

A CURIOUS PIECE OF CHURCH FURNITURE.



[Photo. by Marsh Bros., Henley.]

The above illustration represents the front of an oak chest, five feet six inches square, in the Church of Hambleden, Bucks, and local tradition says that the carving once formed part of Cardinal Wolsey's bedstead. Apparently the only foundation for this notion is that the arms of the Cardinal are represented on one of the panels, and that in 1514 Wolsey held the See of Lincoln, to which belonged a palace at Fingest, three miles from Hambleden. On the other hand, it may be noted that Wolsey was Bishop of Lincoln for less than

a year, and was not then a Cardinal, and, as the arms in the carving include a Cardinal's Hat, it is plain that the work was of later date.

The carving is divided into eight panels, and, numbering the upper four from left to right, it will be seen that No. 1 contains the arms of Wolsey surmounted by the Cardinal's Hat, and above these the Royal arms.

No. 2 represents the arms of Richard Foxe, Bishop of Winchester, Lord Privy Seal to Henry VII. and Henry VIII., and Founder of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. His arms are encircled by the Garter and motto "*Honi soit qui ml y pense*," the Bishop of Winchester being Prelate of that Order. Below is a scroll with the Bishop's motto "*Est Deo Gratia*," and above the arms, on the left, is the Tudor Rose, combining in one the Roses of York and Lancaster. Opposite to this is the Triple Crowned Castle of Castile, and below, a bursting pomegranate, the badge of Catherine of Aragon. The third and fourth of the upper panels contain portraits of two heads which have not been identified, the fourth also exhibiting a mutilated representation of the Virgin and Child, in glory, attended by an angel and S. Joseph (?).

On the first of the lower panels is the semblance of a coat of arms, "*semée of eaglets and trefoils slipped on lozenges*," but to what family belonging has not been traced; neither can the writer throw any light on the curious designs of the remaining three panels.

The alternate arrangement of the pillars dividing the panels and the correspondence between the pillars of the upper and lower rows will be noticed. The figures are mutilated, but some sacred emblems can be identified, e.g., seraphim and a figure holding a chalice, and the figures on the extreme right hold scrolls with inscriptions which unfortunately are illegible.

The history of the chest is possibly connected with that of the family of Lord Sandys, of the Vyne, and the reasons for thinking so may be shortly stated:—

In the Chancel of Hambleden Church is an altar tomb without name or date, upon which are the arms of Lord Sandys, "*argent, a cross ragulé sable*," quartered with the arms of other families with which

he is known to have been connected. The following lines form part of the inscription:—

“I believe in the resurrection of life

“To see you again at the last day;

“And now, farewell, Elizabeth my wife.

“Teach my three children, God to obeye.”

There is little doubt that this is the tomb of Henry, son of the second Baron Sandys, who died (about 1555) in his father's lifetime, and therefore never bore the title. Henry Sandys left a widow, Elizabeth, and three children, viz., William, third Baron Sandys, Thomas, and Margery. The widow was daughter of the second Baron Windsor of Bradenham, and married for a third husband (Henry Sandys being the first) Ralph Scrope, of Hambleden, who is also buried in the Church.

“The Vyne,” near Basingstoke, the residence of the Sandys family, was built by William, first Baron Sandys, early in the sixteenth century, and is embellished with a great quantity of wood carving, to some of which the chest in Hambleden Church bears a strong resemblance. The first Baron Sandys was on intimate terms both with Wolsey and Foxe, accompanying the former on a mission to France in the early days of Henry VIII., and founding, in conjunction with the latter, the Guild of the Holy Ghost at Basingstoke “for the promotion of works of piety, religion, and charity.” This Lord Sandys also accompanied an expedition to assist Ferdinand of Aragon, the father of Catherine, against the French. As before mentioned, the Royal arms and the badge of Queen Catherine are found in conjunction with those of Wolsey and Foxe on the oak chest, whilst among the carvings at “The Vyne” all these are to be found, and also a device combining the initials of the Cardinal and the Bishop, the illustration of which (see below) is taken from Mr. Chaloner Chute's “History of the Vyne.”

Upon the facts as related above the conclusion seems not improbable that the chest was part of the furniture at “The Vyne,” and passed through Henry Sandys to his widow, and was presented by her to Hambleden Church. The date of the carving is probably between 1515, when a Cardinal's Hat was conferred upon

Wolsey, and 1555, the approximate date of the death of Henry Sandys.

Looked at as a piece of historical evidence, the carving may be thought to have a bearing on the disputed allegation of Wolsey's ingratitude to Foxe, and to confirm the view of Foxe's latest biographer (see the article on Foxe in the Dictionary of National Biography) that the relations between them were no other than those of sincere friendship.

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