



Fig. 23 Carlisle Cathedral. Part of the Gondibour Screen

Carlisle Cathedral

Carlisle Cathedral has been what is now described as a 'sacred space' since before the coming of Christianity. The present building is the truncated version of the medieval church and has survived fire, flood, attacks by Scots, Henry VIII, and perhaps worst of all the iconoclasts of the Commonwealth period who destroyed the contents of its medieval library. However there is still much remaining for RFS members to admire and puzzle over.

The 46 choir stalls each incorporate a misericord and can be dated to between 1400 and 1419. Interestingly when exposed to daylight in the course of repair they were found to have a thin wash of gold paint. Misericords are always fun and these were no exception.

More of a puzzle is the Salkeld Screen, datable from the arms of Henry VIII and initials of Launcelot Salkeld as

between 1540 and 1547. No record survives of its purpose or placing but it is thought to be of Anglo-Flemish workmanship – always a good catch-all description! The twelve finely carved heads are very much of the distinctive renaissance style then fashionable in Europe. The recently restored Stirling heads, of a slightly earlier date, are of the same type as was probably the head seen by RFS members in the collection of John Bryan in Chicago. Dr June Barnes suggests that their source may be 'found in the proliferation of printed sheets and pattern books taken from the continental woodcuts and engravings that flooded the sixteenth century, following the widespread advances in printing'.¹

There can be no doubt however about the Brougham Triptych made in Antwerp about 1520 which bears the trade mark of the Antwerp Guild of Woodcarvers.

The Gondibour Screen was installed in the Cathedral by Prior Gondibour between 1465 and 1500. However since then it has had a chequered history. Removed from the Cathedral in 1764, it returned to the Cathedral via a castle, a hotel and a brewery yard and now encloses two sides of the Cathedral shop! The oak of the screen is not local and at least part of the screen is constructed with Baltic timber which may suggest a Scottish construction. The *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer Scotland* show vast quantities of Baltic timber being imported into Scotland in the 15th century. The workmanship of the tracery panels has been declared 'certainly not English' so again there seems to be a Flemish or Scottish connection. The painted armoire in the the north choir is also associated with Prior Gondibour. It is painted with plants like a herbal and gave rise to much speculation among RFS members. However without more precise information no agreed description can be forthcoming!

RFS members were also able to see the ceiling on the first floor of the Prior's Towerr adjacent to the Cathedral

and not normally open to the public. This interesting painted ceiling was constructed in the time of Prior Senhouse c. 1500–20. Again there are obvious Scottish comparisons with painted ceilings studied by RFS members during the Edinburgh conference.

Carlisle Cathedral was of course on the edge of what were known in the Middle Ages as 'the debatable lands', the lands around the borders of Scotland and England where ownership and cultural heritage were remarkably fluid; a cultural heritage not only fluid between England and Scotland but shared between England, Scotland and Europe. The Cathedral with its Antwerp Triptych, renaissance heads and Scottish influenced choir screens is a telling example of that shared heritage.

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1 Dr June C. F. Barnes, 'Carlisle Cathedral The Salkeld Screen, Understanding the Iconography', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, CW3, xii, 2013, p. 153. Dr Barnes provides a very detailed analysis of the screen.



Fig. 24 (left) Medieval painted armoire

Fig. 25 (above) Detail of the construction and the painted decoration