The Clock and Quarter Jacks in the Cathedral Church of Wells.

BY THE REV. CANON C. M. CHURCH, M.A., F.S.A.

A TRADITION is generally current, and appears in print in Collinson's Somerset (1791), and in Warner's History of Glastonbury (1823) that the clock now in the north transept of the Cathedral Church of Wells was once in the Abbey of Glastonbury and was transferred to Wells at the plunder of the Abbey, 1539. This is one of the many traditions connected with Glastonbury which cannot be proved, or disproved. It is a tradition for which there is no evidence, and is against all probability. What probability is there that any of the "lewd fellows of the baser sort" who acted in the sack and pillage of the Abbey, zealous only to rake together money and jewels for the treasure house of the king their master, would have cared to save any such work of art for the use and honour of the Church, even though the arch-spoiler Thomas Cromwell was Dean of Wells in a little brief authority between the fall of Glastonbury and his own execution in the following year. On the contrary, the Church of Wells can claim to have had a clock of its own for a long period before the destruction of Glastonbury, and may disclaim any debt to its wasteful plunderers—though it may be that a monk of Glastonbury of the school of Peter Lightfoot, may have been the ingenious maker of the clock for Wells.

We know now, from the evidence of the Rolls of the 14th

and 15th centuries in the possession of the Dean and Chapter, of the existence of a clock in the Church of Wells from the year 1394-5 and onwards continuously, through the 15th century.[1]

In the Roll of that year, 1394-5, there first appears an item in the "necessary expenses" of the year, of a payment—

"To the keeper of the clock per annum 10 shillings."

in stipendium custodientis la clokk. x*s. per annum.*

The same item appears in every succeeding roll now extant of the 15th century. This is a sum which shows incidentally the importance and intricacy of the clock in possession of the Chapter, if considered according to its relative value at the present day, as not less than £6, and by comparison with other payments made in the rolls at the same time. The very next item in the accounts runs thus—

"To the keeper of the great organs per annum, six shillings and eightpence."

custodi organorum magnorum vi*s.* viii*d. per annum.*

Through no less than 30 rolls running through the 15th century, which are still extant, these items appear in the year's "necessary expenses,—some evidence that Wells Church held its "great clock" of more importance than its "great organs."

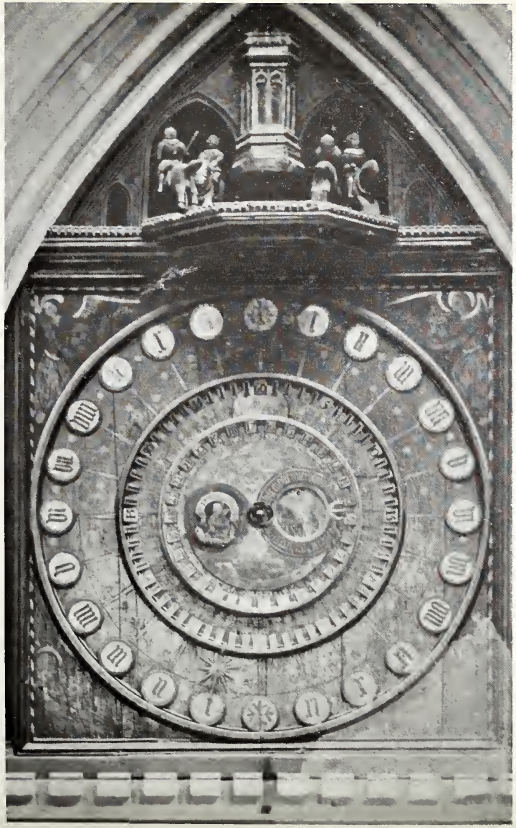
Another point to be observed is that the clock and its works inside and outside are so well fitted to their places in the church, that there is strong evidence that they occupy the position and the local habitation for which they were originally made.

How shall we describe the clock? It is a clock which corresponds to the general description given to the earlier clock[2] which was made for Abbot Adam Sodbury in the first half of the 14th century for Glastonbury—

1. These Rolls have been lately examined and transcribed by Rev. Prebendary Daniel, and await the convenience of the Record Office to be printed in the 2nd volume of "Wells MSS."

2. John of Glastonbury. Hearne, p. 263.

PLATE I.



OLD CLOCK, WELLS CATHEDRAL,
INTERIOR, NORTH TRANSEPT.

"*A great clock distinguished by shows, and figures in movement.*"

Magnum horologium processionibus et spectaculis insignitum.

It takes rank with other well-known clocks of the same date, the 15th century—at Exeter and Wimborne, and in foreign parts, at Berne, Strasburg, Prague—the works of a few scientific handicraftsmen, some of them no doubt monks in monastic houses—with pupils, and schools of skilled workmen carrying on their work through successive periods.

The original machinery of the clock at Wells, naturally worn out in the vicissitudes of time and circumstance, and then neglected and abandoned, has been supplemented from time to time by works of modern skill, which now give united and harmonious action to all the parts of the machine, life and movement to the design, and to "the processions and shows" of the workmen of the 14th and 15th centuries.[3]

The dial represents the movements of the heavenly bodies round the earth in 24 hours and 30 days. (Plate I.)

In the centre of the dial a small round ball represents the earth with the legend—

Sphericus archetypus hic monstrat microcosmum.

"This model ball shows the earth in miniature."

Within a circle of 30 minute divisions are two smaller circles on each side of the central ball. The one to the left (of the spectator) is the moon depicted as female figure with legend—

Sic peragrat Phœbe.

"So Phœbe travels."

On the other circle to the right, the age of the moon is denoted by the varying size of the yellow disc. The buckle on the side of the circle of 30 minute divisions encloses the pointer to mark the day of the calendar month. Once more, two wider concentric circles, the one smaller, with 60 minute

3. The present works were put in by the Dean and Chapter in 1880 after the failure of a modern clock of 1839. Portions of the more or less ancient works have been on exhibition in South Kensington Museum since 1871, lent by the Dean and Chapter.

points; the other larger and all embracing, with 24 divisions of 12 numerals in each half; each contain their pointing star marking out the hour and the minutes of a day and night of 24 hours.

So the clock of the 14th century still tells on its silent face the procession of the heavenly bodies in the language of that time. But the figures of 'the shows,' which were meant to mark by movement and sound the passing hours in their several stations, have been painted in later times and have lost their characteristic dress and costume typical of their time.

It is hard to decipher the dress of the horsemen who only appeared to Collinson "to be ludicrously hurried round in rapid circumvolution," and we cannot suppose "Jack Bandifer"[4] in his present dress to have belonged to the 'spectacle' of the 15th century. Yet a little imagination might restore to them the dress and armour of that time of militant activity, the Wars of the Roses, such as their companions outside still wear, and their original character as military watchmen, the one the sentinel on high tower aloft striking first note of signal, the horsemen defensive and offensive issuing from the castle gate at the hour's stroke. Still, now, as then, they serve their purpose in calling attention to the passing hour, and enforcing the lesson of watchfulness which never grows old.

The face of the clock on the outside of the north transept (Plate II), which is marked out into divisions of 12 hours, has probably been renewed—but the figures, "*the quarter jacks*" bear the marks of original workmanship of the date of the middle or latter end of the 15th century. Mr. St. John Hope says "The armour of the two knights outside is proved to be of the date 1460-1480, but the outer arm of each has been clumsily renewed for greater strength; admirably do they illustrate the time."

4. The origin and meaning of this name for the figure sealed aloft, who now gives the first note of the hour, is quite unknown. Perhaps it denotes the signaller who originally bore a flag aloft and gave the warning note to the knights below to issue from the castle gate and scour the country against the enemy.

OLD CLOCK, WELLS CATHEDRAL.
EXTERIOR, NORTH TRANSEPT.

From a Photograph by T. W. Phillips.

Our late President, Col. Bramble, who was an expert in the armour of the 15th century, after careful study of these figures has left us a valuable and detailed account.

Two years ago some alleged defects led the Dean and Chapter to have these figures taken down and Colonel Bramble was invited to examine and report. On taking off the modern painting the figures were found in sound condition—of solid oak, finely carved, (except for a clumsy piece of elm added to give additional weight to the striking arm), clad in pieces of armour in exact conformity to the armour of fighting men of the later 15th century (Plate III).

On first inspection Colonel Bramble had written, "I cannot doubt from comparison, that the effigies are of the very latter part of the 15th century, very early in Henry VII's reign. There is one feature, the very small *tuille* or *bagniette* at the fork which is very distinctive of that time. There is none before the date named, and later it would be of mail. The two effigies are doubtless of the same date, but there are differences in details; they are probably taken from life."

Later on, June 23rd, 1907, Colonel Bramble wrote:

"Since writing you on the 3rd inst. I have taken further opportunities of comparing the *Quarter Jacks* with other effigies of known date, and have carefully considered the details. For facility of description I term the one on the dexter side "No. 1," and that on the sinister "No. 2." (Plate III).

"Each is habited in a complete suit of plate armour, there are not even gussets of mail. The breast plates are narrow at the waist and over them is an angular plate, pointed upwards, covering the lower part of the breast. This is attached to the breastplate below the chin piece by a strap and buckle. This arrangement gave greater flexibility to the armour.

"Attached to the breastplate from the waist is a "skirt of taces" four in number jointed like "a Venetian blind," and hanging from the lower tace, each by two buckles and straps,

are two elegantly fluted "tuilles" (tiles) or flaps, one in front and the other (smaller) in rear of each thigh. That on the right side of No. 1 is broader and shorter than that on the left. Between the front pair of tuilles there is, on each effigy, a smaller tuille or bagniette—of plate armour.

"The legs are covered with chausses and jambs and the genouillières are pointed above and below with plates of similar shape beneath them. These are all secured behind the line by a broad strap and buckle. The feet are covered with long pointed sollerettes.

"The shoulders are protected by pauldrons or shoulder plates of moderate size fluted in a similar manner to the tuilles.

"No. 1 has four flutings and the pauldron on his right shoulder is larger than the other. This was frequently the case as the right shoulder was the more exposed. No. 2 has three flutings only. The elbow of the inner arm—the others are obliterated by the blocks of elm long since attached to them—is in each case covered with a cup-shaped coudière similar to the genouillières but without the reinforcing plates in rear.

"The head of each effigy is covered by a salade with a fixed chin piece or "mentonière." In each case there is a moveable visor represented as raised. The visor of No. 1 is elegantly fluted; that of No. 2 plain, and has an opening or slit (for sight) of the full width. The crests, probably of wood, are gone; but their supports remain. There is a row of studs or bosses near the edge of each salade.

"The gauntlets are of double plates covering only the backs of the hands. On No. 1 the cuff is pointed, on No. 2 the upper plate is slightly curved.

"On No. 1 there is an orifice on the right of the breastplate which may have been where the lance rest was attached.

"On No. 1 the photograph appears to have brought out the diagonal line of the sword belt—probably painted and not carved.

QUARTER-JACKS IN ARMOUR OF XV. CENTURY,
WELLS CATHEDRAL.

From a Photograph by T. W. Phillips.

"The effigies are four feet in height from the heel to the top of the salade. The figures are decidedly graceful with expressive features and marked individuality.

"I am confirmed in my previous expression of opinion as to the date, say 1485-90, early Henry VII."

Colonel Bramble's report is sure to be of much interest and value to the Society. It should give an additional interest to the many who daily come to gaze upon the Old Wells Clock, to think that while standing by "the Chain gateway," where Bishop Bekynton built the covered passage from Church to Vicar's Close in 1457, they are looking upon the very likenesses of the men in armour who fought at Barnet and at Tewkesbury in 1471, and of the men who marched past this clock when Henry the Seventh entered Wells to crush the Western rebellion, and lodged at the Deanery, on September 30th, 1497.