

XXIX.—ON SOME MEDIEVAL CARVED CHESTS.

BY CHARLES CLEMENT HODGES.

[Read on the 26th August, 1891.]

THE occurrence of two elaborately carved chests of almost identical design, and of evidently foreign workmanship, in the churches of Brancepeth, co. Durham, and Wath (near Ripon), led the writer to make some enquiries as to the origin and use of such chests in churches, and to look for some similar examples elsewhere.

The necessity for a receptacle of some sort to contain all kinds of small and valuable articles and wearing apparel, and also as a means of facilitating their transport from place to place, must have been met with at a very early stage in the progress of civilization. In Western Europe the earliest travelling trunks of which we have any knowledge were formed of wicker work covered with an ox hide. These light cases sometimes contained an inner box of wood. In time the wicker case was abandoned, and the wooden box was more elaborately constructed and strengthened with iron bands, and provided with several locks and strong iron handles, or rings, to allow of its being lifted and carried by several men. The Normans used such chests for travelling, and also for storing articles of all kinds in their castles. The larger ones were carried on strong carts or waggons drawn by oxen, as they were excessively heavy and clumsy. The carved oaken coffin in which the incorruptible body of St. Cuthbert was carried about from place to place during the eight years in which the congregation of St. Cuthbert sought a place of permanent abode, and which Symeon tells us was drawn on a cart by oxen, represents clearly to us the manner in which these huge iron-bound chests were carried from town to town or from manor to manor at that period.

An excellent and valuable example of the ponderous chest of these days is still preserved in the buttery at Durham castle. It is of enormous size, being seven feet three inches long inside, and so exceedingly massive in its construction as to be almost indestructible, the lid and sides being of solid oak more than three inches in thickness. It is formed of roughly-hewn oak slabs, the marks of the adze being

plainly visible on the inside. The outside is entirely covered with iron straps, which butt against each other, so that the wood is nowhere visible. There are twenty-four straps in the front placed vertically, and eight at either end, placed horizontally and embracing the angles. There are two iron rings for lifting the weighty lid, and the staples for two of the locks remain, though the locks themselves are all gone. Vulgar tradition honours this huge chest with being the coffin in which the incorruptible body of St. Cuthbert was carried, an honour which it certainly never so earned, as its date is probably not earlier than the beginning of the twelfth century, and it has always been applied to secular purposes, and was no doubt made to contain articles of value, such as plate and linen for use in the castle.

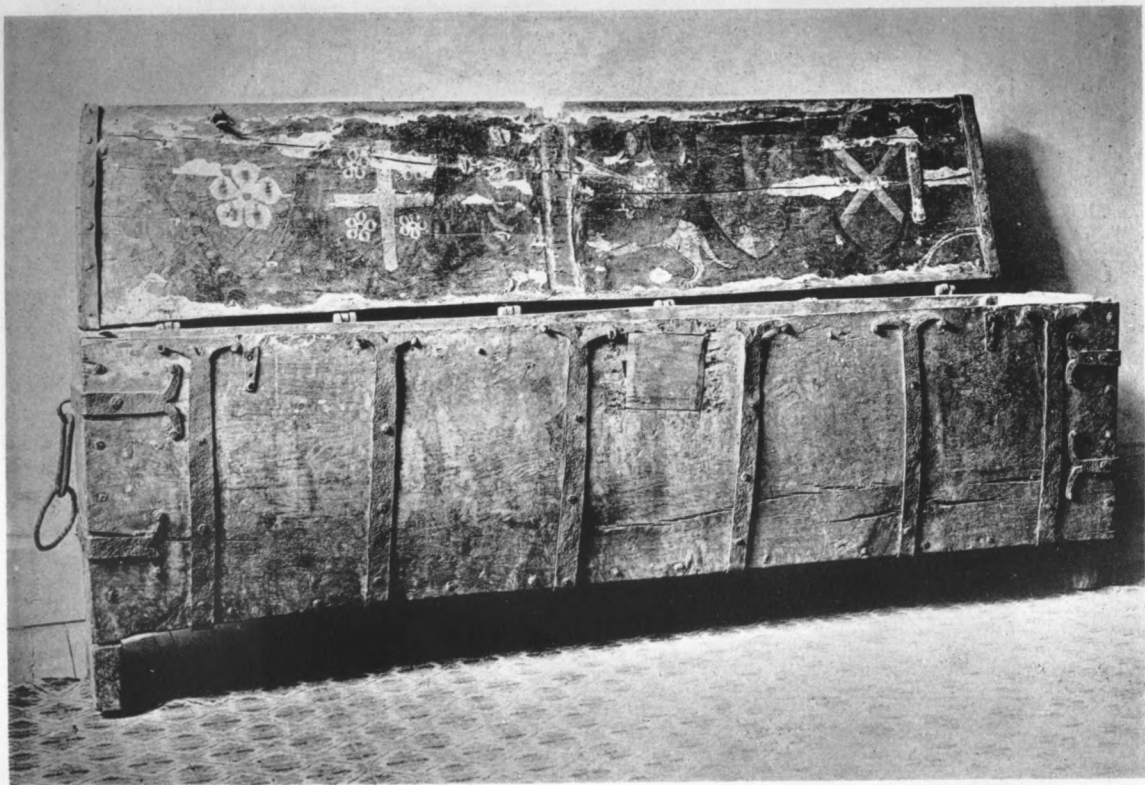
There are four other chests at Durham, but of smaller size than the one in the buttery. One of these is in the castle, and three are in the cathedral library. That in the castle is clearly a travelling trunk, as it is provided with large iron rings at either end fastened to short chains. These chains are long enough to allow the rings to come clear above the lid of the chest when they are raised up, so that a stout pole could be passed through them and the chest carried slung from the pole, which was borne on men's shoulders.

These arched topped chests, though specially adapted for travelling purposes, served, when not so used, as receptacles for various articles of domestic use; but the arched lid was found to be inconvenient when the chest was used in the house, and in process of time was abandoned for all storage chests, though retained, as it still is, for travelling trunks.

At this time the refinements of carving and other ornamentation were restricted to small chests and caskets. An excellent example made of the bones of the walrus, and of an early date, is the Franks casket in the British Museum. It displays a series of figure subjects, both scriptural and legendary, on the sides, the ends, and the top of the lid. The pictures are surrounded by explanatory inscriptions in runes.¹

During the later centuries of the middle ages the chest or trunk was the commonest article of furniture in the houses. It was a long coffer supported on four stout feet, or by the end pieces being made

¹ Mr. J. T. Hodgett's British Museum lecture, 'The Casket,' *Builder*, vol. xlvi. pp. 799-820.



C. C. Hodges, photo.

CHEST FORMERLY BELONGING TO BISHOP RICHARD DE BURY OF DURHAM (1333—1345);
now in private possession.

longer than the height of the front and back, so that the floor of the chest was raised about a foot clear of the ground. The most ancient examples are strongly bound with wrought iron bands, sometimes very profusely ornamented, and the wood itself was often covered with leather or ornamented canvas, or was painted, decorated, or gilded. Such chests were in constant use for an infinite variety of purposes. They formed seats, on which merchants sat and sold their wares and paid and received their moneys. In the illuminations of some of the MSS. of the period such chests are seen to be used as seats by the musicians while they play their instruments to the guests assembled in the hall, or when covered with cushions, by the ladies, while they spend their long solitary hours working tapestry or embroidery. A miser is also seen to sleep upon his chest, which contains all his hoarded wealth. In fact they formed the most indispensable article of furniture in all the chief rooms of the medieval house, serving, like modern safes, to keep gold and silver articles, jewellery, papers, books, deeds, parchments, and wearing apparel of all kinds, as well as for the hangings of the rooms when not in use. They were often so constructed that they could be used as couches and beds.²

In the thirteenth century the ornamental ironwork began to be supplemented by simple carving on the wood itself, and the old system of covering every joint and seam with an iron band, so that the whole of each side presented a nearly plane surface, began to give place to a more scientific and less primitive mode of construction, viz., by forming the sides, ends, and lid into panels, and by inserting these panels into a stout framework. Such a change of construction necessarily led to a change in the method of ornamentation, and the decoration which had formerly been confined to the terminations of the iron bands, painted leather, or canvas coverings, was now followed by mouldings wrought on the angles of the framing, as well as all kinds of beadings and incised carvings.

In the middle ages the chest makers formed such an important body of workmen that, in most of the principal towns, they separated themselves from the guilds of carpenters and formed special guilds of their own. Such guilds were highly favoured, and became very powerful, their members attaining to a high degree of skill; and

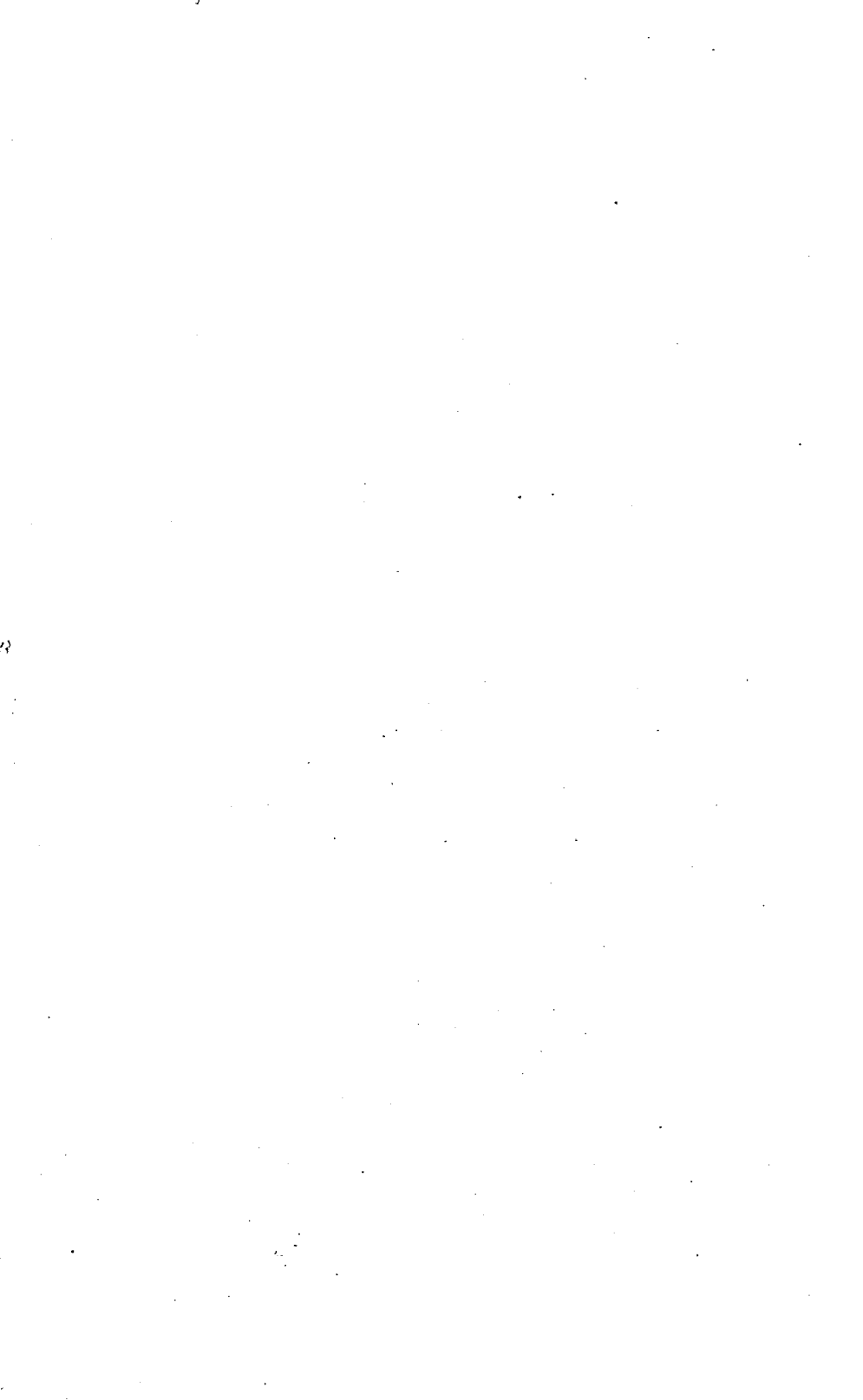
² Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire du Mobilier Français*.

besides the special business of chest making, they worked in ebony, ivory, and all kinds of precious woods, as well as in horn and shell, in fact, they ranked next to the gold and silver smiths amongst the trade guilds of the period. So much were these trunks, bins, and chests in use as articles of furniture amongst all classes, that the guilds of chestmakers found it necessary to have a code of supplementary laws in order to prevent them from turning out faulty work. So amongst other things it was ordered, that no working chestmaker could go to work with the customers of his master; and that the masters be forbidden to furnish tools to workmen who worked only by the piece or by the day. These laws were evidently made by the guilds to keep the trade in the hands of a few, and no doubt the most skilful, and at the same time to maintain the highest quality of design and workmanship, as well as to preserve a high price for all articles made by members of the guilds. One curious law was that no members lend chests to dead bodies. From this it appears as though it had been customary to hire out chests to poor families for the purpose of carrying a dead body to the cemetery for burial, and so avoid incurring the expence of a coffin.³

In the fourteenth century, when the interiors of rooms were fitted with various articles of rich furniture, and the walls panelled with pierced and carved woodwork, of which such abundant remains are to be found in the prior's house at Durham,⁴ and hung with elaborately worked tapestry and costly hangings of woven fabrics brought from the Continent or the East, the iron-bound and plainly moulded chests of the previous centuries were found to be out of keeping with a more luxurious system of furnishing. It was about the beginning of this century that the richly carved fronts, on which every ingenuity of design and skilled labour was lavished, were introduced. Both in England and on the Continent numerous examples of the highly ornate chests of this period still remain. The writer has not been able to meet with an elaborately carved example in this country, which can be distinctly stated to have been made for purely domestic

³ Common coffins were in use at Abercorn and at Linlithgow, in Scotland. There are three at the former place with coped lids, illustrations of which are given in *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* 1889-90, p. 389. There was also a parish coffin at Easingwold, Yorkshire.—*Ed.*

⁴ 'The Works of Prior Castell,' by W. H. D. Longstaffe, *Arch. Ael.* vol. vi. p. 201.





C. C. Hodges. photo.

CARVED OAK CHEST IN WATH CHURCH, NEAR RIPON.

use, though no doubt there are such in some ancient manor houses or castles which have been continuously occupied since they were built. A search through some ancient court houses, moot halls, and the vestries of numerous churches, has resulted in a modest list being made of a few typical examples all worthy of study. It is a significant fact that nearly the whole of the richer specimens are of foreign workmanship; and that there was a large importation of carved chests from Flanders is clearly shown by a search through a number of medieval wills and inventories, such as those printed in the *Testamenta Eboracensia*⁵ and elsewhere.

In the will of Christopher Best, who was the last priest of the chantry of St. John the Baptist, in the church of Wath, and which is dated April 23, 1557, we find 'Item I gyffe unto George Best xls. that he hath of myne remaining in hys hande with all other stuffe . . . excepe a Flanders Kyste and y^t thing y^t ys within yt Item I wyll y^t George Best restore to Wathe Church a. almere, a vestement and a portys that belongeth unto Saint John Chappyll.'⁶ An inventory, dated 1488, of Thomas Creyke of Beverley, gent. mentions 'a chest of Flaunders 4s.'⁷ By his will of 1419, John Amyas of Thornhill gave to his son William 'j cistam de Flaunder,'⁸ and in 1485, Thomas Staunton of Staunton, Notts, to his son his gold chain 'et cistam meam Flandream.'⁹ The inventory of William Melton, chancellor of York, dated 1528, has 'In the great chambre Two Flaunders chistes, and ij other chistes, vjs. viijd.'¹⁰ Robert Kyrkley, rector of Loftus, in Cleveland, who died in 1468, bequeathed to John Gibson, rector of Hinderwell, 'a counter de Flanders warke';¹¹ and, in 1552, Alice Manleverer of Wothersome, widow, bequeathed to her son Edmond 'my great presse, my great cheist carved upon the fore-side, and one counter of oversee worke.'¹²

The carved chest at Wath is said to have come from Jervaulx abbey, and some of the early wills show how such things may have come into the possession of the churches. Thus, in 1497, John Lepton of Terington, says: 'I will that all myne other evidence be putt into a kyste, and therin surely to be kept, and loked, and had to the abbaie of Kirkham: and the Prior of the place to have one loke and one key, and

⁵ Surtees Society, vols. 4, 30, 45, 53, and 79.

⁶ *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*, xiii. p. 83.

⁷ *Testamenta Eboracensia*, iv. p. 36.

⁸ *Test. Ebor.* v. p. 17 n.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 85n. ¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 253. ¹¹ *Reg. Test.* iv. 105b. ¹² *Ibid.* xiii. 933.

myne executors and feoffators another. To my sone Thomas . . . a spruce kyste.¹³ And, again, in 1506, sir Thomas Tempest of Bracewell says: 'I will y^t my new almyry, beyng in my gret chamber, be sett in Saynt Thomas chapell in the chyrch, thayr, to kepe the vestmentes and bokes belongyng thereto, in honour of God and Saynt Thomas.'¹⁴ And in 1507, Richard Brereley, rector of Kirk Smeaton, bequeathed 'To y^e chauntre att Branburgh, where Sir Richard Mylnes servys, my long iron bondon kyrst, for to kepe y^e chales, y^e vestmentes, and the evydence belongyng to y^e said chauntre; and it for to be devided in too; and oon parte to have ij lokes for y^e evydence; and y^e keyes to be in keypyng os y^e composicion shewes. I gyff to y^e servys whilke I have ordenyt to be at Smeton, os is aforesaid, my cowntyr in my chamber, for to kepe y^e evydence therto belongyng and other ornamentes.'¹⁵

These old wills and inventories show us that chests went under various names, such as ark, counter, coffer, almyry, press, and casket, and that the word chest is spelt in a variety of ways, such as 'kyst,' 'kyste,' 'kyrst,' 'kist,' 'kiste,' 'chist,' 'chiste,' 'cheste,' 'cheist,' etc. Some of the chests are mentioned particularly as to construction as 'j chiste bound with yren,' 'my bound cheste,' or 'a bound kiste.' The term spruce is so frequently used as to call for a remark. In old English spruce meant Prussian; thus spruce fir is Prussian fir, and the term as applied to chests no doubt means that they were made of spruce fir. The word is variously spelt, as 'my pruce kyst,' 'a chest del spruce,' 'a sprosse chest,' a spruce kyste,' a sprewe kyste,' 'my coffer of spruce,' 'lez spruse kist,' 'a long chest of cipresse tre,' etc.¹⁶

It is interesting to find in two old north country court rooms ancient chests still doing duty in their original capacity of containing rolls and deeds. They are in the Moot hall at Appleby, and in the Manor court room in Danby castle, in Cleveland. Both are plain rectangular coffers bound with iron bands. That at Appleby is the smaller of the two, and is secured by four locks, two of which are ancient. The one in Danby castle is thus described by the rev. J. C. Atkinson:¹⁷ 'The oak chest stands in the Jury room, and the Jury

¹³ *Test. Ebor.* iv. p. 130. ¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 251. ¹⁵ *Ibid.* iv. p. 265.

¹⁶ An inventory of the Prior of Durham dated 1449 has in the 'CAMERA INFERIOR . . . Item una Mensa de Prusiâ cum foliis . . . Garderoba . . . Item una larga Cista de opere Flaundrensi.'—*Wills and Inventories*, I. p. 93.

¹⁷ *Forty Years in a Moorland Parish*, p. 295.

room is an oak panelled room in the castle, with a grandly moulded late mediæval fire-place in it, only hidden away from view by modern "Gothic" innovations. The chest itself is about three feet and a half long, by twenty inches high, and twenty-four in width. The oak of the sides and ends is more than an inch thick, and it is barred and cross-barrèd with iron bands, so that the parallelograms of oak left uncovered are not of imposing size; and the documents it contains have been in it for nearly two centuries and a half, and the chest was not new, but was probably venerable when they were first entrusted to its keeping, for it has a till in it, and a secret compartment below the till, its present purpose being to hold secure the counterparts of a long series of conveyances affecting the division and distribution of an estate that comprised, in one form or another, nearly twenty-four thousand acres of land.'

Church chests did not greatly differ in their form and construction, and most of them probably but little in their decoration or ornamentation, from those put to secular and domestic uses. The sacristies, chapter houses, and vestries of the ancient churches, more especially those which ranked as cathedral, monastic, or collegiate, all had their numerous chests to hold such things as dyed cloths, tapestries, hangings of the choir for festivals, parchments, charters, deeds, etc. The grand old 'revestry' of Durham cathedral was ruthlessly destroyed without any excuse whatever in 1802, and its loss is the more to be deplored as it is known to have contained all the surviving treasures of the church in the way of furniture and vestments that escaped the spoliation which followed on the heels of the suppression, Carter's plan,¹⁸ engraved in 1801, shows that there were then in it no less than four chests. One of these had an arched lid crossed by iron bands, and may be one of those that still survive in the cathedral library. The other three, which are shown to have been richly carved, have all disappeared or been destroyed.

A good example of an early church chest, dating from the thirteenth century, is to be found at Salton, in the North Riding of Yorkshire.¹⁹ This has a lid with eight sunk panels, and a moulded framing. The uprights, or end pieces, which clamp the boards form-

¹⁸ Some Account of the Cathedral Church of Durham. Plate II.

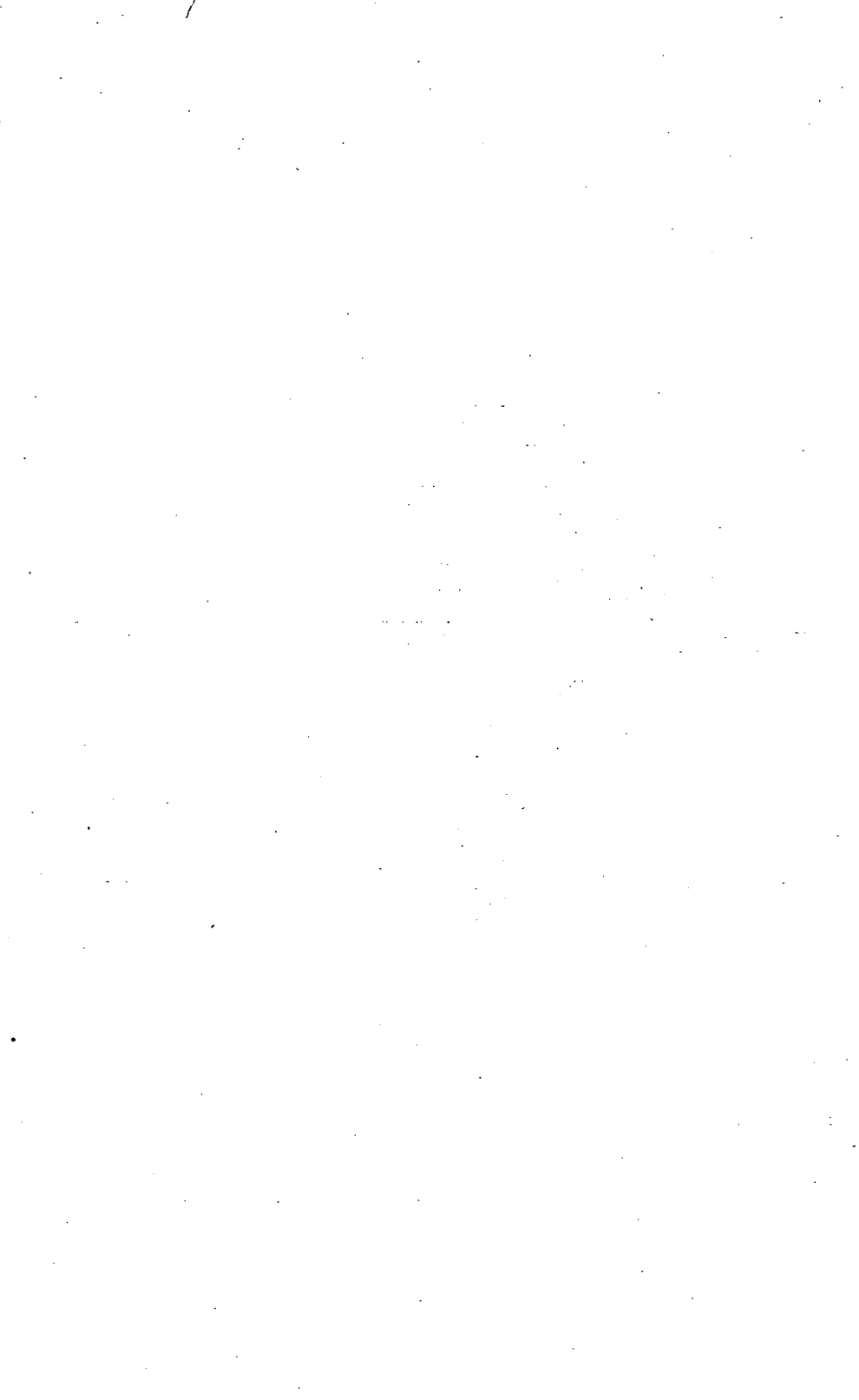
¹⁹ *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*, vol. xv. p. 224.

ing the front and back, are long enough to keep the bottom of the box clear of the floor. The decoration consists of iron bands ending in trifoliations, and there are two iron roses near the top which are probably the only survivors of a number, which studded the front.

A somewhat later but rather similar example remains at Wath-on-Dearne, Yorkshire. It is formed of oak planks two inches in thickness, and the uprights clamping the sides are so unusually broad that they exceed the width of the intervening spaces. Its only decorations are constructive, and consist of iron straps one and three-quarter inches wide and one-eighth of an inch thick. These are admirably distributed for gaining the greatest possible result, both from a constructive and a decorative point of view, with the expenditure of the least amount of material. The two bands crossing the lid also descend the back and form the hinges. All the bands terminate in bifoliations, and the end of each bifoliation is served with a mushroom-headed nail. The front is distinguished by two bands crossed, which form the heraldic cross *moline*, but it is no doubt merely decorative here. The ends are furnished with chains and rings, which could be raised above the lid for slinging the chest from a pole.

At Fishlake, near Doncaster, is another early example, but not in such a good state of preservation. It is five feet four inches long, and sixteen inches square at the ends, and is strengthened with iron bands, only one of which retains the original bifoliated termination. The lid has been secured by six locks, and the chest rests on a curiously formed stand two feet in height. Internally it is divided into several compartments, each with its own lid. One of the more prominent vicars of Fishlake was Thomas Fairbarn, who died in 1496. He bequeaths to his church of Fishlake two books *Pupill et Catholicon* to remain there for ever. These were the *Pupilla Oculi* and *Catholicon seu Summa Januensis*. The late canon Ornsby remarks,²⁰ 'But, alas for the vanity of human wishes and testamentary bequests, the ancient chest of oak with its iron bands, which received them, still exists, but the volumes have long disappeared.' At Gilling church in Ryedale is a chest of medieval date. It has but little ornament, and that confined to the upper portion of the front, consisting of dragon-

²⁰ *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers*, vol. iv. p. 99.





J. Robson, photo.

CARVED OAK CHEST IN ALNWICK CHURCH.

(Length 6 ft. 10½ in.; Width 2 ft. 7 in.; Depth 2 ft. 10 in.)

like creatures terminating tailwards in conventional foliage of the *fleur-de-lys* type. Its date is probably not earlier than the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In the vestry of Alnwick church is a very fine and large chest with a richly carved front. It has the usual three compartments, two uprights and a centrepiece. The uprights are each divided into four panels, the three uppermost of which on either side are carved with dragon-like monsters, some with wings and some without. All their tails run off into several branches bearing beautifully carved leaves of various kinds, conspicuous amongst them being the trefoil, in the uppermost right-hand panel. The lower panels are occupied with scrolls bearing leaves of the strawberry type. The centre of the front is divided vertically into three, the upper third being again divided into three by the lock plate. On either side of this a chase is represented, the animals facing towards the lock. Each of the lower compartments contains two dragons, their tails ending in foliated branches, and with foliage between them. The two lower dragons have human heads and wear jesters' caps. The character of the foliage and the entire absence of any architectural features in the design of this chest places it in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. It is therefore one of the earliest, as it is one of the very finest, of the carved Flemish chests known to exist in this country.

The curious similarity between the chests at Brancepeth²¹ and Wath, near Ripon, is so striking that it is evident that both came from the same workshop, and that a Flemish one. There is little difference between them in size, both being about six feet four inches long, and two feet five inches in height; only the fronts are carved, the tops and ends having plain panels. It is probable that in both instances the end pieces of the fronts and backs were long enough to raise the body of the chests above the floor, but they have both been cut down, and that at Wath rests on modern turned feet, while that at Brancepeth has no supports. The decoration of the Brancepeth chest is richer and somewhat more refined than that at Wath, but at the same time is tamer and less bold in design. The end pieces of the fronts are divided into several panels, in the one case into three on either side, in the other into two only. At Brancepeth all these

²¹ *Builder*, vol. lix, p. 424. See plate XXVIII, reproduced by permission of the proprietor of the *Builder*, and of Mr. Footitt who made the drawing.

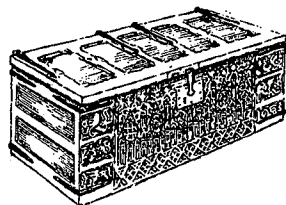
panels are filled with beasts, one being a lion, the rest dragons; one of the latter has a human head. As at Alnwick, all the tails run into foliated branches. At Wath the two upper panels of the side pieces have figure subjects, that on the left side representing a man blowing two long trumpets, and beside him a female figure, but their heads are gone; that on the right represents a dog leaping on to the back of a stag, running under a tree. There is but little difference in the ornamentation of the centre of the fronts of these two chests; both are filled with arcaded work, having in the Brancepeth example six, and in the one at Wath five compartments. These are worked into acutely pointed gablets traceried and crocketed. The spandrils are filled with twirling and twisting dragons, that writhe amongst the crockets and snap viciously at the beautiful bunches of strawberry-like leaves that form the finials of the gablets. Below the gablets are great circles filled with tracery, representing the centrepieces of Gothic windows. Between the main gablets are two light window-like openings, having the peculiar lanky mullions and tracery that are so essentially characteristic of the Flemish and German Gothic of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The chief difference in the designs of these two chests is in the ornament running along the bottom of the main compartment. At Brancepeth this is a range of lozenges formed by intersecting diagonals, the spaces being cusped and filled with tracery. At Wath we find the same space filled with two great dragons, with their necks twisted together, and their tails running off into scrolls, each bearing four very large leaves.

In St. Peter's church, Derby, is a very similar chest to the two just described, having almost the same kind of tracery in the front panels.

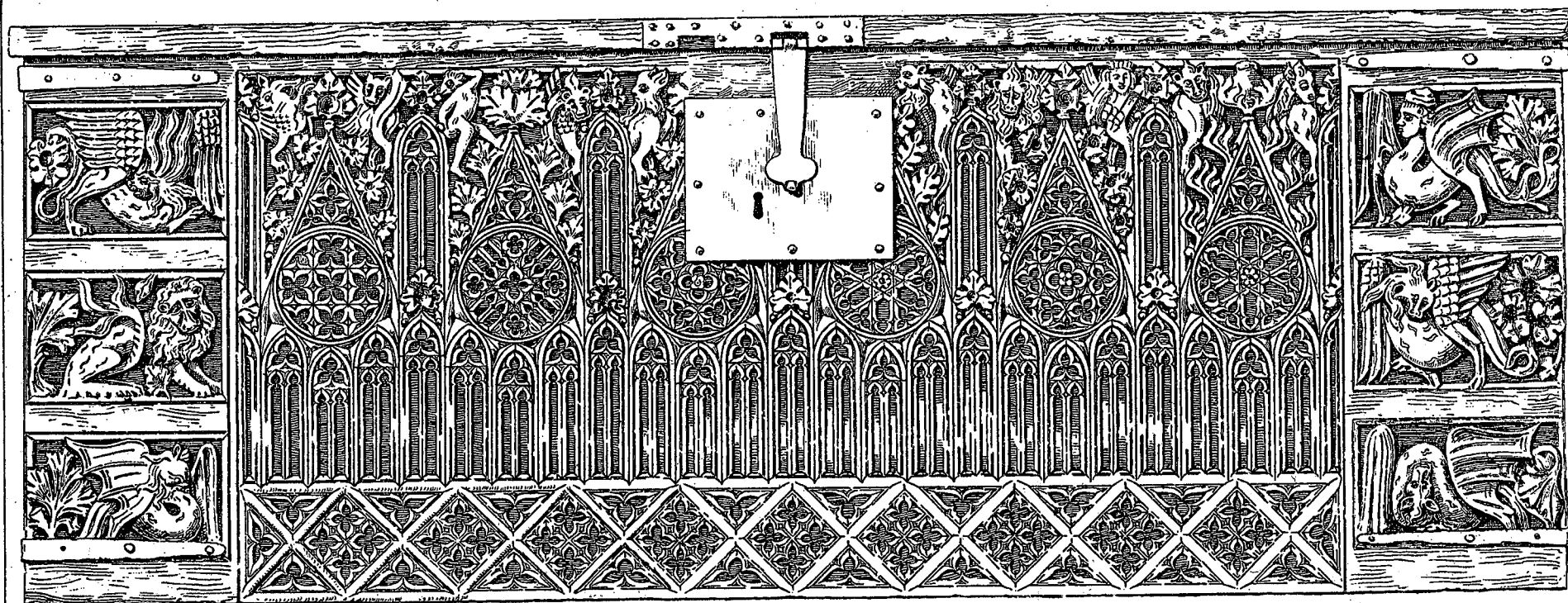
In the kitchen of St. Mary's hall, Coventry, is a fourth chest of the same design, or nearly so, as those at Brancepeth and Wath. So great is the similarity between these examples that it is quite reasonable to suppose that they are all of one date, and all came from the same workshop.

In the vestry on the south side of the choir of York minster is a large chest of Flemish or German work, the general construction of which is like those just mentioned. The lock is more perfect, retaining a single leaf of the foliated ironwork that once covered the lock

OLD OAK CHEST.



BRANCEPETH CH.



SCALE OF 12 9 6 3 0 FEET.

W. G. Footitt.
1890.

PHOTO-LITHO. SPRAGUE & CO., 22, MARTIN LANE CANNON ST. LONDON, E.C.

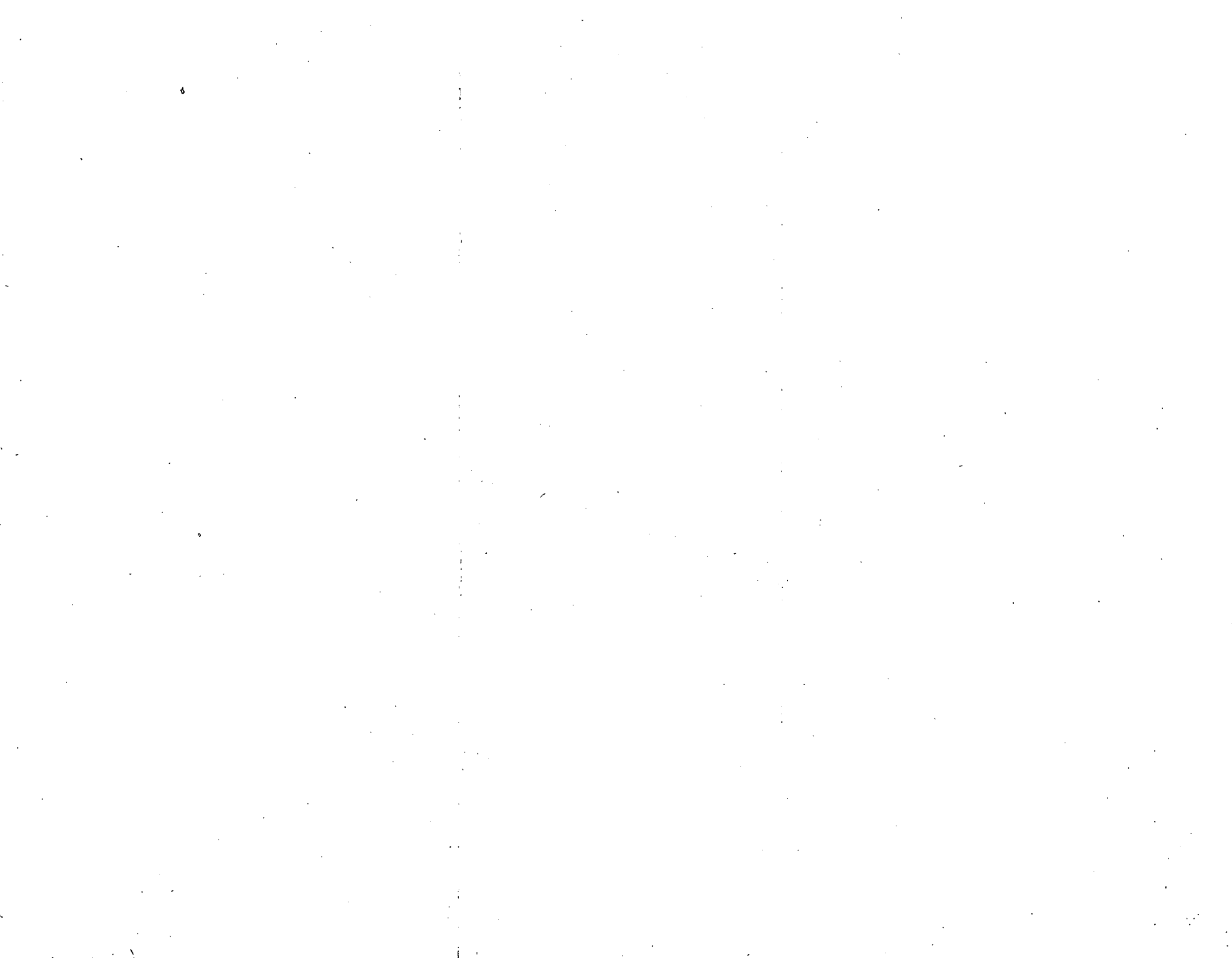


plate. The end pieces of the framework are narrow, and each contain a single figure under an architectural canopy. Below these, in the feet, are carved lions seated. The main front is occupied with a large pictorial representation of the story of 'St. George and the Dragon.' The various episodes in the story being all depicted in different portions of the same panel. In the right hand upper portion is an excellent representation of a medieval town, towards which St. George is riding. Opposite he is represented as having dismounted from his charger, and receiving the grateful thanks of the maiden he has rescued from the jaws of the monster. In the lower portions of the panel the rescue of the maiden is shown. St. George and the Dragon seems to have been a favourite subject for the front of these richly carved chests. Among other mentions of it we find one in the will of William Carre, alderman of Newcastle, dated 1572, 'Also I will that the cupborde with Sayncte george upon yt w^{ch} standeith in my hall shall so remayne styll duringe the life naturall of my wel-beloved wif. And after hir deathe I will that the said cubborde & the said george shall still remayne in the house as an hairelome for ev'.²²

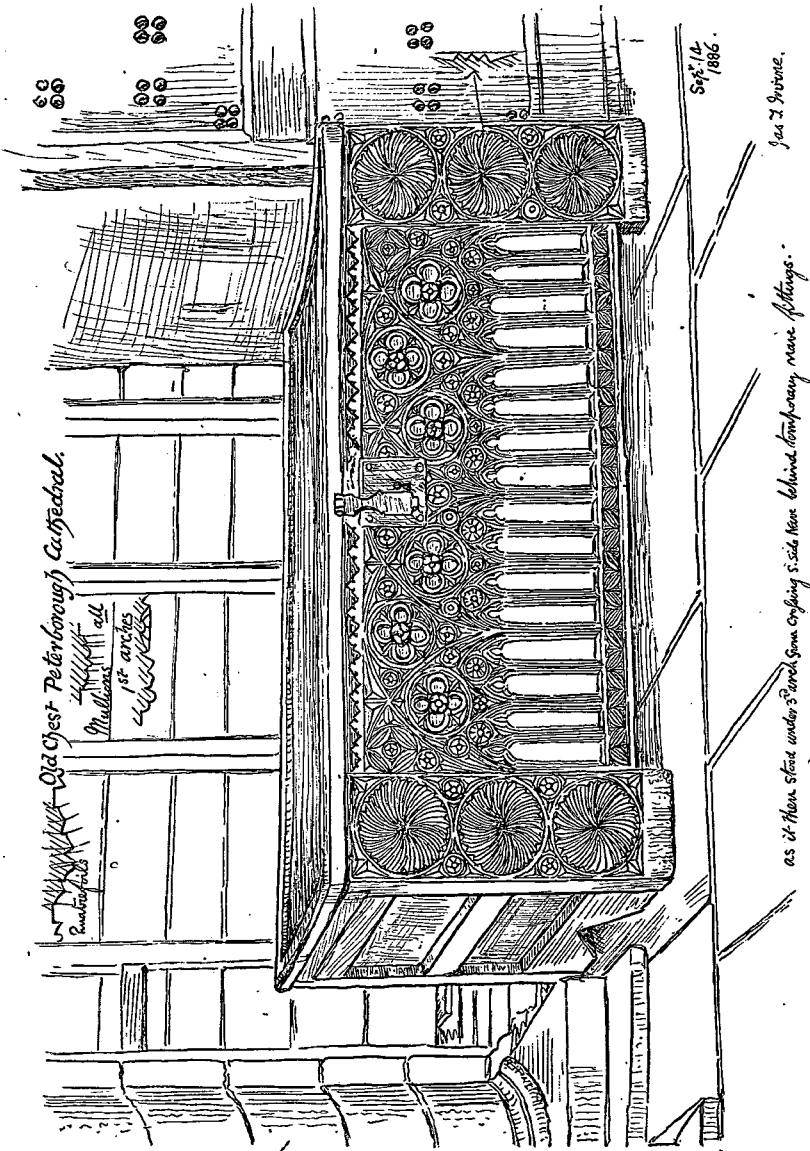
At Coity, in Glamorganshire,²³ is a splendid specimen of a medieval church chest or almerly of unusual design. The angle posts of the framework are prolonged to serve as legs to raise the chest well up from the ground. It has a sloping lid covered with rich tracery. The front is divided into six panels. The three upper ones and the centre one of the lower three bear representations of the emblems of the Passion; the centre upper panel having a symbolical representation of the cross and the five wounds. The tracery is remarkably good throughout, and indicates that the chest belongs to the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

In the second volume of Pugin's *Specimens of Gothic Architecture*, a plate,²⁴ is devoted to the illustration of a fine carved chest, at that time (1822) in the possession of G. Ormerod, esq. It is of English make, having its front ornamented with five panels, four of which contain window tracery under crocketed pediments. The design of the tracery is alike in all the panels, and is of the type known as reticulated, but the main lines are straight instead of being ogee

²² *Wills and Inventories*, i. p. 385.

²³ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. v. 5th series, p. 400.

²⁴ Plate xlv. *q.v.*



MEDIEVAL CARVED CHEST, PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL.
 (From a drawing by Mr. J. T. Irvine.)

curved, thus they form lozenge-shaped spaces which are cusped. This straight-lined reticulated tracery is not frequently met with in church windows, and is confined to the south-west of England and Oxfordshire, and in that district this chest was most likely made, perhaps at Bristol. The centre panel is occupied in its upper part by the lock plate, below it contains a figure subject representing the crowning of a king. The date of this fine chest is about 1350.

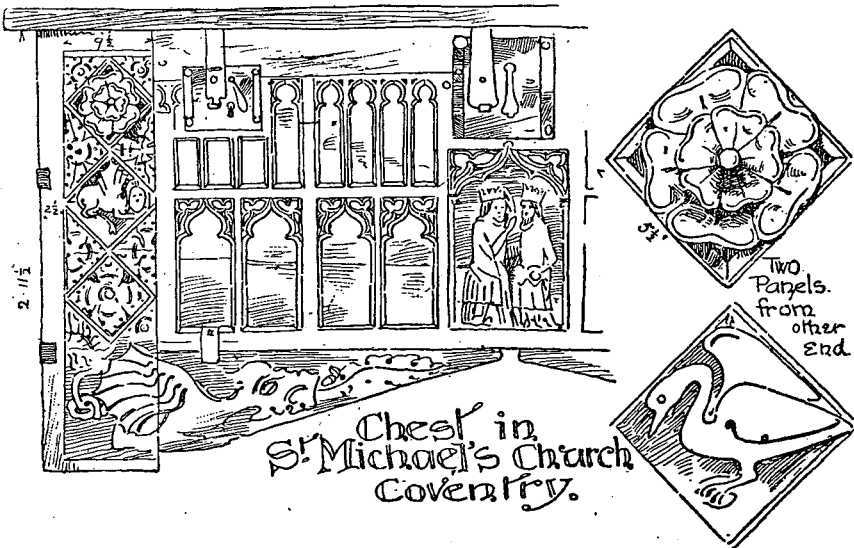
In Peterborough cathedral is still preserved one of the ancient chests belonging to the church. It is of great interest, as it is manifestly of English design and workmanship, and contrasts strongly with the Flemish examples just mentioned. The tracery on the front reminds us of the windows of the 'geometrical decorated' period, before the introduction of flowing lines, and may well be compared with the east window of Lincoln cathedral and with those of the chapter-house at Westminster. The whorls carved on the side pieces of the front are indicative of the early date of this chest, probably about 1260. Similar ornaments occur on a small and very early chest of English make preserved at the Old Hall, Gainsborough, the property of sir Hickman Bacon, bart.

In Minehead church, Somersetshire,²⁵ is a well preserved chest of English workmanship of late fourteenth century date. It has sunk and carved panels on both the front and the back, the top and ends being plain. Two of the panels contain heraldic shields, one the emblems of the Passion, one the initials J.C.M., and another an eagle holding a clasped book in its claws, the emblem of St. John the Evangelist.

A highly interesting example of a medieval chest, which is, however, uncarved, was formerly in the Chancery court at Durham; and when, in 1855, the court was removed from the exchequer building on the Palace green to the bailey, it got into the hands of a joiner, and is now in private possession. It dates between the years 1340 and 1345. It formerly belonged to bishop Richard de Bury, as it bears his arms; and as it also bears the royal arms quartering the *fleur-de-lys*, which were first adopted in 1340, and as bishop Richard de Bury died in 1345, a very approximate date can in this case be given. It retains in its design and construction all the characteristics of the

²⁵ *Builder*, lv. p. 413.

earlier medieval chests ; it is six feet long inside, thirteen inches wide, and two feet high. Each side, each end, and the lid, are in one piece of oak, very wide boards being used. The front and back are checked over the ends, and the whole is bound together by wide iron straps. Six of these pass down the front and under the bottom, and have bifoliated terminations. Two pass around each end horizontally, embracing the angles, and six more cross the lid and pass down the back, and thus form the hinges. These latter have trifoliated terminations. There is a small till at the right-hand end six and a half inches wide

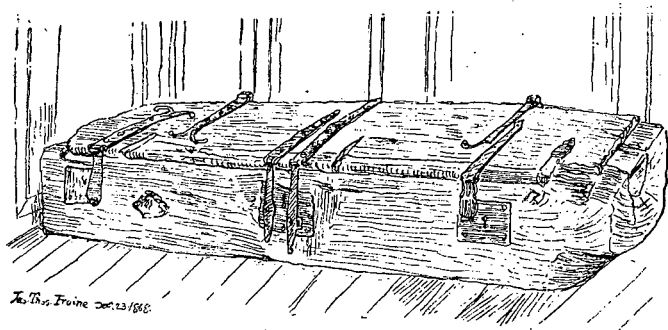


and seven inches deep. But the chief interest lies in the painting inside the lid, which is remarkably fresh and clean. It consists of four coats of arms, the principal ones being those of sir Richard de Aungerville, bishop Richard de Bury's father ; *gules, a cinquefoil ermine pierced, within a bordure bezantée*; and the arms of England and France quarterly, the second and third quarters being *semée* of *fleur-de-lys*. In the centre of the lid, between the four shields, a man on horseback is represented tilting at a cock, and the ends are filled up with lions rampant facing outwards.

A few more examples may be mentioned in conclusion. In the

church of St. Mary the great, Cambridge,²⁶ is a good carved chest. At Saltwood, in Kent,²⁷ is a fine one of English make, with traceried panels dating from the close of the thirteenth century, and another is in the chapter house at Oxford cathedral. St. John's church, Glastonbury, has an early carved chest, with coats of arms of some local families painted on the front. At Huttoft, Lincolnshire;²⁸ Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey;²⁹ St. Michael's, Coventry;³⁰ Southacre, Norfolk; and Guestling, Sussex,³¹ are good carved chests. At Church Brampton, Northamptonshire, and Icklingham, Suffolk,³² are two fine ones with no carving, but covered with rich iron scroll work, in both cases resembling so nearly that of the well-known grille over the tomb of queen Eleanor, as to enable us to date them at the close of the thirteenth century.³³

At Orleton, Herefordshire, there is a chest hollowed out of a solid log of oak. It is shown in the annexed illustration from a drawing by Mr. J. T. Irvine.



Ancient Church Chest Orleton Church

²⁶ *Archaeological Journal*, xii. p. 355. ²⁷ *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xviii. p. 422.

²⁸ Parker's *Glossary of Architecture*. ²⁹ *Ibid.* ³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* ³² The illustration kindly lent by the proprietor of *The Builder*.

³³ *Building News*, August 15, 1884. ³³ Queen Eleanor died November 28, 1290.