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THE SILVER AND PEWTER OF THE VICARS CHORAL AT WELLS

BY E. ALFRED JONES

A WORD or two on the foundation of this medieval body may not be inappropriate. Founded about 1140, it consisted after the Reformation mainly of laymen who are (or were) endowed members of the Cathedral choir, each with one of those charming little houses in the Close, a precious survival of medieval architecture and ecclesiastical organization unsurpassed in England. The domestic plate now to be described, belonged to the Common Hall, a marvellously preserved building dating mainly from about 1348 and adorned with linenfold wainscoting and some old oak fittings. Like so many other ecclesiastical treasures in the precious metals, the early vessels were sacrificed at the Reformation, while the Elizabethan and Jacobean silver was confiscated in the time of Cromwell. Nothing is therefore earlier than the Restoration.

The first vessel belongs to the Chapel of the Vicars Choral and is a plain chalice of conventional form, bereft of its paten-cover, inscribed :

Ex dono Thomæ Clarke Clerici S^{ti} Andreae Wellen Nuper Vicarij In vsum perpetuum Vicariorum Aulæ Clausæ Wellen : 1672.

In the absence of London marks it may be assigned to one of the many goldsmiths working at Barnstaple or Exeter, Taunton or Bristol [PLATE A].

All the other silver pieces are domestic. The first is a delightful plain tankard of small size, with a flat-topped cover inscribed within two feathered scrolls, characteristic of the heraldry of Charles II :

In usum Vicariorum
Choralium aulæ
Clausæ in libertate
Sti andrece wellen

One side of the thumbpiece is missing. It is stamped twice on the cover with the initials IP in an oval punch, not precisely like the marks of its maker, John Peard the second (1662-80) of Barnstaple, illustrated in Sir C. J. Jackson's book [PLATE C]. Illustrated with it is one of a pair of plain solid tumbler cups, without marks or inscriptions, but undoubtedly by a provincial goldsmith of about 1670-80 [PLATE B].

A plain standing salt of the plain reel-shaped variety with three scrolled brackets on the top, familiar from those in possession of certain old Livery Companies, is the next piece. It is inscribed :

Hoc Salinum et multa vasa culinaria in vsum aule noui clausi reliquit dn̄us henricus duvall Redard vicarius choralis : 1677.

Three small marks, two of which appear to be crescents and the third an initial, are stamped inside the receptacle for the salt. Although it is undeniably English, but not London, no definite place of origin can be assigned to it. A goldsmith of one of the four

above-mentioned towns was no doubt the maker in 1677 [PLATE E]. It was exhibited at South Kensington in 1862 (No. 5865 in the catalogue). The many kitchen vessels mentioned in the inscription may include some of the pewter still preserved in the Common Hall.

The pair of small plain silver salts, also of provincial origin and unmarked, are inscribed :

Ex dono Io : Baylie LL.D hujus Dioces :
Cancellarij

The donor, John Baylie, was created B.C.L. from St. John's College, Oxford, in 1663, and became Chancellor of the Diocese of Bath and Wells. Their date is about 1670 [PLATE D].

The only surviving silver spoons are six in number. Two have trifid ends and plain pointed rat-tails on the bowls and are inscribed :

CH . & Dono H Winchcombe

They bear the London date-letter for 1684-5 and a maker's mark, LC, with a crown above and a crescent below in a plain shield, similar to a mark ascribed by Jackson to Lawrence Coles, but with a flat-topped shield. Henry Winchcombe, the donor, matriculated from St. Alban Hall, Oxford, March 13, 1667-8; was clerk, Magdalen College; Vicar Choral, Prebendary and Schoolmaster of the Cathedral Church of Wells, and Vicar of St. Cuthbert, Wells, from 1683 until his death in 1689.

The second pair are similar, with the difference that the rat-tail is beaded. They are inscribed :

Ex Dono Antonij Walkley Vicarij 1691

Stamped upon them is the London date-letter for 1690-1, and the maker's mark of ^SW with a pellet on each side in a plain shield, as in Jackson for 1695-6.

The third pair have wavy ends and plain rat-tails and are inscribed :

CH
Donum
H : Duwall

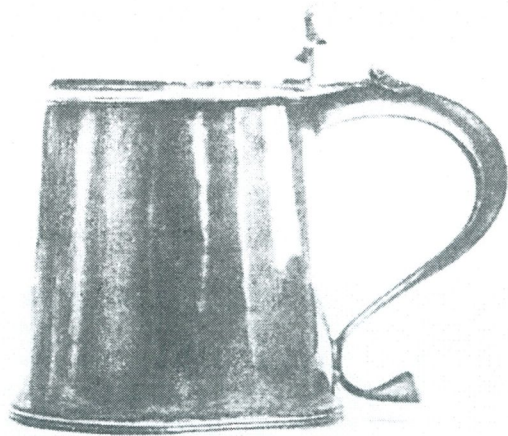
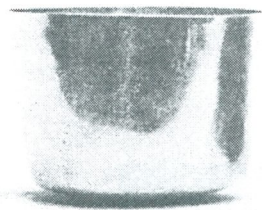
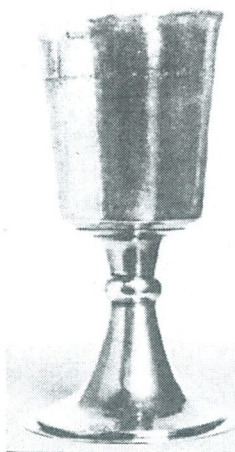
A provincial goldsmith, bearing the initials SW with a mullet below in a plain punch (not recorded in Jackson) was the maker late in the seventeenth century.

Of the pewter the most interesting things are a large dish with a wide flat rim, and a pair of candlesticks. The dish is inscribed :

This dish was giuen unto y^e Haule
of y^e new Close by Mr
Augustin Benford
1670

It is stamped with a maker's mark of a portcullis and four small marks, now much corroded [PLATE G.]

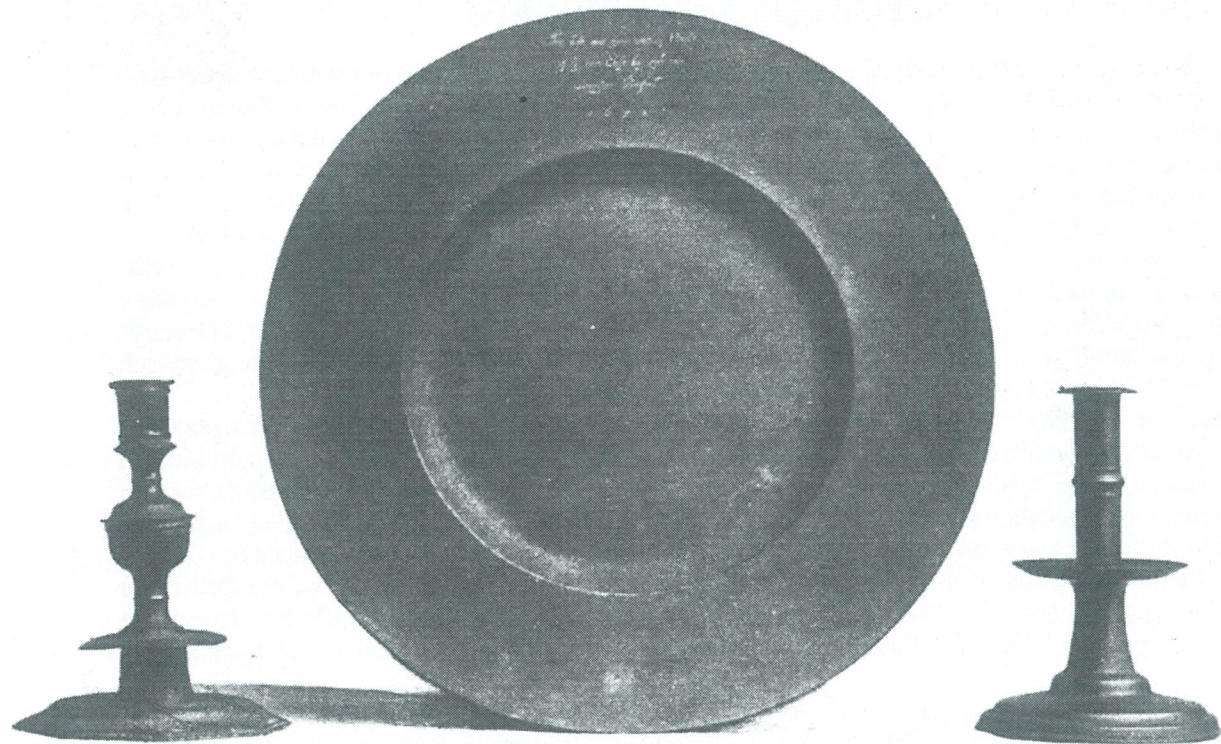
The pair of pewter candlesticks with baluster stems and wide octagonal bases are worthy of more than casual notice for their rarity [PLATE F]. They are engraved CH, for Choral Hall and are stamped



—C



—E



—H

A—CHALICE. PROVINCIAL. ABOUT 1672. SILVER; HEIGHT, 23.4 CM.; B—TUMBLER CUP, ONE OF A PAIR. NO MARKS. ABOUT 1670-85. SILVER, 6.3 BY 9.2 CM.; C—TANKARD, BY JOHN PEARD, BARNSTABLE (1662-80). SILVER; HEIGHT, 12.7 CM.; D—PAIR OF SALTS. ABOUT 1670. SILVER; HEIGHT, 2.5 CM.; DIAMETER OF MOUTH, 6, AND OF BASE 8.2 CM.; E—SALT. 1677. SILVER; TOTAL HEIGHT, 14.9 CM.; DIAMETER OF MOUTH, 14.6, AND OF BASE, 15.2 CM.; F—CANDLESTICK, ONE OF A PAIR, DATED 1674. PEWTER; HEIGHT, 25.4 CM.; G—DISH. DATED 1670. PEWTER; DIAMETER, 52 CM.; H—CANDLESTICK, ONE OF A PAIR. SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. BRASS; HEIGHT, 24 CM.

with the interesting maker's mark IB with the date 1674 in a lozenge, which does not appear in the late Mr. Cotterell's book on pewter.

Equally rare are a pair of large circular brass candlesticks with large grease pans, of the second half

of the seventeenth century [PLATE H].

Some of the pewter plates were made by Stephen Cox, of Bristol, who died about 1754; by Richard Going, of the same city, died about 1765; and by John Lovell, also of Bristol, died about 1742.

A FRENCH REGENCY INTERIOR BY BOULLE BY HANS HUTH

THE fame of no cabinet-maker has been so well maintained throughout the centuries as that of André-Charles Boulle. Practically speaking, not only did his work never become quite out of fashion, but it even became very much up to date in two later periods: one about 1770 at the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, and again about 1850 in the reign of Louis Philippe. His work having been so popular throughout different epochs, Boulle furniture has again and again been restored and copied. Thus various alterations could not be avoided, and the consequence is that to-day it very often remains doubtful to which period certain Boulle pieces should be ascribed. Though the quantity of Boulle furniture still existing is very large, there are actually only a few pieces which can be considered intact and as coming from the workshop of the master himself. Besides this uncertainty concerning the origin of Boulle furniture, little is known about the interiors where this furniture was used. Numerous inventories of palaces have indeed been published, and prints by Lepautre or Bérain give us some idea of what the interiors and decorations of Versailles and the old Paris hotels were like. The halls, anti-chambers and reception-rooms of Versailles must have been rather empty like they are to-day, with only a few pier tables and chairs forming a decorative unit with the walls along which they were standing. But can private studies as a rule really have made such a dreary impression as, for example, the "cabinet d'amour" in the Hôtel Lambert, which Leveau shows us in one of his prints, furnished only with a writing-table and a chair? Where were all the bronzes, china and lacquer placed, the various producers of which Pradel enumerates in his famous *Livre commode*? It is a great loss that an interior of the epoch, which would have supplied us with such details, exists no more in France. Scattered all over the world, Boulle furniture has been collected by all the big museums as one of the most characteristic features of French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century interiors. Here these extremely luxurious products of cabinet-making lead a gloomy existence, usually harmonizing very badly with their sober surroundings; but it seems just as difficult to imagine what they must have looked like in the magnificent interiors where they stood in former times.

The apartments of the Grand Dauphin at Ver-

sailles were the last of the magnificent royal suites to be fitted out, shortly after the marriage of the heir to the throne with Marie-Anne-Christine of Bavaria in 1680. The "cabinet du Grand Dauphin" was decorated by Boulle in collaboration with some other artists and was furnished with the greatest luxury. Shortly after it was finished, the decorative fittings of the whole room had to be transferred to the ground floor of the palace, where a new suite was arranged for him by Boulle, in the so-called "Galerie Louis XIII." Félibien, the celebrated historian of Versailles, has given us a fairly exact description: "Ce cabinet a de tous côtés et dans le plafond des glaces de miroirs avec des compartiments de bordures dorées sur un fond de marqueterie d'ébène. Le parquet est aussi fait de bois de rapport et embelli de divers ornemens entre autres des chiffres de Monseigneur et de Madame la Dauphine." Another writer of the period, Piganol de la Force, praised the cabinet as the "chef d'œuvre de Boulle et de son art." This room, which contemporaries thought to be one of the "merveilles de Versailles," was no longer used after the death of the Dauphin (1711) and later on completely destroyed. Thus, one of the most perfect examples of an intimate princely interior of the time of Louis XIV was lost.

In the gallery of Versailles there is a picture which was acquired from Baron Pichon in 1898 [PLATE I, A]. He was of opinion that it represented the cabinet of the Grand Dauphin at the moment when the youthful Duc d'Anjou was saying farewell to the Grand Dauphin before leaving for Spain (1700). Pierre de Nolhac, on the other hand, believed this youthful personage to be the Duc de Bourgogne, while recently French connoisseurs, with good reason, consider that it is the Regent who is portrayed together with the young Louis XV and his tutor. Although it would be interesting to know for certain who is represented, the picture is valuable chiefly because it not only gives an exact interior but also one that is assuredly no mere fancy, an interior such as was used and inhabited. All those *bibelots* which we seek in vain in contemporary prints are to be found here in profusion. The high quality of the fittings, among which Boulle furniture predominates, places the cabinet shown in this painting very near the famous "Cabinet" of the Grand Dauphin. Nevertheless, we cannot agree with those connoisseurs—of whom Havard was one—