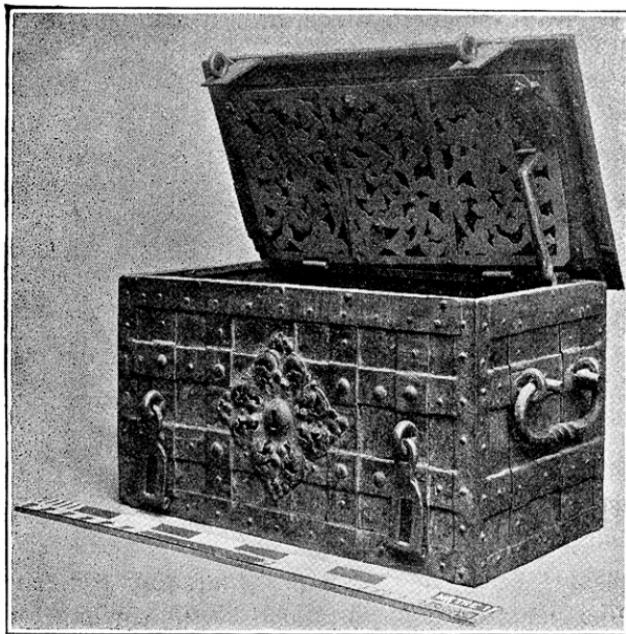


ART. XI.—*The Treasure Chest formerly belonging to the Custom House, Carlisle.* By the PRESIDENT.

Read at Shap Wells, July 15th, 1897.

I HAVE the honour to exhibit photographs of “The Custom House Chest, Carlisle.” The chest is made of sheet iron, and its external measurements are 2 feet 7 inches by 17 inches by 17 inches. The lid overlaps the



box on the front and ends by about three-quarters of an inch, and on the back by about 2 inches: its lower side, front, and ends, is strengthened by a square bar of iron, which shuts over and outside of the box, while a similar bar,

bar, inside of the top of the box, gives rigidity to the box itself. The whole box, top, bottom, and all four sides, is further reinforced by angle pieces of sheet iron, and by straps of the same $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad. On the lid four of these straps run the long way and seven the cross way, and are secured to one another and to the body of the chest by numerous rivets, some with large heads, some with small, according to the thickness of metal they go through. Counting the angle irons, the back, bottom, and front have a similar number and arrangement of straps, while the ends have four each way. To these ends massive handles are attached, and serve for lifting the chest from place to place, or for lashing it to rings in a floor or on a ship's deck. The projection of the back of the lid beyond the box makes the lid stand up if opened a little beyond the perpendicular, and a stout bar of iron, hinged to the inside of the box, is provided as a stay to prevent the lid closing, if not opened beyond the perpendicular.

The real keyhole is a very inobtrusive one, in the centre of the lid: one that may almost be called a secret one. The key worked an intricate system of levers, shooting probably six or eight bolts, which would catch below the bar inside of the top of the box. But the works are now gone, and the keyhole has been closed by a piece of sheet iron: the face-plate of the lock towards the inside of the chest remains, and consists of three compartments of perforated and floriated work, each of the two outermost have the features of a man chased therein, but too faintly to show in the photograph, from which the illustration is taken. The lid is further secured by two hasps and staples for padlocks: I at first thought these were additions to the original chest, but they are coeval with it, and are found on other chests of the kind. A highly ornate escutcheon with keyhole is fixed on the front of the chest, but is a mere sham without works.

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As the "cracksman" of the day can hardly have been deceived into wasting his time over so transparent a sham, this dummy escutcheon, which frequently occurs on these chests, must be a survival from a remote past.

This chest is one of a class of which specimens are not uncommon; several were exhibited at the Spanish Armada Tercentenary Exhibition, held at Drury Lane in October, 1888; there is one, exactly similar to that under consideration, in the Iron Gallery at South Kensington; another, almost exactly similar, is engraved in *Captain Cuellar's Adventures in Connacht and Ulster, A.D. 1588*, p. 30.* There are several in private hands, and to almost every one the legend attaches that it was taken in the Spanish Armada. But there are too many of them for this to be true of all, and Mr. Allingham writes of them: †

Having examined specimens of these treasure chests in South Kensington and elsewhere, belonging to the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries, from the earliest chest downwards the same features are apparent in their construction and ornamentation. They were by no means peculiar to Spain, but were the typical and recognised receptacles for valuables all over the Continent of Europe for many centuries. They were probably of Flemish or German manufacture.

The chest now under discussion was brought to light by the post-master of Carlisle, Mr. Percy James, who called my attention to it. It appears to have been transferred to the Post Office at Carlisle when the Custom House at that city was abolished some fifteen years ago; it was probably used by the Custom House authorities before banks were established in Carlisle.

By the kindness of Mr. James, the present example is now deposited in the Museum, Tullie House, Carlisle.

* Edited by Hugh Allingham, M.R.I.A. London: Elliot Stock, 1897.

† *Adventures, ut ante*; p. 29.

See also the notes on the following page.