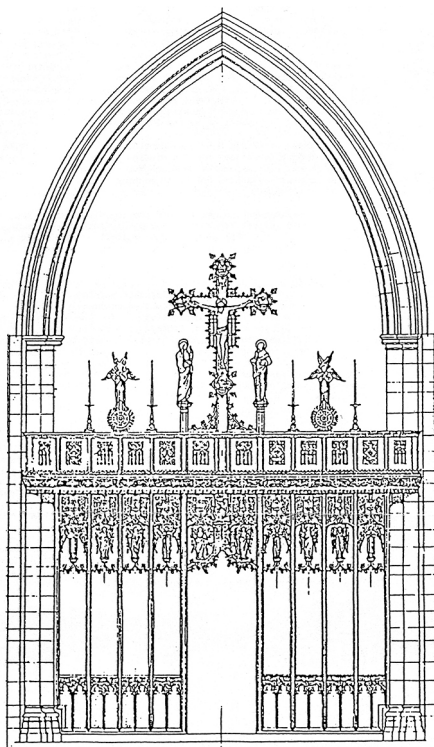


# From Hempton to Hobart: Franklins of Deddington 1850–1917

*Sally Stradling*



The woodcarving tools displayed in this exhibition were used by woodcarvers employed by the firm of H.R. & W. Franklin. The exhibition includes a selection of carving chisels and gouges with blades of varying shapes and sizes.<sup>1</sup>

Franklin's were general builders but also specialised in church building and restoration. Although Franklin's became well known for their local building work it was for the high quality of church carving that the firm gained a national and later international reputation. From c.1850–60 Franklin's probably produced work for the churches under the direction of the Diocesan architect G.E. Street. In the late 19th century Franklin's produced work for the architects G.F. Bodley, T. Garner and in the early 20th century for Cecil Hare.

The firm was founded c.1850 by Robert Franklin who was a carpenter and joiner by trade. Census returns for 1841 show that R. Franklin, aged 50, carpenter, lived in Chapel Street, Deddington. He established a highly successful builders' yard and employed 10 men by 1851. By 1871 his widow employed 84 men and 8 boys. Later the brothers Henry Robert Franklin and W. Franklin took over the firm, which became a very big operation by the 1890s employing 200 men or more.

<sup>1</sup> The pictures of tools are not available for this article.

H.R. Franklin lived at Castle House, Deddington and bought Yarnton Manor in 1895. Thomas Garner supervised the restoration of Yarnton in 1897. W. Franklin lived at The Blocks now called Featherton House. Franklin's Builders Yard was situated immediately behind The Blocks. The yard is now occupied by Johnsons.

Henry Robert Franklin and W. Franklin were the two directors of the family firm. In c. 1912 a financial crisis occurred caused by William's wife leaving him and taking most of the money. Franklin's became a limited company and with two new directors, Frank Gray, MP for Oxford City and Mr. Margete, Manager of Barclay's Bank (information supplied by Mr. J.H. French, estimator for Franklin's).

The firm continued in business until 1917 when it was forced to close due to bankruptcy. It appears that Franklin's received a large order for stretchers during the 1914–18 war which they turned out approximately 6 inches short of War Office specifications. As a consequence the War Office refused payment and the Official Receiver was called in (information supplied by Mrs. Ray, formerly of Deddington). It was also known that Franklin's were to work on Liverpool Cathedral but due to financial problems could not take the work on (Mr. J.M. French).

Output by the firm was prolific. As well as producing fittings and furnishings for churches, Franklin's also produced work for Oxford Colleges, schools and private houses.

## **WORKING FOR FRANKLIN'S : THE WOODCARVERS**

From interviews with residents in Deddington, particularly relatives of woodcarvers, it has been possible to establish some idea of how Franklin's operated. Franklin's employed joiners, carpenters, pit sawers, smiths, masons, horsemen and estimators. Woodcarving was a specialist trade within the firm. The woodcarving tools displayed in the exhibition provide the first clues of how this specialist part of the firm operated. The names of the woodcarvers are engraved on the wooden handles:

A.J. Hancox (Arthur)

Wheeler

H. Faulkner

W. Spiers (William, father of Fred)

C. Carvell (Charles?)

F. Sturch (Fred)

J. Hopcraft (Joseph)

F. Spiers (Frederick, son of William)

J. Spiers

It is known that other carvers were Canberry, Smithin and Walters.

Although most of the men working for Franklin's were from Deddington, a number of carvers were brought in from outside in order to complete specific orders to time. Spiers were one such family. Carvers came from Stratford on Avon, and also from Marples, a firm at Gloucester. Franklin's men would sometimes work for Marples in return. David Hancox was foreman at Franklin's and was brother to Arthur one of the carvers, pre-1914. Woodcarvers served a 5-year apprenticeship. It was common practice to inherit tools from a member of the family or to perhaps buy tools second

hand off another carver. For this reason some of the tools bear two names stamped one over the other. Each woodcarver was expected to provide his own set of tools, paid for out of his own pocket. The metal pieces for chisels, planes, saws and other tools were purchased from the well-known makers of tools such as Marples of Sheffield. The carvers then made the handles commonly out of ash or beechwood, to their own design. A complete set of tools amounting to perhaps 60–90 pieces would be kept in hand-made wooden tool boxes or chests.

Franklin's mostly used English oak for their carvings. The oak came from Exeter and also from Brackley. Oak would be stacked in the lanes for several years to season. It was then sawn by hand in pits. The oak was kiln dried at Franklin's yard. A large stock of timber was held.

From old photographs of woodcarvers, taken c.1895 at Featherton House (The Blocks) it can be seen that the woodcarvers wore white linen aprons. The apprentices wore bell-boy style hats distinguishing them from the qualified woodcarvers. Mr. Hall, the supervisor stands on the far right of the photograph. Mr. Alf Stanley is standing fifth from the left, top row. Mrs. Ray's father is seated second from the left in the front row. The firm reproduced copies of this photograph for their employees.

Franklin's also employed a number of boys to 'fetch and carry' for the working men. Errands were run to collect 'beer and baccy'.

Miss Stanley, daughter of Alf Stanley, one of the last woodcarvers to work for Franklin's, recalls that her father worked extremely long hours, he was often away from home and her mother always kept his bag packed as he sometimes went away on church work at very short notice. There were seven or eight carvers employed



*Woodcarvers at Franklins, photographed about 1895, outside the Blocks (Featherton House). Mr Hall the foreman is on the far right. Alf Stanley stands fifth from left in the top row.*

at Franklin's c.1917. Employees at Franklin's worked a six-day week from Mondays to Saturdays, with only Sundays off. The timetable of a typical working day in the summer was as follows: 6.00am start work; 8.00–8.30am breakfast; 12.00–12.30 dinner; 4.00–4.30pm tea; 7.00pm finish work.

The carvers were paid 6 1/2d [p?] per hour. Holidays were unpaid.

## **FRANKLIN'S CHURCH WORK**

The 19th century was a period of great activity in church building and restoration. In c.1850 R. Franklin carried out general repair work to churches but also worked on new buildings often with J. Hopcraft, another Deddington builder. Examples include: the Chapel of St. John, Hempton 1850–51 and the Church of St John, Milton 1856 to the design of William Butterfield. R. Franklin carried out work at the Church of St. Peter and Paul, Deddington: 1843 nave roof renewed in oak (cost £300); 1836–37 pulpit, reading desk, communion rails and altar pieces. It is likely that Franklin's worked on the general restoration here in 1858 and 1865–66 under the direction of the Diocesan Architect G.E. Street (1824–81).

From 1884–1917 H.R. Franklin's became closely linked with the architects G.F. Bodley (1827–1907), T. Garner (1839–1906) and Cecil Hare, a pupil of Bodley's. It was for the high quality of craftsmanship in producing wood carvings and church furnishings that Franklin's became reknowned. Rood screens, reredos, pulpits and organ cases were very much in demand. This work was carried out to the designs of Bodley and Garner and after Bodley's death, the designs of Cecil Hare. Bodley had worked in Gilbert Scott's office with Street in the 1840s. In 1869 Bodley formed a partnership with Garner which lasted until 1897, when Garner was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

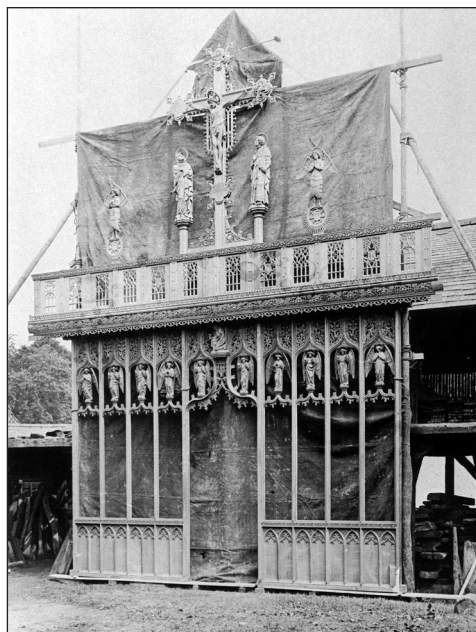
A great many of Garner's churches were built in the English Late Gothic style. Internally churches were often decorated with painted boarded wooden roofs, wood sculpture such as rood screens, reredos and organ cases, sometimes in a heavily gilded and painted Flemish or Late Gothic Style. The list of churches and other work completed by H.R. Franklin's provided by Franklin's head men (from Vane Turner p.39) confirms this association. Franklin's produced high quality carvings and furnishings as well as stone and brick work to the specifications of Bodley, Garner and Hare at: 1850–52 St. Giles and 1883–93 St. Margaret's, Oxford; 1894–96 St. John's, Cowley, Oxford; 1889–91 Holy Trinity, Stratford on Avon; 1886–1902 Magdalen College Oxford; c.1840 and 1902 Wroxall and Barton Abbeys; Marlborough College, Salisbury School, Cripplegate, London; Clumber Chapel; 1903–10 St. Chad, Burton on Trent; 1894–99 St Mary's Eccleston, Cheshire; Church at St. Ives; 1868–94 Hobart Cathedral Tasmania.

From information supplied by relatives of woodcarvers and residents in Deddington it is known that Franklin's also produced work for a number of other churches and private houses including: the pulpit for St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, London; York Minster

where Bodley was consulting architect from 1882, panelling for the House of Commons; rood screen for Powys Cathedral Nr. Welshpool; San Remo, Rome; Leeds Cathedral; Church at Felixstowe; screen for Finstock Church, Oxon; Yule Grange, Witney; The Queen Mary.

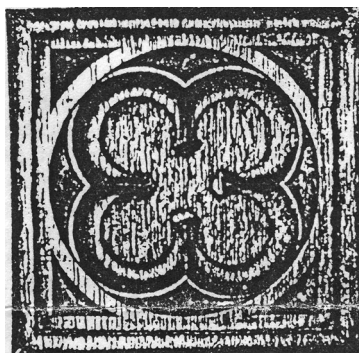
Perhaps the most well known work completed by Franklin's was the chancel screen and pulpit for the Cathedral Church, St. David's, Hobart, Tasmania. Bodley and Garner successfully competed for the commission for the Cathedral which was built 1868–94. The pulpit designed by Bodley was erected 1903. The screen designed by Hare was erected in 1916.

Residents in Deddington recall that a great stir was caused in Deddington at the time the chancel screen and pulpit for Hobart Cathedral were packed. Mrs. Hopcraft, wife of the Deddington builder, recalls that she and her sister Maude, were young girls at the time. '... no one seemed to know where Tasmania was, except that it was a long, long way away'.



*The chancel screen for Hobart Cathedral, Tasmania in Franklins yard before shipment about 1916. Alf Stanley was one of three carvers who made the screen. Copies of this photograph were made for employees of the firm. Alf Stanley made the oak frame for the photograph.*

*S. Stradling, June 1985*



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