

# THE CHANDELIER OF BUNBURY CHURCH

by

ROBERT SHERLOCK, B.A., F.S.A.

Special Archaeological Assistant, Staffordshire County Council.

Such is man's materialism that an object is valued only so long as it is useful, and it is largely because of this outlook that chandeliers in churches are now something of a rarity. Formerly, most town churches had at least one as inspection of terriers and inventories quickly reveals. Even the unpretentious St. Peter and St. Paul's in Marlborough, Wiltshire, had in 1783 "Two large Brass Chandeliers hanging by Iron links painted over the middle Isle, one small Chandelier hanging by Iron links over the Chancel: two Brass Sconces to the Pulpit, two brass Sconces to the Desk, one Brass Sconce to the Clerk's Desk, four brass Sconces hanging to four Pillars in the Body of the Church, four Brass Sconces in the Organ loft". [1] These chandeliers and "sconces" have since disappeared and if their fate was the typical one, there is no hope of their recovery for they would have been sold as scrap and melted down about 1830 or as soon as gas lighting rendered them obsolete.

Bunbury is among the fortunate exceptions in being a Church that still possesses its chandelier, ([plate 1](#)), and one furthermore that has not been spoilt by adaptation for lighting by gas or oil or electricity. The chandelier was "Purchas'd", according to the inscription on the lower globe, "by A Voluntary Subscription of the Parishioners of Bonebury An: Dom: 1756", and the inscription ends by recording that William Fenna and Samuel Shallcross were churchwardens at the time. In this inscription, strict accuracy has been sacrificed in the interests of brevity. For the complete history of how the chandelier was acquired, it is, necessary to refer to a memorandum inserted among the churchwardens' accounts. From this it appears that the event that ultimately led to the acquisition was the rebuilding of part of the roof of the nave. This took place in 1755, and the original agreement made 29<sup>th</sup> September was that the cost should be met according to the method of raising the Land Tax, namely by levying a rate on every pound of income, but the proposal was objected to and consequently "some of those Persons whose Estates pay no Church Ley voluntarily subscribed towards ye extraordinary Expense" £4. 7. 0. There matters would have stood were it not that the money was not used for the purpose intended. Instead it was agreed in 1756 that it "should be put towards raising a Candlestick for the Church & several Gentlemen together wth. some of the chief Inhabitants of the Parish . . . did subscribe £20. 9. 0. which was by the said Willm. Fenna & Saml. Shallcross laid out in paying for the said Candlestick, as in ye Accot. following:"

Recd.	£	S	D	Pd.	£	S	D
from ye 1 <sup>st</sup> sub.	4	7	0	for Candlestick Sconces &c	22	1	0
by ye 2d. Do.	20	9	0	for Carriage of Do.	0	18	9
	24	16	0	for Iron Rod for Candles	3	12	0
					26	11	9
					24	16	0

due to ye Wardens to be      1   15   9  
added to ye Ballance of  
their Accot.

The candlestick, referred to, is, of course, the chandelier. The word, "chandelier", did not gain general acceptance until about 1780, before which date "branch" or "candlestick" with or without embellishments were the the words normally used. "Sconce" was a third alternative, but it might also indicate a standing candlestick, and evidently it has this latter sense when it occurs in the memorandum. That is to say the sconces that were bought with the chandelier were candlesticks presumably matching it and intended perhaps for the pulpit and the reading desk, if for nowhere else, in the same way as ones at Marlborough.

Those at Bunbury do not survive. The essential requirement in such objects was that they should throw the candlelight where wanted. Towards the attainment of this result, a standard was always the main feature, but in other respects designs were apt to differ. In one, [2] a branch capable of being swung or raised or lowered was attached to the standard and at the free end of this branch rested a bar with two sockets and pans, one at each end.

Because the "Sconces &c." are grouped with the chandelier in the statement of account, it is not known what the chandelier cost by itself, but it cannot have been much less than 21 guineas. At least, that is the conclusion formed after the prices of chandeliers elsewhere have been considered. Chandeliers whose prices are recorded include the pair at Penrith, Cumberland, costing 25 guineas each and acquired in 1746/7, one at Frindsbury Kent, obtained in 1747/8 with a bequest of £20 and one at Armourers' Hall, London, costing £25. 10. 0. and dated 1756. All these have two tiers of twelve branches: their cost ought, therefore, to have been more than that of the one at Bunbury, which has two tiers with twelve and six branches respectively. £20 is, in fact, an average price for a chandelier and should be contrasted with £50 for a chandelier of thirty-six branches at Islington, London, [3] and £5 for a chandelier of eight branches at Pembridge, Herefordshire.

That so much as £20 should have been spent on a lighting fixture is surprising until it is realised that a chandelier was valued not only for its usefulness but also because it was potentially ornamental. The parishioners of Bunbury were conscious of this dual role and regarded their chandelier as the complement to the roof of the nave. This had by now been completely rebuilt, and a new roof such as this often incorporated some ornamental device with the very intention that a chandelier should be suspended from it. At Bunbury, before the restoration of 1863-6 when the roof was taken down, there was in the centre of the ceiling "a very large gilt Sun with rays extending 6 feet in diameter". [4] Belize Cathedral, British Honduras, a building English in associations if not in location, had "a passion flower of colossal proportions" [5] and at Whitchurch, Shropshire, there is a double cherub-head and at Alcester, Warwickshire, a single one. Because roof and chandelier were integral parts of the same composition, a chandelier was usually acquired at the same time as a church was rebuilt. Those at Whitchurch, Alcester and Helston, Cornwall, are examples. When the rebuilding amounted only to that of the roof of the nave, the

implications were the same. At Hemyock, Devon, the chandelier is five years later than the plaster ceiling from which it hung for the first seventy odd years of its life.

The importance of a chandelier extended also to the hangings. At first, a rope or "line" was considered a sufficient means of suspension, but after 1700 metal hangings were preferred and the choice then lay between a chain or a series of "rods" or the combination of both. The "rods" or "links" as they might be called were frequently elaborated with wrought iron scrolling as they are at Bunbury, and there are other examples in Cheshire at Ince, Congleton and Mottram-in-Longdendale. The whole of this construction constituted the "ironwork" or just simply the "iron". The finest of all hangings are those that incorporate inanimate objects. At Southwark Cathedral, there is crown and mitre; at Tiverton, Devon, the cipher of the reigning monarch ensigned with a crown; and at Cranbrook, Kent, a scallop-shell.

The hangings at Bunbury are by reason of their modesty more true to type and their only elaboration consists of two crosses in the horizontal plane braced to the vertical rods by scrolling. Their cost, £3. 12. 0., should be compared with £6. 16. 0. paid for the hangings at Axbridge, Somerset, £4. 16. 4. for the pair of those formerly at Malpas, Cheshire, and £6. 12. 0. for those at Cranbrook. There is no indication of who provided the hangings, but a local smith may be assumed to have been employed, as the hangings when elaborate, unlike the chandelier itself, were not easily transportable. At the same time, no special skill or equipment was required to make them.

The third item in the statement of account and the only one that has not so far received comment is the payment of 18s. 9d. for the carriage of the chandelier and "sconces". This is perhaps the most interesting for it helps to suggest where the chandelier was made. The problem of attributing chandeliers to places of manufacture, let alone to makers, is a particularly difficult one. It used to be thought that all the examples in this Country were imported from the Netherlands, but the evidence of signatures, few though these are, taken with that of documents, of style and the reuse of patterns, shows that most chandeliers later than 1680 are likely to be of English workmanship. None recognisably early 17<sup>th</sup> century survives in what can be shown to be its original setting, so that no generalisation about these is possible. However, it would appear from the fact that payment was direct to the founder when a chandelier was bought for the London church of Allhallows the Great in 1629/30 [6] that this one at least was made in England.

The remarkable feature of the chandelier at Allhallows was that it had a spread-eagle finial. [7] This was favoured as a heraldic device more on the Continent than in England, and its use suggests that any chandeliers made in England before 1650 were modelled closely on Continental prototypes. A characteristically national style did eventually develop, and this development in many respects reached its culmination about 1745. Before this date, there was usually only one globe to a chandelier, and the baluster between this and the finial or suspension-ring incorporated trays into which hooked the branches. After this date, there were as many globes as there were tiers of branches and the branches were bolted to collars which formed part of these globes. The chandelier at Bunbury represents the second form of construction, and its flame finial-symbol of immortality-the bands of gadrooning to the body, the branches with the combination of central moulding and

closed spiral end and the detachable nozzles to the candlesockets are each and all features that could only belong to a chandelier made after 1735 at the earliest.

A further indication of date is the extent to which parts have been cast in two-piece moulds, the tendency being for the parts to be cast more and more in such moulds, the later they are. Normally, only one maker or at least one firm would have used particular patterns, and in so far as this is so the recurrence of identical castings presents a valuable means of deciding whether two chandeliers are the product of the same workshop or not.

The only chandeliers known to incorporate any of the castings that occur at Bunbury are the ones at Chesterfield, Derbyshire, ([plate 2](#)), and at Rusper, Sussex, ([plate 3](#)). [8] Those in the former church are a pair given by Godfrey Heathcote, Gentleman, in 1760. They have the same branches as at Bunbury, the same globes and the same two bands of gadrooning. That at Rusper was given by Edmund Mills in 1770. Its larger band of gadrooning is the same as the larger band at Bunbury, and its branches—there is only one tier—are the same as the lower ones at Bunbury. Both chandeliers have the same pendant-handle and both have nearly the same finial. The only reason why the finials are not exactly the same is, because at Bunbury the four castings that are used are all different, whereas at Rusper only three are different and one does duty twice. It looks as though the fourth pattern had been lost or damaged between 1756 and 1770, the respective dates to which the chandeliers belong.

If the argument that chandeliers incorporating the same castings are by the same maker is a valid one then it would seem reasonable to conclude that that at Bunbury is by the same maker as those at Chesterfield and Rusper. There is little chance of ever discovering his name but the distribution of his work is significant. This is because until about 1800, national distribution is almost always indication of London workmanship. Provincial makers were never so widely known: those of Chester, for instance, did not send their products further than about forty miles in any direction. Bunbury is much nearer than this to Chester, but there is no question of the chandelier having been made there. It is far too unlike such typical examples of Chester workmanship as those at Congleton, Denbigh and Mottram-in-Longdendale for this to be possible. [9]

Furthermore, there is the cost of carriage to consider. If five shillings was all that was required to bring the pair of chandeliers, each with twelve branches, the thirteen miles from Chester to Malpas in 1726, 18s. 9d would presumably have brought the Bunbury chandelier with eighteen branches and the accompanying candlesticks much further than eleven miles in 1756. It is difficult to know what would be a reasonable charge for bringing them the one hundred and fifty miles from London, but if the pair at Penrith, each with twentyfour branches, were carried two hundred and fifty miles from London for £3. 18. 0. in 1746/7, 18s. 9d. would not appear to have been too little.

If Provincial makers distributed their work less widely than Londoners, it is true also to say that they were less, progressive. The changes that took place soon after 1735 were mostly introduced by London makers, and it was some time, if at all, before they were adopted by those in the Provinces. A chandelier that belongs to the main

typological sequence is likely, therefore, to have been made in London. The chandelier at Bunbury is such a one. In other words, the evidence of style and technique confirms the conclusion already reached that its place of manufacture was almost certainly London.

Which maker in London was responsible it is impossible to say. The number of groups that seem to, represent the output of single makers in itself suggests that many persons were employed in making chandeliers about 1756. Two of these groups are represented in Cheshire: by examples at Audlem, ([plate 4](#)), and at Tattenhall. [\[10\]](#) The former has scalloped brackets beneath the pans similar to those at Bunbury and Chesterfield, and the latter has a suspension-ring similar to that at Chesterfield and a pendant-handle similar to that at Bunbury. These instances of similarity are the result of deliberate copying over a long period, a possible prototype being the chandelier at Hadlow, Kent, ([plate 5](#)), given in 1739, where all three features-brackets, suspension-ring and pendant-handle occur together. Such copying was common, and the fact that the maker of the Bunbury chandelier is among those who practised it justifies his being regarded not so much an artist as a technician and lessens the regret that his name is not known.

Whether or not the chandelier was made in London, there is no doubt about how it first came into use. for the circumstances are faithfully recorded by the Rev. William Cole. [\[11\]](#) On 30th July, 1757, this antiquary was "at my worthy Friend, the rev. Mr. Allen's House at Torporley in Cheshire, & hearing that there was a famous Rushbearing, as the Cheshire People call it, on account of the hanging up of a new Chandelier of Brass in their Church, which cost the Parish about 30 Pounds, we took a Ride there in the Evening to see the Ceremony. The Parish is a large one, and has about a dozen townships depending on it, which all sent, at different times, garlands and large kinds of fans, adorned with gilt paper cut with various figures, and mixed with flowers; these were borne by separate persons, each having one in his hand, and coming in procession from the many different townships at intervals, and many of the neighbouring villages sending them garlands, all which were set up in different parts of the Church, and made it look very ornamental, and gave the whole village an air of gaiety and cheerfulness not usual in the Southern parts of the Kingdom. On the Dedication Day of their Churches in the North, it is usual with to straw them with Rushes & otherways adorn them: but it had not been practiced at Bunbury within the memory of man: but having new roofed their Church about 2 years before, & very handsomely ceiled it, & buying the aforesaid brass Branch, they were desirous of solemnizing the memory of it; & the Day following was to be ushered in with ringing of Bells & 2 Sermons & great Psalm singing & other Festivities. St Boniface is the Patron Saint of the Church which day [5 June] their Wakes is held." Cole does not mention that this was the first time that the chandelier was used, but an entry in the churchwardens' accounts records that three shillings was "Spent When the Candles were first Light in ye Sconces at ye Rusburying".

As we see the chandelier to-day hanging dignified and graceful from its recently-painted hangings, we can understand the pride and sincerity that prompted the parishioners of Bunbury "to solemnize its memory". At the same time, we return thanks to them and their successors for having tended it so well.

## NOTES

- 1 Terrier at Wren Hall, Salisbury
- 2 Exemplified at Whitby, Yorkshire, and Cornworthy, Devon.
- 3 J. Nelson, **History and Antiquities of Islington**, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p.299.
- 4 Memorandum by Rev. William Lowe in Parish Book, 1873,
- 5 B.F.L. Clarke, *Anglican Cathedrals outside the British Isles*, p.87.
- 6 Churchwardens' accounts. (Guildhall MS. 818/1).
- 7 "The spread Eagle belonging to the greate branche" is referred to in the accounts for 1632/3.
- 8 Illustrated also in **Country Life**, 17 Feb. 1955, p.490.
- 9 For photographs of chandeliers attributed to Chester makers, see *The Connoisseur*, December 1956, pp.241-3.
- 10 For photograph of the Tattenhall chandelier and for an account of Cheshire chandeliers in general, see F. H. Crossley, *Trans. Lanes. & Ches. Antiquarian Soc.*, vol. lv (1940), pp.47-51.
- 11 B.M.Add. MS.5830, f.12.



Plate 1





**Plate 2**



**Plate 3**



**Plate 4**



**Plate 5**