



NO. 1. BACK.



NO. 2. DETAIL.



NO. 3. FRONT.

PRE-REFORMATION VESTMENTS IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES
IN MONMOUTHSHIRE.

By R. H. D'ELBOUX.

Monmouthshire was strongly conservative during the religious changes of the sixteenth century, and remained so, until the success of the great rebellion scattered its Catholic gentry. In the latter half of the seventeenth century it was found that the number of Catholics had greatly increased, and 'in 1678 John Arnold and John Scudamore presented to the House of Commons an *Abstract of Examinations taken upon oath in the counties of Monmouthshire and Hereford*, which was intended to prove to Parliament that Catholicism was extending so rapidly in those counties that it was likely to prove a public danger.'¹ As a result, the bishop of Hereford raided and despoiled the Jesuit college of the Cwm, Llanrhyddol, founded in 1622, and the recusancy laws were more strictly enforced. The failure of the counter-reformation in England left the land Protestant, but there has remained in Monmouthshire to the present day a steady minority of Catholics, whose traditions go back unbroken to the sixteenth century.

In three Catholic churches in the county exist vestments of early sixteenth-century English workmanship, for the most part without definite histories, but traditionally in Catholic hands since pre-reformation days.

I. Abergavenny, which contains the largest number, had a chapel in the seventeenth century in Thomas Gunter's house.² In the *Abstract of Examinations* the vicar of Abergavenny says 'that the said *Thomas Gunter* told him that in *Oliver's* time of severity, he kept a priest and would keep one now' (pp. 8-9). In 1687 the Franciscans took over the mission and served it until 1857, when the Benedictines took charge. The vestments were then left

¹ T. H. Canning, *The Titus Oates Plot in South Wales and the Marches*.

² *Arch. Camb.* 1908, p. 291.

to the Benedictines as belonging to the mission, rather than to the Franciscans.

The vestments were remounted in Rome at the expense of Mr. T. J. Burton,¹ and in their present condition they consist of five chasubles, two dalmatics, a cope, an altar cloth, a stole and maniple, several veils, a burse, and some odd pieces. Unfortunately, their age has necessitated reparation at several periods, and in the last (some time in the middle of the nineteenth century, and possibly when the Benedictines assumed charge of the place) all the vestments save two chasubles were remounted, leaving only the orphries of the original vestments.

There are two theories as to the original ownership of these vestments. That which suggests they were originally the property of the parish church of St. John at Abergavenny is sufficiently prosaic to be true, but has little substantiation. At the dissolution, on the town's acquisition of the Benedictine priory, St. John's was turned into a grammar school, though not dismantled for services. The figure of St. John with the chalice occurs on most vestments, sometimes more than once, so that were the dedication of the old parish church to St. John the apostle, a fact not yet ascertained, there might be some verification for the tradition. On the other hand, that saint is commonly shown on ecclesiastical embroidery, so that his reproduction on the Abergavenny vestments may be purely accidental. Amongst the scraps left over from the remounting is a figure of St. Edmund the Martyr (plate VIII, no. 2), holding an arrow and orb. This saint belongs to the eastern counties, and is rarely portrayed as late as the sixteenth century. The neighbouring church of Crickhowell, however, is dedicated to St. Edmund, so that the presence of this figure at Abergavenny is in favour of a local origin for the vestments.

The other suggestion, that they were the property of Robert Wharton, Marian bishop of Hereford, applies only to a chasuble, which has no points of resemblance with the remainder of the series save date of workmanship.

i. *The Wharton Chasuble*.—Sixteenth-century orphries of embroidered linen, with silver and silver-gilt thread

¹ *The Lamp*, 16th June, 1860.



RED VELVET CHASUBLE, ABERGAVENNY.

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PLATE II.





CRIMSON VELVET CHASUBLE, ABERGAVENNY.

and coloured silks, the figures partly raised, and standing on tiled pavements with gold diapered backgrounds beneath renaissance canopies. On the front: a mitre pierced by a pastoral staff above a 'ton,'¹ between the letters R W; a saint bishop with staff (apparently placed there in the remounting, since between the staff and the figure green velvet is visible); St. John the apostle with chalice; St. Andrew with cross saltire. On the back: the Dove immediately above the scroll with INRI; our Lord on the Cross attended by two angels with chalices; the Virgin and Child (amongst the scraps is one of green velvet showing the exact outline of this figure, with silver-gilt and yellow silk rays issuing from the empty space); a shield of Radcliffe impaling Stafford. Both orphries have been much restored during the remounting, and only traces remain of the original coloured silks (plate 1).

Robert Radcliffe, baron Fitzwalter, and afterwards earl of Sussex, married Elizabeth Stafford in 1505, and was remarried after 1521,² so the vestment may be dated accordingly.

Robert Wharton was a monk of the Cluniac abbey of Bermondsey, Surrey, at which the Stafford family had a right of lodging.³ He was elected abbot in 1520 on the special recommendation of his predecessor.⁴ In 1536 he was consecrated bishop of St. Asaph, and on the surrender of the abbey in 1538 received a pension of £333 6s. 8d.⁵ 'When in London, even after the dissolution, he seems to have stayed at Bermondsey.'⁶ Queen Mary made him bishop of Hereford, and there he died in 1557.

Robert Radcliffe's daughter by a second wife married Thomas, second lord Wharton (a Westmorland family) in 1547. In 1571 Thomas Radcliffe, third earl of Sussex, was possessed of Bermondsey abbey.⁷ The evidence suggests that bishop Wharton was powerfully befriended at court, either by the Radcliffes, through lady Elizabeth Stafford, or through some relationship between the bishop and the Westmorland Whartons.

On the two occasions on which the bishop's surname is

¹ It is curious that there is no play on 'war' in this rebus.

² G. E. Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, vii, pp. 334-335.

³ *V.C.H. Surrey*, vol. ii, pp. 64-66.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *Dict. Nat. Biog.* 1899.

⁷ *V.C.H. Surrey*, vol. iv, p. 21.

given in State Papers it is 'Wartton' and 'Wherton.'¹ In his will,² however, proved 1557, his name is given as Robert Perfey, and bequests are made to Hereford cathedral of 'a mytor of silver and gilte sett wt peerle and stoon and a crosyer or staff of silver and parcell gilte belonging to the same. Also another mytor of needlework garnished with gold with som stones and a crosier staf of copper and gilt belonging to the sam . . . a ryche coope of clothe of tyssue and a vestiment of the same. Also another cope of clothe of golde with diverse other coopes vestiments tynnacles cloathes to hange afore thaultres and also diverse albes with parrelles belonging to the same with a goodlie hersecloth to lay uppon a beare and a paier of gloves with twoo owches sete with twoo rubyes with twoo golde ringes thone having a saphir thother a jacincte.'

Bequests are also made to his brother Richard Perfey (£20) and his natural children (20s. each), to his sister Agnes (20s.), and her natural children (10s. each), to his kinsman and executor John Perfey (£100), 'now being scholar in Oxforde,' and to John's sisters Jane (100 marks) and Katherine (£100), and Jane £33 6s. 8d., 'borne in Flyntshire in Northe Walles,' the son and daughters of William Perfey. John was to divide the plate, household goods, etc., between himself, and Jane and Katherine.

For arms the bishop bore gules, two arms in fess with hands clasped argent between three hearts or.³

This is undoubtedly a Purefoy coat, and bears no relationship to Wharton. It is recorded in Browne Willis' *Survey of St. Asaph* (1801 edn.) as being in the church of Mold, in Flintshire, 'to the building of the south ile of which, he had been a great benefactor.' A letter is then quoted from the author to Dr. Wynne of Tower; in it he says: 'We have in this country a very ancient family of Purefoy, and I am pretty sure they quarter them (the hands clasped) tho' their common arms are three stirrups.'

As a hazardous suggestion to explain the use of the two names, one may consider the bishop a bastard Wharton by a Purefoy, befriended by his kinsman lord Wharton, and, through lady Elizabeth Stafford, by the earl of Sussex.

¹ L. & P. Henry VIII, x, 1256; xiii, i, 821.

² P.C.C. 2 Noodes.

³ Bedford's *Blazon of Episcopacy*, Parl. Roll, 1553, cited as evidence.



ORPHRIES OF COPE, ABERGAVENNY.



MONMOUTH CHASUBLE.

PLATE V.

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Both Wharton and Sussex were promoted for furthering Henry VIII's religious views, and both their sons, brothers-in-law by marriage, were staunchly conservative and followers of queen Mary. This would explain the bishop's appointment as bishop of Hereford on the restoration of Catholicism, as well as his earlier promotion to the see of St. Asaph.

The heraldry of the shield is as follows :—

- dexter i. argent, a bend engrailed sable. *Radcliffe.*
- ii. or, a fess between two chevronels gules. *Fitzwalter.*
- iii. argent, a lion rampant sable crowned or within a bordure azure. *Burnel.*
- iv. argent, three bars gules. *Egremond.*
- sinister i. New France and England quarterly within a bordure azure. *Thomas of Woodstock.*
- ii. azure, a bend cotised argent between six lions rampant or. *Bobun of Hereford.*
- iii. azure, on a bend argent cotised or between six lions rampant of the third, three mullets gules. *Bobun of Northampton.*
- iv. or, a chevron gules. *Stafford of Buckingham.*

ii. A red velvet chasuble, faded green, with orphries and ornaments embroidered on linen with silver-gilt thread and coloured silks.

The ground is powdered with floral devices, and the back has two six-winged angels standing on wheels. Rays are shown in alternate silk and bead. On the orphries are figures on diapered backgrounds under architectural canopies. On the back: Christ crucified, surmounted by the Dove, with two angels holding chalices; St. Simon with book and knotted club; a prophet with a horn, perhaps Nehemiah. On the front: Nehemiah with horn; St. John the apostle, with chalice; a prophet with a wallet.

This chasuble, though reshaped, patched, and its orphries in parts reworked, has not been remounted, and still has its original linen backing (plate 11).

iii. A crimson velvet chasuble, with orphries and ornaments superimposed, of linen embroidered with silver-gilt threads and coloured silks. The ground of the back is unusually closely powdered with fleur-de-lys and six-winged angels on wheels. On either side of the base of the back orphrey is an Annunciation lily in a pot, and having a worked support for the pot, an unusual decoration in

such a position. The floral devices of the front suggest two stags' heads. On the front: a prophet mutilated; St. Katherine with book; a prophet with (?) sceptre. On the back: Christ crucified, with two angels carrying chalices (one arm of the cross repaired out of line with the remainder), and the Dove above; St. Peter with key; a prophet mutilated (plate III).

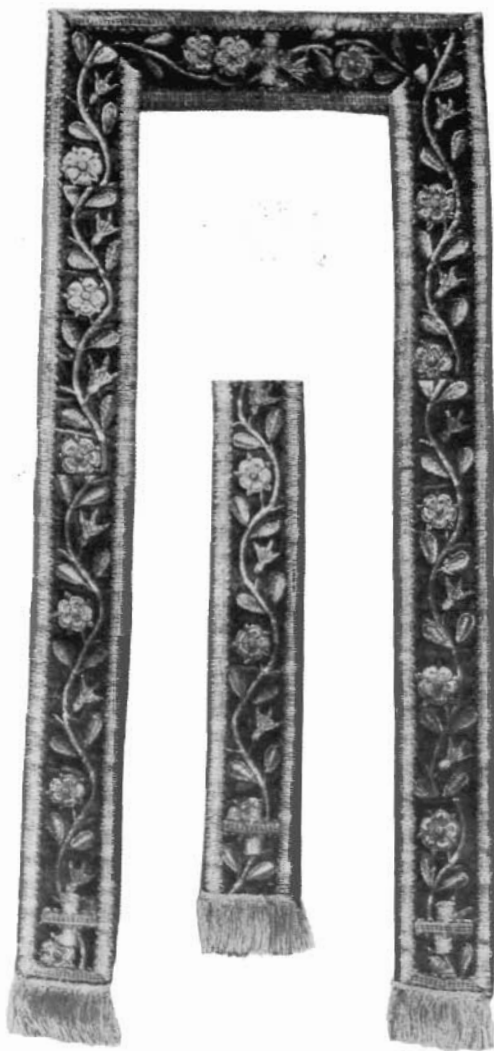
It has been reshaped and its silks much reworked, but not remounted, and is still serviceable.

iv. A green chasuble, the orphries only of which are old, consisting of the usual figures on gold diapered backgrounds under architectural canopies. On the front: An apostle with hands in adoration, perhaps St. John (this embroidery, though contemporary work, has twisted columns to its canopy and does not agree with the remaining figures. It was probably so placed during restoration); St. Andrew with cross; St. James with club; the head of a prophet, the canopy being in two pieces, the upper one in the wrong order and upside down. On the front: the Dove; our Lord crucified, with angels holding chalices; St. John the apostle with chalice; (?) a nun holding a scroll. These orphries are very much restored.

v. A white chasuble, modern, with old cross orphrey. This is in fairly good condition, and some of the original silk work is still apparent. The work is of the usual early sixteenth-century style, and presents no unusual feature. The details are: the Dove; our Lord crucified with two angels (much restored) with chalices; St. Bartholomew with knife and book; a prophet mutilated.

vi. A white cope with sixteenth-century orphrey. Each figure is beneath an architectural canopy that for finial has a golden fleur-de-lys issuing from a white rose. The hood and orphrey immediately above it are modern. The figures, taken downwards, are, on the morse side: St. Andrew with saltire; a prophet; St. Paul with sword; a prophet. On the other side: St. John with chalice; a prophet; St. John with chalice; a prophet. Probably there was a figure of St. John on either side of the original cope, rather than the two on one side, as now placed (plate IV).

vii. A dalmatic, white, on which are two panels of old embroidery, each of two figures under canopies. These



MONMOUTH, STOLE AND MANIPLE.



USK CHASUBLE.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ARTS, NEW YORK

are very much restored, and were doubtless so arranged when remounted. Above: St. Bartholomew with knife and book; St. Nicholas with three golden loaves and a wallet. Below: two prophets (plate VIII, no. 3).

viii. A dalmatic, similar to vii. Above: St. Thomas with book and lance; St. Bartholomew with knife and book. Below: two prophets.

ix. A chalice veil of red velvet, faded green, reconstructed of scraps from ii, possibly when the chasuble was reshaped.

x. A stole and maniple, made of brocaded velvet scraps of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dates, used with the crimson chasuble.

xi. About thirty pieces of embroidery, left over after the nineteenth-century remounting of the vestments. These are mostly floral designs, and six winged angels on wheels, their silks for the greater part re-worked, and having been cut from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century white damask, thus indicating previous restorations of some of the vestments. Amongst these are:—

(a) A figure of St. Edmund the Martyr, crowned, with orb and arrow. This saint is unusual in sixteenth-century embroidery (plate VIII, no. 2).

(b) The end of a stole or maniple, of sixteenth-century damask, showing a large pomegranate pattern. On it is a fleur-de-lys of linen worked with coloured silks in large reticulation, and edges with silver gilt thread.

(c) A piece of green velvet with a space for the figure of the Virgin and Child and yellow silk and gilt thread rays issuing from the space.

(d) A mitre surmounting the letters **Tn**, the n being within the T. This is of linen and stitched on to green velvet (plate VIII, no. 1).

xii. An altar cover, now on the altar at Abergavenny, has an edging of green velvet on which are sewn fleurs-de-lys, and at each end and the middle a mitre above **Tn**, as xi (d). The velvet is the same as that of (c), and of the velvet shown on the figure of the bishop on the Wharton chasuble.

II. At Monmouth, services were held in 1687 in the priory chapel. The priory was sold in the eighteenth century, and the town was dependent upon the Franciscans

of Perth-hir. At the end of the century services were again held in Monmouth and have continued since.¹

One early sixteenth-century chasuble is in use there, with stole and maniple of the same period, but not of the same design. It is of crimson velvet, with the usual orphrey work of the period. On the front: A prophet; a prophet; St. Bartholomew with knife and book (the interior of his canopy is of original light blue silk thread). On both sides of the orphrey, at the top and the bottom, are six winged angels, two with original blue and two with yellow silk worked wings, each bearing a scroll on which is **Deo fit gratiarū accio**. The feet of each rest on a 'tun' inscribed Mvr, the v and r being enclosed within the M (presumably for Mary, Virgin Queen). Between the angels are branches with vine and oak foliage and fruit, with spirals of silver gilt thread. On the back: our Lord, crucified, with angels bearing chalices (much restored); our Lady in adoration; an apostle, possibly St. John, in adoration, the base mutilated. On the velvet are two six-winged angels as on the front, and below them branches of oak and vine (plate v). The vestment was found in pieces, and mounted at Taunton,² but the original colours were seemingly adhered to. The substitution of 'tuns' for the wheels usually found beneath embroidered angels is a noteworthy feature of this vestment, which is said to have come from Holywell, in the diocese of St. Asaph, the bishopric granted to abbot Wharton by Henry VIII (see under Abergavenny, I).

The stole and maniple are of similar velvet worked with a wavy stem on which are alternate Tudor roses and buds, with two leaves between each flower. The roses are of white silk and silver thread, with light brown centres; the stems and leaves of yellow and silver gilt thread (plate vi). The chalice-veil belonging to this set of vestments has on it four floral scraps, including one of a conventional lily, presumably left over after the reconstruction of the chasuble.

The history of the vestment is given, in Mr. Hobson Matthew's manuscript *History of the Counter-Reformation in south-east Wales*, by the following letter from the Rev.

¹ Bradney, *Monmouthshire*, vol. i, pp. 22 and 29; Cath. Record Soc., vols. i. and ix.

² *Arch. Camb.* 1909, pp. 40-43.



NO. 1.



NO. 2.



NO. 3.

ORPHRIES ON DALMATIC, ST. MICHAEL'S, ABERGAVENNY.

Thomas Abbot, at one time in charge at Monmouth, dated Lancaster, 11th June, 1903:

'The fine old vestment (at Monmouth Catholic church) came from Holywell in Flintshire, and belonged to two brothers, both priests and owning the Cross Keys in the market-place of that town. There was a concealed chapel in the roof of the inn, where Mass was said for the convenience of the numerous Catholics, who could assemble without much danger of attracting notice. The brothers, whose surname was Jones, were secular priests. The elder acted as landlord of the inn, and the younger as ostler. After a time they sold the inn and separated, dividing the money and other effects to assist Catholics in other parts of Wales. The younger priest came to Monmouth about 1720 and brought with him the old velvet vestment, which, for fear of discovery and providing legal evidence of his priesthood, he had cut into small pieces and stowed away in a box with the old processional cross (still at Monmouth) which has the two attendant images on branches, and the beautiful ivory crucifix, well worth £70, which I left mounted on a black cross, some moss and stones from Saint Winifred's well, an old copper thurible and pyx, and some other treasures.

'In 1838 I got John Hardman to re-gild the old cross. He and old Mr. Pugin were just commencing that kind of work. Pugin took casts of the old cross with the branches, which till then he had never seen. The pyx and thurible John Hardman begged of my uncle, Bishop Burgess, and I believe the Hardmans have them still in their museum of pre-Reformation ecclesiastical objects. I was too poor to afford silk for the lining of the vestment, when it was put together. The lower part of the back was much damaged, so we rounded it off, Roman style. We could only find a small piece of the dove, so we put some lace across the upper part, thus showing only the *head* of the dove above the crucifix. The thurible now at Monmouth is one of the earliest made by Hardman & Pugin, so is the heavy holy-water bucket, and the brass lamp now at Coedangred. These were among their earliest attempts at ecclesiastical furniture, for they had only been brass-button makers up to that time.'

III. Little is known of the Usk mission earlier than 1819. The church there was built in 1849 and has one sixteenth-century chasuble, remounted.

In reply to enquiries, the Rev. A. C. Knight of Upton, Co. Cork, in a letter dated 1st April, 1923, says: 'I knew the Usk vestment forty years ago. It was then in a worn-out condition. When I saw it again after twenty years the old silk was lost and I had the embroidery mounted on the present diaper silk. . . . I also had the embroidery examined and it was found perfect. Not a stitch was missing.' It is said to have been remounted at the London School of Art, where much of the early sixteenth-century work must have been overworked.

In its present condition the orphries only are old, and have been very much restored. They show no outstanding features in workmanship. On the back: the Dove with the base of its canopy; the scroll, very worn, above; our Lord crucified, with angels bearing chalices (the silver gilt thread renewed at the foot of the cross); St. Paul with book and sword; a prophet, much mutilated. On the front: a saint without halo, with open book and palm; our Lady in adoration (this figure has been completely reworked, but the folds of the dress suggest the saltire of St. Andrew); a prophet, head and base reworked (plate VII).

Thanks are due to the very Rev. E. H. Willson, O.S.B. titular prior of Rochester, of St. Michael's, Abergavenny, to Rev. A. D. Towne of Monmouth, and Rev. H. Parlin of Usk, for their courtesy in facilitating the photography of the vestments, to them and Mr. J. H. Canning of Newport, for such history as is known of the three missions, to the authorities of the Textile Department and the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum for assistance in identifying various saints, and the heraldry of the Wharton chasuble, and to the National Museum of Wales for the use of the photographs.