NOTES ON SOME MEDIÆVAL METHODS OF DEPOSITING DOCUMENTS.

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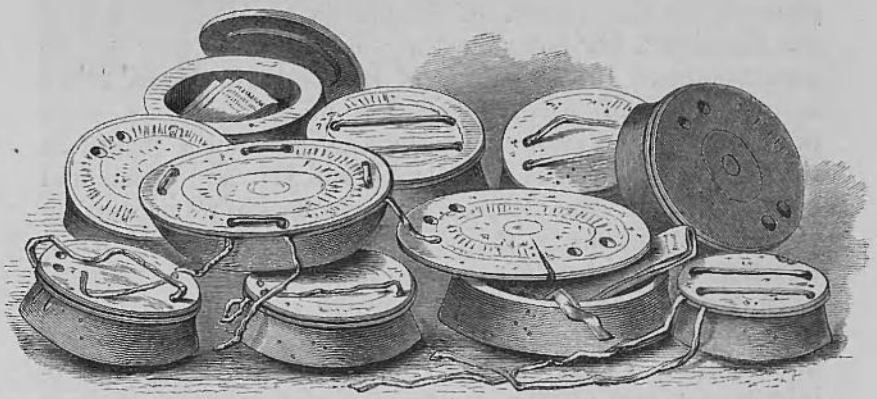
THE occurrence in Cornwall of an example of the turned wooden boxes anciently used in the Treasury of the Exchequer for the deposit of documents has induced me to put together a few notes on the subject, which may not be unacceptable. In the course of last autumn I was called upon to deal with a small collection of similar boxes, some of which were still occupied by the documents placed in them during the reigns of Edw. II. and III., and which had been found by Mr. Scott a few years ago when making those investigations in the precincts of the Abbey of Westminster which resulted in his interesting and valuable work, the "Gleanings."[1] To the ever courteous and kind liberality of our distinguished Vice-President, the Dean of Westminster, I was indebted for the opportunity of exhibiting, at one of the meetings of the Institute, several specimens of those boxes. And to the kind courtesy of Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy I was obliged for the many and varied examples of boxes, &c., which were brought from the Public Record Office on that occasion.

In the year 1836 the late Sir Francis Palgrave published the first volume of "The Antient Kalendars and Inventories of the Treasury of His Majesty's Exchequer; together with other documents illustrating the History of that Repository." That repository then consisted of one building, the Chapter House of the Abbey of Westminster, which was doing duty as the store-house of the chief contents of the three ancient treasuries of the Sovereigns of England, formerly in connection with the Palace of Westminster, and of one in the Tower of London. The first treasury is described as being "in the cloister of the Abbey of Westminster," and which was known as the chapel of

[1] Gleanings from Westminster Abbey, by George Gilbert Scott, R.A., F.S.A., &c. 2nd edition, 1863. Oxford and London J. H. and J. Parker.

the Pyx; another was "adjoining the Court of the Receipt of the Exchequer," in the Old Palace of Westminster; and the third was over the gateway "going out of the New Palace into St. Margaret's Lane." The contents of these treasuries were transferred to the Chapter House at intervals, probably, from the time of the dissolution of the Abbatical Establishment to the year after the fire at the Cottonian Library in Dean's Yard, in 1751.

Attached to the Royal Chapel and Palace, the King's Treasury was an object of especial solicitude in times when large sums of money were collected and kept in bulk, in the



Group of "Skippets" from the Muniment-room of the Abbey of Westminster; about ¼th size.

same place of strength as the crown, jewels, and household plate of the Sovereign, and the most important legal and diplomatic documents. In the volumes to which attention has been drawn we have a complete history of this important banch of the Palace arrangements, from the time of its first organization as a Record Office by Walter Stapleton, Bishop of Exeter, whose calendar was made in the year 1323, to the reign of James I. There are six folded plates of illustration to this work, of which plate ii. is described as representing "An antient *skippet* of wood, turned in the lathe. It appears from a memorandum written in ink upon the cover (too faint to be represented in the lithograph) that it contained a deed executed by the Bishop of Hereford in favour of John de Mawarden, or Marden. The handwriting of this memorandum is of the reign of Edward II." The identity of the "skippet" here represented with that exhibited by the Rev. Mr. Iago from

Bodmin and with those from the muniment-room of Westminster Abbey was at once apparent. For the use of the word as applied to these turned boxes I have searched in vain. It does not occur at all in the calendar of Bishop Stapleton, although such boxes were used in the reign of Edw. I., of which an example was shown at the Institute. In that calendar all the records are described as being in bundles, in hanapers of twigs (of which also an example was exhibited), in forcers of leather bound with iron (also shown), pixes, coffins, coffers, and cases of leather and wood of some variety. These were for the most part distinguished by signs having some relation to the subject matter of their contents. A coffer containing documents relating to the crown would have that figure marked on it; those relating to Yarmouth would be distinguished by three herrings; and those referring to royal marriages had the subject expressed by a hand in hand. The system was, in fact, a picture-writing which required no knowledge of reading to interpret. Continuing the history of the Royal Treasury, books of memoranda follow Stapleton's calendar in date, the first beginning in 19 Edw. III. By the entries in these books, which are doubtless contemporaneous, and which extend to the reign of Henry VIII., it would appear that all documents placed in the Treasury were at least doubly enclosed. They were first put into a pix, skippet, hanaper, or coffer, and afterwards placed in a large coffer, coffin, or chest, with a distinctive mark. If that was the case during the time embraced by Stapleton's calendar it is not so stated. There is, however, one remarkable exception. It is an entry of "A Pix in which is another Pix which is not to be opened except in the presence of the King or Treasurer. It was previously sealed with the King's seal, and was opened at Nottingham by his command in the month of November, in the seventeenth year of his reign [Edward I.]. It is now sealed with the seal of the Bishop of Exeter, the Treasurer." [2]

Of the etymology of the word "skippet" there can be little doubt. It is simply the diminutive of "skep" or "skip," a word which can be traced through dictionaries and glossaries as the Anglo-Saxon term for a basket or tub,

[2] "Antient Kalendars and Inventories," vol i., p. 96.

down to its use in the present day by market-gardeners for the round basket in which all kinds of vegetable produce are brought to market. In the "Promptorium Parvulorum" it means simply a basket. Whether it came originally from the Greek σκαφίς, a canoe or other article hollowed out, we need not here inquire. In Jamieson's Scotch dictionary "skep" is described as "a great vessel of wicker *or of earth* to keep corn in." If the term was not originally limited in application to materials of basket-work its diminutive might be used to boxes of a special make or shape, and particularly to any like the usual forms of basket known as "skeps." The distinction between the "pixis" and "skippettum" is difficult to determine. In the work I have so often referred to we have entries of the "pixis" without any distinction—the "pixis quadrata," "pixis lignea," "parva pixis de ligno rotunda," and the "pixis rotunda," as used for the deposit of documents.

Of the "skippettum" the entries are by no means so numerous. The word is generally without any descriptive adjunct, but there is an entry under the date of 32 Edw. III. of "a long skipet," containing accounts and charters of Poitou, being placed in a coffer with other things,[3] and in 42 Edw. III. we have an entry of a certain little "skypet" containing deeds relating to Dartford.[4] In modern French we have "esquipot," a money-box, showing the transference of the word. There does not seem to me, then, sufficient evidence in the entries in the ancient calendars to appropriate the term "skippet" to the turned wooden boxes lately brought before us, which might with equal fairness be styled "parvæ pixides rotundæ." The gentleman to whose kindness and intelligent research we are indebted for the example of one of these peculiar deed-boxes, found in a remote part of the country, tells us of a local use of the word "skippett," in a sense which appears to have no connection with its original derivation, and to be an application of it not generally known. We know well that the art of turnery flourished extensively in this country during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and some of these curious boxes, by whatever name they were called, are good specimens of the manufacture which supplied wooden bowls and trenchers to the scanty

[3] "Antient Kalendars and Inventories," vol. iii. p. 241.

[4] *Ibid.* vol. i., p. 232.

furniture of the dining-table in ordinary houses during that period.

Among the examples from the Public Record Office were three kinds of round boxes, differing from those lately under consideration. The first was a box turned out of the solid block of wood, and of a shape that would pack much closer in chests than the earlier form. It had also a small opening left for the seal to be pendent externally—a practice which ensured its rapid destruction unless specially protected. The second was a thin wooden frame covered with leather and lined with paper. It is probably of the time of James I., and is of a kind used for the storing of the title-deeds of estates sent into the Court of Wards and Liveries while proceedings were going on, and never taken away. They are very numerous, they differ much in size, and many of them are of a square or oblong shape, while some are round. A careful examination of the printed paper with which they are lined would probably bring to light fragments of very curious, if not valuable, literary matter which has been lost to us. In this respect, time may so have enhanced the value of the material used by the trunk-maker of the

Case of *cuir bouilli* from the Public Record Office. Height, 8¼ in.; diameter, 7¼ in.

seventeenth century, that he may be found to have preserved what has been sought for in vain elsewhere and become an object of great interest. The third specimen was a modern

copy of the early "skippet" or "pix," perhaps fifty years old. Its chief advantage is the exclusion of dust, but there is nothing else in its favour.

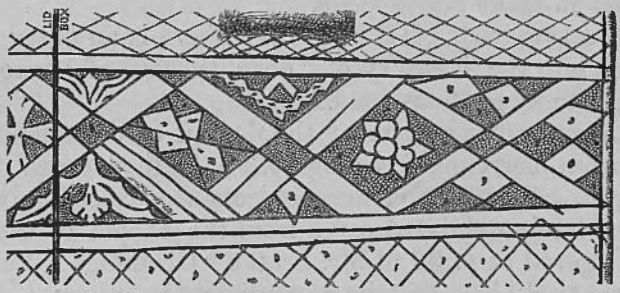
To about the reign of Henry VI. may be assigned the case represented on the previous page. It is round, and formed of a thin frame of wood covered with brown *cuir bouilli*, richly ornamented with patterns worked by a sharp-pointed tool, and lined with blue velvet. It was probably used for plate, or other object of value deposited in one of the Royal Treasuries. The large richly-bound and illuminated Books of Indentures for the foundation of the chapel of Henry VII. at Westminster Abbey, preserved in the Public Record Office, are in cases of a similar construction and decoration, fitted with pads of quilted silk, upon which the velvet bindings and silver seal-cases rested.

Case of *cuir bouilli*, for a piece of plate, or valuable records (?), found at Lanivet Rectory, Cornwall.
"Skippet," or turned wooden box, found in the church chest, Bodmin.
Scale, one-fourth.

The leather-covered case kindly brought by the Rev. Mr. Iago from Cornwall presents many points of resemblance to the cases in the Public Record Office. It is probably of the reign of Henry VII.

Sir John Maclean has kindly directed my attention to some entries of proceedings upon the Common Plea Rolls of

Edward IV. for the recovery of family title deeds relating to Cornwall, spoken of as being in similar boxes of deposit as used in the Royal Treasury. On the Roll of Michaelmas, 7 Edw. IV., Sir Walter Moyle sues John Moyle for the recovery of "quandam pixidem cum cartis scriptis et aliis munimentis in eadem pixide contentis quam ei injuste detinet," and on the roll for Easter, 8 Edw. IV., is an entry showing that John Jane was summoned "ad respondendum Ricardo Boturnell de placito quod reddat ei quendam calathum cum scriptis cartis et aliis munimentis in eodem calatho contentis." The word "calathus" does not occur in the ancient calendars of the Treasury; its meaning is doubtless the same as that of "hanaperium," or the "hanaper of twyggys."



Detail of ornament on the Lanivet case. Full size.

The most interesting examples of the early "skippets"—for I beg leave to continue to use the term assigned to them by the learned editor of the "Antient Kalendars," and the first Deputy Keeper of the Public Records—are unquestionably those found by Mr. Scott, who has, in graphic terms, described their discovery while he was very minutely examining the immediate vicinity of the Pyx chamber in the cloisters of Westminster. Being then in the adjoining Chapter House, I had the good fortune to be called in by that gentleman to assist in the examination and description of the contents of that "chamber of mystery," which I had reason to believe were a part of the contents of the ancient Royal Treasury.

I would now direct attention to another kind of depository for documents, the "hanaper." In Bishop Stapleton's calendar it is often noticed, and generally with a distinguishing mark or sign, as the "hanaperium de virgis," which

appears to have been sometimes put into a chest. In 36 Edw. III. mention is made of a "hanaperium ligneum." In the 42nd Edw. III. there was delivered into the Treasury "a hanaper covered with black leather, and bound with iron and sealed," containing muniments. This description much resembles that of the "forcer," to be afterwards noticed. In the 3rd year of Richard II., Thomas Orgrave, clerk, delivers into the Treasury muniments relating to lands in Berkhampstead purchased by the king, and placed in a certain hanaper in a chest. That hanaper was exhibited, and there is yet attached to it a label describing its contents exactly conforming to the entry in the memoranda, and the deeds now in it agree exactly with the entries. It is not in so perfect a condition as the larger example shown, but the two are identical in make and texture.

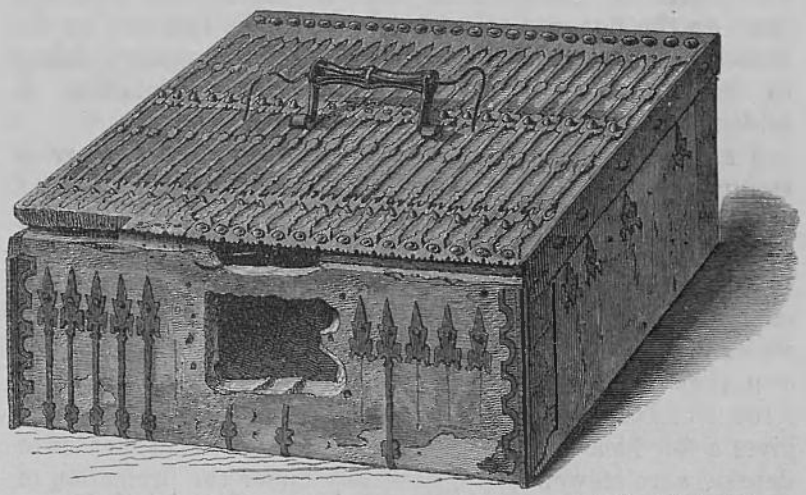
In the 19th year of Henry VIII. there is an entry of the delivery into the Treasury of "oone baskett of bookes concerning the king's household."

Numerous entries occur of the deposit of documents in a "forcerium correum ferro ligato," a leather forcer bound with iron. Examples of these objects are exceedingly rare. The one lately exhibited came from the chapel of the Pyx, and is figured at p. 96 of Mr. Scott's "Gleanings" (2nd ed.). The ironwork has sustained considerable injury. In the fourteenth century forcers do not seem to have been placed in chests. They only occur in the Calendar of Walter de Stapleton, in which it is stated that some documents of kings and queens of England were put in "a green forcer of copper gilt bound with escutcheons of the arms of England and Spain," and others in "a forcer painted plainly" with the chequer board, in "a green forcer," in "a wooden forcer partly bound with iron." The last entry in that calendar relates to letters of the King of England and some nobles of Burgundy being placed in a "black wooden forcer bound with iron." In an inventory dated 30 Edw. I. given by Mr. Riley in "Memorials of London and London Life," is an entry of "one painted forcer, value 8d.;" and in the same work is an "Ordinance of the Forcer-makers" in the 7th of Henry IV., showing that there then was a company of that trade in the City of London.[5]

[5] See Promptorium Parvulorum, p. 170, s. v. Foorcere.

A fine example of *cuir bouilli* work is preserved in the museum at York. It is a cylindrical or shallow drum-shaped box, measuring 21 in. in circumference, 3 in. only in depth, and is elaborately ornamented with representations of stags, animals of the chase, foliage, branches of the oak, and the like; the ground-wood dotted with little punctures that have been filled in with red colour. The late Sir Samuel R. Meyrick ascribed this beautiful box to the time of Edward II. It is figured in the Journal of the British Archæological Association, vol. iii., p. 123. There is a loop of leather affixed to the middle of the under side, and also two at each of the sides, one on the box, a second on the lid; through these a strap or cord was passed, by means of which the box might be effectually secured, and the lid might be opened without being detached from the box. This simple and effective mode of closing objects of this description was not unfrequently adopted.

Besides the depositories to which attention has been directed there are entries in the "Antient Kalendars" of modifications of the coffer or box, the difference between which must be subject of conjecture. A remarkable example of the "Coffer" is here figured. Substantially made



"Coffer" in the Public Record Office, formerly in the Treasury of the Exchequer. Size, externally, 16 in. by 13¾ in., and 7 in. deep.

of oak, bound with iron, and covered with light rods of that metal with heads of "fleur de lis" upon a thin *gesso* ground,

it must have presented an elegant appearance in its original condition. In the inside are remains of a cotton cloth lining on which a pattern in distemper appears to have been stencilled. This coffer was probably used for objects of value. These "coffers" were doubtless chiefly of wood. The chief variations are the following. In Bishop Stapleton's calendar there are entries of "a coffer of leather bound with iron," and marked with the letter V.; "a plain wooden coffin," "a coffer painted red, bound with iron," "coffer painted green, bound with iron," "a little white wooden coffin," "a green coffer bound with iron," "a wooden roll" (scrinium). Among the latter entries there appears, in 35 Edw. III., one relating to some charters of Aquitaine, being in "three white and new coffins," after this are entries of "a square coffin," "two coffins of leather," "a round coffin," and other similar descriptions, by which, perhaps, it might be inferred that the terms "coffer" and "coffin" were used interchangeably. A curious entry occurs under the date 13 Henry IV., showing the delivery to R. Courtney of muniments touching alliances with Scotland out of an oblong coffer, inscribed, "Hic continentur," &c., "being in the chest on *which they used to play chess* in the Royal Treasury." A very fine coffer of the year 1327, with an inscribed lid, and with emblazoned shields of arms on the side and top, was shown at the Institute on the occasion referred to. It contained the documents relating to the ransom of David Bruce. A bag, "mantica," is seldom mentioned.

I must leave others to determine to what class we are to assign "a black case made like a cup and bound with iron," containing charters by Prince Edward to his consort Eleanor of Castile, mentioned by Bishop Stapleton. The description of a great "hutch" ("huchea"), marked with the No. XVI. containing muniments of the kings of Scotland and others of that country, placed in "two forcers of leather bound with iron, four hanapers covered with black leather, nine wooden forcers, eighteen hanapers of twigs, and thirty-two pixes," gives a fair idea of the chests in which the smaller cases of deposit were stowed away, generally under the protection of three locks.

The general arrangement of the records of the Treasury, as shown by Arthur Agarde in his "Compendium," written 1610, seems to have undergone but few alterations to that

period. "A raacke of dubble presses" and great chests contained the "bagges" and "sondry boxes" in which the records were stowed away. Of these none now remain except that very massive one in which the Domesday Book is said to have been kept, and which has been engraved in the photo-zincograph copies of that work. But the early English chests preserved in the muniment room of the Abbey of Westminster are remarkable examples of the taste and skill with which the officers of the great monastic establishments succeeded in treating subjects requiring only simplicity and strength. The details of the ironwork of one of these chests formerly in the chapel of the Pyx, and now existing in the Public Record Office, are given in the "Gleanings," p. 94.