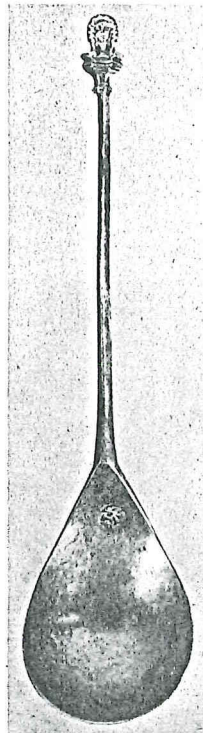
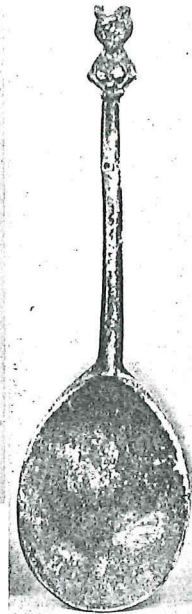


EARLY MAIDENHEAD SPOONS

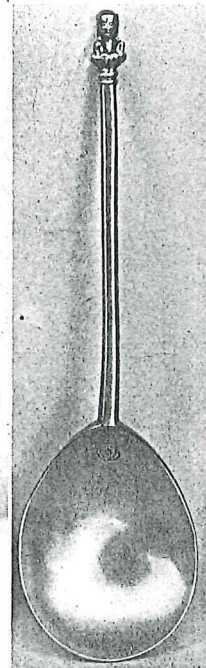
By NORMAN GASE



No. I.—LATE
14TH CENT.
SILVER IN
V. & A. MUS.



No. II.—C. 1420
PEWTER IN
THE AUTHOR'S
COLLECTION



No. III.—C. 1500
SILVER IN
THE AUTHOR'S
COLLECTION

"Halfe a dossen of sylber spounys with mayden heedes on the end, gylte" (Inventory of the worldly goods of Dame Agnes Hungerford, dated 1523).

THE sale in the West End some time ago of a single small finely modelled Henry VII. "Maidenhead" spoon for the record sum of £285 called attention to the unusual attraction for collectors of the early type of this article. The piece in question bore the London marks for 1485-86 with, for maker's mark, the curious pincers-like symbol of none other than Sir Edmund Shaa, who was Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company, Master of the Mint, Cup Bearer and Goldsmith to Richard III., and, in 1482, was elected Lord Mayor of London.

The "Maidenhead" spoon is, of course, so called because the top of the slender diamond-section or hexagonal handle is surmounted by the little silver-gilt head and bust of a maiden, issuing from foliage or the calyx of a *fleur-de-lis* and representing the Virgin Mary. The early "Maidenhead" is one of

the rarest, most beautiful and interesting of the varieties of ancient spoons, with an illustrious English pedigree, dating back more than five centuries. It was, indeed, the first terminal-figure spoon, ranking with the acorn-knop and the diamond-point as a fourteenth-century piece, the Apostle type introduced about 1450, being beside it a comparatively newcomer.

The relatively few early specimens that survive—thanks, frequently, to burial and subsequent excavation—were made either in London or the province; the craftsmanship of the provincial pieces being often every whit as delicate and fine as that of the London-made examples. This may be due to the fact that, from the very nature of its knob, the "Maidenhead" was a favourite spoon in pre-Reformation times for church use.

An unusually fine specimen at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is ascribed to the late fourteenth century, is indeed a provincial church spoon, being stamped in the bowl with its only mark—the arms of the See of Coventry. This example (No. i.) is thus one of the earliest English silver spoons in existence. It comes from the famous H. D. Ellis collection, and is $6\frac{3}{8}$ in. in length, with a long narrow, pear-shaped bowl and a thin diamond-section stem like those of the latten cone and finial spoons of the period.

Again, one of the first published records referring to the "Maidenhead" type is contained in an inventory of Durham Priory of the year 1446, which mentions "*ij cochlearia argentea et deaurata, unius secte, cum ymaginibus Beate Mariae.*" This type is cited in English wills and inventories from the Middle Ages right down to the late sixteenth century and beyond. Three "Maidenhead" spoons, described as "wt womens heddes and faces," are mentioned in Henry VIII.'s Jewel-Book, which is in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

Other characteristic early references are:—

- 1497—*sex cochlearia cum capitibus puellarum* (York wills).
- 1525—spone knopped with the image of our Lady (Bury wills).
- 1546—3 silver spones with mayden heids (Richmond, York., wills).

Early Maidenhead Spoons

The "Maidenhead" types frequently show the approximate dates at which they were made by the manner in which the hair is dressed and the drapery on the bust of the little figure, thus perpetuating for posterity the changes in the dress and coiffure of the woman of fashion in mediæval and Tudor times. This is strikingly illustrated in that rarest and most eagerly sought of all the early definite "Maidenhead" types, the pewter horned-head-dress-knop. This shows, emerging from the usual *fleur-de-lis*, the bust of a woman wearing the peculiar horned, or horse-shoe, form of head-dress which was fashionable in the time of Henry V. and Henry VI. These pewter spoons, described by the late Mr. F. G. Hilton Price as of "elegant form and great rarity," are the life-long quest of some collectors. Perhaps less than half-a-dozen authentic examples, bearing makers' marks and in unbroken condition, are known. One of these is here illustrated (No. ii.). It is 6 in. long, and bears punched in the bowl, as maker's mark, a "W" beneath a floral device, the whole within a beaded circle. It is shown as excavated, with a sepia encrustation and copper-like *patina* probably due to oxidisation.

Plausible modern imitations of the "horned-head-dress," alas, are not unknown. One of these was withdrawn not long ago from a famous public collection, where for some years it had remained unsuspected.

The single specimen known in silver is unmarked. It is in the Jackson Loan Collection at South Kensington.

An interesting silver specimen in almost mint condition, and ascribed to about the year 1500, is shown in No. iii. It is 6½ in. long, and bears as its only mark the distinctive early Tudor Double-Rose—the white rose united with the red and symbolising the union of the two houses of York and Lancaster in the persons of Henry VII. and his Queen, Elizabeth of York.

Another silver specimen, which has also been excavated, is shown in No. iv. (*centre*). A good example of the gracious classic type, it is assigned to about 1530, and is marked in the bowl with a Dragon Crowned. It shows little indication of the usual wear, although the "pitting" on the inside of the bowl, and the corrosion of the head or knop, are evidences of the action of the soil in centuries of burial underground.

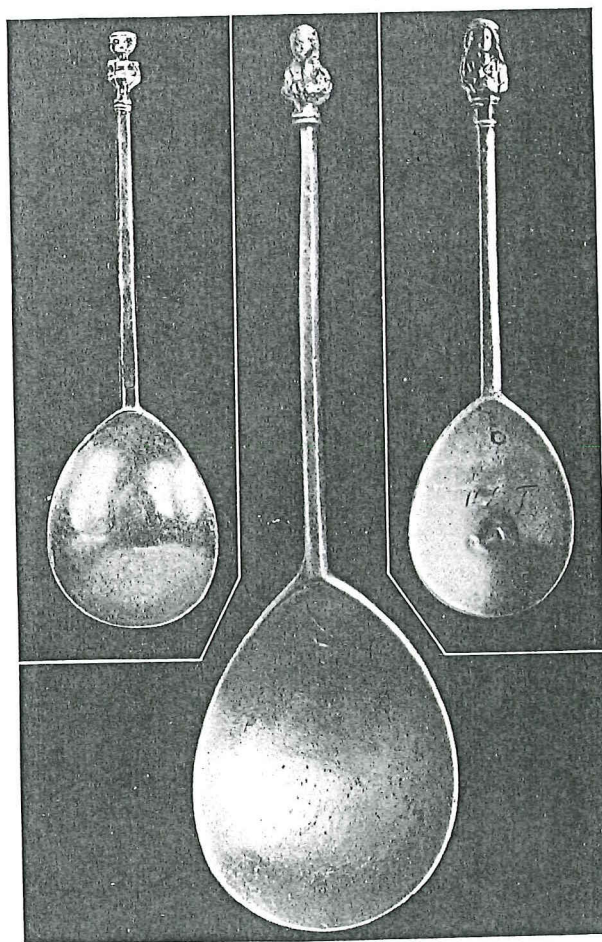
An unusual and charming specimen of about the same period, in the national collection at South Kensington, is shown in No. iv. (*left*).

A small London gilt "Maidenhead," made in 1523-4, is exhibited in the King Edward VII. Wing of the British Museum.

"Maidenhead" spoons continued to be made well into the early seventeenth century, not only in London but at Exeter, Leicester, Poole, Sherborne, and other provincial towns, although after the Reformation the heads are frequently coarser and of commoner and more conventional modelling. They ceased to be made after the days of King Charles I.

An interesting early seventeenth-century example, shown at the Art Treasures Exhibition at Christie's last year, bore the Youghal mark; while an early Elizabethan specimen was lent to the more recent "Reign of Queen Elizabeth" Exhibition by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. An unusual and handsome Elizabethan variety is figured in No. iv. (*right*).

A remarkable set of twelve, made in London in 1630-1, and belonging to Christ's Hospital, can be seen at Guildhall Museum.



No. IV.—LEFT AND CENTRE : CIRCA 1530 : VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM AND AUTHOR'S COLLECTION
RIGHT : 1578-79 : LIONEL CRICHTON COLLECTION