

## A Medieval Coffin Chalice from Ockley

In 1981 a pewter chalice (figs 1, 2) was found in Ockley churchyard by the south wall at the south west corner of the church, and was given to Guildford Museum by the rector, Mr M A R Collins. The chalice was almost certainly buried with a priest originally, and would have been accompanied by a paten.

The bowl of the chalice has been squashed out of shape a little, and the rim has cracked in three places. The foot seems to have been pushed upwards and part of it is missing. Originally the chalice would have been about 4" high and about the same in diameter at the rim. The stem is hollow up to the knot. In shape the chalice is typical of those of the period c1180–1280 (Oman 1957, 41), but it may have been made later.

It was the practice in the Middle Ages for priests to be buried with a chalice and paten. They were placed upright to one side of the body or on the chest of the deceased and might contain wine (Oman 1957, 40; Cooper 1902, 187). William de Blois, bishop of Worcester, in his Constitutions of 1229 ordered that every church should have a silver chalice for services and an unconsecrated pewter one to be buried with the priest (Oman 1971, 127). Oman considers it unlikely that parish churches had vessels of silver or gold before 1066, but that by the 12th century the use of silver was being encouraged and that by 1300 most churches probably had silver chalices, though a few continued to use pewter until the Reformation. Silver chalices were also buried with priests but probably only with important clerics, for example Archbishops de Gray and de Ludham at York in the 13th century (Oman 1971).

Chalices buried with priests before about 1300 were of the normal contemporary type, made for use, but after about 1300, when silver versions were usual, and were following their own line of development, pewter ones continued to be made in the old style for burial (Oman 1957, 40). So it is not possible to date the Ockley chalice precisely as although it is of 13th century shape it may have been made later.

The first documentary reference to Ockley church is in 1291 in Pope Nicholas IV's taxation, when clearly the church was already in existence, though the list of known rectors of the church begins in 1308 (Malden 1911, 153). The present building was mostly rebuilt in 1873 though the west tower was rebuilt in 1699. It is possible that the chalice was disturbed during these works, as no bones were seen when it was found in 1981.

There seem to be a few dozen recorded instances of pewter chalices and patens being found, although obviously many hundreds would have been buried (see the indexes to *Medieval Archaeology*; Council for British Archaeology *Archaeological Bibliographies*). Four are recorded from Surrey: at Charlwood, Cheam, Chertsey and Titsey (see Cooper 1902 for descriptions and earlier references, and Poulton 1988, 47, pls 35 and 36). Their present whereabouts are uncertain except for the chalice from Titsey which is kept in a bank vault.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Fig 1. Medieval coffin chalice found in Ockley churchyard: two views, showing present condition (1:2)

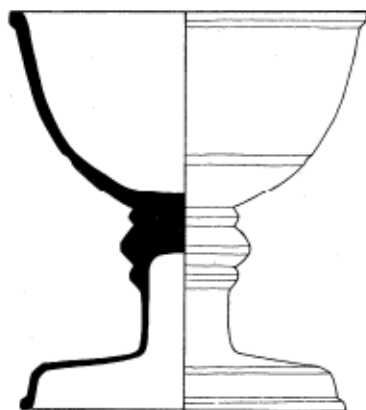


Fig 2. Medieval coffin chalice found in Ockley churchyard: suggested reconstruction (1:2)