A CLOSING RING FROM CAREBY, KESTEVEN, LINCS.

(FIG. 68; PL. XV, B)

Medieval door furniture is generally limited to the most ornate hinges and a handful of bronze sanctuary knockers. The more prosaic items seldom survived the thoroughness of Victorian restoration. It is this comparative rarity that makes the iron door handle from Careby so interesting.

Careby is a small village 14 miles SE. of Grantham and 6 miles N. of Stamford. The church of St Stephen stands in a secluded churchyard beside the R. Glen. The structure has a 12th-century nave and chancel, an early 13th-century W. tower and late 13th-century aisles. A plain free-standing late Saxon cross has also been recorded.[125] The door handle was attached to the S. door, which probably dates from the late 13th-century, contemporary with the aisle, or slightly later — before the porch was added. The door surface has been hollowed to receive the back plate of the handle. A more accurate description is that it is a closing ring; it was secured to the door by a centrally located pin through a back plate. The plate shows no provision for, or evidence of, excessive wear, so the closing ring was not intended to be a knocker. All three portions — ring, pin and plate — are decorated.

DESCRIPTION

The oval ring is of flat section, plain on its underside but decorated with an etched pattern of triangles on the upper face. The inner margin of the design is indicated by a continuous line close to the edge of the ring. The outer margin has a similar line set back 6 mm. from the edge which has a continuous crenellated surface. At the centre of the lower side the pattern of triangles is broken by a square panel with four vertical lines: this seems to indicate a face with the eyes and nostrils punched and the mouth incised. However the deep vertical lines are not adequately explained.

Applied to the surface of the ring either side of the pin are the figures of dragons. Each is attached to the ring by a rivet at the centre of the body. A good attempt has been made to give these dragons a life-like form. Their necks are outstretched, with the ridges and scales well marked; the ears are raised and slightly hollowed, the snouts narrow with flared nostrils and an open mouth. Either side of the body are flattened wings with the web ridges marked. The tails have slight ridges and prominent punched decoration. Both dragons are similar. The left-hand dragon has a curving neck and a slightly curled tail; the right-hand dragon has a straight neck and a tightly curled tail. These dragons are superimposed upon the design of triangles.

The pin is formed of a single piece of iron hammered round the ring which swivels freely in the loop. The loop is rectangular where it holds the ring and is decorated with a face.[126] The almond-shaped eyes, prominent nose, deep mouth and bearded chin can easily be seen. The cheeks are slightly bulbous, but there is no evidence of ears, hair or head-dress. That part of the pin that was within the thickness of the door is tapered; it was secured on the inner surface of the door by a modern washer and then bent over.

The back plate is circular, slightly convex with a raised rim (5 mm. high), indented just like the outer edge of the closing ring. The rim is separately wrought and shows irregular wear but not at the position that the ring now touches. The plate is decorated with three schematic windows and three flowers. The 'windows' are four punched rectangles each surmounted by a circle; the 'flowers' are each of one rectangle with

[125] N. Pevsner and J. Harris, *Buildings of England, Lincolnshire* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 489; L. A. S. Butler, *Trans. Lincs. Archit. & Archaeol. Soc.*, x, ii (1964), 113.

[126] H. Walker, 'Sanctuary knocker at Careby', *Lincolnshire Mag.*, I (1932–4). "In the centre (of the knocker) appears the head of St Stephen who is asleep, and the two lizards are whispering into his ears, warning him that the devil is about to attack him'.' The identification with St Stephen is unlikely. The attribution of this opinion to J. C. Cox (in Pevsner and Harris, op. cit. in note 125) is incorrect. The dating to the 14th century is based more on the style of the door than on the style of the ironwork.

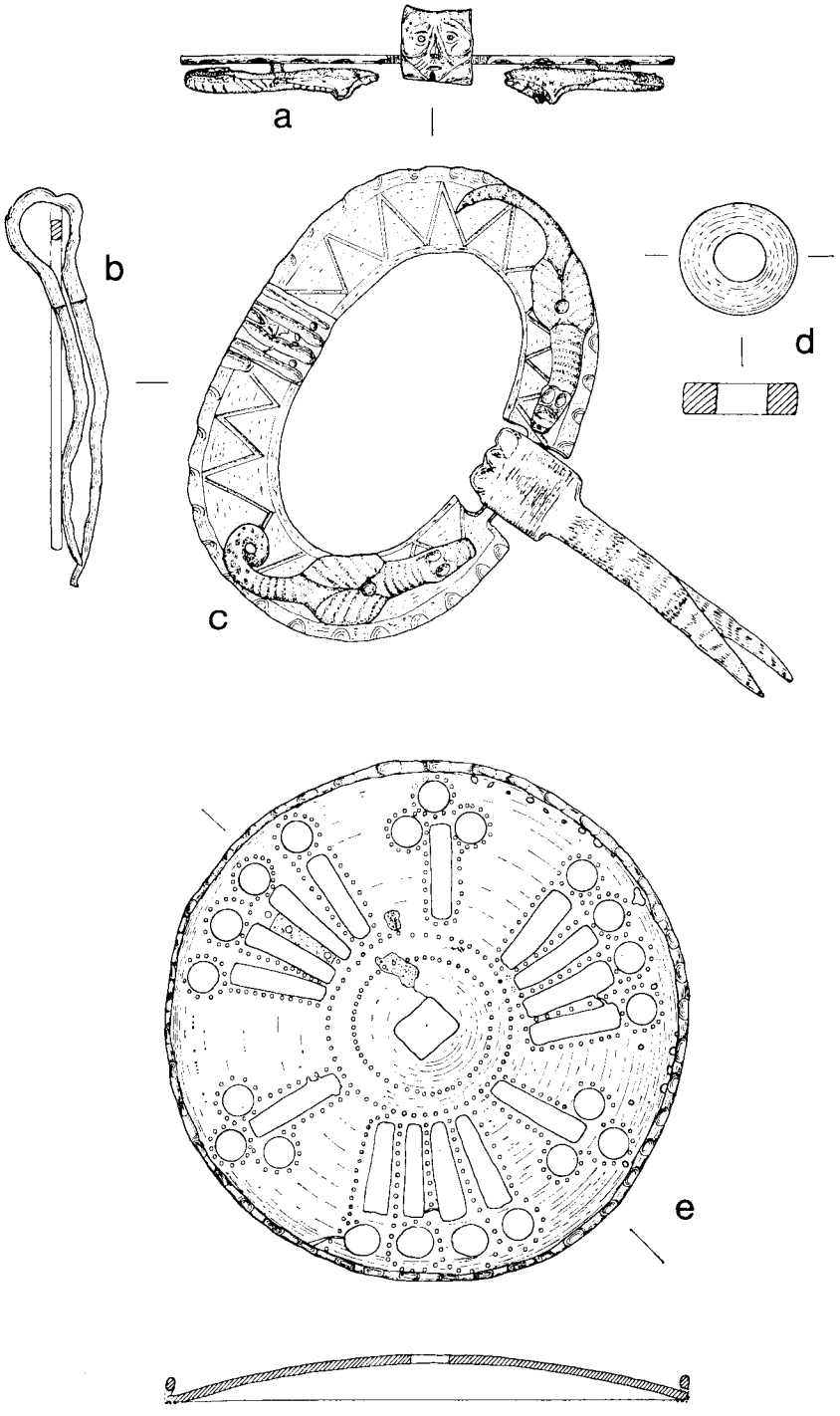

FIG. 68

LATE 12th-CENTURY IRON CLOSING RING, CAREBY CHURCH, LINCS.

a. Cross-section of ring and pin; *b.* Pin; *c.* Ring; *d.* Washer at back of pin; *e.* Back plate. Sc. 1 : 3. *Drawing: David Evans*

three circles at the head. Each design is surrounded by finely punched dots which seldom perforate the plate. The square centre hole for the pin is also surrounded by two circles of dots. One 'window' has been repaired with a riveted strip and two other windows are broken. A line of holes near the rim on part of the plate may have secured a fabric padding, placed behind the back plate and intended to be visible through the windows. It is not clear why this line of holes did not continue all round the perimeter of the plate, unless the rim has been added and the back plate reduced in size.

DISCUSSION

The relative rarity of such closing rings means that there are few examples for comparative study. There has been no national survey and the apparent rarity may reflect more an absence of literature than an absence of examples. The design of incised triangles on the ring can be paralleled on a 13th-century example from Bromham, Wilts., which was attached through a square door plate.[127] The closest parallel to the human head at the base of the ring is the small animal heads at Newton Flotman, Norfolk, probably late 12th-century in date.[128] There is no close parallel to the dragons, though a ring at Shotesham St Mary, Norfolk, has two larger dragons occupying most of the handle on a 13th-century example.[129] The rings on the knockers at Durham Cathedral and Faaberg have dragons' heads as terminals on the ring.[130] The face on the pin is a coarser version of the heads on the bronze knockers at All Saints, York, and Adel, W. Yorks., and, rather later, that at St Gregory, Norwich.[131] The design of the back plate is related to that found at Newton Flotman, Norfolk; this has three 'windows' with shouldered arches placed at the four cardinal points and simple trefoils midway between each. Both the windows and the crenellated rim are not susceptible of close dating, but do occur on 13th-century examples.

In concept and design the closing ring at Careby is related to the door knockers at York and Adel. Particularly the human head on the pin forms an artistic link with the head in the lion's mouth on these two knockers. Another more general link is in the form of the dragons: the punched decoration upon the tails can be paralleled in the sculpture of the Yorkshire School, as on a capital at York.[132]

The sculptural parallel has a date range of 1160–80; the workshop producing the bronze knockers was also in operation at a similar date, probably 1155–85. A date in the last quarter of the 12th century therefore seems probable for this closing ring. The architectural evidence visible in the church would suggest that the ring was made for the Romanesque S. doorway. After the church was enlarged by the addition of aisles, a larger doorway with a new door was provided and the closing ring was transferred to this door. This operation probably necessitated cutting down the back plate to a slightly smaller diameter and fitting a new rim. Evidence for this operation remains in the incomplete line of holes near the perimeter of the back plate.

The closing ring has been cleaned and conserved in the laboratory of the Department of Archaeology, University of Leeds by J. W. B. Black, whose report on the treatment follows. The handle has now been returned to Careby church.[133]

L. A. S. BUTLER

[127] C. ffoulkes, *Decorative Ironwork from the XIth to the XVIIIth Century* (London, 1913), 122, Fig. 71, no. 2.
[128] *The Antiquary*, XXXI (1895), 202–8, esp. 204.
[129] Ibid., 204.
[130] J. Starkie Gardner, *Ironwork* (Victoria and Albert Museum Handbook, 4th ed., 1927), 60–9, pl. 8 (Faaberg).
[131] G. Zarnecki, 'A group of English medieval door-knockers', *Miscellanea pro arte, essays in honour of Herman Schnitzler* (Köln, 1965), 111–18. The use of these knockers is discussed by J. C. Cox, *The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Medieval England* (London, 1911), 120–5, 234–5.
[132] T. S. R. Boase, *English Art 1100–1216* (Oxford, 1953), plate 77b.
[133] I wish to acknowledge the kindness of the incumbent, Rev. G. S. Hoar, for submitting the closing ring for treatment and study and to thank Mr and Mrs M. Phillipson of Castle Bytham for their good offices in this matter.

TECHNICAL NOTE *By* J. W. B. BLACK

The closing ring and plate arrived at the laboratory coated with discontinuous layers of bituminous 'paint' overlying the pitted iron surfaces and obscuring the finer decorative features. A small fragment of textile was attached to the concave side of the plate.

The objects were photographed using oblique illumination and x-rayed thereby showing the presence of the triangular pattern on the closing ring and the punched dot decorations on the plate — also a repair beneath the textile fragment.

The paint layers were partially removed with 'Nitromors' water washable paint remover. The remaining paint and rust on the closing ring were removed mechanically with a needle and vibrotool and by electrolytic reduction in a bath of sodium carbonate solution. After repeated washing in changes of distilled water, the ring was immersed in a dewatering fluid (acetone), dried in an oven and lacquered with several coats of polyvinyl acetate in acetone.

The paint on the plate was less easily dissolved in 'Nitromors' and was subjected to bombardment with bauxite particles in a stream of compressed air (using an 'airbrasive' unit). De-rusting was accomplished electrochemically using zinc and caustic soda solution and the plate was washed, dried and lacquered as described for the ring.

Microscopic examination of the textile fabric has shown the warp (grey in colour) to be flax fibres and the weft (red or yellow) to be wool.

POTTERY WITH ROLLER-STAMPED LINKED CIRCLE DECORATION FROM LINCOLNSHIRE[134] (FIG. 69)

In 1964 W. G. Simpson appended to the report on the Middle Saxon site at Maxey, Northants, a note about a remarkable sherd of pottery found at Stixwould, Lincs. (FIG. 69, No. 1). It was hand-made in a coarse hard fabric, and coated in a slip into which had been impressed a decoration of multiple interlinked circles by means of a roller stamp. Simpson likened the fabric to fabric G at Maxey, and concluded that "the extra-ordinary decoration — surely a unique example of stamped interlace on pottery — leaves no doubt that it is dark-age".[135] This assessment has never looked entirely happy and may be questioned on a number of grounds:

1) *Fabric.* Although the general technique of manufacture includes some features similar to those found in the Maxey wares, in particular coil construction and slipping, the fabric itself is coarse rather than even-textured as G, very hard and dense, with some large and remarkably mixed gritting. Any superficial smoothness is the result solely of the thickness of the slip — indeed 'slip' may not be strictly appropriate for this generous surface coating. This distinction remains valid even though some of the hardness may be attributed to the secondary firing which the sherd has clearly suffered after breaking, and which has caused the surface to be brittle and liable to flake off. The techniques of coil construction and slipping are not, of course, confined to pottery as early as the Maxey assemblages.

2) *Form.* The sherd has a wall thickness of 14–15 mm., which combined with its assessed rim diameter of 16 in. (40 cm.) gives a vessel of a size and weight quite outside the Maxey range. The rim is crudely and unevenly finished, but for most of the surviving length is at an acute angle to the outer surface. This strongly argues that the

[134] I have to thank successive keepers of the City and County Museum, Lincoln for access to the Stixwould sherds, and especially Andrew White for discussing these and related matters referred to below. John Cherry of the British Museum gave help over the Tattershall vessel and kindly read this note in draft. I am particularly grateful to Messrs A. E. Kirkby and A. R. Tailby of Waltham Toll Bar School, Grimsby, for allowing me to examine the sherd from their excavations at Humberston Abbey several years ago in advance of their publication of the site, and to Professor Cramp and Miss Betty Coatsworth of Durham University for patient advice on the stone sculpture. As usual, however, responsibility for opinions finally expressed here is mine.

[135] W. G. Simpson, 'A sherd of stamped pottery from Stixwould, Lincolnshire', in P. V. Addyman, 'A dark-age settlement at Maxey, Northants.', *Medieval Archaeol.*, VIII (1964), 71–2. The sherd was included in the distribution map of P. V. Addyman and J. B. Whitwell, 'Some Middle Saxon pottery types in Lincolnshire', *Antiq. Jnl.*, L (1970), 96–102.