

NOTES ON SOME ENGLISH PAXES, INCLUDING AN  
EXAMPLE RECENTLY FOUND IN IPSWICH.<sup>1</sup>

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The custom of giving the kiss of peace before the reception of the Communion seems to have been in general practice in the primitive church, and we find mention of it in the early part of the second century. From Justin Martyr to St. Cyril of Jerusalem frequent reference is made to the ceremony by the early Fathers, as well as in the nineteenth canon of the Council of Laodicea, and in the Mozarabic Liturgy.<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian was perhaps one of the first to point out the difficulties that were likely to arise from the custom, and this was specially forced upon him by the exigencies of the newly formed Christian community. As early as the latter part of the second century he had introduced the kissing of the paten,<sup>3</sup> which later resulted in the manufacture of special instruments which were handed round to be kissed first by the clergy and then by the congregation. These instruments somewhat resembled a devotional tablet with a handle at the back. Among a variety of other names they were most generally known as paxes.

Although the adoption of this substitute for the actual fraternal embrace is generally assigned to the twelfth century, at any rate as far as England is concerned, there is evidence to show that long before this time it had been in use on the Continent, and paxes belonging to the eighth century are not unknown.<sup>4</sup>

Occasionally the cover of the Textus or Gospel Book did duty as an Osculatorium,<sup>5</sup> but more often a specially

<sup>1</sup> Part of a paper read Nov. 2, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Blunt's *Theological Dictionary*, p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> *ad Uxor*, lib. iii. c. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Fictile ivories in South Kensington Museum*, J. O. Westwood, 1876, p. 380.

<sup>5</sup> A "Carlovingian plaque, ninth century, is fixed on the cover of the gospels in the cathedral of Tongres (Belgium) and used as the pax." Westwood's *Fictile ivories*, 1876.



FIG. 1.—ENGLISH PAX.

Found in 1846 close to the destroyed Chapel of St. Nicholas, near East Grafton, Wiltshire. Now in Devizes Museum.

*(By permission of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society.)*

designed instrument was employed for the purpose. On it a sacred subject was depicted, usually in raised figures of metal or ivory, some of which may be seen to be actually worn down by the kisses of generations of worshippers.

In England the Crucifixion seems to have been most often represented, but among other devices of continental origin I find the Vernicle, also known as the Veronica or Face of our Lord,<sup>1</sup> the Lamb, the Trinity, the Annunciation, the birth of our Lord, the adoration of the three Kings, the adoration of the Shepherds, the Virgin and Child, the Holy Family, the Baptism of the Saviour, the beheading and burial of John the Baptist, our Lord turning water into wine, Christ before Caiaphas, the Descent from the Cross, the dead Christ, our Lady of Pity, our Lord's Pity, Christ revealing himself to St. Thomas, the Coronation of the Virgin, our Lady Star of the Sea, St. Michael overcoming Satan, the Mass of St. Gregory,<sup>2</sup> St. Roch and St. Sebastian, St. Hubert and the miraculous stag, the Virgin giving the chasuble to St. Ildefonso.

In some the design appears to be appropriate, as when the use of the image of the Lamb harmonised with the triple repetition of the *Agnus Dei*, after which the pax was given, according to the rites of Sarum, and according to the present Roman use. These would occasionally bear inscriptions, such as "*Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis.*"<sup>3</sup> Words of peace were sometimes introduced, as the Song of the Angels, and "*Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris,*"<sup>4</sup> but a glance at the subjects chosen suggests on the whole that there was no attempt made to recall the primary object of the kiss by means of the design.

The kissing of relics, which were also at times sunk into the instruments,<sup>5</sup> can hardly be considered as

<sup>1</sup> "a vernicle hadde he sewn upon his cappe." *Chaucer* (c.t. 688).

<sup>2</sup> Silver pax from Lima in the possession of Miss Busk.

<sup>3</sup> Collier's *Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. II, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> Maskell's *Ancient Liturgy of the*

*Church of England*, 3rd edition, p. 172.

<sup>5</sup> I have found two Reliquary paxes in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington. One is Flemish or French early eighteenth century, and represents St. Hubert and the miraculous stag, the other French, about 1500.

suggestive of the salute which in the Apostles' time was a pledge of the unity of the brethren.

Although the number of foreign paxes both in English and continental museums is considerable, the instruments which were at one time in general use in the British Islands are now rarely to be met with, and even our largest museums can show but one or two examples.

There is one small English pax of latten in the British Museum, and a single fine example of an English ivory pax in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Devizes possesses two small instruments found in Wiltshire, and there is one at Moyse's Hall, Bury St. Edmund's; but besides these I have not at present been able to discover any others, though I have enquired at over twenty museums.

A few specimens are however to be found in private collections, and these, with the above, may for convenience be classed under the following types.

First, a square frame, ornamented at the top, with a plate in the centre, sunk or otherwise, on which the subject is depicted and a handle curved to admit a finger, and sometimes recurved at the base to form a stand.

Of these an interesting example was found in 1846 close to the destroyed chapel of St. Nicholas, near East Grafton, Wiltshire. It is of gilt latten, the gilding still remaining. The subject rudely engraved in the central panel is the Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John, surrounded by a cable moulding. The top of the frame is ornamented with flowers de luce. (Fig. 1.) The photograph here reproduced was sent to me by the Rev. E. H. Goddard, Vicar of Wootton Bassett, and is published by the consent of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society. A pax presented to the Bury Museum by the Rev. E. Bennett is very similar except that the engraved plate is not sunk. (Fig. 2.) Both of these instruments have the curved and recurved handle. At New College, Oxford, is yet another example, already illustrated in a paper by Mr. Albert Way in the *Archaeological Journal* for 1845. It is much more elaborate than either of the two described, being in silver parcel gilt with the figures in relief.

The second type is represented by a pax in my possession which was found in Ipswich in October, 1903, during excavations for building purposes. (Fig. 3.)



FIG. 2.—ENGLISH PAX.

Presented to Bury Museum by the Rev. E. Bennett.



FIG. 3.—ENGLISH PAX.

Found in Ipswich at a depth of 8 feet, October, 1902.

*(In possession of Miss Nina Frances Layard.)*



FIG. 4.—ENGLISH PAX.

Found by the Rev. J. F. Edwards, embedded in a wall at Runcton Holme near Downham, Norfolk, in 1836.

*(In the possession of the Rev. E. E. Montford.)*

Enclosed in a Tudor frame, ornamented with cable pattern, is a crucifix, on either side of which are figures of the Virgin and St. John. At the foot of the cross is seen the skull, cross-bones and ribs, a survival of the earlier custom of representing Adam as rising out of his tomb. Like the East Grafton pax the material is latten, on which some of the original gilding remains. The engraved plate which should have formed the background is unfortunately missing, but on the back of the crucifix may still be seen the nails which attached it. The pax when found was buried to a depth of 8 feet, lying beside a wall into which were built stones showing Perpendicular moulding, evidently the debris of some ecclesiastical building. The nearest religious edifice known to have existed was the celebrated chapel of "Our Lady of Ipswich," so that it is possible the pax originally belonged to this famous shrine. The design and character of the pax would suggest its date as late fifteenth century.

This is the sixth example of the kind known to me, the first having been figured in Dr. Milner's paper in Vol. XX. of *Archæologia*. There are several varieties of this type, the most perfect of which is in the possession of Canon Fuller of Durham, while another belongs to the Rev. E. E. Montford of Swanton Abbot, Norwich. The latter, of which we give an illustration, was found near Runtton Holne Church by Downham, Norfolk, in 1836. (Fig. 4.) Both of these differ from the Ipswich pax in the addition of Sol and Luna in metal on the arms of the cross, and this variation is also found on a pax of the same kind in the British Museum.

The backgrounds are variously engraved, sometimes with plain diagonal pattern, sometimes more elaborately with the emblems of the Passion or other devices, but all of the above are identical in size, and the crucifix in the centre might have been produced from the same mould, except that the representations of the sun and moon are wanting in some instances.

A larger pax of the same type from Ireland, also in the British Museum, resembles the Ipswich pax in the absence of these additions, which were probably engraved on the missing backgrounds.



Attached to the backs of these instruments were wooden or metal slabs placed at right angles, forming both handle and stand.

A quaint little pax found in the vicarage garden at Avebury, Wiltshire, shows a third type of English pax, though, so far as I know, it is of unique design. (Fig. 5.) On a metal plate is a raised representation of the Virgin and Child surrounded by rays of glory, the whole enclosed in a frame consisting of an ogee arch supported by twisted pillars. The combined handle and stand resembles those of the last type.

Although at first sight this design would appear to have nothing in common with the preceding ones, except the handle, an interesting link between them is furnished by another pax from East Grafton. (Fig. 6.) Here we find the centre of the one surrounded by the frame of the other, that is to say, the Crucifixion, which is the central design, is a facsimile of that in the Ipswich pax, while the frame has the ogee arch and the twisted pillars of the example from Avebury. A comparison of Figs. 3, 5, and 6 will make this clear. The photograph, which was sent to me by the Rev. E. E. Montford, is taken from a gutta-percha mould in his possession and the figures are therefore reversed.

This combination of the designs seems to point to some common centre from which the three last-mentioned varieties originated. It is to be hoped that further discoveries will throw more light on this subject.

As these paxes are in nearly every case of inferior metal, for which the smelting pot could have no terrors, we may conjecture that it is to this fact that they owe their preservation, at a time when those of more precious metal were sold to be melted down. These small instruments would appear to be the ferial paxes used on common occasions as distinct from those of greater value for use at festivals.

It is not easy at first to account for the early disappearance of English paxes in view of the fact that they were not suppressed by Edward VI., but that their use was specially ordered to be continued. It was even enjoined that the clerk was to stand without the door of the rood



FIG. 5.—ENGLISH PAX.

Found in the Vicarage garden, Avebury, Wilts, in 1872.  
Now in Devizes Museum.

*(By permission of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society.)*



FIG. 6.—GUTTA-PERCHA IMPRESSION OF AN ENGLISH PAX.

The original was found by a labourer when paring a hedge close to the residence of the Rev. W. L. Lukis, of East Grafton, near Burbage, Wilts, in 1848. This pax shows the link between the Ipswich and Wiltshire types.

screen ("the church door," as it is called)<sup>1</sup> with the instrument in his hand, to proclaim aloud that it was a "token of joyful peace," etc.

Notwithstanding this injunction an examination of the certificates of Suffolk church goods shows that in this country at least, in the first six years of Edward's reign, the greater number of churches disposed of their paxes with other ornaments, for various purposes.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it was for repairing the church, sometimes for "furnyshyng of serten sodgers" for the King, often, as at Kessingland Church and others, "for settinge furthe the screpture on the wales."

As the English pax was usually in the form of a crucifix or some such device, it is easy to understand that, when the use of images was discouraged, the kissing of this instrument would naturally become repugnant to the people.

Stringent as had been the regulations during the first year of Edward's reign to ensure the safe keeping of church ornaments, they still continued to disappear, so that fresh inventories were taken in the sixth year, with the result that a full account of all missing articles was rendered. From these we learn the fate of at least forty of the Suffolk paxes, and it is probable that the inventories of churches belonging to other counties would be found to correspond in this particular. In some instances two or more paxes were mentioned, either as belonging to the church or as being sold, as at Barkinge, Dunwich, Kessingland, Laxfield, Mddylton cum Fordeley, Saxmundham, Southwold, and Westylton, from which we may infer that in most churches there was a ferial pax as well as one of greater value.<sup>3</sup> Naturally the instruments of silver would be disposed of with ease, while those of less valuable metal were left on the hands of the churchwardens. At any rate, the following entry at Wangford Church suggests that this was the case. "Sold a pax" (probably silver and gilt), not sold "a pax of brase," and at Easthorpe in

<sup>1</sup> Maskell's *Liturgy of the Church*, 3rd Edward, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Suffolk Notes and Queries*. New Series, commencing Vol. I., 1885, paper by J. J. Muskett.

<sup>3</sup> In the inventory of Hadleigh Church, Suffolk, two paxes of silver gilt are mentioned and one of "coper overgilt," paper by Mrs. Hugh Pigot, *Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 1863, Vol. III., p. 254.

Essex, "1 paske of latton" is still left in the inventory of church goods.

In the town of Ipswich mention is made of paxes belonging to "Seynt Margaretts," "Seynt Mary Keye," and "Seynt Clements," all of "syluer and gylte," but it is not said that they were disposed of. "See Mathai Gippch," however, sold "a pax wt other small thynggs wiche drawyth to the sm LVli." (?)

In every case where the pax is described in these Suffolk churches it is either silver or silver and gilt, with the exception of the two already mentioned of brass and latten.

The following is a list of other churches in this county in the records of which mention is made of the paxes, most of which were sold:—Aldeburgh, Badyngham, Berhold, Blaxhall, Brusyerde, Carlton-Colvyile, Cokeclay, Dunwich St. Peter, Fframysdon, Hacheston, Huntyngeffylde, Leiston, Melton, Monedon, Pytestre, Southcove, Sprowton, Sternefield, Stradebroke, Sudbourne. and Walberyswyk. Belings Parva sold "a pax of syluer to Mr. Sakforde lorde and patron of the Towne etc." Boxstede sold "the pax waynge iij owsys and have vs viijd." Brampffylde "have sold a pax a yeare agone." Cheston "a pax containing xix ownses." Dunwich St. John "there ys a sylur paxe alinated beinge in thands of Wyllam Glampe of the same towne." Fresingeffylde, 1547, "We present that the Towne layed to pledge to Mr. Toppysfylde of the same towne one paxe of syluer for ffoure pounds to sette vp a newe ele (aisle) and is sett up at this day." Marks Teye sold "in xxxvijth yere off Kynge hery a pax of sylv." (for repair of church) Snape "layede to mortgage a sylur paxe." Also at Feering in Essex a paxe was sold.<sup>1</sup>

Wooden paxes are said at one time to have been in common use in the poorer parishes, but from their perishable nature are now extremely rare. At "St. Mary's Chepe" in 1431 there were "iij lyttel paxbredes of tre." St. Stephen's, Colman St., London, in 1466 had two "paxbredis of tre glasyd," described as "j paxbord of tre glasyd for the hygh auter wh. y crucifix Mary and John," and "j paxborde of tre glasyd for our lady auter in the

<sup>1</sup> *Suffolk Notes and Queries*, Vol. I., 1885, paper by J. J. Musckett.

chapell wh the fyger of our Lord.”<sup>1</sup> We read of the commissioners in Elizabeth’s reign seizing and burning wooden paxes from Dunsbie, Baston and Haconbie.<sup>2</sup> There is an example of a Spanish pax in wood at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It dates from the first half of the fifteenth century.

Stealing paxes seems at one time to have been of such common occurrence as to have become almost proverbial, and there is a suggestion in Shakespeare’s *Henry V.* that heavy penalties were meted out for this particular offence, for Pistol is represented as saying

“Fortune is Bardolph’s foe, and frowns on him,  
For he hath stol’n a pax, and hanged must a be

\* \* \* \* \*

But Exeter has given the doom of death  
For pax of little price.”<sup>3</sup>

The disuse of these instruments in the English Church, and their almost entire disappearance except where they are to be found in a few museums, has led to the very meaning of the term having become the monopoly of the antiquary.

Until lately the editors of Shakespeare, supposing that a “pyx” was intended, substituted this word in the play, and only in comparatively modern editions will the word “pax” be found. Even Dr. Johnson explained that the two words “signified the same thing.”

Among the clergy of the Church of Rome the use of the pax instrument at Mass now appears to be confined to special occasions, such as the presence of a cardinal or bishop or possibly a king. In confraternities, however, it is still in use at times of ordinary prayer. The pax as an embrace without the instrument continues to be given in any High Mass, but only to the clergy and occasionally the choir, the laity never now take part in this ceremony. The act is entirely formal and can only be regarded as an embrace in a stage sense. The method of giving it is as follows. The senior places his hands upon the shoulders of the one who is to receive it, and he in his turn places his hands under the elbows of the senior.

*Archaeologia*, 1, 42.  
Maskell’s *Ancient Liturgy of the Church*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> *Henry V.*, Act iii., Scene 6.

The gradual disuse of the instrument at Mass has been attributed to various causes. In England the Reformation must have had much to do with the removal of paxes, but this would not account for their decline on the Continent. Quarrels about precedence, and even irreverent conduct, are given by Le Brun as reasons for the pax being discarded.

As an example he quotes the behaviour of one Joan Dyaca, who was "presented before the Archdeacon of Middlesex for throwing the pax brede on the ground." But it seems doubtful whether isolated instances of the kind could be responsible for so universal a change.

Possibly it was recognised that in the elaboration of this instrument the primal object of the salute had been forgotten, and a return to a more primitive method was deemed expedient.

From whatever cause, it is certain, that except in the cases already mentioned, the pax instrument in this country is now relegated to the museum, and the possessors of the English examples of these ancient church ornaments are few and far between.

#### LIST OF SOME OF THE PAXES IN ENGLISH AND IRISH MUSEUMS, ETC.

##### *British Museum.*

##### Ivory—

"The Crucifixion with six figures besides the Saviour." French fifteenth century.

"Baptism of Our Lord, in the centre a shield." French fifteenth century.

"Virgin and St. John." French fifteenth century.

"St. Roch and St. Sebastian." French fifteenth century.

"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." French fifteenth century."

(coloured under crystal.) "The Coronation of the Virgin." French fifteenth century.

##### Painted enamel on copper—

"The Virgin and Child with Worshippers." Italian fifteenth century.

"Our Lord rising from the tomb." Venetian early sixteenth century.

Enamelled copper (Champleve) with "figures of SS. James and Jude." Twelfth century.

Enamelled and gilt copper—"Virgin and Child." Italian early sixteenth century.

## Bronze or Latten—

"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John," above arms of Cross, Sol and Luna. English late fifteenth century.

"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." Irish late fifteenth century.

*Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.*

## Ivory—

"St. Michael overcoming Satan." Italian fourteenth century. 246—1867.

"The Saviour in the Sepulchre." North Italian fifteenth century. 247—1867.

"Our Lady of the Sea." Flemish first half fifteenth century. G. Salting Coll.

"Crucifixion." Spanish fifteenth century. 150—1879.

(with painted enamel plaque). "Virgin and Child." French sixteenth century. F. H. FitzHenry Coll.

"The Trinity." English fourteenth century. 34—1867.

## Silver gilt—

"The Virgin giving the chasuble to St. Ildefonso." Spanish 1540—50. 314—1864.

"The body of the dead Christ mourned over by the Virgin and the Holy Women." Italian sixteenth century. 130—1864.

"Adoration of Shepherds." (In gold leaf etching and varnish painting on glass.) Italian early sixteenth century. 401—1872.

Silver and gilt metal, repousse, with lapis lazuli—"The Crucifixion." Flemish sixteenth century. 742—1891.

Silver parcel gilt and gilt bronze—"Resurrection." Italian. 92—1865.

Silver gilt frame, beaten work (containing enamel plaque of Jean Limousin)—"Virgin and Child." French early seventeenth century. 179—1866.

Silver gilt—Architectural façade in renaissance style, richly decorated with paintings under rock crystal and with garnets and enamels—"Adoration of the Magi." Italian late fifteenth century. J. Pierpont Morgan Coll.

Silver. Centre repousse with "Miraculous stag appearing to St. Hubert." Between the dogs is an oval reliquary. Flemish or French early eighteenth century.

## Gilt metal—

"Figure of Virgin and Child, angels and groups of amorini." Mounting in chiselled bronze with silver filigree work. Italian 1490—1500. 4408—1857.

Gothic arch. "St. Jerome" in circular medallion of Limoges enamel. (Appears to contain reliquary.) French about 1500. 811—1891.

Gilt bronze and enamel on copper and silver, silver filigree—"Pieta." Italian about 1500. J. Pierpont Morgan Coll.

Gilt metal frame with enamel, painted—"Annunciation." French (Limoges) sixteenth century. 807—1891.

Bronze—"Virgin and Child under canopy." Italian 1490—1500. 4441—1857.

"Holy Family." Italian late fifteenth century. 6977—1860.



Bronze gilt—"Nativity." (In relief inlaid with lapis lazuli.) Italian sixteenth century. 1205—1854.

Electrotype reproduction of silver pax—"Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception." Portuguese end of fifteenth century. 1882—1853.

Electrotype reproduction of silver gilt—"Pieta." Portuguese 1534. 1882—1854.

Wood, carved and gilt, painted subject—"Resurrection of Our Lord." Spanish first half fifteenth century. 270—1879.

*Free Public Museum, Liverpool.*

Ivory—

"The Crucifixion." German sixteenth—seventeenth century.

"The Crucifixion with the Blessed Virgin and St. John."

"A Pieta, or figure of the dead Saviour, supported by His Mother." German sixteenth—seventeenth century.

Silver, brass and copper gilt—"The Nativity and Angelic Message." in niello work on a silver plaque, surrounded by good cinquecento metal work. Above bust of Our Lord, in lapis-lazuli, upon a blood-stone ground. Italian fifteenth century.

Silver and gilt—"Our Lord turning water into wine." On plaque of copper, painted with black and white enamel, and mounted on open work screen of Gothic architecture. Sixteenth—seventeenth century.

*Castle Museum, Norwich.*

Two ivory paxes.

*Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds.*

Engraved copper—"Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." English fifteenth century.

*Devizes Museum.*

Gilt latten—

"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." English late fifteenth century.

"Virgin and Child." English late fifteenth century.

*Ipswich. (In possession of Nina Frances Layard.)*

Gilt latten—"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." English late fifteenth century.

*In possession of Canon Fuller of Durham.*

Gilt latten—"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." English late fifteenth century.

*Downham, Norfolk. (In possession of Rev. E. E. Montford.)*

Gilt latten—"The Crucifixion, Virgin and St. John." English late fifteenth century.

*Science and Art Museum, Dublin.*

Enamel (Limoges)—"A Pieta." In metal frame; also two reproductions. Sixteenth century.

Plaster cast (ivory). German tenth century.

Electrotype, silver gilt. Spanish sixteenth century.