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### MORTARS.<sup>1</sup>

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These objects are among the earliest relics we have of the household life of the remote members of our race. Stone mortars of immemorial antiquity have been found in Assyria and Egypt. In England and on the Continent they have been discovered among the remains of the early inhabitants. The Rev. G. C. Atkinson describes one found in Cleveland<sup>2</sup> which is certainly of pre-Roman time. In many places where Roman habitations have been, stone mortars, or their fragments have been unearthed. I possess one which was found a few years ago during excavations at Lincoln. It was probably made on the spot, for the material of which it is composed is the oolite of the neighbourhood. It is eight inches wide and four and three-quarters high. There are two lips for pouring from and on the opposite sides two unperforated ears. It is probable that these early stone mortars were used not only for the purposes with which we are all familiar, but also, occasionally, for pounding grain when a quern was not at hand. Stone mortars continued to be employed during the middle ages, but few of them have been spared to our own time. One was found some years ago on the east side of Monmouth Castle. It is believed to be made of gritstone from the Forest of Dean. Its four sides are ornamented with shields charged respectively as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, June 4th, 1891. Several examples of Mortars were exhibited by

the author from his collection of these objects.

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. ccxv p. 80.

- I. A fess between six crosslets.
- II. A chevron between three roses.
- III. A chevron between six [or nine] crosslets
- IV. Apparently a saltire, but much defaced.<sup>1</sup>

The modern stone mortars are familiar to all of us from seeing them in chemists' shops. I think they are mostly of Italian manufacture,

"Of bright Carara pure, without a flaw,  
The mortar opes his ponderous marble jaw."<sup>2</sup>

sang an anonymous poet of seventy years ago.

As far as we may judge from the information furnished by inventories there was a mortar in almost every household, at least during the latter part of the Middle Ages. They were usually of bell-metal, then called brass. We not infrequently find them the subject of bequest in wills; for example, in the eighth year of Richard the second, Margery Legat of Wotton, widow, bequeathed to Lord Berkeley, "a brasse mortar and an iron pestle."<sup>3</sup>

What seems to be a very early example of the mediæval brass mortar is figured in the *Journal* of the Institute.<sup>4</sup> It was acquired by my friend Mr. Hartshorne, at Colchester. He was told that it had been found among Roman remains. I can give no very satisfactory reasons for believing it not to be Roman, but its character leads me to the conclusion that it is Early Mediæval. It is  $4\frac{3}{8}$  inches high by  $4\frac{7}{8}$  inches in diameter.

Perhaps the finest mediæval mortar in existence in this country is now preserved in the York museum. In 1813 it belonged to a Mr. Blount, a surgeon in that city, in which year it was rather rudely engraved in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> There is an upper and a lower inscription and between them two sets of quatrefoils containing within them lions, griffins and birds. The upper inscription is—

✠ Mortariu' sci' Joh'is evangel' de i'firmaria b'e Marie Ebo'

That near the base runs—

Fr' Will's de Tovthorp me fecit A.D. M.CCC.VIII.

The Apothecaries company of London sold, to be melted down, because it was cracked, little more than a century ago, a mortar which though not quite so old must have

<sup>1</sup> Waugh, *Guide to Monmouth*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *The Banquet*, 1819. Canto ii, line 337.

<sup>3</sup> Smyth's *lives of the Berkeleys*, vol. ii, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. xl, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. lxxxiii, p. 17.

been in some respects even more interesting than the York example. It is figured and described in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. I give the inscription as there recorded, though there may be some doubt as to its correctness :—

Veni Creator Spiritus, mentes tuorum visita imple superna gracia  
que tu creasti pect[or]a.  
Salve me cristur St. Wenni.

J. N., the writer who communicated the drawing to the magazine, thus describes the ornamentation :—

“On one side were raised two lions rampant, supporting a castle triple-towered, and surmounted by a chevron between two birds in chief: or perhaps the chevron may be a merchant's mark, with a flag, at the head of the inscription, and a roundel for difference. Also two lions rampant supporting a tree. On the other side two griffins rampant, and two antelopes or stags supporting trees.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Henry T. Wake in one of his catalogues of antiquities describes the abbey mortar of Holme Cultram then in his possession. It is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches high and  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches in diameter. It is inscribed “Robart Chambr.” Between the christian and surnames is a chained bear. On the side opposite the name are the initials R. C. Robert Chamber was abbot of Holme Cultram in the beginning of the sixteenth century. His name occurs in 1507 and 1518.<sup>2</sup> The same gentleman in other catalogues mentions a mortar  $10\frac{3}{4}$  inches high by 14 inches in diameter inscribed “John Knowles of Pontefract 1675.” It also bears on a shield the mark of the maker,—

S. S.  
Ebor.

The Sellers or Sellors were well-known bell-founders at York in the latter years of the seventeenth and the earlier years of the eighteenth centuries. S. Sellar appears in the Rev. W. C. Lukis's list as in business at York in 1713.<sup>3</sup> A John Knowles, probably the owner of this mortar, was Mayor of Pontefract in 1684.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Wake also describes a mortar  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches high and  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide with letters thus :—

E.  
S. E.

and the date 1715.

<sup>1</sup> Vol lix. p. 877.

<sup>2</sup> *Monasticon*, vol. v, p. 593.

<sup>3</sup> *An Account of Church Bells*, 1857, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> B. Boothroyd, *Hist. of Pontefract*, p. 455.

Mr. Hartshorne has kindly furnished me with a drawing of a very beautiful mortar in his possession  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches high which was obtained by him at Chester in 1885; it is inscribed:—

MARC LE SER ME FECIT. 1565.

Another correspondent has sent me a sketch of a mortar which I also regard as foreign, with the legend:—

SOLI DEO GLORIA. 1655.

I have seen a sketch of another, probably English, with the same motto but dated 1654.

Mr. H. G. Griffinhoofe has sent me rubbings of the ornaments on two mortars. The one bearing lions rampant (5) and the other fleurs de lys. The character of the lions leads me to attribute the mortar that bears them to the fourteenth or the earlier part of the fifteenth century.

What seems to be the oldest brass mortar in my own possession is one which was purchased some twenty years ago at a village near Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire. It is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in diameter, and has four handles, two [c r] half circles and two squares. On one side are the letters:—

T. R. M.

And on the other what I consider as a merchant's mark,



The next is a fine example, which I regard as German, though some have conjectured that it is of Italian manufacture. It is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by 10 inches in diameter. The two handles are finely wrought grotesque male heads. On the body are four masks with long beards and two representations of what I suppose is a coat of arms in an oval. It is not easy to describe it in heraldic language. It consists of a bridge of three arches, the entry and exit protected by a tall embattled tower. In chief a star. Round the base is a narrow moulding containing little animals. Around the upper part is the legend:—

ANNO DOMINI M. CCCCC. LXVIII.

I purchased this interesting object about twenty years ago at the sale of the effects at Walton Hall, an old mansion near Wakefield.

A mortar  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $8\frac{3}{4}$  in diameter. It is singular from having a band of 3 inches deep, quite plain,

without any ornament or moulding whatever. It bears a coat of arms; party per pale, a key in pale between two stars of six points. A bird of nondescript character. In a rim around the base is the legend:—

SCHLITZWEGH DROSTE . 1666.

A mortar purchased by me at Rotterdam  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $7\frac{3}{4}$  in diameter, inscribed:—

PETRVS VANDEN GHIEN ME FECIT MCCCCXLV.

A mortar also purchased at Rotterdam 5 inches high by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  in diameter with the legend:—

LOFT . GODT . VAN . AL . AO . 1612.<sup>1</sup>

A mortar  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches high by  $4\frac{3}{4}$  in diameter, inscribed:—

LOF. GODT. VAN. AL. Ao. 1642.

Though of different sizes this mortar and the last are almost identical in their ornamentation. The latter one was acquired by my father in the year 1855 from an old cottage in the Isle of Axholme. The Isle of Axholme was settled for drainage purposes in the seventeenth century by Dutchmen and Flemings. It is probable that this mortar was imported from the Netherlands in the baggage of one of these foreign settlers.

Mortar  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  in diameter. Legend:—

EVERT BVRRGERHVYS ME FFECIT 1617.

Bought at Rotterdam.

Mortar  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in diameter of Renaissance character; around the body Romans in combat. Around the base nondescript animals. Bought in London.

Mortar  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by 5 inches in diameter, inscribed:—

AMOR VINCIT OMNIA 1679.

My friend the Rev. J. T. Fowler, F.S.A., has seen a mortar in the north of England bearing this pretty motto. Probably this and other similar legends were not mere tasteful fancies but used for a serious purpose—intended to add to the efficacy of the drugs prepared therein. My readers will call to mind that

“Amor vincit omnia”

was the motto of Chaucer's prioress. The lady and the mortar-maker alike had taken the idea from Virgil's

“Omnia vincit amor; et nos cedamus amori.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Praise [the] God of all.

<sup>2</sup> Ecl. x, l, 69.

Mortar found by Mr. Hartshorne at Colchester, in 1881, probably of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, with an inscription which has not hitherto been interpreted.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches high,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter.<sup>1</sup>

Mortar 5 inches high,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, charged with six fleurs de lys. Probably of the sixteenth century. The Rev. J. T. Fowler possesses a mortar in the casting of which the same fleur de lys stamps have been used.

Mortar  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches high by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, charged with three crowned fleur de lys. Probably of the time of Charles the First.

Mortar 5 inches high by 6 inches in diameter, charged with four crowned roses. Probably of the early sixteenth century. This has been in my family for many generations.

Mortar 4 inches high by 5 inches in diameter, charged with three crowned roses. Much more modern than the foregoing. Probably of the time of Charles the Second.

Mortar 3 inches high by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. A crowned bust with long hair, probably meant for Charles the Second.

Mortar 2 inches high by 2 inches in diameter, inscribed:—

ANNA MVLLER.

Purchased at Rotterdam. Probably seventeenth century.

In the inventory of the plate and household stuff at Gilling, the property of Sir William Fairfax, taken in 1594, there occurs "a silver mortar and pestell," valued at 43s. 2d.<sup>2</sup> In 1629 Lord William Howard gave xxs. for "one little silver mortar."<sup>3</sup> A lady tells me that she has seen a little silver mortar about two and a half inches high, which she thinks was intended to be used for pounding scents. In the Inventories of Church Goods destroyed or put to profane use in Lincolnshire in 1566, which were published by me in 1866, there are several instances of sanctus bells being turned into mortars.<sup>4</sup>

Mortars formed the arms or badges of several of the trade guilds of Flanders<sup>5</sup>; they were occasionally used as vessels in which lights were burnt. An instance occurs

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Jour.*, vol xxxviii, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, vol. xlviii, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> *Household Books* (Surtees Soc.), p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> pp. 30, 33, 59, 114.

<sup>5</sup> Felix de Vigne, *Recherches Hist. des Guildes et Corporations*, pl. 10, 34. *Ibid.*

*Mœurs et Usages des Corporations des Métiers*, pl. 26, 30.



in the account of the baggage provided in 1513 for Henry Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland, preparatory to his joining the English army in France.<sup>1</sup>

Mortar was also a term used to indicate the wide-mouthed vessels in which lights were burnt in churches. Dr. F. G. Lee has published, an engraving of one of these mortars, formerly in St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rock quotes from the *Testamenta Vetusta* a passage from the will of Richard Earl of Arundel A.D. 1375, in which he desires "that no men at arms, horses, hearse, or other pomp be used at my funeral but only five torches with their mortars," (i. 94.) and explains that a mortar was a "wide bowl of iron or metal; it rested upon a stand or branch, and was filled either with fine oil or wax which was kept burning by means of a broad wick,"<sup>3</sup> and adds that small mortars of this kind holding perfumed wax are placed around the confessional of Saint Peter and Saint Paul on their feast-day.

<sup>1</sup> *Archæologia*, xxvi, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloss. of Liturgical Terms*, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> *Church of Our Fathers*, vol. iii. pt. 1. p. 89