

A late medieval pilgrim badge from Chaucer House, Tabard Street, SE1

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL excavations were carried out at Chaucer House by the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee (now part of the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology), between July 1975 and June 1977 under the direction of Brian Yule¹. The site was situated *c* 800m (½ mile) south of London Bridge, south of a known Roman settlement in the Borough High Street area and within the medieval parish of St George's of the Great Liberty Manor. It was bounded on the south-west by Tabard Street (medieval Kent Street), and on the north-east by the Bermondsey parish and manorial boundary, known as the Bermondsey 'ditch'. Six main phases were identified, dating from prehistoric to 18th century. From the medieval period there was ribbon development along the Kent Street frontage with rear garden areas backing onto fields. Among the finds from deposits in the garden area was a small, copper alloy pilgrim badge. It measures 25mm (1in) square and represents three figures; a central figure tied to a tree and flanked by two archers (Fig. 1). On the reverse there remain traces of a fastening which appears to have been a button loop. The location of the site near Borough High Street and the Tabard Inn, made famous by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, suggests a scene of erstwhile intense pilgrim activity since this was a traditional meeting point for pilgrims of various origins, bound for numerous destinations.

Pilgrimage was a vital component of devotional practice in the late Middle Ages, pilgrims visiting shrines for a number of reasons: to solicit favours, to remedy sickness, to express gratitude or to offer penance. Once at the scene of pilgrimage, visible proof of piety was supplied by the sale of pilgrim badges such as this one. An identical badge was found in the Saltway near Hailes Abbey in Gloucestershire. It was

provisionally dated as early 15th century and is currently housed in the Moyse's Hall Museum at Bury St Edmunds². The Chaucer House example was found in a general dump layer, the pottery of which dates from 1550 to 1650. Although obviously residual, a date of about 1500 seems likely for the badge itself. Together the badges illustrate the custom of mass producing pilgrim souvenirs at shrines. This mass production, which increased the revenue given over in honour of a particular saint, was achieved by the use of moulds³. Pilgrim badges were usually inexpensive and were made mainly from lead or pewter, their extreme fragility often contributing to their loss. Probably many thousands of badges were manufactured during the height of the medieval period but few survive, coming mainly from water-logged deposits or river beds⁴. Copper alloy examples are relatively rare and were presumably more expensive. Such badges appear to have been produced at richer shrines where the saints in question often had international devotees. The Virgin Mary and St Barbara, two of the highest order of saints, achieve the distinction of cast copper alloy badges⁵, and it is some reflection on the status of both the pilgrim and the saint that the Chaucer House badge is of an equivalent standard.

The identity of a saint in visual representations such as this is given by certain iconographical indications. These relate most often to the nature of the saint's martyrdom, but also to the performance of either a miracle or to an act of outstanding virtue, which thenceforward characterises the saint. Consequently

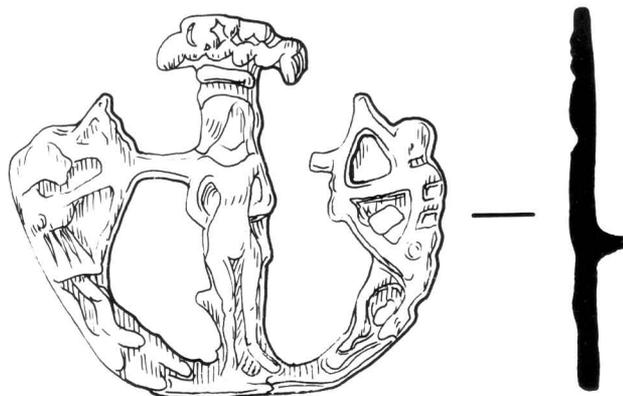


Fig. 1: the pilgrim badge (height: 25mm, 1in).

1. B. Yule *Excavations at Chaucer House, Tabard Street in Excavations in Southwark 1976-79*, Surrey Archaeol Soc/London and Middlesex Archaeol Soc *Joint Publication Series*, forthcoming.
2. Moyse's Hall Museum, Acc. No. 1976 183, see B.W. Spencer 'Medieval Pilgrim Badges' *Rotterdam Papers: A Contribution to Medieval Archaeology*, ed. J. G. N. Renaud, (Rotterdam 1968), 138.
3. *Ibid.* 139.
4. *Ibid.* 139.
5. B. W. Spencer (*pers comm*).

St Barbara is represented holding a tower, the scene of her captivity; St Catherine is identified by the wheel on which her torturers attempted to break her body or by the sword with which she was finally executed; St Martin, meanwhile, is most usually seen to be sharing his cloak with a beggar in an act of charity which secured his sanctity since the beggar was none other than Christ. Such visual aids were invaluable in an age of widespread illiteracy and had the effect of promoting both religious sentiment and sympathy with the sufferings of the martyrs.

An examination of the iconography of this badge provides similar clues as to the identity of its protagonist. The badge presents a possible dilemma since two saints, St Sebastian and St Edmund, shared the same fate and the scene which the badge depicts applies equally well to both. It was St Sebastian's reputed misfortune to be discovered to be a Christian under the rule of Diocletian. His punishment was to be shot with arrows and left for dead. Although he recovered from this ordeal he was later beaten to death with cudgels. He is most commonly represented as a nude youth tied to a tree or to a pillar with his body pierced with arrows. He became a particularly popular object of devotion from the last quarter of the 15th century onwards and he was a firm favourite with Renaissance artists and patrons throughout Europe.

The second candidate is St Edmund, king of East Anglia. He was a 9th-century king who was ritually tortured and murdered in 869 during the Danish invasions. His demise is graphically related in a number of accounts of his life and martyrdom. The traditional, oral narrative of his capture and execution was committed to writing as early as 985 by Abbo de Fleury⁶, allegedly acting on information given to him at an earlier date by an eye witness, who claimed to be the armour-bearer of Edmund on the day of his death. He tells how Edmund, refusing to surrender his kingdom's riches to the pagan Danes, was humiliated by them, in a manner made to resemble the mocking of Christ, before he was shot with arrows to the point of death⁷. He was then decapitated and his head was thrown into the thickest part of the wood of Hoxne⁸. The king's Christian subjects searched for his head in vain until it miraculously beckoned to them by calling "Here! Here! Here!" and was found

6. Abbo de Fleury 'Passio Sancti Eadmundi' *The Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, vol. I, ed. T. Arnold, (London 1984) 4.

7. *Ibid.* 15.

8. *Ibid.* 16.

9. *Ibid.* 17.

10. B. Houghton *Saint Edmund - King and Martyr* Lavenham Press 1970, 31.

11. Arnold *op. cit.* fn. 6, vol. I, 48.

resting between the protective paws of a devoted wolf⁹. By the time that Abbo de Fleury composed his *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*, the cult of the murdered king was undoubtedly already established. The veneration of Edmund's relics was immediate and spontaneous and reflected a political as well as a religious necessity. King Alfred propagated the cult as a means of unifying the country against the Danes and to this end he minted coins in Edmund's honour upon his own accession to the throne in 871¹⁰.

As a royal saint and martyr Edmund naturally attracted a fair degree of royal patronage and King Alfred's initiative was seized upon by successive monarchs both before and after the Norman Conquest. Edward the Confessor helped to establish his own pious reputation by visiting the shrine at Bury St Edmunds in 1043, walking for the final mile¹¹. Henry III named his second son Edmund in honour of the saint¹², whilst Edward I paid singular attention to the Abbey, visiting Bury at least fourteen times. The most notable occasion was prior to his Scottish campaign in 1300 when he had his banner touched with the relics of St Edmund and a mass celebrated in the saint's honour¹³. In the 15th century interest in Edmund was sustained in particular by Henry VI, a pious monarch whose own claim to sanctity was pressed until the breach with Rome. His most celebrated visit was at Christmas in 1433 during the abbacy of William Curteys and was commemorated by the richly illuminated manuscript of St Edmund's life and miracles written by Lydgate¹⁴. The association of Bury St Edmunds with a succession of monarchs and royal families ensured the survival of the cult and made St Edmund's shrine one of the richest in England. In 1341 John de Beaumont exclaimed that the profusion of gold and jewels at the shrine might be better employed in helping the King to win his wars. As divine retribution for this rash statement de Beaumont was promptly killed in a tournament¹⁵. When the Abbey fell under the inspection of the Commissioners in 1536, it was noted in a letter to Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General:

"Pleasith it your lordship to be advertysed, that we have ben at saynt Edmondes Bury, where we founde a riche shryne whiche was very comberous to deface. We have takyn in the seyd monastery in gold and silver [five thousand marks], and above, over and besydes a well and riche crosse with emerredes, as also dyvers and sundry stones of great value."¹⁶

12. A. Gransden *The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds (1212 - 1301)* London 1964, 49.

13. *Ibid.*, 157.

14. Edmond Bordier *Vivant Saint Edmond* Paris 1960, 73.

15. *Vita et Passio cum miraculis Sancti Edmundi Regis et Martyris excerpta de cronicis et diversis historiis seu legendis*, ed. Arnold *op. cit.* fn. 6, vol. I, 367 - 68.

16. T. Wright (ed.) *Three Chapters Relating to the Suppression of the Monasteries* London 1843, 144.

Although St Edmund did not achieve the international following of St Sebastian, he was revered both as a local saint and as a national martyr. The subsequent wealth, fame and longevity of his cult in England considerably strengthen St Edmund's claim to the badge's subject matter. Unfortunately, neither this badge nor its twin were found in or near Bury St Edmunds, and the iconography offers no real solution at first sight. As a result supposition alone has thus far provided the basis for identification. However, although evidence as to its origins cannot be irrefutably drawn from where the badge was found, closer examination can be seen to give conclusive proof of its devotional intent. The most general way in which St Sebastian and St Edmund are differentiated is for emphasis to be given to the latter's kingly status. This is achieved by two means, both exemplified by badges of St Edmund within the Museum of London, and their variants. The first, (MOL 78.13), an early 14th-century badge, represents St Edmund crowned and naked, apart from a loincloth, standing in front of a tree with his hands bound as though in prayer. Traces of arrows remain but prominence is given to the bearded and crowned head of the king which appears disproportionately large¹⁷. Another example from the same mould exists in the British Museum whilst similar badges from the Thames at Queenhithe not only have the lower half of the tree remaining and visible between the saint's legs, but incorporate into the design the wolf of the legend¹⁸. Another such badge was recently found at Salisbury and is catalogued and illustrated in Brian Spencer's *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, (No 100), in the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum's *Medieval Catalogue*, (forthcoming).

A second category of badge dispenses with the crown but allows Edmund to be robed. This suitably distinguishes him from St Sebastian but in no way reduces the humiliation of his torture. Again this type of badge is represented in the Museum of London's collection (MOL 8770). Here Edmund is placed behind a forked tree, robed, but covered with a profusion of arrows. A close parallel to this manner of representing St Edmund is in the *Queen Mary Psalter* (1320 - 30)¹⁹. The badge probably dates from the first quarter of the 14th century and seems to be derived from another kind of pewter pilgrim souvenir which is hollow cast but treats the figure of St

Edmund in the same way²⁰. A third variant dates from the early 15th century and was found at Salisbury. It combines the two devices and represents St Edmund robed and crowned, holding a large arrow²¹. This restrained representation follows the late 14th-century depiction of St Edmund in the National Gallery's Wilton Diptych and illustrates the late medieval desire to refine its symbolism and iconography. The Chaucer House pilgrim badge achieves a degree of refinement in quite a different way.

Superficially, the badge represents a nude St Edmund without a crown and possibly unbearded, (although, due to corrosion, much of the detail is lost), and consequently its content is open to confusion. It is the form, not the content, which in this case provides the most conclusive evidence as to the saint's true identity. The anchor shape of the badge has specific allusions to the posthumous career of St Edmund as intercessor and the miracles enacted through him. The miracles recorded at St Edmund's shrine show him repeatedly and increasingly emerging as the saviour of those in distress at sea. The first recorded incident involving the invocation of St Edmund to preserve a vessel from shipwreck is given prominence by two of his hagiographers. Hermannus the Archdeacon relates in his *De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi* (1095), how, some time after 1081, a Norman knight travelling with a relic of St Edmund escaped shipwreck by seeking the protection of the saint²². The episode is important since Hermannus equates the power of St Edmund with that of St Nicholas, the official patron saint of sailors in distress. The same incident is related with modifications by Abbot Samson in his *Opus de Miraculis Sancti AEdmundi* (1180-89). The substance is the same but in this instance a knight named Norman resorts to the relic in the storm after a vision²³. The comparison between Edmund and St Nicholas is not made but it recurs later in an interesting context. Samson records that Lambert, an Angevin abbot, was in the habit of paying particular devotion to St Edmund. When prevailed upon to explain, Lambert tells how being wind bound at Barfleur he was instructed by an old Angevin monk named Nicholas, to pray to St Edmund. Lambert was reassured that this entailed no offence to St Nicholas since St Edmund is particularly powerful in England. Once the prayer was said Lambert's vessel crossed the channel in ten hours²⁴. Samson reinforces his tale by

17. Photograph published in *Flowers of Cities All: First Report of the Museum of London* 1980, 22, No. 30.

18. H. Syer Cuming 'On Signacula found in London' *Journ Brit Archaeol Assoc* 24 (1868), pl. 17, No. 12.

19. London, British Library, MS.2 BVII.

20. B. W. Spencer 'Pilgrim Souvenirs' in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200 - 1400* (London 1987), 223, No. 79.

21. B. W. Spencer *Pilgrim Souvenirs* No.101, the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue (forthcoming).

22. Hermannus the Archdeacon *De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*, Arnold *op. cit.* fn. 6, vol. I, 72-3.

23. *Samsonis Abbatis Opus de Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi*, Arnold, *op. cit.* fn. 6, vol. I, 140.

24. *Ibid.*, 176-8.

stating that barely was Lambert finished when three men from London arrived praising St Edmund for the fair wind they enjoyed on a voyage to St Giles.

After this point a number of sources relate an abundance of miracles involving seafarers²⁵. The most outlandish concerns a clerk from Lichfield who fell overboard on a voyage to Jerusalem, whereupon he was seized by the hair by St Edmund and brought safely to land²⁶. The association with St Nicholas appears to have worked through the popular imagination to a point where the saints are invoked together in dangerous situations other than those at sea. In 1190, a young man from Shimpling in Suffolk was taken in war, tortured and imprisoned, but was miraculously set free upon invocation of St Nicholas and St Edmund²⁷. Edmund's prowess as intercessor for those in danger at sea, however, remains most prominent among his miracles. Lydgate refers to it in his *Life of St Edmund*, dedicated to Henry VI in 1433, in the following terms as he implores Edmund to:

Saue trewe pilgrymes from al aduersite
And maryners from wyndy disturbaunce!²⁸

There is little doubt that St Edmund's geographical location helped to determine the course his authority would take. A brief look at the principal miracles attributed to Edmund (Fig. 2) shows a very marked gravitation to coastal or near coastal areas where faith in him was obviously at its strongest. Indeed the concentration of miracles is greater in these areas than in those immediately surrounding Bury St Edmunds. The appropriateness of the anchor shaped badge as Edmund's symbol is clear. It was a form associated with St Edmund by a number of pilgrims. In 1173 several Dunwich fishermen, caught in a storm, invoked St Edmund and were saved. In gratitude they subsequently offered an *ex voto* of an anchor at his shrine²⁹. It is highly likely that a vast quantity of similar wax tokens of ships and anchors decorated the wealthy shrine at Bury St Edmunds while the badge was probably worn as a charm for protection at sea. Its importance lies in the fact that it draws attention to a specific aspect of St Edmund's miracle working and increases its significance. This creates another dimension to Edmund who functions not only as a royal saint, where emphasis is given to his powers of intervention on a military level, but as a champion of sailors, pilgrims and fishermen. Iconographically the importance of this connection is all the greater because

25. *Ibid.*, 162-4, 178, 192-5; vol. II, 363; vol. III, 318, 319-20, 330, 331.

26. *Ibid.*, vol. I, 195-6.

27. *Ibid.*, vol. I, 374.

28. Lord Francis Hervey *Corolla Sancti Edmundi* London 1907, 506.

29. Arnold *op. cit.* fn. 6 vol. I, 367.

it appears to be absent or unnoticed in other representations of St Edmund, and, as such, it acts as an iconographical innovation which seems not to have been previously documented.

In conclusion, the badge was almost certainly produced at or near Bury St Edmunds, in honour of the town's kingly martyr, in the late 15th or early 16th century. The aim of this study has been to establish the anchor motif as a precedent in representations of St Edmund and to secure a basis for other possible identifications of the saint in a variety of media.

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Fig. 2: distribution map of the principal miracles of St Edmund, and of badges identical to the Chaucer House example.