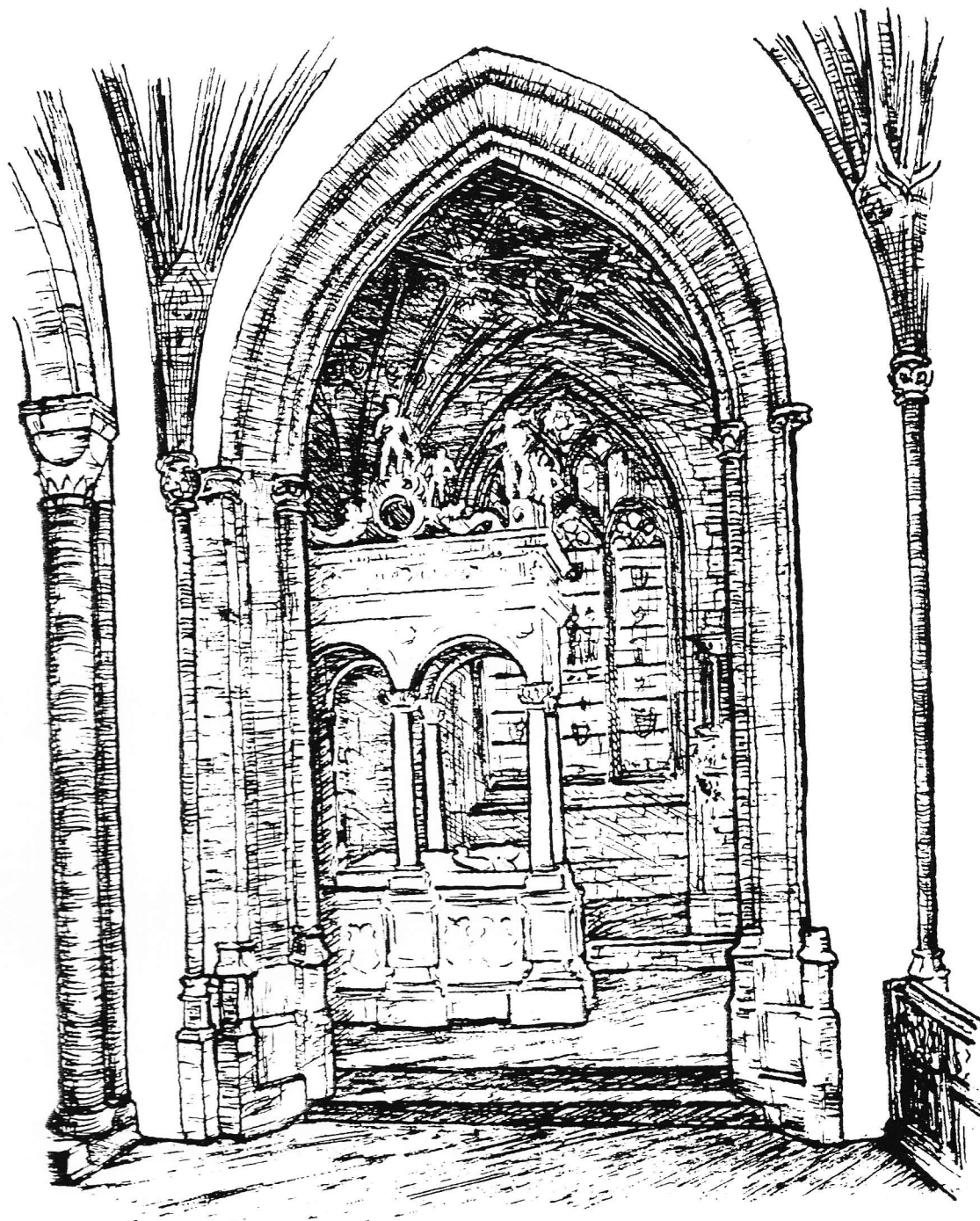


Sherborne Abbey

The Sherborne Missal St. Catherine's Chapel
The Winstons and the Churchills



The Sherborne Missal

The considerable library of Sherborne Abbey was dispersed after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII in 1539. A few of its treasures survive – the 9th Century Sherborne Pontifical in the Bibiotheque Nationale, Paris; the 12th Century Cartulary in the British Museum; and the 15th Century Sherborne Missal at Alnwick Castle, the home of the Duke of Northumberland.

A missal is the book used by the priest who is celebrant at the Mass and the Sherborne Missal is one of the finest English mediaeval manuscripts in existence. It measures 21¾ inches by 15 inches, is written on 690 pages of vellum and weighs almost 50 lbs.

Four men were jointly responsible for its production. Richard Mitford, Bishop of Salisbury (1396 - 1407), Robert Bruning, Abbot of Sherborne (1385 - 1415), John Sifrewas, a Dominican friar, and John Whas, a Sherborne Benedictine monk, and probably a native of Sherborne.

Work began about the year 1400 and went on for many years. The Bishop and the Abbot appear to have been joint sponsors of the book, the friar and the monk creating it by their combined craftsmanship. Sifrewas was responsible for the illumination and Whas for the script. It is rarely that so much is known of the individuality of such a distinguished team of mediaeval literari.

Sifrewas has been described as 'the greatest of English limners' – or illuminators. He was a natural artist. The illuminated portions of well over half of the book are his work as well as the superb Crucifixion page immediately before the Canon of the Mass. He was one of the geniuses of the Middle Ages. Numerous birds adorn some of the pages and these studies of wild birds give Sifrewas an even higher claim to recognition. Some 46 birds appear on the pages of the Missal, complete with their names in dialect.

The pages for the great festivities are brilliant in colouring and rich in variety of ornamentation.

History

From approximately 1400 until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 it was used in Sherborne Abbey.

From 1539 it was lost and came to light in:

1703 when it was given by the Bishop of Lisieux to Nicholas Foucault.

1719 -1744 owned by Charles d'Orleans, Abbe de Rothelin.

1744 bought by M. de Selle, Treasurer General of the French Navy for 1810 livres.

1797 bought by G. G. Mills of Slaughter House, Glos.

1800 bought by Hugh, 2nd Duke of Northumberland for £215. It has since that date remained in Alnwick Castle, Northumberland.

On leaving the Abbey the visitor can walk about fifty yards East – towards Cheap Street – to the Sherborne Museum. There he has the opportunity to see some of the glory of this magnificent book photographed by Kodak. Slides may also be purchased.

F. G. Hunt
Head Verger

St. Catherine's Chapel

The Virgin Martyr St. Catherine, or St. Katherine, (for the Greek letter 'K' can be translated either way), lived in the 4th Century and was the daughter of the King of Cyprus. She withstood the lecherous approaches of the wicked Emperor Macentius at Alexander and also protested against his cruel persecution of the Christians there. Legend says that as a consequence she was tied to a wheel, tortured and eventually beheaded, after which a troop of angels carried her body to the summit of Mount Sinai. She was one of the *most popular saints of the middle ages*.

The Chapel dates to the time of Abböt Bradford (1436 - 1459) although he probably remodelled and vaulted a chapel that already existed. It is also known as the Leweston Chapel. The Leweston family occupied the Manor of Leweston (3 miles south of Sherborne) from before the Norman Conquest until the family died out with John Leweston in 1584. The property then passed to a step-son (son of his wife Joan's previous marriage), John Fitzjames of Redlinch, Somerset, who erected the fine Renaissance tomb in 1586. The Church accounts of February 1586 state that for the sum of ten shillings the chapel was assigned to John Fitzjames of Leweston 'for seat and burial and to his heirs for ever.'

The visitor will probably find his attention immediately attracted by the Leweston tomb. Similarities between this tomb's elegant cartouche and porthole cresting, and the crested parapet at Longleat in Wiltshire suggest that the tomb may be the work of Allen Maynard (or Mayneard) a French craftsman who was working at Longleat in the 1570's and 1580's. The Leweston family had occupied Leweston Manor since before the Norman Conquest so it was sad to think there was no male issue to continue the name of Leweston at the Manor. However, John Leweston's wife, who had predeceased him (in 1579) and was the widow of Alfred Fitzjames of Redlinch, Somerset, had a son John Fitzjames. He, it was, who erected the tomb after becoming the occupier of Leweston Manor. The detail of these effigies is worth noting. Joan with the many ringed left hand — a ring also on the second finger of her right hand. Her girdle and flowered gown, her petticoat and the ruffles at her wrists.

The Bible at her feet. John resplendent in armour and gauntlets, helmet and sword at his feet. Both the heads resting on tasselled cushions, the arms of the Leweston family, the three battle axes, looking down on them from the eastern wall of the tomb.

In the southwest corner the visitor now spies the Walcot monument. This quite clearly states that Johan Walcot died 24th July, 1630 and that she was the daughter of Sir Henry Winston of Standish, Gloucestershire. Here, now, is where an explanation is so very necessary because the visitor might not know that her sister, Sarah Winston married John Churchill, who lived near by at Mintern. Their son, a Winston Churchill, also had a male offspring who became the Duke of Marlborough. So the direct link from a Winston of Standish to our great Prime Minister of 1940 - 1945 War fame — Sir Winston Churchill — born at the home of the Marlboroughs at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, and now resting just outside those walls at Bladen.

Well, so much for the two memorials we can see, but how about the great and illustrious Sir Walter Ralieggh for whom no stone records that he, too, graced our Chapel with his presence. It is a certain fact that during the period 1592 - 1603 when Sir Walter, and Lady Betty, held the Manor of Sherborne (i.e. lived in the Castle) this was where they worshipped. Quoting from the Sherborne Book of Orders dated 18th January 1600 - 1601, 'the seate that was sometime Mr. Leweston's and also the seate next unto yt downward should not be at any tyme be solde to anye partie but should be kept for Sir Walter Rawleigh and his Ladye.'

In the east end of the south wall is the trefoil headed Piscina used by the priest, after mass, for his ablutions.

How Lady Elizabeth would have enjoyed a recent flower festival when 'Lady Betty pinks' (named after her) were arranged in profusion in this Chapel in which she prayed. These were picked wild in the Old Castle grounds where Lady Betty took such a pride in her flowers some four hundred years ago.

So to the windows and what is left of the Mediaeval stained glass that once occupied the Choir windows. This was removed during the restoration of 1850 - 1860 and stored. The intention at that time was that it should grace the Early English window in the Bishop Rogers Chapel (now the Choir Vestry). But it remained stored, and virtually forgotten, for almost 70 years until placed here in this old chapel by Mr. Hamilton Fletcher. It is remarkable how beautiful much of the detail, especially the *facial detail, of these old figures remain* after some five hundred years, as opposed to the almost complete obliteration of detail in some of the Victorian glass of little over one hundred years.

Just one more interesting feature before we leave. Look at the outline of a recumbent figure in the stone work of the base of the window in the South Wall. Now walk up the South choir aisle toward the Bow Chapel. On your right is a modern Altar tomb with the effigy of an Abbot and his well preserved stave. We have just seen the answer to this preservation. The stave had been encompassed by the wall of our Catherine Chapel until the Victorians decided to remove it to its present resting place. The Abbot is most probably Abbot Laurence de Bradford, elected 7th November, 1246.

F. G. Hunt
Head Verger

The Winstons and the Churchills

An interesting memorial tablet in Sherborne Abbey is on the wall of the Leweston (or St. Katharine's) chapel on the south side of the nave. It reads 'Here resteth the bodie of Johan Walcot, late wife of John Walcot, of Castletone, in the County of Dorset, esq. deceased, eldest daughter of Sir Henry Winston of Standish, in the County of Gloucester, Knt. and one of the coheirs to her brother Henry Winston, esq. who departed this life the 24th July, 1630.'

In the church at Longburton, a small village three miles south of Sherborne on the road to Dorchester, the Winston family name appears again. Two impressive canopied monuments are in the small north chapel which was specially built to accommodate them early in the 17th Century. One of them was erected to the memory of the Winston family of Standish. Full length painted stone effigies of Sir Henry Winston and his wife, the Lady Dionise (a daughter of Sir George Bond, Lord Mayor of London in 1587) lie above, and tucked away below (one might say) is an alabaster effigy of Sir Henry's father, Thomas Winston, an old bearded man in armour, with a gold chain about his neck.

The inscription explains why these memorials are in Longburton church rather than at Standish. 'Elenor, one of their daughters, now wife of Leweston Fitzjames of Leweston, esquier, being denied to repayre and erect these remembrances of her parents in the church of Standish, where they lie buried, hath transferred them thence, and placed them here, where part of their posteritie is now, by the merciful Providence of the Almighty, planted.'

It seems that annoyed by being refused permission to place these possibly over-grandiose monuments in Standish church Elenor transferred her plans to Longburton, and even removed to Longburton the effigy of her grandfather Thomas, which was an already accepted feature of Standish church — a long and difficult cross-country journey which did the old gentleman's alabaster effigy no good at all.

Johan and Elenor — two daughters of Sir Henry Winston, one remembered in Sherborne Abbey and one in Longburton. But there was a third daughter, Sarah, who does not seem to have a memorial; and she too married a local man, John Churchill of Round Chimneys, Glanvilles Wootton. Round Chimneys stands on the north side of the parish, about a mile from Glanville Wootton church. It is now a farm house, and part of it has been demolished, and was built between 1590 and 1600.

In Hutchins 'Dorset' it is described as 'one of the best planned and most comfortable houses which I have ever seen of the age of Elizabeth, and when complete must have been a very excellent gentleman's residence.'

John and Sarah Churchill's son was christened Winston, his mother's maiden name. He was the first Winston Churchill, father of the great Duke of Marlborough, and direct ancestor of Sir William Churchill of the war years.

John Churchill studied law at the Middle Temple and 'by his learning made an addition to his estate' (whatever that implies), and was soon living at Minterne, three miles south of Glanvilles Wootton. His son, Winston Churchill the first, was quickly caught up in the Civil War and fought so determinedly on the King's side that he was fined the enormous sum of £4,446.18s.0d. by the Parliamentarians, which left him practically destitute. However, during his years of fighting he met and fell in love with Elizabeth Drake, of Ashe, near Axminster, whose family was Puritan and supported the Parliamentary party. Having married his Elizabeth, he took shelter for 14 years in the Drake family home at Trill, Ashe House having been burnt by the Royalists in 1644.

Here most of his 12 children were born. The eldest son was also christened Winston, but he died in infancy. The eldest of the four sons who survived was christened John, and after the Restoration he received a place at Court. Perhaps his upbringing with a Royalist father and a Puritan mother helped to teach him tact and broad-mindedness. It is clear that his lack of any formal schooling in no way hampered his career and he went on to become the great Duke of Marlborough of Queen Anne's reign.

The third of the brothers, Charles, inherited the Minterne estate and in Minterne church you can read an account of his distinguished military career. The Duke of Marlborough himself inherited the Glanvilles Wootton property which he later sold. From Round Chimneys to Blenheim Palace in two generations!

Mrs. E. O. Cockburn