

MEDIAEVAL ENGLISH SILVER SPOONS

BY NORMAN GASK

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Apollo
March
1935

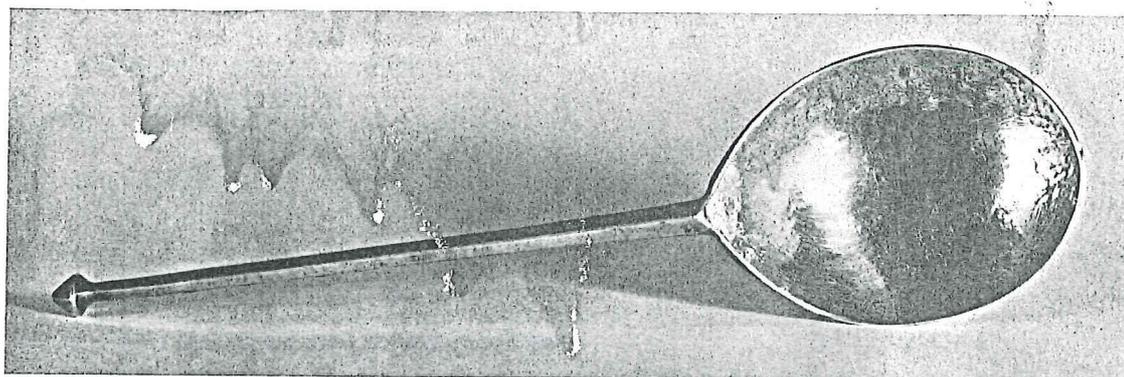


Fig. III. DIAMOND-POINT. Date *circa* 1400. $6\frac{3}{8}$ in. Shown at Exhibition of British Art, Royal Academy, 1934. Author's Collection

A SINGLE spoon in mediæval times conferred distinction on its humblest owner. It was carried on the person for use when travelling, was handed down in wills and recorded in inventories. It is to the jealous care with which it was preserved and to building and other excavations that we owe the comparatively few mediæval specimens that have survived.

The six famous types here illustrated and described have the beautiful simplicity, quality and craftsmanship which made "de opere Anglie" so eagerly sought after in the Middle Ages on the Continent as a guarantee of excellence.

The oak and the acorn are rich in ancient English folklore and history, and it is the spoon knopped with an acorn that enjoys the distinction of being the first definite type of mediæval silver spoon of which we have any authentic record. A reference to this variety is found in a will as far back as 1348, proved at the Court of Husting, London, in 1351, whereby John de Holegh bequeathed to Thomas Taillour twelve silver spoons with "akernes." Six silver spoons "cum acrinse de auro" are likewise mentioned in a will dated 1392, registered at York.

These are the first references that can be discovered to English silver spoons of a definite variety. A dozen "cochlearia argenti" are certainly mentioned in the will of Martin de St. Cross, a will dated as early as 1259, but there is no mention of their shape, type or design. The same statement applies to an

entry in the wardrobe accounts of Edward I, of the year 1300, which refers to seven gold and eight silver spoons marked in the stem with the *fleur-de-lis*, the "touch" of Paris.

The acorn-head, then, was introduced not later than the early part of the XIVth century. It continued to be wrought in the two centuries following, although, like the diamond-point, it is essentially a mediæval piece. Similar spoons described as "Dim. Dos. Cochlearium cum Akehornes" are mentioned in a will dated 1459; and the will of the Countess of Northumberland, filed in 1542, specifically cites in her bequests "a sponne with an acorne doble gilt." The bowl of this rare type is fig- or pear-shaped. The slender handle is generally somewhat rounded or bodkin-like, or else is hexagonal. The stem is knopped with a finely-modelled silver-gilt image of an acorn, some of the acorns being large, others very small. This variety rarely comes into the market to-day.

An Elizabethan example, probably made to replace a lost one or to match a broken set, bearing the marks for 1593-4, sold at public auction in 1902 for £34, and a XVth-century specimen for £29 in 1907. Prices would be considerably higher now.

There are two of these interesting types in the National Collection at South Kensington. Both are XVth-century examples, the one with the larger acorn having been dug up at Coventry. Both are shown in the illustrations (Figs. I and II).

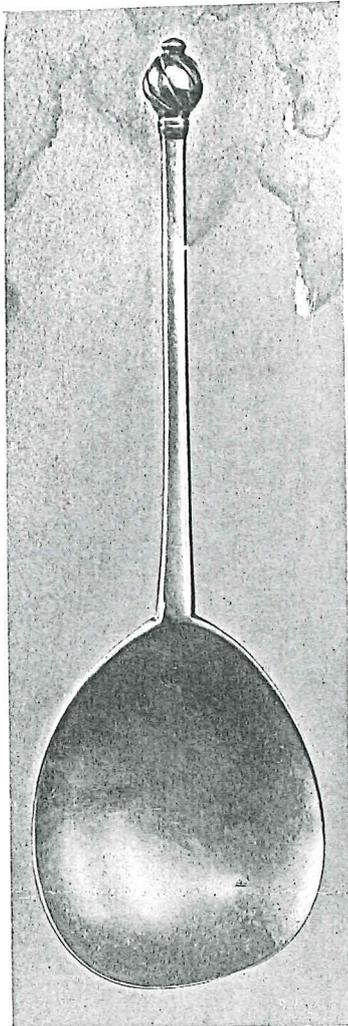


Fig. V. WRYTHEN-KNOP.
Date circa 1500. Length
6½ in.

From Breadalbane Collection.
Courtesy Victoria and Albert
Museum.

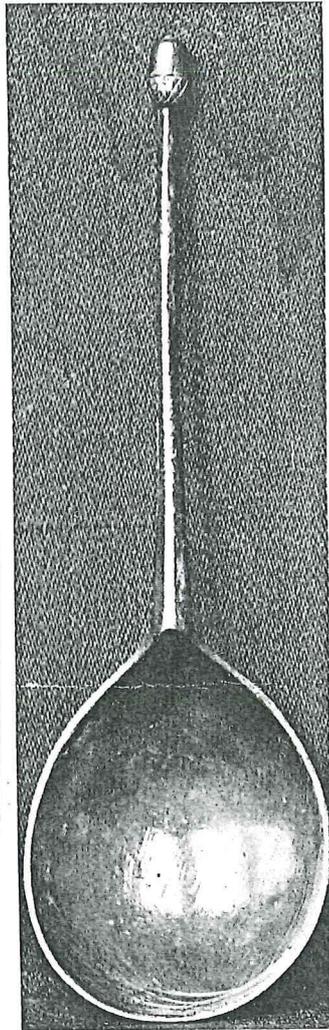


Fig. II. ACORN-HEAD.
Larger acorn than Fig. I.
Date circa 1400. Length
5¾ in. Dug up at Coventry.

Victoria and Albert Museum.

“foulden sponne” about her person on her
“Progresses.”)

A double rarity in my possession has not
only a diamond-point knob but a tapering
diamond-section, or four-sided, handle. It is
6¾ in. long, dates from about A.D. 1400, and
was shown with Figs. IX and X at the Royal
Academy Exhibition of British Art early in
1934. Engraved on the back of the bowl is
a black-letter capital “R,” an early owner’s
initial. It is shown, actual size in Fig. III.
A later example in the Victoria and Albert
Museum bears the full London marks for

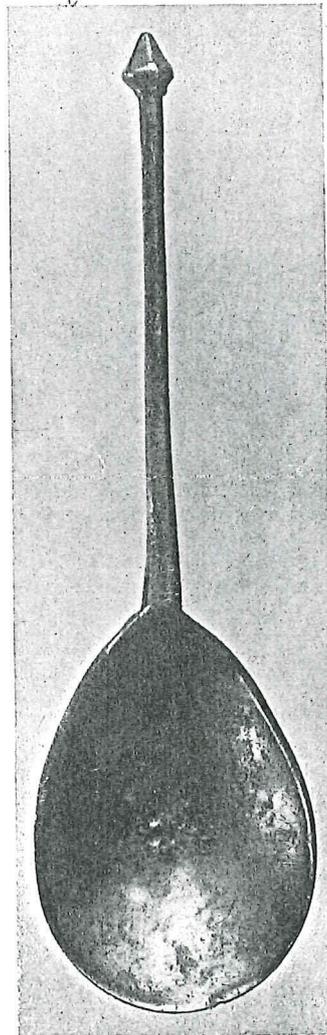
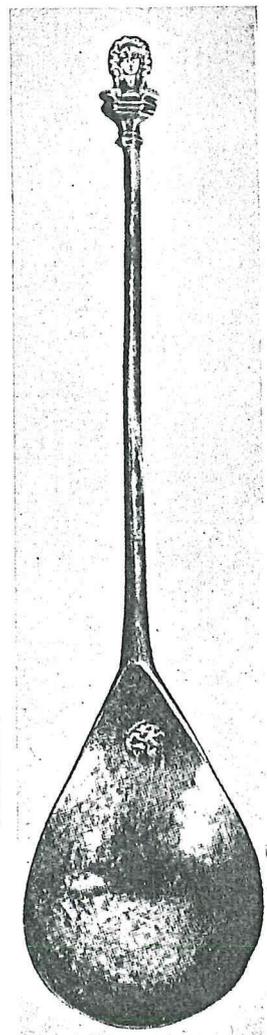


Fig. IV. DIAMOND-
POINT. Date 1493-94.
Length 6 in. Dug up at
Wandsworth.

Courtesy of
Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig. VIII.
MAIDENHEAD.
Diamond section stem.
6¾ in. long. Mark Arms
of See of Coventry. Late
XIVth century.
Victoria and Albert
Museum.



A close rival to the acorn-head in early
dating, so far as surviving specimens are
concerned, is the diamond-point or spearhead.
The six-sided pointed knob of this type—a
knob that is faceted like a diamond—may
alternately have been inspired by one of the
finials in Gothic architecture, or by a mediæval
spear. A silver diamond-point hinged, or
folding, spoon found in a grave at St. Mary’s
Church, Scarborough, and now belonging to
the Scarborough Archæological Society, is
assigned to the XIVth century. (It is recorded
of Queen Elizabeth that she carried a gold

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1493-4, and, for maker's mark, a fish. It was dug up at Wandsworth (Fig. IV).

Seven spoons with "dyamond poynts," bearing the London marks for 1565-6, are in the possession of the Mercers' Company. More than one diamond-point has been fished from Thames River.

Wrythen-knops (from the Anglo-Saxon word "writhe" meaning "twisted") have the head composed of a ball or cone which is fluted or spirally twisted. Robert Morton's inventory of 1487 mentions "Ij (2) dosen spones with wrethyn knoppes."

Six gilt "spones with wrethen knoppes" are mentioned in the 1512 inventory of the

Fig. X. LION SEJANT.

Late XVth and XVIth century type. Length 6½ in.

From Breadalbane Collection.
Author's Collection.

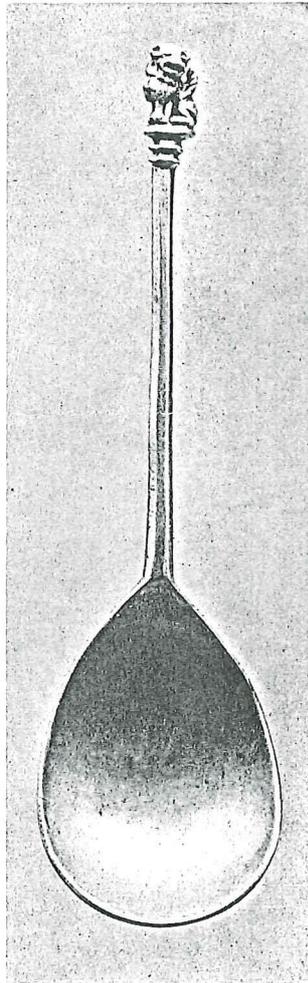
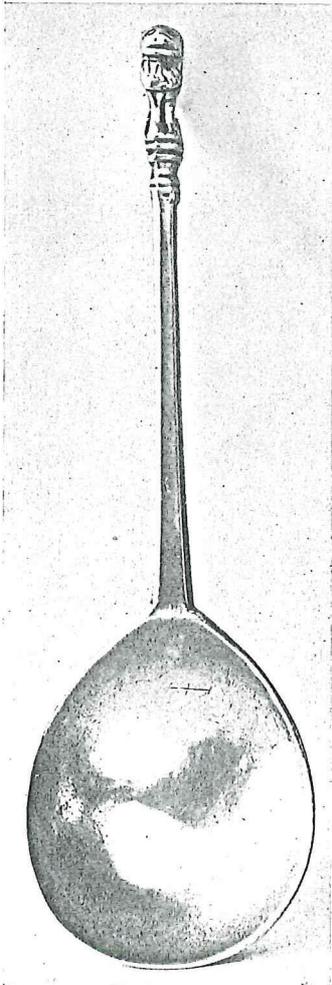


Fig. XI. LION SEJANT GUARDANT.

Date 1400.

Length 6¾ in. A rare variation of the Lion Sejant. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig. XII. APOSTLE. St. James the Greater. Late XVth century. Length 7½ in.

Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum.

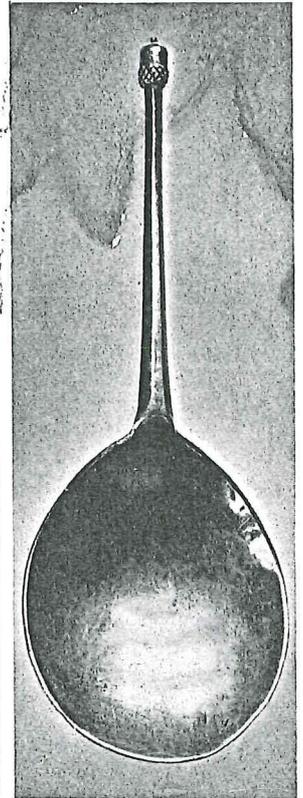
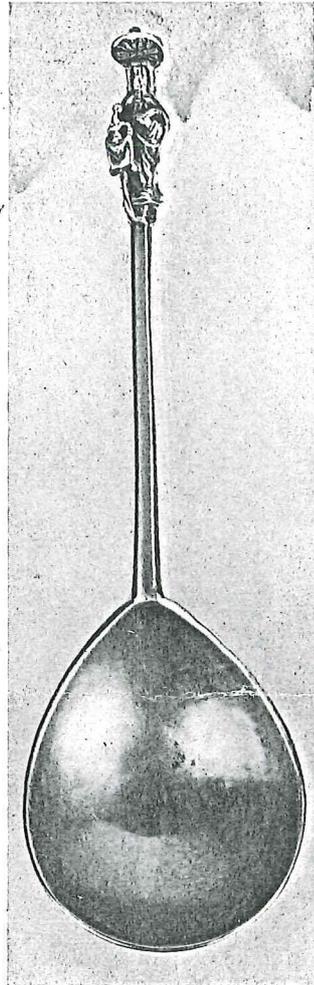


Fig. I. ACORN-HEAD.

The first definite mediæval type of which there is a record. XVth century.

Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum.

Merchant Taylors' Company. A Wrythen-knop of 1488-9, with, for maker's mark, a wheel, realized 100 guineas at the Breadalbane Sale in 1926. A handsome specimen in the Victoria and Albert Museum is figured in Fig. V and another in Fig. VI.

Among the mediæval silver spoons surmounted by terminal figures the Maidenhead comes easily first in date. This variety is topped with a little silver-gilt bust of a maiden issuing either from foliage or from the calyx of a *fleur-de-lis* and representing the Virgin Mary. It was a favourite type for Ecclesiastical use.

The Maidenhead sometimes reflects in its knop the wondrous changes in the coiffure of

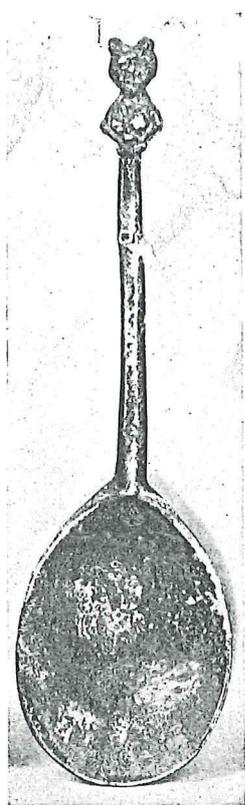


Fig. VII. HORN-HEAD-DRESS MAIDENHEAD. Circa 1430. Author's Collection.

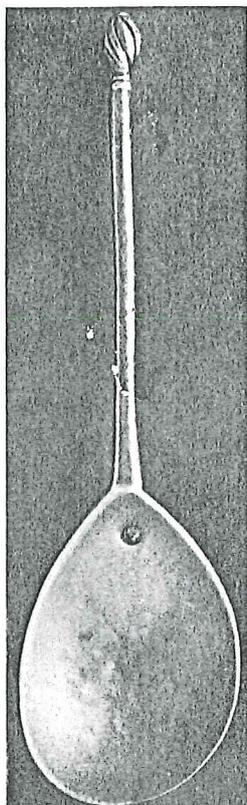


Fig. VI. WRYTHEN-KNOP. Date 1488-89. Mr. Lionel Crichton's Collection.

the woman of fashion of the period. An early XVth-century unmarked example in the Jackson Loan Collection at South Kensington shows the curious horned head-dress of the belle of the times of Henry V and Henry VI. A pewter example of this rare variety is shown in Fig. VII.

A Maidenhead, $6\frac{3}{8}$ in. long, at South Kensington, stamped in the bowl with the arms of the See of Coventry, is ascribed to as early as the late XIVth century (Fig. VIII).

An inventory of Durham Priory of the year 1446 mentions "ij (2) cochlearia argentea et deaurata unius sectae, cum ymaginibus Beatae Mariae." A characteristic late XVth-century type, assigned in this case to about the year 1500 or perhaps a trifle earlier, is figured in Fig. IX. It measures $6\frac{1}{4}$ in. and was also shown at the Royal Academy last year. A Maidenhead made in 1485-6 was sold in the West End a few years ago for the record sum of £285.

Another interesting relic of the Middle Ages is the Lion Sejant ("sejant" meaning "sitting," from the old French word "seiant"), a spoon

topped with the silver-gilt image of a small lion, which sits like a cat with its fore limbs stiff and upright and frequently supports a shield on the front of its body (Fig. X). An early variation of this type is also shown in Fig. XI. The knob takes the form of a lion sejant guardant instead of lion sejant only. It measures $6\frac{3}{8}$ in., and is assigned to the 1400 period.

Latest of the mediæval terminal-figure spoons is the Apostle, introduced from the Continent about 1450 and made in England for more than 200 years. An interesting late XVth-century example in the Victoria and Albert Museum is shown in Fig. XII. It is $7\frac{1}{8}$ in. long, the Apostle being St. James the Greater. Note the backward tilt of the nimbus characteristic of early Apostle spoons.

An Apostle spoon, made in 1490-1, sold for £215 in 1928, and a pair, also made in 1490-1, which had cost their fortunate modern owner only £150, when put up to auction in 1910 realized the astonishing sum of 1,000 guineas.

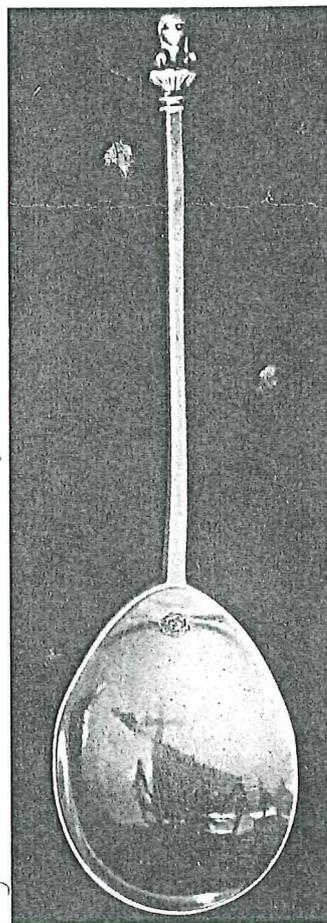


Fig. IX. MAIDENHEAD. Date circa 1500. Length $6\frac{1}{4}$ in. Author's Collection.