

The Significance of the Secular Sculptures in the Lane Chapel, Cullompton

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IN the celebrated Lane chapel at Cullompton, one of the glories of late medieval Devon, there are to be seen—in close proximity to emblems of the Passion—two decorative motifs of an unusual character, motifs which are repeated again and again in the stonework, both in the fan-vaulting of the interior and on the buttresses outside. The visitor, enquiring locally as to their significance, is informed in the guide on sale in the church that one represents ‘John Lane’s sheep shares’; that the other is a ‘merchants’ mark’ which is also ‘alchemists’ mark for tin’; and that John Lane himself was ‘a successful woollen stapler of Cullompton’. The guide further calls attention to the monogram J.L. which appears frequently among the carvings in the chapel, and it prints a transcript of the inscription carved round the outside of the chapel below the dripstone of the windows. This inscription asks the reader to remember with a paternoster and an ave maria the souls of John Lane and Thomasyn his wife; it records that they were founders of the chapel and lie buried there; and it carries the date 1526.¹ Should the visitor pursue the matter further into the pages of the Devon Association *Transactions* there too he will read of ‘John Lane, wool merchant’, of his ‘sheep shears’ and of his ‘merchant mark’, though here the mark is described as ‘a hurried cross made on a wool bag’.² And should he consult *Old Devon Churches* he will similarly learn that ‘the Lane aisle was built by a wool merchant of Cullompton about 1526’ and that ‘the outside of the aisle is ornamented with devices representing the wool trade’.³

Thus, then, whatever the difference of opinion as to the precise interpretation of the so-called ‘merchant mark’, the two designs together have been taken to denote that John Lane was a Merchant of the Staple, a merchant, that is to say, whose business was primarily the export of England’s raw wool to the continent, and that his richly ornamented chapel is a monument to the flourishing state of that trade in his day. A closer examination of the sculptures, however, shows beyond any shadow of doubt that this interpretation is one that cannot be maintained, and that the carvings in fact commemorate not the ancient, time-honoured traffic in raw materials—whether wool or tin—for which England had long been one of Europe’s principal sources of supply, but the very different traffic in manufactured woollens, a traffic which was expanding rapidly in the later middle ages,

¹ Murray T. Foster, *A Brief Description of the Church of St. Andrew Cullompton* (3 ed., 1954). The transcription is in places obscure since contraction marks have been ignored.

² Edwin Chalk, ‘The Church of St. Andrew Cullompton’, *Trans. Devon Assoc.*, XLII (1910), 198 *et seq.*

³ J. Stabb, *Old Devon Churches*, I (1908), 44; cf. ‘ships, woolpacks, etc.’ in *Archaeol. J.*, LXX (1913), 336.

eclipsing altogether that in raw wool. By early Tudor times 90 per cent. or more of England's exports consisted of cloth, most of it shipped by English merchants known as Merchant Adventurers, who were now far more important than the Merchants of the Staple. It is to this traffic that Cullompton church in fact bears witness, as, less explicitly, does many another church in Devon and elsewhere.

The simplest of the two motifs is shown in PL. XIII, A, B. In PL. XIII, A, taken from one of the corbels in the interior from which the fan-vaulting springs (the easternmost corbel on the south side), a winged angel is seen holding a pair of shears. The shears have a stout outer framework into which two broad blades are set—flat-ended blades that are broader at the end than at the base. In PL. XIII, B, taken from a much-weathered external buttress, there is to be seen beneath the representation of a ship a somewhat mutilated roundel in which two pairs of shears, similar to those on the corbel and set at right angles to each other, combine to make a pleasing decorative panel.

Now these shears cannot possibly be intended for sheep shears. To shear a sheep with such broad-ended shears, and with shears set in so heavy a frame, would be a difficult, if not an impossible task. The shears used today to penetrate a sheep's fleece have slender, pointed blades. So too had those used in medieval times. They may be illustrated by a bas-relief from the elaborate thirteenth-century doorway of the cathedral at Trogir (Croatia) where, among many realistic scenes of everyday life, is one depicting the shearing of a sheep against a background of pine trees (PL. XIV, A).⁴ The sheep's legs are tied together, and the shearer has the points of his shears embedded in the fleece; about half of this has already been shorn off and is lying alongside. The shears which the sculptor here illustrated must have been between one and one and a half feet long, judging by the size of the man, and this is very much the length of sheep shears still used today in, for example, the Isle of Skye.⁵

But if heavy, broad-ended shears are wholly unsuited for the shearing of sheep, they can be, and have for centuries been, used for the shearing of cloth—that is to say for cutting or 'cropping' the surface of woollen cloth so as to give it a close, smooth, finish. The actual method of cloth shearing at the very time that John Lane lived is vividly shown in one of the windows in the cathedral of Semur-en-Auxois. This window, the glass of which probably dates from the early sixteenth century,⁶ contains eight lights illustrating eight successive stages in the manufacture of cloth; at the apex of the window is the figure of Bishop Blaise, patron saint of clothworkers, holding his customary emblem of a woolcomb. The seventh light shows shearing (PL. XVI, A). The cloth is seen laid out over a table which has a padded cover and is rather longer than the width of the cloth. The shearman stands behind the table with the shears under his right arm. His left

⁴ Reproduced from Radovan, *Portal Katedrale u Trogiru* (Biblioteka Likovnih Umjetnosti urednik Jela Tadijanovic, Zagreb, 1951); cf. the sheep shears, very similar in size and shape, in B.M. Cott. MS., Aug. A V, f. 372.

⁵ Those used, for example, by Miss Moir of Sconser are 13½ in. long.

⁶ I am indebted for this opinion as to the date to M. Quarré, Conservateur of the Museum at Dijon, who considers that the glass certainly cannot be assigned to the end of the fourteenth century as in de Lasteyrie, *Histoire de la peinture sur verre* (Paris, 1853), I, 289.

hand passes through a loop on one blade of the shears, reaching across to the other blade, which he pulls towards him, helping also with his right hand. The shears have a bow spring and broad, flat-ended blades, broader at the end than at the base. Their size is remarkable. They are much larger and heavier than any sheep shears could be, for, if we compare them with the shearman, they appear to be some 3 feet long or more. It might, indeed, be thought that their size is exaggerated and that to crop close and fine the surface of a piece of cloth with such a cumbrous instrument would be almost impossible. Yet Millin, visiting Semur and a contemporary cloth factory nearby in 1804 when collecting material for his *Voyages dans les départemens du Midi*, remarked that the great shears in the cathedral window 'ont absolument la forme de ceux dont on se sert aujourd'hui pour le même usage'.⁷ Moreover precisely similar shears continued to be used in England until shearing was mechanised early in the nineteenth century, as may be seen from many specimens preserved in local museums, and the shears shown in PL. XIII, D, were used in the present century by a worker who is seen standing by them at Haggart's Mill, Aberfeldy; they weigh 35 lbs.⁸ The type has in fact persisted virtually unchanged from Roman times, as is evident from a bas-relief of cloth-shearing from a tomb at Sens (PL. XIII, c) and from the shears found at Great Chesterford, Essex.⁹

The similarity between the Cullompton shears and those at Semur, Sens and Aberfeldy is apparent; all have a bow spring and flat-ended blades, broader at the end than at the base. A further comparison may be made with the shears in a medieval English representation of cloth-shearing carved in wood on one of the misericords in the parish church of Brampton, Hunts. (PL. XV, c). Here the shears and the posture of the shearman are in all essentials the same as at Semur, except that the shears are under the man's left, not his right, arm, and it is his right hand that passes through the loop in one of the blades. The Brampton illustration of shearing is in one respect more detailed than that of Semur, in that it shows the cloth pegged down on each side to the padded table. The shears here appear to be almost as long as the shearman is tall.¹⁰

In medieval records these immense cloth shears are clearly distinguished from sheep shears, tailors' shears, or barbers' shears, and they are usually described either as 'shearmen's shears' or as 'fullers' shears' (*forpices fullonum*), which becomes 'tuckers' shears' in the west of England and 'walkers' shears' in the north of England, since tucker and walker are variants in these regions for fuller, as are tucking-mill and walkmill (or walking-mill) for fulling-mill (*molendinum fullonum*). The dressing of the cloth followed immediately after the fulling,

⁷ A. L. Millin, *Voyages dans les départemens du Midi de la France* (Paris, 1807-11), I, 197.

⁸ Photograph taken by the author in 1938; Haggart's mill was opened early in the nineteenth century.

⁹ E. Espérandieu, *Recueil général des bas-reliefs, statues, et bustes de la Gaule romaine* (Paris, 1907-18), IV, 12, for the tomb at Sens. The shears from Great Chesterford are in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge. They are nearly 4½ feet long, with 20-inch blades; see *Archaeol. J.*, XIII (1856), 10.

¹⁰ This misericord was for many years in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Cambridge (see G. W. Morris and L. S. Wood, *The Golden Fleece* (1922), p. 101); it has now been restored to Brampton. The carving dates probably from the late fourteenth century; see Francis Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches*, I, *Misericords* (1910), 96, 211, 226. Cf. also the shears in a fifteenth-century French MS., B.M. Add. MS. 18,750, f. 3.

and a first shearing, at least, was commonly given on the premises of the fuller, so that it is not always easy sharply to separate the two processes. Hence the expression 'fullers' shears'.¹¹ The bas-relief of shearing on the Gallo-Roman tomb at Sens, it may be observed, is closely linked with one on the same tomb showing the fulling of the cloth by treading in a trough, and when fulling-mills had been invented they were usually equipped with shears, as was the one built on the bishop of Winchester's estate at Taunton in 1218/19; this was provided at the outset with 'a pair of great shears for shearing cloth' (*j par' magn' forfic' ad pann' tond'*).¹² But the more finely finished cloths were subjected to a number of successive shearings. Sometimes they were re-shorn even after they had reached the customer, just before being made up by the tailor,¹³ and occasionally 'small' instead of 'great' shears had to be used, as for certain striped cloths, where the surface of the stripes varied.¹⁴ Hence a highly specialized craft of 'shearmen' emerged, though one often closely allied either to the fullers or to the tailors.¹⁵

Much skill must have been required to give the 'great' shears a cutting edge of some 18 inches, even enough and sharp enough to crop the surface of a fine cloth, and the grinding that they needed from time to time was a costly and difficult task. A Norwich shearman, John Mayll, once claimed damages for two pairs of 'shermans sherys' which, he alleged, had been ruined through faulty grinding by a Dutchman, William Aron of Haarlem. Aron, however, declared that he had ground them properly, charging 1s. 4d. for the job, but that when Mayll had used them for a long time he had given them to Thomas Elys, 'a weyfaryngman', to grind, and Thomas had ground them so negligently that the shears were of no further use.¹⁶ Mayll's claim of 33s. 4d. for the value of the two pairs corresponds closely to the price of 16s. once alleged to have been paid early in the sixteenth century for 'a payr of greate sherys',¹⁷ though three 'shermans sherys' said to have been stolen during a riot over the possession of a fulling-mill in the Stroud valley in 1486 were somewhat more modestly valued at 30s. for the three,¹⁸ as were fourteen pairs pledged in 1481 for a debt of £8 8s.¹⁹ Valuations for customs duties, which approximate at most to wholesale prices, were very much less than this at the end of the fifteenth century, and by the London Book

¹¹ Several fullers were distrained by *forpices fullonum* at Sudbury in the fourteenth century, e.g. 'Adam le Fullere', P.R.O. Court Rolls, 204/2 (17 Edward III), 204/10 (3 Richard II).

¹² P.R.O., Eccles. 2. 22/159275. The detailed account of the building of this mill, as given in this Pipe Roll of the bishop of Winchester, will appear in *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, CI-CII (1956-7), in an article by Mr. T. J. Hunt of Taunton.

¹³ See M. Postlethwayt, *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (4 ed., 1774), s.v. 'Cloth', and cf. frequent expenses in accounts of royal and noble households for re-shearing cloth, e.g. P.R.O. Wardrobe Accounts 350/18 (1273/4).

¹⁴ P.R.O. Exchequer Accounts Various 401/5.

¹⁵ The surname 'le Scherman' appears in England in the thirteenth century, e.g. in the clothmaking cities of Lincoln (P.R.O. Exch. Accounts Various 505/28) and of Leicester (*Records of the Borough of Leicester*, ed. Mary Bateson (1899, 1901), I, 203, 209).

¹⁶ P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings 16/478. The grinding of shears had become a specialized profession in England by the thirteenth century; see, e.g., William 'le Schergrinder' at Lincoln (P.R.O. Exch. Accounts Various 505/28).

¹⁷ P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings 326/81.

¹⁸ Mary A. Rudd, 'Abstract of Deeds relating to Chalford and Colcombe', *Trans. Bristol & Gloucs. Archaeol. Soc.*, LI (1929), 218.

¹⁹ P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings, 59/33.

of Rates of 1507 the rate fixed for a pair of shearman's shears was 6s. 8d.²⁰ Even so the price of shears seems to have risen considerably since the thirteenth century, for the pair of great shears bought for the bishop of Winchester's Taunton mill in 1218/19 together with two small pairs, cost only 8s. 4d., while at Ipswich in 1271/2 two pairs *forpicum vocat' shermans shears* were valued at 3s. 6d. each, and in the Colchester valuation for tax purposes of 1301 shearman's shears, often mentioned, were assessed at from 2s. to 3s. each.²¹ Similarly in 1351, when property of Hanse merchants in Wiltshire was confiscated, one pair of 'schereman-scheres' in the hands of William le Touker was valued at 2s. and six pairs in the hands of Ralph le Scherer at 12s.²²

Many of the shears used in Devon in the life-time of John Lane must have been of foreign origin, like those which the Hanse merchants seem to have been selling in Wiltshire in 1351, for shears figure frequently in lists of miscellaneous manufactured goods imported at Exeter in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as at London and elsewhere, particularly in ships coming from the marts of the Low Countries.²³

Whatever the precise market price may have been, a pair of shears was clearly a precious possession—one that was often pledged for a debt, taken as a distraint, bequeathed by will, or let out on hire. Not every shearman could afford to possess his own. A Suffolk merchant, William Smyth of Higham, once lent a pair for two days to a shearman who, he afterwards complained, kept them five years and more without paying a penny;²⁴ and amongst the property of St. Catherine's gild at Bridgwater was a pair of 'tuckers' shears' which brought in 2s. a year when let out on hire²⁵—a substantial return on the capital value, even taking into account maintenance costs. The church tower of Old Cleeve, Somerset, owes something to a pair of 'tokers shers' left in 1533 towards its building by John Toker of Dunster, who left another pair, his 'best shers', to the church and vicarage of Dunster.²⁶ And in the West Riding of Yorkshire very many Halifax clothmakers of the time of Lane bequeathed one or more pairs of 'walkers' shears' in their wills, besides shearing tables ('shearboards'), as William Tatersall in 1534 left a pair of walkers' shears 'of the best that I have' to each of his sons, while in 1526 Richard Northend of Northowram left his son a 'sherebord' and three pairs

²⁰ N.S.B. Gras, *The Early English Customs System* (1918), p. 703.

²¹ Ipswich Court Maritime Roll (No. 2) of 1 Edward I (reference kindly given by the late Mr. V. B. Redstone); *Rotuli Parliamentorum* I. 247, 255, 261 (*bis*), 262 (Taxation of Colchester).

²² P.R.O. Exch. Accounts Various 128/10. At Exeter in 1376/7 one 'sherc' taken as pledge in court from a shearman was valued at 4s. (Provost Court Roll 50 Ed. III).

²³ P.R.O. Exchequer K.R. Customs Accounts 201/3, 42/6 (Exeter 1506-7, Dartmouth 1520-1), 72/17, 194/19, 194/22, 194/24, 78/7, 78/9, 79/5 (London 1406-7, 1471-2, 1477-8, 1480-1, 1487-8, 1490-1, 1494-5), etc., etc. Shears imported at Dartmouth in 1520-21 were valued at only 5s. the pair; those at Exeter in 1506-7 at 6s. 8d.

²⁴ *Christ Church Letters*, ed. J. B. Sheppard (Camden Society, n.s. XX, 1877), 48 (circa 1485). At Tiverton in 1499-1500 Richard Maryk was distrained by a pair of 'Toukershers' (Exeter City Library, Court Rolls of Tiverton, No. 238).

²⁵ Corporation of Bridgwater MS. 953 (N.D.).

²⁶ *Wells Wills*, ed. F. W. Weaver (1890), p. 77; cf. *Medieval Wills from Wells*, ed. D. O. Shilton and R. Holworthy (Somerset Record Soc., XL (1925), 213, and Salisbury Corporation Muniments, Domesday Book No. 5, f. 27b.

of shears. Indeed, a pair of shears was the tool of his trade most commonly mentioned in the Halifax clothier's will at this time.²⁷

Surely there can be little doubt that the shears carved in the Lane chapel at Cullompton are cloth shears, not sheep shears, and that they indicate that John Lane was interested not in the trade in raw wool, but in the manufacture of finished cloth? What then is the meaning of the second motif?

The so-called 'merchant mark' appears even more frequently than the shears. In the interior it is found on the north side of the Lane chapel on the first four and on the last of the corbels from which the fan-vaulting springs, and it is also to be seen on the central pendants. Externally it, like the shears, can be detected on the buttresses, though much denuded by weathering.

PLS. xv, B, D, give two representations of this motif from interior corbels; in each it is to be seen wielded by an angel. What is it which the angel holds? One part of the design presents little difficulty. This is the geometrical device like a figure 4 with a cross on the end. Devices of this character were commonly used in the middle ages as merchant marks, sometimes in combination with a merchant's initials. By this means the wares of one merchant could be distinguished from those of another. Placed on a merchant's bales of goods they were regarded as legal evidence of ownership in case of shipwreck or piracy. Innumerable examples of them have survived in written records, on merchants' seals, and in the houses and churches that they built—particularly on memorial brasses, where they appear as a substitute for coats of arms; they may even be found on the pictures that merchants commissioned.²⁸ They were also used as cloth marks, to distinguish not merely the cloth of different makers but different varieties of cloth made by the same manufacturer. Thus a Trowbridge clothman bequeathed to one of his married daughters a 'packe of clothes of the Crosse Marke'.²⁹ Cloth-marks of makers with a high reputation naturally had a considerable value. Often they were bequeathed by will; sometimes they were counterfeited; and one clothier, when hard up, sold his for £20.³⁰ The mark in the Lane chapel may, then, be either an ordinary merchant mark for use on merchandise of any kind, or, more specifically, a cloth mark.

What of the remainder of the so-called 'merchant mark' device? It consists of a cross composed of an upright passing through a crosspiece which curves slightly upwards on each side; above the crosspiece, set in neat rows diminishing in length towards the point of the upright, are rounded, knobbly objects. In PL. xv, D the crosspiece seems to be made of two parallel bars fixed transversely across the upright, and in PL. xv, B a twisted cord appears to encircle the knobbly

²⁷ *Halifax Wills*, ed. J. W. Clay and E. W. Crossley (1904-6), I (1389-1544), 29, 35, 69, 72, 75, 92. For shears taken as a distraint see, for example, Exeter City Library, Court Rolls of Tiverton No. 238 (1499-1500).

²⁸ See F. J. Schechter, *The Historical Foundations of the Law relating to Trade Marks* (New York, 1925); *Proc. Clifton Antiquarian Club*, VII, pls. xiii-xxiii, shows many Bristol merchant marks from various sources. In the Sala della Pace of the Palazzo Pubblico at Siena, in the allegorical fresco representing Good Government, merchant marks are to be seen stamped on bales of goods carried by pack-animals.

²⁹ Somerset House, P.C.C. 19 Spert (Will of Thomas Bayley of Trowbridge, 'clothman', 1543).

³⁰ P.R.O. Early Chancery Proceedings 115/51; see G. D. Ramsay, *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry* (1943), p. 51.

objects and to be fastened to the crosspiece at either end. It is this device which has presented so puzzling a problem to antiquarians and archaeologists. Is it an 'alchemists' mark for tin', or a 'bag of wool', or 'a basket or receptacle filled with fleeces of wool'?³¹

A solution of the problem is at once suggested by a glance at another light in the clothworkers' window at Semur, close to that depicting cloth-shearing (PL. XVI, B). Here is to be seen a worker wielding an implement with an upright handle and crosspiece, above which are set neat rows of rounded objects, the rows diminishing in length towards the point of the upright. The similarity between this object and the Cullompton device is at once apparent, though the crosspiece is here straight, not curved; the rounded objects are more regular in form, slightly more elongated, and more pointed at the top; and the rows are divided by a second crosspiece. Now this light illustrates the process that preceded shearing—that of raising the nap on the cloth. Raising was effected by stretching the cloth over a bar or 'perch' and passing over its surface a wooden frame set with rows of equal-sized teasel heads, so that the teasels should draw out the fibres and thus rough up the surface and raise the nap before it was shorn close and even by the shears. Before each shearing the cloth was raised again. It was important that the cloth should be damp during this operation, or the teasels might scratch away the fibres altogether, robbing the face of its proper amount of wool and leaving a quantity of waste flock.³² For this reason alone a first raising and shearing, at least, was usually carried out while the cloth was still in the fuller's hands and damp from the fulling; should the cloth have been allowed to dry it had to be sprinkled with water from time to time. Many medieval regulations refer to the necessity for keeping the cloth moist, as does one of the very earliest known technical ordinances for the English cloth industry, that by which at Leicester in 1260 the fullers were made to swear that they would not use the 'bachandle' on dry cloth.³³ Clearly 'bachandle' here refers to the hand-frame set with teasels, which was often simply termed a 'handle' in England, while in Flanders it was called a 'cross' (*croix* or *cruce*). Handles, like shearman's shears, were often bequeathed by will, as when a Frome clothworker left 'my shears, my handles, and my shearboard'.³⁴ And they too were bought ready-made from the continent, especially towards the close of the middle ages, when the growing demand for clothmaking implements of all kinds was met largely by craftsmen in old-established textile centres abroad which were then fast declining in face of English competition. Thus a ship entering the port of London from the Low Countries in

³¹ V. *supra*, p. 104; W. H. H. Rogers, 'Two Tudor Merchants of the Staple of Tiverton and Cullompton, Devon', *Devon Notes and Queries*, II (1902-3), 54.

³² J. and J. C. Schofield, *The Finishing of Wool Goods* (1935), pp. 583 et seq.; Postlethwayt, *l.c.* in note 13.

³³ Bateson, *op. cit.* in note 15, I, 89: '*quod non ponent Bachandle super siccum pannum*'. The editor prints *Bathandle*, adding a note to the effect that Bac not Bat is clearly written, but that the reading must be *Bat*, i.e. a mallet for beating the cloth. The word has not been met with elsewhere than in the Leicester records, but taken in conjunction with the ordinance of 1343 (see below) and with the frequent references to 'handles' it seems clear that the instrument alluded to is not that for pounding cloth in the fulling stocks, but that for raising the nap.

³⁴ Shilton and Holworthy, *op. cit.* in note 26, p. 213.

1480/81 brought, in addition to shearman's shears, 900 'handles pro fuller', together with 2,500 teasels to put into them.³⁵

From an early date teasels were cultivated as a cash crop on a considerable scale in England and abroad. That there was an active trade in them in this country in the late thirteenth century may be seen from their frequent mention in lists of tolls and profits from tolls, as at Nottingham, Stamford, Ipswich, Bristol, and many other places.³⁶ At Taunton teasels as well as shearman's shears were bought for the fulling-mill in the first year it was operated (1218-19),³⁷ and in the model account drawn up in the mid-thirteenth century for the use of the Cistercian abbey at Beaulieu there is entered under the 'costs of the fulling-mill' 10d. for the cutting of teasels.³⁸ Perhaps Beaulieu grew its own teasels, since nothing is entered for their purchase. Teasels were among the agricultural products on which tithes were paid in England,³⁹ and that such tithes were often profitable is shown by disputes about them. Thus in 1221 it was ordained by the bishop of Lincoln that at High Wycombe 'the tethe of tesyls that longyn to the office of fuller' should go not to the vicar but to Godstow Nunnery.⁴⁰ At Easton, near Winchester, in 1317, the vicar complained that the rector was depriving him of the tithes of teasels that his predecessors had for a long time enjoyed.⁴¹ By that time demand was evidently exceeding supply, and in 1326, on the ground that Flemings and others were buying up all the 'thistles which are commonly called Teasels' (*cardones qui Tasles vulgariter nuncupantur*), Edward II was persuaded to forbid their export, lest English clothmakers should run short.⁴² Indeed teasels were probably already being imported into England,⁴³ and their import increased as England's industry expanded, until by the end of the middle ages vast quantities, mainly from the Low Countries, were being landed at ports all round the coasts.⁴⁴ It was a thoughtful tucker of Bristol who, at a time of rising prices in the mid-sixteenth century, bequeathed 20s. to be spent on teasels for the relief of poor tuckers, so that they need not pay for a 'staff' of teasels but 1d. more than they cost.⁴⁵

³⁵ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts 194/24.

³⁶ P.R.O. Patent Roll 3 Edward I, m. 22 ('*caretta carcata cardonibus ffulon*'); *ibid.*, 51 Henry III, m. 2 ('*caretta cardonum ad preparationem pannorum*'); *Black Book of the Admiralty*, ed. Travers Twiss (Rolls Series), II, p. 186 ('cardoun'); P.R.O. Ministers Accounts 851/6 m. 11. 'Cardones', i.e. thistles, is the customary Latin expression for teasels, though sometimes, as above, they are more precisely described to distinguish them from ordinary thistles. Teasels are sometimes mentioned as the property of fullers, e.g. in the Colchester valuation of 1301, *supra*, note 21.

³⁷ *V. supra*, note 12.

³⁸ B.M. Add. MS. 48,978 f.42 ('*in cardonibus secand' xd.*').

³⁹ E.g. at Long Melford and Glemsford; see *Nonarum Inquisitiones* (1807), 103, 104.

⁴⁰ *The English Register of Godstow Nunnery*, ed. Andrew Clark (Early English Text Society, 1905-11), II, 648. This is a translation, made circa 1450, of the Latin cartulary compiled in 1404.

⁴¹ *Registrum Henrici Woodlock, Ep. Winton*, ed. A. W. Goodman (Canterbury & York Society, XLIII-XLIV, 1940-41), I, 206 ('*decimis cardonum*').

⁴² W. Cunningham, *Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (5 ed., 1927), p. 656, quoting Close Rolls 19 Ed. II m. 5d.

⁴³ The Exeter local customs rolls (Exeter City Muniments, Customs Roll 5-6 Edward III) record the import of 18,000 teasels in a boat with woad and weld in 1331-2. That this was as yet a somewhat unfamiliar import is suggested by the fact that the clerk at first wrote '*carbon*' instead of '*cardon*', altering it later.

⁴⁴ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts *passim*, e.g. 78/9 (London 1490/91).

⁴⁵ F. F. Fox, *Some Account of the Guild of Weavers* (1889), p. 94. Bunches of teasels are still today tied together on a stick or staff and marketed in this form, see e.g. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Aug. 1957.

Attempts were made from time to time to find substitutes for the teasel, especially when there was a shortage. At Leicester, not very long after Edward II's ordinance, complaints were heard that iron instruments were being used. These no doubt replaced the natural teasel by wire hooks, so that the implement used would be very similar to, if not identical with, the 'cards' used for carding wool. Such attempts were resisted. At Leicester an ordinance was passed (1343) forbidding fullers to use any 'iron instrument' (*instrumentum ferri*) 'that is to say bachandle, cardes, or skrattes',⁴⁶ and in 1463/4 an Act of Parliament decreed that every fuller should use 'Taysels and no Cards'.⁴⁷ Similarly at Coventry it was decreed in 1514 that no cards, 'roughht' teasels or anything else which might hurt the cloth were to be used, but only 'dobyys' or smooth teasels.⁴⁸

The superiority of the natural teasel over any substitute is still today asserted in English factories making the finest quality cloths, and there teasels may still be seen set in rows in small frames not unlike those of the middle ages, though now these are fastened to mechanical rollers, over which the cloth is passed.⁴⁹ For the teasel, it is alleged, has more spring and elasticity than any metal hook and is therefore less liable to damage the delicate fibres of the wool. Moreover it is also greatly superior in its ability to draw out not bunches of fibres, but single ones, and in its holding power. The dried flower-head forms an almost perfect cylinder covered by closely set bristles, each of which has a tiny hook at the end (PL. XV, A); this hook will grasp a single fibre and draw it out until one end is free, when it releases its hold.⁵⁰

It is therefore not surprising that medieval representations of teasels and the teasel-frame should be found in England. Some of the finest are on the carved wooden bench-ends of Devon and Somerset. At East Budleigh can be seen the frame set with teasels (PL. XVI, C) and, close by, the shearman's shears. At Spaxton (PL. XVI, D) the frame without the teasels appears among a miscellaneous collection of clothmaking tools, including shears; here the clothmaker himself is shown completing the work by brushing, or 'laying', the nap after shearing—a process which is also depicted in the last light of the clothmakers' window at Semur. Sometimes the teasel-frame appears on the memorial monuments of those concerned with cloth-making, in place of armorial bearings, as, for instance, on the magnificent brass of John Jay in St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol; here two of the shields at the four corners display the teasel-frame, and two Jay's merchant mark. The teasel itself was also a happy decorative motif. Over a fireplace in a medieval house at Loose (Kent), where much cloth was made, there may still be seen a

⁴⁶ Bateson, *op. cit.* in note 15, II, 50.

⁴⁷ Stat. 4 Ed. IV.

⁴⁸ *The Coventry Leet Book*, ed. M. Dormer Harris (Early English Text Society, 1907-13), p. 639.

⁴⁹ Already in the fifteenth century 'gig-mills', in which the teasel-frames were set upon rollers worked by water power, were known in England, e.g. at Castlecombe. But opposition to the gig-mill was as vigorous as had once been opposition to the fulling-mill, and their use never became widespread until the early nineteenth century.

⁵⁰ Schofield, *op. cit.* in note 32, pp. 586 *et seq.*; *A Manual of Cloth Finishing*, by the Editor of 'The Dyer and Calico Printer' (1911), pp. 55, 236. The wild teasel (*Dipsacus sylvestris*), unlike the fuller's teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), has no such hooks (see Anne Pratt, *Flowering Plants*, III, 167). I am much beholden to Mr. J. L. Jones of Bristol for permitting me to publish his photograph of teasel heads (PL. XV, A) and to the editor of *Country Life* for the loan of the block.

fresco of teasels, perhaps put there by some wealthy clothier. The Weavers, Tuckers, and Shearmen of Exeter, incorporated in 1479-80, placed a teasel upon their coat of arms with other instruments of their craft,⁵¹ and later on the teasel was promoted to a place of honour on coats of arms of boroughs which had grown rich by cloth-making, like Kendal and Ashburton. On the continent, too, other representations of the teasel-frame may be found, as for instance at Rouen, on one of the misericords in the cathedral, where the actual process of raising is shown (PL. XIV, B); close by, on another misericord, two craftsmen are shown working with pincers to repair defects and remove extraneous particles (PL. XIV, C).

If in his representation of the teasel heads the Cullompton sculptor was less successful than the Semur glazier, in two respects his carvings reveal a precision and detail unmatched elsewhere. The corbel shown in PL. XV, D, displays not only the *two* parallel crosspieces attached to the upright but also the teasel stalks fixed in between them, tightly held; while that in PL. XV, B shows the twisted cord which encircles the teasel heads, fastened to the ends of the cross bars. Both of these are familiar features of the hand frames used in more modern times.⁵²

The clothworkers' window at Semur, together with these other representations of the teasel-frame in England, surely establishes beyond any shadow of doubt the meaning of the most puzzling of the Cullompton motifs, and confirms the conclusion drawn from the simpler of the two motifs that John Lane must have been concerned with the production of cloth, in particular with the finishing processes. Moreover the merchant—or cloth—mark appended to the teasel-frame implies that he was no mere fuller or shearman but a merchant *entrepreneur*, a 'clothman' marketing under his own name the cloth that he himself was responsible for manufacturing. Further, the ships carved on the external buttresses suggest that he was concerned not merely with the manufacture and sale of cloth but with its export overseas.

A very different picture in fact emerges from that of the 'wool merchant' or 'successful woollen stapler' of Cullompton. Certainly John Lane was a successful man, but the business in which he made his wealth was not that of the old-established traffic in raw wool shipped from England to the Staple port of Calais. Nor was he much interested in tin. Lane was a 'clothier' or 'clothman', organizing the production of cloth, putting wool out, perhaps, for spinning and weaving in and around Cullompton, or buying raw webs from the countryside, probably finishing the cloth in his own workshops, and exporting it himself to foreign lands.

Lest any reader should doubt this interpretation of the Cullompton sculptures, based primarily on a comparative study of other medieval works of art, it may be well to set down shortly some corroborative evidence of Lane's business activities from written records.

⁵¹ The actual grant of arms dates only from 1564, but the arms themselves probably existed earlier; J. Bowring, 'Ancient Exeter and its Trade', *Trans. Devon Assoc.*, V, 91. Richard Izacke, *Antiquities of the City of Exeter* (1677), p. 60, gives an illustration of this coat of arms; B. F. Creswell, *Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen of Exeter* (1930), pp. 7, 38.

⁵² *Manual of Cloth Finishing*, l.c. in note 50, and Schofield, *op. cit.* in note 32, pp. 584-5. Hand-frames are now almost obsolete, but they are still sometimes used in treating patterns and short lengths. There is a very clear drawing of the Cullompton teasel-frame, showing the cord, in *Devon Notes and Queries*, II, *ut supra* in note 31, p. 54.

Lane's tombstone in Cullompton church informs us that he died on 15 February 1529.⁵³ Twelve days before his death, Lane made his will.⁵⁴ He bequeathed 10 woollen cloths to each of three 'servants' who were specified by name—Emma, John Pewe and Alexander Trott; 5 woollen cloths apiece to all such 'household servants' as were in his service at the time of his death; and to each child of Thomas Waryn his son-in-law one woollen cloth or 10s. in money. His only other specific bequests, apart from those concerning lands and buildings, were certain small cash legacies to Exeter cathedral and to Cullompton church and the brotherhood of St. John the Evangelist there, and 6s. 8d. each to one hundred parish churches 'next about Cullompton', so that they should put his name 'on their bederolls' and pray for him 'in their pulpits'.⁵⁵ The residue of his estate he left to his wife Thomasyn. Thus John Lane's goods and chattels at the time of his death, apart from such as may have gone to his wife, seem to have consisted principally of cloth, and there must have been at least 50 standard-size pieces⁵⁶ in stock on the premises. Three servants, other than household servants, were in his employment, and perhaps many country folk in those hundred villages round about Cullompton were also working for him, supplying 'raw' cloth for him to finish and export, or spinning and weaving for him for piece-work wages. That cloth was the chief marketable commodity to be found on his premises is also indicated by the fact that two Cullompton men, a tanner and a fuller, were pardoned shortly after his death for having broken into his house at Cullompton in 1526 and stolen two 'kerseys'.⁵⁷

That John Lane was an exporter, as well as a manufacturer, of cloth, as might be suspected from the ships among the carvings on the outside of his chapel, can be abundantly proved. Though some of his cloth may have been sent up to London for sale, as was the cloth of many Devon clothiers at that time, some at least he shipped in his own name locally over a period of 23 years or so, as may be seen from the detailed annual accounts sent up by the Exeter customs collectors to the royal exchequer; ten of these survive intact for the first thirty years of the sixteenth century. Lane's first recorded shipments of cloth were in October 1506 and his last on Christmas Eve 1528, just before his death.⁵⁸ In each extant account for the years in between shipments of cloth by Lane appear. They occur from two to six times a year and amount to up to 78 cloths a year, with an average of 43 cloths a year;⁵⁹ most of them are on Devon ships, chiefly of Topsham.

As an exporter of wool, on the other hand, Lane never once appears, and indeed no wool at all was shipped from Exeter during this period. As an exporter

⁵³ See *Devon Notes and Queries*, II, W. H. H. Rogers, *op. cit.* in note 31, p. 52. The date of death is sometimes given according to the old style, i.e. as 1528, e.g. in J. Stabb, *Old Devon Churches* (1908), I, 44.

⁵⁴ Somerset House, P.C.C. 4 Jankyn (3 Feb. 1529); see W. H. H. Rogers, *op. cit.* in note 31, p. 55.

⁵⁵ These 100 parishes cover an area, roughly, within a radius of 13 miles from Cullompton, reaching beyond Exeter and Crediton, and into Somerset and Dorset.

⁵⁶ The cloths are described in Lane's will as 'dozens of woollen cloth', i.e. lengths of only 12 yards instead of 24 yards as in the statutory 'cloth of assise' in which cloth was reckoned for Customs purposes.

⁵⁷ *Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII*, IV, ii, 5510 (16).

⁵⁸ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts 201/3, 42/1, 201/4, 201/5, 42/2, 42/3, 201/6, 42/4, 42/6, 42/7, 42/8, 42/9, 42/10, 42/11.

⁵⁹ I.e. reckoned in terms of cloths of assise, *supra*, note 56.

of tin he appears in two years only—in 1520-21, when he shipped one small consignment worth £4, and in 1523-24, when he shipped three consignments worth £37; it is clear therefore that he took scarcely any part in what was then a flourishing trade, for large quantities of Devon and Cornwall tin were leaving the port of Exeter at this time. The records thus confirm that Lane was not a wool merchant—a Merchant of the Staple, but that he was engaged, on the contrary, in the export of manufactured cloth.

If the tale of Lane's exports is monotonous, so, too, is that of his imports. Almost invariably these consist of consignments of linen cloth called crescloth; this was made in Brittany and Lane shipped it often on Breton vessels, many of which were laden almost wholly with crescloth. Now, important as was linen among the wares dealt in at Exeter, much business was done there in foreign goods other than this, notably in wine, iron, salt, honey, and dyestuffs such as woad. John Greneway of Tiverton, whose chapel is thought to have inspired Lane to emulate it, handled all these commodities and others too, in addition to crescloth, importing large quantities of wine and woad, and he possessed ships of his own which came into Dartmouth frequently with fish, salt and other goods. He also exported large quantities of tin and hides, as well as cloth.⁶⁰ But only in four of the nine years for which record of Lane's trade survives is there mention of his importing anything else than crescloth. Even in these four years his other imports are limited to five consignments of iron, probably from northern Spain; two of wine; two of oil, soap, and fruit, probably from southern Spain; and two of canvas and miscellaneous wares, probably from Normandy. And the last we hear of his trading transactions is that several consignments of crescloth arrived at Exeter shortly after his death, entered in the name of his widow Thomasyn.

Though Lane may have sold some of his cloth to merchants of London, so far as we can tell he never exported cloth from London himself. Greneway, on the other hand, while remaining a Tiverton man to the day of his death,⁶¹ with his own ships in and out of Devon ports,⁶² had quite a flourishing branch of his business in the capital. Through membership of the Drapers' Company, of which he became a master,⁶³ he took up the citizenship of London, where was the focal point for trade between England and the great international marts of the Low Countries, then principal outlet for England's cloth.⁶⁴ In the port of London he laded cloth, white and coloured, on ships sailing for these marts,⁶⁵ and, like other citizens engaged in this trade, he joined, as he was in duty bound to do, the Merchant Adventurers' Company.⁶⁶ Entry fees and membership subscriptions to

⁶⁰ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts, *ut supra*, note 58.

⁶¹ He is described as John Greneway 'of Tiverton' in his will (Somerset House, P.C.C. 2 Thower), and all his charitable legacies concern Exeter, Tiverton or Plymouth.

⁶² P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts 41/25, 42/1, 42/4, 42/6, 42/8, 42/10, 201/3, 201/4, 201/6, etc.

⁶³ A. H. Johnson, *History of the Drapers' Company* (1914-22), II, 265, 269. Greneway is described as *civis London'* in the Exeter Customs Account for 1502-3 (Exch, K.R. Customs Accounts 41/25).

⁶⁴ E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (1954), pp. xxvi *et seq.*

⁶⁵ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts 80/4, 80/5, 82/9, 82/3.

⁶⁶ E. M. Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 64, pp. 159 *et seq.* The arms of the Merchant Adventurers' Company are on Greneway's memorial brass at Tiverton, as are also those of the Drapers' Company, and both appear also on the carvings in his chapel.

two companies, besides special contributions on such occasions as Cabot's Newfoundland expedition of 1521 or the raising of a vast loan for Henry VIII in 1522,⁶⁷ made London citizenship no sinecure, even for one who was called to no high office there, but Greneway must have found its rewards worth while; he died (1529) leaving almost £900 in cash legacies alone,⁶⁸ a much wealthier man than John Lane can ever have been.

Lane's interests, in fact, were much narrower and more provincial than those of Greneway. He was occupied almost entirely, in so far as foreign trade was concerned, with the export of manufactured woollens from Exeter and with the import of Breton linen, and his dealings must have been almost exclusively with France and the Iberian peninsula. If Greneway was primarily a foreign merchant, handling many commodities, dealing with many lands, and lading cloth not only in Devon ports but at London, Lane was first and foremost a clothman, manufacturing cloth but, like many another clothman, shipping it abroad himself at his own local port of Exeter.

The contrast between the two is vividly reflected in the carvings of the splendid chapels which each added to his parish church. Whereas John Greneway's depict a great variety of ships (some, perhaps, representing faithfully or otherwise those which he himself owned), and also anchors, barrels, fish, a merchant mark, a monogram, the arms of the Drapers' Company and of the Merchant Adventurers, John Lane's show, it is true, one or two ships and anchors, a merchant mark and a monogram, but no barrels, fish, or coats of arms of London livery companies;⁶⁹ instead they abound in cloth shears and teasel-frames, symbols of the cloth finisher's art.

And what emblems could better commemorate the clothman's business? The pack of cloth does not lend itself so readily to artistic treatment as does the sack of wool or the barrel of wine. Nor does the dye vat, still less the fulling-mill. The loom is too complex, though a single fragment of it may be displayed, as is the shuttle in the Weavers' chapel at Bristol⁷⁰ and the reed on the Spaxton panel (PL. XVI, D). Neither the pincers with which imperfections were removed, nor the brush with which the nap was laid, are very distinctive, though both appear in late medieval carvings (PLS. XIV, C; XVI, D).⁷¹ It is the shears and the teasel-frame which provide the most satisfactory, the most easily represented, and the most recognizable badge of the clothman's business, and the finest, but by no means the only, example of their use for this purpose in English medieval sculpture is to be found at Cullompton. Both must still have been familiar objects when Polwhele wrote his history of Devon, published in 1806, for only in his lifetime were they coming to be superseded by machinery. Recognizing immediately their implications, as more modern historians could scarcely be expected to do, he wrote of

⁶⁷ A. H. Johnson, *l.c.* in note 63.

⁶⁸ Somerset House, P.C.C. 3 Thower; cf. Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 108-10.

⁶⁹ Lane's brass in Cullompton church has disappeared; only the matrix remains, and it is now impossible to tell what was on the shields.

⁷⁰ In the glass of the Temple church, now destroyed; see *Proc. Clifton Antiquarian Club*, VI (1906), 62.

⁷¹ *V. supra*, p. 112.

John Lane as 'a prosperous clothier', and described how his chapel was filled with 'proper emblems of the cloathing trade and shipping—the clothiers at that time exporting their own manufacture'.⁷²

Appearing at Cullompton when they do, these carvings commemorate not merely one isolated clothman, but also the remarkable expansion of the whole Devon cloth industry in the early sixteenth century, and the even more remarkable growth in the trade of the port of Exeter, which in the lifetime of Lane enjoyed an unprecedented boom, and a boom which is in striking contrast to the depression suffered by many a provincial port at that time, as the ever-expanding cloth trade concentrated more and more upon London.

⁷² Richard Polwhele, *Devonshire*, III (1806), 254-5. I am indebted to Miss J. Youings for calling my attention to this passage. Very occasionally later writers have followed Polwhele in describing Lane as a 'clothier' (see e.g. *Archaeol. J.*, LXX (1913), 536), while giving no clear explanation, or even an erroneous one, of the symbols. The description of the sculptures in Polwhele's book is given in a footnote quotation from a letter to the late-eighteenth-century antiquary, William Chapple.