

An interpretation of the decoration on Cistercian wares

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Summary

The Cistercian ware discussed here is mainly from Ticknall, Derbyshire. Other sites are included where appropriate. A few decorative motifs on Cistercian ware have already been noted: 'ihc' and 'cartwheel' stamps for instance. A more comprehensive scheme is proposed here, where the motifs are grouped by themes. Each is then analysed in the context of late medieval religious belief and practice. The motifs are linked to similar examples from church architecture,

stained glass, wall paintings and other contemporary sources. Biblical quotations explain the origins of some motifs. Traditional and original designs from Ticknall are discussed. The significance of the decorative motifs in the abrupt ending of Cistercian production is considered and set against historical events. This study follows on from the research published in Spavold, J. and Brown, S. 2005, Ticknall Pots and Potters from the Late Fifteenth Century to 1888.

Introduction

Cistercian wares have had a religious connection since they were recognised as a specific type of pottery, and they were so named because of the finds at Kirkstall Abbey, a Cistercian house. It was thought that they were made there, but subsequent research has shown that they were made by potters on secular sites and sold to the monastic houses. Ticknall and Wrenthorpe, among others, are recognised as significant producers of these fine wares, which were often decorated, either with impressed patterns or with contrasting clays as applied pads. They were finely potted tablewares serving a quality market.

Cistercian wares were being produced by about the mid 15th-century, though the origins of the ware, its shapes and decorative patterns, are not known. We do not know which site came up with the idea, and which followed. It has long been a puzzle as to why the wares suddenly stopped production, though the link with the Dissolution has been noted. I suggest that the reason why the potters ceased production so abruptly is linked to the decorative motifs on the pottery, and I propose an interpretation of these motifs which is based on medieval iconography. While comparable designs in other religious contexts will be discussed, they are only random examples, not an exhaustive list; many others can be found.

The decorations on Ticknall wares – 'cartwheel' and other applied or impressed stamps – are generally accepted as simple decoration. It is my contention here however that many of them carry religious significance equal to that already recognised for 'ihc' trigrams and fish motifs (see below). I suggest that several of the Cistercian pottery motifs can be found within a similarly wide religious context.

Background of thought

Most people in the medieval world were unable to read or write, though the advent of printing was changing that. Many in the higher levels of society were educated and cultured, but this did not automatically mean they could both read and write. Reading was more common, and scribes and clerks were employed to write for those who needed written words, but could not write themselves. Ordinary people still needed to be educated in the Church's beliefs, the Bible, and Christian morality. Christianity underpinned the whole of medieval society and the way it lived its life, and was deeply ingrained in everyday domestic life. Popular saints' cults had reminders everywhere: 'engraved on drinking-cups and bowls, carved on lintels and gable-ends' (Duffy 1992, 155). The cult of the saints was at its height in the early 16th-century and one of the most popular was St Thomas Becket (Ticknall's first church was dedicated to him). Personal veneration of a saint often permeated all aspects of an individual's life (ibid 155ff). The majority learned Christian values from their priest's preaching, and from their church itself. Late medieval churches were full of colour from stained glass,¹ wall paintings² and church vestments; they developed elaborate carvings in stone and wood, and their praise of the Lord was regularly expressed in music. The windows and the carvings told Christian stories and illustrated the Christian virtues through the lives of Christ and His saints and martyrs. Sometimes Old Testament stories were used to prefigure events in the New Testament.³ Above all, the great Rood screens 'were first and foremost Christological images, proclaiming the centrality of Christ's atoning death' (Duffy 1992, 158). The principal image was the Crucifix with Mary and John on either side.

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The screen below carried images of the apostles, locally revered saints, and other figures such as the prophets or the nine orders of angels, as at Southwold, Suffolk. The Doom paintings on the chancel arch wall above the Crucifix warned worshippers of what was to come. The images were 'an important indicator of the doctrinal and devotional context of lay devotion' (ibid 159). The intensity of lay devotion is indicated by the fact that 'fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century gentry increasingly sought licences to keep altars ... in their households' (ibid 99) and would have needed to equip them properly. Religious festivals promoted 'holy neighbourliness' (ibid 138) among the laity, and the widespread local guilds were intended 'to regulate ... the devotional lives of their members' (ibid 142). The Church in every aspect was the *Biblia Pauperum* – the Poor's Bible – intended to be 'read' by them so they would learn from it (there was also a book of this title). In 1144 Abbot Suger of St Denis, Paris, said, 'The pictures in the window are primarily for the humble, who cannot read the Word, to show them what they are to believe.'⁴

Christian symbols

The Cross, the most important Christian symbol, can take several forms. Those used on Ticknall ware are discussed below with the Cistercian Ware motifs.

Each significant Christian figure had recognisable attributes which were always included when the figure was illustrated, so they could be immediately recognised by the congregation. For example, St Peter is shown with the keys of Heaven or St Edmund with the crown and crossed arrows. The saints' attributes generally show either the means of their martyrdom or a story widely recognised as associated with them.

Christ and the Holy Family also had recognisable attributes. While all saints have haloes, those for God the Father and Christ are distinguished by being elevated haloes with three lines – two horizontal and one vertical – dividing the halo into segments. The elevated halo signified divinity and is only used for the persons of the Trinity. The dividing lines can be simple or decorated, and they are often wider where they join the edge of the halo. Rays of light signifying the Glory of God, called a nimbus, often extend behind the halo. A starry halo (with a row of stars around the edge) signified Mary, the mother of Christ, and was only used for her. A 13th or 14th century Rye jug has a striking figure of Christ, with an elevated halo and his hand raised in blessing (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, fig. 192/1242, 323).

A grapevine was used for Christ who said, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches' (Holy Bible, St John ch. 15, v. 5). It frequently appears in churches: as a roof boss to the chancel arch of York Minster, and as the Tree of Jesse (Christ's family tree) in a few windows, for example a south choir aisle window in York Minster and in St Michael's, Spurriergate, York. The grapes

alone symbolise the Eucharistic wine, especially if used with an ear of wheat for the bread, where the wheat symbolises the human nature of Christ. All Saints, North Street, York, has vines, leaves and grapes as the side decorations to the panels showing the coronation of the Virgin and Christ rising from the tomb in the right hand light of the north aisle east window.

The stag in three different forms was another symbol for Christ, but although stags' heads are a Wrenthorpe motif, they do not show any Christian attributes. They are as Boyle suggests more likely to represent hunting (Boyle 2006, 237), or to have heraldic associations.

The circle symbolises eternity. As three separate circles placed close together it represents the eternal nature of the three parts of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is frequently associated with a Trinitarian symbol such as three intertwined circles. The circle can also represent the world which Christ came to save. In some Doom paintings of the Last Judgement Christ is seen in majesty, judging the souls of the dead, holding the world in one hand. This is reflected in the coronation service, when the sovereign holds the orb, which is surmounted by a cross, signifying the victory of Christianity in the world.

The palm frond has a long history of symbolism. In pre-Christian times it was a symbol of triumph or victory, and Roman champions were awarded a palm wreath. This transferred to Christianity through Christ's entry into Jerusalem as a victor on Palm Sunday. In Christian iconography, martyrs carry a palm frond as a symbol of the victory of the faithful over the enemies of Christ. It can also symbolise the victory of the spirit over the flesh. Through the association with victory, the palm on its own can symbolise Heaven.

Another ancient symbol representing Heaven in Christian iconography is the acanthus. Originally a Greek design, it was used especially in the Corinthian order of decoration. The botanical name for this Mediterranean plant is '*acanthocarpous*' for the spiny fruited plant, and '*acanthocladous*' for the spiny branched plant. Acanthus leaves have a fingered shape. Theologically, it was believed that the Roman soldiers twisted acanthus branches together to make Christ's crown of thorns when they mocked him prior to the Crucifixion. The belief arose because the Greek words for 'thorn' and for 'acanthus' have the same genitive plural, '*acanthon*'. In chapter 27, verse 29 of Matthew's gospel, the crown of thorns is a '*stephanon ex akanthon*'. Acanthus leaves thus came to symbolise Heaven, and the crown of thorns was changed to the crown of glory when Christ ascended to Heaven to sit on the right hand of God.

The rose was a symbol of Mary, especially a rose without thorns as she was born without sin. Roses were believed to have acquired thorns when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. White roses were associated with her because that was the colour of purity, and the dog rose was often shown with her. Her roses are often shown stylised with four petals, though they actually carried five.

Cistercian ware motifs

The applied decorative pads on the Ticknall Cistercian wares are in general rather crudely made and do not all have clear, sharp designs. Nevertheless, there is enough detail to support the theory that many of these pots carry designs of religious significance, which would have been well familiar to the potters and their customers. The Ticknall pot sites are referenced by numbers and a map showing their locations can be found in *Ticknall Pots and Potters* (Spavold and Brown 2005, 39).

IHC and fish symbols

Religious significance has already been noted for the 'ihc' and 'ihs' stamps, these being the shortened forms of the name 'Jesus' which are widely used in Christian symbolism (Blake 1999, 23–56).⁵ In the Byzantine empire it was stamped on bread as a constant reminder of the sacrifice of Christ, symbolised in the bread and wine of the communion service. In the Balkans, it is sometimes stamped on honey cakes. It is the Jesuits' monogram, and it forms part of the crest of the city of Geneva, dating from the 15th century. It forms a prominent roof boss in Exchequergate, Lincoln, and is painted on the quarries of the Longland chapel windows in the cathedral. The alternating roof panels in Blythborough church, Suffolk, built in the late 1400s, each carry 'ihc' stencils and would remind parishioners of Christ's sacrifice each time they looked up (Knott, for Blythborough). There is one in the south quatrefoil of the east window of All Saints, North Street, York, below the Christ in Majesty. The Feast of the Holy Name was instituted in England in 1488–9 and became one of the most popular devotional feasts (Duffy 1992, 45).

The symbol is found on pottery from Ticknall, Yorkshire and possibly Ely (Boyle 2006, 246). Boyle notes that on the possible Ely cup, found at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, the symbol is surrounded by a crown of thorns (ibid 246). Two of the Ticknall examples are in a circle. Figure 1 shows the third, with the scribe's horizontal mark above the letter 'h' showing that the word 'Jhesus' has been abbreviated. It is set in a decorative hexagon. All three are from Site 6.

The fish, another ancient Christian symbol, was recognised as such on four sherds of the Site 6 pottery from Ticknall (Spavold and Brown 2005, 91, 92, 98). Boyle suggests that the fish shown in Figure 2 is a pike (Boyle 2006, 236). The fish has great significance; it was a Greek acrostic, forming one of the first Christian creeds. Each letter in the Greek word for fish, ἰχθυσ, represented a word in this creed. (There are two forms for the letter 's', one used within a word and the other as a final letter.)

ι	ἰησοῦς	Jesus
χ	χριστός	Christ
θ	θεοῦς	God's
υ	υἱος	son
ς	σωτηρ	saviour



Figure 1
Site 6, 'ihc' stamp.



Figure 2
Site 6, fish symbol.

Early Christians used the symbol to recognise fellow believers. The fish on the Ticknall pieces therefore carry great meaning. There are other references which extend this, such as Christ calling the disciples to be 'fishers of men' (Holy Bible, St Matthew ch. 4, v.19; St Mark ch. 1, v. 17) and the importance of the fishes in the feeding of the five thousand (Holy Bible, St Matthew ch. 14, v. 17; St Mark ch. 6, v. 38; St Luke ch. 9, v. 13).

These two motifs can be found in many religious contexts: in church carvings, on priests' robes and altar cloths, in stained glass, in encaustic tiles⁶ and manuscript illustration.

Crosses

The most common Ticknall form of the Cross is the Greek cross in glory (Type 1), shown in Figure 3. It has four arms of equal length. The nimbus's rays are either sparse or crowded behind the cross itself, extending only as far as the ends of the arms to form a circle. Twenty

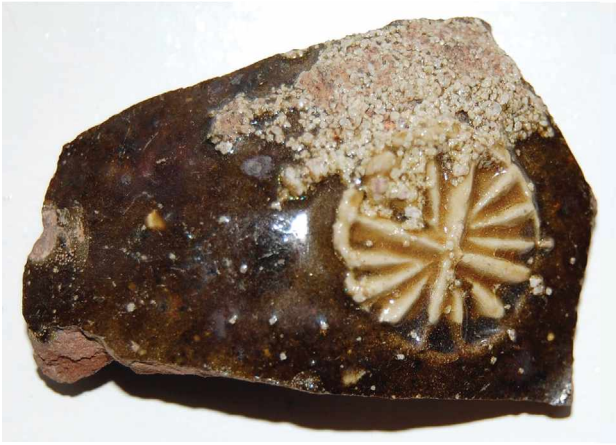


Figure 3
Site 2, Type 1 cross: Greek.

three pots or fragments show at least one example. Six of them appear in association with other patterns: impressed leaves, an ear of wheat, acanthus or wheels of eternity. One is in the centre of a knob from the cover of a cup or chalice. The cross is visually prominent over the background of the nimbus; sometimes there is a dot at the crossing point, which may represent the world, or may reflect the perfection of the circle. One example has a tiny Greek cross in the centre of a wide nimbus. Another cross in glory is in the inside base of a cup, so that the reminder of the glory of God is gradually revealed.

A Greek cross in glory was reported on ten roof tiles from Mancetter Farm. They were described as ‘cart wheel’ stamps, but I suggest this is a mistake arising from cursory comparison with the true wheel stamps described below. Comparable stamps had been found on ‘late 14th-early 15th-century pottery at the Nuneaton kiln complex, six miles away’ and the tiles are probably of the same date (Scott 1983, 159). A Thetford ware vessel (later 9th-early 12th century) has an elaborate all-over pattern of Greek crosses surrounded by tiny circles (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, fig. 81/173, 160). Stamps like these Greek crosses but without the nimbus form part of the designs on Saxon pots as analysed by Lady Briscoe, so the use of the design may go back much further.

A plain Greek cross can be seen carved into the stonework of the south wall battlements of Laxton church, Nottinghamshire, which date from the 1520s. St Mary’s, Axminster, built a new south aisle between 1525 and 1530; it has a plain Greek cross in the battlements. Most of a medieval glass representation survives in the composite window in Melton Mowbray parish church. Other examples can be seen at All Saints North Street, York, in the lower left-hand light of the fourth south aisle window. At the Norman church of St Oswald King and Martyr, Oswaldkirk, Yorkshire, the east side of the south door has a capital built into the door jamb, which has Greek crosses in the centre of each visible side. One is stamped on the obverse

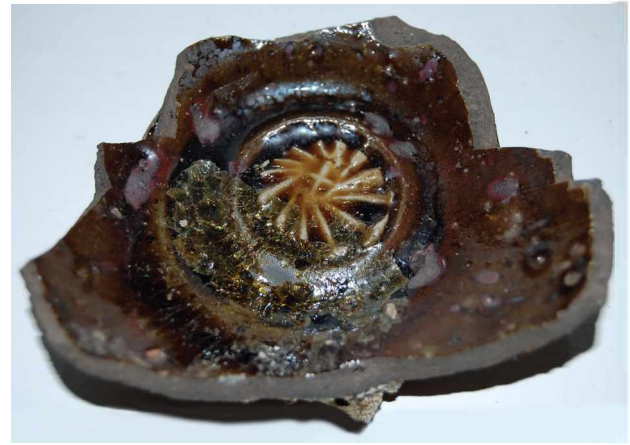


Figure 4
Site 2, Type 2 cross: Latin.

of a penny struck in Malmesbury under Edward the Confessor (reigned 1042–1066). We still use a plain Greek cross on hot cross buns.

The Latin cross has an extended lower vertical. If the nimbus is shown it usually forms a circle behind the upper arms. Seven definite, and two possible, Ticknall examples show a tiny Latin cross against a nimbus (Type 2), as shown in Figure 4. The nimbus’s rays are set at an angle, comparable to the swirling ruby glass glory in the topmost panel of the right hand tracery in the east window of St Michael le Belfry, York, which dates from c1330.

The Jerusalem cross can be a Greek or Latin cross with a dot at the end of each arm. It may have additional short arms at right angles to the horizontal and upper vertical arms, with or without dots. It may have a further design in each quadrant, as shown with the Type 3 Jerusalem cross. Figure 5 shows one in a circle with a centre boss, and a dot in each quadrant. This cross echoes that on the Beverley Orangeware jug, 13th to 14th-century, illustrated in the 1993 report on Hull (Watkins 1993, fig. 35, bo. 1, 77). A Ticknall Yellow ware fragment found at Codnor castle has a different version. Here the outer circle and the cross within it are wide and cleanly cut, and there is a sun motif in each quadrant (though blurred in places through overstamping). As the sun represents God (see below), and the cross represents Christ, this vessel carried considerable religious significance.⁸ A jug in Lincoln Museum has one on its shoulder. A partial example is recorded from Chilvers Coton (Johnson 1984), and it appears on other recorded pottery. Holt church, Denbighshire, has a Jerusalem cross carved below the wall table used for the vessels during Mass.

A consecration cross takes the shape of a circle containing a cross whose equal arms curve outwards towards the circumference. Consecration crosses were marked on the exterior walls of a church and were blessed when the church was consecrated. There is only one clear example of a consecration cross (Type 4) among the Ticknall fragments, shown in Figure 6. There



Figure 5
Site 2, Type 3 cross: Jerusalem.



Figure 6
Site 2, Type 4 cross: Consecration.

is another possible example. Comparable examples can be seen in the outer cusps of the west door head at Byland Abbey, a Cistercian foundation; it is a very common form of cross.

Acanthus leaves

Acanthus leaves are by far the most common motif on the Ticknall Cistercian ware; some examples are carefully detailed but many are basic shapes and rather crude in their execution. There are well over 100 fragments with acanthus patterns on them. They are mostly without other decoration (Type 1, shown in Figure 7); sometimes they have a centre dot (Type 2, Figure 8); a few have a Greek cross in glory in the centre dot (Type 3, Figure 9), thus combining two potent symbols.

The best examples are three sherds from the lids of cups or chalices which are neatly finished and carry other decoration. One has trailed lines along the lower edge and a dot at the base of the leaf with an impressed cross (see below, Figure 32). Another has Type 2 sun symbols between the acanthus, also a heavenly reminder. Type 1 suns accompany an acanthus on the body of another pot where the acanthus again has a cross in the dot. Most of the Ticknall acanthus sherds are from Cistercian ware cups. There are similar examples from Wrenthorpe (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992, 113–115, 134, 135). One is described as a ‘many-lobed oak leaf decoration’ (ibid 94) but I suggest it is probably an acanthus, as are many of the sherds in museum stores with patterns described as oak leaves.

While crude patterns on their own could be seen just as decorative leaves, the use of the acanthus with other symbols shows that they do carry significant meaning. Duffy describes the close association of religion and everyday life in the late 15th and early 16th centuries (Duffy 1992, chs. 5 and 6) and in a domestic context a drinking vessel with an acanthus pattern demonstrated that. It provided a constant reminder of Heaven and the life to come. Outside the home, churches and cathedrals used the acanthus as decoration in all kinds of places: along the tops of screens, carved in stone or painted in small glass quarries.



Figure 7
Site 2, Type 1 acanthus: plain.



Figure 8
Site 2, Type 2 acanthus: dot.

Gresford church, Denbighshire, which had a famous shrine before the Henrician and Edwardian reforms, has a fine 15th century roof, shown in Figure 10. All the rib joints are carved with acanthus leaves, and angels support the roof. Parishioners looking up would envisage Heaven in them. In the north aisle east window of All Saints, North Street, York, there is a band of acanthus over the picture of the Nativity in the lowest centre panel. In the east window of the south aisle of Newark, Nottinghamshire, parish church are two lights showing the Trinity in an acanthus border, one incomplete. In York Minster, acanthus leaves run along the top of the choir screens. At Lincoln Cathedral acanthus leaves run around the West door; they can be found in the Musician's Window; they run along the top of the side chapel screens; they form the keystone of the ribbed arches in the south side aisle roof.

Wheels

Some of the Ticknall designs clearly are wheels, not Greek crosses. I dispute that they represent cartwheels and suggest this idea has arisen because the stamps have not been studied in the light of medieval iconography. They seem to have been made using three stamps. One has a large hub, 12 evenly placed spokes



Figure 9
Site 2, Type 3 acanthus: dot and cross, combined with Type 1 suns.

and a clear rim (Type 1, Figure 11); there are 27 examples of this. Type 2 (Figure 12) has a small hub and 11 more widely spaced, deeply indented, spokes. Type 3 (Figure 13) shows a large hub and ten rather irregular spokes.

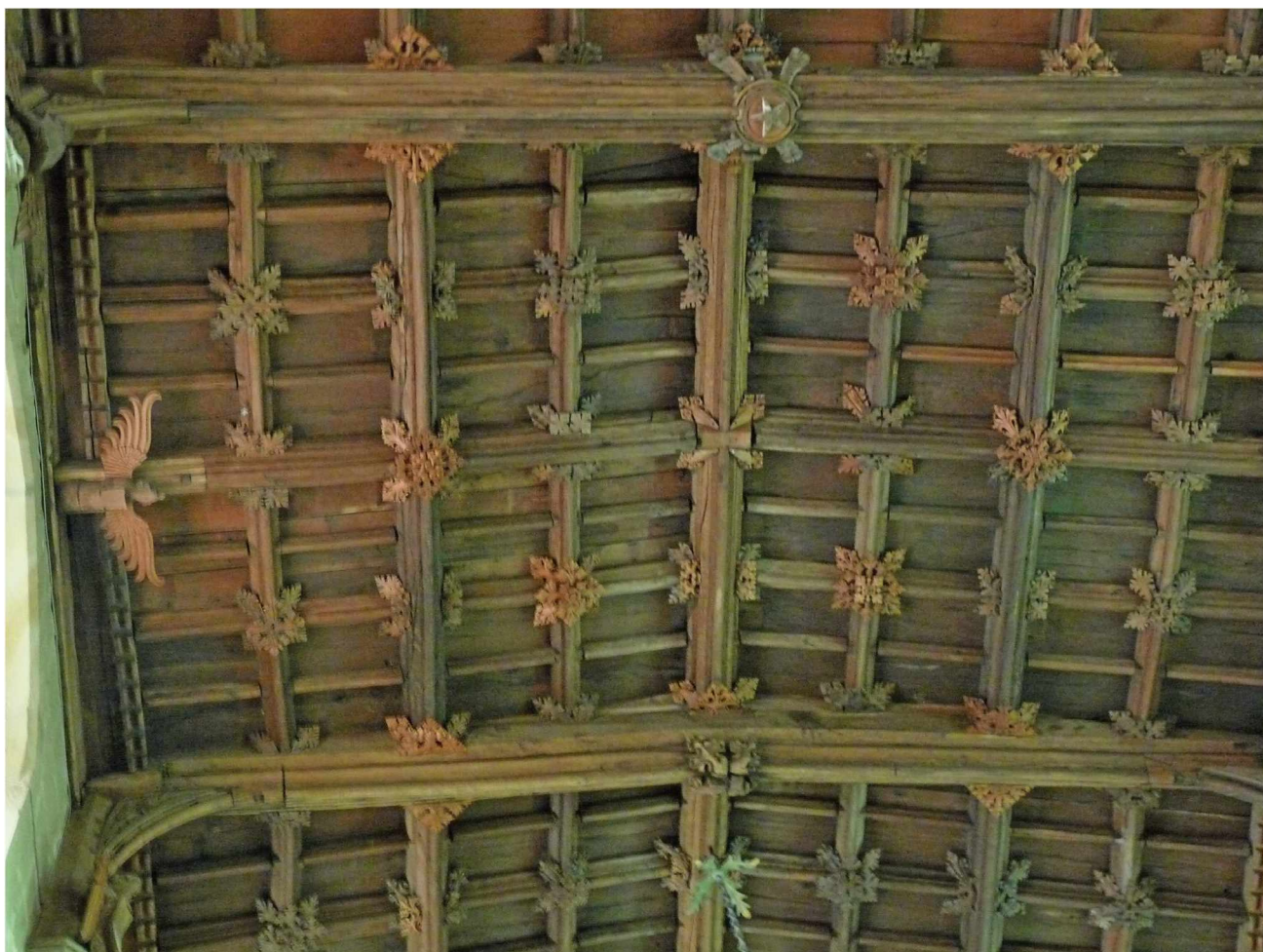


Figure 10
Gresford church, nave roof.

They are not cartwheels, but the wheels of eternity, and angels are often shown standing on these wheels. The angels are cherubim and seraphim. God sits 'enthroned between the cherubim' (Holy Bible, 1 Samuel ch. 4, v. 4; 2 Kings ch. 19, v. 15; Psalm 80 v. 1; Psalm 99 v. 1) and the seraphim stand above His throne (Holy Bible, Isaiah ch. 6, v. 1–2); 'And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory' (Holy Bible, Isaiah ch. 6, v. 3). Their function is to sing the praises of God for all time and the wheels symbolise that eternity. Angels on wheels originate in a vision the prophet Ezekiel saw.

5 Also out of the midst [of a whirlwind] came the likeness of four living creatures ...

15 Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

20 Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. (Holy Bible, Ezekiel ch. 1, v. 5, 15, 20)⁹

I heard also the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels over against them, and a noise of great rushing. (ibid ch. 3, v. 13)

The angels are cherubim (ibid ch. 10, v. 2–9) and the wheels are inseparable from them.

16 And when the cherubim went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them.

19 And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. (ibid ch. 10, v. 16, 19)

The vision suggests that the wheels ran vertically beside the angels, though it would be difficult to produce an engineering drawing of their movement as it is described. Medieval representations show angels on both vertical and horizontal wheels. They are mainly shown in stained glass, where they are painted with silver nitrate and therefore appear golden when the light shines through the glass.

There are examples of angels on vertical wheels in the upper lights of windows in the Trinity chapel north wall of Cirencester parish church, Gloucestershire, from 1517–23. Similar angels can be seen in Sampford



Figure 11
Site 2, Type 1 wheel: 12 spokes.



Figure 12
Site 2, Type 2 wheel: 11 spokes.



Figure 13
Site 2, Type 3 wheel: 10 spokes.

Courtney church, Devon. In Southwold parish church, Suffolk, the entire nine orders of angels are painted on the chancel screen northern panels. The screen dates from about 1500 (Knott, for Southwold). The cherub and seraph are each shown standing on a large vertical wheel with a wide rim (panels 6 and 7). The seraph has red face and hands, symbolising love, and he holds a scroll with the letters 'S.S.S.' for 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus' – Holy, Holy, Holy. The cherub should have blue face and hands, symbolising knowledge, but his colours have not been painted. Wenhaston church, Suffolk, has a medieval Doom painting, on display in the church though not in its original position over the chancel arch (ibid, for Wenhaston). Here Christ is seen sitting on the rainbow judging the souls on the Day of Judgement. In the top left corner, over Christ's right shoulder, is a wheel of eternity, reminding worshippers that His judgement of the way they lived on earth is permanent.

There is a fine, accessible example of a horizontal wheel from c. 1420 in York Minster, in the south choir



Figure 14
Angel standing on a wheel of eternity, York Minster.

aisle window nearest to the crossing (window 18, shown in Figure 14). In the left hand light's lowest panel is an angel standing on a wheel like those on the pottery; it is linked to the lowest right hand panel by the texts (on the left) 'To Thee Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry' and (on the right) 'Thou art the King of Glory O Christ', emphasising the eternal nature of their praise. An example of Humber ware H1 (early to late 13th-century) has decoration of a wheel type (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, fig. 154/901 265). There are others on a Ryc jug dating from the 13th and 14th centuries (ibid fig. 192/1243 323).

Suns

Three other stamps, looking rather like a wheel of eternity, represent the sun. One, with 12 or 15 examples, has a centre boss, which can vary in size, surrounded by fewer spokes with distinctive dots between them (Type 1, Figure 15). In St Michael le Belfry, York, the St Christopher window has a similar design for the sun which lights the scene; it dates from about 1530 (Figure 16). An older medieval angel, a surviving fragment from Cartmel Priory's destroyed glass, is now installed in the porch window and he carries a similar sun (Figure 17).

Another sun symbol has a hexagonal centre with rays that are larger at the outer edge (Type 2, Figure 18). They are probably intended to indicate the wavy rays of the sun, as in the York Minster south transept roof boss which shows the sun and the moon. In the Annunciation shown in the lower left panel of the Minster's north aisle choir window (window 2), the archangel's gown is clasped with a wavy sun buckle. A similar sun is shown in the centre lowest panel of the Acts of Mercy window in All Saints, North Street, York (Figure 19). Each Act of Mercy is shown as a miniature sun, and they surround Christ, the central sun. The Pricke of Conscience window in the same church has another in the topmost



Figure 15
Site 2, Type 1 sun.

Faith made manifest

Figure 16
Sun, St Christopher
window, St Michael
le Belfry, York.

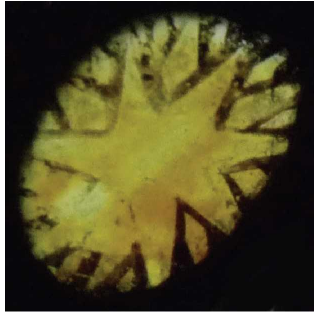


Figure 19
Acts of Mercy window, All Saints, North Street, York.



Figure 17
Angel carrying the sun, Cartmel Priory.



Figure 20
Site 2, Type 3 sun.



Figure 18
Site 2, Type 2 sun.

centre light. In both, the heavens are shown as blue acanthus leaves. There are five Ticknall Cistercian ware examples, plus that from Codnor castle.

The Type 3 sun (Figure 20) has deeper indentations around the centre and dividing the rays. The sun represents God, as the Bible says: 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield' (Holy Bible, Psalm 84 v. 11).

Moons

There are two Ticknall examples of crescent moons; one is shown in Figure 21. We had previously classified them as part of the lace patterns group in *Ticknall Pots and Potters* (Spavold and Brown 2005, 95–6), which was written before the present study of the iconography. The crescent moon is another of Mary's symbols; as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so she reflects the glory of her Son. St Michael's, Spurriergate, York has a window showing a vision from the Book of Revelations. She is Mary, 'a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with

Figure 21
Site 6, crescent moon.



the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars' (Holy Bible, Revelations ch. 12, v. 1). In the window, she stands on a crescent moon. Beverston church in Gloucestershire is dedicated to Mary; the capitals of its Early English pillars are decorated with a ring of crescent moons.¹⁰ Lincoln Cathedral, also dedicated to her, has crescent moons as borders to panels in the Mason's Window in the north transept, which detail incidents in her life.

Stars

In *Ticknall Pots and Potters*, we had classified this group with the lace groups and there seems to be a degree of overlap. There are ten sherds with possible stars, and one is shown in Figure 22. They are very similar to examples seen in stained glass. Figure 23 shows the Pricke of Conscience window where the stars are falling from the heavens, and their rays are characterised by irregularly curled tips to indicate their twinkling light. The tips of the stars on the sherd shown in Figure 22 also curl in different directions.

The stars are perhaps used on the pottery because the prevailing understanding of astronomy, which presented the universe as a series of nested spheres, saw sun, moon and stars as inseparable. In the Ptolemaic system, the earth was believed to be at the centre. The moon and each planet, including the sun, circled the earth in its own sphere, the outer one forming the starry firmament. As the spheres moved, each produced one of the notes of the musical scale, resulting in heavenly harmonies, so 'the morning stars sang together' (Holy Bible, Job ch. 38, v. 7) and 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork' (ibid Psalm 19 v. 1). Next came the crystalline sphere, then the *primum mobile*, which moved the system, then the empyreal heavens where God and the angels resided. This unchanging hierarchy was echoed on earth in the social structure, where everyone had his or her place; the king at the top down to the peasant at the bottom. The idea of order was central to this view and the loss of order resulted in social chaos.

A problem for Ptolemaic astronomy was the comet, which clearly moved across the visible heavens. But comets had to be placed in the Earth's atmosphere, otherwise they would disturb the fixed order of the spheres by shattering the transparent boundaries. They



Figure 22
Site 6, border of stars.



Figure 23
Pricke of Conscience window, day 13 of the last 15 days of the world, All Saints, North Street, York.



Figure 24
Site 6, comet and star.

were seen as harbingers of disaster. Their true nature was not understood until the work of Tycho Brahe following his study of the 1577 comet (Ferguson 2002, 95–98). I suggest that the designs of two Site 6 sherds in fact represent comets; they show a larger head and trailing tail, and they have similar curled twinkling tips along their length. They are shown with swooping disordered tracks, whereas the fixed star is confined to a straight track – its proper sphere (Figure 24). Though we have no way of assessing motives, it is tempting to see the use of this terrible portent as the potter's comment on Henry's attacks on the Church.

Trinitarian

There are seven examples of a group of three plain circles on the body of a cup, separate and not inter-linked or overlapping. They represent the three separate elements of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Ghost. One (Figure 25) has a wheel of eternity next to it; another is made up of three wheels of eternity. Similarly grouped circles are illustrated from Wrenthorpe's Site 2 Cistercian wares (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992, 113–115). Some Wrenthorpe pots had 'large applied pads of white clay in groups of three' on posset pots and Type 4 flared cups (ibid 92, 94).

Where the three circles are touching, so that they make a single trefoil motif, they represent the Trinity itself – three in one. We have one, possibly two, examples of this (Figure 26). Sometimes the Trinity motif looks like a three-petalled flower with a centre, where all parts of the motif touch. There are three Ticknall examples; one (Figure 27) has a wheel of eternity as its centre. There are two fleurs-de-lys patterns on Yellow ware. A Kingston ware jug has both fleurs de lys and Greek crosses impressed on it (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, fig. 187/1186 312). Trinitarian motifs are so ubiquitous in churches and cathedrals that it is easy to overlook their meaning.

Communion motifs

Two stamps have a pattern looking like a waffle, with three vertical and three horizontal lines. One is shown in Figure 28 and is probably a representation of the Host, which in a monastic community was a single large wafer. A piece was broken off for each communicant, in accordance with Jesus' actions at the Last Supper in breaking bread, which represented His body, and giving each disciple a piece.¹¹ The centre of one of the Ticknall Trinity motifs may also carry the same pattern. The same motif appears on a 13th to 14th-century jug made on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border.¹²

Similar grid patterns have been used on pottery from other sources, though as the grid pattern varies from the Ticknall examples I am not sure how far this analogy can be carried. Lady Briscoe noted it as a 'grid' on the Saxon pottery designs.¹³ It appears on the neck



Figure 25
Site 2, the 3 Trinity elements.



Figure 26
Site 2, the Trinity.



Figure 27
Site 2, Trinity with centre wheel motif.



Figure 28
Site 2, the Host.

of a biconical pot from Abingdon, Berkshire, with four vertical lines, and on a hollow-necked pot from Kempston, Bedfordshire which has four vertical and four horizontal lines, among others (Myres 1977, fig. 100, 2036; fig. 101, 384). A Chichester ware vessel (11th to early 12th-century) has a five-by-five grid (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, fig. 98/374 185).

Two motifs are probably ears of wheat, which also represent the Host. It appears on another two fragments of pots, in association with wheels of eternity and traditional impressed leaf patterns. Figure 29 shows an ear incised between two acanthus leaves, a clear reference to Heaven.

Site 2 produced five pieces of pottery decorated with what we were informed were 'raspberry prunts'. They do look rather like raspberries, projecting from the body of the pot. They clearly have an irregular surface to the domed or pointed shape, seen in Figure 30. But I suggest they represent something infinitely more important: they are bunches of grapes. They produced the wine which was changed into the Blood of Christ at the Last Supper, and which still represents Christ in the communion service.

In view of the general themes of the Ticknall decorations, strongly linked to the core figures and tenets of Christian belief, I suggest therefore they stand for Christ Himself. To a religious owner, a cup with a design of grapes would be a constant reminder of Christ's sacrifice. A Scarborough ware vessel from York, dated to the 13th or 14th-centuries, has similar prunts in alternating rows with a pattern I suggest is an ear of wheat (ibid fig. 128/657 229). A Beverley 1 ware vessel (mid to late 12th-century) and a Beverley 2 Orangeware jug (later 13th-century) also carry prunts and ears of wheat (ibid fig. 135/699, fig. 135/702 238).

Eighteen Ticknall fragments show that cups were faceted in imitation of silver chalices, as shown in Figure



Figure 29
Site 2, incised ear of wheat.



Figure 30
Site 2, bunch of grapes.

31. Another two have knobs on the stems as chalices did; the cups with grapes would be a variation on this theme. Some of the cups were made to have covers, much as chalices had. One fine example of a cover has a well-designed and executed acanthus pattern, which was clearly repeated around the cover (Figure 32). In Lincoln cathedral's treasury is a silver chalice dated 1489, the second oldest hallmarked church plate to survive. It has stylised acanthus leaves engraved on the base. Many seventeenth century silver chalices are decorated with acanthus patterns, such as that made in 1617 and shown on the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* from Lanhydrock in December 2008. I suggest that Ticknall's were intended to be imitations of silver chalices.

One pot (Figure 34 below) has an impressed pattern of a fronded leaf with many lines angled to the stem. I suggest that this is the martyr's palm, also the palm of Palm Sunday.



Figure 31
Site 6, faceted ware.



Figure 32
Site 2, acanthus cover.



Figure 33
Site 2, Type 1c flower, centre cross.

Marian designs

There are 17 pottery fragments with a simple four-petalled flower design each with a small circular centre (Type 1a), and a further nine without (Type 1b). I suggest that these are the dog rose, one of Mary's symbols. Three of the centres carry another religious symbol, a Greek cross or a wheel of eternity (Type 1c, Figure 33). Like the acanthus, these flowers are widely found; there are many examples in Lincoln Cathedral as it is dedicated to her. The Mason's Window in the north transept uses them in the grisaille and as borders to individual panels. There is an entire stone screen of them opposite the south side of the east chancel aisle. They are illustrated on the Wrenthorpe pottery too (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992, 113, 116, 134, 135).

A variant on these is the flat segmented flower with a centre, with or without dots on the edges (Type 2, Figure 34, which also has the only palm frond edge from Ticknall to date). There are two examples in the pottery but many can be seen at Lincoln, for example in the borders of the Musicians' Window in the north transept. It forms a motif for the floor tiles made at Repton Priory's medieval tile kiln.¹⁴

There are two five-petalled flowers with centres (Type 3, Figure 35), one of which has another religious symbol, the Type 2 wavy sun, beside it. Mary's dress is patterned with five-petalled flowers in the Coronation of the Virgin scene shown in the lower centre panel of the north aisle choir window (no. 2) at York Minster (Figure 36). There is also a possible Wrenthorpe example (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992, 116). The five petals signify the Five Joys of Mary.

The crescent moon is another Marian symbol, discussed above with the sun and stars.

Other Ticknall designs

The potters also used many familiar designs. There are 21 impressed designs, like birch or beech leaves.



Figure 34
Site 2, Type 2 flower and palm frond edge.

Some are found in association with religious motifs. Six more leaf designs are on applied pads. Ten more flower designs do not seem to have any religious association. Dots, traileed patterns and incised wavy or straight lines are used.

On Site 6 we found fragments with beautifully designed and detailed animals, as well as the fish designs. There were three dogs, a pig (shown with a flower pattern) and a bull.¹⁵ We interpreted them as portrait designs rather than looking for religious symbolism when writing the book, and this is probably still the case. If they are part of the religious interpretations, the dog symbolises fidelity, loyalty and watchfulness, as well as orthodoxy, but the dogs shown are all fashionable lapdogs of the time. The pig symbolises gluttony or sensuality. The ox symbolises patience and strength, and is the personal symbol of St Luke, but the animal on the Site 6 fragment is definitely a bull. This site produced the 28 or so lace designs which matched fragments found on the Austin Friars site in Leicester, and while we had noted the link with secular fashions in the book, it is also possible that the lace was inspired by that seen on priests' vestments. One piece which had an applied pad with a design like a snowflake came from Site 11. Five pieces had a traileed pattern pricked into the body of the pot to give the appearance of the pyramid patterned roof ribs in the aisles of Lincoln Cathedral. Two fragments from Site 2 had a lion mask and a spread eagle.

Although I have reservations about some designs, I suggest that in the main the motifs found on the Cistercian wares are religious in origin. They would have been made this way to sell to the religious houses, but they probably also sold to secular households who wished to express their faith in a visual way during their daily lives. For individuals, holding a cup in their hands would bring their faith as close as possible. Most of the symbols relate to Christ and to the core Christian beliefs. Customers would buy designs according to their inclinations. Even the shape of the Cistercian ware cups reflected religious practice. Cistercian monks were directed to hold the cup in both hands to drink: 'when we drink we use both hands' (Boyle 2006, 234). As the monks drank with their hands crossed, the two small handles would fit the thumbs neatly for this custom. It seems likely that these cups were made specifically for this market. The consecration cross pottery could have been made specifically for the consecration of a church, much as we produce commemorative pottery today.

The abandonment of Cistercian pottery

It has been noted that decorated Cistercian ware disappeared relatively quickly, but that the potters continued to produce high quality undecorated Cistercian wares. They began to make more cheap

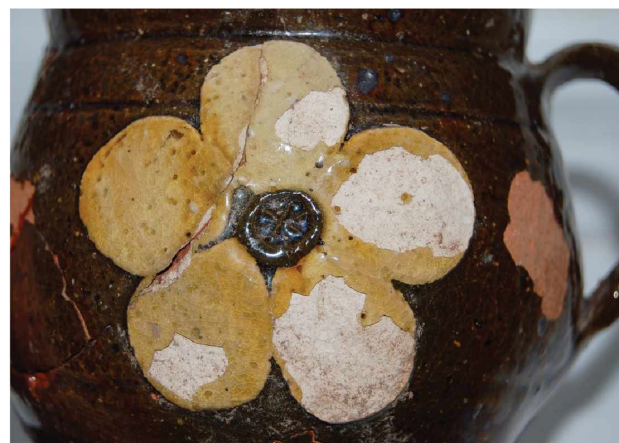


Figure 35
Site 2, Type 3 flower with centre cross.



Figure 36
Coronation of the Virgin, York Minster.

coarse wares for the kitchen, dairy and buttery in Ticknall. Plain Black wares, which had been made alongside the Cistercian wares, continued to be made and indeed became more prolific. On the face of it, this seems a curious reversal of skills. But if we look at the historical background, perhaps the reason can be discerned.¹⁶

Henry VIII had attacked the religious houses from the mid 1530s, but they were not all dissolved at once. They were finally ended in 1540. He set

the Reformation in train, had the Bible translated into English and curbed (but did not outlaw) the cult of images which led to the destruction of many shrines. Although his son Edward was educated by Protestant Reformers, Henry himself never absolutely rejected Catholic tenets and to the end of his reign he enforced the strongly Catholic Six Articles of faith that he promulgated in 1539. He never believed in the Protestant idea of justification by faith alone. He died in 1547, and up to that point his subjects could continue with much of their old faith.

Henry was succeeded by Edward VI when he was only ten. He was strongly influenced by the Protestant Reformers, and his Council actively moved to destroy Catholicism and persecute those who maintained it. In 1547, his government ordered that all images in churches be destroyed or defaced, because they were 'superstitious' and the government claimed that ignorant people worshipped the images rather than what they represented. This meant that crucifixes, statues, roods and local points of devotion, the individual saints' shrines, were removed. The order was repeated in 1550, which suggests that many churches had not obeyed orders. In addition, the churchwardens were ordered to remove any stone altars and replace them with a wooden communion table. In 1548 Parliament outlawed all the old ceremonies like bearing palms into church on Palm Sunday. The Act of Uniformity was passed in 1549, which made it illegal to hear Mass. All the old service books were to be handed to the authorities or destroyed, and Cranmer's first Prayer Book was authorised for use instead. In 1552 the government seized all 'surplus' church equipment, leaving only a bell, a chalice and a surplice in each church. Royal officials travelled round the country enquiring into local religious observance and enforcing the new laws – by death if need be. The revised Prayer Book was instituted. Edward died in 1553.

His sister Mary I succeeded him, and she had retained her Catholic faith. She restored both traditional Catholic worship and obedience to the Pope. In the churches, altars and statues began to appear again, some new but some from their hiding places. She counted Protestantism as heresy, and burnt Protestant leaders at the stake. But she died in 1558, so the Catholic restoration was only short-lived. Elizabeth in turn restored the Protestant faith and Edward's reforms, and both statues and altars were again dismantled. Elizabeth went further, ordering that the chancel screens should be removed and that the communion table should be placed in front of the chancel so that it stood among the congregation, not separated from them.

Conclusion

Against this background, I suggest that the potters mainly stopped making decorated Cistercian ware between 1547 and 1550. When the government was

actively seeking to persecute all those who stuck to the Catholic faith, it would have been highly dangerous to use tableware that proclaimed the range of beliefs that the Cistercian ware illustrated. The use of a cup decorated with grapes, or a covered cup with acanthus patterns, could be a poisoned chalice. Designs of religious symbols were exactly the kind of thing the Protestants saw as worshipping images. It is possible that individuals might have broken their own Cistercian tablewares for safety. This may have been the period when pottery with secular designs like those from Site 6, with naturalistic animals, were made to try to save their lucrative trade. The return of Catholicism under Mary may have seen a brief revival for Cistercian ware, but it was soon over. Whatever had survived of the trade was finally finished by Elizabeth's Protestant accession in 1558.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following for assistance and suggestions in preparing this paper: Dr Anne Boyle, Sue Brown, Sybil Carter, Sylvia Corsham and Brother Martin Horwath. All the pottery photographs were taken by Sue Brown. I am also grateful to the Church authorities for allowing photography in the following churches: York Minster; All Saints, North Street, York; St Michael le Belfry, York; Gresford parish church, Denbighshire and Cartmel Priory, Cumbria.

Endnotes

- 1 See Fairford church in Gloucs., for an almost complete medieval scheme.
- 2 See Pickering church, N. Yorks, for an almost complete scheme. Several Suffolk churches eg Wenhaston still have medieval Dooms.
- 3 See the windows in Kings College Chapel, Cambridge.
- 4 A good modern guide to these ideas is Broughton, L., *Interpreting Lincoln Cathedral: The Medieval Imagery*, (1966) which explains in detail what every aspect of the cathedral building represented.
- 5 Blake describes the use of the trigram on maiolica. Several of the other designs he describes are similar to some of those discussed here and seem likely to fit in with the theory that they have religious rather than decorative significance.
- 6 I am indebted to Sybil Carter for this source.
- 7 Information from Dr. Boyle.
- 8 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11780212/Codnor-Castle-Derbyshire> fig. 9, pl. 4. I suggest that the fragment in pl. 3 is also Ticknall rather than Wrenthorpe, and shows part of an acanthus leaf.
- 9 I am indebted to Sylvia Corsham for this reference.
- 10 I am indebted to Sybil Carter for this reference.
- 11 Information from Brother Martin Horwath, Mount St Bernard's (Cistercian) Abbey.

- 12** Featured on a Time Team dig. I am indebted to Sybil Carter for this reference.
13 Information from Dr Boyle.
14 See the collection of fragments kept at Repton School, Repton, Derbyshire.
15 All these are illustrated in Spavold and Brown.
16 Thanks to Sue Brown for suggestions here.

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Résumé

Les céramiques cisterciennes analysées ici proviennent majoritairement de Ticknall, dans le Derbyshire. D'autres sites sont inclus, le cas échéant. Certains motifs décorant les céramiques cisterciennes ont déjà été notés : le monogramme 'IHS' et la roue de charrette, par exemple. Une analyse plus complète est proposée ici avec regroupement des motifs par thèmes. Chacun est ensuite analysé dans le contexte des croyances et pratiques religieuses de la fin du Moyen Âge. Les motifs sont reliés à des exemples comparables tirés de l'architecture des églises, des vitraux, des peintures murales et d'autres sources contemporaines. Les citations bibliques expliquent les origines de certains motifs. Les motifs traditionnels et originaux de Ticknall sont analysés. La signification des motifs décoratifs dans la fin abrupte de la production cistercienne est considérée et replacée dans son contexte historique. Cette étude fait suite à celle publiée dans Spavold, J. et Brown, S. 2005, *Ticknall Pots and Potters from the Late Fifteenth Century to 1888*.

Zusammenfassung

Die hier besprochenen zisterziensischen Töpferwaren stammen hauptsächlich aus Ticknall, Derbyshire. Falls angebracht, werden auch andere Fundstätten in Betracht gezogen. Es gibt bereits Hinweise auf einige wenige dekorative Motive auf zisterziensischen Töpferwaren. z.B. Prägungen mit 'IHS' und 'Wagenrad'. Hier wird ein umfassenderes Schema vorgeschlagen, in dem die Motive nach Themen gruppiert werden. Jedes dieser Themen wird dann im Zusammenhang spätmittelalterlichen Glaubens und religiöser Praktiken betrachtet. Die Motive werden mit ähnlichen Beispielen aus der Kirchenarchitektur, von Glasfenstern, Wandgemälden und aus anderen zeitgenössischen Quellen in Verbindung gebracht. Bibelzitate erklären den Ursprung einiger Motive. Traditionelle Motive und Originalmotive aus Ticknall werden besprochen. Die Bedeutung der dekorativen Motive beim abrupten Ende der zisterziensischen Produktion wird erörtert und in den Kontext historischer Ereignisse gestellt. Diese Studie ist eine Folgestudie der Forschungsergebnisse, die in Spavold, J. und Brown, S. 2005, *Ticknall Pots and Potters from the Late Fifteenth Century to 1888* veröffentlicht wurden.