

SAINT MARY'S LAUDIAN COMMUNION TABLE

At the east end of the Corpus Christi chapel in St Mary's church is a wooden communion table. The table is easily overlooked but it is an interesting historical artefact made at a time of significant religious and political change. The table is of typical early 17th Century construction with baluster legs on square bases with ball feet. At some point the original top has been replaced with three planks from a wooden door held together by modern pine boards. On the apron, the panels just under the top, are carved leaf designs on three sides but on the north side is an inscription carved in relief which reads:

C. N. VIC. 1626
W. M. T. R. CHI

These initials relate to Christopher Nicholson, vicar of Fairford from 1617 to 1656, and Walter Morgan and Thomas Robins, his churchwardens for the year 1626. It was the Reverend Christopher Nicholson who started the surviving parish registers of Fairford when he arrived in 1617. In the register Christopher Nicholson recorded the burial of Thomas Robins on 14 May 1631 and the baptisms of Walter and Elizabeth Morgan's children in 1617, 1620 and 1622.

In 1616 William Laud was appointed Dean of Gloucester Cathedral and through a series of promotions eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 with the strong support of King Charles I. Laud's controversial ideas for the reform of church rituals started early and involved, amongst much more, the positioning and importance of the communion table. Ambitious, obsessive and autocratic, Laud managed to antagonise a wide range of people, both clergy and secular. His close relationship with the king eventually led to Laud's trial and execution on the orders of Parliament in 1645 during the English Civil War when the king was no longer able to protect him. The communion table in St Mary's Corpus Christi chapel is known as a Laudian table and is a reminder of a troubled period in English church history.

The images show the carved inscription and the underside of the table top, the three planks held together by a modern pine board fastened by screws. The underside of the top shows some evidence of staining, perhaps somebody spilt the communion wine!

