ENGLISH MEDIEVAL BASE METAL CHURCH PLATE

By CHARLES OMAN

All was not gold that glittered on and around the altars of medieval churches. In this paper I shall deal principally with those base metal articles which may be regarded as cheaper versions of the silver ones used in the wealthier churches. I shall restrict myself to those made in brass, latten, gilt copper and gilt bronze since my aim is to explore an uncharted borderland of goldsmith's work. I shall avoid articles made in pewter, lead and tin. In describing the metals it is as well not to be too nice about their nomenclature.[1] There were the yellow metals and the white metals and it is possible to give scientific definitions of their several varieties. All the yellow metals were imported which meant that they were difficult to come by, so that disused articles found a ready market as scrap. Pieces of identical design will be found to be made of metal of very different colour, so that one may be fairly described as being of brass whilst its fellow is obviously either of copper or bronze. Though some articles were fairly consistently made of a recognisable alloy, others tended to be made of whatever scrap was in the pot; since most of the wares with which we are dealing were gilt, this was not apparent originally.

Throughout the period there was a healthy rivalry between the craftsmen who worked in the yellow metals and those who worked in the white. Tin and lead were, of course, indigenous but this failed to give them a decisive advantage. A sort of balance grew up. If crosses were of brass or copper-gilt, cruets were of pewter or lead. Most of the wares with which we shall be concerned were made both in the white and the yellow metals.

It is similarly impossible to draw a rigid line between the work actually done by goldsmiths and that done by the other types of craftsmen. In some cases it is evident that a piece is entirely the work of a goldsmith, in others it may seem safer to assume that there had been a goldsmith behind the original design. Whilst it is clear that English goldsmiths continued to make base metal goods for church use throughout the Middle Ages, it seems that it formed a less important part of their work than in many continental countries. The official attitude towards this class of work is defined in a statute of 1403 (5 Henry IV, c.13) which deals with the goldsmiths and may be translated as follows:

> 'But that chalices always excepted, the said craftsmen may make and work ornaments for Holy Church of copper and latten and gild and silver them: always provided that on the foot or on another part of the said ornament it is arranged that the copper or latten be left plain, so that one can see whereof it is made.'[2]

[1] There is an excellent article on the metal of monumental brasses in the *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, VIII (1946), 110–30. In it Dr. H. K. Cameron discusses the names given to the alloys with which we shall be concerned. He does not, however, deal with 'maslen' about which the Oxford Dictionary is very uncertain. It was clearly distinguishable from brass since in the Edwardian inventory for Stone church (S. W. Hutchinson, *The Archdeaconry of Stoke-on-Trent* (1893), 187) there is mention of 'Itm ij crosses of maslen, a brazen sensor'. It was probably an alloy so mixed as to defy definition.

[2] I have found no instance of this last stipulation having been observed. This is not surprising in view of the laxity with which the goldsmiths' regulations were observed down to the end of the 15th century.

Major pieces of base metal church plate appear to have been rare. Thus the only base metal altar frontal which I have found mentioned is one made for the abbey of St. Albans in the days of Abbot John de Cella (1195–1214) to replace one of silver-gilt which had been destroyed in the reign of Stephen.[1] There appears to be no unambiguous record of any large saint's shrine of copper-gilt similar to those which were so popular in the Low Countries and Germany.[2] On the other hand large bronze paschal candlesticks appear to have been made in this country, but, as I published all the available information about them a few years ago, I shall not repeat it here.[3]

Chalices and Patens

From the practical point of view pewter chalices were superior to those made of copper-gilt since the latter were only safe as long as their gilding remained intact. As the wine only remains in the chalice for a short time the risk of its becoming poisoned by direct contact with the copper was only serious if a lot of the gilding had been worn away. The reason why copper-gilt chalices never entirely disappeared from use before the Reformation was that when clean and new they looked like gold or silver-gilt, whereas pewter ones could never be mistaken for silver.

Though I have found no record of an English copper-gilt chalice of artistic importance comparable to the one at Kremsmunster, in Austria, presented by Duke Tassilo (749–88) and his wife,[4] the little chalice (Pl. XIA), found *c.* 1861 beneath the floor of the North transept of Hexham Abbey, will bear comparison with the general run of early continental base metal chalices.[5] It is made in three pieces, bowl, knop and foot, riveted together. It would be unwise to attempt to date closely an object of such simplicity but an origin in the 10th or 11th centuries would seem probable.[6]

We have no means of judging how widespread was the use of copper-gilt chalices in Anglo-Saxon times. Since the canons issued by Edgar in 960[7] expressly forbade the use of wooden chalices, it would seem likely that the choice of materials was not closely restricted. On the other hand when the English bishops in the 12th and 13th centuries campaigned to secure that every church should have at least one silver chalice, it is pretty clear that they were trying to displace those of pewter rather than of copper-gilt. Though there are no references to the latter in their injunctions, there is sufficient evidence to prove that they never fell entirely into disuse. The surviving examples range in date

[1] T. Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum S. Albani*, Rolls Series, 1867, I, pp. 93–4. It is interesting to note that St. Albans had close contacts with Denmark where copper-gilt altar frontals were very popular at this period.

[2] In 1565 the churchwardens of Grantham reported that they had sold two chalices and patens and a copper-gilt shrine of St. Wulfram in order to buy two silver communion flagons. Clearly the shrine of the patron saint must have been large enough to contribute an appreciable sum or else it would not have been mentioned. (E. Peacock, *English Church Furniture* (1866), 88).

[3] *The Gloucester Candlestick*, Victoria and Albert Museum Monographs (1958), 10–12.

[4] J. Braun, *Christliche Altargerat* (1932), Pl. I, fig. 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, Pl. XI, figs. 33–4, for examples at Skara and Hildesheim.

[6] It has been published at least three times: *Archaeologia Aeliana*, N.S. v (1861), 170; N.S. xv (1890–3), 192; and *Archaeologia*, XCVIII (1961), 90–1.

[7] Wilkins, *Concilia* (1737), I, 227.

between the 14th and the 16th century. We are lucky to have as many as three examples since the inventories of church goods taken in the reign of Edward VI show that they were then very rare. The returns for some counties make no mention of them. Some of the churches which had them were small and impoverished. Thus the little Anglo-Saxon church of St. Martin at Wareham[1] had a broken silver chalice and one of copper-gilt. The neighbouring rural church of East Holme had also a copper-gilt chalice.[2] On the other hand examples are recorded at churches of considerable local importance. Thus Cheadle, Staffs., had 'one challes of coper and gilte'[3] and Morpeth, Northumberland, had '2 challes of copper' as well as two of silver.[4] Wimborne Minster, likewise, was by no means impoverished but had a copper-gilt chalice amongst its plate.[5]

It is now time to turn to the surviving examples all of which present points of interest. The example which was found in a grave in Beverley Minster (Pl. XIB) has a shallow bowl, round stem and flattish knop made in two pieces soldered together and a hexagonal foot. The workmanship is clumsy but the prevailing opinion that it dates from about 1400 would seem to be correct. It is, however, of copper-gilt and not latten as has been previously stated[6] and this suggests that it was made for use and not merely for funerary purposes. It is a miserable piece technically and must have been made by a local goldsmith.

There is nothing amateurish about the other two chalices both of which are now at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The first (Pl. XIIA) was acquired in 1961 and derived from the collection formed in the first half of last century by A. W. Pugin and J. Hardman. It will be found to resemble the silver chalices of Group VII[7] which includes examples datable between 1479 and 1498. The date of the appearance of this type remains uncertain since hall-marks with date-letters only came in in 1478. The foot is coarsely engraved with the Crucifixion and ORATE PRO ANIMA RECARDI BEAVCHAMP (contracted) and is tinned underneath.

The other example (Pl. XIIB) resembles the silver chalices of Group VIII[8] which includes hall-marked examples dated between 1490 and 1507. It is carefully finished and the foot is engraved with a crucifix. It was acquired in 1904 and was said to have been found in 1887 in the ditch of the Tower of London.[9]

None of the chalices which have been described retains its paten and only two examples appear to be known. That belonging to Bredhurst Church,

1 J. E. Nightingale, *Church Plate of Dorset* (1889), 168. The Commissioners seized the silver and left the copper-gilt chalice.

2 *Ibid.*, 152.

3 S. W. Hutchinson, *The Archdeaconry of Stoke-on-Trent* (1893), 173.

4 *Surtees Society*, XCVII (1896), 165.

5 Nightingale, *op. cit.*, 80. The use of copper-gilt chalices with silver bowls was widespread in Italy, so that it is possible that the 'chales the fote and patente of copper gylte' recorded at All Saints, Southampton, had been imported (*Hants. Field Club*, VIII (1917–19), 36).

6 T. M. Fallow & H. B. McCall, *Yorkshire Church Plate*, I (1912), 221. The suggested dating makes the Beverley chalice more or less contemporary with the Goathland one which also has a round plate to reinforce the junction of the stem and bowl and a knop soldered together round the middle.

7 C. Oman, *English Church Plate* (1957), 40, 300–1, Pls. 12–14.

8 *Ibid.*, Pls. 14–17.

9 This provenance arouses speculations. Had the chalice been sent up to the Mint during the Edwardian spoliation and discarded when it was found not to be of silver or is it a relic of one of the Recusant priests imprisoned in the Tower?

Kent (Pl. XIIIA) and now on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum, was in use until 1867 when a new silver set of plate was presented.[1] It belongs to the type with a double depression. In the centre is engraved the *Manus Dei*, whilst the spandrels of the quatrefoil depression are decorated with conventional foliage. The rim is engraved with scalloping, a most unusual feature. On the underside is engraved the Sacred Monogram. The style of the engraving suggests a date around 1250.

The only other example noted is in Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds. It is of copper with traces of silvering or tinning and belongs to the single depression type. Since it is unengraved it is difficult to date but is probably late medieval. It was found near Cockfield, Suffolk.

Altar Candlesticks

All the evidence seems to point to the conclusion that the base metal candlesticks on the altars of English medieval churches were normally founder's work and, therefore, outside the scope of this paper. The glorious exception of the Gloucester Candlestick was the subject of a monograph which I wrote recently for the Victoria and Albert Museum so that it is not necessary to describe it here. Doubtless there were other gilt-bronze altar candlesticks made by goldsmiths particularly in the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages.[2]

Crosses

The practice of placing a cross upon the altar during mass appears to date only from the 13th century. Though the single purpose altar cross arrived before long, the ordinary parish church down to the Reformation had usually a dual purpose cross which could both be carried in procession and placed upon the altar.

When, in 1368, William de Swyneflete compiled his inventory of the goods of the churches in his archdeaconry of Norwich he noted crosses in 307 of them.[3] Only seven were of silver, two of crystal, and twelve of base metal (copper or brass). Though only half a dozen are specified as being of wood it seems likely that the majority of the remainder were of that material. Though no English medieval wooden cross with a base metal crucifix seems to have survived, a number of the latter have turned up. It would require a whole paper to deal adequately with the sequence of types. Wooden crosses sheathed in copper-gilt, such as were common in some continental countries, are seldom mentioned in English inventories.

If it is realised that only a limited use was made of crosses of base metal in the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages, it is easier to understand why it is so difficult to find examples now. The first of these is in the National Museum, Copenhagen, and came from the little church at Lundø in North Jutland, but as I pointed out in a detailed study,[4] is an example of English art of the latter part of the 11th century. The form of the cross is sufficiently clear from the

[1] *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XXVIII (1909), 301–3.

[2] Thus in the 1093 account of the treasures of Ely abbey four gilt-bronze candlesticks immediately follow a pair of silver ones: *Liber Eliensis*, ed. D. J. Stewart (1848), 282.

[3] *Norfolk Record Society*, XIX (1948), lxxxiii.

[4] *Burlington Magazine*, XCVI (1954), 383–4.

illustrations (Pl. XIV). At the ends of the arms are embossed symbols of the Evangelists (two are missing), whilst above the very dignified crucifix is engraved a representation of the Ascension with the figure of Christ being assisted by two angels towards Heaven. Beneath the crucifix is a partly obliterated inscription: AILMARF ?T.PA?ARE. CRVCEM ?NMI. It is fairly easy to see that the first three lines tell that Ailmar had the cross made but the fourth line is unintelligible and the fifth lost. The reverse side is engraved with St. Michael overcoming the Devil (Pl. XIVB).

The next example (Pl. XVA) was presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum by the late Dr. W. L. Hildburgh who had bought it in Paris. In a note which he published about it he described it as English work of first third of the 13th century;[1] there appears no reason to dissent from this. It is a distingushed example of goldsmith's work though not comparable in quality to the Lundø cross.

An interval of some two hundred years separates this example from those which we have now to discuss and which have survived in considerable numbers. They may be divided into three main groups which seem to have been in production for a very long time, probably from the middle of the 15th century until the Marian reaction. They were intended to serve the needs of churches which could not afford the best. Their workmanship is not sufficiently good to suggest that they were made in goldsmiths' shops but they are very well proportioned so that it is obvious that the original design was the work of a very capable artist, probably a goldsmith. Though they leave a general impression of crudeness it will be found that the champlevé enamel ornaments and engraving is often fully as good as is found on the contemporary silver.

Though over thirty examples are listed in the appendix to this paper, none is complete in every respect.[2] They were intended both for use on the altar and for processions but for the crosses listed only two processional staves and five feet survive. The dual purpose part consisted of four pieces: the cross, two branches supporting figures of Mary and John, and a knop with a socket to fit on to the foot or on to the processional staff. In most examples the two branches were socketed on to the knop (Pl. XVB, XVIA, B, XVIIA) but in a few they are fitted on to the cross itself (Pl. XVIIB).

The crosses may be divided into three groups. Groups A and B comprise crosses with roundels at the ends of the arms and crocketing round the edge. The cross is given a double outline, the inner cross is sometimes left plain, more often engraved and sometimes set with copper strips decorated with champlevé enamel. The crosses were invariably gilt, but the figures of Christ, Mary and John were either gilt or silvered. Examples of Group A have the roundels at the ends of the arms decorated with the symbols of the Evangelists in champlevé enamel whilst those of Group B have cast symbols riveted on to a dark blue enamelled ground. Only a few examples retain the enamelling in good condition and it is possible that some were never so decorated. The

[1] *Ant. J.*, XXII (1942), 144–6.

[2] The example at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Pl. XVIA) is built up from pieces from three different sources.

roundels which occupied the corresponding places on the reverse of the crosses were always engraved, occasionally with the Yorkist 'sun in splendour',[1] more often with a single rose and more rarely with a double one. Whilst it is clear that the crosses must have been in production before the fall of the House of York, the distinctly Renaissance character of the engraving on the inner cross on some examples suggests that these may have been made as late as the reign of Mary in order to replace crosses destroyed during the reign of her brother.

The crosses of Group C are generally similar to the foregoing but instead of having roundels at the ends of the arms they have lozenges engraved with the Sacred Monogram on both front and back.

The branches with figures of Mary and John do not call for further attention. The processional staves were of wood covered with brass tubing and divided into sections by knops, as may be seen on the example at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Pl. XVIII) which was retrieved from Spain by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh.[2] Three of the feet are essentially similar and have a domed centre resting on a six-lobed base. At the bottom of the neck over which the socket of the cross fits, is a coronet. The domed centre is engraved in black letter: **Ihs nazarenus rex iudeorum fili dei miserere mei.** The Stoke Poges and Wisbech examples are also engraved attractively with posies of flowers but the ex-Nelson and Victoria and Albert Museum ones are otherwise plain except that the latter has **Ihs help** engraved round the lobes of the base.

The foot of the example from St. Sampson's, Guernsey (Pl. XVIB), has also got a six-lobed base but the domed centre is spirally gadrooned.

Whilst it is possible that the crosses of Groups A and B may have emanated from the same workshop, it is obvious that Group C was a separate establishment. It is also clear that the makers of these three groups did not enjoy a complete monopoly though they undoubtedly set the fashion. Anyone who has gone carefully round local museums will have found other crosses which cannot be fitted into these three groups but can fairly be described as crude contemporary copies.

Censers

A number of base metal censers has survived, they are generally incomplete, and hardly any qualify for inclusion here. The two outstanding examples are the early 11th-century covers, one from Canterbury and the other from London, now in the British Museum. They were fully described and illustrated by Sir Thomas Kendrick to whose comments I have nothing to add.[3] The only complete late Saxon censer, found at Pershore in 1770, has now joined the two last at the British Museum and is about to be republished. It is a less sophisticated piece than the other two and hints at the falling off in design and execution noticeable in the 12th and 13th-century fragments which have turned up.

[1] The best preserved example is the one at Lamport church, Northants. (Pl. XVB). The example belonging to the Society of Antiquaries was dug up on the battlefield of Bosworth in 1778. The cross at St. Oswald's, Durham, is peculiar as three of the roundels are filled with the 'sun in splendour' and one with a Tudor rose (Pl. XVIIA).

[2] The example at Claypole, near Newark, is similar and serves to support the book rest in the pulpit.

[3] *Ant. J.*, XVIII (1938), 379, Pl. LXXIII.

A. CHALICE. Gilt bronze, 10th-11th century
(height $2\frac{3}{4}$ in.)
Hexham Abbey

B. CHALICE. Copper-gilt, *c.* 1400
(height $4\frac{5}{8}$ in.)
Beverley Minster

A. CHALICE. Copper-gilt, second half of 15th century (height 6½ in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum

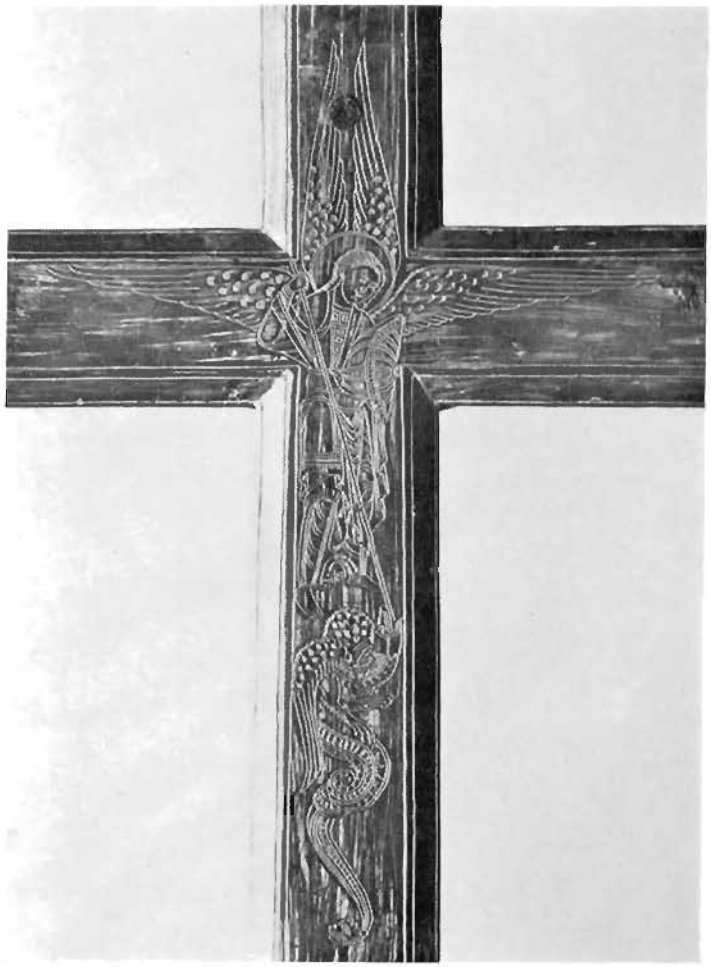
B. CHALICE. Copper-gilt, 1490–1510
(height $5\frac{3}{8}$ in.)
Victoria and Albert Museum

A. PATEN. Copper-gilt, *c.* 1250
(diam. $4\frac{7}{8}$ in.)
Bredhurst Church, Kent

B. PYX. Copper-gilt, *c.* 1330
(height 3½ in.)
Victoria and Albert Museum

PLATE XIII

A. CROSS. Copper-gilt, second half of 11th century (height 26 in.)
National Museum, Copenhagen



B. Detail of back of A

A. CROSS. Gilt Bronze, first third of 13th century
(height $10\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
Victoria and Albert Museum

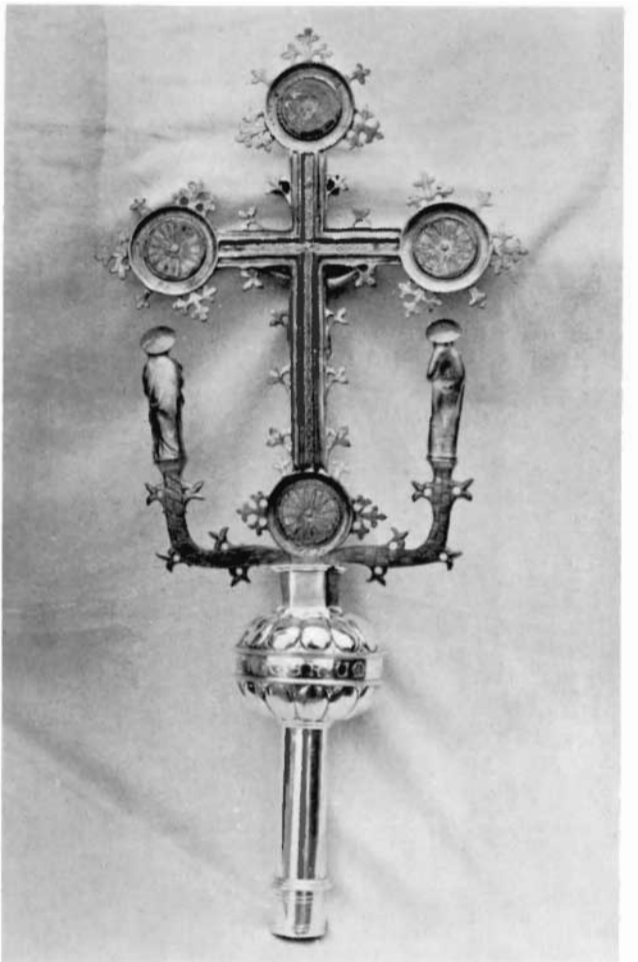
B. CROSS. Copper-gilt, with brass knop and stem, Group A, *c.* 1480
(height 23¾ in.)
Lamport Church, Northamptonshire

A. CROSS. Copper-gilt, with brass knop, socket and foot, Group B, late 15th century (height 25⅛ in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum

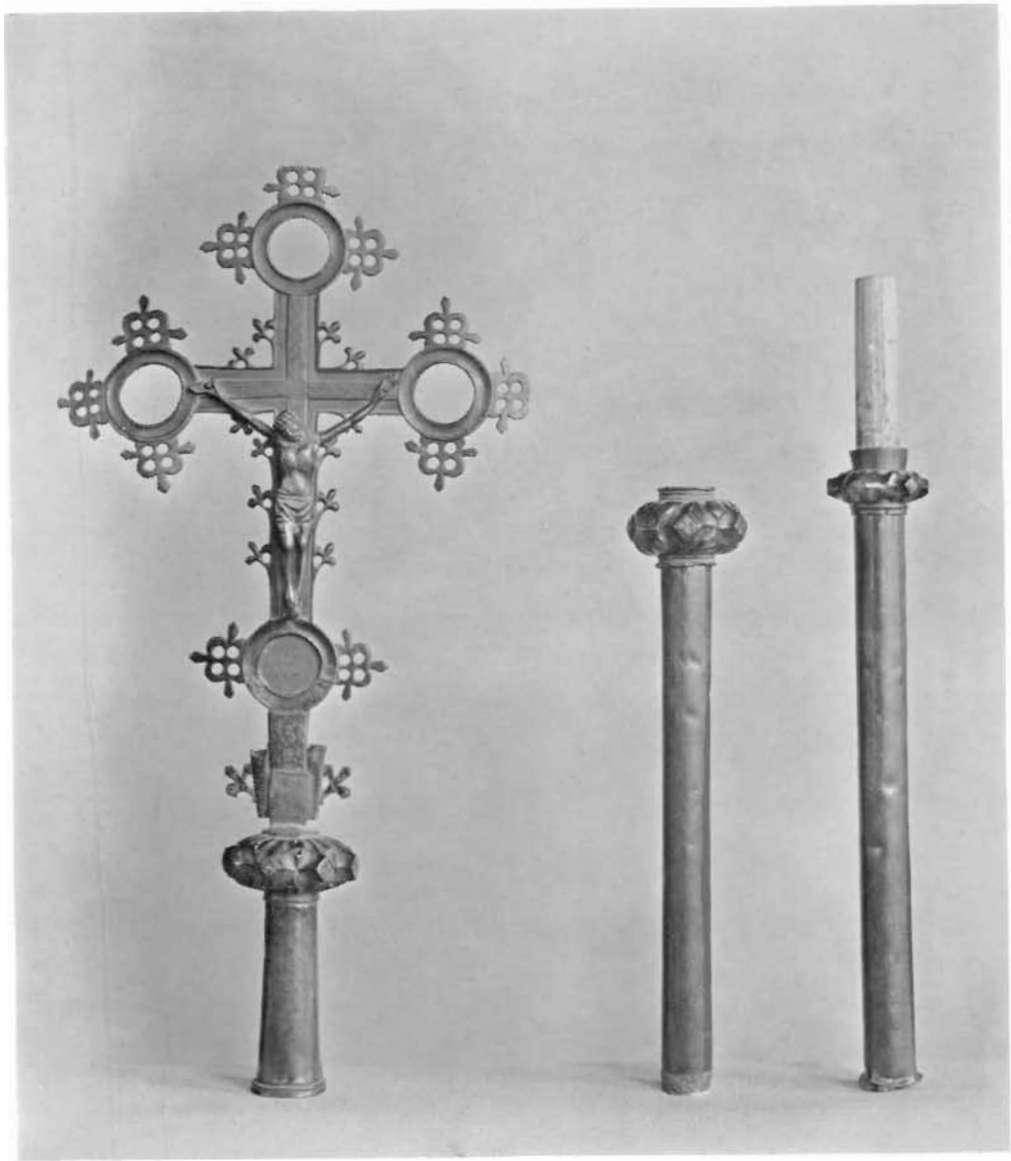
B. CROSS. Copper-gilt, with brass knop, socket and foot, Group C, first quarter of 16th century (height 26 in.)

St. Sampson's Church, Guernsey



A. CROSS. Copper-gilt, Group B, *c.* 1480
(height without modern knop and socket 14½ in.)
St. Oswald's Church, Durham

B. CROSS. Copper-gilt, with brass knop and socket, Group B, late 15th century
(height $23\frac{3}{4}$ in.)
Hereford Cathedral



CROSS with processional staff. Copper-gilt and brass,
early 16th century
(height assembled 6 ft. 1 in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum

A. PAX. Pewter, *c.* 1400

B. Back of A

(height $4\frac{b}{1}$ in.)

Private collection in Germany, 1925

A. PAX. Brass, *c.* 1400
(height $4\frac{5}{8}$ in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum

B. PAX. Copper-gilt, first half of 15th century (height 5¾ in.)

National Museum of Wales (from R. C. Church, Abergavenny)

A. PAX. Bronze, early 15th century
(height 5 in.)

Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds

B. PAX. Brass, early 15th century
(height 5½ in.)

Mr. C. Fitzherbert

A. PAX. Copper-gilt, mid 15th century
(height $4\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
Mr. G. C. Lilley

B. PAX. Copper-gilt, mid 15th century
(height $5\frac{1}{4}$ in.)
Victoria and Albert Museum

A. PAX. Gilt-brass, late 15th century
(height $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.)
Devizes Museum

B. PAX. Bronze, perhaps Flemish or Rhenish, early 16th century (height $2\frac{5}{8}$ in.)

Society of Antiquaries

A. FINIAL from a shrine. Copper-gilt, early 12th century (length $3\frac{1}{2}$ in.)
Victoria and Albert Museum

B. ERIKSBERG RELIQUARY. Copper-gilt on a wooden foundation, Swedish, second half of 12th century (height *c.* 11 in.)

Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm

RELIQUARY. Copper-gilt with champlevé enamel, *c.* 1400
(height $5\frac{7}{8}$ in.)

Victoria and Albert Museum

A. CHRISMATORY. Brass, mid 14th century
(length 6 in.)
St. Martin's Church, Canterbury

B. CHRISMATORY. Gilt brass, first quarter of 15th century
(length $4\frac{1}{16}$ in.)
Christchurch Mansion Museum, Ipswich

A. CHRISMATORY. Brass. Late 15th or first quarter of 16th century (length 6 in.)
City Museum, Liverpool

B. CHRISMATORY. Brass, late 15th or first quarter of 16th century (length 6⅞ in.)
Sir John Soane's Museum

Though these still show some trace of the goldsmithing tradition, they are of such international patterns that they cannot be confidently claimed as English. The only late medieval censers which have come to light are miserable affairs of sheet brass which owe nothing to goldsmiths and may be ignored here.

Paxes

In Early Christian days the members of the congregation gave each other a kiss of peace at mass. As time went on the custom was modified and an object was handed round which could be kissed in turn by the worshippers. The constitutions of Walter de Grey, Archbishop of York, issued in 1250 mention without comment the *osculatorium* as part of the furnishing of a parish church. Other English references show that some sort of pax was in use in the 13th century though continental references begin a little late.

The pax consisted of a small panel decorated with a religious subject, usually either a Crucifix or the Crucifixion, and with a scroll handle, sometimes hinged, behind. A good paper on English paxes was read to the Royal Archaeological Institute by Miss Nina Layard in 1904[1] but it is now possible to double the number of examples known to her.

Base metal paxes were produced *en masse* and may be divided into two types — those in which the devotional subject is engraved and those in which it is cast. The standard of design is good whilst the engraving is no worse than that on English medieval chalices.

The earliest pax of English origin is one which was in a private collection in Germany before the last war.[2] It is of pewter and must date before 1408 as the Royal Arms on the back show the French quarterings *semée de fleurs de lis* (Pl. XIX). A brass version of the same design was acquired in 1930 by the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is necessary to look at it carefully to find that it was not cast from the same mould. It was said to have been found at Leek in Staffordshire (Pl. XXA).

The next example, at present at the National Museum of Wales, turned up in the cellar of the presbytery of the Roman Catholic church at Abergavenny in 1865 (Pl. XXB). Its construction is rather more complicated than that of the other surviving examples. It is of copper-gilt and consists of a recessed panel decorated with a trellis pattern in wriggle engraving. The crucifix, Mary (now missing) and John were cast and attached by rivets. The frame instead of being cast solid was decorated with four strips of metal with a black letter inscription;[3] above the top strip (now missing) is a cast cresting of the usual sort but the handle is missing. There is no reason to dissent from the dating in the first half of the 15th century suggested by Sir Mortimer Wheeler when he showed it to the Society of Antiquaries.

The next two paxes are cast in one piece (except for the handle) and consist of an oblong frame with cresting of conventional leafwork. They are both

[1] *Arch. J.*, LXI (1904), 120–30.
[2] *Burlington Magazine*, XLVII (1925), 245.
[3] As it is both contracted and partly missing it is by no means certain that the version suggested by the late G. McNeil Rushforth is correct: *Ant. J.*, X (1930), 358.

engraved with the Crucifixion. The example at Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds, is of bronze (Pl. XXIA) and retains its hinged handle. The engraving shows a rendering of a good early 15th-century design by a not entirely unskilled artist. The other pax (Pl. XXIB), belonging to Mr. Cuthbert Fitzherbert, is of brass and shows a much cruder rendering of a design of much the same date.

A copper-gilt pax (Pl. XXIIA) shown to me in 1938 by Mr. G. C. Lilley was said to have come from an abbey in Staffordshire. It consists of a back-plate engraved with a cross between two escutcheons, one charged with the Three Nails and the other with the Crown of Thorns enclosing a cross. The background is decorated with flowers. The crucifix, Mary and John, the sun and moon, are all cast separately and riveted on. The Victoria and Albert Museum possesses the back-plate only of another example, engraved in a very similar manner. Another pax (Pl. XXIIB) in the same museum, acquired in Paris by Dr. W. L. Hildburgh, is closely similar but has a background engraved with a trellis pattern and an applied crucifix instead of having the Christ riveted on to an engraved cross. It would seem best to date these about the middle of the 15th century.

The pax of gilt brass found in 1846 close to the destroyed chapel at East Grafton, Wilts., (Pl. XXIIIA) consists of a cast oblong frame with creasting and an engraved back plate to which the handle is attached. The rendering of the Crucifixion is not very well executed but it is clearly of a late 15th-century date and therefore considerably earlier than the silver pax at New College, Oxford, with which it has been compared.

Miss Layard only knew two examples of the last type to which we must refer. This is made in two pieces, consisting of a cast arched frame to which is attached at the bottom the Crucifixion group (Pl. XXIIIB). The back plate has a plain triangular piece of metal to serve as a handle. The background is sometimes left plain, or it may be engraved with a trellis or diapered in one way or another.[1]

Another variety shows the same Crucifixion group which is, however, attached to a more elaborate ogee frame. Though there is an example in the Devizes Museum (also from East Grafton),[2] there must be considerable doubt whether either variety was made in this country. There is a considerable number of examples abroad and artistically they might be regarded with equal probability as Flemish or Rhenish.

Even more Flemish is a pax dug up at Avebury, Wilts.,[3] cast with the Virgin of the Assumption within an elaborate ogee frame. The same subject is found on a rather simpler example dug up in 1820 on the site of the old

[1] Plain ground: Berlin Museum (W. Bode, *Die Italienischen Bronzen* (1904), no. 603) and Schnütgen Collection, Cologne (*Catalogue* by F. Witte (1913), Pl. 68). Trellis ground: example from Runcton Holme, Norfolk (*Arch. J.*, LXI (1904), 123). Ground with diaper and fleurs de lis: Society of Antiquaries (Pl. XXIIIB); 'in the possession of an old family in the Wolverhampton area' (*Archaeologia*, XX (1821), 153); Berlin Museum (*ut supra*, no. 654); formerly at Downside Abbey but since given away (*Ant. J.*, XI (1931), 286).

[2] *Arch. J.*, LXI (1904), 124. There is also an example without a provenance at the Victoria and Albert Museum and two are mentioned in *Revue pratique de liturgie, etc.* (Jan.–Feb., 1925), 170.

[3] *Arch. J.*, LXI (1904), 124.

church at Bolton, Lancs.[1] Both of these appear to be of mid 16th-century date and may have been acquired during the Marian reaction.

Pyxes

In the Middle Ages the Sacrament was reserved in every church and in England it was usually placed in a little box or pyx which was hung over the altar and was raised and lowered by a pulley.

It might have been supposed that the vessel to contain the Sacrament would always be made of a precious material, but right down to the Reformation there were numerous churches in which the pyx was only of base metal. Since the purpose for which pyxes were used was particularly obnoxious to the Reformers, it is not surprising that there have survived only two examples, one of silver and the other of copper-gilt.

The latter was found in February 1878,[2] fairly close to the former chapel of a commandery of the Hospitallers at Godsfield, near Alresford, Hampshire. It is a little cylindrical box with a domed lid and is engraved with foliage. It has a hinge but the hasp is wanting and the cross at the top is modern. It would seem to date about 1330. It was acquired for the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1921.

Reliquaries

It may be suspected that a lot of the minor reliquaries which appear to be rather under-described in inventories were not so precious as they appeared to be at first sight.

In 1886 Sir John Evans bought, in Chester, a fragment which has recently been presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Dr. Joan Evans. (Pl. XXIVA.) It represents a very finely finished wolf's head having a man's head in front of its jaws, probably commemorating an incident in the legend of St. Edmund whose head was found guarded by a wolf after his remains had been abandoned by his Danish murderers. It must date about the beginning of the 12th century. It is obviously the finial from the roof of a miniature shrine similar to the one from Eriksberg in the Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm (Pl. XXIVB).

The only complete base metal reliquary was bought for the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1870 from a London dealer who provided no provenance for it. It is a copper-gilt casket (Pl. XXV) on four claw feet surmounted by a hipped lid on the front of which is a representation of St. George and the Princess Saba against a ground of red and black enamel. The front of the casket is crudely engraved with St. Magnus (?) and the Virgin and Child, whilst on the ends are St. Etheldreda and St. Vincent. On the back is engraved some foliage and a devil's head which are separated by a ring handle.

Over the engraved subjects have been attached six small figures cast and chased. They are more or less contemporary with the rest of the reliquary which may be dated *c.* 1400, and were perhaps added to satisfy a troublesome customer. The little figures are cast from the sort of type models which must

[1] *Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancs. & Chesh.*, LXVIII (1916), 167–75.

[2] *Proc. S. A.*, 2nd Ser. XXXI, 1918, 63–4.

have been stocked by a goldsmith with a church clientele. The figures of the Virgin and of a female saint with a book are well chased up, those of St. Etheldreda and a prophet (?) are fairly well finished, whilst the figure of a boy and the half-figure of a bishop are very rough. It is a mysterious piece.

Chrismatories

The chrismatory was a concession to convenience which made its appearance in English churches in the 13th century. Hitherto the three holy oils had been kept in separate *ampullae*. One of these has survived and was fully described by Sir Thomas Kendrick[1] so I have not thought it necessary to illustrate it. Though he described it as a cruet I prefer to consider it as an *ampulla* since the reasons which made the use of copper chalices inadvisable applied with greater force to cruets, as it would be difficult to keep a watch on the state of the tinning of the interior. It is a curious little piece of 11th-century date, the work of a lazy goldsmith who built up the decoration with the aid of the stock patterns in his workshop.

When the inventories of the churches of the City of London were compiled in the reign of Edward VI, nearly half admitted the possession of or had had a silver chrismatory. Outside London the possession of a silver chrismatory was unusual and they appear to have been fairly evenly divided between pewter or lead and copper-gilt or brass.

Though three designs are known to us, nearly all the surviving examples are of the latest and worst type. The earliest belongs to St. Martin's church, Canterbury (Pl. XXVIA), and is an oblong box of sheet brass with a hinged lid with a hipped roof having a cresting pierced with quatrefoils. Inside is a plate with three holes into which fit three pewter flasks. It was probably made about the middle of the 14th century.

The next belongs to Christchurch Mansion Museum, Ipswich (Pl. XXVIB) and is also of a good design. The lid is engraved with tiling and along the ridge is a cresting finished at each end with a cross (one is missing). The sides are engraved in black letter with Benedict' ds in domis tuis. It is a nicely finished piece attributable to the first quarter of the 15th century.

The last type has survived in considerable numbers and is included here with an apology since it is only too obvious that it was not made by craftsmen who had undergone the arduous training given to goldsmiths. Examples vary slightly in size but all are essentially similar to the two examples illustrated, both of sheet brass, one at the City Museum, Liverpool, and the other at Sir John Soane's Museum (Pl. XXVIIA, B). They stand on four feet and have a curious apron below the hasp; the lid is gabled and has a cresting engraved in imitation of tiling; the sides and lid are engraved with a black letter inscription, empty spaces being filled in with conventional ornament. The purpose which these objects served has been much disputed and they have frequently been described as reliquaries; this resulted from the lack of an agreed reading of the inscription which they bear. I must thank Canon F. J. Bartlett for identifying it as a blundered rendering of *Confirma hoc deus quod* [*operatus es in nobis*]. This

[1] *Ant. J.*, XVIII (1938), 337 *et seq.*

text from Psalm 67, vulgate (68 A.V.) is used as an antiphon in the confirmation service. Whilst it is obvious that these chrismatories are late medieval it is very difficult to suggest any closer dating.

Conclusion

What exactly happened to all the base metal church plate at the Reformation? The Crown took very little of it and though the abbeys and friaries were dissolved there was always a certain amount of base metal to be sold. At the end of the reign of Henry VIII it became obvious that the parish churches were going to be robbed. When the blow actually fell after his death, royal commissioners were sent round to compile inventories of the goods of all the parish churches. The 1552 inventories show that the churchwardens had been selling off the sort of thing which they thought that the government would seize. A lot of plate had gone but not much of this was base metal. Little of the parish capital was invested in the sort of articles described in this paper and panicky churchwardens tended to sell off the heavier church furnishings like standard candlesticks, lecterns and bells. Nonetheless things were disappearing, as is evident from the results of the visitation by Nicholas Harpsfield of his archdeaconry of Canterbury in 1557 towards the end of the reign of Mary.[1] He was obliged to order thirty churches to get a cross of latten and twenty-two a pax. How far his instructions were obeyed is a matter for conjecture.

In the reign of Elizabeth the elimination of base metal church plate formed part of the campaign against superstition. It was left to the archdeacons to make it effective but allusion is made to it in Archbishop Grindal's articles[2] for the province of York issued in 1571 in the following enquiry: whether 'pixes, paxes, handbells, sacring bells, censers, chrismatories, crosses, candlesticks, holy water stocks, and images and such other relics and monuments of superstition and idolatry be utterly defaced, broken and destroyed?' The results of this sort of campaign can be seen from the returns for a similar one in Lincolnshire five years earlier. The following are two examples:

> BARDNEY. 'Itm̄ one crosse of lattin, one pear of senseres, and iij handbells, ij candellstickes of lattin wth other metall of papistry — sold to robt fowler and he sayth th. they be defacid.'
>
> COLSTERWORTH. 'Itm̄ a crose, a paire of sensors, a crismatorie, a cruet, a pix and ij candellstickes sold in the second yeare of Elizabeth at Granthame faier.'[3]

It seems clear that most of the base metal church plate had disappeared from sight long before the end of the reign of Elizabeth I and that nearly all of it had gone into the melting-pot. When we try to account for the survival of the pieces which we have described, we encounter extraordinarily few provenances which are really enlightening. Hardly anything has been preserved in the place to which it originally belonged. The cross from St. Sampson's, Guernsey, was discovered in the church tower on 20th June, 1913, together with

[1] Catholic Record Society, *Archdeacon Harpsfield's Visitation*, 1950.

[2] Frere, W. H., & Kennedy, W. M., 'Visitation Articles & Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation', Alcuin Club, 1910, III, pp. 135–6.

[3] E. Peacock, *English Church Furniture* (1866), 37, 60.

altar and branch candlesticks, the bowl of a censer, etc.[1] The chrismatory from St. Martin's, Canterbury, was found under the nave roof in 1849.[2] The Lamport cross was found in 1674 during alterations to the Hall;[3] there were no traditions about it but it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that it had been brought for safety from the church during the reign of Elizabeth I. Most of the other pieces in Anglican churches have been acquired without provenances in recent years.

One of the crosses at the Victoria and Albert Museum was discovered in an oak chest in a house at Abbey Dore, Herefordshire, together with mass vestments, a portable altar, etc. Clearly this little hoard had been preserved for the periodic visits of a Recusant priest and had afterwards been forgotten. Several of the other crosses and paxes come from known mass-houses.

When the cross-foot at the Victoria and Albert Museum was acquired it had been converted into a candlestick. Preservation by secularisation would seem to account for all the other chrismatories which have lost their internal fittings and become merely small boxes of a useful size.[4] On the other hand a number of the pieces appear to have been accidentally lost long before the Reformation, as in the case of the Godsfield pyx. Turning to the pieces with foreign provenances the cross at Copenhagen is merely a reminder of the very close ties between England and Scandinavia in the 11th and 12th centuries. Just as a certain amount of church furnishings were imported into England in the latter part of the Middle Ages, so it may be supposed that some English pieces must have drifted across the Channel. The Reformation gave a temporary boost to the export of church furnishings. The English crosses which have turned up in Spain and Portugal are paralleled by the English brass lecterns preserved as far afield as Italy and Dalmatia, all doubtless bought at bargain prices when the churches in this country were being despoiled.

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[1] *Proc. S. A.*, 2nd Ser. XXVI (1913), 3–7.
[2] *Ibid.*, 2nd Ser. VIII (1879), 430.
[3] Sir G. Isham, *All Saints' Church, Lamport* (1930), 9.
[4] On the other hand in 1565 the churchwardens of Harlaxton, Lincs., reported that they had sold their chrismatory for 2d. to a Mr. Blewitt and 'he hath made his boie a standish therof as he saieth' (E. Peacock, *English Church Furniture* (1866), 99).

APPENDIX

List of late medieval crosses of Groups A, B, and C, with location, provenance, and published illustration if any.

Crosses marked **K** have knop and socket
B have branches
F have foot
S have staff

Group A (*champlevé enamel roundels*)

Bagborough, Devon.
Copnor, Hants., **A**.
Lamport, Northants.; from Lamport Hall; Pl. XVB.
London, Soc. of Antiquaries; from Bosworth Field; J. Nichols, *Leicestershire* IV, pl. XCI.
London, V. & A. Museum (821–1901); from Abbey Dore.
London, V. & A. Museum (136–1879).
Ushaw College, Durham, **K**.
Private Collection (*ex* Hardman).

Group B (*cast symbols of evangelists*)

Ampleforth College, Yorks., **K B**.
Birmingham, Oscott College.
Cardiff, National Museum; from Radnorshire.
Chesterfield, Derbyshire; *Architectural Review* (Sept., 1923), 101.
Dublin, Royal Institution; from Sheephouse, Co. Meath; *J.R.S.A.I.*, XLV (1916), 27–31.
Durham, St. Oswald's, **K B**; Pl. XVIIA (front view: *Proc. S.A. Newcastle*, V (1892), 196).
Guildford, Sutton Park R.C. church.
Hereford Cathedral; Pl. XVIIB.
London, British Museum (1853, 9.2.1); from Glastonbury.
London, British Museum (1878, 11.1.97).
London, St. Dominic's, Haverstock Hill, **K B**.
London, V. & A. Museum (2093–1855).
London, V. & A. Museum (472–1907).
London, Westminster Cathedral.
Mawdesley, Lancs., Lane End House, **K B**; B. Camm, *Forgotten Shrines* (1910), 316.
Rouen, Musée des Antiquités, **K F**.
St. Donats, Glamorganshire.
Wardour, Wilts., R.C.church, **K B**.
Winchester, R.C. church; from Barton Stacey, Hants.
Private Collection (*ex* Hardman), **K**.
Private Collection (Lennox B. Lee), **K**.
Private Collection (*ex* Nelson), **K B**.

Group C (*lozenge-shaped ends*)

Ipswich, Christchurch Mansion Museum.
St. Sampson's, Guernsey, **K F S**; Pl. XVIB.

Unclassified

Groups A *or* B (*roundels missing*)
Braga Cathedral Treasury, Portugal.
Claughton Hall, Lancs., **K**; B. Camm, *Forgotten Shrines* (1910), 376.
Dublin, National Museum, **K**.
London, V. & A. Museum (M. 39–1920) **K S**; from San Sebastian; Pl. XVIII.
London, V. & A. Museum (M. 98–1914), **F**.
Stoke Poges, Bucks., **F**; *Proc. S. A.*, 2nd ser. XXIII (1909–10), 49.
Wisbech Museum, **F**.
Private Collection (*ex* Relph).

Staff only
Claypole, Lincs.; J. C. Cox, *Pulpits, Lecterns and Organs* (1915), 67.