

The Story of the Cathedral Kneelers and the Cushions in the Canons' Stalls

by Grace and Oswald Sitwell

In June 1952 we paid a visit to the newly completed Guildford Cathedral. We were impressed by all we saw but perhaps most of all by the kneelers. Each of these differed from the others in concept and execution but yet there was something that was common to all. This was the fact that they were divided diagonally into a lighter and darker half, and we were told that, since the cathedral stands on a hill, the designers had taken as their theme the road sign for a steep hill.

Returning to Suffolk we went in search of something we could do for the county of our adoption. We learnt that an extension was to be made to the Church of St James in Bury St Edmunds, the church that had been chosen in 1914 to become the Cathedral Church of Suffolk, but which was in fact rather too small to be able to fill its function properly and which was now to be extended by pulling down the existing chancel, incorporating its site as the basis for a transept, and building a new Chancel in which was to be placed the former East window. We wondered if the Provost, the Very Rev John Waddington, would like kneelers for his new church. We went to see him and found he most certainly would; when asked how many, he replied that he wanted a thousand. Recovering from the shock we asked how many parishes there were in the Diocese and he said he thought there were about five hundred. The way then became clear, we had only to get two kneelers from each parish and the job was done.

Impressed as we had been by the underlying note of uniformity we had seen at Guildford, we cast around for something that would do the same for Suffolk, but it must be something essentially Suffolk, so the following scheme was worked out, submitted, and approved. On each and every kneeler there was to be a "Y" cross worked in red and gold, the stem starting from the bottom centre, with the arms reaching to the two top corners. This was to stand for Christianity and the Church. It is an early Christian symbol and also could be thought of as a man standing with arms upraised imploring help.

The background in the triangle between the arms was to be in light blues, the rest to be in dark blues. Here was something essentially "Suffolk", for in its heyday all Suffolk cloth was coloured blue, light, middle, or dark, and by these was known to, and identified by, all the countries of Europe as coming from Suffolk. This then was the Diocese. Since the parishes were, we hoped, to be the principal contributors, it was necessary to give each at motive or symbol that would identify that particular parish, either with the dedication of its church or with some landmark by which it was generally known and, of course, its name. Finally, the worker as an individual would be seen in the stitches chosen and the way they were worked. The next step was to obtain a copy of the Diocesan Yearbook which gives details of every parish including the dedication of each church. These were counted and it was found that there were one hundred and forty one churches dedicated to St Mary, seventy to All Saints, fifty to St Peter, over forty to St Andrew, nineteen to St Margaret, sixteen to St Michael, fifteen to St John, thirteen to SS Peter and Paul, twelve to St Nicholas, seven to St James, and only five to St Edmund. As every worker would require a detailed drawing from which to work it was decided that we would save ourselves a lot of time and trouble if we could get each of these drawn out and photocopied on to squared paper, and this we were able to do through the good offices of Mr John Williams who had the necessary machinery here in Framlingham.

For the Virgin there was a "crown" or a large "M", though these were later supplemented by a "crowned M", an "A.M.R." for Ave Maria Regina, a device often seen worked in flints on church walls or foundations, and a lily, open or in bud.

"All Saints" presented the greatest difficulty of any. At first we thought of hosts of lighted candles, both large and small, but later in response to popular demand we introduced a "winged crown".

St Peter had his familiar "crossed keys". St Andrew hail his well-known "cross", though this was later supplemented by a design of fishes, and for these two Saints, where they occur together, we originally had "crossed keys and a scroll", the scroll being of course for St Paul to write his epistles on, but later we used

a design of "crossed keys and a sword".

For St John the Baptist, a lamb holding a cross, and for St John the Divine, an eagle.

St Margaret of Antioch has by legend a dragon split by a cross. The story goes that she was thrown into prison as a preliminary to being tortured for refusing to give up Christianity and the Devil appeared to her in the form of a dragon and was proceeding to swallow her when she made the sign of the cross which caused him to split open and release her. From this story comes her patronage of women in childbirth.

St Michael has several devices, the most common being a dragon pierced through by a sword, others adopted later were the scales of justice or a winged sword.

St Nicholas is shown by a book on which are three golden balls. Originally these were the three bags of gold with which the Saint ransomed the three daughters of a poor man who was about to sell them into slavery.

St James is represented by a scallop shell, the badge that all pilgrims used to wear in their hats, or by a staff and wallet. St Edmund has the familiar crown and arrows.

Other saints with well known symbols are St Lawrence, a gridiron; St Martin, a cloak which he divided to share with a beggar; St Catherine, a broken wheel and so on. These were drawn individually as occasion demanded.

We received tremendous help in our search for emblems from a little book called quite simply Emblems of the Saints, long since out of print, I imagine, but of which we were very kindly given a copy.

Now leaving the dedication of the parish churches, we turn to other motives worked and the reasons for choosing them, many of which are obvious while others are less so.

First, a representation of the church itself or some part of it, as in the case of Little Bradley, Bramford, Capel St Andrew, Copdock, Cretingham, Culpho, Debach, Earl Stonham, Ipswich St Lawrence, Ipswich St Mary at the Elms, Ipswich Stoke, the two chancels, Flexton, Kersey, Long Melford, Moulton, Rougham, Stoke by Nityland, Trimley, Wickham Market and Wherstead.

Mills, either wind or water, appear for Barningham, Friston, Holton St Peter, Letheringham, Mendham, Pakcnham, Pettaugh and Saxtead.

Coats of arms in whole or in part: for Aldeburgh, an ancient ship being part of the Borough arms; Ashbocking, the Boking family; Beccles, part of the town seal; Charsfield, Dolphins, the arms of Sir John Lemman who had a court here; Chelsworth, the Poklington Swan; Euston, two Cs back to back, the cypher of Charles II who built the church; Haughley, the Silyard arms; Gipping, the Tyrell arms; Hacheston, the Brandon arms; Helmingham, the Tollemache arms; Holbrook, the arms of the Clench and Rodwell families; Ipswich St Mary Quay, the Tooley arms; Ipswich St Stephen, the Robert Lemman tomb; Ipswich town, the Gippeswich ship; Monewden, the arms of Edward the Black Prince; Preston, the arms of Queen Elizabeth I; Rushbrooke, the arms of Henry VIII; Westerfield, an ostrich, part of the arms of the Edgar family; and Wingfield, the arms of the De la Pole family.

For some we had puns, something the old medieval craftsman were so fond of, so, a wheelbarrow for Barrow, a gate for Burgate, and a crow for Crowfield. In this vein are the railway crossing gates for Darsham; a jockey's cap and whip for Newmarket; Saint Peter's Tree for Pettistree; and for Nayland a rebus — "A Bell" for the Abell who did so much for the village.

Then come a set of bench-ends: cranes for Cransford; The Sciapod for Dennington; a wolf guarding St Edmund's head for Stonham Aspal, and for Wilby a poppy head.

There are brasses for Brundish, Easton, and Rougham. For Parham, the wall scratchings of old time ships almost certainly done when the church was built in the last part of the fourteenth century.

Buildings, as apart from churches, are: Erwarton, the gate house; Framlingham castle; Freston tower; Hadleigh, the gate tower; Heveningham, the Hall; beiston, the nuclear power station; Mildenhall, the market cross; Ipswich All Hallows, the power station; Nettlestead, the Chae; Snape, the Maltings and the old bridge; the Tattingstone Wonder; and West Stow, a gateway.

Connected with the rivers or the sea are: Levington, at sailing barge; Nacton, a wild duck; Orford, avocets; Ramsholt and Waldringfield, small sailing boats; Wolverstone, the smugglers cat in the window; and Wrentham, a steam trawler.

Flowers and plants or leaves represent Bouge, Fitzgerald's Persian Rose; vine and hop leaves for Bruisyard, where both of these plants used to grow; flax for Linstead; a nettle for Nettlestead; cherries for Polstead; while oak leaves occur for Huntingfield and Occold. An unusual motive is the "locust tree" and bees for St John the Baptist at Onehouse.

Finally there are symbols which represent a parish which are known locally but probably not to the world at large. These include Bardwell, the Bardwell Sword; Barton Mills is known locally as the church of the Green Dragon; Bawdsey, a Suffolk Punch, for we were told the breed began here; Blythburgh, a robin from the legend that once a robin nested in the lectern, and jock o' the Clock; Bradwell St George has an unusual church organ and a statue of St George; Bungay, its famous Black Dog; Cornard, peacocks; Dalham, the Golden Hind, for Martin Stuteville who came from Dalham was Drake's agent and sailing companion;- Dunwich, the great wave that overwhelmed the town; Earl Soham, a falcon, for the name of the place is derived from the Earl's swamp or hunting ground; East Bergholt, the bell cage; Eyke, from the great key found here with the lands made of the letters IKE; Felixstowe, the Cork Lightship, now withdrawn; Frostenden, a frog because the Danes called this the "valley of the frog" Kettleburgh, a Viking's winged hat because of Keitel, the Dane who lived here; Lydgate, a picture of Sir John Lydgate at his desk; Shotley, the mast of H.M.S. Ganges; Sternfield, a madder rose: the church is dedicated to St Magdalene of Magdala. And finally Thorpeness with "the house in the clouds".

Needless to say all this wasn't done in a day. To start with we approached friends whom we knew enjoyed embroidery but we were able to make a wider cast of the net by taking advantage of the fact that the Cathedral authorities had a tent at the Suffolk Show of 1963 and by working hard we were able to have a dozen or more "tops" ready for show there. We also prepared a large number of "samplers" which consisted of a small piece of single thread canvas, fourteen lines to the inch, some crewel wool of different colours, a chart of stitches, and a sheet of instructions and advice. These we handed out to anyone interested. On receiving a sampler back we were able to judge the ability of the worker and then issue them with a full sized canvas, detailed chart and wool to do the arms of the cross, the two backgrounds, the lettering, and the design.

Gradually the word spread and by the end of a year we had one hundred finished kneelers to show, first at an exhibition in the Cathedral Cloisters, and then at the Suffolk Show the following year when again the authorities had a Cathedral tent.

It was not long before other bodies became interested, notably the schools, but also many other organisations including churches of other denominations.

From the beginning it had been hoped that the venture would be self-supporting. We worked out the cost of materials for one kneeler plus the cost of making up and settled on one guinea to cover these and allowed a little over for postage. As regards this last item we were wrong, for not only had a great many more letters to be written than at first expected — there were over five thousand in all — but as time passed so the postal rates rose, but even so the cost never exceeded £1.5s.

The canvas used was a French type of single thread with fourteen threads to the inch. The wool was of the kind called "crewel", a very fine wool which allows several strands to be used in the needle at one time and since the usual number was three, and sometimes four, this allowed a considerable degree of shading by mixing one or more colours together.

The letters giving the parish name were done in gold, seven threads high, and as stated earlier the stem of the "Y" cross and the arms were in red and gold.

As far as possible the work was confined to those who lived in Suffolk or had close affinities with the County.

Generally speaking each volunteer to work a kneeler was asked if they were prepared to meet the cost, but if for any reason this was not possible there were always those who in a wish to contribute would offer to pay if someone else could be found to do the work, and of course in many cases the local P.C.C. or M.U. would put up the money. It was always forthcoming. In quite a number of cases a parish was unable to find a worker so then the kneeler was offered to someone outside who was willing to fill in, and here I must pay tribute to Mrs Flo. Godwin of Ipswich who was always willing to come to the rescue and in fact did no less than fifty tops for parishes, or other bodies, who called for help.

The Cushions for the Canons' Stalls, their design and making.

When the work of making the thousand kneelers for the Nave was approaching completion, there arose a hope that we might be allowed to provide some form of decoration for the stalls in the new Chancel. The stalls in the old and now demolished Chancel had numbered twenty four and were dedicated to olden time Saints, Abbots, East Anglian Kings and two Sacristans. These old stalls were plain oak stained black and Mr Dykes Bower, architect for the reconstruction, was adamant that they would find no place in the new work. Furthermore he was at first unwilling that there should be any form of decoration at all in the new stalls, but he was eventually persuaded to allow cushions for the seats so that, though they would not be immediately conspicuous, they would provide a modicum of comfort for their occupants.

Before embroidery could commence it was necessary to find a design which, while being harmonious each with the other, could nevertheless bear repetition and thus save an immense amount of time in drawing out each design on paper — for to the original twenty four were now added another twenty one, thus providing stalls for all the church's dignitaries. The old dedications were to old time personages, the new ones were to be more modem.

Consultation with Mr Dykes Bower resulted in approval for a series of flowered designs, each with a central area based on a circle with cusps totalling ten inches across. These circles were to contain the motive or dedication. All round was to be the flower design and of these there were four, large flowers and leaves, small flowers with different leaves, a third design with the addition of stylised fruits, and finally grapes and vine leaves. A very pleasing variation could be achieved by using different colours as can be seen from studying the cushions themselves.

When it came to finding a drawing that would best represent the dedication in hand the original twenty four were the most difficult because so little is known about many of the personages to be depicted. It is doubtful if we could ever have achieved a satisfactory solution had we not come across a most valuable little booklet written some years ago by Miss Jane Willis called Founders and Builders of the Church in East Anglia, being notes concerning the Patrons of the Canons' Stalls in Saint Edmundsbury Cathedral. This came into our possession through the kindness of Canon Southwold.

Now follows a list of these Patrons, and how each was dealt with.

St Felix. Is the Patron Saint of East Anglia. He died in 647 A.D. He was consecrated Bishop of Dunwich by Honorius, Archbishop of Canterbury. There is a story that the book of the gospels which he used was, till not very long ago, still extant and was known as The Red Book of Eye. In our representation he is

shown in priestly robes and holding his "red book".

St Edward the Confessor. A note must be inserted here to say that whenever our subject was known to have had a coat of arms we have used these, so, following the reasoning in the note above, Edward is represented by his arms, a blue shield on which is a cross, in special form, with a martlet in each segment of the shield.

St Edmund. His story is well known and so are his arms, a golden crown with two crossed arrows, so this was the inevitable choice.

St Ethelbert, King and Martyr. He died in 794 A.D., slain by Offa King of the Mercians, who conquered East Anglia. He is shown sword in hand with his severed head under his arm, and a nimbus where his head should be.

King Eorfwald. Reputedly the first Christian king of East Anglia, but he wavered in his allegiance to Christianity so, to make sure of a favourable reception in the next world, he built in his church at Rendlesham, two altars, one to the Christian God and one to the pagan deities. These we have shown by two altars, one each side of the throne on which he is seated, one with a cross upon it, and the other with a winged hat.

King Siegebert, son of Eorfwald. Unlike his father, Siegebert had no doubts at all and as a thorough Christian he built a large number of churches, so we see him on his throne with a small church on one side and a more pretentious one on the other.

St Mary of Beodricsworth. She was the Patron Saint of the small church that stood where the Abbey was later built. The village name was altered from Beodricsworth to St Edmundsbury. She is shown holding her little church in her arms. Bishop Aylwin. Was consecrated Bishop of Elmham in 1020 having originally been a monk in Ely. After the death of King Edmund his body was moved several times to save it from the Danes, and Aylwin finally brought it to Bury where he laid the foundations of a magnificent church. He is shown guarding the catafalque.

King Anna. Succeeded King Siegebert and died in battle at Bull Camp near Dunwich in 665. He is said to have had as many children as there are straws in a sheaf of wheat, so we have set him on his throne with a sheaf on each side!

St Baldwin. Became the third Abbot of Bury in 1065. He died in 1097. It was he who built the great tower of the Abbey. The original church had been made of wood but the coming of the Normans had seen the start of the use of stone. He is seen, mitred, with crozier in one hand, and his tower in the other.

St Anselm. Seventh Abbot. He seems to have been a controversial sort of person, always appealing to the Pope for some position or other. He made frequent trips to the Continent and to Rome so we have shown him on horseback as setting out on one of these journeys.

St Fursa. An Irishman. The nearest he got to Bury was when he founded a monastery at Cnobbesburg (Burg Castle), which, with Bury, was one of the first two monasteries in England. His emblem is said to have been cattle so we have shown a pair yoked.

Stephen Langton. Archbishop, died in 1228. His is a complicated story mixed up with Pope Innocent III who consecrated him Archbishop and Cardinal; and with King John, who was at loggerheads with the same Pope, who had excommunicated him. The King had closed many churches and caused great suffering. In 1213 Langton produced the Charter of Henry I by which Anselm had won the liberty of the Church from Henry and which was to be the basis for Magna Carta. This, when placed on the High Altar at Bury, was sworn to by the nobles before presenting it to King John at Runnymede in 1215. To Langton we owe the division of the entire Bible into chapters. He also enforced the celibacy of the clergy. He is represented

by his coat of arms.

St Etheldreda, Queen of Northumbria and later Abbess of Ely was one of the daughters of King Anna. She lived a very austere life. The Abbey owned vast estates many of which lay in Suffolk. She also had a coat of arms which we used, three golden crowns on a red shield.

Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, was a scholar and writer. His works, chiefly theological, are quoted by most contemporary writers. As a Bishop he too had a coat of arms.

Sacristan Godfrey. Described as a man of "large body and great ideas" he continued Baldwin's work of building the great Abbey church. He is represented by a chalice with the opening words of the Creed with music in plain chant.

Sacristan Hervey (Hervius). He was a contemporary of Abbot Anselm and did a lot of work on the Abbey. We have given him a Bible.

John Reeve. Became Abbot in 1509 and was deeply involved in the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. He tried to buy Cromwell off but failed. He died, probably of grief, in 1540. He is represented by the arms he bore. Originally his grave, with a very fine brass, lay in St Mary's church nearby, but this was taken up about 1745 and laid in the entrance to the graveyard by the south porch of that church.

St Denys, Bishop and Martyr, was the Apostle of the Gauls and the first Bishop of Paris. Abbot Baldwin had been a monk of St Denys and had built a basilica in his honour but this was pulled down when his "great church" was begun. The present church of St James, which is now the Cathedral, was founded by Anselm to replace Baldwin's basilica. He also is represented by his coat of arms, a white cross on a red shield with a rampant lion in each segment.

Jocelin de Brakelond. Born about 1156 he was probably a native of Bury. His chief work was to write a chronicle covering the history of the Abbey from 1173 to 1190. The Latin text of his work is in the British Museum. We have portrayed him as a monk seated working at his desk.

Abbot Samson. Worked as a sub-Sacristan under Abbot Hugh and was a contemporary of Jocelin de Brakelond. When Abbot Hugh died Samson was elected to succeed him. His first work was to get the financial affairs of the Abbey in order. He confirmed the rights of the Burghers of Bury under their own charter. In the sixth year of King Richard II St Edmundsbury became an ecclesiastic Court and the Abbot was made a local magistrate, which we have shown by incorporating the scales of justice into the design. Bishop Humbert. There is very little known about him but he is said to have crowned Edmund King in 855. He is also said to have been the first Bishop of Elmham so we have placed him between two elm trees.

Abbot Theodred. Abbot of Holme and Bishop of Elmham, he was a zealous friend and patron of Bury. He died in 962. His will is preserved in the Registers of the Abbey. He is shown giving an audience. Thomas Wolsey. Archbishop and Cardinal. He is not specifically connected with Bury, unless because of the many East Anglian monasteries he had marked for suppression to provide revenue for his new college to be built at Ipswich. He fell from favour with King Henry VIII and died a broken man on November 12th, 1530. He is here represented by a Cardinal's hat.

St Thomas a Becket. Archbishop of Canterbury. He first won Henry II's friendship when he was Archdeacon of Canterbury by defeating a project to crown Stephen's son Eustace as King. Henry made him Lord Chancellor and after the death of Theobald, Henry secured his election as Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas then changed his mode of life and became very austere. He resigned the Chancellorship and devoted himself to the welfare of the clergy. Later there was a violent disagreement with the King, and this was followed by his martyrdom in his own church, the story of which is well known. His device is a white shield with three choughs thereon. This stall is that occupied by the Chancellor of the Cathedral and is not one of the original twenty four dedications.

The buildings of the enlarged chancel gave an opportunity to include stalls for the other prelates attached to the Cathedral and these now follow with their dedications and include the eight lay Canons whom the

Bishop wished to create.

Archbishop Sancroft. 1617-93. Was Archbishop of Canterbury in 1678. Represented by his coat of arms. The stall is occupied by the (Suffragan) Bishop of Dunwich.

St Dunstan. Also was Archbishop of Canterbury. It was he who restored the monastic life of the Church and founded Benedictine monasteries at Peterborough (966) and Ely (970). Represented here by the old story of how, in a moment of exasperation, he caught the Devil by the nose with a pair of tongs. Occupied by the Assistant Bishop.

St Botolph. Founder and first Abbot of a monastery at Iken. Shown as a prelate holding a thatched church. (Iken church was thatched until fire recently destroyed the roof.) Occupied by the Archdeacon of Ipswich.

Simon of Sudbury. Born in Sudbury, he became Chancellor to King Richard II. He is depicted holding the Charter that the people under Wat Tyler were demanding. When the King demurred, he is said to have suggested that it could always be torn up later, hence the sly look in his eyes. He was murdered by the mob after Tyler's death by treachery. He seems always to be represented accompanied by a white dog. The stall is occupied by the Archdeacon of Sudbury.

Nicholas Ferrar. A very religious man who founded an Anglican Community at Little Gidding which aimed at bringing monasticism back into the Church of England. This Community was dispersed by the Puritans in 1646. All we could do was to write his name large. The stall is occupied by the Archdeacon of Bury St Edmunds.

St Augustine. The first Archbishop of Canterbury. He is shown baptising the King of Kent. Sent by Rome, he introduced Christianity to the South of England. Spreading North, agreement was reached eventually with the earlier Christians coming South from Scotland at the Synod of Whitby in 664. The stall is that of the Provost.

Pope John XXIII. This Pope received in audience Bishop Morris of this Diocese and Provost John Waddington in 1961 together with a group of others from this Cathedral. Represented by the Papal arms the stall is that of the Diocesan Registrar.

Bishop Patteson. One of the earliest English missionaries. He became Bishop of Melanesia in the South Pacific in 1861. Represented here by "a coral island". Stall of a Canon Residentiary.

William Temple. Recently Archbishop of Canterbury. The design by which he is represented is taken from the frontal of the altar in Canterbury Cathedral dedicated to his memory. Occupied by the second Residentiary Canon.

St Alban. He was the first English martyr under the Diocletian persecution, circa 305 A.D. Shown as a priestly figure holding a cross in one hand and sword in the other. The stall is that of one of the two Minor Canons.

St Boniface. Born in Devonshire, he became the Apostle of Germany. His courage in felling the oak tree of Thor won him great renown. He is shown here with his axe laid to the foot of the tree. The stall is that of the other Minor Canon.

Roland Taylor. He was Rector of Hadleigh and Domestic Chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer. During the reign of Mary Tudor he was burned as a heretic on Aldham Common in 1555. Represented by a cross surrounded by flames. The stall is that of the Precentor.

St Cedd. Bishop of the East Saxons, circa 654. He is regarded as a missionary Saint and so is depicted, as such often were, by a figure holding a chalice, namely bringing the Sacrament to the people. The stall is that of the Succentor.

Now follow the Lay Canons. These were introduced by Bishop Leslie Brown, to represent the chief industries of the Diocese, namely Printers, Weavers, Farmers, Brewers, Seafarers, Glaziers, Carpenters and Stonemasons.

The Printers are shown as in an old print depicting printers at work.

The Weavers are taken from a painting by Van Gogh.

The Farmers by an old-fashioned horse-drawn plough.

The Brewers from the drawing of a vat found in a book of 1825 entitled *The Art of Brewing*.

Seafarers are represented by both a sailing and a steam fishing boat, with on one side a lighthouse, and on the other a lightship.

The art of Glazing is a drawing of the great east window in the Cathedral (worked by a girl aged eleven).

The Carpenters and the Stonemasons are shown at their work.

The whole was a labour of love done with skill, care, and dedication in an attempt to enhance the beauty of the surroundings in which they would be used, and grateful thanks are due to those who so willingly gave their skill and time.

Grace and Oswald Sitwell