

changed, for in the earlier days when the bed of the river was shallow punting poles (or, as the keelmen termed them, 'pooies') were used to push the boat along, and afterwards when the river had been deepened, sailing had to be resorted to. This might possibly be the reason for the change of rig, as with the sprit-sail the vessel would come much nearer into the wind, and the sheet being fleeting would aid it in the short tacks across the river in head winds.

Owing to the improved modern method of shipping coal by spouts the keel has lost its vocation and become well nigh obsolete, so that the rising generation may have to resort to drawings and description to realise what it was like.

Although apparently a flat-decked, broad-beamed, clumsy-looking craft, yet the keel was constructed on fine sailing lines, and in a brisk wind could hold her own with any river craft afloat.

'Weel may the keel row' is now a song of the past.

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#### XXIV.—THE CONYERS FALCHION.<sup>1</sup>

BY CHARLES CLEMENT HODGES.

THIS remarkable weapon is in an excellent state of preservation, and is one of the finest, as it is one of the earliest, examples of this class of sword remaining in the country.

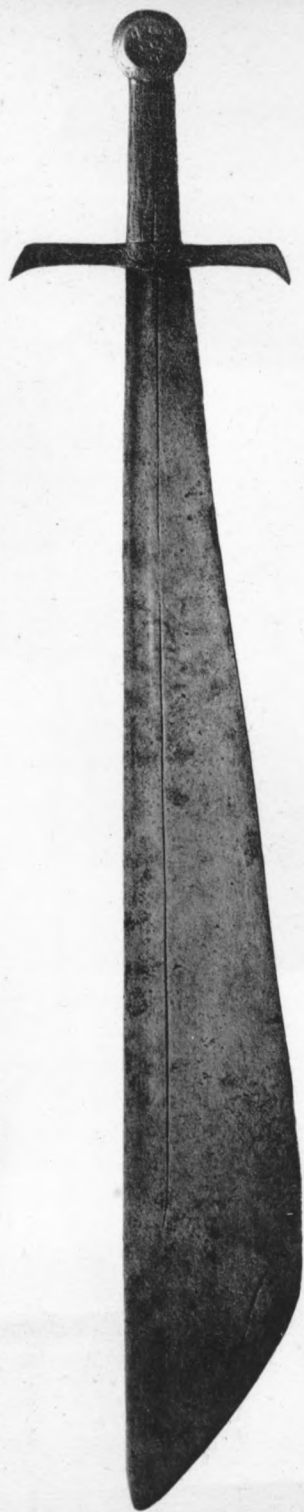
The occurrence of the three lions of the Plantagenet kings<sup>2</sup> on one side of the pommel indicates that the date cannot be earlier than the time of Henry II., and as the character of the ornament is that of the type in use at the close of the twelfth century, there can be little doubt that this falchion is of the time of Hugh Pudsey, the tenth bishop of Durham, and was therefore made before 1195.

The falchion is a broadsword with one cutting edge, and has an Eastern origin. It is supposed to have been introduced into England about the time of the first Crusade.<sup>3</sup> It was not in common use, and but few examples have been preserved to the present time.

<sup>1</sup> The falchion was exhibited by Sir E. W. Blackett, at a meeting of the Society, on the 29th April, 1891. See *Proc.* V. pp. 26-28 and 42-44.

<sup>2</sup> The earlier Plantagenets wore, *gules, two lions passant guardant in pale, or.* Henry II. added a third lion to the shield.

<sup>3</sup> 1096 A.D.



C. C. Hodges. Photo.

THE CONYERS FALCHION.



The Conyers sword is composed of four parts: the blade, the guard, the hilt, and the pommel. The blade fits into the under side of the guard against a 'shoulder,' and is then reduced to form a tang, which passes through the wooden handle and also through the pommel, and is seen rivetted over to hold the various portions together. The blade measures two feet five-and one-eighth inches from the point to the guard. As the point shows considerable signs of wear, it may have been originally quite an inch longer. Its width is now, at the widest part, four and a quarter inches, and its thickness at the guard a quarter of an inch. At a distance of about one inch from the back is an incised groove, from which the thickness of the blade is gradually reduced to the cutting edge. The thicker portion between the groove and the edge has a slight hollow on both sides to lighten the blade. The backs of the blades of such swords, and indeed those of other types, were so formed to give a more obtuse angle to the section of the blade than if the two sides had been made in straight lines from the edge to the back, and at the same time greater strength is obtained. The back of the blade presents a nearly straight line, having only a slight 'camber' at the centre. The cutting edge, on the contrary, presents a waving outline, and the general appearance of the blade indicates that it has been frequently ground and cleaned. It has also been subjected to some rough usage, as there is a fracture near the point, right through its thickness, two inches long and one inch from the edge, which must have been caused by a heavy blow.

The guard is of bronze, and is six inches and five-eighths in length, three quarters of an inch in width at the centre, and one inch at the points. In thickness it varies from a quarter of an inch at the points to three quarters of an inch where it embraces the blade. It is ornamented on both sides with an engraved pattern consisting of dragons, which are exceedingly well drawn, and have their tails represented as waving scrolls, each bend having a large veined leaf, and terminating in volutic curves bearing leaves, which closely resemble the type first adopted in architecture and ornament about 1180, and continued in a more or less modified form up to the middle of the thirteenth century. This leaf is generally considered to be a conventional form of the beautiful foliage of the water aëvens or herb benet (*Geum urbanum*).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Browne's *History of the Metropolitan Church of St. Peter, York*, p. 22.

One wing of each dragon is skilfully disposed so as to fill the spaces formed by the pointed tips of the guard, the upper side covered with a guilloche pattern between incised lines. The handle is a piece of oak, and has the appearance of antiquity, though it is probably not the original one, and the rivetting of the tang into the pommel has a modern look as though at some time a new handle had been added, and the tang must in consequence have been somewhat shortened.

The pommel, also of bronze, is circular in form, one and three quarter inches in diameter, and nearly an inch in thickness. At the edges this thickness is reduced to half an inch by a hollow bevel, which is ornamented with a scroll of similar character on both sides, and having its sweeps filled with foliage resembling that on the guard. The chief interest of the falchion is centred in the pommel; for it bears a shield on either side, the form of which is obtained in the one case by an incised line, and in the other by the marginal termination of the field. One shield bears the arms of the Plantagenet kings, *three lions in pale*; and in order that these arms might appear correctly blazoned on the pommel, the field was removed by cutting out the metal and filling the hollows so formed, they being left rough for the purpose, with red enamel, thus representing the *gules* field, while the polished bronze would show the lions as gold. In the same manner the tincturing on the other shield was correctly shown; but in this case the order of procedure had to be reversed, as the field was gold. The charge was consequently deeply engraved, and the hollows filled with black enamel. The arms therefore may be heraldically read, *or, an eagle displayed sable*.<sup>5</sup> I leave it to the heralds and genealogists to decide to what family or individual they belonged.

The Society is greatly indebted to Sir Edward W. Blackett, Bart., who most kindly allowed the writer of these notes to have the falchion for the purpose of examination and for taking the photographs which are here reproduced. The size of the page did not admit of the falchion being shown full size in the detail photographs; but as all the views are taken direct, a scale can be arrived at with the aid of the dimensions given.

<sup>5</sup> A similar local instance of heraldic tincturing by means of metals and enamels is to be found in the shields of the Ogle brass at Hexham. See *The Abbey of St. Andrew, Hexham*, plate 34, p. 52.





C. C. Hodges, Photo.

THE CONYERS FALCHION.



C. C. Hodges, Photo.

THE CONYERS FALCHION.





The manor of Sockburn<sup>6</sup> formed a portion of the large tract of land granted by the Danish king of Northumbria, Guthred, to the congregation of St. Cuthbert at the time of their settling at Chester-le-Street in 883. In the time of bishop Flambard the manor was granted, with others, to Roger de Conyers, which grant was subsequently confirmed by deed by king Henry II. and the prior and convent of Durham. It was never held by the Conyers family *in capite* of the king, and it never formed part of the Wapentake of Sadberge; nor was it a part of the great South Durham fees of the Bruces or Baliols.

The manor was held under the bishops of Durham by the then Conyers presenting this falchion to the bishop on his first entering his diocese. The tenure is distinctly described, and the falchion mentioned, in the Inquisition held on the death of Sir John Conyers in 1396: 'Tenuit manerium de Socburne per servicium demonstrandum Episcopo unam fawchon, ita quod postea Dom. Episcopus illud viderit restituat ostendenti, pro omnibus aliis serviciis.'

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NOTE.—In Paul Lacroix's *Arts of the Middle Ages* (p. 126) is an illustration of the so-called sword of Charlemagne in the Imperial Treasury of Vienna. The hilt closely resembles that of the Conyers Falchion. The guard is straight and ornamented with a diaper pattern; the handle appears to be of bronze or ivory, and it is enriched with diagonal bands of ornament. The pommel is circular in form, and the side shown in the illustration bears a spread eagle. In date it is probably very nearly contemporary with the Conyers Falchion.

<sup>6</sup> I am entirely indebted to the Rev. J. R. Boyle, F.S.A., for these historical memoranda.