle of the last century its small revenues were augmented from Queen Anne's Bounty".

The chapel as it exists today is a small oblong building constructed of coarse flint stone, with a grey slate roof. It has a small wooden bell-cote at the west end containing one bell without mark or inscription. The chapel was clumsily repaired about 1830, and again in 1912. According to *The Directory of Cheshire* published by Francis White & Co. of Sheffield in 1860, the chapel became "much dilapidated about 30 years ago, but was again put in a state of reparation by the farmers". The south wall of the chapel has a central doorway hidden behind a new porch erected in 1924

<sup>(2)</sup> J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire*, Vol. II, pp. 171-2.

<sup>(3)</sup> His burial is recorded in the Mottram Register:—"1579. 23 die Aprilis. Sr. Guy Sylvester—buried".

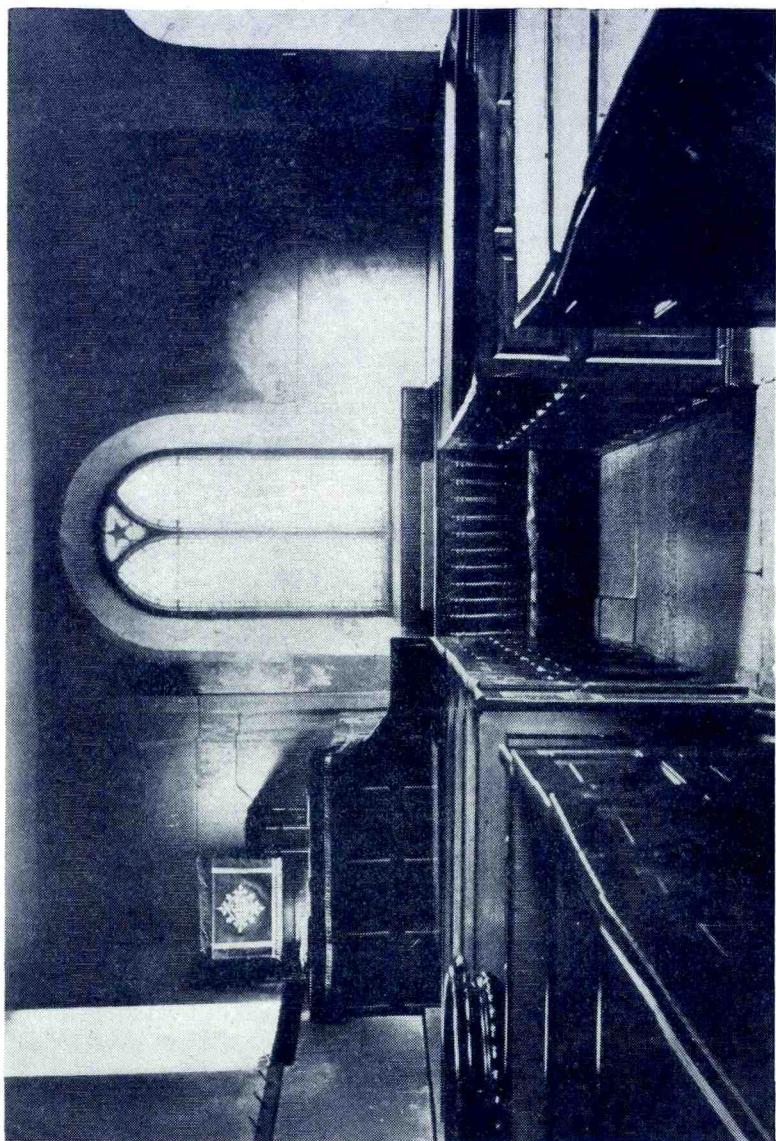


PLATE 11 : WOODHEAD CHAPEL, INTERIOR LOOKING EAST BEFORE  
INTERIOR RE-MODELLING IN 1912.



as a memorial to the fallen in the first world war. Two large round-headed windows placed on either side of the doorway form the best architectural feature of the building. The east end contains a simple round-headed window of two lights divided by a wooden mullion. The north side of the chapel looks on the rough hillside, and has a round-headed window placed in the centre of the wall with two lesser square-headed domestic type windows inserted at higher levels immediately beneath the roof line. The west end of the chapel is windowless with the exception of a small oblong aperture, which until recently repaired permitted so much water to seep through into the building that for years a tin bath was used to collect the drainage.

Until the year 1912 or thereabouts the chapel possessed its Georgian furniture intact, and the pleasing old-world appearance of the interior may be seen from Plate No. 11, reproduced from a photograph in the possession of Mrs. Nichols of 99a Old Road, Tintwistle. In the shockingly misguided attempt to smarten and modernize the old chapel in 1912 almost everything was altered to the disadvantage of the building. The incised grave slabs covering the remains of the old hill-farming families of Woodhead seen in the photograph have been hidden under new wooden parquetry blocks which cover the entire chapel floor space. The quaint pew boxes were pulled to pieces, and some of the timber used to wainscot the walls. New timber was used only within the small sanctuary. Until the chapel was partially redecorated in 1951, the old pew doors, utilized in the wainscoting, retained many initials of the original occupants. Mr. Edward V. Davis, the vicar's warden, states he helped to scrape off the lettering before the wood was painted its present unsatisfactory colour. During the sweeping re-modelling of 1912 the charming early-Georgian turned altar rails and the two-decker pulpit were discarded. Fortunately wiser councils prevailed in considering the fate of the early eighteenth-century font, and this fine example remains quite undamaged except for its coat of treacly paint, and its loss of a small piece of the bowl which was cut away to enable it to be placed closer to the wall. The font, which is entirely constructed of wood, is unusually large for so small a chapel, and gives the impression that it was brought to Woodhead from some other church. The bowl is heavily gadrooned round the base, and the bold pedestal is vigorously carved with foliage. As an example of English Renaissance wood carving, the font would enrich a Wren city church. At the west end of the chapel the singers gallery, *circa* 1800, remains, but the front panelling has been painted to accord with the wall wainscoting. The iron-studded chapel door is interesting with its massive locally fashioned hinges and great plate lock. The chapel is lit by oil-lamps suspended from three hooks in the ceiling. The two old wooden collecting boxes are believed to have been brought from Mottram church.

In the small graveyard from which Mottram church seven miles



PLATE 12 : WOODHEAD CHAPEL: EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY FONT.



away can be seen on a fine day, the oldest stone is to the memory of "Shusanna the wife of James Dyson of Croden Brook who died Feb. 22. 1755 aged 44." The fact that no earlier memorial is to be found in the yard gives some colour to the local tradition that the original Woodhead chapel founded by Sir Edmund Shaa in the fifteenth century was built near the river Etherow on a site known as Robin i' Meer.

All the old church plate has been lost, the small chalice and paten at present in use being modern silver of poor design. Previously pewter plate appears to have been in use, for in November 1951 Mr. Roland J. A. Shelley, a former President of the Society of Pewter Collectors, advised me that a friend of his had recently acquired a pewter paten eight inches in diameter, inscribed *Woodhead Cheshire 1712*. It was made by Thomas Banks of Wigan, a well-known pewterer who flourished about 1700. It is to be hoped that this paten will be restored to Woodhead Chapel. Canon Tyson and the author are making efforts towards that end.

Until 1926 Woodhead remained a separate parish with its own parsonage situated about half a mile west of the chapel. On the death of the Rev. G. N. Hutchinson in 1926, however, Woodhead Chapel was again joined to Mottram, and since then services have been maintained by the clergy of the larger parish. The registers record baptisms from January 1782, burials from March 1782 and marriages from April 1856.

The following is a list of incumbents of Woodhead since 1724.

- 1724 John Gee.
- 1766 Christopher Alcock, B.A.
- 1783 Joseph Broadhurst.
- 1807 Christopher Howe.
- 1850 Richard Blakehurst.
- 1852 William Bateson.
- 1872 Charles Newton.
- 1877 John Chambres, M.A.
- 1905 Samuel Stockton, M.A.
- 1911 G. N. Hutchinson.
- 1926 Canon M. Power, M.A.
- 1951 Canon E. P. Tyson, M.A.