

ARMS AND ARMOUR IN CHURCHES IN ENGLAND

By F. H. CRIPPS-DAY

I will quote clauses from three wills as typical of the expression of the wishes of testators, from the execution of which many of our churches came into possession of what were termed later funeral achievements.¹

- (a) 1525. Will of John Arden : ' I bequethe for my mortuarie or cors-presente a black gelding ambling . . . *item* I bequethe my white Harness complete to the Church of Aston for a George to wear it and to stand on my pewe.'²
- (b) 1529. Will of Sir David Owen, Kt. : ' My body to be buried in the Priory of Easebourne after the degree of a banneret, that is with my helmet, and my sword, my coat-armour, my banner, my

¹ A complete sixteenth-century achievement in the Elizabethan period included head-piece with the family crest, a sword, a pair of gauntlets, a pair of spurs, a tabard displaying the blazon of the deceased's armorial bearings, and an escutcheon of the same arms. Of early achievements only one of such a complete character has been preserved, namely that of the Black Prince in Canterbury Cathedral (Pl. i). The sword, dagger, and another targe are known to have been hung over his tomb, and the spurs must have also once been there. The only case in which both tilting and fighting head-pieces formed part of an achievement is foreign, and of much later date, and is referred to and illustrated by Carre in his *Panoplie* (p. 447, pl. xxxii). This achievement was over the monument of Claude de Lorraine, 1st Duc de Guise (d. 1550), erected in the Chapel attached to the Chateau de Joinville, destroyed in 1792. The only instance of a saddle being hung over a monument, except that of Henry V in Westminster Abbey, known to me, is that of

Sir W. Bowes in a part of Streatlan Castle, Yorks., used as a chapel. It was sold when the chapel was dismantled, and purchased by me from a dealer in London.

Examples of almost complete achievements of later date are those of Sir W. Penn in the church of St. Mary's Redclyffe, Bristol; it, however, lacks the tabard (Cripps-Day, *Church Armour*, Laking V, fig. 1623); of Sir Thomas Lombe, in St. Giles', Kingstone, Kent; of the Stanhope family in their Chapel, Chevening, Kent; of Henry, 1st Earl of Manchester, St. Andrews, Kimbolton; of the Noel family, Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, Exton, Rutland (*Ibid.*, figs. 1713-16). The funeral roll of Sir Philip Sidney, 1586, by Thomas Lant, shows the pieces of the achievement being carried at the funeral (Cripps-Day, 'Armour in Somerset Churches,' *Som. Arch. Soc.*, xxxvii, p. 3, pl. iv; *A Herald's Mourning Hood*, Connoisseur, March, 1934.

² Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, p. 928.

standard, my pendant, and set over a banner of the Holy Trinity, one of Our Lady, and another of St. George, after the order of a man of my degree and the same to be set over my tomb in the said Priory.'¹

- (c) 1530. Will of Sir Godfrey Foljambe of Walton, Derbyshire: 'that my sword, helmet, with the crest upon the head, and my Coat of arms be hanged over my tomb and there to remain for ever.'²

But in the majority of cases the achievements were given to the churches by the families of the deceased persons for the purpose of being hung over their monuments, or near the effigy, tablet, gravestone, brass, or tomb-chest, or in the family chapel where the burial had taken place.

Every monument, gravestone, tablet, or brass erected or laid in a church becomes part of the freehold and ecclesiastical property; even a pew, which has been put up and or kept in repair at the cost of a person, in whom there is an easement of the exclusive right to occupy it during Divine Service or other religious observance, becomes part of the church freehold. No ecclesiastical property of or in a church can be sold from a Cathedral, Abbey, Church or Chapel unless a faculty is obtained authorising such sale, and in a prosecution for theft of anything from a church the ownership is laid in the clergy and/or churchwardens and parishioners. No person or persons in control of the ecclesiastical property of monuments, etc., in a church may move them without a faculty. It is no doubt true that the person who has control of a consecrated building of the Church of England, may in the first place give leave, and make terms with regard to the custody and hanging up of ornaments, such as colours, flags, etc., but in the absence of an original agreement all ornaments become ecclesiastical property.³ This point, however, cannot now arise with regard to arms and armour, unless families revive

¹ Nicolas, *Test. Vet.* ii, 700.

² *Col. Top. et Gen.*, Vol. i, p. 358.

³ C.f. the recent case of the colours of the county regiment in Kendal Church.

the old custom to remind future generations of the services of those who served in 1914-18. There are decisions of the Courts on the point which have never been overruled, the earliest dating from 1469, reported in the Year Books,¹ and entitled *Wyche's Case* :

' Un bille fuit port en bank le roy per le Dame de Wyche vers un parson *quare unam tunicam vocatam* a coat armour, a certain poinons ove les armes Sir Hugh Wyche sa baron, et un swerde, en un Chappell on il fuist sepilite, prist, etc. Et le parson fuit appose per Yelverton del matter, et dit pur ceo q̄ ils fuer de oblation, ils appertyet a luy, *Yelverton*, Jeo aye un lieu de seer en le chauncel et la jay mon carpet et lyver et quishen, doit le parson avec ceux pur ceo q̄ ils sont en le chauncel? jeo die q non, et nient pluis doit il aver les dits chises, car ils fueront pendus la pur le honour del corp. *Pigot* Poit le parson prender un graveston que gist sur un sepult en le chauncel? Jeo die que non. *Quaere* de ces matter, car j'entends q̄ oblation serra adjudge solongs l'entent del donor.²

This case was followed in 1635 by *Corven v. Pym*,³ where it was held that 'a parson cannot take a gravestone, coat of armour, tomb, etc., though they are annexed to his freehold, nor can he take the things that are hung up in the church for the honour of the deceased.' In the following year the decision was again followed in *May v. Gilbert*,⁴ 'Coke, C. J. If there

¹ 9 Ed. iv. Edition 1599, p. 14.

² *Translation* : 'An action was brought in banc by Lady Wyche against a parson in the matter of a coat called a "coat-armour" and certain pennons with the arms of Sir Hugh Wyche, her husband, and a sword in a church where he was buried, which had been taken away. The parson was opposed by Yelverton and pleaded that they were an oblation and belonged to him. *Yelverton* : I have my own pew in the chancel with my carpet, my book and cushion ; can the parson take these because they are in the chancel? I say "no," and that he has no right to

these things for they were hung up in honor of the corpse. *Pigot* : Can the parson take a gravestone over the burial place in the chancel? I say "no." My decision is that the nature of the oblation is shewn by the intention of the donor.'

³ Coke Rep. Pt. xii, p. 105 (Ed. 1826, p. 342). In *Moore's Cases*, p. 878, *Pym v. Corwyn* (10 Jac.), occurs this passage : 'Et Coke Chiefe Justice cite le case del Lady Gray que al funeral de son baron levy ses armes et helmet en l'Eglise, et le parson eux diruite et le Lady port trespas. Et adjudge maintenable.'

⁴ 2 Buls. Rep., p. 150.

be an isle, built by a gentleman, or by a nobleman, and he hath used to bury there, and there hath his Ensigns of Honor, as a gravestone, coat-armor, or the like, which belong not unto the parson, if he take them the heir may well have an action of Trespass.' *Coke upon Littleton*¹ states the law thus: 'If a Nobleman, Knight, Esquire, etc., be buried in a church, and have his cote armour and pennons with his armes and such other ensignes of honour, as belong to his degree or order, set up in the Church, or if a gravestone or tombe be laid or made, etc., for a monument of him, in this case, albeit the freehold of the church be in the parson, and that there be annexed to the freehold, yet cannot the parson or any other take or deface them, but he is subject to an action to the heire and his heires in the honour and memory of whose ancestor they were set up.' In *Frances v. Ley*² the Court held that 'The heir shall have an action for injuring the tomb of his ancestor.'

These decisions show that it is illegal for those in control of a consecrated building of the Church of England to move from the position they occupy, or in any way interfere with an achievement or part of one. It follows, of course, that it is equally illegal for any one, claiming to be the heir of the donor of the achievement, to move or remove these insignia of honour, because, when given to the Church, they became attached to the freehold, and consequently ecclesiastical property. There is no doubt a custom by immemorial usage that just as there is a right in the heir, but not an obligation, to repair the monument, so there is a right for him to do what is necessary to preserve an achievement. In the great majority of cases it would be impossible to trace the person or persons who have inherited the rights of the original donor of the achievement, but as at least 280 of those still preserved in our churches have crests on the helmets, or tabards, or escutcheons, or are suspended over monuments or in family chapels, there is a strong presumption that where the family still owns the old estate in the parish,

¹ 18 (b), see also 3 Instit. 202.

² 1614 (12 Jac. 1) Croke Rep. (Jac.), 367.

or when the family who once owned the estate has not died out, the head of that family is the 'heir.' The advantage to the public of being able to identify such 'heir,' is that he is the proper person to take action, should the person or persons in control of the ecclesiastical building attempt to move or remove the achievement. If no such 'heir' can be traced, then the person or persons in control of the church can by faculty more easily do as they please. It must be remembered that many clergy take little interest in the historical traditions of their churches, but it is important to bear in mind that the old churches and their antiquities are assets of the Church of England, exciting the sympathy and interest of a great many, who are not members of their Church. There are in England at least 500 consecrated Church of England buildings, which contain arms and armour placed there as the insignia of honour of deceased persons, in many others the empty perches testify to the loss of achievements,¹ and, within the living memory of many, a considerable number have disappeared. Some have been stolen,² some sold,³ some thrown away,⁴ some destroyed by fire,⁵ some given away,⁶ some have been removed from one church to another by parsons appointed

¹ Cf. the perch over the tomb of Thomas Earl of Arundel, ob. 16. Hen. VIII. The helmet was there in 1825 (Cripps-Day, *Church Armour*; Laking, V, fig. 1761).

² Cf. the helmet of John, Earl Lumley from Cheam in 1913 (Cripps-Day, *Church Armour*, Laking V, fig. 1749); a finger plate of the Black Prince's gauntlet which eventually found its way to Liverpool Museum; I once saw a gadding from the same gauntlet in the hands of a private collector, on whose death it was returned to Canterbury; both these pieces must have been originally stolen.

³ In 1013 the Duke of Norfolk in the nick of time prevented the completion of the sale of the helm and crest suspended over the tomb of the 2nd Duke of Norfolk, to a collector in the U.S.A. The loss of the Rayne helm of Sir Giles Capel is irreparable.

⁴ Early in the nineteenth century the so-called helms of 'Edward IV'

and 'Henry VIth' were thrown out of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, but later rescued and restored to the Chapel by the Prince Consort. In *A sword and helm in Westminster Abbey*, xi. Ant. J. 408, Mr. Mann refers to the holes in the wall where perhaps perches were once fixed over the tomb of Henry VII, and to the helm formerly in the Undercroft. Until 1643 the helm carried at the funeral of Mary Queen of Scots was suspended in Peterborough Cathedral, after which date it disappeared.

⁵ Cf. the crest, cap of Maintenance, targe and lance of John of Gaunt in old St. Paul's (Cripps-Day, *The Tournament*, p. 53 (illustrated)).

⁶ The finest helm in England, that of Sir Richard Pembridge, which hung over his monument in Hereford Cathedral was 'given' by the Dean of the time to Sir S. J. Meyrick, from whose collection it passed to the Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

to other livings, who looked upon them as 'rarities,' some have disappeared, and no one knows how, when or where to,¹ and many have been removed to their private residences by the families claiming actual possessive ownership.² Some, too, have disappeared on the pulling down of the old church or chapel in which they were hung.

England has resisted, perhaps better than most countries, the depredations of the collector, the soulless dealer, the ubiquitous iconoclast, the vandalistic restorers in company with rashly generous benefactors, and not a few ignorant or listless clergy. Happily to-day there has been awakened in this country a great and growing interest in these old achievements, and their existence is being gradually recorded in books of authority.³ What is urgent now is that something should be done to preserve them from rust and decay. Armour wants cleaning, crests protecting against worm, tabards mending, gauntlets releathering. In my opinion, all arms and armour in churches should be varnished after cleaning, because, as a rule, there is no one to take care of them, except perhaps in Cathedrals, Abbeys, rich city churches, and some family chapels. The places, where they are suspended, make the care of them especially difficult.

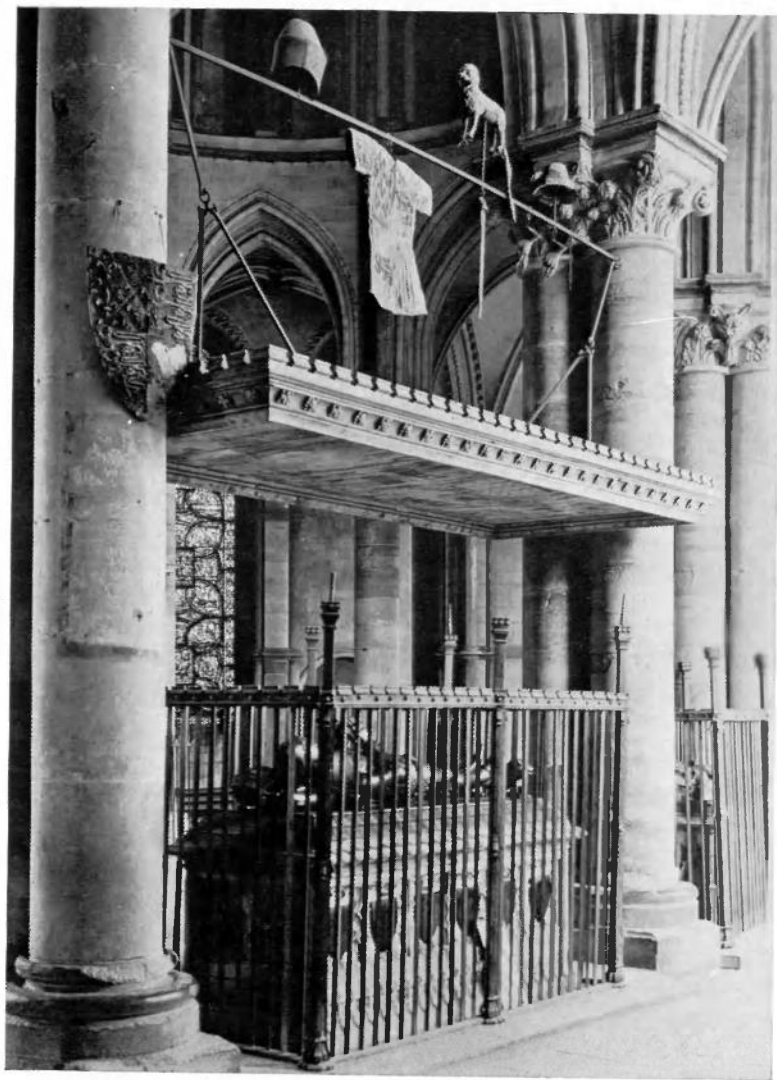
When it was the duty of the inhabitants of cities and towns to find, at their 'common charges and expenses . . . such harness and weapons as shall be appointed by Commissioners of the Sovereign,' such armour was kept in a place nominated by the Commissioners, and among the places selected for their safe custody were frequently the parish churches. It is for

¹ Many of these are referred to in my chapter on Church Armour in *Laking's Record*, Vol. v.

² Cf. one of the finest helms in England, that of the Digby family, once in Coleshill Church, Warwickshire (Cripps-Day, *Church Armour*, Laking, Vol. v, p. 106), probably that of Sir Simon Digby, was removed in 1841 by the father of the present possessor, Lt.-Col. F. J. B. Wingfield-Digby, from the church and taken to Coleshill Park, and when this estate was sold, to Sherborne Castle (Mann,

The Coleshill helm, Ant. J., Vol. xiii, p. 152); the helmets once in Laycock Church, now in the Abbey; the helmet of John Hampden, once in the Church of Great Missenden, now in Hampden House; the funerary helmet of the 3rd Earl of Worcester, once in Raglan Castle Chapel, now in Badminton. The helmet formerly over the tomb of the Lord Treasurer, Stamford; it is now in Burgley House.

³ Especially the volumes of the Victoria County History, and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England).



THE TOMB WITH THE ACHIEVEMENT OF HELM WITH CREST AND CAP OF
MAINTENANCE, TABARD, TARGE, GAUNTLETS, AND SCABBARD OF EDWARD
THE BLACK PRINCE, IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

this reason that we find arms and armour in many of them. Such arms and armour were often called 'Town Armour.' It is clear that it was the property of the parishioners, but the Church, having been in possession of it uninterruptedly for many generations, has presumably acquired a prescriptive title to retain it.¹

A few Churches are also in possession of pieces of armour which have from time to time been dug up and given to the Church. They have become ecclesiastical property.²

¹ The most interesting Town Armour of any in England is in the parish church of Mendlesham. There is also such armour in the parish churches of Langwathby, Great Salkeld (Cumberland), Norwich Cathedral, Over Peover (Cheshire), Higham-Ferrers (Northants). In Wimbleton parish church there is some armour of the 'Trained Bands.' The Town armour of the '15 men' whom Meare, Somerset, sent to assist the Abbot of Glastonbury, was removed from Meare Church in 1886, and has never been returned. It

is now in the Glastonbury Museum. All these examples are recorded in Cripps-Day's *Church Armour* (Laking, Record, Vol. v.).

² Cf. Hexham. In the Abbey is an interesting salett dug up in the neighbourhood; in Eardisley Church, Herefordshire, is a salett found in a moat of an old castle nearby; in Cropredy Church (Oxon) is armour from the battlefield of Cropredy Bridge (*Ibid.* pp. 221, 223). In Ravensthorpe Church, some pieces of armour from the battlefield of Naseby.