

## CONSIDERATIONS RELEVANT TO THE DATING OF THE IRELAND CHAPEL AT LYDIATE

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#### Earlier notices and the evidence of the initials

The building of the chapel at Lydiate has been ascribed at one time or another to various members of the Ireland family. The more common attribution has been to the first Laurence Ireland, who is thought to have died before 1469, or to Laurence and his son, John, who died in 1514. The chapel has also been attributed to John himself, and by implication, of dating to his son George, or to George's son, Laurence 2 who succeeded c.1535 and who died in 1566. Understandably, no one has suggested that the chapel was begun in the reign of Edward VI or of Mary Tudor, and the period covered by these attributions, which have not in every case been supported by evidence or argument, is from some time before 1469 to 1546.

The purpose here is to examine whether a reconsideration of the earlier references, together with some evidence to be found in the fabric itself, may suggest a firm date for the ground course of the chapel. It will be useful to look at the principal notices in the order of their appearance.

According to Pennant (1801), who described the chapel towards the end of the eighteenth century:

'It had been a Chapel of Ease to the Parish Church of Halsall, dedicated to St. Catherine, and supposed to have been founded by one of the Irelands of Lydiate Hall, over the door are the letters L.I. for Lawrence Ireland, probably the founder.'

In 1824, Gregson described the chapel as, '... an interesting ruin of a Gothic building which seems never to have been completed. Its date is the reign of Henry VIII, when the Reformation probably suspended the labours of its catholic builders. The walls covered with ivy are yet in good condition, but it is clearly discernible that they never received a roof'. Taken separately, these statements are not incompatible. That of Pennant permits an attribution to Laurence 1 or Laurence 2; that of Gregson to John, George or Laurence 2. When Pennant's 'L.I.' and Gregson's (1924) reign of Henry VIII are taken together, an attribution to Laurence 2 seems to be inescapable. The period 1535 to 1546 falls within the fairly narrow limits of dating suggested by the architecture. The early years of the second Laurence's tenure saw the first of those acts of government which were to bring to an end the founding of chantries and the building of chapels such as that at Lydiate.

Redding (1844) placed the building of the chapel in the year 1520, though he gave no reason for doing so. His statement was accompanied by a marginal vignette, showing the chapel as having a window over the south porch.

W. J. Roberts' 1849 paper on the Ruined Chapel at Lydiate, made the first comprehensive attempt to provide the chapel with a history. His argument for the dating has not been positively challenged and though it has been conceded uneasily by some later writers and qualified by others, it has remained influential. The most important contribution made by Roberts was his addition of the initial C to the existing evidence:

'The dripstone over the outer arch is terminated by shields, on which are carved initials; on that on the west side of the entrance L1; on the other C1.'

'The arms and initials on the shields on the porch of the ruin point to the era and the individual who founded it.'

'Thomas Ireland ... was succeeded by his son Lawrence, who married Catherine, daughter of Henry Blundell, of Little Crosby.'

'..... no doubt he erected this edifice as a domestic Chapel, on the domain about four hundred yards south-east of the hall. The initials on the shields on the porch of the ruin, the armorial bearing, the dedication and the architecture combine to confirm it.'

'The late Mr. Rickman ..... considers the perpendicular style to have prevailed from the year 1377, time Richard the Second, down to the close of the reign of Henry the Eighth, 1546, a period which embraces the life of the founder, and in which style this edifice is constructed. The dedication to St. Catherine must be considered in honour of his wife Catherine Blundell, whose initials C.I. are on the shield to the east of the entrance to the porch, opposite to his own on the west. Above the porch are his arms .....

In fact, the period suggested by the architecture is the second quarter of the sixteenth century. The dedication of the chapel is not known. The arms while they say Ireland do not indicate any Ireland in particular. Only the initials seem to point to Laurence 1 and his wife, if we accept with Roberts that Catherine Ireland spelled her name with C, rather than in the usual fashion of her time, with K.

T.E. Gibson (1876) produced an account of the

chapel which he admitted to be derivative from that of Roberts, but which contained some qualifications and some additions. His contribution to the dating of the chapel is as follows:

'It is tantalising to be unable to obtain more precise information on many points of interest connected with Lydiate, and especially regarding the domestic Chapel of St. Katherine, the date of its erection being still a matter of doubt.'

'The chapel also is of that debased order of architecture which was prevalent at the commencement of the sixteenth century; but as the initials of Lawrence and Katherine Ireland are still to be seen on the spandrels of the doorway, this couple must be regarded as its founders.'

'The writer has already remarked, that with reference to the period to which the building of St. Katherine's Chapel must be assigned, he has no new evidence to offer. It is certain that Lawrence and Katherine Ireland were the founders, and Lawrence died before 1485, so that the work must have begun before that date. It seems most probable that both the Chapel and Hall were left unfinished by Lawrence, and that both were completed by his successor, John, before Henry VII's reign had come to an end.'

The purpose of Gibson's suggestion, that Laurence began the building of the Chapel but that John completed it, seems to have been to extend the building activity into the sixteenth century, so as to effect some sort of compromise between the implication of the initials and the evidence of the architecture. John died in 1514, and Gibson does not say why the chapel must have been completed before 1509.

The account of the chapel given by the Victoria County History (Farrer and Brownbill 1907) repeats the argument given by Roberts together with the reserve expressed by Gibson:

'Katherine the heiress seems to have died in 1435. Her grandson Laurence Ireland son of Thomas would then have come into possession of the manor ..... he married Katherine daughter of Henry Blundell of Little Crosby, and by her had a son and heir John, who in March 1469 is described as Lord of Garston, so that his father Laurence probably died before that time.'

'To the south of the Hall in an open field stands the ruined chapel called Lydiate Abbey. It was dedicated in honour of St. Catherine ..... There are north and south doorways near the west end, with a south porch, over the outer arch of which are the arms of Ireland and on the dripstones of the label the initials L.I. and C.I.'

'The date of the building is probably fixed by the initials on the porch of Lawrence Ireland, ob. before 1486 and Catherine (Blundell) his wife, though the details would suggest a later date, especially the absence of cusps in the window tracery.'

It is of interest that what seems to have been regarded as an acceptable terminal date for Laurence I (1469) has not been applied to the dating of the chapel, and that even the later date (before 1486) has been offered with caution.

In his notes on Aughton, W.A. Wickham (1908) referred to a correspondence between the masons' marks found at Lydiate and those of the north aisle at Aughton:

'There are masons' marks upon the Aughton aisle like some found upon Lydiate Abbey,

N Σ □ X

which is supposed to date from about 1486, though the jambs of the windows and details of the base mouldings and buttresses are exactly like those of Sefton south aisle, which may be dated about the earlier part of the sixteenth century (say 1530), on which the marks

X Z W

also appear.'

The evidence of the masons' marks is more compelling than might appear from Wickham's statement, as may be seen from the following comparison:

LYDIATE:

□ X 2 X

AUGHTON:

□ X X

ORMSKIRK:

□ M

SEFTON:

X 2 X W

BEBINGTON:

□ X 2 X W

Between 1520 and some time after 1545, the parish church of Sefton was largely rebuilt and enlarged; extensive and elaborate reconstruction was carried out at Bebington; the great tower of Ormskirk was erected and a north aisle and arcade were built at

Aughton church. If the evidence of the mason's marks is not to be disregarded, it is in the context of these building activities that the chapel at Lydiate must be placed.

Wickham's comments, or their implication for the dating of the Ireland chapel, seems to have escaped general notice. In 1933, J.W. Robertson described the chapel in terms which seem to reflect his own observations:

'The church is now roofless, but from its western end rises a battlemented tower, still crowned with its tapering finials. To the side of it and facing south is the small entrance porch, traversible in three steps, which brings one to the doorway opening on to the nave. The moulded arch over the porch door terminates in two shields, on which may yet be discerned the faint outlines of the letters LI and CI, the initials of the founder, Lawrence Ireland and his wife, Catherine. Along the sides of the porch run seats, and in the north-east corner is a ragged cavity that originally contained the holy water stoup.'

P. Fleetwood-Hesketh (1955) gave the date of building as 1465 and the builder as Laurence Ireland; and in 1962 an article in the Liverpool Echo and Evening Express newspaper returned to the Gibson compromise, giving the initials as those of Laurence and Catherine, John and his wife Beatrix:

'Work started about 1485, but Lawrence and his wife died before the chapel was completed and the building was then carried on by their son John and his wife.'

'The initials of both builders and their wives can still be seen today carved in the stonework above the porch.'

More recently, in the volume of *The Buildings of England for North Lancashire*, Pevsner (1969) gives a brief notice of the chapel; and in this instance we have the writer's assurance that he has seen what he describes:

'St. CATHERINE, SW of the Catholic church, and in ruins. Perp, and probably once the chapel of Lydiate Hall, when it belonged to Lawrence and Catherine Ireland, i.e. c. 1470-80. Their arms and initials are over the S porch arch. The chapel was aisleless and had no N windows at all. Perp S windows. Perp chancel arch. The W tower had a giant arch for W doorway and W window.'

The usefulness of this report may perhaps be judged from its final statements. In fact, the chapel possessed neither chancel arch nor west doorway.

It is to be regretted that no one has provided a

drawing of the initials, which are no longer available for inspection, nor described their character. Roberts (1849), whose whole argument for the dating of the chapel depended upon them, was satisfied to support his paper with a sketch by H.C. Pidgeon, in which the south door is shown as having a square label instead of the four-centred dripstone correctly described by Roberts himself and confirmed by the photographic record.

The porch is now reduced to ruin, a condition which may have been achieved between the time when Pevsner claims to have seen it and 1975, when the Christ's College Archaeological Society made drawings of the chapel (O'Hanlon 1977).

The initials were located by Pennant 'over the door' by the Liverpool Echo and Evening Express, 'carved in the stonework above the porch;' by Pevsner, 'over the south porch arch.' It is clear from a photograph of 1903 that the initials were not in any place which might answer to these descriptions. There is, moreover, no agreement as to what the initials were: Pennant gives LI; the writer for the Liverpool Echo gives LI, CI, JI and BI. Pevsner gives LI and CI.

Roberts (1849), Gibson (1876) and Robertson (1933) are agreed that the initials were LI and CI; though while Roberts and Robertson place them on the dripstone stops, Gibson describes them as being 'on the spandrils.' Gibson carried out some excavation in the chapel, and it is unlikely that he did not look for the initials. His reference to the spandrils may be an echo of Roberts concerning Lydiate Hall: 'Lawrence ..... enlarged the family seat, Lydiate Hall, in the spandrils of the doorway of which, are carved his initials L.I.'

Roberts and Robertson carry conviction by the detail and clarity of their descriptions, which derive some support from the photographs which are available. These seem to confirm the arms at the crown of the arch and the shields as dripstone stops. The initial L is unlikely as a misreading of J or G. Some doubt may perhaps be felt in respect of the initial C, when it is considered in the light of other evidence.

The attempt to move or to extend the building of the chapel into the sixteenth century by attributing its commencement or its completion to John, and to explain the initials LI and CI as a pious memorial, derives from a feeling first expressed by Gibson, that the character of the architecture does not admit of a building date as early as 1485. To say that Lawrence began the chapel and John completed it does not resolve the difficulty, since the building is clearly of one design, whatever may have happened in the execution. The alternative proposal is that John began the building between 1500 and 1514, when he died, and that out of eccentricity he placed his parents' initials on his own work. There is

nothing to suggest that he did so, and the effect is to remove any real significance that the initials may have. In any case the compromise does not go far enough, and for the purpose of obtaining a better date the work might equally have been ascribed to John's son, George, and with as little justification.

The strongest argument for the dating of the chapel is implied in the passage from Wickham already quoted. It is clear that a group of masons employed at Lydiat before 1485, could not have worked at Aughton more than sixty years later. A low average age of twenty years in 1500 would imply an unlikely average of sixty-five years in 1545. It is clear, therefore, that the activities of the group of masons in question are to be placed in the first half of the sixteenth century. It is hard to see how this reasoning can be made to accommodate the initial C, if that is to retain the significance originally assigned to it by Roberts.

The condition of the initials when Roberts saw them cannot be known. In 1933, when Robertson reported them, they might 'yet be discerned' as faint outlines. The possibility is not remote that Roberts misread the initials, and that Gibson and Robertson were guided by the earlier reading.

As will appear in his references to other aspects of the building, Roberts was not always accurate in his observations. The initial L presents no problems; it is not a very likely misreading of J for John or G for George, whether in their mediaeval or modern forms, and will stand as well for the second Laurence as for the first. The only letter which, in a form in use in the early sixteenth century, might perhaps have been read as C, and which is at the same time compatible with the other evidence, is the letter E, the initial of Eleanor, who was the wife of Laurence 2 and who was living in 1540.



### **The purpose of the chapel and the evasion hypothesis.**

There is no certain evidence which might help to determine the ecclesiastical status of the chapel. Pennant said that it had been 'a Chapel of Ease to the Parish Church of Halsall.' Roberts did not agree with Pennant: 'It is to be regretted that so laborious and respected an antiquary and topographer as Pennant, has not given the authority for his calling it a Chapel of Ease, ....' Speaking of the first Laurence Ireland, he says: 'His parish church, Halsall, being situate at the inconvenient distance of three miles and a half, and those of the adjoining parishes of Aughton and Sephton equidistant; no doubt he erected this edifice as a domestic Chapel, on the domain about four hundred years south-east of the hall.'

According to Gibson, 'It could not be correctly styled a chapel-of-ease to Halsall, as it was altogether a private chapel, built by the Irelands for the convenience of daily Mass ....'

Robertson considered that the chapel had provided accommodation for a chantry: 'Five centuries ago the building was a chantry dedicated to St. Katherine, and served the little Catholic community that dwelt within the manorial confines of Lydiat.'

There seems to be no reason why a chapel of ease should not have been intended, though it could never have accommodated any great number of people; nor any reason why a chantry should not have been founded there. The combination does not seem to have been uncommon. The Lovekyn chapel at Kingston-on-Thames, referred to by Cook (1947), was both chantry chapel and chapel of ease. It was no more than forty feet in length, rather less than the Ireland chapel. A free-standing chapel, having a tall bell-tower, placed at an inconvenient distance from the domestic complex of the hall, suggests something more than a private chapel or oratory.

It may be thought unlikely that the Ireland family preferred to walk the greater part of half a mile merely to say their prayers, or that they needed a bell-tower to call them to their minor devotions.

The tower was not characteristic of a private chapel, and in this case was sufficiently assertive to suggest that the purpose of the bell was not simply liturgical; that it was meant to summon and not merely to inform. Gibson's opinion, that the chapel was 'built by the Irelands for the convenience of daily Mass' is no doubt the correct one; but it is not certain that the convenience was to be limited to the Ireland household. Whatever the intention may have been, there is no evidence to suggest that it was realised. The chapel generated none of those records, whether of an ecclesiastical or other nature, which might have been expected. The only evidence of its existence is in the ruins of the fabric itself.

In the case of a domestic chapel, existing for the private devotions of the household, where there was no endowment and no formally constituted chantry, and where the officiating priest was employed on a casual basis at the will of the founder or his family, it does not appear that any diocesan or other record would necessarily exist. Nevertheless, if mass was to be said in such a chapel the Bishop's licence was required. Mrs Arthur Cecil Tempest (1889) gives an example of such a licence from William Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, in 1451 permitting Hamon le Mascy and his wife Johanna to have mass said in their chapel of their manor of Rixton:

'That in the Chapel within your manor of Rixton .... it may be lawful for low masses and other low

divine offices to be celebrated by all proper chaplains whomsoever in the presence of you or either of you, your children and household ..... we grant to you and each of you and your children and household special licence to hear as well as to the chaplain thereof to celebrate divine worship .....

The setting aside of lands or rents for the support of a chantry priest required a licence from the Crown, and the chaplain required diocesan authority. The requirement is stated by K.L. Wood-Legh (1965) as follows:

'Before the place of a new chantry could be finally fixed, it would of course be necessary to secure the approval of those ecclesiastics whom it might affect. For there could be no extra-parochial services, even in a private oratory, without the consent of the rector or of some higher authority able to override him.'

'..... the consent of the rector or of the rector and vicar had to be obtained before a chantry could be established anywhere within the bounds of the parish.'

The creation of a chapel of ease, which was a part of the parish structure, was no less subject to control and scrutiny, whether of the diocesan or of a rector concerned for the dues and prerogatives of the parish church.

Roberts supposed the chapel to have been in use for a period of more than sixty years; from a date before 1470 to some time after 1535. He recognised that a complete absence of record was best explained by the absence of anything to record, and suggested that in the first place the foundation was not of a nature likely to appear in diocesan records, and that the chapel did not appear in the reports of the royal commissioners of 1535 and later because it was by then no longer in use. Of the period to 1535 he says:

'Examining the ecclesiastical records of the county from the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*, 1291, to the royal commission issued 26th Henry Eighth, 1534-5, the name of Lydiate Chapel does not occur. From this it may be inferred that it was not consecrated.'

It might equally be inferred that during the period in question the chapel did not exist. In any case the absence of record is not explained. If, as Roberts believed, the purpose of the chapel was to avoid the necessity of attendance at Halsall parish church, it was clearly intended that mass should be said there on a regular basis, and provision for a chaplain must have been made.

For the final stage in the life of the chapel the relevant passages are as follows:

'A royal commission issued in the year 1535, to ascertain the value of all the ecclesiastical property in the kingdom, and the following year an act was passed for the dissolution of the lesser monasteries. In the 1st Edward the Sixth, 1547, the dissolution of the chantries took place, and their revenues were confiscated. These things no doubt would have their influence with the Lord of the Manor of Lydiate, and cause him to preserve if possible the foundation of his ancestor from falling a sacrifice to these measures. Stripping it as much as possible of its ecclesiastical character, and doing away with any endowment it might have, he would try to render it an object that would not call the attention of the royal commissioners.'

'To this eventful period during the life of George Ireland, is to be ascribed the desertion and consequent delapidation of Lydiate Chapel.'

The act of 1534 for the payment of first fruits and tithes was followed in 1535 by the commissions for the evaluation of Church property, and in 1536 and 1538 by the acts for the suppression of the monasteries. The years 1546 and 1547 produced acts for the suppression of the chantries, etc. Laurence succeeded George about 1535, and those fears and resulting measures of evasion which Roberts ascribed to George Ireland might more reasonably have been attributed to his son. It is not clear what Roberts had in mind when he spoke of stripping the building of its ecclesiastical character. In its ruined condition it continues to look very much like a church. The chapel envisaged by Roberts was long established; and conspicuous, as it was intended to be. The removal of its fittings, its glass, lead or timber, even the termination of its services, would have been matters of general report. In 1535 and later, the disguise or concealment of the chapel could not have been attempted.

It has been shown that on the evidence of the masons' marks the chapel could not have been built in the time of the first Laurence Ireland. If the initial L is to be accepted as evidence, an attribution to the second Laurence, and a date after 1535, are inescapable. Having begun the chapel even in the first year of his tenure, Laurence could not have completed the work before the date of the Valor, which in any case was concerned with taxation, not with confiscation. The events which might have induced Laurence to dismantle a chapel which he had completed or to abandon the construction of one which he had begun were the acts of 1536 and 1538 for the dissolution of the monasteries and that of 1546 for the suppression of the chantries and some other religious foundations. The extent to which these measures may be supposed to have influenced Laurence must depend upon when he decided to build his chapel. The evidence yet to be

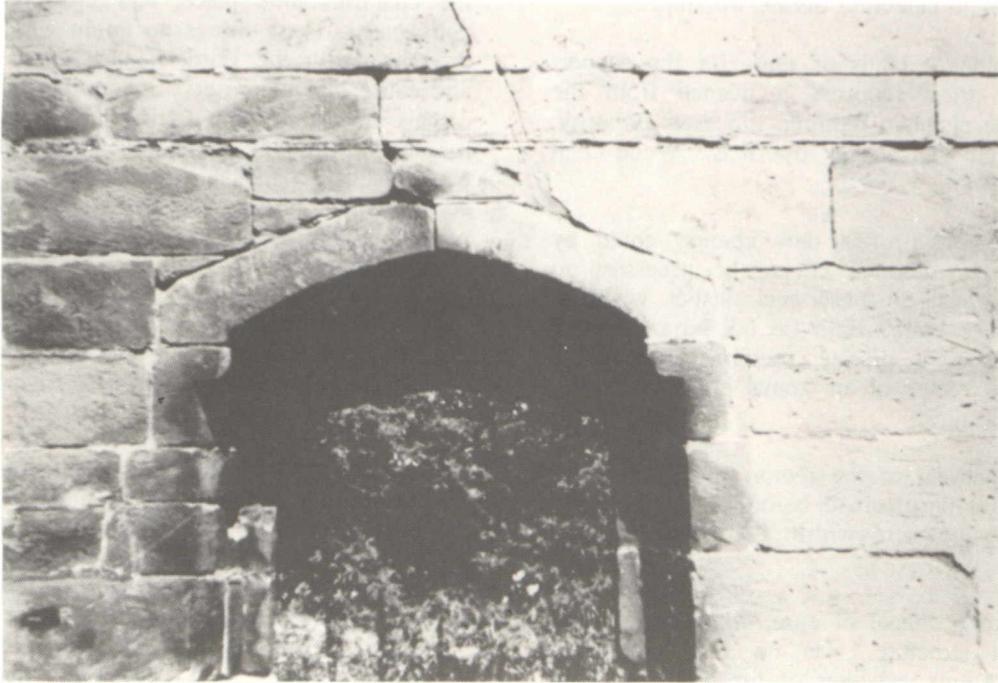


Figure 1. North doorway, interior



Figure 2. North doorway, exterior

considered for the dating of the ground course seems to indicate that work began a few years before 1546 and when the dissolution of the monasteries was already completed. There are also certain peculiarities in the construction which in combination suggest an intermission of uncertain duration, commencing when the work was very little advanced.

### **The evidence for an intermission**

The chapel is an unaisled, rectangular structure of five bays, forty-seven feet in length and sixteen feet five inches wide internally, with a rather incongruous west tower and a south porch. The four bays to the east of the south porch are filled by windows having two tiers of three round-headed uncusped lights separated by a plain transom. The mouldings are hollow chamfers. The window heads contain a single row of uncusped tracery lights formed by supermullions carried up to the window arch. The east and west walls of the chapel are completely filled by windows. There is no chancel arch or west doorway, and the only internal division is the draped tower arch, which has a span of five feet. The north wall is without windows, and is pierced only by a north doorway corresponding in position to the inner doorway of the south porch, see Figures 1-5.

The interior of the chapel is dominated by the blind north wall. This curious feature, which adds nothing pleasant to a design which had little to commend it in the first place, can scarcely have been a part of the original intention. Roberts thought it had been intended from the start, and claimed to have found support for his view in local practice. He says:

'The north side of the structure is finished with buttresses and battlements, like the south side, but is without windows. At the west end, there is a doorway opposite to that opening to the porch. This peculiar feature in this edifice, led to an inspection of the neighbouring Church of Sephton, erected in the same style of architecture. It has a door on the north side, and four small windows, not at all corresponding with those on the south, which are five in number and nearly thrice their dimensions: and on the south side there are eight clerestory windows, which are not repeated on the north side. .... it must be considered that these precautionary measures were adopted to guard against the heavy winds that are experienced here from off the Irish sea.'

In fact, no such precautions were adopted at Sefton; and it is not easy to see how Roberts should have supposed that they had been. The north side retained its earlier, less expansive fenestration, because with the tower, and unlike the rest of the church, it was not rebuilt in the first half of the sixteenth century.

As for the clerestory, the treatment of the north range, in respect of the number of its windows, their size and character, does not differ from that of the south.

The north doorway was not so exceptional as Roberts seems to have thought, and it was not necessary to go to Sefton to find another example. The parish church of Aughton, which lies less than two miles to the east of the chapel at Lydiate, possesses a north door closer in character and period to that at Lydiate than is the north door at Sefton. The north aisle at Aughton, to which the door gives access, has windows which are almost exact reproductions of the clerestory windows at Sefton. The masons' marks found on these windows are found also at Sefton south aisle, and at Lydiate chapel.

If protection from the winds was of first importance, the provision of a north door, without the shelter of a porch, was not the best way to obtain it. It seems likely that the omission of windows in the north wall of the chapel represents a departure from the original scheme, and should be viewed in conjunction with some peculiarities in the treatment of those windows which were provided.

Roberts refers only briefly to the windows in order to observe that the saddlebars appear to have been removed with violence. He seems not to have noticed, or perhaps he did not attach any significance to, the fact that the chasing of the jambs and archlets to receive the glazing is discontinuous, and that the sockets for the saddlebars lie sometimes in the intended plane of the glass and sometimes towards the outer face of the wall.

The courses of the jambs and the heads of the lights have in some cases been prepared for permanent glazing, and in other cases they are partly worked or left plain. All three conditions may be observed in the same window, and no order appears in their distribution. In at least one instance, though the sill has not been worked, the chasing of the archlets and parts of the jambs has been attempted. It is clear that the work was carried out on the bench in a haphazard fashion without reference to the necessary order of assembly, and was abandoned before the wall had reached the level of the sills.

Although the mouldings provide no rebate for the seating of the frames, it seems possible that the windows were closed with movable glazing, in a manner more usually associated with domestic practice of the period, and that the sockets, which were cut after the attempt at conventional glazing had been abandoned, received either the usual saddlebars or other metal fixings. Gibson refers to his finding window glass in the course of his



Figure 3. Head of windows, south side



Figure 4. South doorway, interior

excavation and according to Roberts, 'Richard Bryan Smith Esq., of Pygons Hill, Lydiate, informed me he had found fragments of glass attached to the mullions.' In windows of the type in question the word mullions might equally refer to the super-mullions, and it is possible that fixed glazing was confined to the tracery lights, perhaps of the east window as suggested by Gibson, which could not conveniently be closed in any other way. From what remains to be seen, it does not appear that the tracery of the south windows was prepared for glass.

The manner in which the chasing has been carried out is not consistent with the workmanship of the windows themselves. The window forms are cleanly finished and are worked precisely to the lines of the scriber, where these are visible. The grooving on the other hand is at times little more than a tentative scratching, and appears in general to have been worked with a pick rather than with a chisel. The same inconsistency may be seen in the treatment of the doorways, in the manner in which the courses are addressed to the angles of the heads. Only the inner face of the south doorway shows the form originally intended; elsewhere, in an attempt to regularize the courses, the pedimental heads have been cut away. In the outer face of the north doorway it has been necessary to modify the spandrel pieces, and the masonry over the inner arch is little better than a rubble filling. The handling of the inner arch of the south doorway, though neater, is makeshift; and although, exceptionally, the outer face has spandrel pieces precisely made and correctly positioned, in this case also the head of the doorway has been partly cut away. It appears that when the heads were put in place, of the sixteen spandrel pieces required only four were available, and that the capacity, or perhaps the inclination, to provide the remainder was no longer present.

 who worked

upon the lower course of the chapel, were associated with a more ambitious programme at Bebington; and it is difficult to suppose that their services were available when the chasing of the windows was attempted and when the heads of the doorways were put in position.

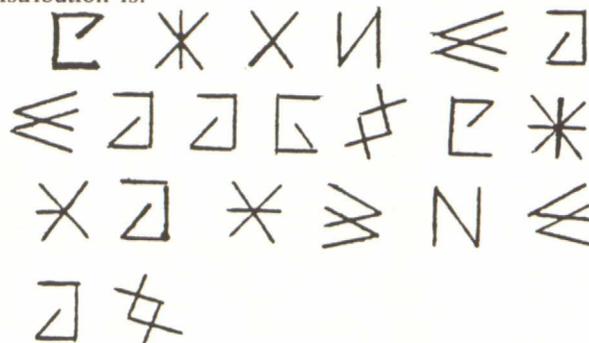
It is probable that the windows, doorways, set-offs and other embellishments were shopwork, in accordance with a common practice of the period, when, in the words of John Harvey (1978), 'mass production had reached the stage where it was very nearly possible to buy a chantry chapel out of the catalogue.' Salzman provides an example of such an arrangement made at Oxford in 1528, by which William Jonsons, freemason, is to make or cause to be made three heads of windows of four lights and the head of an east window of five lights, complete with voussoirs and jambs, to be delivered on site.

It is likely that under such a contract the parts required, which in any case would necessarily be provided in advance of requirement, would continue to be delivered without regard to any suspension of the building activity, until such time as the agreement was terminated. A possible inference is that the chapel though of one design is of more than one build, the first of which terminated below the level of the sills, and before the windows of the north side were available; that this was followed by an intermission of sufficient duration to require the dispersal of the labour force; and that when building was resumed it was with less skilled operatives and to correspondingly lowered standards of requirement. In addition to the shopwork, a certain quantity of worked material might remain available from the first build, such as the spandrel pieces of the outer faces of the north and south doorways. Some support for this interpretation may be found in the distribution of the masons' marks.

The marks found at the lowest level of the ground course are as follows:



Proceeding clockwise from the north doorway the distribution is:



Twenty-one marks appear on the first course. Above this level, over the whole of the interior walls, which average 17 courses in height, only 18 marks are found, distributed as follows:

NORTH WALL

- Course 5 
- Course 6 (level of the sills) 
- Course 12 
- EAST WALL None

SOUTH WALL

Course 5 

ADJACENT TO AND OVER HEAD OF SOUTH DOORWAY

Course 7   
 Course 8   
 Course 9   
 Course 11 

SOUTH WEST WALL

Course 8 

NORTH WEST WALL

Course 7   
 Course 8   
 Course 10 

TOWER None

Over the marks found above the first course, half are grouped in the small area above and adjacent to the head of the south doorway. This very localised concentration of marks appearing above the level of inferior work, when seen in conjunction with the sporadic occurrence of marks over the other areas of wall, and with the fact that no marks appear upon the corresponding outer face, is compatible with the use of materials remaining from an earlier stage of building.

An intermission, occurring when the building had not progressed much above the ground course, would permit a possible explanation of two features not so far considered. These are the increased pitch of the roof and the absence of a piscina, or any trace on one. In respect of the original weather mold, Roberts says:

'Above the arch there is a stone factable to secure the end of the roof from the weather; this has been considered flat as there is a groove of greater pitch cut in the surface of the tower, in which from its appearance was inserted the roof.'

The implication, that the designer of the roof as first intended did not know his business, is unconvincing. Certainly the roof was flattish, but it was not uniquely so and it was perfectly in keeping with the architectural character of the building. Roofs of comparably low pitch are not unusual; and it is strange that in the course of his inspection of



Figure 5. South doorway, exterior

the clerestory at Sefton, Roberts did not notice that the pitch of the roof was scarcely different from what had been intended at Lydiate.

It was certainly the original intention that the roof of the chapel should be covered with lead. The increase in pitch probably reflects the later decision to use stone slates, requiring a steeper slope, and would very likely have been greater had it not been necessary to keep the ridge below the parapet of the existing east gable. Gibson refers to his discovery of stone slates in the course of his excavation.

Gibson believed that he had found the drain from the piscina:

'No remains of the piscina have been discovered, but it is probable that the cavity in the wall which it would occupy was filled up some years ago, when it was found necessary to repair and strengthen the building.'

'Above six feet in front of the altar, and about three feet from the surface, some dark mould was found mingled with fine sand which had evidently been brought there, as it did not belong to the natural soil. .... on mentioning the subject to the Bishop, he at once referred it to the well for the deposit of the sacrarium, which it was customary to place in front of the altar: he believed that a communication would be found with the spot occupied by the sacrarium on the south side. This conjecture proved to be correct, and a little channel could be traced leading to the position indicated.'

'The presence of the dark mould in such a situation clearly proved that the sacrifice of the Mass had been frequently offered in the Chapel before its desecration.'

If Gibson's account is dependable a piscina seems to have been intended; and certainly, in view of the character of the building and its presumed original purpose, its absence is very noticeable. Very possibly it would have suffered from vandalism, but it is unlikely that it would have been removed in its entirety from the wall into which it was bonded. Apart from a single small block, which in view of its size could not have replaced the piscina, the south wall of the chapel, adjacent to the altar, shows no sign of filling such as Gibson suggested. The run of the courses is otherwise uninterrupted, and the stones are more or less uniform in dimensions; that is to say, about twelve inches deep and thirty-six inches in length. The piscina could not have been less than twelve inches high nor as much as thirty-six inches in width; and the restoration of the wall to its present appearance would therefore have involved the replacement of a substantial quantity of masonry. It may be doubted that any restorer would have gone to so much trouble and expense to make good some minor

damage, in a chapel already fallen into ruin, when a little neat patching would have served as well. It is clear that the small block was inserted to make good the failure to achieve a correct junction with the south-east angle; and the workmanship is in character with that of the doorways and the courses immediately above the crown of the tower arch.

A better explanation for the absence of a piscina might be that work on the chapel terminated before the intended level of the piscina had been reached, and that when work was resumed the original purpose had been abandoned and the piscina was no longer necessary.

### **The evidence of the masons' marks**

The usefulness of the masons' marks for the purpose of dating was reasonably stated by W.H. Rylands (1891):

'When, however, the same mark is found on different buildings, within a reasonable distance from one another, both buildings being of about the same date, I think we may fairly conclude that the stones in both places were prepared by the same workman.'

At Sefton, Bebington, Ormskirk, Aughton and Lydiate we are fortunate in finding a repetition not merely of individual marks but of consistent groups; and it is clear that if reasonably accurate dates can be arrived at for the campaigns at Sefton, Bebington, Ormskirk and Aughton, the possible dates for the commencement of the chapel at Lydiate may be determined.

The work carried out at Sefton involved the almost total dismantling of the existing church, the erection of new north and south arcades, the addition of a south aisle, the raising of a clerestory where none was before and the building of a chancel and vestry. Of the earlier structure only the tower and the walls of the north aisle remained; and it may be supposed that the cold wind to which Roberts attributed the retention of their fenestration was financial rather than climatic.

The cost of rebuilding the chancel, or the greater part of it, seems to have been met by Anthony Molineux, who was rector of Sefton from the latter part of 1535 to 1557. G.W.Wall (1895) gives the evidence as follows:

'Anthony Molyneux, a Rector, is of opinion, in his will, dated the 13th of October, 1553, that his 'successors cannot in consequence requyer any dylapidac' one ffor Sefton,' owing to the fact that he had 'made so greatt coste of y<sup>e</sup> chanuncell and revestre.' .... the restrictive phrase is hardly the

language of a man who had raised the whole building.

Probably he found the arcades already erected by some unrecorded builder of the early part of the sixteenth century, and, by the addition of the sacarium and 'revestre', only completed a church which had at least a south aisle in the year 1528.'

By her will of November, 1528, Margaret Bulkeley made provision for a chantry, presumably in the south chapel. Her memorial brass, formerly in the south aisle, gives the date of her death as 22 February, 1528; which is to say, 1529 in modern reckoning. For the building of the clerestory, following the completion of the aisles, a period from 1528, or earlier, to 1535 seems excessive, supposing the work to have gone forward without interruption.

Nevertheless the building programme seems to have been carried through without intermission from south aisle to chancel; of the masons' marks recorded by Rylands for the chancel,



are among those recorded for the south aisle, chapel and south porch.

The marks



from the chancel are subsequently found together with other marks from the south aisle, porch and chapel, at Bebington; and it appears from this that work on the chancel had begun before the reduction of the work force which followed the completion of the main body of the church.

It is possible that the work in question was carried out in the time of Anthony's predecessor, since Anthony does not say that he built the whole of the chancel himself. He does seem to imply, however, that his part was considerable; and since the building of the chancel was not a very great undertaking, the earlier work cannot have begun long before his induction. It seems safe to say that the movement of masons from Sefton in the direction of Bebington took place about 1535, and possibly a little earlier.

The intended reconstruction of the parish church at Bebington is thought to have come to an end with the dissolution of the abbey of St. Werburgh at Chester, which as patron was presumably responsible for the undertaking. The masons' marks from Sefton are found, together with marks from other sources, at the lower levels of the building;

thus  and 

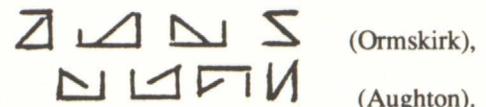
the one from Sefton and the other form elsewhere are both found on the first course.

It is clear that the masons from Sefton were present at the beginning of the work, about 1535. The dissolution of the monastery took place in January, 1540, and it is unlikely that funds continued for long thereafter to be available for the work at Bebington. Considering the extent and elaboration of what was actually achieved, a period from 1535 to 1540 does not seem excessive.

It has been shown, on the evidence of the masons' marks common to Aughton north aisle and Lydiat chapel, that if the initial L is to be allowed any significance it must refer to the second Laurence Ireland, whose tenure is believed to have begun in 1535, or a little later. From c1535 to c1540, however, the marks common to Bebington and Lydiat were engaged at Bebington, so that the beginning of work at Lydiat must have followed the termination of the work at Bebington; it appears therefore that the ground course of Lydiat chapel was laid at some time after January, 1540.

The received dating of the tower at Ormskirk lies between 1540 and 1550, and seems to be confirmed by the presence of mason's marks which are common to the new work at Bebington and the north aisle at Aughton, which was begun probably towards the end of the decade. W.A. Wickham gave the date 1545 for the work at Aughton, on the evidence of the masons' marks, some stylistic resemblances and documentary evidence:

'There is also some resemblance between some of the Aughton marks and some found on the Great Tower of Ormskirk.



Indeed, my theory that the north aisle of Aughton was built about 1545 is greatly strengthened by a careful comparison of its windows with those of Ormskirk tower, ..... the tracery of the Aughton and of the upper Ormskirk windows is the same.' ..... '.... the four windows in the north wall of the aisle ..... exactly resemble the large windows in the tower of Ormskirk Church, and also those in the clerestory of Sefton.'

Wickham (1908) gives the documentary evidence as follows:

'In the Annals of Aughton (p.48) an inventory is given, which was made in 1552, and from this it appears that at an earlier date ('iij yers befoare the first Invetoire was made,') 'ij chalices and a coape were by the consent of the holle pische lade to

pledge to Sr Bryan Morecroft decessud ... and the money bestowed upon the building of the Ile in the body of ye same church.'

'The inventory of 1552 states further that one of the ij chalices conteyned in the last Invetorie was pledgit to Petr Stanley for Xs about one yere last paste, and the money bestowed upon the repacon of the same Church.'

Bryan Morecroft was rector at Aughton from 1528 to 1547, and had formerly been chaplain to rector Edward Molineux of Sefton (1509-1535).

Pevsner (1969) questions Wickham's dating:

'At Aughton near Ormskirk we have the dates 1528-48, but can they apply to the round arches?'

'It seems to have been built by a rector of 1528-48 and is decidedly post-Perp. The windows are round-headed and have uncusped intersecting tracery. It looks in fact more C17 than C16.'

In fact the windows are almost exact reproductions of those in the clerestory at Sefton, which Pevsner himself places about 1540. The masons' marks on the round arches at Aughton are found at Bebington and the south aisle of Sefton.

The wording of the inventory seems to imply that the north aisle was in being at the time of writing.

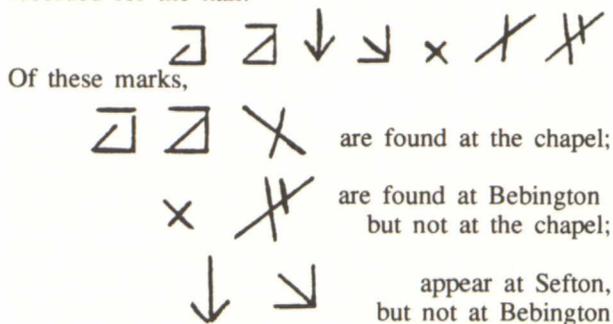
The date of the first inventory was 1548, so that the building was at least projected about 1545. This cannot be the date when work began. The tower of Ormskirk church can only have been built after the termination of the new work at Bebington and before the building of the north aisle at Aughton; it is extraordinarily massive, being forty feet square within the buttresses and having walls eight feet in thickness. For the construction of such a tower, at the time in question, a period of seven or eight years would not have been exceptional.

The aisle at Aughton is a low and unpretentious structure of four bays, and can scarcely have required more than two years for its completion. It is possible that at the time of the inventory of 1552 the aisle was only recently completed, and that the pledging of a chalice about one year before was in respect of the same work. But even allowing that the work at Aughton may not have commenced before 1549-50, it is clear that the building of Ormskirk tower must have begun in the first years of the decade; perhaps not later than 1542, when John Bochard bequeathed £60 towards the building of the steeple and church of Ormskirk. It cannot have reached completion before 1546.

During the reign of Edward VI, from 1547 to 1553, when the future even of the parish churches was

uncertain, a project such as the Ireland chapel could not be contemplated; after 1553, in the time of Mary Tudor the social context of such foundations had been disrupted and newer patterns of ostentation were making their appearance. The only period to which the first work at Lydiat chapel can be attributed with any probability is the very brief one between the end of the work at Bebington and the beginning of Ormskirk tower. The dates 1540-41 cannot be far wrong.

The survey carried out at Lydiat Hall in 1981 (see Lewis and Samuels page 41 this volume) brought to light a group of masons' marks not previously recorded for the hall:



nor at Lydiat chapel. The presence on the lower courses of Ormskirk tower of marks from both the hall and the chapel suggests that operations at those sites came to an end about the same time. From the fact that certain marks are common to both buildings it appears that an interchange of labour took place, presumably under one supervision; that the first courses of the chapel were contemporary with the final stages of the hall; and that hall and chapel are to be seen as two parts of a single programme.

A carved ceiling boss, illustrated by John Samuels in his Interim Report, adds something to the evidence for the dating of the hall. The boss carried the letters I.E., and it is difficult to say what they may stand for if they are not the initials of Isabella, Laurence Ireland's mother, and of Eleanor his wife. The letters so exactly reproduce the character of those found on the bench ends at Sefton, and on the furnishings of the choir, that one must suppose that if they are not from the same hand they are certainly from the same shop. In view of the probable date of completion of the chancel at Sefton, the screens and furniture were very likely in place by 1540.

Laurence Ireland could not be unaware of what was being done at Sefton. He had married Eleanor, sister of the rector, Anthony Molineux, whose scholarly tastes may perhaps be seen at work in the italianate details of the screen; and in 1540 he, or Eleanor, presented a window to the church. There can be little doubt that the character of the ornament at Lydiat derived from the comparable work at Sefton, and is unlikely to be much later in date.

## Conclusion

Gregson's (1824) dating of the Ireland chapel received little attention from writers who came after him; perhaps because his statement contained none of those appeals to social or sectarian nostalgia which characterized the constructions of Roberts and Gibson, who noticed him briefly, and dismissively. Nevertheless it appears that Gregson was right. His 'reign of Henry VIII' is qualified by the suggestion that 'the Reformation probably suspended the labours of its catholic builders.' Whether he considered that the beginning of the Reformation should strictly be placed after the accession of Edward VI, or in the few years before 1540, his date cannot have been far removed from a central date about 1541, as suggested by the masons' marks.

The evidence for a suspension of the building activity has been shown. The reason for the interruption, however, may not have been such as Gregson supposed. When Laurence began the chapel the dissolution of the monasteries was well advanced, if not already completed. And while an increased awareness of the developing pattern of religious legislation may have inclined him to discontinue the work, other motivations may have been present. The cost of the work at Lydiate Hall must have been very considerable, and that of the chapel, had it been carried through as intended, could not have been less so. In 1543-4 Laurence Ireland was engaged in the purchase of monastic lands. His decision to suspend work on the chapel may therefore have resulted from a consideration of financial priorities. The submission of piety to sound business sense was a not unusual feature of his period.

The masons' marks, which provide a date for the lower courses of the chapel, are of no assistance in determining the date of the later work. It seems probable that the completion of the chapel was attempted during the brief period of religious reaction under Mary Tudor, or not later than the first years of Elizabeth, when a measure of accommodation between the old and the new in matters of religion may not have seemed to be out of reach.

The fabric of the chapel presents a number of problems. Masonry in excellent condition alternates with material which shows evidence of rough handling rather than of weathering, and much stone appears to have come from an earlier building. The contrasts in the quality of workmanship have already been noticed. A detailed examination of the chapel might throw some light on the probable sequence of events in its building and on how many builds the existing structure contains. Since Dorothy O'Hanlon's report of 1977 the vandalism of which she warned has become a reality, and the condition

of the chapel has worsened to the extent that its total destruction, which the passage of more than four centuries has failed to effect, is likely to be achieved within the next twenty years.

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