THE BLITHFIELD SALLET

By C. BLAIR

In two lists, published respectively in 1922 and 1939, Mr. F. H. Cripps-Day and Mr. A. R. Dufty have recorded more than 600 English churches containing armour.¹ For obvious reasons the authors were unable to visit more than a proportion of these churches and much of their material was obtained from such published sources as were available and from friends and correspondents, some of whom had no specialised knowledge of the subject. Despite the wealth of information they contain, therefore, the lists represent only a preliminary survey, and a great deal of our church armour awaits detailed examination. What such an examination may reveal was demonstrated in 1941, when two 14th-century gauntlets were discovered associated with an apparently undistinguished 18th-century achievement in Ripon Cathedral;² in all probability a number of other important pieces still await discovery in much the same way. Such a piece, a fine 15th-century helmet of the type known as a sallet, forms the subject of this paper.³

The helmet (Pis. XVII, XVIIIc) is supported on a wrought-iron bracket above the tomb of Richard Bagot, Esquire (ob. 1597), the third of that name, and his wife Mary (ob. 1608), in the north-east angle of the chancel of the parish church of St. Leonard at Blithfield, Staffordshire.⁴ It is composed of three principal parts: skull, reinforcing brow-plate, and visor.

The deep rounded skull, forged from a single piece of steel, follows the contours of the head, swelling rather prominently at the rear and then curving gently inwards to join the short, bluntly-pointed tail at the nape of the neck. A low keel-like comb extends along the top, continuing as a medial ridge down the reinforce and visor and down the tail; it is pierced in the centre by a circular hole, originally for

I should like to express my gratitude to Lord and Lady Bagot and the Rev. H. H. Goodin, Rector of Colton and priest-in-charge of Blithfield, for every assistance in connection with my study of the helmet in their church. Mr. H. R. Robinson kindly made the line drawings for reproductions, and I thank Mr. D. Byrne and Mr. Anthony Dixon for information about, and photographs of, the Coventry and Witton sallets respectively, also Herr Professor Dr. Paul Post for the loan of a photograph of the Liege reliquary.


The Blithfield Sallet and Crest
A. Sallet in the Historisches Museum, Basle

B. Sallet in St. Mary's Hall, Coventry

C. The Blithfield Sallet

D. Sallet in Witton-le-Wear Church, Co. Durham
attaching a light war-crest,\textsuperscript{1} but subsequently much enlarged to take a spike for a wooden funerary-crest\textsuperscript{2}. The lower edge of the skull is turned over outwards, probably round a wire, and curves up steeply in front to form the sides of the face-opening; the upper edge of this last is plain and cut straight across. Extending all the way round at brow level is a row of lining-rivets, of which twelve remain out of an original fifteen; they have flat, rectangular heads facing inwards. Part of the leather strap to which the lining was stitched still survives. Lower down, placed one on each side, are two pairs of similar rivets for the attachment of the forked chin-strap, also of leather, portions of which also survive. A small circular hole is pierced behind the centre of the right-hand edge of the face-opening; the purpose of this is uncertain, but it probably served to attach a small pivoted fork by means of which the visor was propped in the open position.\textsuperscript{3}

The heavy reinforce, extending halfway round the skull on either side, is secured to the brow by the visor-pivots and a single rivet on the left. The two rear ends are cut straight, while the upper edge curves up in two deep cusps to form a tongue-like extension over the front of the comb; the edges of this extension are cut into a series of ornamental curves and notches. The lower edge is straight at the sides but curves up slightly in front to follow the top of the face-opening, where it is bordered by a turn in continuation of that along the edge of the skull.

The visor, which projects boldly forward, is of the type that only covers the face below the eyes, the sight being formed by the gap between it and the top of the face-opening.\textsuperscript{4} It is pivoted on two simple iron rivets, similar to those securing the lining-strap. The upper edge slopes downwards from the pivots towards the front, then drops suddenly on either side in a short step before flattening out to form the bottom of the sight; this last curves strongly outwards and is then flanged inwards to protect the eyes. The rear edges are concave and the lower edge, which curves up slightly towards the front, is turned over outwards. There is no trace of any device for locking the visor in the closed position.

The whole surface of the helmet has been painted grey, but much of the paint has scaled off to reveal the heavily patinated metal beneath. No armourer’s mark is visible, but it is possible that one might be revealed by careful cleaning.

\textsuperscript{1} Sallets with crests are illustrated in the \textit{Warwick Pageant} mentioned below. For an account for making one of the spherical ornaments which appear to have been popular substitutes for crests see Charles Buttin, \textit{Le Guet de Genève}, Annecy (1910), 88.

\textsuperscript{2} The spike is unusual in being formed by an extension to the bracket upon which the helmet rests instead of being riveted to the comb.

\textsuperscript{3} See, for example, that on a German sallet in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (No. 29.150.5). C. O. von Kienbusch and S. V. Grancsay, \textit{The Bashford Dean Collection of Arms and Armor}, Portland, Maine (1933), no. 4, Pl. IV.

\textsuperscript{4} This is probably the type of visor referred to as a ‘demye visere’ in one of the Howard accounts for 1463: \textit{Manners and Household Expenses of England in the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Centuries}, Roxburgh Club, London (1841), 215.
Riveted to the lower edge of the visor is the top lame of a 16th-century pauldron. Formerly riveted to the bottom of this was the rounded lowest lame of a tasset of the same date, now hanging loose from the bracket. Both lames are painted gold and are clearly additions made for Richard Bagot's funeral, presumably to deepen the sallet and give it the appearance of an heraldic helm.1

The height of the helmet, at the crest-hole, is 8\(\frac{3}{4}\) ins., and the weight, including the pauldron-lame, is 6\(\frac{1}{2}\) lbs.

The sallet may be compared with two others of English provenance, namely, the splendid helmet in the church at Witton-le-Wear, Co. Durham (Pl. XVIIIb), and that in St. Mary's Hall, Coventry (Pl. XVIIIa). All three have short tails, half visors with flanged lips, and brow reinforces, although they vary in certain other details. The reinforces on both the Witton and Coventry helmets are of cusped, triangular shape and barely extend round the sides. The Coventry helmet has a high, pointed skull surmounted by a later plume-holder, and its lower edge is turned over inwards instead of outwards as on the other two. The Witton helmet has a 'stepped' comb and the lining-rivets are decorated with large, hollow, crimped heads of iron. Again, the visor on the Blithfield sallet is deeper at the sides, and therefore pivoted somewhat higher up than are the visors on the other two. Despite these differences, however, all three headpieces are sufficiently similar in general form to suggest that they were produced under a common influence, if not in the same area. Unfortunately, as with the Blithfield sallet, any armourers' marks that may exist on the Witton and Coventry examples are effectively concealed by paint.

The late Sir Guy Laking suggested that the Coventry helmet was of English make, on the grounds that these 'strange, high-crowned salades . . . are peculiar to England'.2 This statement, however, will not bear examination, for while it is true that sallets of both the Coventry and the Blithfield-Witton type, with either full or half visors, are depicted on certain English monuments and MSS.3 they are also found frequently in the pictorial art of France.4

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1 This effect is shown very clearly on a photograph reproduced by Wrottesley, op. cit., opposite p. 82, taken when the lower plate was still in place.
2 Laking, op. cit., ii, 23.
3 E.g. on many of the figures depicted in the Warwick Pageant (see below) ; on the figure of Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, on the Roux Roll in the College of Arms ; and on brasses and effigies in the following churches : Castle Donington, Leics ; Aughton, Yorks. ; Melbury Sampford, Dorset ; Clitheroe, Lancs. ; Brancebeth, Co. Durham ; Tyingham, Bucks. Some of these sallets have high, fluted skulls similar to those depicted on the tapestries at Pastrana, Spain (see below p. 163, note 4). Their presence in both countries may perhaps be attributed to a common influence from Flanders.

In addition, Mr. A. R. Dufty has drawn my attention to a helmet (with a full visor), very similar in form to that at Coventry, on a painting, L'Arrestation du Christ, by the Master of St. Gilles, in the Musee des Beaux Arts, Brussels (see Gazette des Beaux Arts, 6e periode, xvii (1937), 224). M. Buttin suggests (op. cit., 84) that this type of high-crowned painted sallet was indicated by the medieval French term salade a bicoquet.
ders, Spain, and the Germanic countries. This does not, of course, in itself prevent the three helmets under discussion from being English, but the very small amount of information we have about the armour made in this country during the Middle Ages points to the conclusion that it was not of the highest quality. No evidence has yet been produced to show that there was any factory in London or the provinces, worked by armourers, either native or foreign, which enjoyed a great reputation. There is no record of any Italian, French or German noble sending to England for a suit of armour.

On the other hand, there is a considerable amount of evidence to show that those in England who could afford to do so sent abroad for their armour, chiefly to Italy and the Low Countries. It will be recalled, too, that when Henry VIII founded the Greenwich workshops in 1511 he staffed them almost entirely with foreigners, a fact which seems to indicate clearly that our native armourers were not capable of producing the first-quality armour that Henry required. These three helmets are of fine quality and form: we are forced to conclude, therefore, that they are more likely to be of foreign than of English origin. This conclusion is confirmed by the existence of a group of similar helmets of Continental provenance, all bearing marks of Italian character.

The best known sallet of this group is associated with the composite Gothic armour from the Carrand, Spitzer and de Dino collections, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. 1). The edges have been decorated with modern piercings and the skull is not pointed, but it

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1 E.g. MSS. illustrated by Loomis, op. cit., figs. 344-6, 349-54; B.M., MSS., Royal 18 E.I., 14 E. iv, 15 E. vi, Harl. 2943. The figure of St. William on a retable by a follower of Van der Weyden, in the church at Ambièrle, near Roanne, wears a sallet not unlike that at Coventry (J. Destree, Roger de la Pasture van der Weyden, Paris and Brussels (1930), ii, Pl. 182). See also the Liége reliquary and the Dyson Perrins MS., mentioned below.

2 E.g. on a tapestry in the church at Pastrana (Sir James Mann, 'Notes on the Armour worn in Spain', Archologia lxxiii (1933), Pl. LXXXV), and on a painting by Nicolas Frances in the Cathedral at Leon (C. R. Post, A History of Spanish Painting, Harvard (1930-38), i, 267).

3 E.g. Loomis, op. cit., figs. 15 and 381-3; Alfred Strange, Deutsche Malerei der Gotik, Berlin (1934-54), vi, figs. 4, 89, 101 and 180; Zeitschrift für Historische Waffenkunde, vi, 285; ix, 56; xi, 250; xii, 3 A high-crowned fluted sallet of this type is also shown on the Volkamerfenster of 1487 in the Lorenzkirche, Nürnberg. The Germans, on the whole, seem to have preferred the long-tailed type. Such short-tailed German sallets as have survived are usually much squarer in outline than the group under discussion, e.g. Kienbusch and Grancsay, op. cit., no. 39.

4 F. H. Cripps-Day, Fragmenta Armamentaria, i, pt. ii, 10; privately printed, Frome (1934). Reference should be made, however, to a group of fine late 15th century helmets in English churches which may be of English origin. See Sir James Mann, 'A Tournament Helm in Melbury Sampford Church,' Ants. Jour., xx (1940), 368-379.

5 For a number of examples of this see Sir James Mann, 'A Further Account of the Armour preserved in the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie near Mantua', Archologia, lxxxvii (1938), 319-321.

In 1473 John Paston was buying armour from Martin Rondelle, 'Armurier de Monsire le Bastart de Bourgogne' in Bruges (J. Gairdner, The Paston Letters (1901), iii, 95-6; Maj. H. D. Barnes, A Fifteenth Century Armourer's Letter, privately printed, 1932; also Z.H.W.K., xiv, 65). In 1465 J. Payn, writing to John Paston, refers to '... j hernese complete of the touche of Milleyn ...' (Gairdner, op. cit., ii, 155). The skull of a sallet in the church at Eardisley, Herefordshire, bears Italian marks consisting of a 'spur' and a crowned I.

6 No. 04.3.293 A. I am indebted to Mr. S. V. Grancsay, Curator of Arms and Armor at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, for information about this helmet. The whole armour is discussed by Mr. C. R. Beard in 'Too Good to be True', Connoisseur, April, 1932, 219-225.
otherwise closely resembles the Coventry sallet, even to the inward turn
along its lower edge. The skull bears a triple mark (fig. 2) consisting
of a letter S surmounting two split crosses whose legs terminate in the
letters BG. The same marks are stamped on the rerebraces associated

with armour No. 18 at Churburg¹ and on the cuirass of armour No. 4
in the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie near Mantua.² There
can be little doubt therefore that they are of N. Italian origin. Another
sallet, in the Historisches Museum, Basel³ (Pl. XVIII A), so closely

resembles the New York example that one would attribute it to the
same armourer but for the fact that it bears a different group of
marks, unfortunately somewhat defaced (fig. 3). These marks are

¹ Oswald Graf Trapp and Sir James Mann. The Armoury of the Castle of Churburg (London, 1929), 35–41, Pis. XVIII, XIX, XXII.
² See Sir James Mann, "The Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie" (loc. cit.), 338.
³ Inv. no. 1874.29. I am indebted to Dr. W. Schneewind of the Basel Museum for the
information that the helmet was purchased in 1874 from Mrs. Buholzer, widow of the master
of the ordnance at Lucerne; he had apparently been a collector. Nothing further is known of
its history. Permission to reproduce the photograph of this helmet has been kindly given by
the Historisches Museum, Basel.
Reliquary in Cathedral of St. Paul, Liège
Executed 1466-7 by Gérard Loyet
A. Detail from MS. *History of Thebes*, Flemish, dated 1469. 
*(Dyson Perrins Coll., Malvern)*
B. Detail from the 'Warwick Pageant' (B.M. Cot. MSS., Julius EIV, f. 24 v). (*By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum*)
again typically Italian in character and consist apparently of the crowned (?) letters iao surmounting two split crosses whose legs terminate in the letters SO. Finally, there is the fine headpiece on an armour, from the Argaiz collection, now belonging to M. Pauilhac of Paris. This has the characteristic short tail, half visor and triangular, cusped reinforce, but accompanied by a high skull terminating in a short stalk from which a series of embossed ribs radiate downwards almost to the level of the visor-pivots; these last are set rather high as on the Blithfield sallet. It bears the cross-keys mark usually regarded as being one of those used by the Negrol of Milan.1

Closely related to this group of sallets is another in which the visors and reinforces are combined. A fine example at Churburg,2 which much resembles the Witton helmet in general form although slightly lower in the skull, is also encircled by a row of exactly similar lining rivets with large crimped heads. It bears a group of Italian marks including one that may well be the town mark of Milan.3 Another example from Churburg, now in the Tower of London,4 also bears Italian marks and has a skull of similar form to that of the Blithfield helmet.

In writing of the New York helmet Mr. C. R. Beard adopts the view that these short-tailed sallets were ‘made... in one of the many ateliers at Lyons and Tours managed by Milanese master armourers’.5 It is true that helmets of this style appear to have been particularly favoured in the Franco-Flemish countries, and they must have been produced there in great quantities. It is true also that, if the evidence of contemporary painting and sculpture is to be believed, they were scarcely, if ever, used in Italy. This does not mean that they were not made there. There is a certain amount of evidence that foreign styles of armour were produced in Italy, presumably for export,6 and our helmets probably fall into this category. In view of the geographical position of the castle of Churburg it is extremely improbable that the two Churburg sallets were purchased anywhere other than in N. Italy and, as we have seen, one bears a mark that may well be that of the town of Milan. Thus, while it is possible that some of the helmets may

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1 Sir James Mann, ‘Armour in Spain’, (loc. cit.), 297–8, Pl. LXXXIX, 1, and ‘The Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie’ (loc. cit.), 335–6. The Pauilhac helmet may be compared with another, with a different type of visor, in the armoury at Madrid. The latter bears a mark consisting of three crowns and is illustrated in the Inventario Illuminado amongst pieces described as having come from Flanders. Conde de Valencia, Catalogo de la Real Armeria de Madrid, Madrid (1898), 143–4, D.14.
2 Trapp and Mann, op. cit., 64–5, no. 23, and Pl. XXIXa.
3 The mark consists of a letter M with its central leg prolonged upwards to form the vertical limb of a cross. The fact that a similar mark is also found on weapons, for example, on a sword from the De Cosson collection in the Tower of London (IX.950), suggests that it is not that of a maker. See the Baron de Cosson’s account of this sword in Proc. Soc. Ants., 2nd Series, xiv (1892), 238–42.
4 On armour no. II.168. See Trapp and Mann, op. cit., 91–2, no. 61, and Pl. XXXIc. It was acquired by the Tower from the Hearst Collection in 1952.
5 Beard, op. cit., 220.
6 For examples of this in relation to Germany see Sir James Mann, ‘Notes on the Evolution of Plate Armour in Germany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century’, Archaeologia, lxxxiv (1935), 88–88.
have originated in the manner suggested by Mr. Beard, there can be little reasonable doubt that others were made in Italy itself.

Presumably an armourer would normally continue to use the same mark wherever he was working. This being so, it would be unwise in our present state of knowledge to attempt to distinguish between similar armour made respectively at home and abroad by the same craftsman. The safest course would seem to be to describe all the sallets under discussion as of Italian workmanship in the Western European fashion.

We come now to the question of date. The sallet appears to be derived from one of the many variants of the 14th-century bascinet. The word occurs in its Italian form of *celata* as early as 1407 and seems to have been introduced into France in the second decade of the 15th century. It probably appeared in England in the fourteen-thirties for, while it does not occur in an inventory of 1430 of the armour of Lyon, Lord Welles, another inventory of the 13th May, 1439, amongst the records of the City of London, includes several sallets. The early form of the helmet which we are accustomed to understand by the word seems also to have made its appearance on the Continent during the period c. 1430. It was probably introduced into England almost immediately, for its earliest representation in this country is apparently that on the figure of St. George on the reredos of the Henry V chapel in Westminster Abbey; this, on the evidence of the rest of the armour, can hardly be later than c. 1445. Sallets are also shown in the illuminations to a MS. book of poems and romances presented to Queen Margaret of Anjou by John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, between 1445 and 1447.

The shape of all these sallets, deep and rounded with a very short tail and no comb, is clearly much earlier than that of the Blithfield type. The brass of Robert Staunton (ob. 1458) at Castle Donington, Leicestershire, however, shows a sallet, with a full visor, that seems to belong to the Blithfield group and from the next decade onwards examples are common. Perhaps the most attractive of these is depicted near the kneeling figure of Charles the Bold of Burgundy on the charming gold and enamel reliquary in the Cathedral of St. Paul, Liege (Pl. XIX). This was executed by Gérard Loyet in 1466-7 and presented by the Duke

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2 The documentary history of the sallet and the etymology of the word are very fully discussed by Charles Buttin in *op. cit.*, 73-101.
3 Lincoln Record Office, MS. Anc. 10/A/1. I am indebted to Miss D. M. Williamson for sending me a transcript of this document.
6 It can be compared, for example, with that shown on the brass of Thomas de St. Quintin (ob. 1445), in Harpham church, Yorks. The date of the erection of the reredos is unfortunately unknown. The chapel was in course of construction in 1441 and the sculptures would, presumably, have been started before the main building operations were completed. See Sir Wm. St. John Hope, 'The Funeral Monument and Chantry Chapel of King Henry the Fifth', *Archaeologia*, lx (1914), 155.
7 B.M., Royal MS., 15 E. VI.
to the former Cathedral of St. Lambert, Liége, in 1471. The sallet, which is surmounted by a globular ornament in lieu of a crest, closely resembles that at Blithfield, excepting that it has a triangular, cusped reinforce and lining-rivets with large, spirally fluted heads similar to those at Witton. Another, plainer, helmet of the same type is illustrated in a Flemish MS. dated 1469 in the Dyson Perrins Collection² (Pl. XX.A), while numerous specimens, with both full and half visors, are shown in the famous Pageant of the Birth, Life and Death of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, executed between 1485 and 1490³ (Pl. XX.B).

Finally, a very late example occurs in a window of c. 1515-17 at King’s College Chapel, Cambridge, although this may be the result of conservatism on the part of the Flemish artist, for there appears to be no evidence for the general continuance of this form after the first decade of the 16th century.

It is, of course, impossible to identify the original owner of the Blithfield sallet. If it came from the armoury at Blithfield Hall⁴ it presumably belonged to one of the 15th-century members of the Bagot family, perhaps Richard Bagot II (c. 1420-85), who was almost certainly killed at Bosworth fighting for Henry Tudor; but any suggestion of this sort would be mere speculation, for the sallet may well have been supplied for the third Richard Bagot’s funeral by the undertaker.

Associated with the sallet is the wooden crest (out of a ducal coronet, a goat’s head argent armed or)⁵ made for the funeral (Pl. XVII). It is of carved wood, the horns and ears being attached by pegs. The whole surface is covered with a thin layer of gesso under the white and gold paint. The mantling has dagged edges and is formed of two pieces of silk-lined velvet arranged to hang one on either side of the helmet. The velvet is now black and the silk brown, but it is not certain that these are the original colours. Now in a very dilapidated condition it is presumably contemporary with the crest, unless a small fragment of a page from an early 19th-century book stitched into the lining on one side indicates a replacement. On the other hand, the page may have been inserted at some comparatively recent date to act as a support for the old fabric.

¹ Sir Martin Conway, Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Flemish and Belgian Art, London (1927), 162, no. 495. Loyet must have been well acquainted with the construction of a sallet, for in 1467 he was responsible for decorating one belonging to the Duke. Buttin, op. cit., 88.
² Sir George Warner, Descriptive Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts in the Library of C. W. Dyson Perrins, Oxford (1920), i, 220-24, no. 99. Permission to photograph the detail reproduced here was kindly given by Mr. C. W. Dyson Perrins.
³ B. M. Cottonian MS., Julius E. IV. Sir E. Maunde Thompson in the Introduction (p. iii) to a facsimile of the MS., produced for the Roxburgh Club in 1908, suggests that the artist responsible for the drawings was a Fleming, although the text is in English. On the other hand, Viscount Dillon and Sir Wm. St. John Hope in their introduction (p. iii) to another facsimile, published by Longman, Green & Co. in 1914, maintain that the whole production is English.
⁴ Portions of the armoury still remained at Blithfield in the 18th century, and William, 2nd Lord Bagot, describes (op. cit., 144) how the walls of the old Hall were ‘ hung round with twelve complete suits of armour (parts of which as a boy I remember having seen) ’. No portions of these now survive at the Hall.
⁵ This crest appears to have been adopted by the Bagots in the 14th century; the descendants of the famous goats that inspired the crest still roam in Bagot Park. See G. K. Whitehead, ‘An Historic Herd of ’ Wild ’ Goats’, Country Life Annual (1932), 178-83.