

The King's Board, Gloucester

Once located at Tibberton Court in Victorian times this impressive monument originally from Westgate Street Gloucester has a mysterious and chequered history stretching as far back the 1300's.

It's now located in a public garden on London Road, east of the city centre. Open access site, easily reached on foot from the city centre or by car, parking in nearby residential streets.

There are three historic monuments clustered in Hillfield Gardens, on the eastern fringe of Gloucester. One is the chapel of a 12th-century leper hospital, the second is a 17th-century conduit house known as Scriven's Conduit, and the third is ... well, how would you describe the King's Board? A medieval garden gazebo? A folly? In truth, no one knows quite what the King's Board was meant to be. The Board is a peculiar structure that looks, well, like a multi-sided gazebo, decorated with exceptional medieval carvings.

The King's Board was originally erected in the late 14th century, where Bull Lane joins Westgate Street. Recent archaeological investigation on the site discovered the foundations of a rectangular structure. Tradition suggests that it was a gift to the city of Richard II (1377-1399), though it is possible that King Richard merely gave money to repair an existing structure, which would make the King's Board even older. The oldest documentary evidence comes from 1455.

The peculiar name uses the term 'board' in the sense of a table, as in the modern terms 'room and board' or 'board and lodging'.

But what was it used for?

Here is where the mystery deepens, for in truth we don't know. It could have been a common preaching cross, which makes sense because the exterior is decorated with carvings depicting the life of Christ. In the 12 and 13th century Gloucester had a proliferation of religious institutions including a large Jewish Community. It was a prosperous time for the city with many benefactors contributing to buildings and



structure for spiritual, health and commercial purposes. It could have had a more prosaic purpose, such as a coin exchange. In the reign of Elizabeth I it was used as a cheese and butter market.

Then in 1693 the Board was altered to serve as a cistern, holding water pumped from the River Severn.

The original pyramidal roof was taken off, as were carved heraldic figures on the parapet.

Road improvements in 1750 meant that the structure, by then an ancient

monument, was an obstruction. It was dismantled and re-erected in the gardens of Marybone House, home of the Hyett family, on the site of Gloucester's Norman castle. In the 1780s the site was needed for a new gaol, so the monument was moved once more, and erected in the grounds of a dwelling on Barton Street.

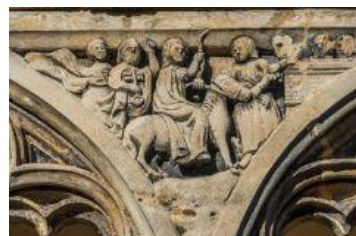
In the Victorian period the entire monument was purchased by WP Price and re-erected once again, in the gardens of Tibberton Court. There it stayed for a century, until in 1937 it was dismantled and moved yet again, to be erected on its current site in the middle of Hillfield Gardens, a public park on the eastern edge of the city.

Now with all the times the King's Board has been dismantled and re-erected over the centuries it has been altered in style and shape. In its current form, it is an 18th-century decagonal structure made with 14th-century architectural details. It is built of limestone ashlar with a flat roof. On the south side there is an open arcade of five bays rising above wide stone steps, while the north wall is solid ashlar.

The spandrels above the arcade columns on the south side are filled with exquisitely detailed 14th century carvings in bas-relief. Each spandrel depicts a scene from the life of Christ. Scenes include the Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, and the Resurrection. The carving detail is exceptional, so crisp and clean that at first, it looked to be a Victorian copy of the medieval original.

Where to find the King's Board now?

Hillfield Gardens is within walking distance of central Gloucester. The garden is open at any time.



The so-called King's Board
at Tibberton Court, near Gloucester.

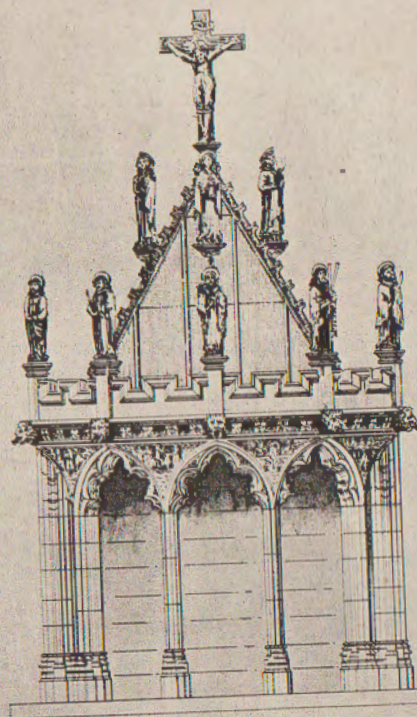
By M. H. MEDLAND, F.R.I.B.A.

THE SO-CALLED KING'S BOARD AT TIBBERTON COURT, NEAR GLOUCESTER.

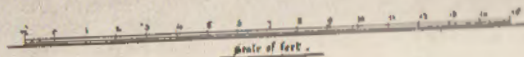
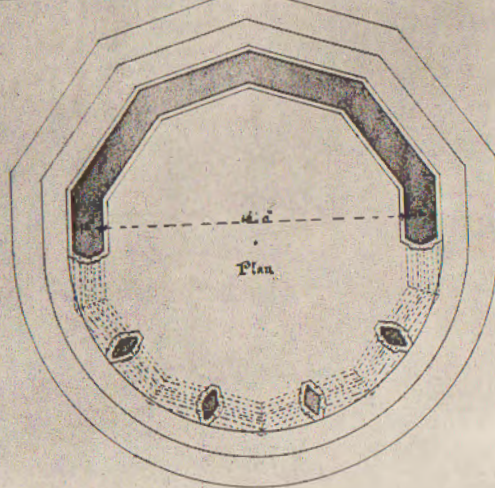
By M. H. MEDLAND, F.R.I.B.A.

THE remains of the elegant and ornate little building known as The King's Board, which now stand in the pleasure grounds at Tibberton Court, originally stood between the churches of St. Mary de Grace and Trinity, in Westgate Street, in the city of Gloucester, possibly opposite the premises now occupied by Mr. C. Morgan, the tailor. This was the site of Jemmy Wood's house. By Act of 23 Geo. II., A.D. 1749, entitled "An Act for taking down several buildings and enlarging the streets and market places in the city of Gloucester," the King's Board¹ and many other buildings that stood in the streets of Gloucester were taken down and cleared away as "obstructions." It was accordingly removed from Westgate Street to Maribon Park, the seat of Charles Hyett, Esq., who was one of the Commissioners for the carrying out of the Act. Maribon Park occupied the site of the present Gloucester Police Station and the County Gaol. It is to be presumed that the King's Board stood on part of the site of the County Gaol, for when that building was erected it (the King's Board) was removed to the property of a Mr. Smith in Barton Street, now occupied by the headmaster of the Boys' Endowed School. This property fell into the hands of Mr. Chadborn, solicitor, and the late Mr. William Philip Price, who married Mr. Chadborn's daughter, removed it to Tibberton Court.

The remains indicate a building of the end of the
¹ The King's Board is mentioned in the inventory of the buildings to be removed attached to the Act.



The Building known as The King's Board, which originally stood in Westgate Street, Gloucester, between the Churches of St. Mary de Grace and Trinity. The materials for this drawing were obtained from the remains now standing in the grounds at Tibberton Court, near Gloucester, and from historical records. The building is of a distinctly ecclesiastical character and probably was originally used as a Chapel for the celebration of Mass or a Preaching Cross.



THE KING'S BOARD, GLOUCESTER.

2 THE SO-CALLED KING'S BOARD AT TIBBERTON COURT.

fourteenth century. This would accord with the tradition that it was given to the city by Richard II.

A. The building is decagonal in plan. Five sides are open and are divided from each other by elegantly moulded piers, surmounted by elaborately cusped arches, the spandrels between which and the cornice are filled with carved subjects illustrative of incidents in the Life and Passion of Christ.

In order, apparently, to get large spaces for the carvings, the angles of the cornice are formed over the points of the arches. This is a most unusual and ingenious arrangement. The building is in such a good state of preservation that I think a very considerable portion must have been reworked at the time it was rebuilt at Tibberton. It seems incredible that a building in oolitic limestone should have remained in such a perfect condition for 500 years. The cornice, with its carved pateras, gives evidence of alterations, as recorded as having taken place in 1691. The pateras appear to have been sawn from their original beds and to have been inserted in another and coarsely moulded cornice. In rebuilding the carved subjects have not been placed in chronological order. They are as follow:—

B. THREE SEATED FIGURES.—Head-dresses like the more modern "Cap of Liberty."

C. THE ENTRY OF CHRIST INTO JERUSALEM.

D. THE LAST SUPPER.—St. John lying on Jesus' breast. Figures mostly inactive. Christ points to Judas who, on the near side of the table, extends his right hand to "dip the sop," his left hand grasps the bag.

E. THE SCOURGING OF CHRIST.—Christ bound to a stake. Four partly-draped figures, armed with rods or scourges, three of whom are actively engaged, whilst the fourth is resting.

F. THE RESURRECTION.—Christ emerging from the tomb; the right hand elevated in the act of blessing, the left hand grasping the resurrection cross. Two angels with extended wings in the act of adoration. Two cherubs at feet. This form of cherub on seventeenth and eighteenth-century tombs



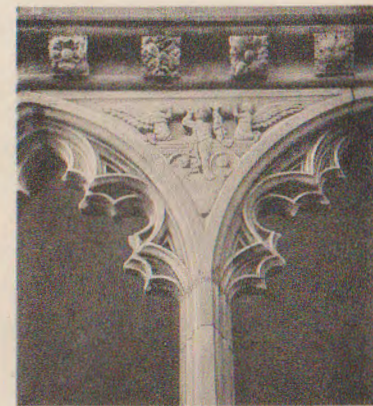
A.



B.



E.



F.



C.



D.



G.



H.

THE KING'S BOARD, GLOUCESTER.

THE KING'S BOARD, GLOUCESTER.

and monuments was evidently borrowed from mediæval examples.

G. A FLAGELLATION.

The spandrels are sunk and moulded on the inside.

H. The moulded piers, with their varied bases, are worthy of note as an instance of the ingenuity of the old masons, and evidence of their love for their work.

Now let us see if we can ascertain the original appearance of this interesting building, and the use for which it was intended.

I have obtained the following notes from Fosbrooke's *History of Gloucester* and from the Corporation Records, which will, I think, enable us to form a good idea of its original appearance.

Fosbrooke says: "Martin, who wrote in 1759,¹ describes it as a small market house, over which was a cistern of Severn water. Over the arches and on the sides and ends of it were carvings of scriptural subjects. At each corner was a large statue, and on the upper part a cross upon a pyramid between four effigies, and it had battlements round it. It was formerly assigned to the sale of butter and cheese, and was built or repaired by King Richard II. In 1752 the upper part was repaired, and about 1691 was ['the upper part'] taken down that a large cistern might be erected as a reservoir of Severn water from the West Gate."

The Corporation Records say: "This structure formed part of the markets, being assigned to the sale of butter and cheese. In 1654 there was a new roof put to it, covered with lead, at a cost of £45 18s. 3d. Again repaired in 1686, at a cost of £12 3s. 6d." (See Book E, p. 83.)

"1694, June 7th. Whether Mr. Thomas Nicholls shall have liberty to build an engine and waterworks below the Westgate bridge in this city, and that the same be soe expressed in his articles from the Mayor and Burgesses thereof."

"1694, August 13th. Whether Mr. Thomas Nicholls

¹ *Nat. Hist. of Eng.*, p. 354.

shall have liberty to build a cisterne for his water works upon the King's Board in this City, he repairing and making good the same soe that noe damage may be done thereby, and being repaired to keep it soe during his terme with the water works, and also preserving and repairing the present figures about the King's Board and making good those that are wanting, and provided that the said Thomas Nicholls doth not build his cisterne above one foot higher than the battlements of the King's Board."

Being decagonal on plan, and the existing carvings being of such a sacred character, I think we may reasonably assume that the figures surrounding the edifice represented ten of the apostles, St. John and the three Marys standing on brackets, on the pyramidal roof, surrounding the crucifix. Judas would necessarily be excluded from the company of the apostles.

Now comes the question as to the original intention and use of this very distinctly ecclesiastical structure. I am disposed to think that it was built either for a preaching cross or for a chapel in which mass might be celebrated in public.

"The First Prayer Book of Edward the Sixth speaks in the rubrics in the Communion Service and in the Service itself four times of a 'Table,' four times of 'the Altar,' and once of 'God's Board.' The Second Prayer Book of Edward the Sixth, reintroduced by Elizabeth, speaks throughout in the rubrics of the Communion Service and in the Service itself, of a 'Table' and of 'God's Board' (in the present book altered to 'Table'), and of the Communion itself as 'a supper,' 'a feast,' or 'a banquet.'"¹

It must be remembered that the word Board was formerly used in the sense of Table, as indeed it is now in the common expression "Board and Lodging." We find in Wycliffe's translation of the New Testament (St. Matthew xv. 2) "the litel whelpis eten of the crummys that fallen down fro

¹ "The Ornaments Rubric," by E. Blackwood Wright, *Nineteenth Century Magazine*, August, 1903, pp. 231, 232.

the bord of her lordis"; and in St. Luke xxii. 21, "the hond of one bitrayinge me is with me in the bord." So in the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer, in all the editions of the book previous to the last the rubric before the prayer of humble access ran, "Then shall the priest, turning him to God's Board—or kneeling down at God's Board—say in the name," &c.; but in 1662 the expression the Lord's Table was substituted for God's Board. It would be easy to multiply instances of the use of this expression, and it surely may very well be that the name "The King's Board" means God's Board presented to the city by King Richard II.¹

I cannot imagine that it could have been designed for a market for it is so small, only 10 ft. in diameter, and the openings between the piers are only 2 ft. 10½ in. The somewhat similar market crosses at Malmesbury, Salisbury and Chichester are much larger and are open on all sides. At Malmesbury the openings have dwarf walls between the piers on which the produce was and is placed, the vendors being inside, under cover.

"The Dominicans arrived in England in 1220. St. Francis saw that the parochial system is admirable, but that it was unsuited to a town; that in the towns the attempt to work it had ended in a miserable and scandalous failure. The friars, whose office was that of preacher, came as helpers of the poor town clergy just when those clergy had begun to give up the task as hopeless."²

The friars were the evangelisers of the towns in England for 300 years.

¹ On looking at Murray's *Dictionary* I find the following references to the word "borde": "Moral Ode 307 in Lamb, *Hom.*, 179: 'Before Godes borde.' *Trin. Col. Hom.*, 93: 'Mi borde is maked cumeō to borde.' *Ancr. R.*, 324: 'Hwon gredie hundes stondeō binoren the borde.' *Ayenb.*, 235: 'Hi serveth at Godes borde.' *Pilgr. Perf.* (W. de W., 1531), 10: 'With humble and reverent love go to the borde of God.' *Primer in Liturgies Edward VI.* (1844), 375: 'Pray we to God the Almighty Lord, to send His blessing on this board.' *Featly, Clavis Myst.*, 340: 'To present ourselves at the Lord's board.'"—M. H. M.

² Dr. Augustus Jessop, *The Coming of the Friars*.

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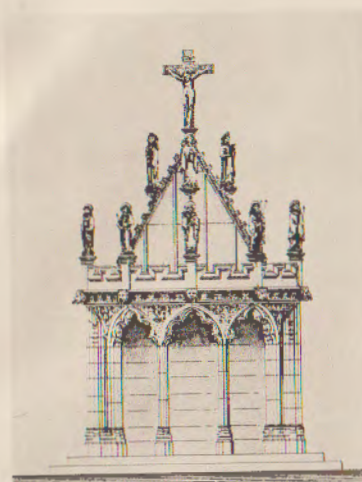
Such being the case, what could be more necessary than for them to have a suitable preaching station in the most prominent place in a city or town, and what decorations could be more appropriate for a preaching station than striking events in the life of the Master and representations of His personally-chosen disciples—the men whose lives the friars were endeavouring to follow?

There were in Gloucester establishments for Black (Dominicans), Grey (Franciscans), and White (Augustinians) Friars. Remains of the first two still exist not far away from the original site of the King's Board. Preaching stations of this kind were not uncommon; there is one in the churchyard at Iron Acton in this county, but the most famous of all was the preaching cross to the north-east of St. Paul's Cathedral, known as Paul's Cross.

"One of the last sermons preached from Paul's Cross, on May 30th, 1630, was attended by Charles I., who came in state to St. Paul's, and first heard the service in the Cathedral, and after that took a seat prepared for him in the open air before the door to hear the sermon. The abolition of bishops, deans and chapters took place in 1642, and was followed, in 1645, by the destruction of St. Paul's Cross in the churchyard, which had been for *many ages* the most noted and solemn place in the nation for the gravest divines and greatest scholars to preach at."¹

Viollet le Duc, the eminent French architect, in his *Dictionnaire d'Architecture*, gives an illustration of a somewhat similar edifice, a chapel with open sides, at the entrance to the cemetery at Avioth (Meuse). In the centre of this chapel was a stone receptacle for gifts, which assistant priests obtained for the repose of souls in purgatory. Mass having been said, the priest left the chapel and advanced to the platform to exhort the faithful to pray for the departed, and then gave his benediction.

¹ *Old England*, p. 207.



GLOUCESTER.
(RESTORED.)



MALMESBURY.

