English Catholic History Association

Reg. Charity No. 1072269

NEWSLETTER

VOL. 2, No. 89

DECEMBER 2020

CONTENTS

News and Notes	5
Article	6 – 25
Research Projects	26 – 27
Subscription Reminder	28

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NEWS & NOTES

Note from the Chair

At the point of producing this newsletter we are still very much in the midst of a national lockdown. As an association one of our main charitable aims is the organisation of visits to sites of historical interest, places which have, or still do, have a significant place within the English Catholic landscape. Apart from visits to the supermarket and perhaps the pharmacist, most of us have had very little opportunity to visit anywhere. However, with the vaccination programme in full swing, there is a renewed optimism that the pandemic is at least being challenged by science and that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

We are all now very familiar with interacting via Zoom or Teams, FaceTime and Skype, and the ECHA has been updating members of online activities and in particular a series of talks. Dr Carmen Mangion and Dr Francis Young both gave talks over the autumn via Zoom. Committee members, including myself, have not mastered the 'virtual arts' after a shaky start! A series of online talks and podcasts can be viewed via the website: www.echa.org.uk

I know that not everyone has access to IT to enable this virtual communication so we have arranged for talks to be 'written up' in the future so that members can read about the content of the talks in these newsletters. I do apologise that we are behind with the production of the *Newsletter* however I am pleased to say that I now have enough copy for the 2021 series and the next *Newsletter* will be with you shortly.

We're very keen to hear of your news and developments so please do continue to e-mail or write to us. If you would like to contact me directly, please do, as I am always keen to hear the news of our members. Association correspondence should be sent to secretary@echa.org.uk Stay safe and best wishes to you all.

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Keeping in touch

The membership continues to be strong and we are always happy to welcome new members. If you would like to update your details or are able to provide an e-mail address for communication then please get in touch. All data is held strictly in line with current data protection law and used accordingly. The Association has saved a considerable sum of money by meeting virtually and we will continue to do this for the foreseeable future. Some members prefer, in fact *depend*, upon a hard-copy *Newsletter* so please be assured that these will continue.

News and Notes:

Sting?

An interesting communication came in from the USA regarding a piece of work that, at first, appeared to be about the artist Sting! Evyatar Marienberg has been following the ECHA blog and website for many years and made contact about his recent work*: Religion in England from Prehistoric Times to the Early 1980s*

[see: https://religioninengland.blogspot.com/]

The author is an Associate Professor at the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. It is, in many ways, a microhistory of a Catholic parish in Wallsend (Northumberland) in the 1950s – 70s. We hope to be able to review the book in a future newsletter.

The English medieval churches and the assault on the senses by Evangelical Reformers In the Sixteenth Century

Tim Guile

Abstract

This article deals with the question of why we should value the craftsmanship, art history, and architectural designs of previous generations especially its ecclesiastical buildings and furnishings. It reminds us that we are custodians of the art and craft of our forefathers and that we should cherish it and protect it from damage and destruction. It explores how, in the sixteenth century, a wave of iconoclastic destructiveness swept across England and left a trail of destruction in its wake. The article aims to explore the reasons for this vandalism and how it affected churches and Christian communities. It looks at churches in Oxfordshire and surrounding areas. It is concerned with sensual imagery and the use of the senses in the late medieval church and how this sensory experience for worshippers was gradually eroded and replaced during the Sixteenth Century.

With the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in recent times and the removal of other reminders of the slave trade and an imperial past, we are reminded that art has often been attacked and destroyed by fanatics, reformers or those who oppose what these objects stand for. This is sometimes referred to as 'iconoclasm'. It could be said that art has the power to trigger its own destruction.[1] The issue of images and the role they played in worship was central to the Protestant Reformation. Reformers feared that people were adoring statues and paintings instead of God by praying to them, making offerings, kneeling before them and kissing them. This was the very definition of the sin of idolatry as far as they interpreted the Bible. Removing images, as they saw it, also removed the temptations and dangers they posed. Under Henry VIII church images were mostly still permitted but the government of Edward VI in the mid-Sixteenth Century was more radical. A regime of systematic iconoclasm was

[1] The Financial Times, 5 July 2013

implemented. Orders were given to 'utterly extinct and destroy' images 'so that there remain no memory of the same.'[2] Religious images were accordingly removed, defaced, whitewashed or obliterated to prevent people's engagement with them. The turbulent religious changes which occurred during the period 1535 to 1555, were marked by successive waves of iconoclasm in English churches and cathedrals. Statues, screens, wall paintings, and windows were among the 'idols' targeted by fanatics of the new state church. While some objects and artworks were completely destroyed, others remained, but bearing the marks of iconoclastic violence. Although the nineteenth century saw many churches and religious art works 'restored' and repaired, many were left untouched. Even today, many English churches contain numerous examples of defaced images which have suffered beheading or scoring of the face and hands, yet have been neither repaired nor removed. For around 480 years, the vast majority of their existence, many of these statues, images and objects have been as they were left by those who chose to damage and deface them. One could contrast the craftsmanship and skill of their creation with the desecration and violent destructiveness of the iconoclasts.

In 2013, an exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London entitled, 'Art under Attack', showed some objects which had been damaged or defaced throughout history.[3] One of the most striking of these was a statue of Christ. The centrepiece of the show was a damaged sculpture of Christ that lay hidden for hundreds of years beneath a floor of a London chapel. The Statue of the Dead Christ (*circa*. 1500 - 1520) is missing its crown of thorns, arms and lower legs. It is thought by some art historians to be the result of an attack by religious reformers in the sixteenth century. The statue was discovered beneath the chapel floor of the Mercers' Hall in central London in 1954. The BBC News reported that it may have been buried to protect it from further damage. Penelope Curtis, director of Tate Britain, said the national collections had been shaped by historical waves of destruction that other European collections had escaped: 'We know about the dissolution of the monasteries, the wars of religion and the civil war, but we don't often make the connections with what that means for the collections we have in our

[2] 'Art Under Attack': Histories of British Iconoclasm: Room 2, The Tate
[3] BBC News, 5 July 2013

museums – why so little survives and so much was destroyed,' she said.[4] Tate curator Tabitha Barber was said to be delighted that the Mercers' Company had loaned the sculpture to the exhibition. Confronted by the statue today, its emotional impact is still such that we can only imagine the fear and loathing in the mind of Sixteenth Century reformers, the confusion between the real and the represented, or the concept of sinful worship of an image instead of God (*see figure 1*). Either way, the image was defaced and later hidden during that turbulent century. What anger, violent thoughts or hatred could have caused such wonton vandalism of a supposedly sacred image of the Redeemer? The pulling down of Edward Colston's statue and the calls for the removal of other hated images of slave traders or imperialists gives us some clues as to what was happening in the minds of modern-day reformers. Could this be what happened during the Sixteenth Century? In this article I am going to focus on a small number of churches in Oxfordshire and neighbouring Gloucestershire. The purpose of the article is to demonstrate, by looking at examples of medieval craftmanship, that the medieval church was a place of vibrant colour, imagery and active faith. The senses were used by the medieval Catholic church to teach and nurture the Christian faith. This imagery and sensual experience is a vital part of Catholic architecture and worship. Much of this symbolism and imagery was deliberately altered and damaged by fanatical reformers in the Sixteenth Century. By attempting to destroy imagery and sensual experience, the reformers aimed to rid England of the Catholic faith they thought was reflected in and represented by these images and sensual worship.

Thus, England's churches were shorn of much of their finery and colour and replaced with arguably, drab monochrome and de-sensualised worship. When one realises what a vibrant colour scheme awaited the medieval worshipper within and sometimes without the church, one realises what we have lost. It could reasonably be argued that the Sixteenth Century Reformation was, in part, an iconoclastic attack on the worship Catholics had experienced for centuries and the buildings in which they had worshipped. This had the effect of obliterating some of the features of a medieval Catholic church building which had been familiar to believers for generations. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of 'iconoclasm' is the: 'action of attacking or

[4] BBC News, 5 July 2013

assertively rejecting cherished beliefs and institutions or established values and practices.' This rejection of cherished beliefs and their replacement with a new, reformed, set of beliefs lead to the destruction of craftsmanship in churches on a massive scale in the period 1535 to 1555 during the reign of Henry VIII and his son Edward VI. Reimagining the glory of the medieval church we get a small window into what medieval Catholicism was like from the point of view of the faithful Catholic English person.

The world of the twenty-first century is a very different place from that of five hundred years ago. Catholic churches today are full of symbolism and messages to the faithful who go there to pray. The visual elements of a Catholic church are integral with its message and the faith which it proclaims. Shorn of these visual stimuli, it could not possibly convey the truths of the Catholic faith. The images of saints, both statues, icons and stained glass, rood screens, holy water stoops, the symbols, and of course, the focal point of the church, the altar, all convey meaning. This article concerns itself with the physical destruction in churches brought about by the English Reformation in the Sixteenth Century and its assault on sensual worship of what Eamon Duffy refers to as the 'traditional religion.'[5] We will look at some examples of English church buildings and some of the medieval features which we can still see today. This will help us to understand a little more about what a medieval church could have been like.

The medieval Catholic church building was a feast for the senses. The sights, the sounds, the smells, the taste of the Eucharist and the touching of sacred objects all created a holistic experience of faith for the church goer. The bright coloured vestments, the smell of the incense at High Mass and the sound of the Sanctus bell are all evocative of this rich faith. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the word 'senses' as the faculty by which the body perceives an external stimulus; one of the faculties of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. It is through our senses that we perceive the world around us. The medieval church building and its worship was indeed a very sensual experience and one in which the worshipper was transported from the work-a-day world into a liminal

[5] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: traditional religion in England c. 1400 – c. 1580* (Yale University Press, 1992), Preface XV

state via the sensory experience of entering the church building and partaking in its complex worship. From the material existence of a person's life to a spiritual and numinous state of mind. One purpose of the medieval Catholic liturgies such as the Sarum Rite, was to unite oneself with Christ through participation in the sacrifice of the Mass and the receiving of the Sacraments. This multi-sensory faith experience involved physical objects such as statues, often brightly painted, coloured stained-glass windows, carved wooden rood screens, colourful wall paintings, decorative carving, candles, altar pieces, and colourful vestments worn by the priests and deacons conducting holy rituals in the chancel beyond the rood screen. Let's think about our senses and how we use them. The five senses are: touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing. How did the church use these senses both outside and inside the building? How were the senses utilised during worship in the church? Why did some of the Protestant reformers want to effectively eliminate many of these sensory experiences and instead favour knowing God through the heart and mind instead of the body?

Medieval churches had many features created by skilled craftsmen. Stained glass windows, carved wooden rood-screens, painted statues, wall paintings, sometimes crude and rustic, sometimes skilled and well executed, were just some of these features. To get a little flavour of this medieval church and its rituals one could attend an Orthodox church service today. Although different from medieval Catholic churches and worship, nevertheless the principles are similar. The purpose is the same, namely, to join the human being to God in prayer and unite them to the Church, the body of Christ. This is done in the Orthodox church by means of holy images or icons, chanting, vestments, the iconostasis or screen and the liturgies of the church. Orthodox worship continually reminds believers through all their senses of the heavenly state of the Church. Alternatively, we could attend a high Latin Mass known as the Extraordinary Form which is still available in some Catholic churches and, although later than the medieval period, it has certain similarities with the medieval rites which varied from diocese to diocese at that time. This effectively acts a bridge linking us to the worship and experience of Catholics long ago. It cannot transport us into the mind of the medieval worshipper, but it can give us an insight into their experience and a window into our shared past. At the National Museum of Wales at St Fagan's near Cardiff, there is a church of St Teilo's, dating from the late

twelfth-century, which has been removed from its original location, at Llanteilo Tal-y-Bont, Glamorgan disassembled and re-built at the museum. Inside this church, one finds walls decorated as they may have been around 1530, shortly before the English and Welsh Reformation burst upon the scene *(see figures 2 and 3).*

Let's think about the features found in many medieval churches. They were usually brightly painted with scenes from the Bible, saints or Christian morality. They persuaded, cajoled, instructed and warned the faithful to live the 'Christian life.' A largely illiterate population would have meditated on these images and the messages they conveyed. The colourful stained-glass windows added yet more colour and imagery of saints, Bible stories and holy people. The images of the saints adorned the average parish church. Sometimes they represented the saint the church was dedicated to or they may have been local saints or ones that the vicar encouraged such as the cult of St Sidwell at Morebath, Somerset where it was reported in the church records that the priest, Sir Christopher Trychay, was encouraging parishioners to spend money on the adornment of the altar associated with St Sidwell, a saint connected with Exeter.[6] In addition, every church had, often brightly painted, statues of saints. These niches for images were sometimes referred to as 'tabernacles' and often had candles and flowers before the image. In the case of Morebath, it was the duty of groups within the parish such as the young men or the young women, to maintain different images of the saints. Rood screens separated the nave from the chancel and delineated the areas which were the responsibility of the incumbent and which were the parish's responsibility to maintain. The holiest part of the building was the sanctuary containing the altar, reredos, if there was one, the *piscina* and the *aumbry*, a small cupboard like structure, or pyx which might be suspended from the roof, for reserving the Blessed Sacrament. Everywhere was bright paint, decoration and imagery, provided the local parish could afford to adorn their parish church.

Let's look at some of the features which might be found in a medieval church. A reredos is a screen or decoration behind the altar in a church, usually depicting religious iconography or images. The oldest and perhaps

[6] Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (Yale University Press, 2001), p. 40

the single most important carving in St James' church, Somerton, Oxfordshire is the remarkable Brize Norton stone one behind the altar, which is described as 'rustic' in style in the church guide. It is set into the east wall of the church and it appears to be at first glance a complete medieval reredos. It portrays the Last Supper with Christ and the disciples ranged behind a long table covered in a pleated cloth. They are all tucking into food and drink, eating from wooden trenchers and drinking from bowls in true Medieval style. It has often been assigned to around 1400 according to the guidebook in the church. On the basis of the style of carving, a date in the mid-fourteenth century would be much more likely. This is a similar date to the chancel so perhaps it dates from the time of its construction. There is clear evidence that this artefact was at one time painted, with traces of red and green paint clinging to bits of drapery here and there. It depicts the Last Supper in a very lively style. All the figures are caught in mid-gesture, for example one disciple is refusing another drink except for John who is lying in the lap of Christ. It is medieval sculpture at its most engaging and accessible. It is similar to one at Bampton which is also made of Brize Norton stone. The story in the village is that it was taken down and hidden from the Puritans in the seventeenth century and only put back in 1822. However, a close examination reveals that it doesn't appear to have survived the Reformation without damage. It was common during the reign of Edward VI to vandalise images and remove the heads and sometime the hands too. Damage also occurred during the Commonwealth era into the seventeenth century. This, some believed, deprived the images of their power over the faithful. All the heads, except that of the beloved disciples, many of the arms, most of the bread trenchers, cups, bowls and so forth, appear not to be medieval at all. They seem to have been replaced in plaster of Paris worked over wooden dowels drilled into the original medieval work (*see figure 4)*.

When this work was done is not clear, perhaps in 1822, when the piece was apparently 'restored'. These features probably have more in common with Romanesque sculpture than with the work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which is perhaps why the piece has been so difficult to date. Whenever this restoration work was done it has survived well and the whole together is still a rare survival of the Catholic art of the people of the parish. But if the reredos was vandalised by iconoclastic Protestant enthusiasts, when did it happen? We know that the local landowners, the

Fermor family of Somerton Manor, and from 1616, owner of the manor of nearby Tusmore, were staunch Roman Catholics and known recusants. They appointed the rectors at this time and had a chantry chapel in the church which became, after the passing of the Chantries Act in the 1530s, a family chapel complete with elaborate monuments. From 1537 until 1552 the rector of Somerton was Robert King, a distinguished conservative reformer who opposed those who 'want to pull down the images of saints and who denied that the Virgin and Saints are mediators.' King went on to become Bishop of Oxford, a position he retained when Mary reinstated Catholicism after her accession in 1553. As such, he sat in judgment on Cranmer, who was burnt in Oxford in March 1556. In 1552 King was succeeded in Somerton by his own curate, Thomas Gardiner. It may therefore be assumed that little changed, despite the coming into force of the revised Prayer Book the same year. The reign of Edward VI, when much of the iconoclastic damage to churches was done, was 1547 to 1553. It is unlikely that the Fermor family and the rector, Robert King, would have allowed this damage to be done to the church they were responsible for and had much affection towards.

Early in the seventeenth century the Fermors appointed another distinguished cleric to be the rector of Somerton. William Juxon subsequently became President of St John's College in Oxford (when he continued to come to Somerton during the vacations), and later Bishop of London. As such, he prayed with Charles I on the scaffold before the latter's execution. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 he was Archbishop of Canterbury for the last years of his life. Juxon was what we might call 'High Church' or 'Anglo-Catholic', and would have been happy to accept the Fermors' continued role in the church locally. It is unlikely that Juxon would have been at all happy with the vandalism of the reredos either. So, it remains a mystery as to when the damage to the sculpture was carried out, let alone who was responsible for it. Was it hidden, perhaps in the churchyard? We do know that alabaster reredos pieces were found buried in the church yard at St Peter's church, Drayton near Didcot, Oxfordshire. Sadly, one of the pieces has, in recent years, been chiseled off the wall of the church and stolen by thieves.

In Bampton in west Oxfordshire there is a similar stone panel, which still serves as the high altar reredos and like the one at Somerton, probably dates from the end of the fourteenth century. In this stone carving, Christ in majesty is flanked by figures of the twelve apostles, each one set under a separate canopy, each holding their attribute. Possibly, this is a pictorial representation of the vision of Jesus:[7] 'Jesus said to them', [the disciples], 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' Thus we see how the medieval church taught their parishioners about Christ's teachings and how preaching during Mass must have referenced this artwork. This reredos has not been damaged and one can only speculate why that was. Perhaps it was protected by parishioners or perhaps it was hidden until less turbulent times.

St Peter ad Vincula church at South Newington, Oxfordshire is a feast for lovers of medieval wall paintings. Up until the Reformation in the 1530s, it was linked with the Benedictine Abbey at Eynsham near Oxford. The wall paintings must have been so useful in pictorializing the Christian message of the Gospels as well as pleasing the local landowner. The paintings have, despite the best endeavours of the Edwardian reformers, survived and have been restored and stabilised in recent times. The paintings were covered with limewash at the Reformation, and this has acted to preserve the art in an amazingly good condition. Facing you as you enter the church, decorating the north nave arcade, is a series of vivid paintings depicting the Passion. This series dates to the fifteenth century, and while some areas are well preserved, others are quite worn. From the left you see the Entry into Jerusalem, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Flagellation, Carrying the Cross, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. The final looks for all the world like Christ getting out of a bath. The spandrels show Trinity Trees and the Instruments of the Passion. This was almost certainly a private chapel for the Giffard family, and it is to them we owe the astonishing wall paintings that decorate the north wall. The paintings in the aisle date from about 1330 and are at the same time a devotional expression and a statement of political affiliation and family status. They are created with oil on plaster, a very unusual and expensive way to produce paintings at that time (*see figure 5)*.

[7] St Matthew: ch. 19 v. 28.

Although the windows of the parishes and the secular cathedrals remained largely untouched throughout Henry VIII's reign, in 1538 the king declared Thomas Becket a traitor and decreed that images of the saint be destroyed, which must have occasioned the loss of some stained glass. The murder of Becket was a popular subject in medieval church art, but only fifteen or so wall paintings survive, and this is undoubtedly one of the finest. Henry VIII also ordered 'idolatrous' paintings to be destroyed, but this one was spared because it was covered by a painting of St George and the Dragon.

At St Peter's church one can see Becket kneeling by an altar, confronted by the four knights. He is in an attitude of prayer, defended by a priest, who has blocked the first sword blow. A second knight strikes a fatal blow, while a third has his sword ready and the fourth begins to draw his weapon. Becket's head is perfectly preserved, but only the head of the fourth knight, Richard le Bret, has survived relatively intact. Set in the east corner of the north aisle wall is the finest and most historically important painting in the church. This scene is wonderfully preserved, and shows Our Lady within a Gothic arch decorated with three leopards, representing the Giffard coat of arms. She holds the Christ child in one hand and a fleur-de-lys in the other. At the base is a geometric tile pattern and two figures of donors, probably John and Lucy Giffard. The figures of the donors incorporated into the painting is very rare, as is the rich, three dimensional quality of the painting. This effect was achieved by using linseed oil as a paint base. This slowed the drying process, but made it more expensive. The other known use of this technique from the mid-fourteenth century is at Westminster Abbey, which again emphasises just how remarkable and unique these paintings are.

During the brief reign of Henry's son, Edward VI, imagery in windows was specifically singled out for examination by the zealous evangelical reformers. Even so, the high costs of re-glazing a large church probably saved some of these beautiful windows. Only in places where reformers were more powerful and influential were concerted efforts made to strip the church of all its medieval stained glass. In Norwich, for example, several parish churches spent large sums removing images that were deemed to be what Edward had in mind, while at Durham Cathedral we can conclude that the eager reformer Dean Horne must have decided

the fifteenth century cloister windows depicting the life and miracles of St Cuthbert constituted idolatry and superstition.

Elsewhere, those damaging stained glass windows were prosecuted for their acts and in York, with its Minster and its parish churches full of medieval stained glass, very little seems to have been done in response to the Edwardian injunctions. In the English church a middle way has often been sought between the 'catholic' and the 'evangelical' wings. A policy of expediency was probably the order of the day through much of England. Some glass was removed and preserved against the day when traditional religion was restored, while elsewhere it was whitewashed to obscure the most 'problematic' images. This was the 'stained-glass' equivalent of knocking the head off a statue. Even at Canterbury there was little appetite for iconoclasm where the cathedral's windows were concerned.

Visiting St Mary's church in Fairford, Gloucestershire, one can see no less than twenty-eight windows that make up the most complete set of medieval glass in the UK. It's very rare to find a church that is still glazed as it would have been at the start of the reign of Edward. The windows were made by Barnard Flower, Master Glazier to Henry VII. They were designed to read like a book, with the plot craftily adjusted so that an uplifting image was placed above each altar. This was a book the laity could read, meditate on and focus on in their devotions. We find the Assumption of Our Lady in the Lady Chapel, the Crucifixion above the high altar, and the transfiguration above the Corpus Christi altar. One can almost imagine what it must have been like for the typical medieval peasant in the Sixteenth Century to gaze upon such extraordinary sights. For ordinary folk, bright colours were reserved for the royal family, the nobility, the landed gentry, the rich merchants and of course, for the Church. Expensive dyes for clothes would still have been reserved for the wealthy, so the lives of ordinary people's clothes would have consisted of a limited range of browns, dull dark blue, rust red, and a bit of green, with a lot of grey when the colour washed out. Going into a church and seeing the wonderful colours in medieval manuscripts when the books were paraded around the church must have been a literal eye-opener. This was even more true for those churches which had beautiful stained glass where gorgeous light flooded in to illuminate the interior. The rich, jewel-like colours would have made well-known Biblical stories, saints, and the life of Our Lord and Our Lady come alive in a vivid and

dramatic way. The Gothic architecture allowed for large windows and here the whole of the Christian story is depicted (*see figure 6)*.

At the start of the Sixteenth Century, pilgrimages were part of the traditional faith of England and central to everyone's lives. This was an experience which was extremely common in the medieval period right up to the reign of Henry VIII after which it was strongly discouraged in the 1530s by acts of parliament and the new regulations brought about by the religious reformers who happened to have the king's ear at that time. A pilgrimage, as we know, is a devotional practice consisting of a prolonged journey, often undertaken on foot or on horseback, toward a specific destination of significance. It is a short-term experience, removing the participant from his or her home environment and identity. The means or motivations in undertaking a pilgrimage might vary, but the act, however performed, blends the physical and the spiritual into a unified experience.[8] Shrines to the saints were once a common feature of medieval churches and cathedrals. One local saint in Oxfordshire was St Eadburgha or St Edburg as she was known in Bicester. She appears to have been a Mercian princess and abbess of a nunnery near Aylesbury. We know that some of her relics were moved by papal decree to Flanders in Belgium in 1500, but a fourteenth century shrine remained at Bicester Priory. This was a focus of local devotion and pilgrimage until their removal with the suppression of religious houses in 1536 when not only were shrines suppressed and demolished but all monasteries and nunneries dissolved. If it were not for Sir Simon Harcourt, an Oxfordshire landowner, we would have little idea what her shrine looked like. Why Sir Simon, who was tasked with the demolition of the priory, chose to save parts of the shrine is unknown. The remaining section was re-erected in the chancel of his village church St Michael's, Stanton Harcourt. It was placed on an early Sixteenth Century platform, possibly an Easter sepulchre, which may have predated the installation of parts of the shrine. The carving of the upper parts, with heads and small figures of the Evangelists in niches at the corners, is in good condition. This makes St Michael's church a particularly interesting and rewarding church to visit for those interested in the medieval Catholic experience (*see figure 7)*.

[8] Tim Guile, 'Ipswich, Willesden and Walsingham, Three Marian Shrines in Sixteenth Century England', *English Catholic History Association Newsletter*, vols. 87 and 88, (September, 2020).

Another fascinating medieval survival is the shrine of St Frideswide, or Fritheswith, to give her, her Saxon name, which is the oldest monument in Oxford cathedral. What we refer to as 'the Shrine' is in reality only the platform on which the actual shrine rested. The shrine was dismantled in 1538 and fragments of it disposed of and hidden around the cathedral precincts. The face and foliage on the shrine appear to show fine medieval craftsmanship which was nearly lost forever, because the shrine was damaged by iconoclasts, and its broken pieces discarded. The surviving fragments of this shrine platform are covered in plant inspired carvings which was a very unusual form of decoration on a shrine from the medieval period. The natural world appeared to have provided inspiration to the medieval carvers of the imagery on the shrine. The plant foliage adorning the Shrine may well have been used symbolically. For example, the presence of a vine perhaps symbolising the central theme of sacrifice of the Mass, or columbine possibly as a symbol of the Holy Spirit as the back of the leaf is said to resemble a cluster of doves. In the legend, Frideswide hid in a tree to escape from King Algar and a worldly life that she had rejected. Surrounded by greenery, her face is said to reflect emotions such as fear, patience and hope. Three faces appear on the south side of the shrine, of which the central face is believed to be Frideswide's and the others, perhaps, the nuns who accompanied her on her flight to Binsey near Oxford. A fourth face may have existed on the north side but was badly damaged, presumably when the shrine was destroyed by statute in 1538. Perhaps this face was another carving of Frideswide, or perhaps some other character in the story. We will never know as it is too damaged to identify. However, the faces appear to represent the human emotions of fear and therefore may have been a kind of sermon in solid form and possibly intended as a message to the faithful to trust God in times of adversity just like the saint depicted. Thus, we see that carvings within a church could speak volumes to the believer. These visual representations, and presumably the messages they carried, were hated by many of the iconoclasts who may have believed that they were simply idolatrous and reminders of the Old Faith which they hoped to supplant with their reformist agenda (*see figure 8)*.

Under Henry VIII church images were mostly still permitted but that was soon to change as the evangelical reformers gained a greater influence. There were not great numbers of them but their influence

was felt throughout the land. Under the government of Edward VI, a regime of systematic iconoclasm was implemented by edict and regulation. During his comparatively short reign, the church was largely controlled by the Protestant faction who disliked and disapproved of images and Catholic ritual. Fines were imposed on those clergymen who dared to defy the new laws. Orders were given to 'utterly extinct and destroy' images 'so that there remain no memory of the same'. Religious images were accordingly removed, defaced, whitewashed or obliterated to prevent people's engagement with them.[9] It was as if the reformers disliked sensual imagery.

The English Reformation was thus an ongoing process of churning and change with distinct phases according to who was on the throne and who had the monarch's ear. The premature death of Edward VI in 1553 meant a return to Catholic traditions and customs under the Catholic Queen Mary. The Latin Mass made a comeback and images and Catholic rituals once again became commonplace. With the death of Mary though the fourth religious upheaval of the century began. Church images reappeared in the reign of Mary from 1553 to 1558 but were removed again under Elizabeth I. The result was a comprehensive dismantling and eradication of centuries worth of medieval art and religious and cultural tradition. The Religious Settlement of 1559 made Elizabeth Supreme Head of the Church. However, she did not give any clear indication as to the direction of her Church and many of the clergy kept altars, images and the old ways of doing things and many refused to part with the paraphernalia needed for Mass. People increasingly referred to the Old Religion and senior church bishops faced a very difficult task in stamping out support for Catholic practices. But stamp out the Catholic traditions and beliefs they did. Statues, screens, wall paintings, and windows often bore the signs of damage or complete destruction. Recusant Catholics tried to keep alive some of the old ways of doing things but there were harsh laws against Catholic priests and customs passed during Elizabeth's reign. The Church of England gradually became more reformed during her reign and the old sensual experience of church design and worship that the churchgoer would have been familiar with at the start of Henry's reign, gradually passed into history and in many cases became little more than folk memory.

[9] Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm: Room 2, Tate

Figures

Figure 1



Dead Christ (1500 – 20) courtesy of The Mercers' Company

Figure 2



St Teilo's church, painted as it might have been around 1530, courtesy of the National Museum of Wales

Figure 3



St Teilo's church, detail of rood screen as it may have been around 1530, courtesy of the National Museum of Wales

Figure 4



The Last Supper reredos, St James' Church Somerton, Oxon., courtesy of S. Vincent

Figure 5



Virgin and Child, St Peter Ad Vincula, South Newington, Oxon., courtesy of wasleys.org.uk

Figure 6



Christ in Majesty, St Mary's Church, Fairford, Gloucestershire, courtesy of P. Lovett

Figure 7



Shrine of St Edburg, St Michael's Church, Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., courtesy of Bicester Local History Society

Figure 8



The Shrine of St Frideswide, Oxford cathedral. Courtesy of Christchurch Cathedral, Oxford

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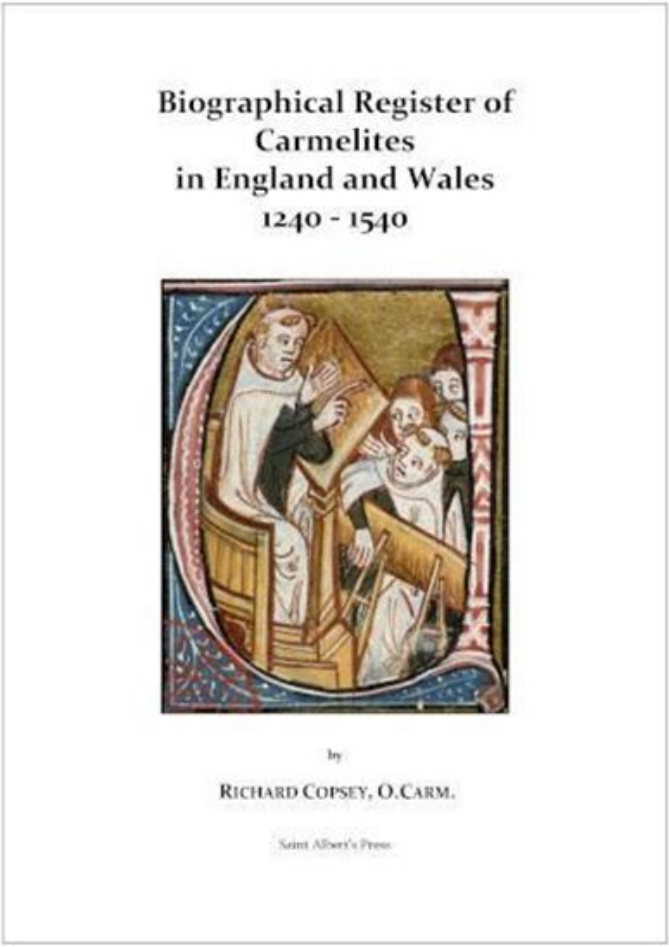
RESEARCH PROJECTS

Biographical Register of Carmelites in England and Wales, 1240 – 1540 by Richard Copsey, O.Carm. (Saint Albert's Press, 2020: £49.95 + £10 PP). Available for purchase from the Shrine of St Jude, Faversham, Kent: hb. xxiv, 548 pp. [ISBN: 978 0 904849 52 3] Tel.: 01795 539214 or shrineoffice@stjudeshrine.org.uk or click here.

Richard Copsey has recently published the labours of his considerable research into the biographical details of the Carmelites in Medieval England and Wales; the result of many years work. Fr Richard has written extensively on the early history of the Order and has served as editor of the Order's academic journal *Carmelus* (in Rome for six years). This seminal work provides and introduction into the organisation of the medieval province, the formation of friars, and the sources used to compile the *Register*. There are over 4000 entries and the work includes appendices to accompany the entries including: Carmelite houses in the Medieval English Province; the four Distinctions in the English Province; a List of Provincials of the English Province; Notable Foreign Carmelites who visited England; English and Welsh Carmelite Bishops and Priors General, 1240 – 1540.

The work is a must for anyone with an interest in the English Carmelite communities of the medieval era and will be a vital *vade mecum* for scholars of Medieval Catholicism in England and Wales.

The project is not over as additions and corrections to the *Register* will be updated on the Carmelite Province's website at www.carmelite.org/copseyregister ... congratulations Fr Richard on the completion of such a he research project!



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