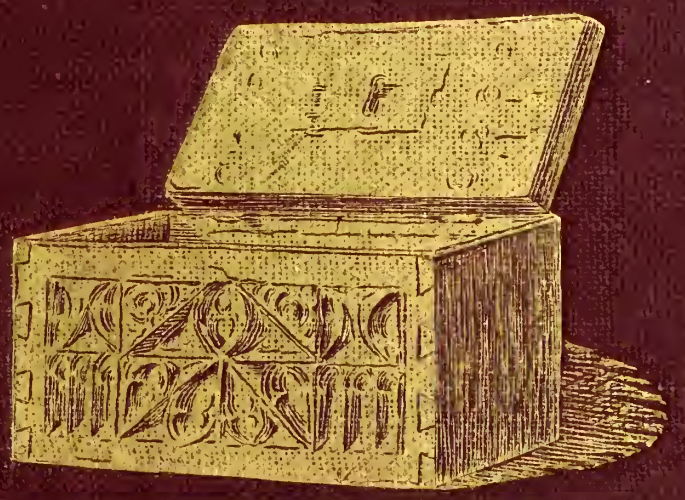
ANCIENT COFFERS & CUPBOARDS



FRED ROE

ANCIENT
COFFERS AND CUPBOARDS

PAINTED COFFER FORMERLY IN THE COURT OF CHANCERY, DURHAM. FOURTEENTH CENTURY

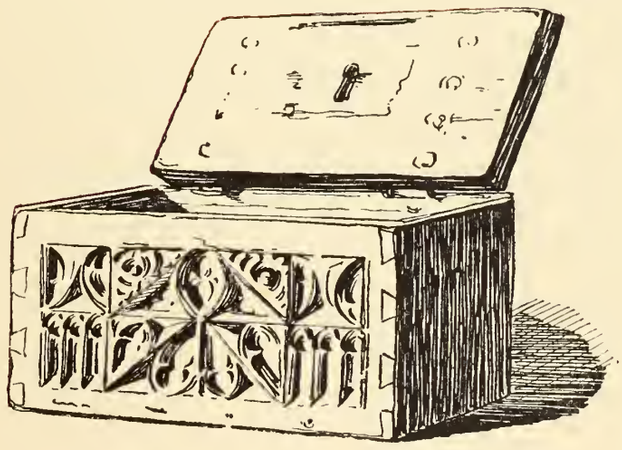
ANCIENT COFFERS AND CUPBOARDS

THEIR HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

BY

FRED ROE



WITH TWO COLOURED AND NUMEROUS OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

IT is easy enough to commence a work of this description, the difficulty is to leave off. Fresh specimens crop up as the work progresses, and valuable as every additional type is, the stern necessities of time and space which forced Stothard to eliminate the two earliest brasses in England from his book on Monumental Effigies, compel one to at length desist. The subject, however, is not the study of a few weeks or months, but one which requires continual exercise of observation and comparison. The compilation of the present volume has been a labour of love extending over a space of seven years, which, lightly commenced, gave no indication of the amount of work required.

A humorous side is not wanting to the difficulties which have necessarily appeared. The series of fraudulent rascalities which culminated in what is known as the Shipway Case has not facilitated investigation in country churches. More than once have the researches connected with this work been regarded with evident suspicion. Curiously enough, also, a burglary was effected, and an attempt made to break into one of the chests which had been sketched but a short time previously. In some cases the drawings were regarded in quite a different light to that which they were intended. The illustration representing the elaborate linen panel at Rye House was mistaken by a Philistine for a collection of golf sticks.

As regards the history of even our best-authenticated pieces the details are disappointingly meagre. The historical digression in Chapter V. refers only to mere surmise, of which no actual proof exists, though the conjecture is not at all improbable.

Much kindness has been shown to the author during the course of this work, and his sincerest thanks are due to those who have allowed sketches and examinations to be made, and to others who have as kindly come forward with information.

104, Priory Road,
West Hampstead, N.W.

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ANCIENT COFFERS AND CUPBOARDS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

HE subject of Ancient Furniture is necessarily a complex one, and that branch of it which relates to Coffers and Cupboards perhaps not the least so. International influences were so strong and so curiously intermingled with the fashions which successively arose during the Middle Ages that a history or description of British work alone would be singularly and lamentably deficient without copious reference to the styles which prevailed generally in Northern Europe, including even Scandinavia, and in Italy.

We are accustomed to particularise certain things nowadays with the stereotyped expression "Made in Germany." This in the abstract is indeed nothing new; old documents and inventories executed some four hundred years or so back not unfrequently refer to "Flanders chests," these being for possibly a couple of centuries a recognised article of import.

When the Flemings did not export their goods they sent us their workmen, who introduced many new phases and details into things which were undoubtedly made on English soil.

Hither also came the Italian, perverting our ideas from the pointed or Gothic style to the classic taste of Rome. German influence, if not actual workmanship, is distinctly visible in much of the ironwork with which articles of domestic use were furnished, and although German work in an architectural sense does not seem to have exercised any impression on our early wood-carvers, the treatment of heraldry and its decorative accompaniments certainly received some impetus from German contemporaries. A near resemblance to their peculiar management of flowers and fruit in conventional forms when applied to ornamental purposes was, about the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, freely adopted over here.

Our nearest neighbour, France, after the approximation of styles which followed the Conquest became obsolete, contributed perhaps less to the variety of borrowed mannerisms than any other nation, for what reason it is difficult to imagine, except that peace between the countries was a thing which rarely existed. North of the Tweed

some strong influences may be traced, but in England French motive power in design and decoration of furniture did not assert itself again until comparatively recent times. French designs and methods, however, which were engrafted on English ground by the Norman Conquest, continued while they lasted to show the most remarkable affinity to work which was being produced on the opposite side of the Channel. In Normandy more especially the earlier stages of Gothic or pointed styles proceeded on nearly the same lines as in England, and the similarity between wood and also iron-work sometimes renders the "placing" of early caskets and coffers a matter of extreme difficulty. For instance, a coffer said to be French, of the second half of the thirteenth century, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, at South Kensington, is so identical with our English work of the same epoch that were its history totally unknown few critics would be venturesome enough to pronounce emphatically on its nationality, and those who did would probably differ in their opinions (see note 1).

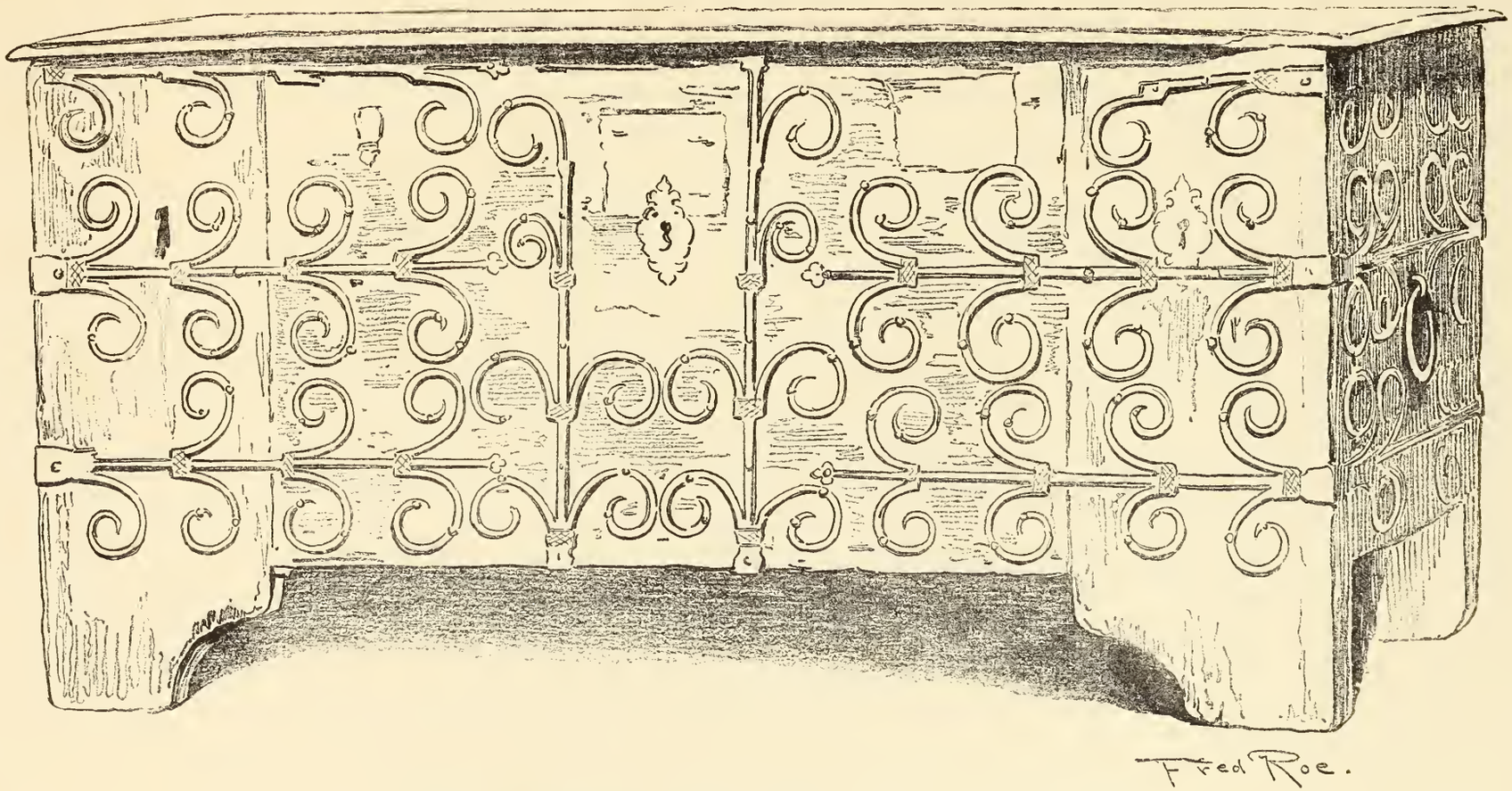
It is hard to picture the conditions under which our ancestors lived at the period to which such relics belong. Luxury and discomfort went hand in hand. Art was associated with squalor, and the gorgeously designed and carved buffet which formed an indispensable part of the equipment of the banqueting-hall often stood inches deep in an accumulation of decaying rushes mingled with filth, which strewed the floor, and was removed at the rarest intervals, and which proved a potent factor in assisting to destroy productions of the greatest beauty (see note 2).

In many a mediæval sideboard, the upper part of which has possibly been respected by the hand of man, the base and legs, if existing at all, are now in a state resembling unsound cork, to which we believe this foul mode of living greatly contributed.

The terms "chest" and "cabinet" are used pretty generally nowadays, even by collectors, but the varieties are many, and there is a proper method of classification according to ancient form and usage which should not be lost sight of.

The Coffer, as its name implies, was a box of great strength intended for the keeping and transport of weighty articles, and having its front formed by a single panel, thus carrying out the architectural term. Great sums of money, gold, silver plate, and even shot and bullets, are spoken of by the old chroniclers as being kept and carried in coffers (see note 3). The simpler construction of the single panel would necessarily give greater strength than a box made of many pieces. In olden times a coffer was sometimes called a "treasury," and for the keeper or guardian of the box the terms "treasurer" and "cofferer" were synonymous.

There seems to have been a Guild or Union of Cofferers in the Middle Ages, from which probably sprang the first seeds of our present Cabinet Makers' Union. Though little is known now of this society, its laws were apparently very strict, especially those which were directed against the making of "deceitful work"; indeed, the aims of the Guild were directed fully as much towards the stringent maintenance of conscientious labour as to the protection of such work when



THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER, BOUND WITH IRON SCROLL-WORK

Formerly owned by M. Peyre, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum

accomplished. Sometimes the coffers of Trade Guilds were marked with the signs of their various crafts or ownership. There was formerly a coffer of sixteenth-century workmanship in the possession of the Glovers Company at Perth, which had its front incised with the representation of two gloves, a pair of scissors, and a roundel or reel.

In France the name *bahut* was principally used to denote leathern trunks, but it was sometimes applied to strong boxes and coffers intended for travelling purposes. The term *huche*, by which an ordinary trough or bin is now designated, was used in the Middle Ages for household coffers of a rough description, The maker of coffers was often termed a *huchier*. In England the weighty receptacles used for packing and storing purposes were often termed "trussing chests." The name "bride wain" was also used, and still is in some of the northern counties, to indicate a marriage coffer.

The Credence of the Middle Ages was in the nature of a table and a cupboard combined—in fact, a shallow cupboard elevated upon legs with sometimes a shelf underneath. It might or might not be used for ecclesiastical purposes, though the name is now exclusively applied to articles in religious use. The cupboard in this case would be used to contain the sacred elements and vessels, but if intended for domestic purposes a very different meaning was attached to the name. In the latter case the credence would stand in the dining-halls of noble and wealthy families and would be used to carve the meats upon. The steward would taste a portion off each joint before serving—an ominous but essential precaution, taken to prevent poisoning.

The credence for domestic purposes often attained to the height of several stories, and though no English example is known to remain, some fine French and Flemish pieces of this type, dating from the fifteenth century, are still in existence. The descendant of the domestic credence is still with us in the shape of our modern buffet or sideboard.

Food lockers of various kinds were also made and used during the Middle Ages. They are mostly known by the name of Almeries or Dole Cupboards, but though some of them may have been put to charitable purposes it is probable that a good many were originally intended for domestic use. Those almeries which were meant for the keeping of food were generally pierced with perforations to admit air, in the form of Gothic tracery. In the illustration to *Froissart's Chronicles* representing the sudden death of Count Gaston de Foix, a cupboard of this description may be seen, set out with flagons and plate in preparation for the meal which was to take place at the inn (see note 4). That Almeries were occasionally used for other purposes may be gathered from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, in which (book xvii., chapter xxiii.) the books are said to have been "put in almeries at Salisbury."

A much scarcer thing is the *armoire*, a type so difficult to find that an example of home manufacture dating from Gothic times is of the greatest rarity, and in fact scarcely to be met with in England. The armoire was a cumbrous piece of furniture,

being in the nature of a great press or wardrobe. The body was not elevated on legs after the manner of the credence, but reached down to the floor, the lower space as well as the upper being enclosed with doors or shutters. Owing its derivation to the Latin *armarium*, it is thought by some that the armoire might be used as a cupboard to contain armour or arms, and it may be that the name originally became connected with this particular species of receptacle, not only on account of its strength, but the use it was applied to for keeping warlike panoplies in. Armour in the Middle Ages was an excessively costly production, being often a work of the highest art, and it is unlikely that the nobility, whose harness would be of an infinitely superior description to the jacks and headpieces worn by their retainers, would allow such suits to rust aloft on the damp walls of their castles. War alarms were sudden in those days, and much inconvenience and delay would have attached to such a custom, nor do we believe there is any mediæval illustration in existence which depicts armour hanging as now seen in our old country mansions. Armour was only hung aloft as a decoration when its use had departed, as memorials over the tombs of deceased warriors, for whom it had been specially made, or later, when in the time of Charles II. the improvement of artillery and musketry rendered its use unavailing. An old engraved Dutch portrait of Charles I. shows his armour placed in a cupboard beside him, and we may readily suppose that the practice dated from earlier times. The exceeding rarity of existing armoires renders reference very difficult. A fine example of the fifteenth century remains in Munich Cathedral, while another German specimen of about the same date has found a home in our Victoria and Albert Museum. France possesses notable armoires at Bayeux and Noyon, and probably others remain in less known parts.

The Court Cupboard is a modification of the armoire which appears to have first come into use during the reign of Elizabeth. The court cupboard differs essentially from the armoire. It was never intended for a hanging cupboard, which the armoire seems to have been. The superstructure was generally recessed and the cornice supported with balusters. The doors were small and square and in the form of a single panel. Often the court cupboard was merely a sort of hutch elevated on legs, but the space beneath was sometimes enclosed with doors of a larger size, more after the manner of its predecessor. During Henry the Eighth's reign cupboards were made which partook of the nature of both types, combining the uniform flatness of the armoire with the small upper story of the court cupboard. Court cupboards of three stories high are common in Wales and Shropshire, but they are mostly late productions and wanting in character and design.

The Cabinet was a much more minute article, and would perhaps be best exemplified by a nest of drawers enclosed by folding doors, or by a movable flap.

Intelligent search may not unfrequently reveal some special or uncommon feature, but in general structure the objects mentioned are each as distinctive as separate types of furniture of the present time.

ANGLO-SAXON CASKET OF WHALE'S BONE IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Height 5⅛ inches; length 9 inches; width 7½ inches

CHAPTER II

THE DARK AGES

WHAT is believed to be the earliest carved receptacle of English workmanship extant in a fairly perfect state is a casket in the British Museum. Although belonging in point of fact to a subject outside the scope of the present work, this casket is so absolutely unique in character, and sheds such a ray of light upon the obscurities of the Viking Age, that it is expedient to include it. Of small size, measuring only some 9 inches in length, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in width, and $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches in height, the box has been fashioned out of whale's bone, beautifully polished, and elaborately carved with a variety of subjects, accompanied by inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon runes in the Northumbrian dialect. The carvings represent severally Romulus and Remus suckled by the wolf, the Adoration of the Magi, the beheading of St. John the Baptist (doubtful), and an episode from the Teutonic legend of Egil, while the combat depicted on the back is sufficiently explained by the description:—

"HERE FIGHT TITUS AND JEWS,
HERE FLY JERUSALEM INHABITANTS."

In this subject, as well as that on the front plaque of the casket, a strong resemblance to "long and short" work is shown in the architecture. The early conical helmet with its projecting nasal is also seen in some of the figures.

Round the box runs a stave-rime, which George Stephens, the well-known writer on Scandinavian subjects, has thus rendered into modern English:—

"The whale's bone from the fishes' flood (sea),
I lifted on Fergen Hill.
He was gash'd to death in his gambols
As aground he swam in the shallows."

Or as another writer, the late Rev. D. H. Haigh, interprets it:—

"Whale's bone, fish flood,
Above on hill bridge.
Dusky back was vanquished
Where he ashore swam."

Haigh and others have identified the name Fergen Hill, or Hill Bridge, as Ferry Hill in County Durham. It is supposed that the whale crossed the bar at some extraordinarily high tide, and being left injured and helpless fell an easy prey to the natives.

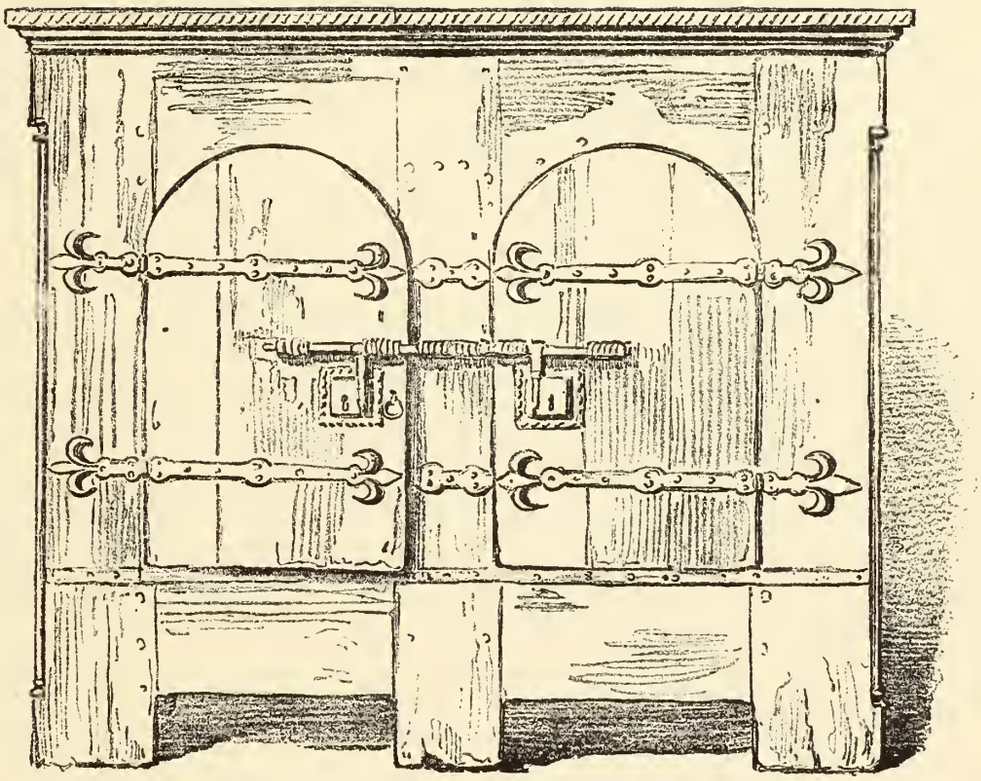
This precious and unique casket was presented to the British Museum by A. W. Franks, Esq., its late enterprising keeper, whose account of its acquirement is as follows :—

"When the casket came into my hands it was in pieces. It was obtained from a dealer in Paris, and was considered to be Scandinavian. The form of the runes, however, clearly proves its origin. I traced the casket into the hands of Professor Mathieu, of Clermont Ferrand, in Auvergne."

Mathieu's further account of its history, rendered from the rather mixed dialect which the original represents, is briefly this : "The monument was in a private house of Auzon, the chief town of a canton of the district of Brionde, department of La Haute Loire. The ladies used it as a work-box, and kept in it their thread and needles. It was mounted in silver. One of the sons of the house took it to pieces and exchanged the plaques for *une Bague de celles qu'on nomme chevalières.* If one were allowed to make a conjecture, one would add that the Church of Auzon (see note 5) is traced back—by its colonnated porch and by the paintings of a ruined chapel—to the ninth or at least the tenth century. This church had a chapter of twelve canons."

Franks adds that Professor Mathieu informed him "that in consequence of the removal of the mountings the box fell to pieces, and some of them got lost. He offered a reward for the missing end, but it was supposed to have been thrown away on a heap, and carried out to manure the vines" (see note 6). This is the scanty extent of the known history of Mr. Franks' casket. Conjecture, in the person of the Rev. Haigh, supplies a wonderful field for the imagination. On the back, in the left and right-hand lower corners respectively, are the words "DOM-GISL," while on the top is what Stephens describes as an episode from the legend of Egil, one of the figures having the word "AEGILI" inscribed above him. This conjunction of words and places inspired Haigh to weave the thread of a visionary historical romance round the casket.

Agila was a king of Spain who was slain in 554 at Cordova, and his son Athnagild was father of Gailesunth, wife of the celebrated Chilperic, King of Soissons. In 582 Chilperic sent an envoy to Spain to inspect the dowry which Reccared, son of Linvigild, had offered, as a suitor for the hand of Regunth, Chilperic's daughter. This envoy was named Domegiselus, afterwards Governor of Angers. Haigh thinks that the casket must have been made for Athnagild's queen or for her daughter Gailesunth, who was wife of Chilperic. He identifies the words "DOM-GISL" with the signature of the envoy Domgiselus, who he thinks was the artist of the casket, and who several times travelled between the two countries. If this



Fred Roe.

ARMOIRE AT AUBAZINE, CORRÈZE, FRANCE

Late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Front view

Height 7 feet 8½ inches; length 7 feet 10 inches

were only correct we should be in the possession of a signed work of art of the sixth century, but support to his view is unfortunately scanty. "AEGILI" he takes to be Agili, King of Spain, father of Athnagild, and grandfather of Chilperic's wife. He adds: "Thus the casket, worthy even to have been a wedding present from Chilperic to Gailesunth, would be made about 567, for that was the year of her marriage, and in the following year she was murdered, and thus it has not travelled far from its original home when it rested at Auzon."

Stephens says that this is all very ingenious, but thinks it a mere fanciful combination. He believes that it is more than doubtful that the two words "DOMGISL" are one name at all, and looks on the date 567 as two hundred years too early. It would be dear to the antiquary to believe that this precious relic could actually have been connected with Chilperic and the sister of the famous, or infamous, Brunehaut; but Stephens is so fully master of his subject, and has dealt with it in so learned a manner, that to doubt his decision would be presumptuous.

It has been settled now, so far as is humanly possible, that the remains of St. Cuthbert's coffin, made in 698, may with certainty be regarded as those in the Cathedral Library at Durham. These fragments, which at the exhumation of the saint's body, in 1827, were flung into a drawer and forgotten till within the last few years, have now been pieced together with the most wonderful patience, presenting a fairly accurate idea of the incised decoration of wooden receptacles as practised in England during the seventh century. The coffin is covered with outlined figures of saints and apostles. In the representation of the Blessed Virgin and our Lord, at the foot of the coffin, is a most peculiar flow or following of line, which should be noticed by the student of archaic sculpture. Each of these examples have insertions of Roman type sprinkled among their Runic descriptive embellishments. Their decoration would no doubt be entrusted to the best local artists obtainable at the time. It is curious that both these exceedingly early and interesting specimens should have been made in such close vicinity.

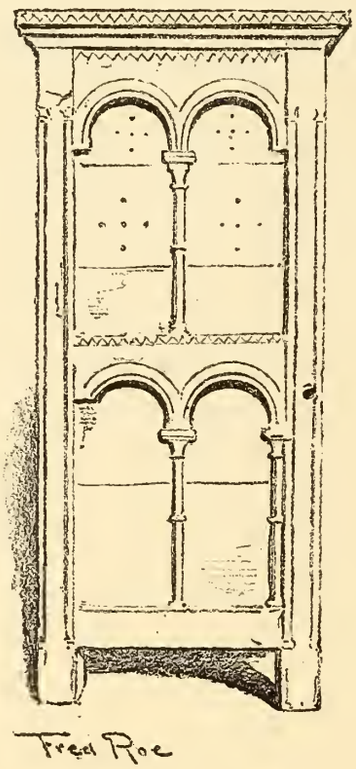
Of typical Norman work in coffers we know the least; presses or armoires, we have evidence, existed in some form or another. A very ancient armoire remains to this day in the Church of Aubazine, Corrèze, in France. It has doors composed of planks, clamped with strap-hinges with circular tops, and is without doubt the oldest of its class in existence.

At Brampton Church, Northamptonshire, is a very ancient coffer, bound on the lid, front, and sides with ironwork, the scrolls of which are not split from the stem, but join on to small blocks resembling binding straps. Viollet le Duc put this chest down as dating from the last years of the twelfth century.

Norman fonts, which abound throughout the kingdom, and especially a Norman stoup in Davington Church, Kent, give a fanciful idea as to what scale the decoration of woodwork on similar lines may possibly have been carried to. No carved woodwork, however, of so early a period is in existence, and it is believed by

some authorities that prior to the second half of the thirteenth century decoration of furniture was confined to painting and embellishment by aid of the blacksmiths' art (see note 7). Forgeries occasionally crop up. A reputed Norman casket of wood, lavishly decorated with ornamental mouldings of the period, shown among the antiquities in the Chapel of Dover Castle, is, we believe, admittedly the work of a sometime petty official stationed there.

At Canterbury in the Cathedral Library is preserved a hutch of oak with a rounded top, which is stated to be of Norman work. This, from the character of its ironwork, cannot date earlier than the sixteenth century, and is evidently not a piece of furniture at all, but a lining which was provided in later times to fit a recess in one of the Norman arcadings. The wood shell, which is not more than a quarter of an inch thick, fully corroborates this, and the measurements of the hutch with portions of the arcading exactly correspond.



ARMOIRE AT AUBAZINE

Side view. Depth 2 feet 9½ inches

COFFER BOUND WITH IRON SCROLL-WORK IN BRAMPTON CHURCH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

End of the Twelfth Century or beginning of the Thirteenth

THIRTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN CLIMPING CHURCH, SUSSEX

Present state

CHAPTER III

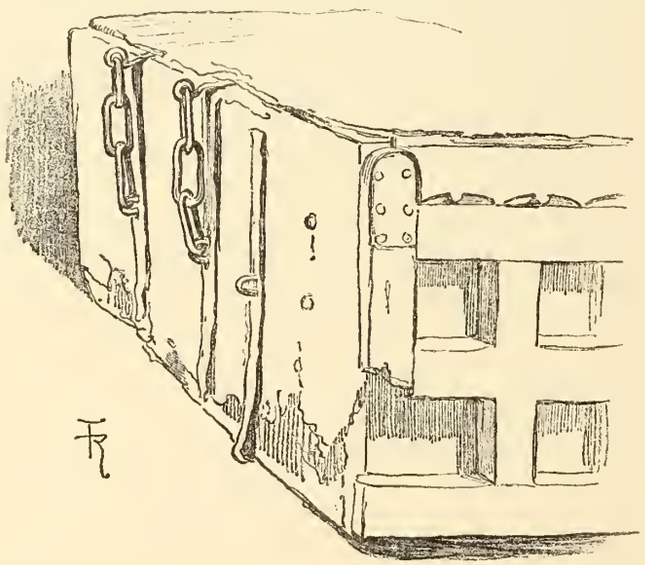
THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

BETWEEN the Anglo-Saxon specimens noticed and our next earliest receptacle of carved wood there is a hiatus of five or six hundred years. It is not until the thirteenth-century work is reached that we are able nowadays to arrive, by the senses of sight and touch, at a definite idea as to what the decorative strong-boxes of our forefathers were actually like. A fair number of examples of this period are left to us. The wonderful coffers still remaining in the churches of Stoke d'Abernon, Climping, and Saltwood, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, give silent evidence as to what was being carried out in the dark days when Matthew Paris wrote his famous chronicles and Simon de Montfort warred against the Crown.

The reason of the scarcity of early specimens is not difficult to determine, even if the great lapse of time and consequent decay were not to be taken into consideration. Furniture of any description down to late Plantagenet times was inconveniently scarce —so much so, in fact, that the wealthy classes when leaving home on any considerable journey generally carried a goodly portion of their movables with them, for convenience both at the inns at which they stopped *en route* as well as at their ultimate destination. Even the inventory of furniture taken at the huge Castle of Kenilworth in 1584 exhibits a comparative paucity of chattels, which contrasts strangely with their recorded magnificence. Thus it happens that while many published treatises on ancient furniture abound with engravings of Jacobean or Georgian examples, work of a Gothic character is scantily represented by a few illustrations copied from well-known manuscripts or else "designed from authentic sources." One thing, however, is evident. Before the Reformation the Church dominated almost everything, and there is plenty of evidence that its influence extended to things in domestic use wherever design or ornament was an object.

In coffers of the thirteenth century we find almost invariably the same construction throughout. The face or front was formed by a single mighty piece of wood, or else by two or more pieces placed longitudinally, which the carver then treated as one panel. This crude method of construction was not best calculated to display the art of wood-carving, the cleavage of the material compelling most forms of architectural

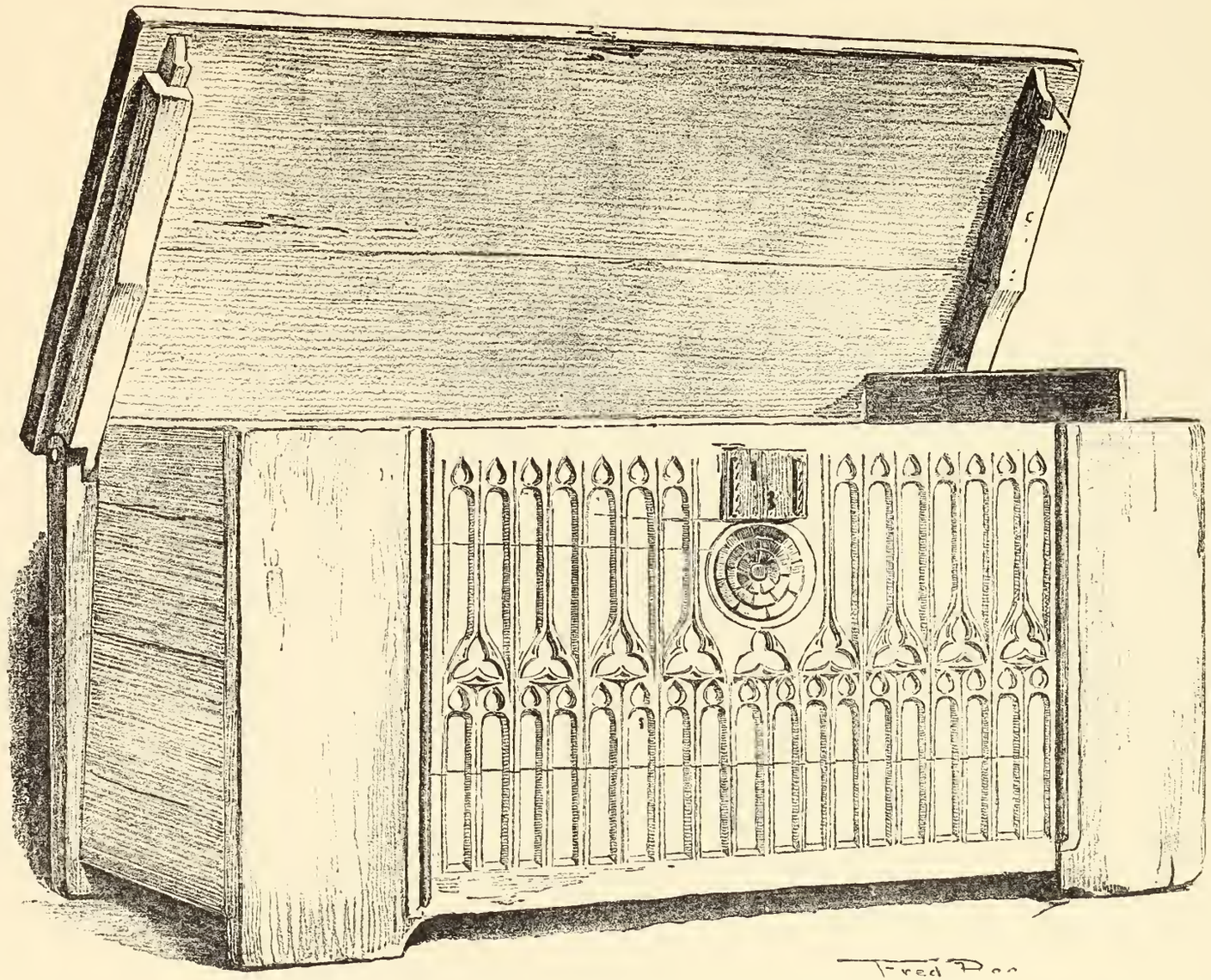
decoration to be cut across the grain. The casing of recessed panels was yet to come, but when attained at a later date the advantage secured to the wood-craftsman was obvious. At this period the two front uprights or legs were left uncovered, being often brought flush with the panel, and their broad surface decorated with carving. The bases of the uprights were sometimes ornamented with representations of dragons and other fabulous monsters grotesquely carved, and towards the end of the Early English period and during the following century this decoration was extended and carried up the stiles in successive stories or compartments. Excessive breadth of framing—which in our time is generally associated with roughness of workmanship—is a characteristic of early furniture which seems to have declined with the reign of



BACK OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN CLIMPING CHURCH, SUSSEX

Showing pin-hinge and protecting chains

Henry VIII. In coffers of the Early English period the stiles or uprights are often enormous, measuring sometimes as much as eleven or twelve inches in width. Yet in spite of this tendency to heaviness there is a symmetry about the measurements which is very attractive. Many of the early conventual coffers are provided with two or three locks, but this fashion would appear to have become actually prevalent at a later period, when additions were made. Towards the end of the fourteenth and during the fifteenth century the disposition of the carving often indicates that this plurality was part of the original plan. The keys in each case would be differently warded, and severally possessed by the persons whose duty it was to guard the revenues, vestments, or archives of the establishment to which they belonged. In our earliest receptacles, however, we do not find evidence of there having been primarily more than one lock-plate, the others evidently being

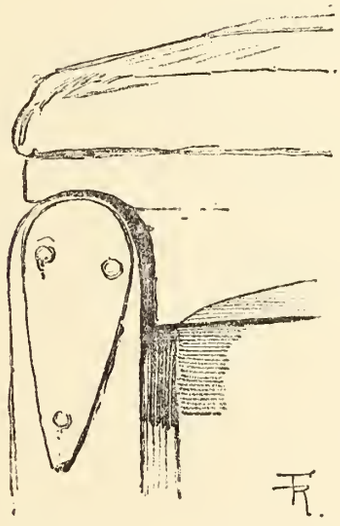


LATE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

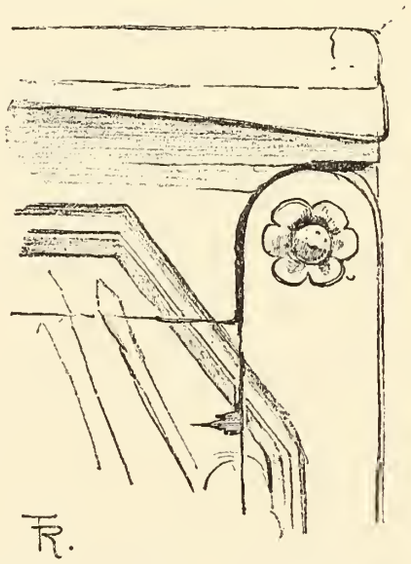
Lid open, showing fitted flanges and converging ends

Height 2 feet; length 4 feet; depth 2 feet

additions of a later date. The coffer ends of this and the succeeding period were often clamped with cross-bars of wood resembling the strengthening grille often seen at the backs of doors of Gothic fortalices. One feature may be noticed in coffers of the thirteenth century which is absolutely peculiar to this period. The lids possessed no hinges, but revolved on pivots which were inserted horizontally through the back uprights. These uprights were rounded at the top to give play to the lid, and the semi-circular tops fitted into hollows of a similar shape made in strengthening wooden clamps which were fastened on the under side of the lid at each end. When the coffer was closed these flanges covered the junction between the lid and sides, and effectually prevented any attempt to force the box at its weakest part. The methods by which the clamps were brought level with the uprights were various. Sometimes



PIVOT-HINGE OF THE STOKE D'ABERNON COFFER



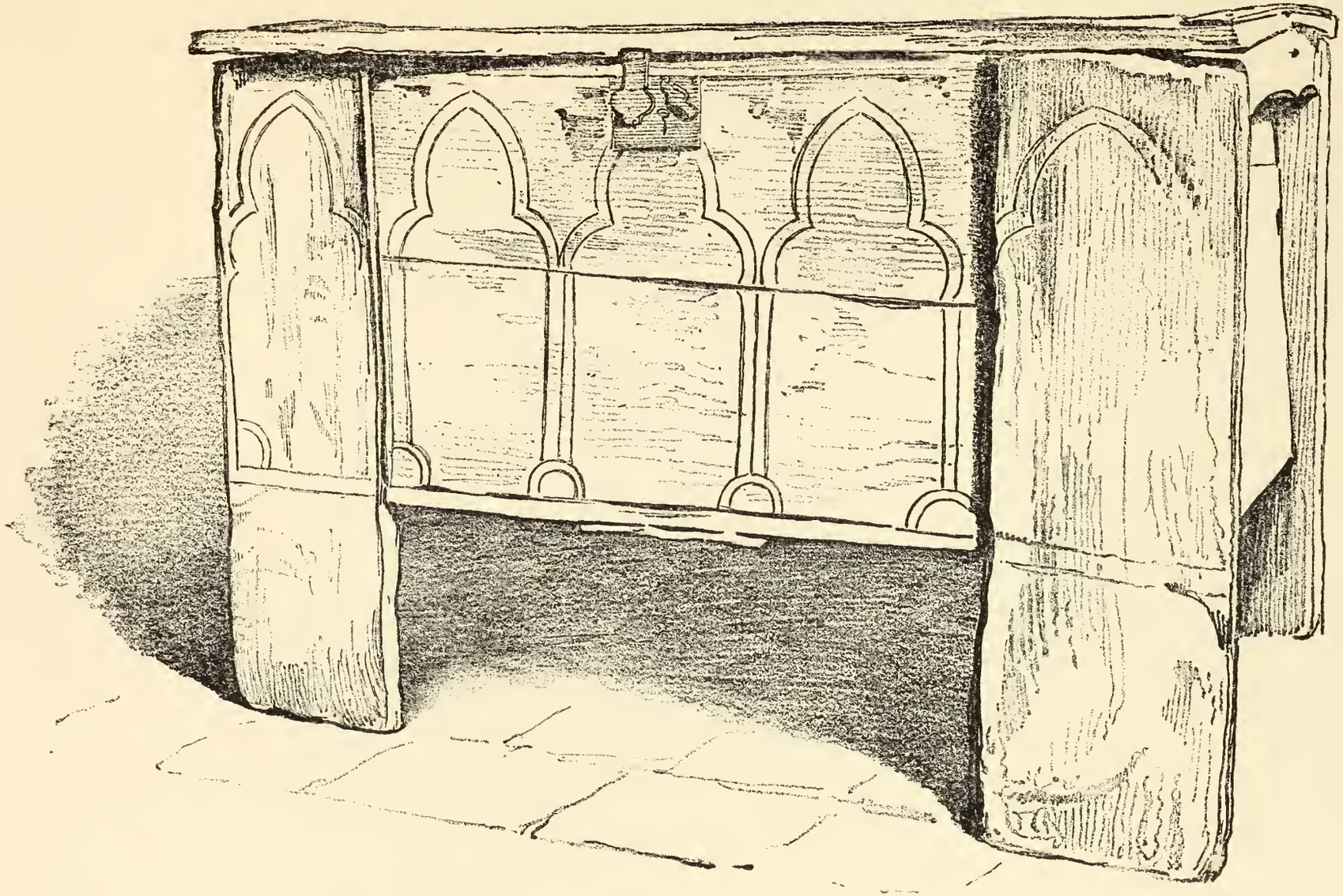
PIVOT-HINGE OF COFFER IN THE MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS

it was effected by sloping the ends inwards to allow space for the clamps to fit in, and sometimes by making the clamp the top, and consequently a movable bar of the grille. Another and more elaborate method was by cutting a half-section from both the side panels and clamps, thus allowing the surface to fit evenly, and further strengthening the grip by means of an upright pin and socket. Untouched coffers of the period are sufficiently rare to render it a matter of some difficulty to study these features, but examples of the three varieties may be seen at Climping, Stoke d'Abernon, and the Cluny Museum respectively. At Stoke d'Abernon, the pivot is covered with a piece of iron shaped like a Norman shield, and in the Cluny example with a rose. The iron-bound coffer from the Peyre Collection, No. 733, Victoria and Albert Museum, which has already been mentioned, curiously enough shows no indication of ever having possessed the peculiar form of mechanism just noticed. The

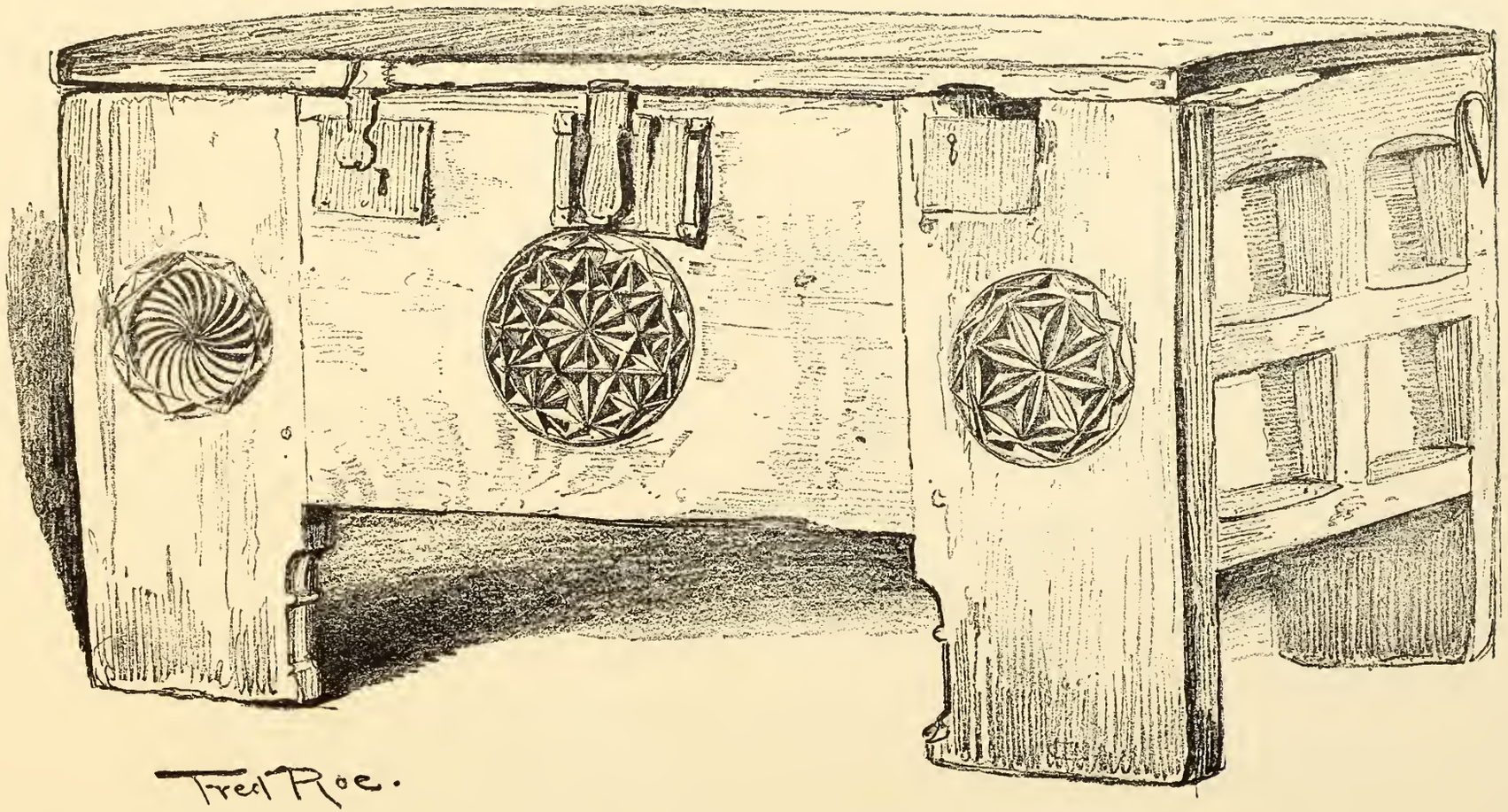
lid, it is true, is not the original one, which would probably have been covered with iron scroll-work agreeing with that on the body of the coffer, but there are no signs of the pivot sockets in the back uprights, and the ornamental ironwork on the sides of the coffer approaches so nearly to the top as to preclude all possibility of any flanges being fitted to the lid. In the author's own collection is a very interesting Early English coffer, having its front carved with tracery, and exhibiting a good specimen of the pivot-hinge. The bottom of this coffer is wedged in by an inward curvature of the side walls, thus giving great strength and resistance to any attempt at forcing. Beneath the lock plate is carved an early type of rose.

Another feature may be noticed which was peculiar to the period and which is now seldom seen. It is obvious that locks in front and flanges at the sides constituted a defence in themselves. The absence, however, of any hinges at the back rendered that part of the lid the easiest and most likely point of attack. To remedy this, some small chains were occasionally fastened to staples driven through the back of the coffers and attached to the iron bands which crossed the lid, thus acting as a guard against the most desperate attempts at leverage. At no other period was this peculiarity in vogue. A plain, massive coffer of Early English work, with its chains intact, may be seen in Shere Church, Surrey. The extra precaution in this case was rendered all the more necessary by the excessive length of the coffer, which measures some 7 feet 3 inches. This example was probably placed in the church about the time when the western doorway and font were added (*circa* 1250). It is presumably the coffer which Brayley speaks of in his *History of Surrey* as containing a very interesting volume of churchwardens' accounts, commencing in the time of Henry VII. and extending down to the latter end of Elizabeth's reign.

There are probably no older coffers bearing any pretence to decorative carving remaining in the kingdom than those in the churches of Graveney, Kent; Climping, Sussex; and Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey. Their date may approximately be placed at about the middle of the thirteenth century. The decoration of the Graveney example is the simplest, consisting of a row of five Early English arches incised on the front, the lid being strengthened by two iron bands covered with a cross-hatched pattern. The whole thing is in a fairly perfect state and entirely free from restoration. The Climping coffer is rather more elaborate, but the cusping of its ten arches is singular and rather less pronounced than in the Graveney example. Since Shaw published his book on *Ancient Furniture* in 1836 the feet of this coffer, with their beautiful indented patterns, have disappeared, and the lower edge has been embellished with a piece of new moulding nailed on by the village carpenter. Geometrical roundels, or whirles as they are sometimes called, are carved on the front and uprights. The coffer must have been made for the church after its completion in the first half of the thirteenth century. Two out of the three chains still remain at the back. Stoke d'Abernon Church is notorious as possessing the earliest brass in England, but it is not so well known that it also contains one of our very earliest carved coffers. In this example a



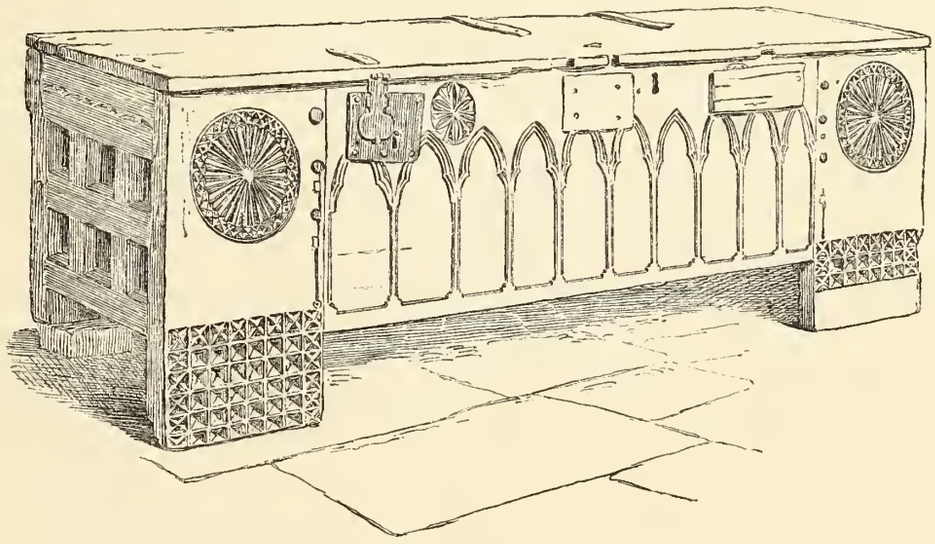
THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN GRAVENEY CHURCH, KENT



THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN STOKE D'ABERNON CHURCH, SURREY

Height 2 feet 2½ inches; length 3 feet 11 inches; width 1 foot 6½ inches

noticeable feature is the immense breadth of the stiles compared with the small size of the coffer itself. The inner edges of the legs are carved with simple moulded pilasters, and the front is enriched with three roundels filled with geometrical tracery, these being almost the only decoration. In the roundels on this example, as well as in those on the Climping coffer, we discern traces of that tendency to Scandinavian design which cropped up in the thirteenth and was afterwards fitfully revived in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both the Climping and Stoke d'Abernon coffers have a money slot for "Peter's Pence" over their trays, and have probably been used as almeries from the commencement of their existence. An interesting Early English coffer exists (or did until recently) in Chichester Cathedral. It has much the same character as the Stoke d'Abernon specimen, but is of rather later date.

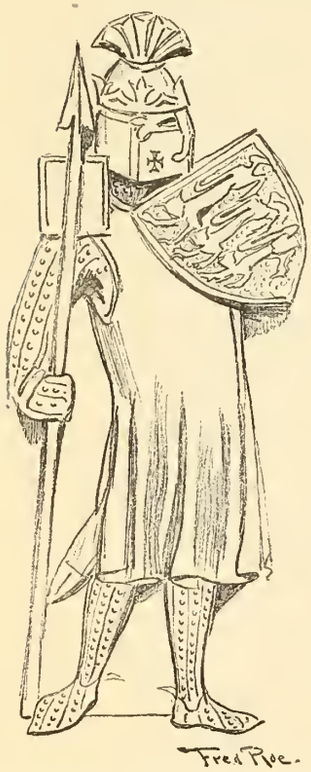


THE CLIMPING COFFER IN 1836

From Shaw's *Specimens of Ancient Furniture*

Coffers of the thirteenth century bearing representations of the human figure are excessively scarce. The Cluny Museum in Paris possesses a superb specimen of this kind, which, however, dates from rather late in the century, and has been much restored (see note 8). This masterpiece was formerly in the possession of M. A. Gerente, a well-known connoisseur, and was purchased at the sale of his collection by the authorities of the museum. The front is carved with a representation of twelve armed knights standing beneath early ogival canopies. The details of the costume and equipment of these figures are remarkable. They are clad from head to foot in ringed mail, and their headpieces include varieties of the heaume, the casque, and the chapelle de fer. Most of the figures have on their shoulders those curious square *ailettes* which puzzle our antiquaries so much, otherwise there is no trace of plate in their defensive armour. One of the figures—that under the last bay but one on the

right hand—is crowned, and his shield bears as device the three leopards of England. The lid is carved with a variety of subjects, enclosed in quatrefoil medallions. Amongst them may be noticed two menials drinking what was technically known as a "yard of ale." Both back and sides, as well as front and lid, are enriched with carving; there is scarcely an undecorated space on the whole coffer. The subject at one end is a group of knights on horseback being guided by a hind or yokel. The expressions on the various countenances are truly comic. The decoration generally, though it includes architectural features of an ecclesiastical type, indicates that this coffer was intended for secular purposes. In mentioning this coffer M. Viollet le Duc has said: "Nous regardons ce meuble comme le plus beau qui nous soit reste de ce siècle." The mechanical fitting of the lid has already been mentioned as the most elaborate of its kind. It should be noticed that the strap bands on the Cluny coffer, together with the lock-plate and chains, though in every way correct, have the appearance of being replacements of a more recent date. Indeed, the ironwork may generally be open to doubt as a restoration.

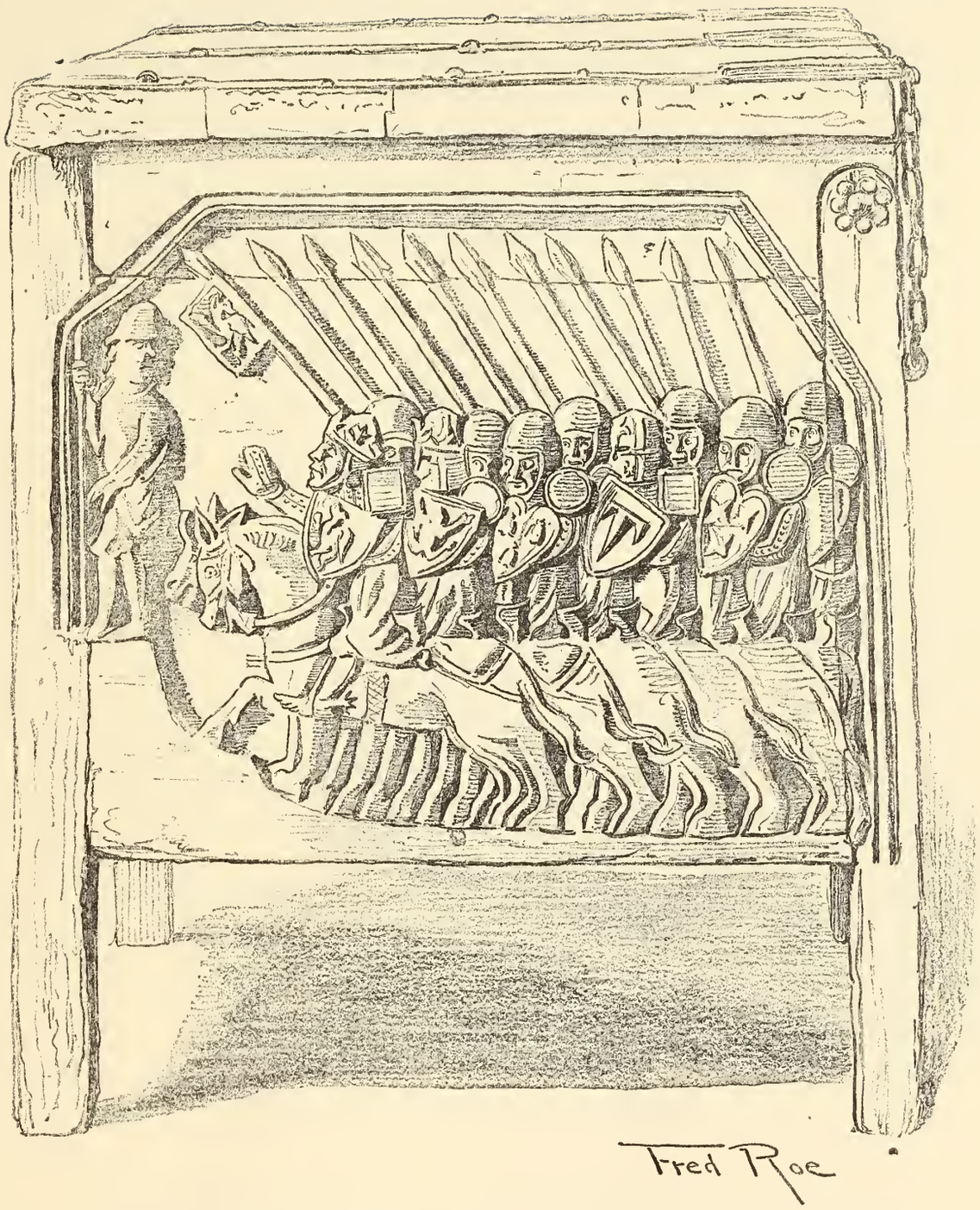


CARVED FIGURE BEARING THE ROYAL ARMS OF ENGLAND

On the thirteenth century knightly coffer in the Musée Cluny, Paris

As already mentioned, it is believed that painting formed one of the earliest methods of decorating furniture. A fine example of the painted coffers of the thirteenth century exists in the parvise of Newport Church, Essex. It is a big iron-bound mass, carved with shields on the upper and a row of plain circles on the lower part of its front. Between these ornamentations is a singular and unique feature—a band of open tracery, cast in lead or pewter, and fitted into lozenge-shaped compartments sunk to receive them. The lid, which has been unfortunately cased and panelled in oak during the last century, is decorated on the inside with oil paintings, representing Christ on the Cross, the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Paul. Over each of the figures is a cusped Early English arch, painted in red and green, which colours predominate almost without variation throughout all the five figures. The heads of the Apostles are evidently portraits, and remarkable for character, most probably having been executed by some monkish artist, from models selected from his brethren. The shields on the front of the coffer were once resplendent with armorial bearings, but these have now disappeared, the only traces of this ornamentation being a stain which the oil has left round each of the shields. The painting on the Newport coffer proves conclusively that oil was used as a vehicle in England at this early period. It may be regarded as the earliest national specimen of that art remaining. Incorporated with the coffer is a fitted strong-box, which bears some evidence of having been added at a later date, probably during the fourteenth

PAINTED COFFER IN NEWPORT CHURCH, ESSEX. THIRTEENTH CENTURY



LATE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN THE MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS

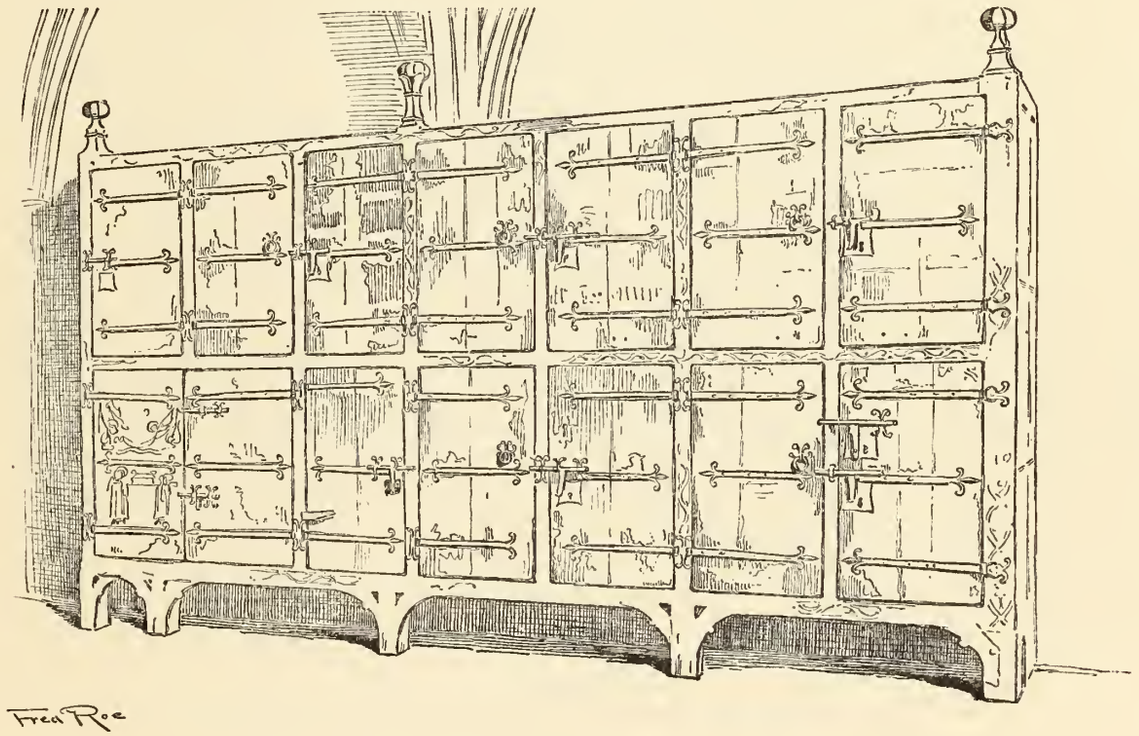
Side view

THIRTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN THE MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS

Formerly in the possession of M. A. Gerente

century. It also possesses a secret sliding panel in the bottom, guarded from observation by two false transoms. The lock is full of interest, being one of the very earliest original locks on an English coffer in existence. There is a remarkable but simple device for masking the keyhole by means of a small dropping plate. As usual, nothing whatever is known of the history of this remarkable coffer. Fairholt, who wrote some remarks on it in 1847, mentions that the centre band was then painted a deep, rich brown, and that the circles underneath, of a similar colour, bore marks on their ground tint of having once possessed metal decorations similar to those above. Since his day the metal remains have been acquired for the South Kensington Museum, and replaced by gilt casts of the original work.

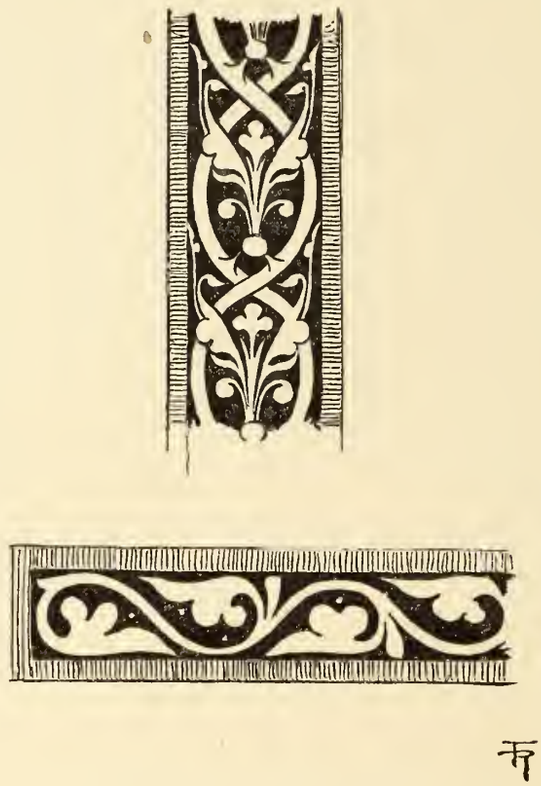
Much scarcer than coffers are the armoires of this early period, and of cabinets we know nothing except from contemporary manuscript illustrations. Anything of the kind intended for secular use is now non-existent—internecine wars have wiped out what



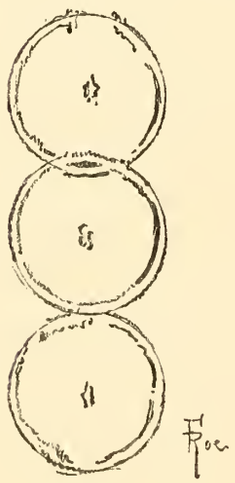
THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ARMOIRE IN THE SACRISTY OF BAYEUX CATHEDRAL

rot and worm might have spared. At Bayeux, in Normandy, in the upper sacristy of the cathedral, a marvellous specimen remains. Little known, and thrown completely into shade by the fame of Matilda's tapestry, the quaint old Norman town contains few treasures more interesting than this. It is a huge double-storied press of oak, both floors being divided into seven compartments. Each of these is closed by a shutter, working on strap hinges, the ends of which terminate in fleur-de-lis. The

unequal number of doors, opening alternately *dos à dos*, presents one of those curious features of irregularity so frequently introduced by the mediæval architect. With the exception of some simple finials the armoire is destitute of carving, but it has been painted with monkish subjects, bordered with patterns in black, white, and red, the greater part of which have now disappeared. Two more early armoires exist at Noyon Cathedral. One, of thirteenth-century work, has its shutters composed of planks and clamped with scroll hinges. It has a singular row of oblong doors closing the compartments at its base. The other, a much more elaborate example, has a roof-shaped top, surrounded by a pierced and embattled cornice. The framework of the armoire is of oak, but the shutters, which are of some white wood, are painted with figures and decorative patterns, both on the exterior and interior. The date of this remarkable piece of furniture is probably a hundred years later than the two others, though it is said to have been made in the thirteenth century. Noyon abounds in fine examples of early coffers, decorated lavishly with twisted ironwork and, in some instances, with tooth moulding.



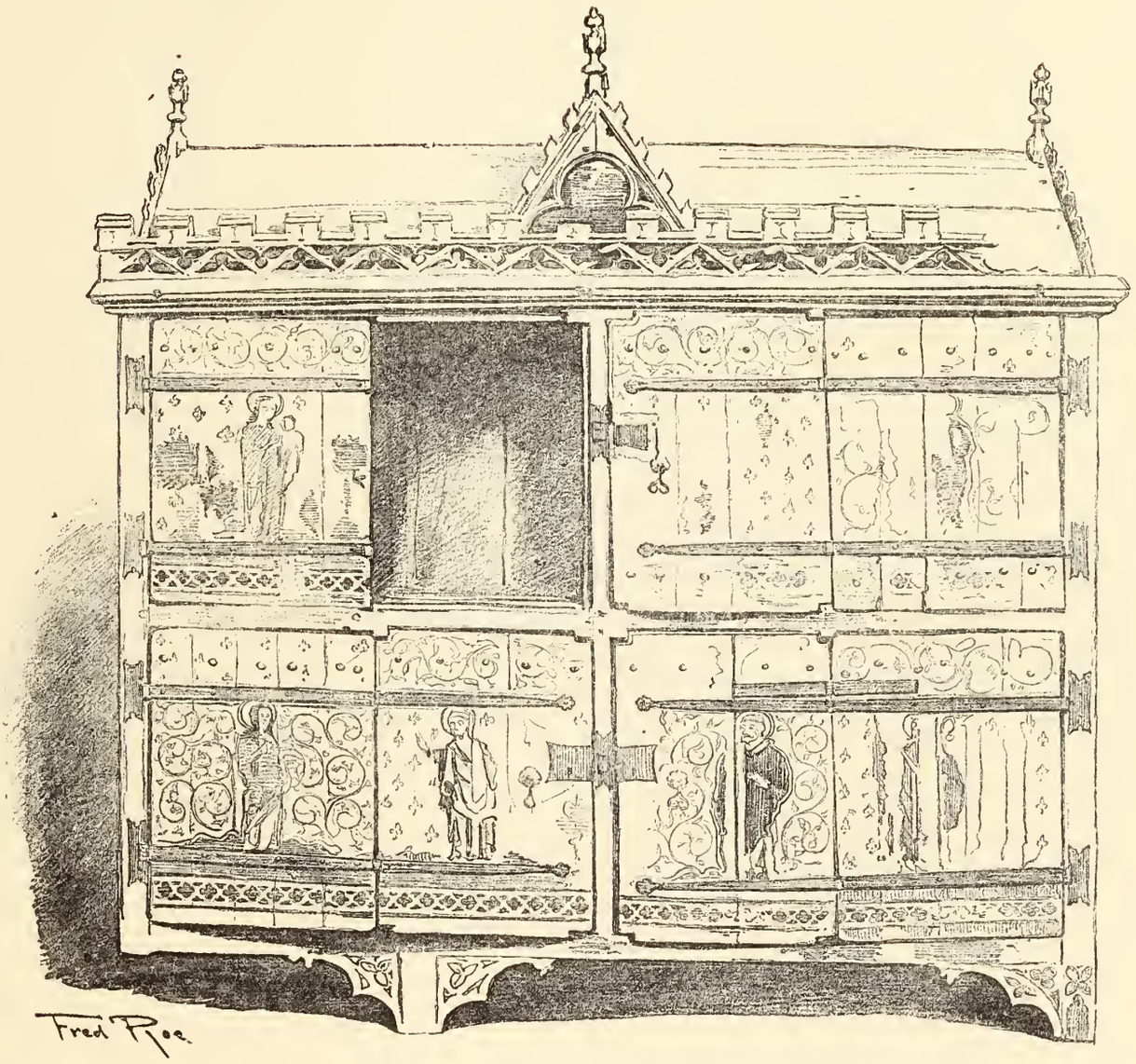
DIAPER PATTERNS IN BLACK, WHITE, AND RED
On the Bayeux Armoire



MAKER'S MARK
On coffer in Saltwood Church, Kent

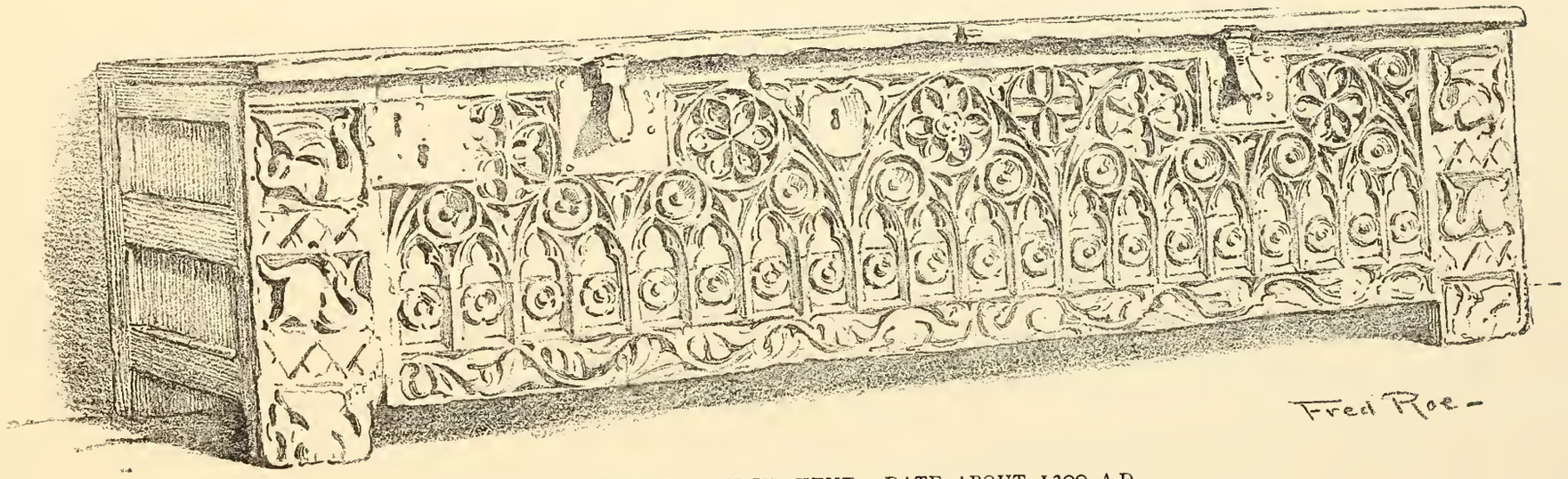
At Saltwood, in Kent, we possess a notable traceried coffer which dates from the borderland between the Early English and Decorated styles. The Saltwood coffer is said to have been translated from the castle some hundred and twenty years back, but the story is probably apocryphal. The tracery on its front is very beautiful, and the spaces between the supporting mullions are embellished with a line of roses, a very unusual feature. The original lid has unfortunately been replaced, apparently in Stuart times, by one of panelled deal. The coffer formerly possessed two locks, though others have been added. On the top edge of the front plank is what appears to be the maker's mark.

At Peterborough Cathedral is a finely carved coffer which has more than once been quoted as a genuine specimen of thirteenth-century work. Nothing in the architectural decoration



PAINTED ARMOIRE IN THE CATHEDRAL OF NOYON, FRANCE

Late thirteenth or early fourteenth century

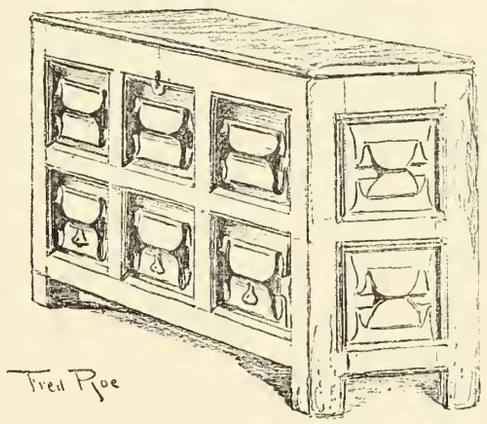


COFFER IN SALTWOOD CHURCH, KENT. DATE ABOUT 1300 A.D.

Length 7 feet 5 inches; height 1 foot 11 inches; width 2 feet 6 inches

or interior surface of this box can be objected to, but its colour and the knife-like sharpness of the carving proclaim its modernity. On examining the Peterborough coffer, inquiries revealed the fact that it was made of old wood, but in recent years.

Westminster Abbey contains a good example of the conventual coffers of the thirteenth century. It is of good proportions and the legs are slightly but elegantly moulded. The chains at the back are perfect.



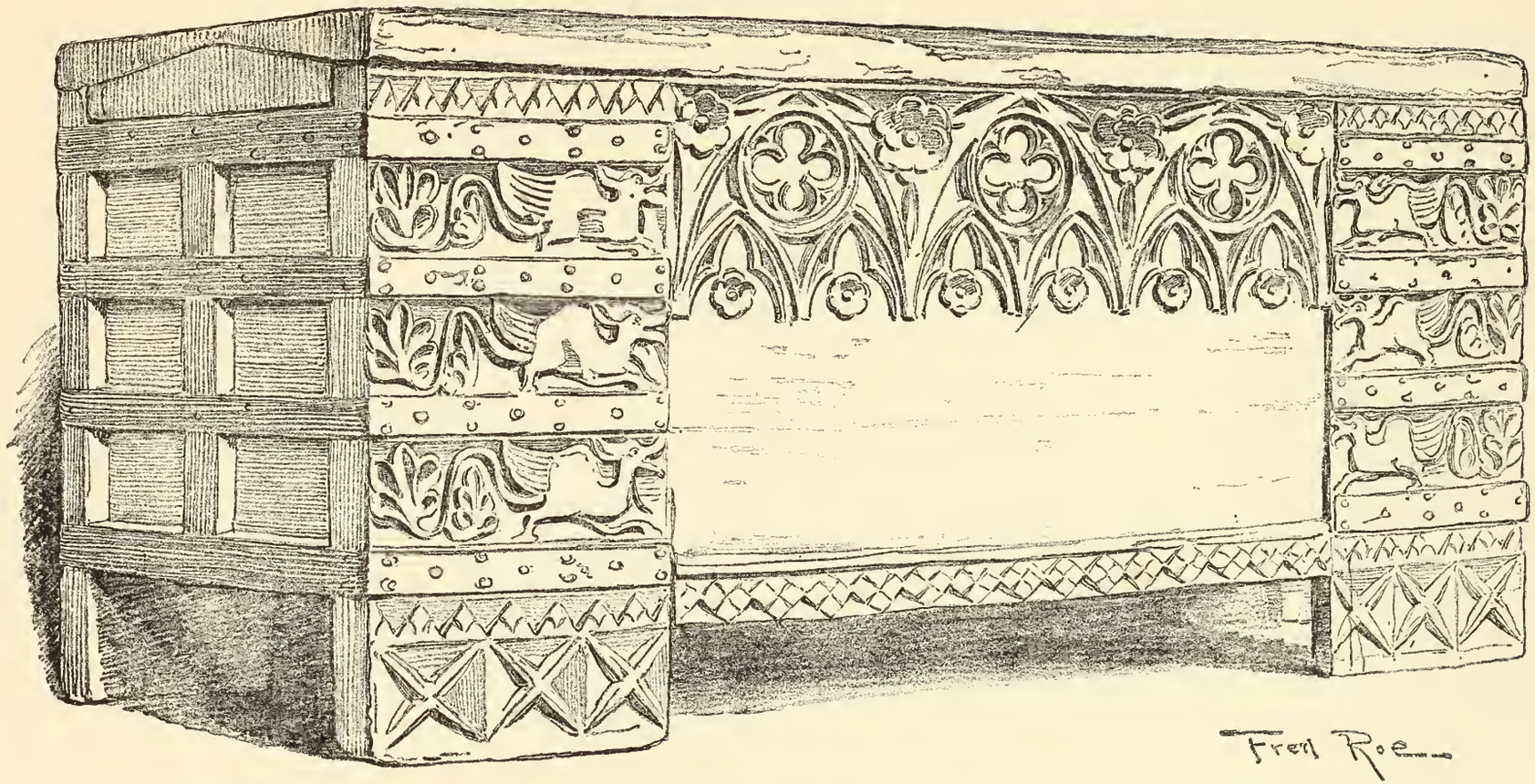
INGLE-NOOK SEAT WITH BOX TOP AND DRAWERS

French or Flemish, about 1500

CHAPTER IV

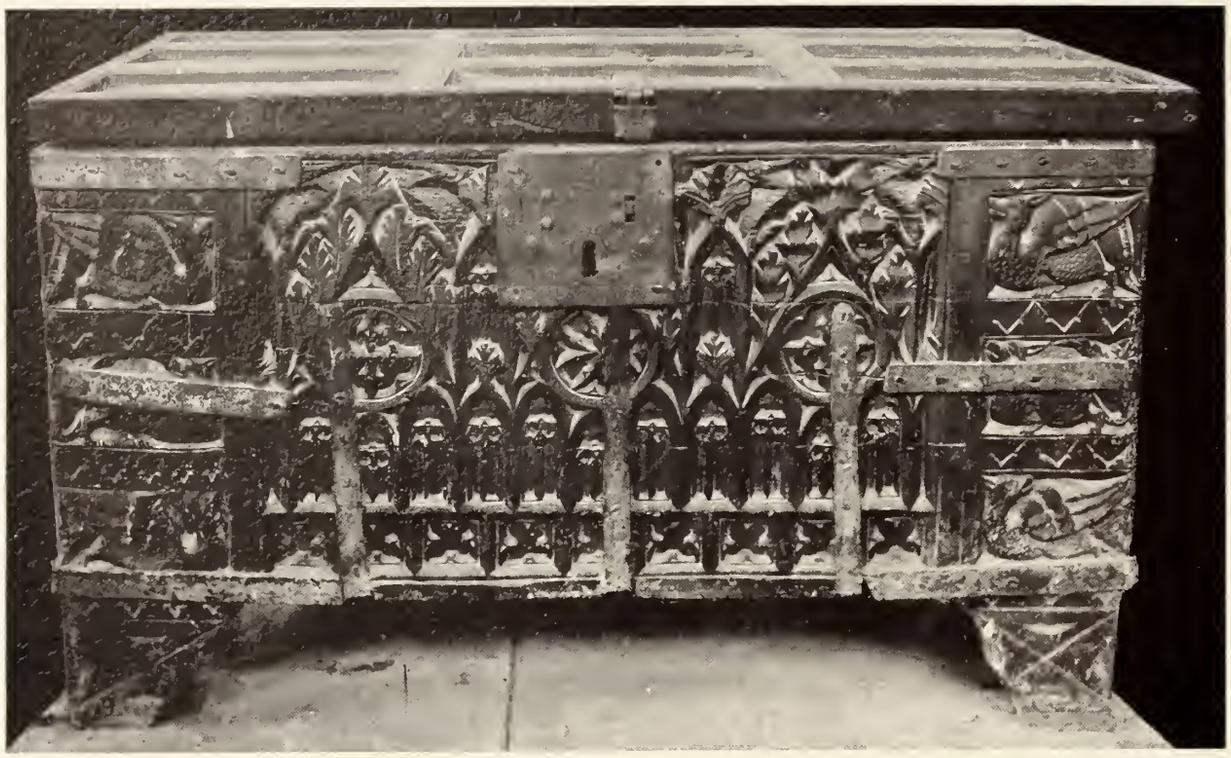
THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

WITH coffers of the fourteenth century we have a more extended field as regards design, but the number of examples remaining is not greatly in excess of those of the preceding epoch. The same construction was generally adhered to, the fronts being formed as one oblong panel and the ends clamped with crossed bars of wood. In many specimens the only changes noticeable are a greater richness of detail in carving, and the addition of hinges. A distinctly new feature, however, was introduced during the second half of the fourteenth century, this being the adornment of the fronts and sides with buttresses, and their consequent division into a series of panelled compartments. This more advanced mode of construction may be safely assigned to not earlier than the end of the Decorated period, as it may be pointed out that although the tracery may be of the purest flowing or geometrical type, details in wood-carving did not immediately follow architectural changes, and in many parts an approximation of style was not arrived at until some years had passed. It is noticeable, however, that these buttresses, instead of being applied to broad stiles, are fastened directly on the fronts of coffers treated with planks after the earlier style, the recessing of the panels by the addition of a further moulding round the framing belonging to the more developed conditions of the fifteenth century. Coffers of the fourteenth century, most of them architecturally treated, are to be found in many parts of England. The churches of Alnwick, Northumberland; Brancepeth, Durham; Haconby and Huttoft, Lincolnshire; St. Peter's, Derby; Wath by Ripon, Yorkshire; St. Mary Magdalene, Oxford; Chevington, Suffolk; Faversham and Rainham in Kent, may be picked out as examples, which while covering a wide field, are amongst the most noticeable in the country. Many of these possess a very great similarity, not only in design but execution, and practically almost the only difference between some of them is the number of bays or wheels with which they are carved. In the coffers at Haconby, Chevington, and Wath, the details are identical and leave no doubt that they must have sprung from the same origin. The feeling and method of the carving is unmistakeable. Coffers of this type often exhibit an approach to floridity in the manner of their decoration, and a fallacious impression exists that they were productions of either



FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER, KNOWN AS THE "JEWEL CHEST," IN ST. MARY MAGDALENE'S CHURCH, OXFORD

Length 5 feet 10 inches; height 2 feet 11 inches; width 2 feet 2 inches



FOURTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN HACONBY CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE

Height, 2 ft. 3½ in. Length, 3 ft. 8 in Width. 1 ft. 8 in.

FOURTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN DERSINGHAM CHURCH, NORFOLK

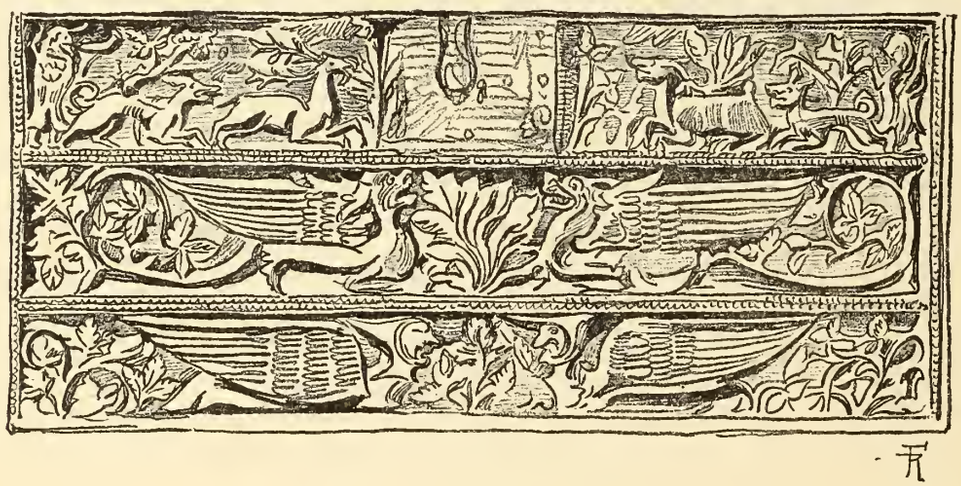
LATE FOURTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN BRANCEPETH CHURCH, NORTHUMBERLAND

Flemish or German nationality. It may be pointed out, however, that mention of "Flanders chests" in wills and inventories is not to be found prior to the fifteenth century, and that this peculiarity may be put down to the period when they were manufactured. Such admittedly English coffers as the Saltwood and Oxford examples partake rather of the purity of the Early English than of the Decorated style, while at Huttoft the chest is so advanced as to be almost classed with the Perpendicular. Many of the so-called Decorated pieces, while actually being of fourteenth-century workmanship, are in fact early productions of the Perpendicular period, after the borderland between the two styles had been passed (see note 9). It is unnecessary to give a description in detail of all the Decorated coffers mentioned, but a few striking characteristics should be noticed.

The coffer in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene at Oxford is one of the earliest fourteenth-century English examples remaining. This piece is locally known by the name of the "jewel chest" and it traditionally dates from the time of Henry VII. This, however, is quite an error, and may have arisen from the coffer being repaired or used at some special function during his reign. Its decoration is of a semi-Early English character, and while taking into consideration the "follow on" of our early wood-carvers' art, this piece certainly belongs to a period some hundred and fifty years prior to that suggested. The formation of the lid is massive and unusual, and on it is carved at each end a row of Gothic arches, similar to a contemporary example in the museum at Ypres. The early date of this coffer is shown by the fact that, although it has never possessed the pin-hinge, it is yet provided with lid flanges, shutting flush with the side grilles. The south aisle and other portions of St. Mary's Church were built *circa* 1320, and the coffer may have been made about the same time. The church was restored by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1847, when the coffer was also renovated, none too skilfully. The front has been patched in several places, but evidence can be seen that it at one time possessed two staples, as well as a large lock. The interior of the coffer is fitted with two trays, and a row of pigeon-holes, which appear to have been added at some later date. The plain portion beneath the carved arches on the front was most likely once painted with figures of saints or with religious subjects which disappeared during the stormy times of the Reformation. The mullions supporting these arches may also have been painted, as they have never been carved in relief.

The coffers at Wath, Haconby, and Chevington are so surprisingly alike that an account of the architectural features of one would fairly well apply to the others. The main difference is that the Haconby example has three wheels or roundels filled with tracery, and supported by mullions, while those at Chevington and Wath have four and five respectively. The crocketing surmounting the gables is freely treated, and the spaces between filled in with gryphons, birds, etc. The stiles are carved with the usual monsters, apes, etc., in compartments, and in the Wath coffer human figures are introduced. The Chevington example has a one-sided look, owing to the existence

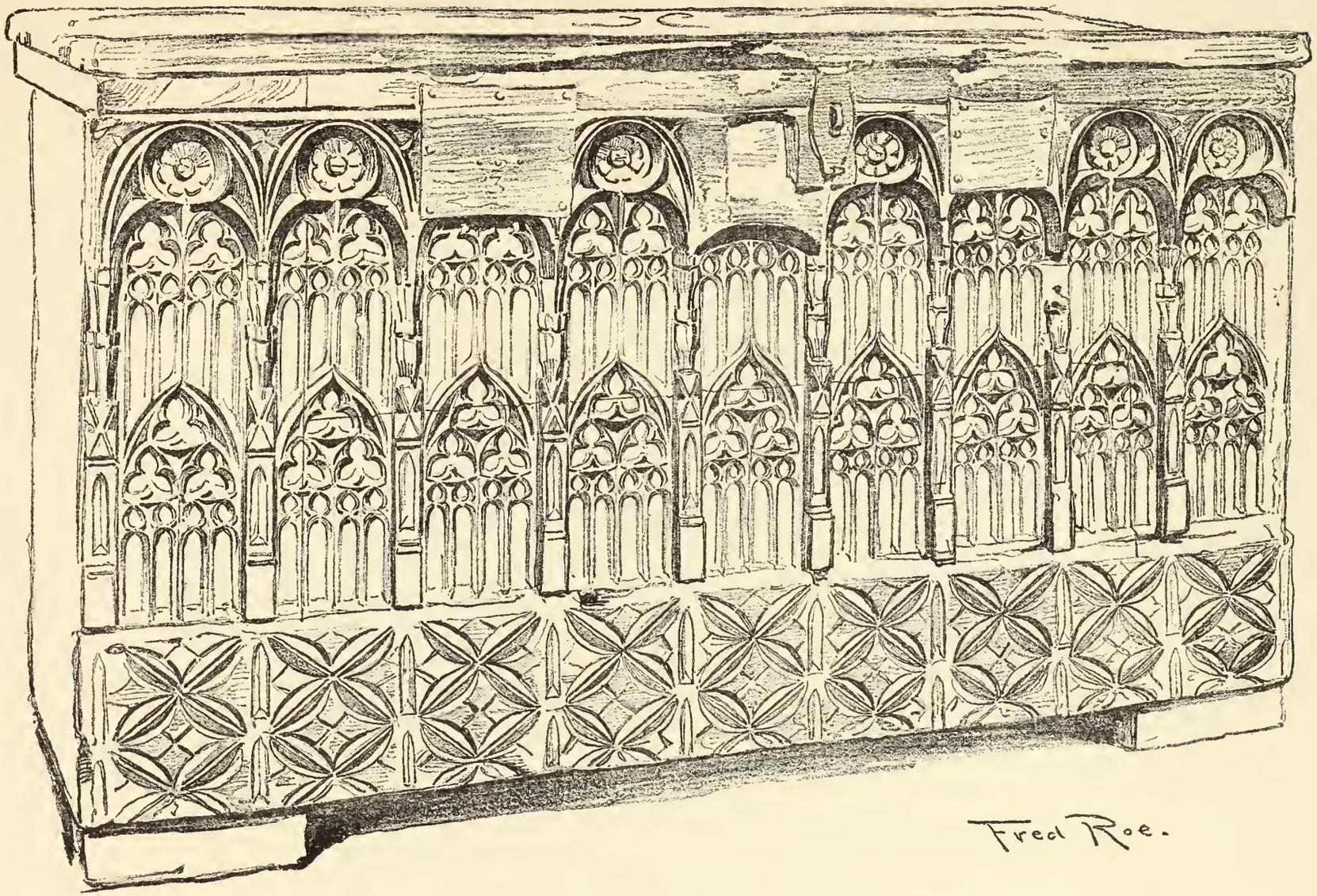
of only one upright on its front. The evident traces of a tenon on the end of the panel proves that the coffer has been mutilated at some time, the end being now boxed with a plain board. A legend exists in the village that the missing part was removed to make more room for the bellringer, but we are informed that the present incumbent and his ancestors have held the benefice for over one hundred years and that the coffer has always been in the same condition during their occupation. Inside, at the unmutilated end, is fixed a strong box of oak, with three locks, a species of incorporation which is seldom met with. The Alnwick and Brancepeth coffers bear a family likeness to the three just mentioned, the first-named bearing the earlier characteristics and probably belonging to the early part of the century. The front of the Alnwick coffer is divided, like the stiles, into three parallel compartments. In the



PANEL OF THE ALNWICK COFFER

top one, on either side of the lock, is carved a representation of a stag hunt, probably the earliest existing on a mediæval box. The keepers wear a curious kind of smock unlike anything generally associated with the pleasures of the chase. The decorative treatment of the birds on the two lower divisions is extremely clever, those at the base having human heads hooded with the headdresses of the period. The lid of the Brancepeth coffer is panelled and decorated with an elaborate chamfer. This elaborate example dates from the introduction of the Perpendicular style, towards the end of the century.

The Faversham coffer is a most beautiful piece of purely architectural work. It is somewhat puzzling, however, for while possessing superficially an earlier appearance, we are inclined to place it rather late in the Decorated period (see note 10). Elaborate as the coffer is, its construction still smacks of an early type, and in some respects it is most unusual. Although it is buttressed, the traceried windows are carved on planks placed longitudinally, instead of panels cased with framing. The uprights are treated



FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN FAVERSHAM CHURCH, KENT

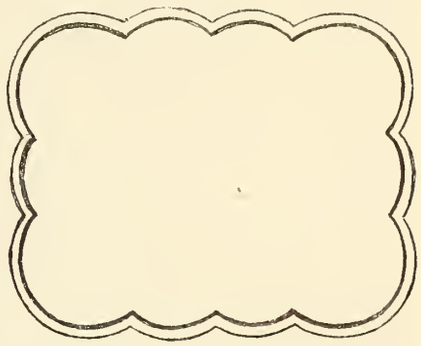
This is the earliest example of a buttressed cofler existing in England. Length 5 feet 3¼ inches; height 3 feet ½ inch; width 2 feet 4 inches

FOURTEENTH CENTURY COFFER IN HUTTOFT CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE

This is later than the Faversham Chest, but one of the earliest buttressed chests remaining in England.

The front is formed of planks, the tracery and buttresses are appliqué.

in the same manner and brought flush, so as to form an even surface, upon which the arches, buttresses, and skirting-board are appliqué. The buttresses are very simple in character, and the lid is incised with patterns composed of segments of circles. Though perfect not many years since, this coffer has now been reduced by senseless vandalism to merely the front and lid, the rest being replaced by "neat deal." One of the buttresses has also disappeared within the last few years. A coffer of absolutely identical design to that at Faversham stands in the Tufton Chapel in Rainham Church, Kent. Both these pieces show evidences of having been decorated with red ochre on the tracery, indeed their characteristics are so strikingly similar as to leave no doubt that they must have issued from the same source. The Rainham coffer, however, is not square, the front and back inclining inwards towards the top. The Huttoft chest, though of more strictly Decorated character, belongs to an advanced type which appeared during the last quarter of the century. Constructively it is a great advance on anything yet mentioned, being both panelled and buttressed. It used to be elevated on moulded legs instead of the ponderous flat uprights hitherto in vogue, but the chest has suffered much since Parker published his drawing of it, and the legs have now disappeared. This is almost the only remaining instance of an English chest on which the tracery has been cut out and then applied to the surface of the wood, after the manner of later foreign examples.

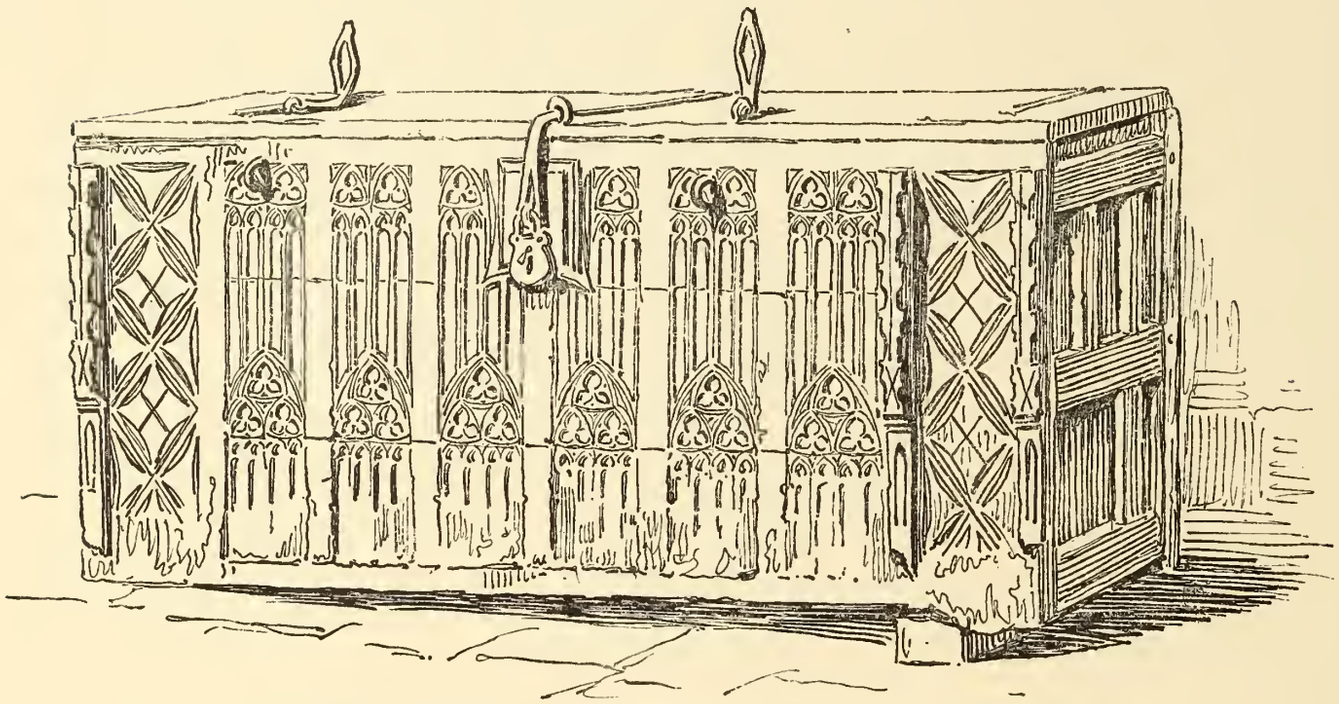


INCISED PATTERN ON THE LID OF THE FAVERSHAM COFFER

A very complete and interesting coffret of early Perpendicular or Transition work is in the author's collection. It is in the nature of what is known as a "trustee box," the lid being divided, and a strong partition fixed across the inside of the coffret. A lock is fitted to each section of the lid, to open which separate keys would be required. The front is carved with very good tracery, and small iron bindings appear at the corners. These are evidently part of the original scheme, as wood supports on which to affix them have been left in parts where the tracery is sunk. The lid, like in many early pieces, is thicker in front than at the back, and the whole box appears to have been made with a view to strength as well as ornament.

Among the many beautiful specimens which have disappeared during recent years, the coffer formerly at Wittersham Church, in the Isle of Oxney, Kent, may be specially noticed. This example has been engraved several times, and was remarkable for the purity of its Decorated tracery, and the advent of the buttress, at a date perhaps anterior to that of the coffer at Faversham, in the same county. The Wittersham coffer has vanished. It is stated that between the end of the last rector's tenancy and the incoming of the present incumbent, some twenty-seven years

ago, an interval occurred, during which this fine example disappeared, and at the same time the stocks which had stood at the eastern extremity of the village for over two hundred years. The prey, doubtless, to some enthusiastic but unscrupulous collector, neither stocks nor coffer have been discovered. The churchwardens and villagers always professed to know nothing about the removal, and the whole affair has remained a mystery. The loss of such a fine example of Decorated work is irreparable. The Rev. A. J. Pearman, however, in the *Archæologia Cantiana* (1887), mentions this coffer as almost a myth, and states that the oldest inhabitant has never

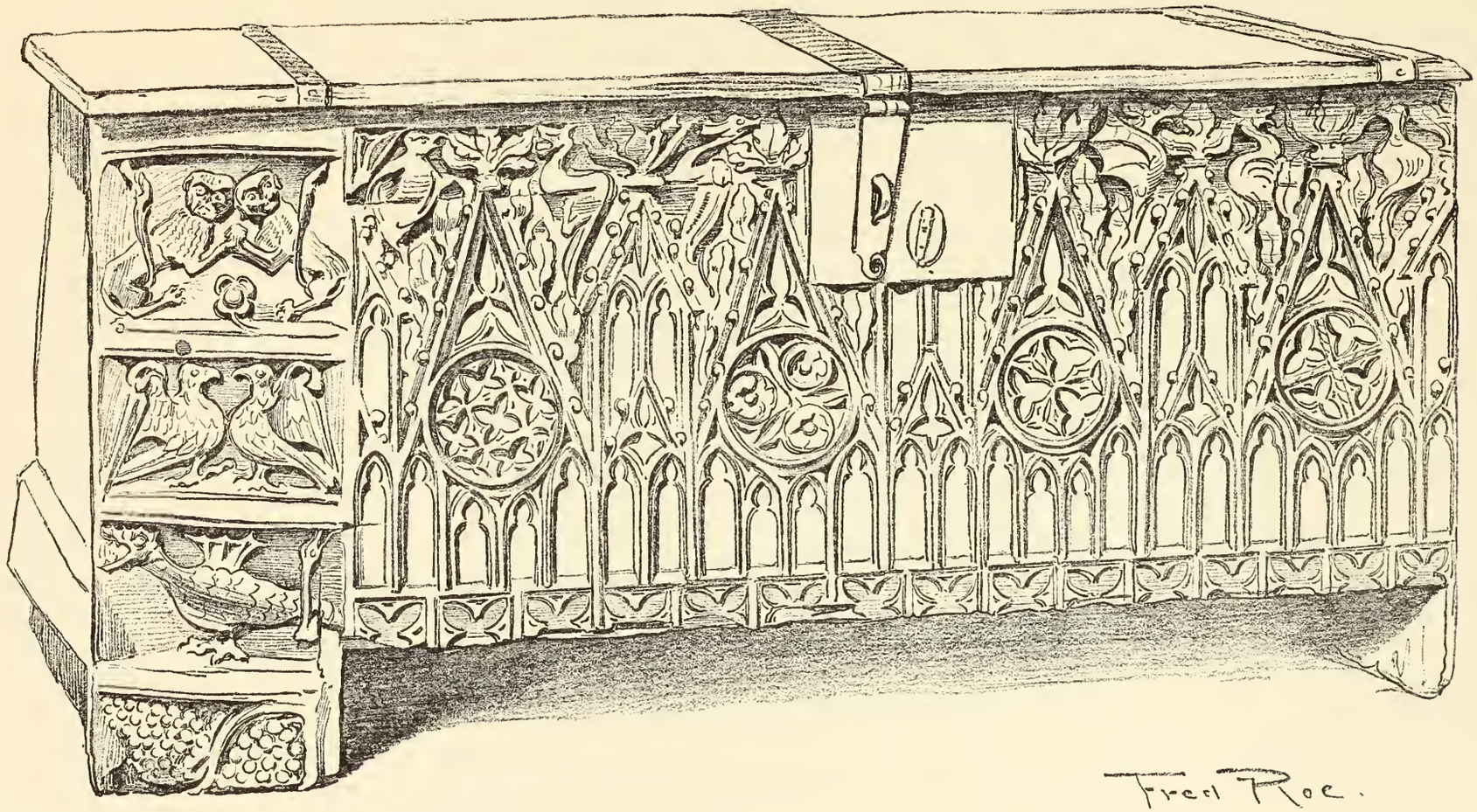


FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER, FORMERLY IN WITTERSHAM CHURCH, KENT

From *The Dictionary of Architecture*, 1859

heard so much as a rumour of it. He cites the letter of a Mrs. Deedes, widow of a former rector, who states that when a visitor went to the church to see the chest he was immensely disgusted to find that it was not there—"nor was anyone aware that it ever had been."

A very valuable example of the end of the Decorated period is in the church at Dersingham, Norfolk. It is carved on the front with the emblems of the four Evangelists with their names on labels. Though this chest is made of planks of oak, after the early fashion, the symbols are separated by a raised imitation of framing within which they are recessed. The top and lower rails have a pattern of birds and roses placed alternately. On the corner uprights are carved late Decorated windows, similar to the east window of the church, which was built about the time of transition



FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN CHEVINGTON CHURCH, SUFFOLK

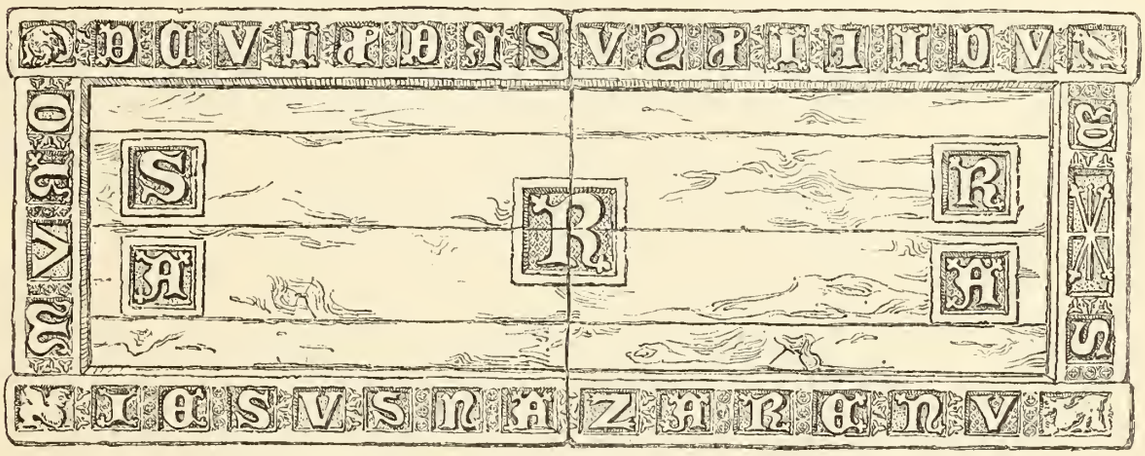
Length 5 feet 1¼ inches; height 2 feet 6½ inches; width of stile 11 inches

COFFER IN WILNE CHURCH, DERBYSHIRE

COFFER IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, DERBY

End of the Fourteenth or beginning of the Fifteenth Century.

between this and the succeeding style. The uprights terminate at the lower end with cusped arches. Etchings of the Dersingham chest appear in Cotman's *Architectural Remains*, and a drawing of it is also included in the Dawson Turner Collection in the British Museum. These illustrations show that the feet have been considerably worn during late years. Cotman's book also gives a full view of the lid, which is one of the most interesting points about this example. Round the border in early lettering is the inscription: "JESUS NAZARENUS CRUCIFIXSUS. REX JUDEORUM." Within the border towards the centre of the lid appear the letters $\begin{matrix} S & R \\ & R \\ A & A. \end{matrix}$ The most curious part of the whole thing is that the inscription, which commences on the band nearest the front, is reversed as it travels round the lid, that part which is on the back, or hinge rail, actually reading backwards. It is sad to find that half the lid has now disappeared.



LID OF A CHEST IN DERSINGHAM CHURCH, NORFOLK

From Cotman's *Architectural Remains*, 1838

The right-hand half is now missing. Fourteenth century.

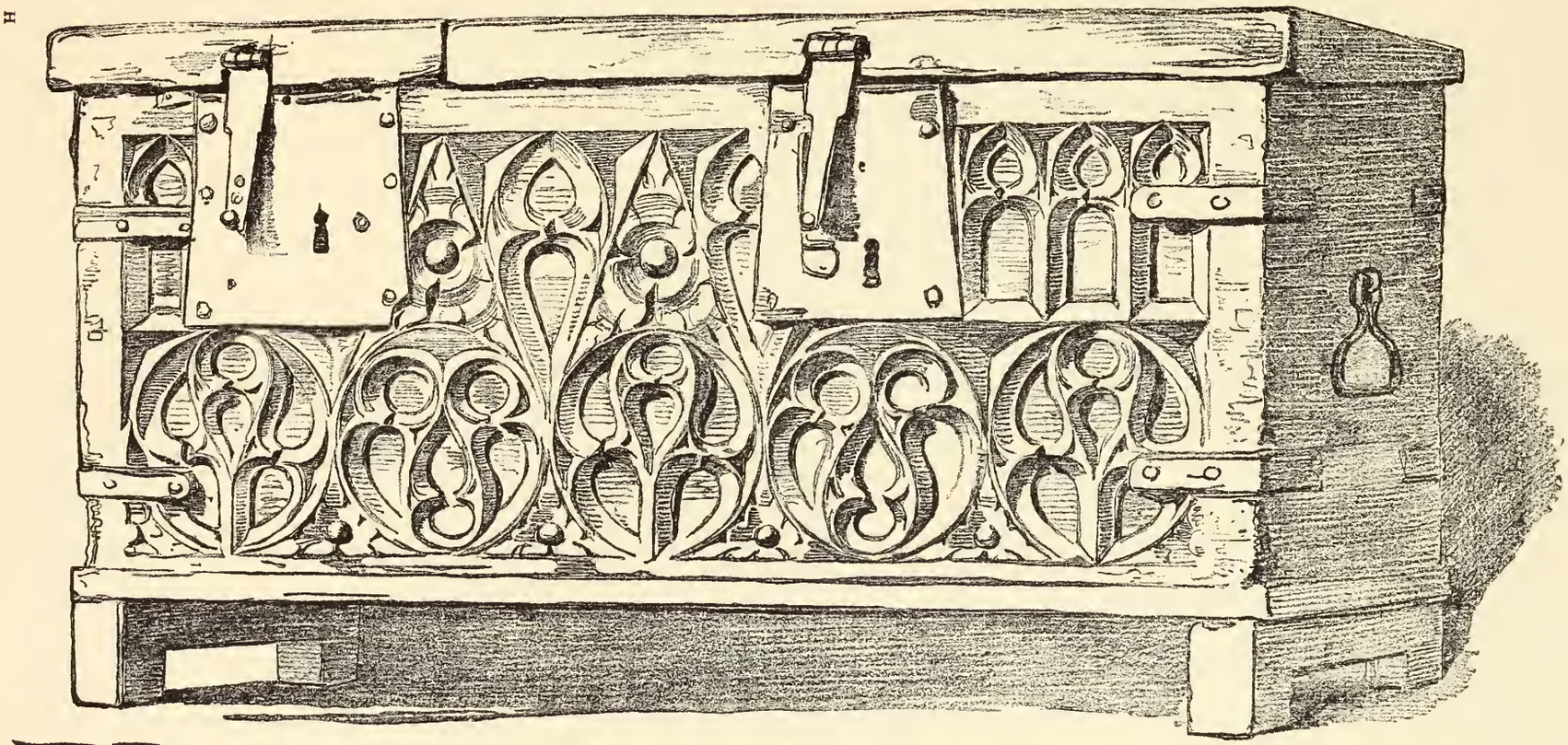
Cotman's etching shows that it was sawn in half, though no traces of a partition exists in the centre of the chest. The left-hand half alone remains. This chest retains traces of rich colouring. Its construction is so unusual as to suggest the idea that it was not made by an ordinary chest maker, but rather by someone connected with timber roofing. It was undoubtedly made for the church in which it remains.

At Wilne, Derbyshire, and St. Peter's Church, Derby, we have instances of two fourteenth-century coffers which have been mutilated. The Wilne coffer (which is much the earlier, and a most singular type) has apparently been toyed with and altered during the seventeenth century. The mullions on the lower front plank have been shaved off for some inexplicable reason, and the corners fitted with fresh uprights ornamented with an incised pattern. The Derby coffer resembles in a great degree

that at Brancepeth, and belongs to the end of the fourteenth century. It has been a very fine work, one of the most beautiful of that type. Like its brother coffer, the crockets surmounting the tracery are interspersed with figures, though at Derby birds and gryphons alone appear, while at Brancepeth, apes and semi-human monsters may be found. The devils or chimeras on the uprights are finer in the Derby example, being admirably designed, but unfortunately a question of fit has caused the ends to be planed down by some local vandal. It is impossible to compare these two coffers without being convinced that they are by the same maker.

FIGURE OF ST. GEORGE

From fourteenth-century Coffer front in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fred Roe

EARLY PERPENDICULAR COFFRET IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Length 2 feet 1½ inches; height (exclusive of legs) 1 foot 1 inch; width 1 foot 1 inch

FOURTEENTH CENTURY PANEL FROM KNIGHTLY COFFER IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON

Formerly at Rufford Abbey, Notts

CHAPTER V

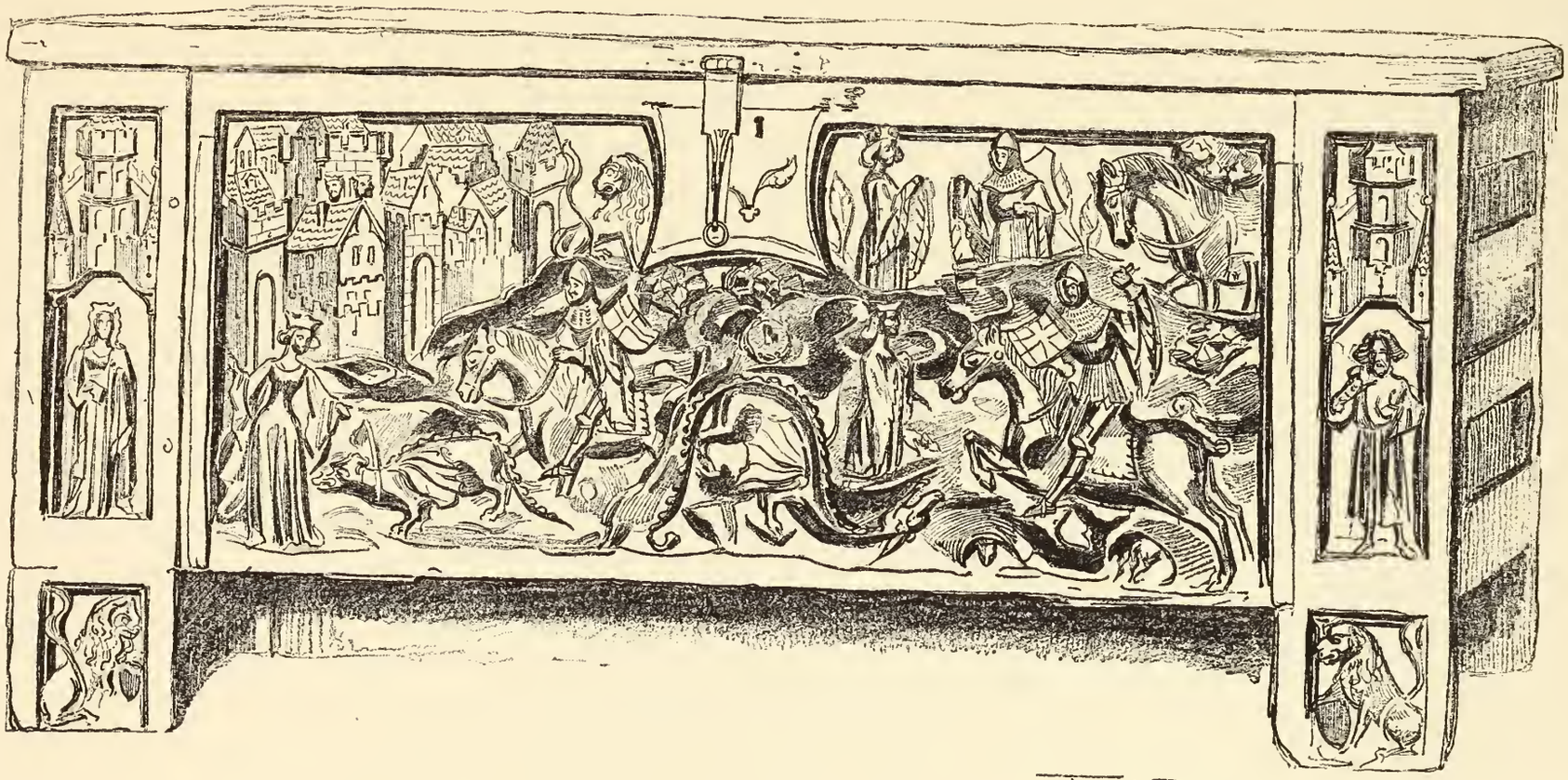
TILTING COFFERS

A FORGOTTEN GENIUS

IN the fourteenth century mythical or warlike subjects seem to have become popular amongst the upper classes, for coffers of that date, as well as those of the early part of the succeeding century, often combine decoration of an architectural nature with groups of figures, the incidents represented being frequently those of the tourney or associated with deeds of arms (see note 11). The architectural features are usually confined to the stiles, and are of a castellated or defensive order quite dissimilar to the ecclesiastical tracery used when the ornamentation is derived from architecture alone. This departure tends to show how the dominating influence of the Church was partly replaced by an independent spirit of militarism. Some precious examples have descended to us, and in not a few of these traces of the same master hand are visible. Those remaining in England may be found in York Cathedral; Harty Church, Isle of Sheppey; Southwold Church, Suffolk; and two specimens in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Of the latter, one is merely a panel or coffer-front minus the uprights, etc., the other is a coffret described as of French manufacture, and exhibiting no architectural details whatever. The panel of the York coffer and the first-mentioned South Kensington piece are almost identical, with the curious exception that the composition is reversed. The similarity of treatment, handling, and execution, the mannerisms and peculiarities, in each case, leave no doubt that they were executed by the same person. A legend exists, we believe, in certain quarters, that the panel in the Kensington example is the *original* of that in the York coffer, and that the latter is a copy which must have been substituted during some repairs. This is most certainly not the case. The measurements of the two panels do not agree, and careful inspection will only go farther to substantiate the fact that they are both originals of fourteenth-century work. Many theologians maintain that certain discrepancies in the various accounts given by the writers of the Gospels do but substantiate and prove the unconcerted truth of the New Testament. The want of sameness in some parts of these coffer panels supplies a like illustration, the contrarieties in each being executed with absolutely the same

spirit and mannerism. On the York panel traces of vermilion and gilding are still visible, and it may be reasonably supposed that if the brown stain with which it has been daubed could be safely removed, more of this adornment might be brought to light. In the Kensington example St. George wears a *pig-snouted bassinet*, with its attachment of flowing camail, a form of defensive headgear which was in vogue here during the reign of Richard II., and of which numerous illustrations occur in the Harleian manuscripts dealing with the Campaign in Ireland in 1394. In the York carving St. George's bassinet is plain and unvisored. Both panels exhibit St. George as wearing over his armour the belted and tight-fitting surcoat, an earlier form of garment than the loose tabard which appears in the Harleian illuminations referred to. In the Kensington panel faint traces of *dagging* may be observed round the lady's dress, and sleeves of St. George ; in the York example the dagging exists to a much greater degree and is even carried round the saddle-cloth and reins of the knight's charger (see note 12). The various incidents of the story are shown, as was customary in mediæval work, in the same picture, and in both specimens the fight is concluded by the princess leading the wounded dragon into captivity. This rather irregular ending to the fable is supported by some of the ancient writers and is quite in accordance with the romantic traditions of the times. An old legend says that Princess Cleodolinda tied her girdle round the dragon's neck and "the dragon followed as it had been a meek beast and debonayre." The costume of the princess affords a fine exposition of the hanging sleeve which was so popular during the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Some portions of the carving on the panels have been so undercut as to separate them from the surface. These have mostly suffered from ill usage and have now disappeared. The tree-trunks are but stumps, and on the right hand of the York coffer what appears to be a basket of cabbages on the charger's back is merely the foliage of a tree with the stem broken away. A curious detail in the centre of this panel is a wattled border or fence round the tree which occurs underneath the lock-plate. The York coffer is purely secular in its design throughout, and shows no trace of religious influence, but rather of its having been commissioned by someone who exercised a knightly or warlike calling. It would never have been produced by order of the ecclesiastical authorities, though it may have been received as a gift or bequest, the form of which was not at all unusual in the Middle Ages. King Richard II. himself twice visited York: first in 1385 and afterwards in 1389, the latter occasion being for the purpose of settling certain differences between Church and Corporation. It is recorded that to the mayor, William de Selby, he presented his own sword, taken from his side, for the purpose of being borne before him and his successors in the mayoral office (see note 13). It is not known what gifts were made to Mother Church on this occasion, but the coffer in question, which has singular national characteristics, may have had some connection with this visit.

The true nationality of the maker of these coffers is open to doubt, though there is every probability that they were executed in this country. In the South Kensington

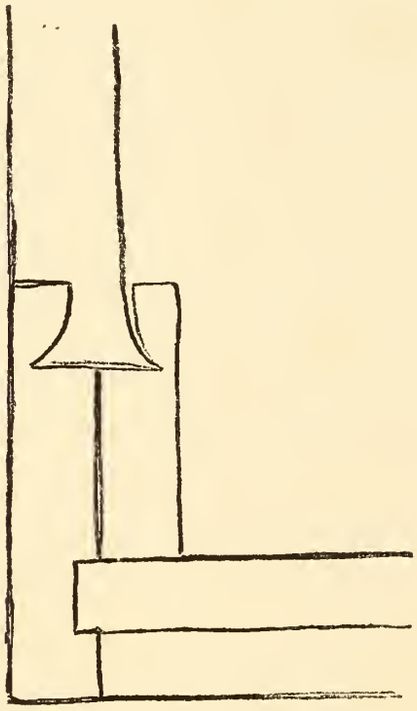


KNIGHTLY COFFER OF LATE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY WORK IN YORK MINSTER

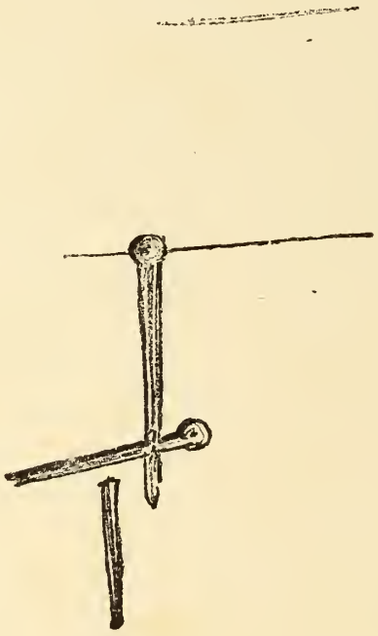
Height 3 feet ½ inch; length 6 feet 2¾ inches; width 2 feet 6 inches; panel 2 feet 2½ inches × 4 feet 9 inches

example, which has been stripped, the wood has the appearance of being English oak, and there is a simplicity about the handling and workmanship which, while admitting the exceeding rarity of contemporary specimens, seems to point to home production. In the museum at Dijon is a carved wood retable, which is known to have been produced by Jacques de Baerze, a Flemish sculptor, in 1391, for the Church of the Chartreuse, and which displays a statuette of St. George habited in a manner wonderfully like that on the coffer-front. The details of dress and equipment on these presentments of the Prince of Cappadocia illustrate absolutely the same period, but as regards style and execution the results are vastly, not to say nationally different. On the other hand, a survey of the fortified town which appears on the York and Kensington coffer-fronts will discover some singularly Flemish details (see note 14). Among a multitude of roofs and towers, crowded as only those Gothic towns which were cramped for safety within walls could be, several instances of "corbie" or "crow's-step" gables may be seen. These are mingled with houses fronted with tracery, resembling the somewhat later domestic dwellings which to this day remain at Bruges and other old towns in Flanders. The feature known as "crow's-step" was not introduced into England until a much later period, and then it rarely penetrated further than the eastern counties or the maritime fringe of England which lay nearest the Continent. It would be vain labour to search among the decreasing specimens in this country for so early a contemporary as those on the coffer-fronts, nor is it likely that any existed here before the Renaissance, though some resemblance may be seen in the rising battlements of certain buildings of the Perpendicular period, such as the gate-house of Oxburgh Castle, Norfolk, and some of the college gates at our Universities. Many illustrations containing "crow's-step" gables may be found in the manuscripts of the *Travels of Marco Polo*, and the *Romance of Alexander*, at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. These illustrations, in which the details have been rendered with remarkable accuracy, were executed by Jehan de Grise, a Frenchman who is supposed to have worked in England between the years 1338–44. The deduction from these considerations is either that the specimens in question were the work of an Englishman who had been influenced by architectural work which he had seen abroad, or else that of a foreigner residing in this country, and whose early impressions while working as a specialist for the wealthy classes were not entirely to be got rid of. In Poole's *History of York* a notice of the coffer there is given by Sir Samuel Meyrick, who suggests rather vaguely that the legend of St. George expresses allegorically the union of Henry V. with the French princess, that the town at the back represented Paris, and that the king and queen looking from the castle windows are anxiously watching the fate of their kingdom, the English Alliance being typified by the lion. It is interesting to note that the Kensington example has been traced back to Rufford Abbey, in Nottinghamshire, where the coffer of which it formed part was ruthlessly broken up, as a cure for craziness, which might probably with care have been rectified.

At Harty Church, situated in a deserted spot in the Isle of Sheppey, is another tilting coffer that shows strong indications of having emanated from the same source as the two examples dedicated to St. George. It is a rather later work, and no Flemish influence is discoverable in its decoration, the slight architectural features which it displays being merely confined to some battlemented canopies on its uprights. The subject carved on the panel in this case is different, but similar mannerisms and handling are observable, and the basis on which the design is carried out is the same. On the front appears the representation of a tournament, the knights being armed *cap à pie*, and attended by their respective squires. An interesting detail may be



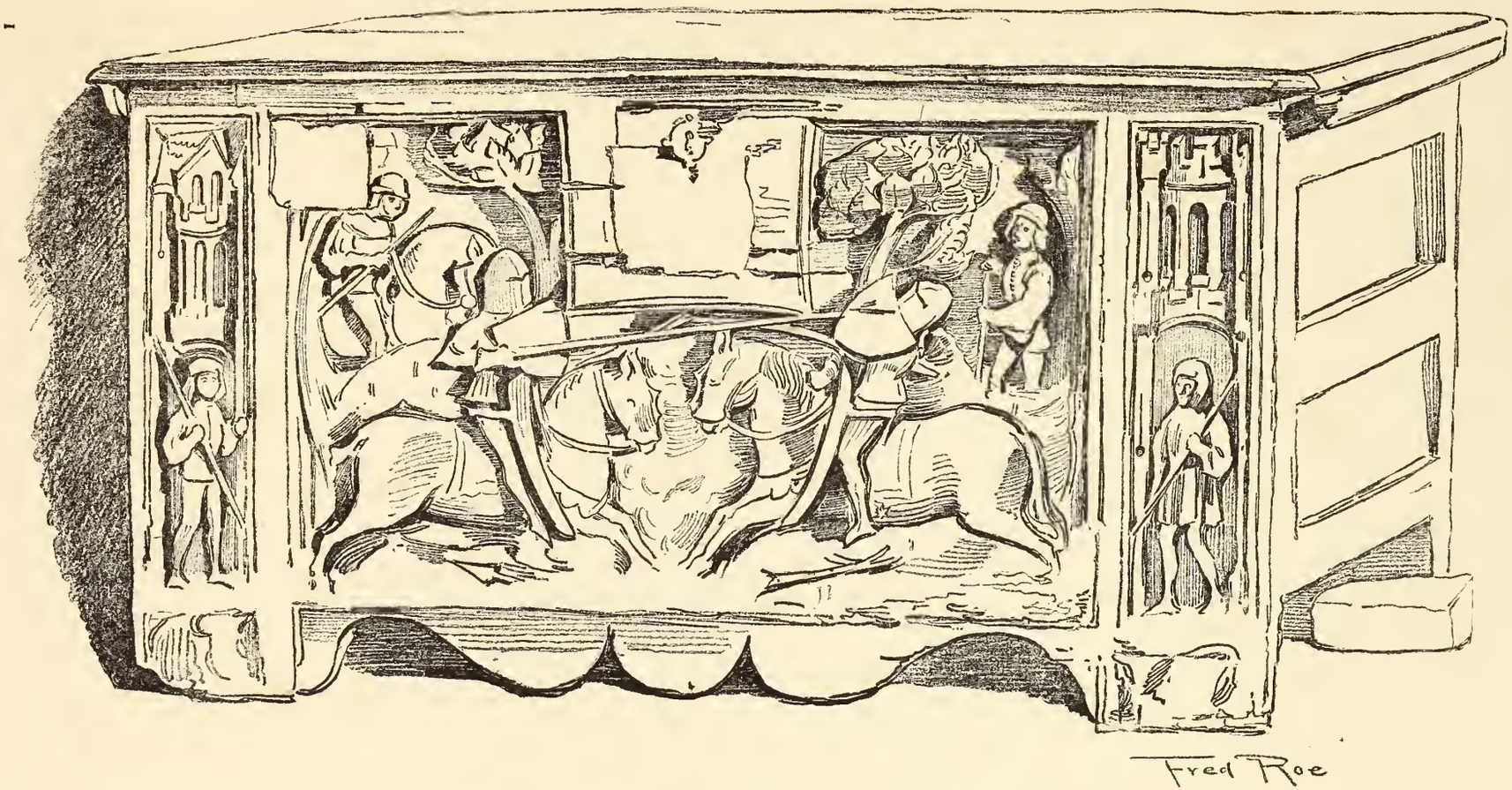
DOVETAILING IN CONSTRUCTION OF HARTY COFFER



SUPPOSED MAKER'S MARK ON HARTY COFFER

noticed in the unbuckling of the vanquished knight's heaume by the blow of his adversary's lance. Trees are depicted as in the York and other examples, and the uprights are carved with figures in civil costume standing under simple architectural canopies. The constructive dovetailing of the stiles and front is curious, and there is what appears to be a maker's mark on the top surface of the right end transom. The lock has long since disappeared, and the coffer, which is a fine and nearly complete specimen, is not kept with that care which so valuable a relic deserves. Its date may be approximately placed between 1400 and Agincourt (see note 15).

The tilting coffret in the South Kensington Museum, which is described as being of French nationality, is in more than one sense a debatable specimen (see note 16).

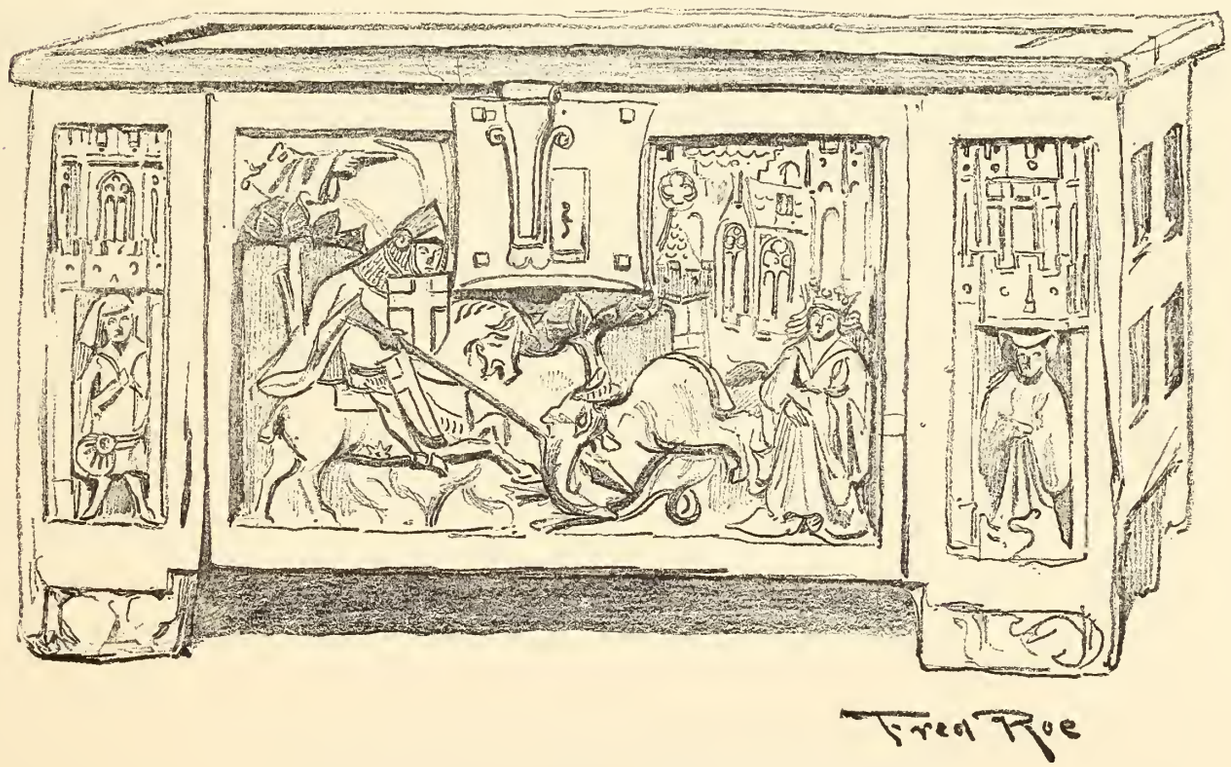


EARLY FIFTEENTH-CENTURY TILTING COFFER IN HARTY CHURCH, KENT

Height 2 feet 5 inches; length 4 feet ½ inch; width 2 feet 2 inches

It belonged to the Peyre Collection, but all records of its acquirement by that antiquary are now lost. M. Peyre's extensive researches in England render it not at all improbable that the coffret may have been found in this country, and, indeed, he himself admitted that he believed some of his early specimens to be English. The roughness of its execution certainly gives this impression. The treatment of the trees which appear at each end of the panel is remarkably like any one of the three examples previously mentioned, but in the action of the charging horses the coffret bears a resemblance to the Bayeux tapestry which is striking and distinctly singular. Both the knights wear the heaume, and their legs are protected by tilting saddles of great length, upon which are displayed their armorial bearings, which appear also on their surcoats. The horses on this and the Harty coffer are armed with chamfrons, which do not appear in the two earlier specimens.

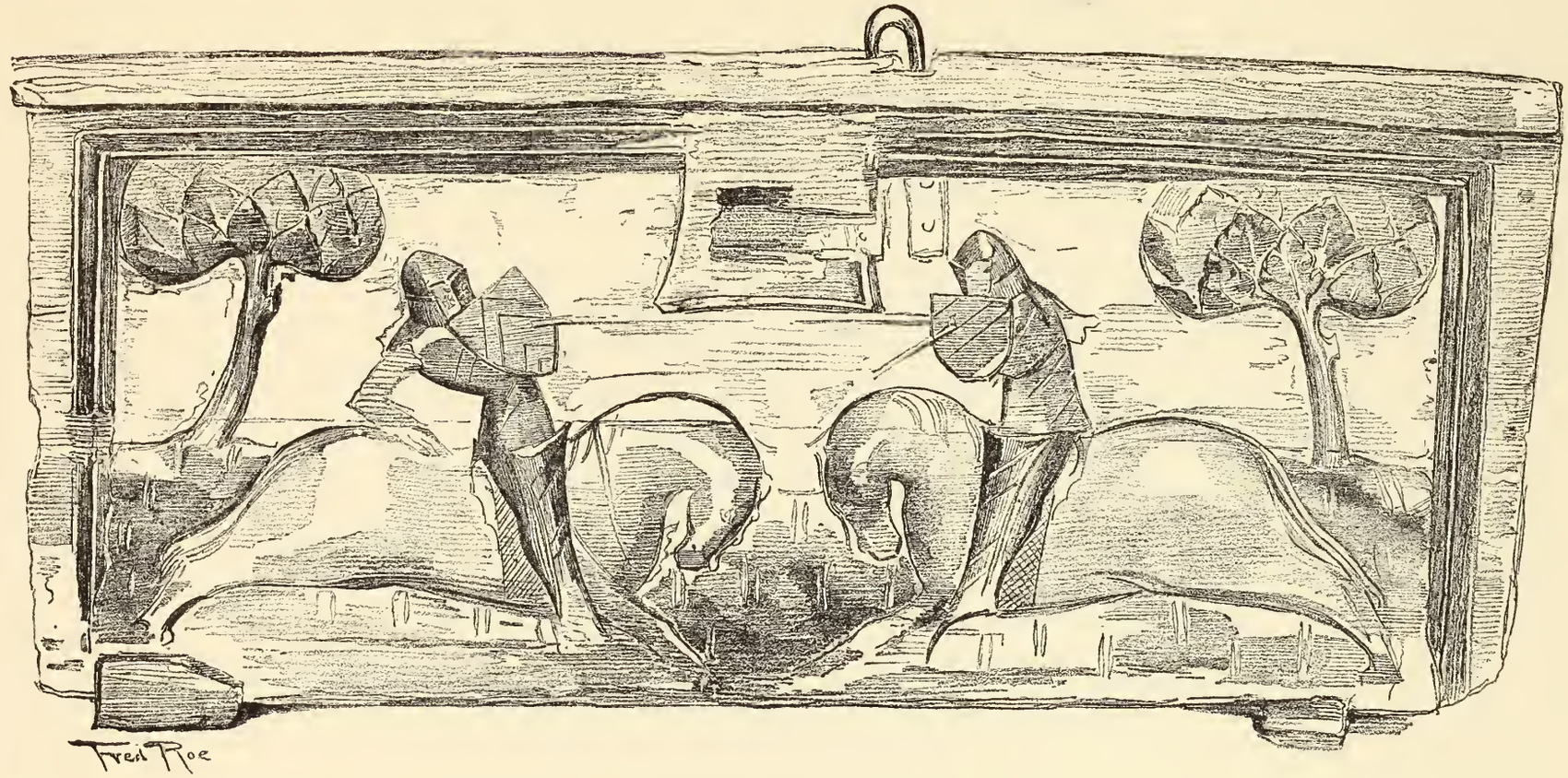
A contemporary work exists in south-west Flanders, which to anyone who has studied it carefully, together with the three examples first mentioned, admits of little doubt that it was made by the same man. In the Cathedral of St. Martin, in the City of Ypres, stands what may be justly designated as the most nearly perfect tilting coffer in existence. This example not only possesses its original lock scutcheon and lid—an extremely rare thing with so early a specimen—but its further embellishment by tempera painting remains fairly intact. It must be remembered that most of these



FOURTEENTH-CENTURY KNIGHTLY COFFER IN YPRES CATHEDRAL

coffers, if not all, were originally painted and gilt, and the conditions under which we now see them give only a partial idea of what their former splendour must have been. Decorative furniture of the Middle Ages presented a corresponding appearance to the restored magnificence of Saint Chapelle in Paris, but specimens which retain any sensible traces of this adornment are now of the utmost rarity. The carving of the Ypres coffer is rougher than either the York or Kensington examples, but its mannerisms and treatment are unmistakable. The stricken monster occupies the space beneath the lock-plate, as in the York coffer, and again a walled city is seen in the background. Above St. George appears the directing hand of the Deity, projecting from the clouds in a way highly suggestive of a modern indicator (see note 17). The uprights are carved with figures, male and female, in civil costume, standing beneath castellated canopies, and underneath these may be seen decayed traces of dragons or gryphons in compartments, as so often occur in our early examples (see note 18). The cross clamps at each end are coloured red and the ground between them white, thus indicating in an ingenious manner the armorial bearings of the patron saint. For many and obvious reasons this coffer could never have been made for the cathedral, though it has been used there as an almery (or strong-box for alms) for generations. This time-worn memorial with its broken colouring, standing in the mysterious light that penetrates the Cathedral of St. Martin, is one of the most impressive mediæval antiquities of its kind that can be witnessed.

Some interesting speculations might be indulged in concerning this Ypres coffer. Its nationality is not actually determinable, but its secular or military purpose can scarcely be doubted. Local history suggests further possibilities. In 1378 Pope Urban VI. proclaimed his famous crusade against the French, who had set up their own countryman, Clement VII., in opposition to his rule. England's assistance had previously been solicited by Philip van Artevelde, but without success. However, after the battle of Rosbecque, in which the Flemish champion was defeated and slain, an event occurred which decided this country to send aid to the sorely pressed men of Ghent, in their struggle against French domination. This was a special claim for help, made by Pope Urban, and it was responded to by an expedition, under the leadership of Henry Spencer, Bishop of Norwich, landing at Calais in 1383. Bishop Spencer appears to have been a pugnacious leader, and in spite of the advice of Sir Hugh Calverley, that (see note 19) all Flemings were good Urbanists, and the French all Clementists, he conceived the idea of uniting with the Ghentese against the whole power of France, and the rest of Flanders as well. Circumstances did not disfavour this policy, for the turbulent Flemings, when not engaged against a common enemy, seemed to desire nothing better than to fight amongst themselves. An entry was soon effected into Flanders, a breach of the peace followed, and the combined forces of England and Ghent laid siege to Ypres. Looking over the map one cannot help being struck by the number of place-names associated with contemporary English



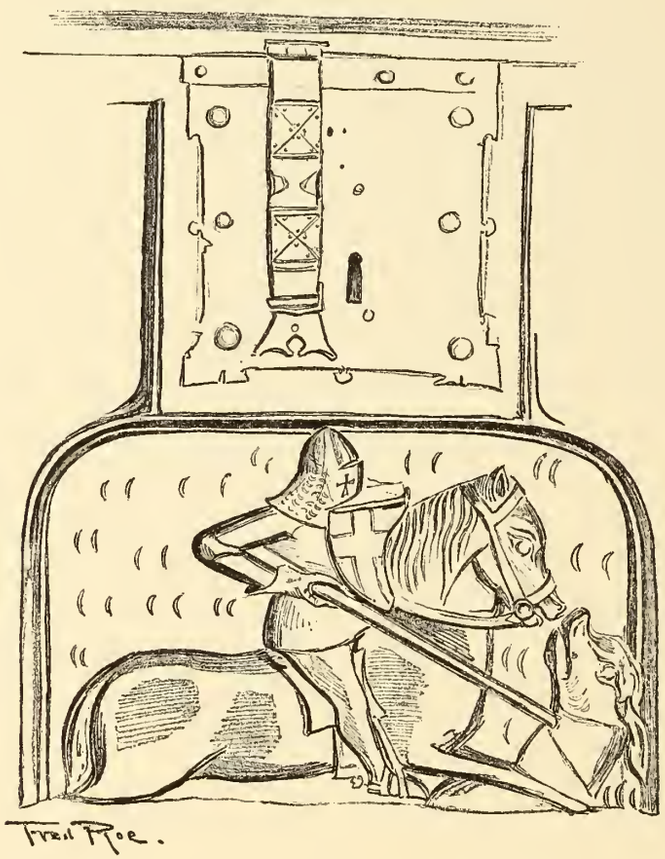
TILTING COFFRET FROM THE PEYRE COLLECTION

Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington. Early fifteenth century

successes. Dunkirk, Emenin, Poperinghe, Cassell, St. Venant, are all connected with victory. The English, however, never got into Ypres. Some good modern mural paintings which adorn the interior of its vast Town Hall give a stirring idea of the tremendous conflict which raged, and of the pride with which its inhabitants still regard the successful defence of its walls. The siege was bloody and prolonged, but at length came a startling rumour. It was noised among the besiegers that the King of France, with an army of 80,000 men, was advancing by forced marches to relieve the town. The combined camp of investment was hastily broken up, the men of Ghent returned home, and the English retreated on Bergues, which they had but recently conquered. From Bergues they decamped to Bourbourg, on the approach of the grand army of France, but at Bourbourg they were overtaken, and after a desperate resistance the scanty remains of the English force capitulated with the honours of war. One by one the strongholds occupied by the English were won back, and in most cases our countrymen obtained no such fair terms as those at Bourbourg. The short supremacy of England in Flanders was ended (see note 20). Can it be possible that the Ypres coffer was captured during this disastrous retreat, and was deposited as a thankoffering for the deliverance of the city in the Cathedral of St. Martin? Its elaboration and the want of iron binding and transport rings preclude the chance of its ever having been a military treasure chest in the ordinary sense of the word. But taking into consideration the pomp and grandeur with which such expeditions were undertaken, it is not unlikely that this wonderful strong-box, whose fellows remain in England, and whose date so nearly tallies with the events just mentioned, may have held English wealth, and been left behind, a veritable spoil of war.

The tilting coffers which have been treated in detail all possess certain features which are absolutely identical. There is a very uncommon sort of chamfer running throughout the series, which appears on the framework of the lids, or the trays with which the coffers are fitted. They are all purely secular, not a sign of ecclesiastical tracery or sacred emblems appearing about them, and though slight changes may be noticed in the armour of the knightly figures, they are not more than might have occurred during the course of a very moderate lifetime. It should be interesting to the student of costume to note that the advancement in the armour depicted on the York coffer is supported by a corresponding increase in the fashion of dagging, both being a development of those which are shown on the Kensington panel. The undulations of the ground are represented in the York coffer and the Kensington fragment as being burrowed by animals. This does not happen in the other examples, but the treatment is distinctly alike, grass being indicated in every case by a double slit which is placed perpendicularly at intervals with conventional regularity. It is not intended for a moment to suggest that all specimens of this type extant emanated from one source. A comparison, however, with others that exist will only tend to strengthen the belief that the York, Harty, and Ypres coffers and the Kensington

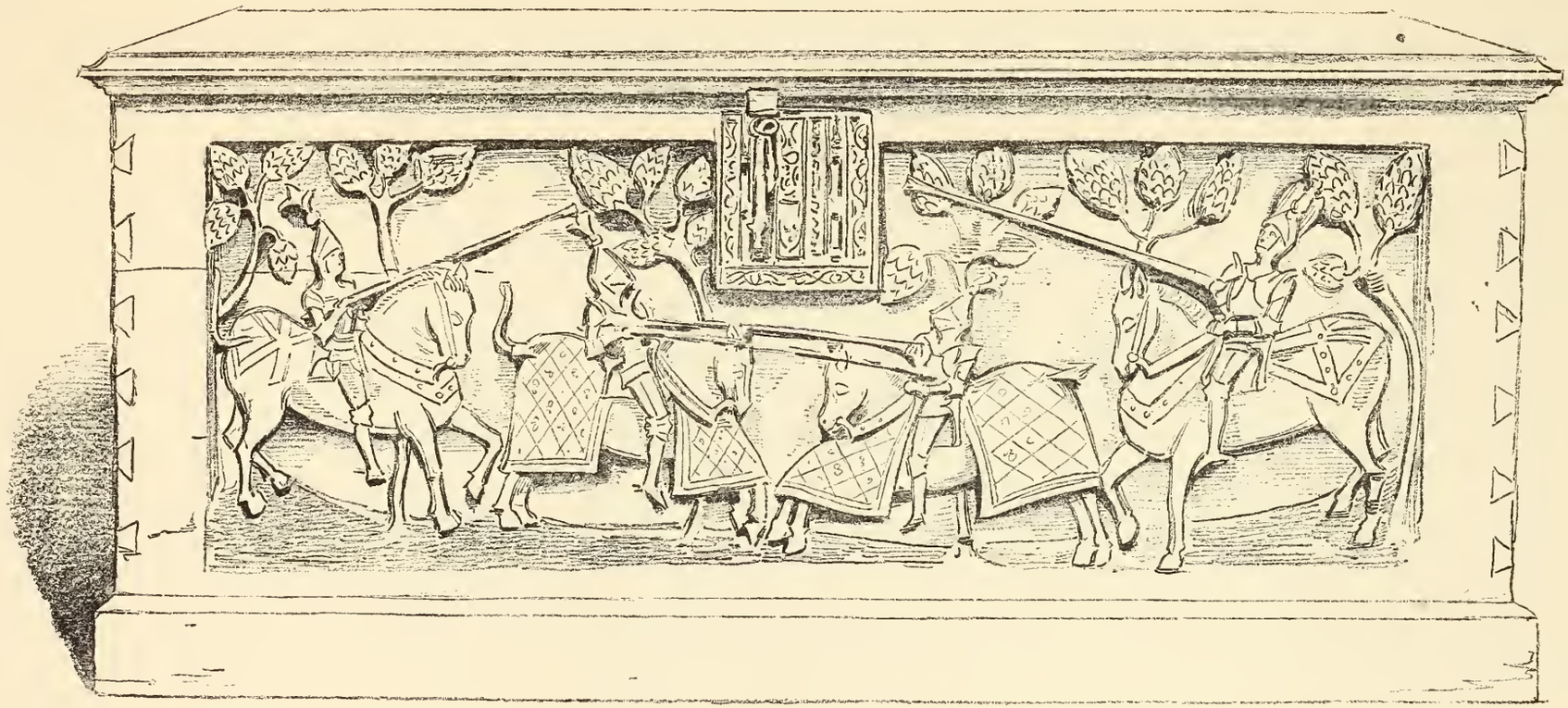
panel are by the same art worker. Directly a thing ceases to be obvious it is open to argument. The Kensington coffret, in spite of many similarities, seems to be less a creation of this hand than its prototypes. It hints rather at being a production from the same workshop, probably by an apprentice, and influenced by the master spirit. The Southwold coffer, which is of much later date and a different type altogether, will be dealt with further on. Other coffers of the tilting class might be mentioned.



CARVED FIGURES OF ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON, AND LOCK-PLATE

On the Flemish coffer in Southwold Church, Suffolk. Fifteenth century

There is a large one made of walnut wood in the Cluny Museum, which is also of later date and vastly inferior workmanship. Here the defensive armour of the knights and their attendants includes the *passe garde* and plastron, while one of the figures wears an eagle as his crest. The lock is far finer than the coffer, being a superb piece of work. Ypres Museum, a deserted and unpretending gallery in a back-yard, also possesses a tilting coffer, which in design partially resembles that in the cathedral, but it is evidently by a different workman, and appears to be a free imitation executed at a later period.



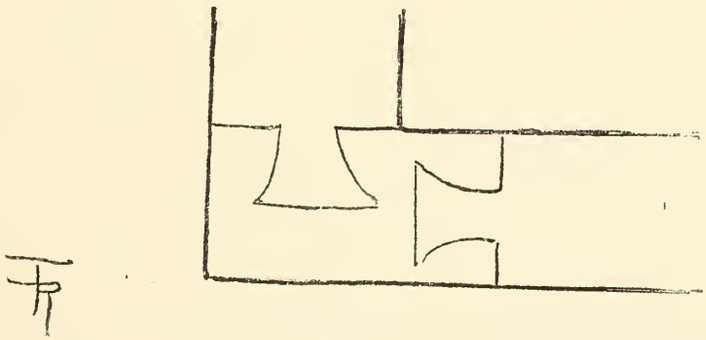
Fred Roe.

TILTING COFFER IN THE MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS

French, end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century

It should be mentioned that till well into the fifteenth century, dovetailing, when practised at all, was carried out in a singular manner, being worked perpendicularly down the inner part of the uprights, so as to be invisible from the front. The Harty coffer and a still older municipal treasure chest at Ypres are good specimens for reference.

One more tilting coffer yet remains to be mentioned, but it is of an entirely different type, and indeed unique of its kind. This coffer, though originally an ecclesiastical possession, was located till some forty-five years back in the office of the Chancery Court of the Palatinate. The fifties were bad years for antiquities, and



DOVETAILING OF FRONT AND SIDES WITH UPRIGHTS, IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER, YPRES MUSEUM

on the translation of the Chancery offices this coffer for a time disappeared. It was eventually found in ignorant hands and rescued by an eminent antiquary, in whose safe keeping it remains. By this means the coffer was undoubtedly preserved, as afterwards, thinking it well to get from the same warehouse some pieces of carved work which had been there with it, the rescuer found they had all been destroyed. This coffer has apparently been ornamented at one time all over with tempera painting, of which that inside the lid and a fragment on the tray is all that remains. The lid decoration is remarkable as affording a glimpse of its original history. On a green diapered ground is painted an array of four shields and a mythical incident, the subject of which is doubtful. The shields are blazoned as follows :—

1. Gules, a cinquefoil or (or argent) ermine pierced (of the field?) within a bordure sable charged with bezants.

2. Gules, a cross or (or argent) between four cinquefoils ermine pierced.

3. England quartering France Ancient. (Here England is given preference. This is unusual, but the arms are given, among other instances, on the south porch of Gloucester Cathedral. *Vide* Woodward and Bennett's *Heraldry*.)

4. Gules, a saltire or (or argent).

In the centre of the lid is a sort of centaur, half man, half beast, who is running a tilt against a dragon. The tilting figure is hooded and wears no armour, excepting

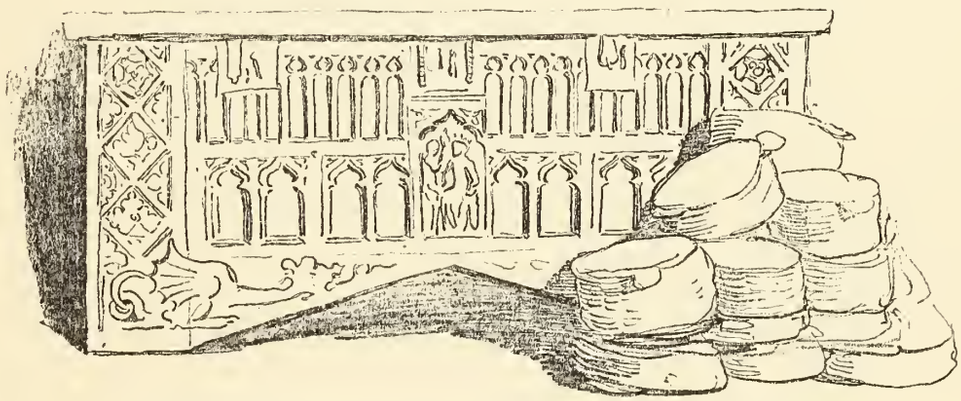
what may be taken for a brigandine on its body. At the extreme ends of the lid are the rampant figures of a lion and a gryphon.

The arms on the first shield are undoubtedly those of Sir Richard d'Aungerville, a knight of old Norman family, father of Richard de Bury, who was Bishop of Durham during 1333-45. The second cannot be identified, but as the ermine cinquefoil is the chief bearing on the coat of d'Aungerville it also probably has to do with the Bishop's father. The third shield, England and France quarterly, was not adopted till 1340, consequently the coffer could not have been made prior to that date. The saltire on the fourth shield is probably argent and not or, and if so it is the coat of Nevill, Earl of Westmorland. The colour of the cinquefoils is the same as that of the saltire and may have probably resulted from some chemical change in the colouring, due to length of time.

The d'Aungervilles appear to have been settled in Suffolk, and the birthplace of Sir Richard's son was adopted as his ecclesiastical name. Sir Richard d'Aungerville died during his son's infancy, and left him to the care of his uncle, a priest named Willoughby, who educated him. After a course of study at Oxford he entered the monastery at Durham (see note 21). Thenceforth his career was eventful and brilliant. He passed in quick succession from being tutor to Edward, Prince of Wales, to the post of Treasurer of Guienne. Here it is said he was able to shelter Isabella the Fair, Queen of Edward II., and her youthful son from the persecution of the Despencers. This may be received with caution, but it is beyond doubt that Treasurer Bury was pursued by their myrmidons and forced to take sanctuary in Paris. His adherence to the young Prince was not without its reward, for on the accession of Edward III. his career of continued prosperity was unbroken. He passed rapidly into a variety of appointments, including Treasurer of the Wardrobe, Archdeacon of Northampton, Keeper of the Privy Seal, and Ambassador at Rome, eventually being elevated to the Bishopric of Durham. The list of his honours is immense and does not stop here. In 1334 he was appointed Chancellor of England, and in 1336 High Treasurer, which post he continued to fill till his death in 1345. Bishop de Bury was an indefatigable collector of books, and it is said that his agents collected for his library more books than all the other bishops of England possessed put together. His retinue was splendid and his manner of living sumptuous. On his elevation to the bishopric he entertained at a magnificent banquet the King and Queen of England, and King Baliol of Scotland, besides numbers of prelates and the northern nobility. He placed all the shipping of the Palatinate at the service of Edward for passage of troops during the Scotch wars, and furnished at his own expense twenty men-at-arms and twenty archers. It is even said that he appropriated the royal sturgeon for his table. He died full of honours and worn out on the 14th of August, 1345, and was buried on the 21st in the cathedral. Among the various objects mentioned at the funeral ceremony are "two coffers," which the sacrist claimed as his right with other effects. Amongst his personal belongings are

mentioned many robes, one being a robe of "bloody velvet" which was sold to Lord Nevill, who reverently restored it to the Church. In spite of all this magnificence no monument was raised to the memory of Bishop de Bury, the coffer is almost the only memorial left of him. The Close and Patent of Bishop de Bury are the earliest extant in the Chancery at Durham, and differ little except in the variation of the episcopal style from those issued from the Royal Chancery (see note 22).

Inside the coffer is a tray, which was once painted with a green pattern, the same as the groundwork of the lid. At the ends are twisted rings, for its transport by mules. The front, back, and sides, as well as the lid, are all composed of single slabs of oak, some inch and three-quarters thick. These are bound together by strong iron bands terminating in double splays. The lock has disappeared.



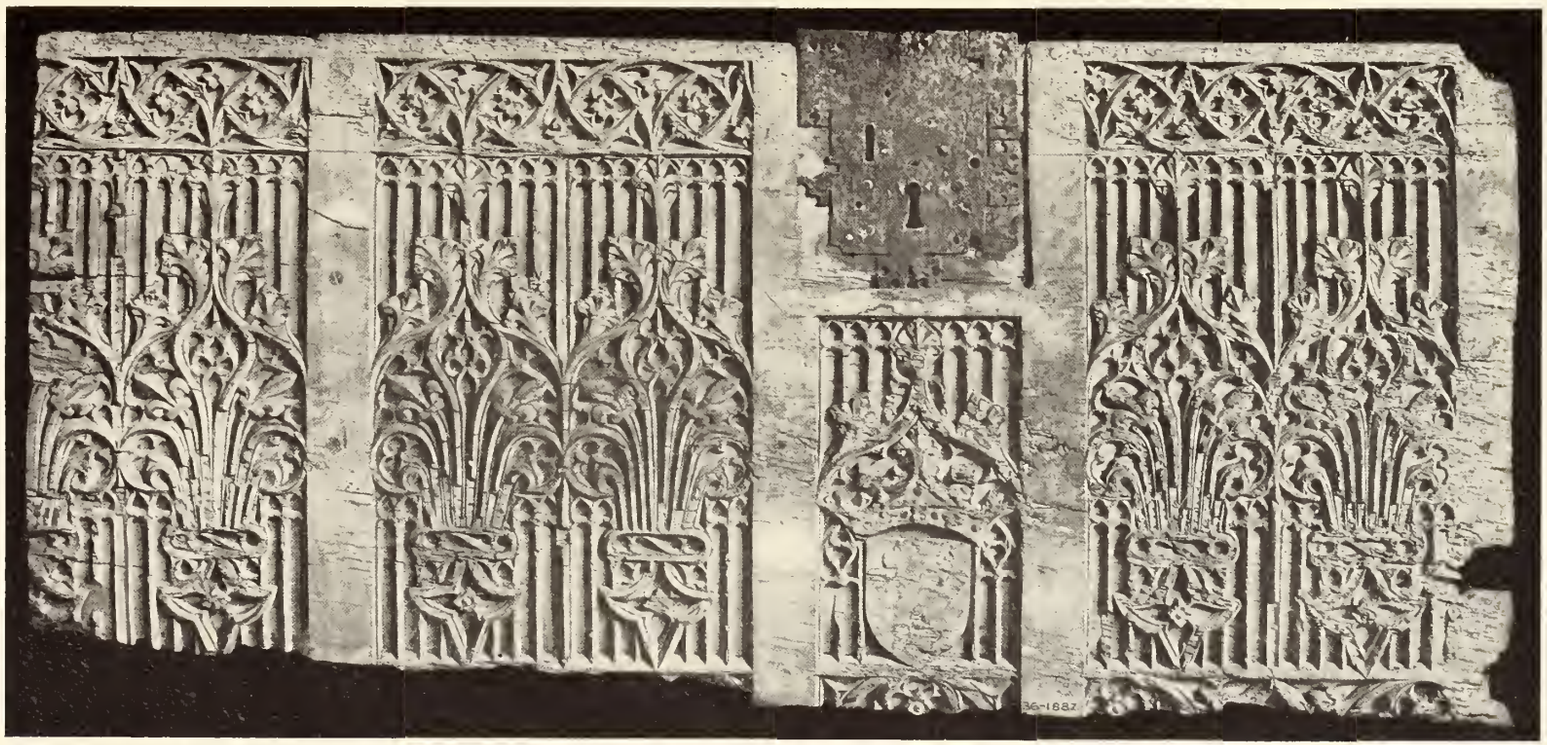
FIFTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, COVENTRY

CHAPTER VI

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

IN the latter part of the fourteenth century a complete divergence had been arrived at between the architectural styles of England and France. Hitherto the latter country had conducted generally, by its example, the abstract principles which prevailed over a great part of Europe, and changes of style, though gradual, had been fairly synchronous. The advent in England, however, of a purely national style (the Perpendicular) appeared to indicate that the leadership of France was declining. This in fact was so, and the leadership was only reasserted some hundred and twenty years later by the imitation of the antique which the French conceived a strong predilection for during their invasions of Italy.

The divergence of styles on the opposite sides of the Channel produced some singular contrasts. The French Rayonnant had been contemporary with our own Decorated, and the two styles were nearly allied, though the former was not eventually carried so far. The waving lines which mark our English geometrical tracery are absent in the French style. It was not until the rectilinear had been established here for over a quarter of a century that French architecture followed in our wake, breaking forth into that florid succession of waving curves which procured for the style the appellation of Flamboyant. A comparison should be made between international examples of this period. The crumbling fragment of a French coffer-front dating from the end of the fourteenth century exists to-day in the South Kensington Museum (see note 23). The workmanship of this is as fine as anything of its kind which can be seen on the Continent, and though a mere wreck and hopelessly decayed, enough remains to give an idea of the pitch of magnificence to which work of this class could be carried on the surface of a single panel. The tracery, which shows but very slight inclination towards the Flamboyant, is fashioned by a series of most exquisite curves into representations of the national fleur-de-lis backed by a range of mullions. The cutting, where time and worm have spared it, is sharp, clear, and not too deep. The material used is walnut. If this specimen is compared with a purely English example of approximately the same date—the Faversham coffer, for instance—the vast distinction between national quality and handling is at once obvious. The English

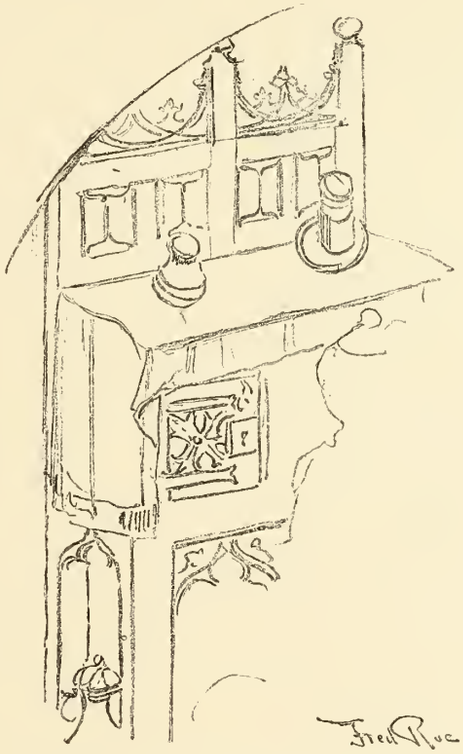


COFFER PANEL IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON

Given by Starkie Gardiner, Esq. French. Early Fifteenth Century

piece is bolder and its leading lines are more pronounced, though it does not approach the French fragment in richness of detail or quaintness of invention.

The fifteenth century showed a great increase in the manufacture of chests and other receptacles. In France alone the number of specimens remaining is simply marvellous. The Louvre, the Cluny, Orleans, and Troyes Museums all contain quantities of national work, the like of which it is absolutely hopeless to look for in any of our own institutions. Not only can numerous credences of the most beautiful design be studied, but further evidence can be found in an extraordinary series of diminutive pieces of domestic furniture which are carved in the subjects represented on the stalls of Amiens Cathedral. These stalls were executed about the commencement of the sixteenth century, the dates 1508 and 1521 being visible on them, but they are believed to have been designed some years previously. It is said that most of the nineteenth-century counterfeits in which the French are so clever (credences, armoires, settles, and the like) are designed by the dealers from these little representations of furniture.



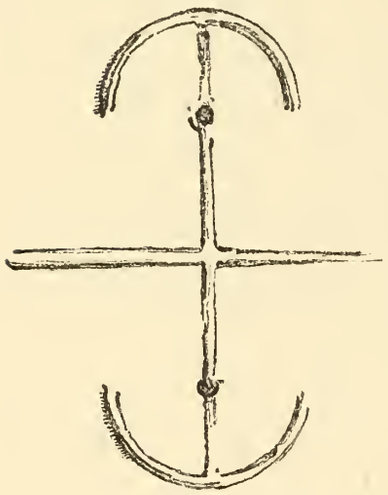
CREDENCE, SCULPTURED ON THE STALLS OF AMIENS CATHEDRAL

Not only in France, but in other countries fine French chests of the fifteenth century are to be found, if not exactly in abundance yet in sufficiently surprising numbers. The Victoria and Albert Museum possesses one or two excellent examples, quite apart from the gigantic Peyre Collection. Among the oak treasures at South Kensington is a cabinet of Flamboyant work, which exhibits several rare and valuable features. In the centre is a figure of St. George in Gothic armour, above which are the remains of a rich canopy of pierced work. This piece has evidently been a *chef d'œuvre*, and has the maker's mark on the inner side of both doors. Dublin and Edinburgh Museums also contain good specimens of this date. The output must have been enormous.

FIGURE OF ST. GEORGE ON FRENCH CABINET OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington

Now, in all our national museums English work is but scantily represented, a Gothic piece being of the greatest rarity. There can be but little doubt as to the prime reason for this. Our own history of civil war and consequent demolition is not singular enough to account for the lack of early examples. The corroding nature of the climate may be partially responsible for the disappearance of many, but the fact remains that work of this kind must have been produced abroad in much greater abundance than in our own country. So great indeed was the influx of foreign work that Richard III. endeavoured to promote his popularity by creating a statute forbidding "certain merchandises to be brought into this realm ready wrought." "Cupboards" are specified in this Act amongst other things, inasmuch as "by reason thereof the people of strange countries where the said wares be made be greatly occupied and increased and the said artificers in this realm greatly impoverished, and without the King's grace showed them in this behalf are like to be undone for lack of occupation . . . on pain to forfeit all the said wares so brought into this realm contrary to this Act, or the value of the same, in whose hands they or any of them shall be found, the one half of such fines and forfeitures to be paid to the King, and the other half to him or them that shall seize or pursue for the same action of debt, by writ or bill at the common law, or by bill or plaint, after the custom of the city or town where any such fines, forfeitures, and penalties shall hereafter happen to be or fall, and that the defendant in such action be not admitted to wage or do his law, nor that any protection or essoin of the King's service shall be allowed for any such defendant" (see note 24).



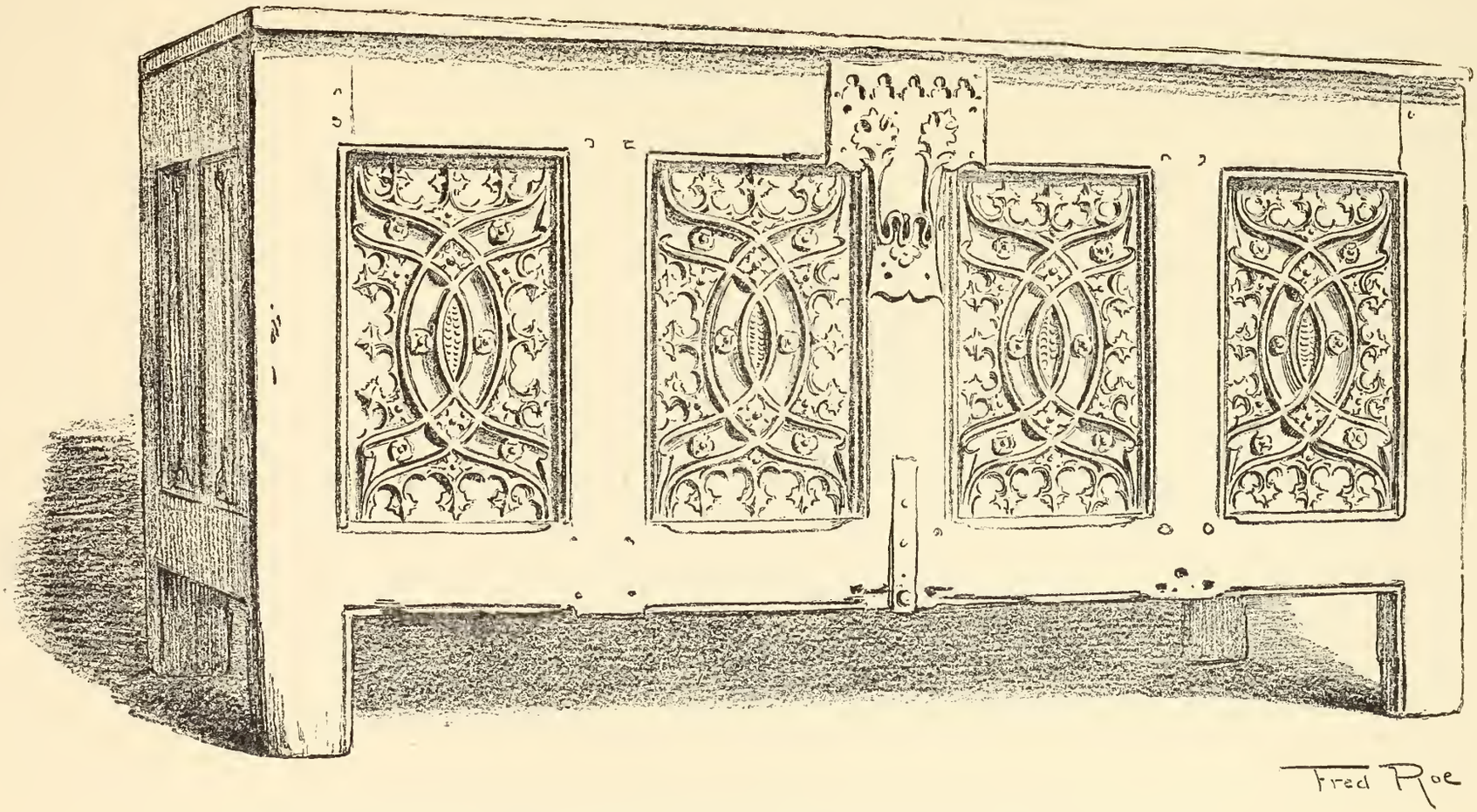
MAKER'S MARK ON FRENCH CABINET OF FIFTEENTH CENTURY
In the Victoria and Albert Museum South Kensington

During the fifteenth century Germany was prolific in the manufacture of carved receptacles, many of them of great size and covered with ironwork, which often took the form of vine leaves and tendrils. A fine collection of works of this class may be seen in the museum at Nuremberg. The armoire in Munich Cathedral has already been noticed, and others no doubt could be found. Of early Dutch work little is known or remains. Such specimens as the fifteenth-century hutches in the Ryx Museum at Amsterdam, and the very similar panels in the cathedral screen at Haarlem seem to indicate that the work was either executed from German designs, or was much influenced by German art of the period (see note 25).

There appears to have been no regular importation of carved woodwork from Germany into England, though a large trade in ironware was done by the merchants of the Hanseatic League. A great many of the locks and hinges which adorn our fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cabinets and hutches were without doubt imported to the Steelyard, until German merchants were eventually shut out by order of Elizabeth

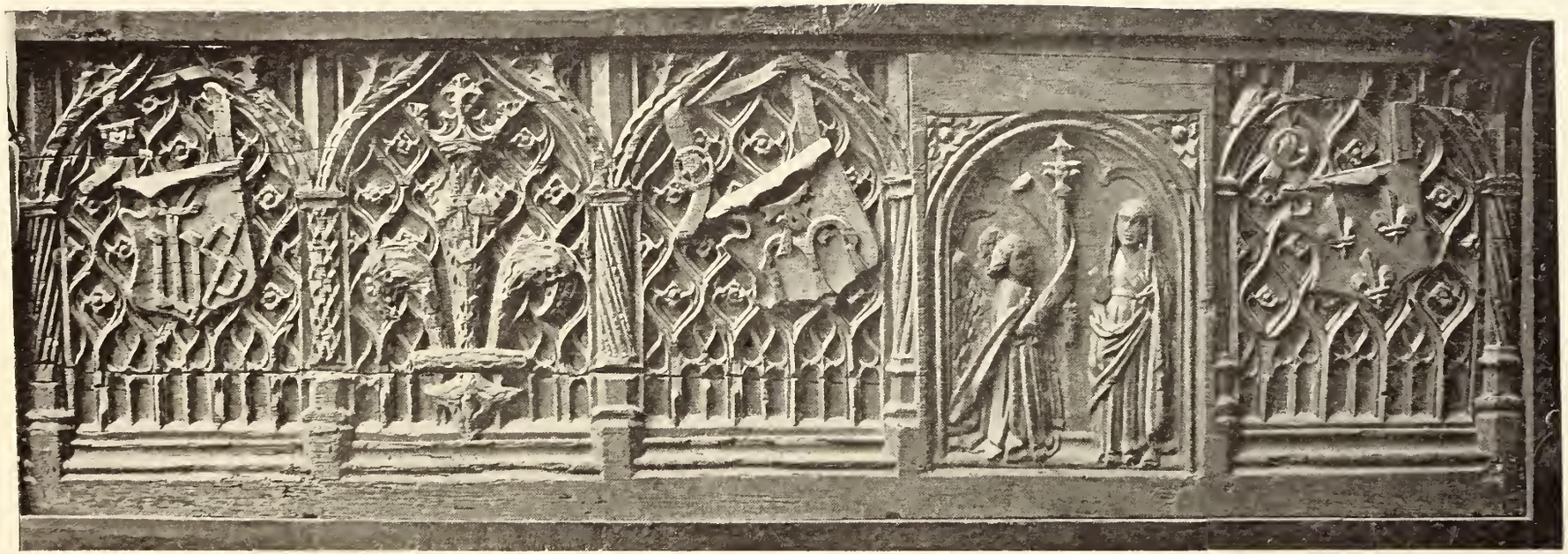
CABINET IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON

Northern French. Late Fifteenth Century



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN CHEST FROM NUREMBURG, IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Height 2 feet 10 inches; length 5 feet 5 inches; width 2 feet 2 inche ; panels 1 foot 5 inches × 9¾ inches

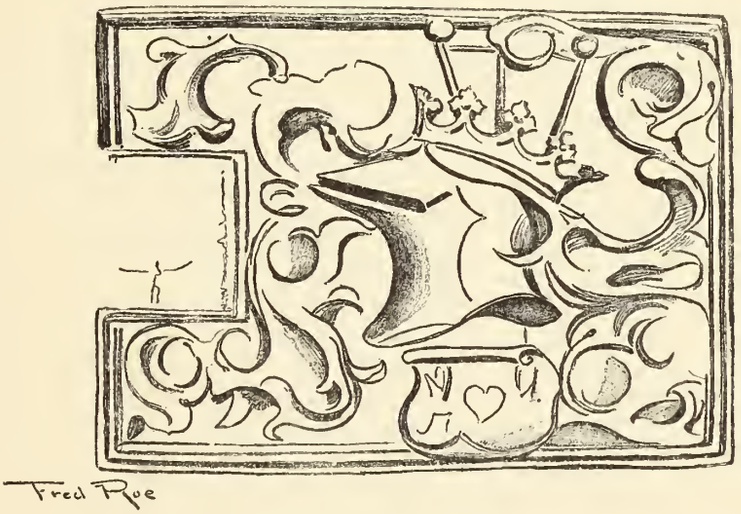


FLAMBOYANT COFFER-FRONT IN THE MUSÉE DE TROYES

French. Fifteenth Century

in 1597. Holland and Flanders, however, received a good share of German woodwork, and it is probable that the cupboards at Amsterdam just mentioned were importations from the Rhine provinces, and were actually of German workmanship.

An immense quantity of work was produced in Flanders during the fifteenth century, partaking of both French and German characteristics. In the Steen Museum at Antwerp (once Alva's old citadel) a good collection of coffers and sideboards has been gathered. Here also a unique curiosity may be seen in the shape of a diminutive

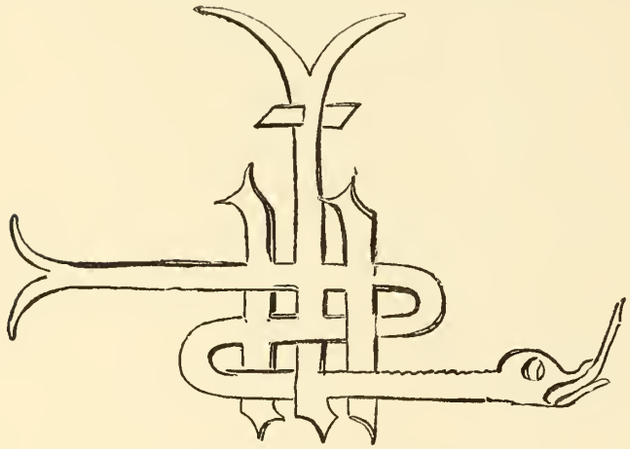


CARVED DOOR ON FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CABINET

In the Ryksmuseum, Amsterdam

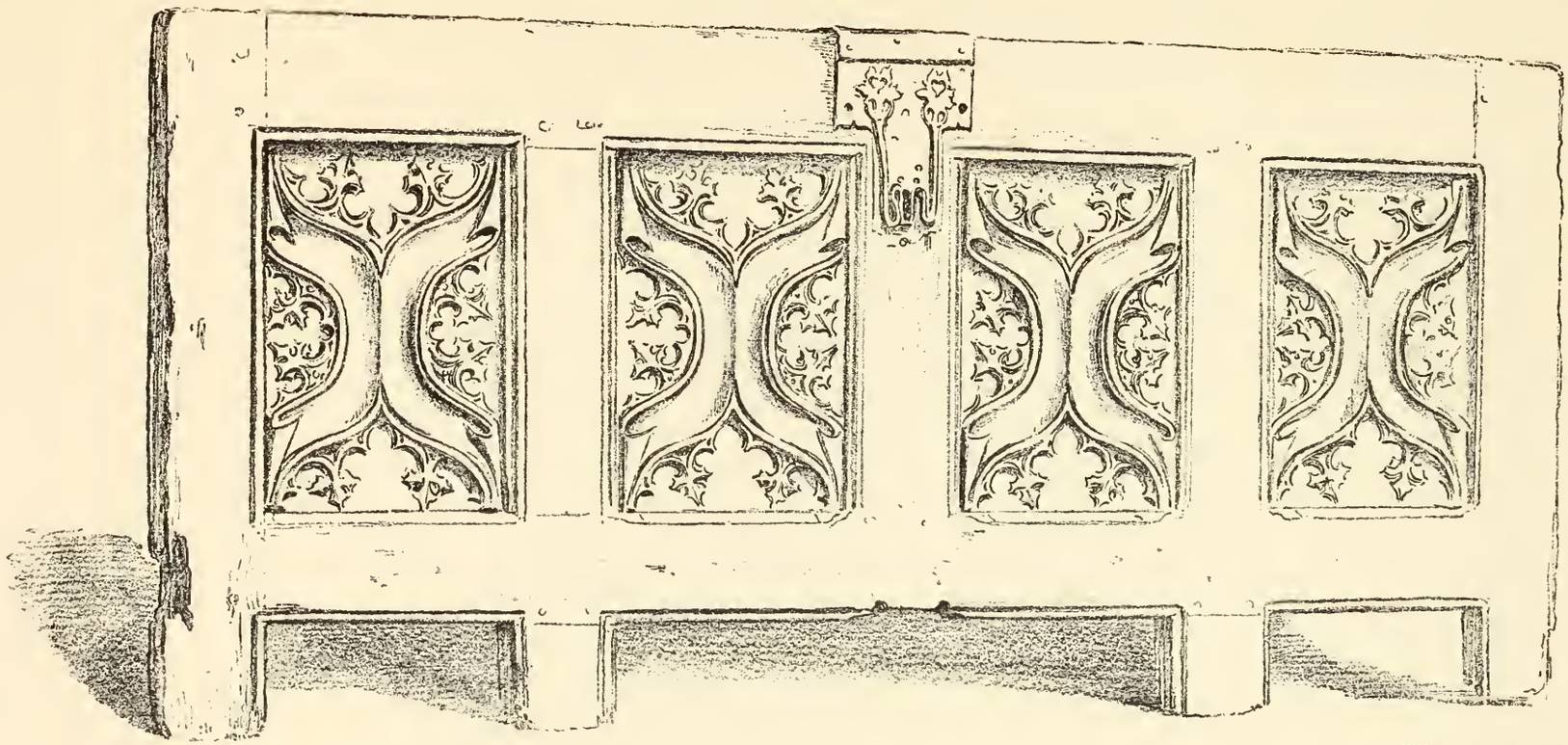
Gothic chest of this period, obviously a prentice's model. "Flanders chests" still exist in use in England, though they are not to be found in any considerable number. Two of the most interesting examples remain at Southwold, in Suffolk, and East Dereham, in Norfolk, while a very beautiful and curious hutch of Flemish work is preserved in the Church of Minehead, Somersetshire. A noted Flanders chest of beautiful workmanship formerly existed at Guestling Church, in Sussex. It was many times engraved, and appeared in Parker's *Glossary of Architecture* and other archæological works. This chest has now totally disappeared, and more than thirty-seven years ago, when the present rector first entered upon his incumbency in this parish, a portion only of one of the panels remained. It is not known whether someone walked off with this or whether the clerk burnt it; at all events the last vestige of the Guestling chest has now gone. It appears to have been an elaborate production, buttressed, with Flamboyant panels, not to be distinguished, except by its traditional title, from the beautiful works executed in France at the same date. The Southwold piece is in some respects more uncommon. It has a long carved front decorated with wheels of Flamboyant tracery, while in a small compartment under the lock-plate is a representation of St. George slaying the dragon, executed with mediæval mannerism and rude

vigour. The situation of this example is in itself interesting as affording collateral evidence of its origin. The district around Southwold bears evidence of Flemish occupation. Names of both places and inhabitants often betray an undoubted Flemish source, while it is known that Flemish settlements were formed about here from time to time after the tyranny and presumption of the national trade-unions had brought about the inevitable decay of prosperity. This coffer may have been executed in the neighbourhood by one of the immigrants, and our patron saint placed on it, either by order or by way of compliment. The apparent date of the coffer coincides with the fittings of the interior of the church, which may be rather late in the fifteenth century. It should be mentioned that the rood screen, a most beautiful piece of carved and painted work, shows in parts an evident leaning towards Flemish design, a tendency which is not uncommon upon our East Coast. The Southwold coffer, unfortunately, is missing its base, having been cut down and repaired by some journeyman blacksmith, in wood. In connection with this coffer a detail may be noticed which should be of assistance in "placing" its proper period. The earlier forms of dovetailing when used in the construction of boxes were invariably carried perpendicularly down the thickness of the stiles, so that this method of joining was not perceptible when the lid was closed. In the Southwold coffer the dovetailing is multiplied, being formed by numerous small V-shaped intersections of the front and sides, all of which are perfectly visible from the outside. This mode of construction does not appear to have been used in English work till about the year 1500, but bearing in mind the more advanced state of things on the Continent, it seems not improbable that the more recent method may have been imparted at a rather earlier time by foreign workmen. At all events neither the architectural details nor the headpiece of St. George appear to be of so late a date as that just mentioned. We have, however, only a very limited number of these examples to work upon, and hence it is uncertain when the method was changed. The Flanders chest in the Church of East Dereham, in Norfolk, belongs to the time of Henry VIII., and will be described among the specimens of the sixteenth century.



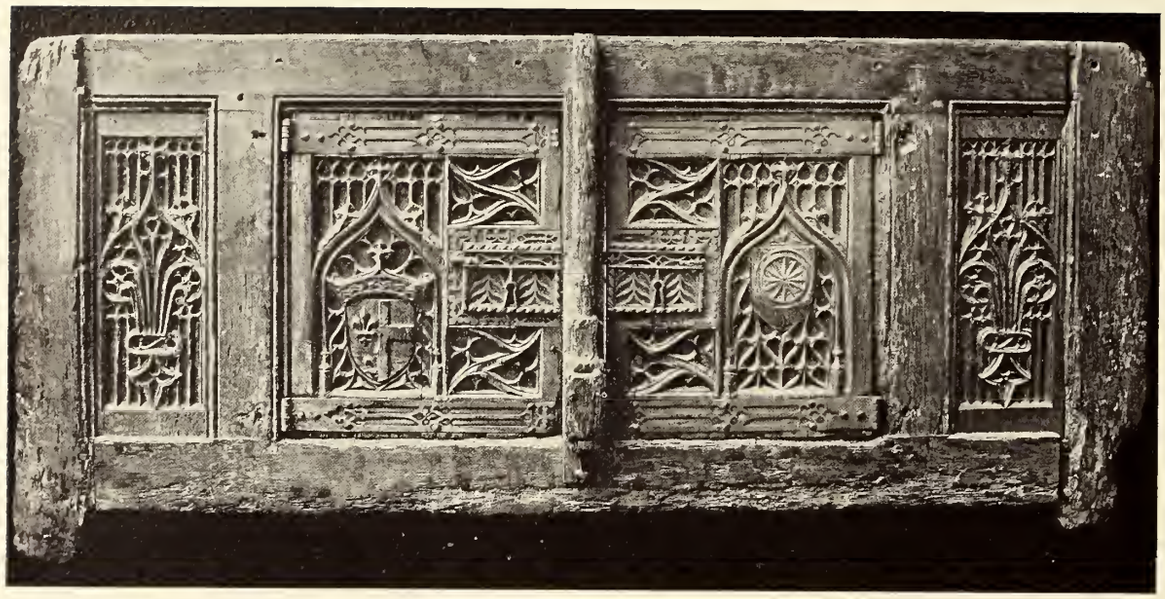
SACRED MONOGRAM ON CABINET IN THE STEEN MUSEUM, ANTWERP

The Minehead hutch is a work of English shape, but with Flemish details. It is carved on both back and front, and was evidently intended to stand in the centre of a room. Two of the panels are carved with heraldic shields. One the Arms of England quarterly with France 1405–1603, the other a dolphin surrounded by three



LATE FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLEMISH CHEST FRONT IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

Height 2 feet 6½ inches; length 5 feet 6½ inches; panels 1 oot 3¾ inches × 10¾ inches



FRONT OF A CUPBOARD IN THE MUSÉE DE TROYES

French. Fifteenth Century

PANELLING BEARING ST. ANDREW'S CROSS

On settle in the possession of Arthur Radford, Esq., Hillingdon

Scotch. End of the Fifteenth Century

mullets. The initials "J. M. C." and the emblems of the Passion are interlaced with the tracery, while the doors exhibit a traceried rose and the eagle of St. John. The doors were once furnished with strap hinges, which have now been discarded for rough clouts. Underneath are two drawers carved with flamboyant tracery. The date of this piece is probably late in the fifteenth century.

The gilt and painted cassones of the Italians differ essentially from anything else which was made in Europe during this period. Work of a Gothic character was only produced in the north of Italy, where it was seldom free from classic details. The elaborate stamped and wrought ironwork with which many of the North Italian productions are furnished frequently show distinct German influence. An exceedingly interesting coffer, or the remains of one, for it has been fearfully restored, may now be seen in Fonnereau Hall, Ipswich. Its front is boldly carved with figures in mediæval costumes, carrying halberds and lanterns, and one of them a two-handed sword. At the back of these figures is the representation of a curtain, depending by rings from a rod, and treated precisely in the same formal way as a "linen panel." The whole piece in its original state was gilt, and must have presented a very splendid appearance, but it has been carefully "squared up" in the Churchwarden Period, and little is now left except the front and ends. On the latter are carved heads in medallions. Three keyholes now exist in the front panel, but evidently two of these are of later make, one of them being cut clean across the features of one of the halberdiers. The centre, which is the original keyhole, is placed in the mouth of a mask.

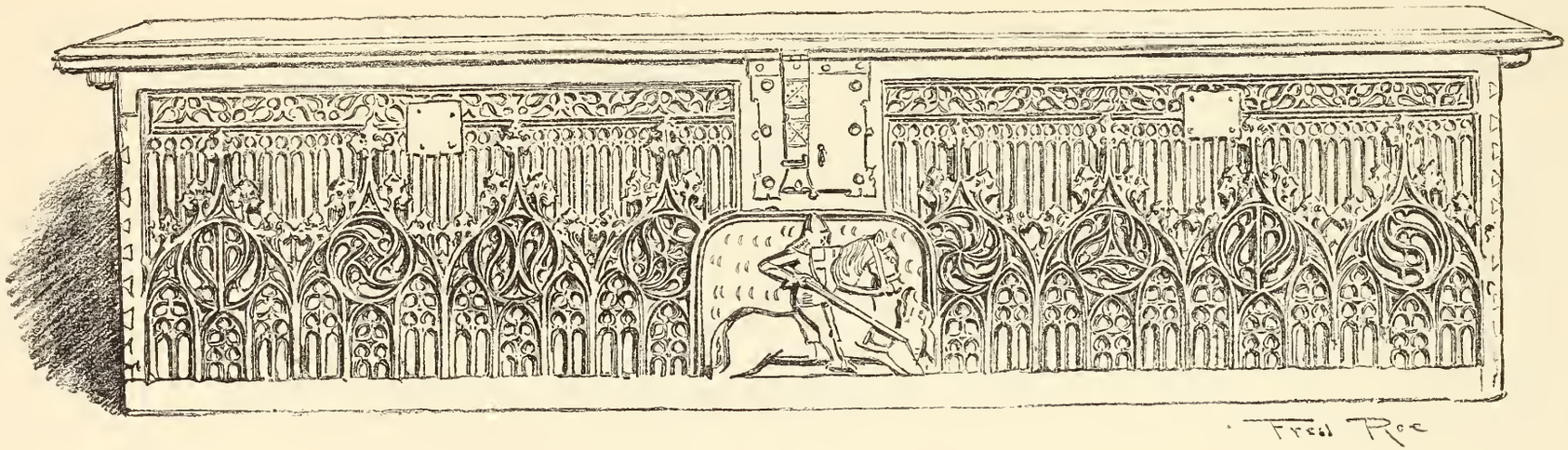
A woodcut of this coffer in its original state was inserted in Clarke's *History of Ipswich*, published 1830, where it is stated that the chest was then in the Moot Hall of the borough, and in it was deposited the records of the Corporation, the keys being kept by four clavigers. This coffer is most probably of North Italian work, and dates from the commencement of the sixteenth century.

Spanish chests of the fifteenth century are extremely scarce. They are seldom without a semi-Mooresque suggestion, and mostly have an elaborate arrangement of drawers and shutters which seem to render them a sort of chest and cabinet combined. Although the lines of French and Spanish ultra-Flamboyant decoration are remarkably similar, the distinctions of construction in their national manufactures, as well as other important details, are sufficiently obvious (see note 26). The carving on their productions was also covered with gesso, which was gilded and coloured. Curiously enough, the elaborate painted subjects with which many of the Spanish chests are adorned are mostly executed *inside* the lid, and though more likely to be thus preserved, yet rendered the object less decorative as a whole when closed. Spanish work is almost as distinctive as Italian, but stands quite alone, for unlike the latter it exercised no influence on the rest of Europe. In the sacristy of Burgos Cathedral is preserved an old iron-bound coffer, said to be the identical one which was used by the Cid in his somewhat doubtful transaction with the Jewish financiers. This, however,

like many Spanish relics, may be regarded as extremely unlikely, the piece in all probability dating from later mediæval times.

Actual evidence of earlier material may be scanty, but of the fifteenth century a vast quantity of work yet remains which can be seen and handled. Occasionally fresh specimens come to light, though rarely, but it may be taken for granted that furniture of the Gothic period is now never discovered in its original or untouched state. Additions, or more likely extensive dilapidations, have in every case taken place, and the piece is either grievously shorn or else half modern. With all this plentitude of fifteenth-century work yet remaining, English chests of architectural design are very scarce, cabinets still scarcer, while armoires are to be counted only by units. A fine armoire of Perpendicular design exists in the vestry of York Minster, and two painted almeries in Carlisle Cathedral. A few cupboards or credences also remain in private hands, but their number is inconsiderable. The York armoire is rather flat in design, with few mouldings, though what decoration it has is purely Perpendicular in design. It has an embattled cornice, and the doors work on elaborate strap hinges. The ironwork resembles many fittings which may be found in other parts of the cathedral. The armoire has unfortunately been much cut down at the base, probably owing to decay accelerated by contact with a damp stone floor. Indeed, so much has it been shorn that one of the hinges (that on the lower part of the left-hand door) has completely disappeared. The right-hand portion is closed by a long shutter extending the whole height of the armoire, and was evidently intended to contain a crozier. This is probably almost the only English armoire of the fifteenth century in existence.

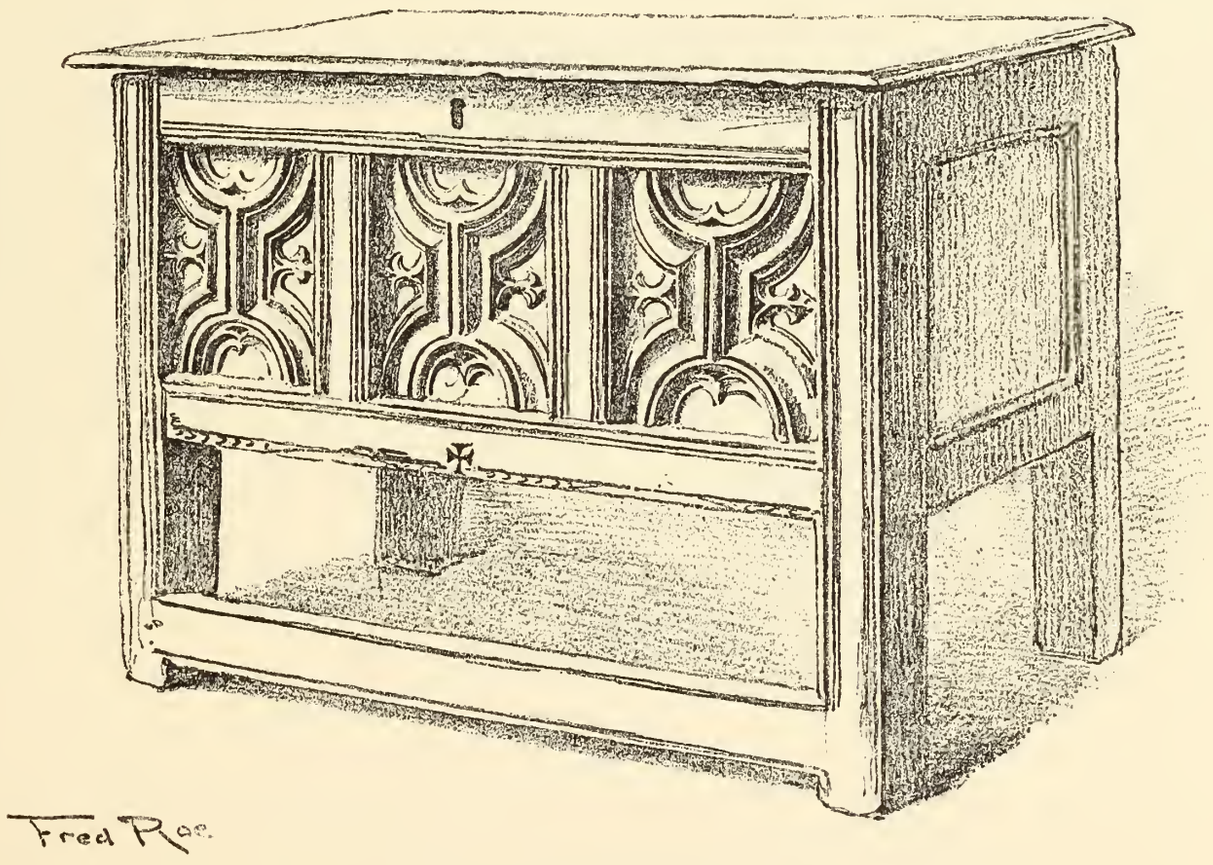
The fifteenth century is responsible for a number of vagaries in decorative carving, Germany and Flanders being prolific originators in this respect, the subjects representing chimeras being not always of the most refined description. The fifteenth century also saw the rise of that remarkable species of decoration known as the "linen panel." Springing into existence most probably in France, this curious feature speedily became fashionable throughout Flanders, England, and Germany. It was accompanied during the change of the century by another type of decoration, the "scroll pattern," or as the French term it *parchemin*, from its resemblance to an unrolled strip of that material. In Scotland a form of decoration was employed which, while being less flowing and graceful, suggests a comparison with the other just mentioned. St. Andrew's cross was carved in relief across the panels of chests and other articles of furniture, the spaces between being cusped and ornamented with fruit and flowers in conventional forms, even human heads being occasionally inserted. The easy adaptation of the scroll pattern to the Scottish national device was no doubt responsible for the first suggestion of this type. The workmanship of such specimens is usually of a coarse kind and cannot approach that of Flemish contemporaries. In England the scroll pattern developed into a stiff and somewhat meaningless decoration, clearly manifesting a decline in art.



"FLANDERS CHEST" IN SOUTHWOLD CHURCH, SUFFOLK. END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

English chests of the fifteenth century exhibiting Perpendicular tracery are but rarely met with. At first sight this seems difficult to account for, but it must be remembered that the civil wars, in a great measure, destroyed our industries, while during the reign of Henry VII., when peace was established, the linen-fold decoration seems to have almost superseded the fashion of ornamenting our chests and cupboards with architectural designs.

The want of English traceried chests of this period is rendered still more puzzling by the discrepancies which occur in the works of some of our best-known authorities. For instance, a chest in the Chapter House at Oxford, which is described by Parker as being in the Perpendicular style, is really of French make and Flamboyant design. Other specimens, like the almery at Coity, in Glamorganshire, which are, in some sort, Perpendicular in design, were evidently made at the very end of the period, probably about Henry VIII.'s time, and only belong to those survivals which are to be found in remote districts. At Coventry, however, may be seen a fine traceried English coffer of the Perpendicular period, and the remains of another. The first-mentioned, which is in St. Michael's Church, is probably of the time of Henry VI. It is a large and



CHEST IN THE POSSESSION OF H. JEAFFRESON, ESQ., M.D., WANDSWORTH

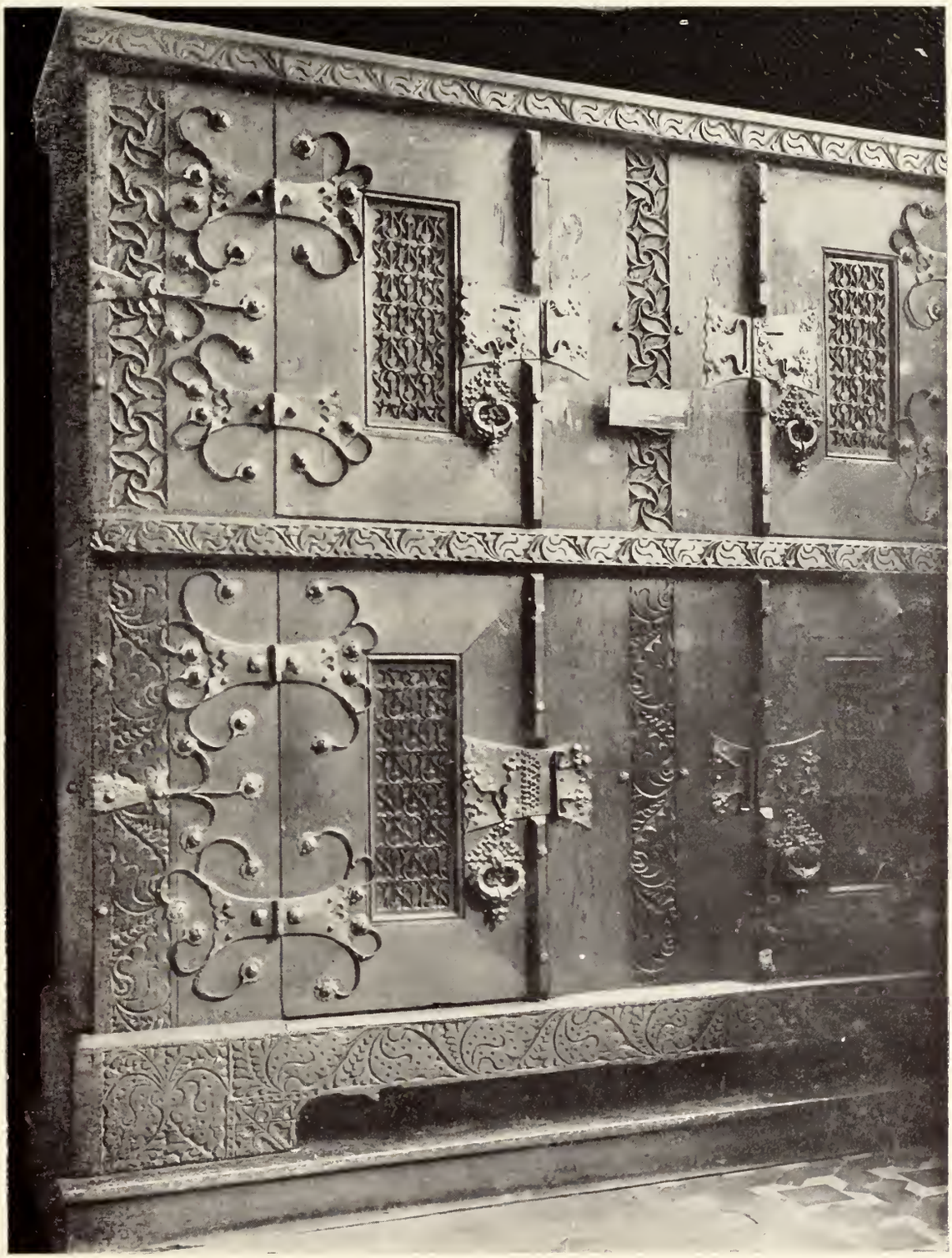
Late fifteenth or early sixteenth century

bulky piece of furniture, and is in a good state of preservation, excepting for a thick coat of paint. It has always had three locks, blocks for the support of the plates being left between the mullions carved on the front. The uprights are beautifully carved with a lattice pattern filled in with foliage. A swan holding an orb also appears on the right-hand upright, and a gryphon or sphinx on the left; above them are roses. The conjunction of the swan and roses may have some political significance. The White Swan was a Lancastrian badge, descending from Margaret Bohun, first

WINGED FIGURE ON FIFTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER

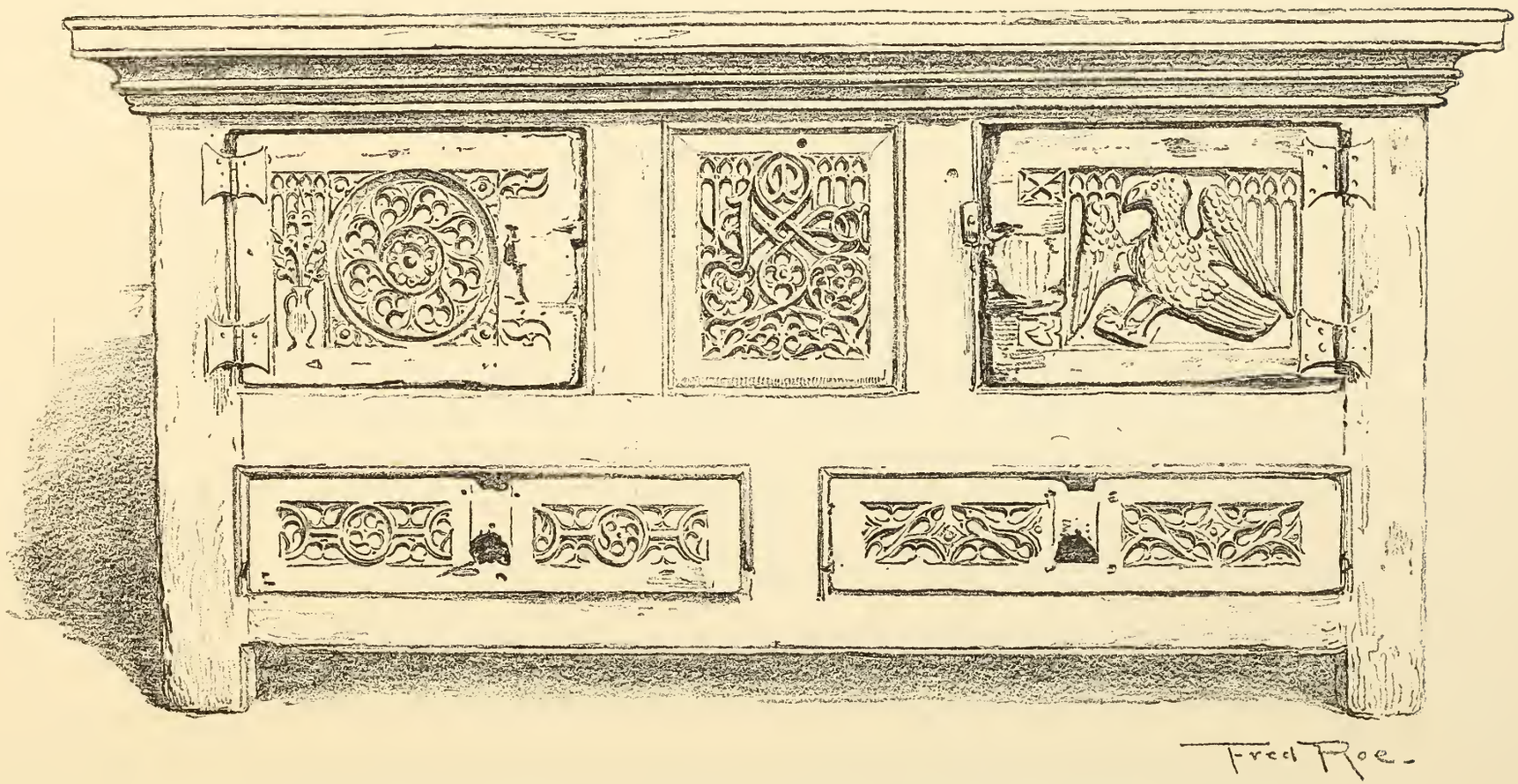
In St. Michael's Church, Coventry

wife of Henry IV., to her son and grandson, Henry V. and Henry VI. Margaret of Anjou, Queen of Henry VI., held her court at Coventry, which town throughout the wars proved loyal to the Red Rose, and the coffer in St. Michael's Church probably dates from the brief period of her ascendance in the struggle (see note 27). The ends of the coffer have a cross grille of ten bars. Beneath a canopy under the central lock-plate are the figures of a king and queen. Two figures almost precisely like these may be seen on a central boss of the groined ceiling to the entrance gateway to St. Mary's Hall. In each case the action is the same. The king holds an orb in his left hand, and raises his right towards the queen's crown. Local tradition states that the subject represents the Deity crowning the Virgin Mary (see note 28). This may not be unlikely, and the duplication would seem to point to the coffer having originally been made for St. Mary's Hall, the lapse of over four hundred years only resulting in its translation to the shadow of the church on the opposite side of a very narrow street.

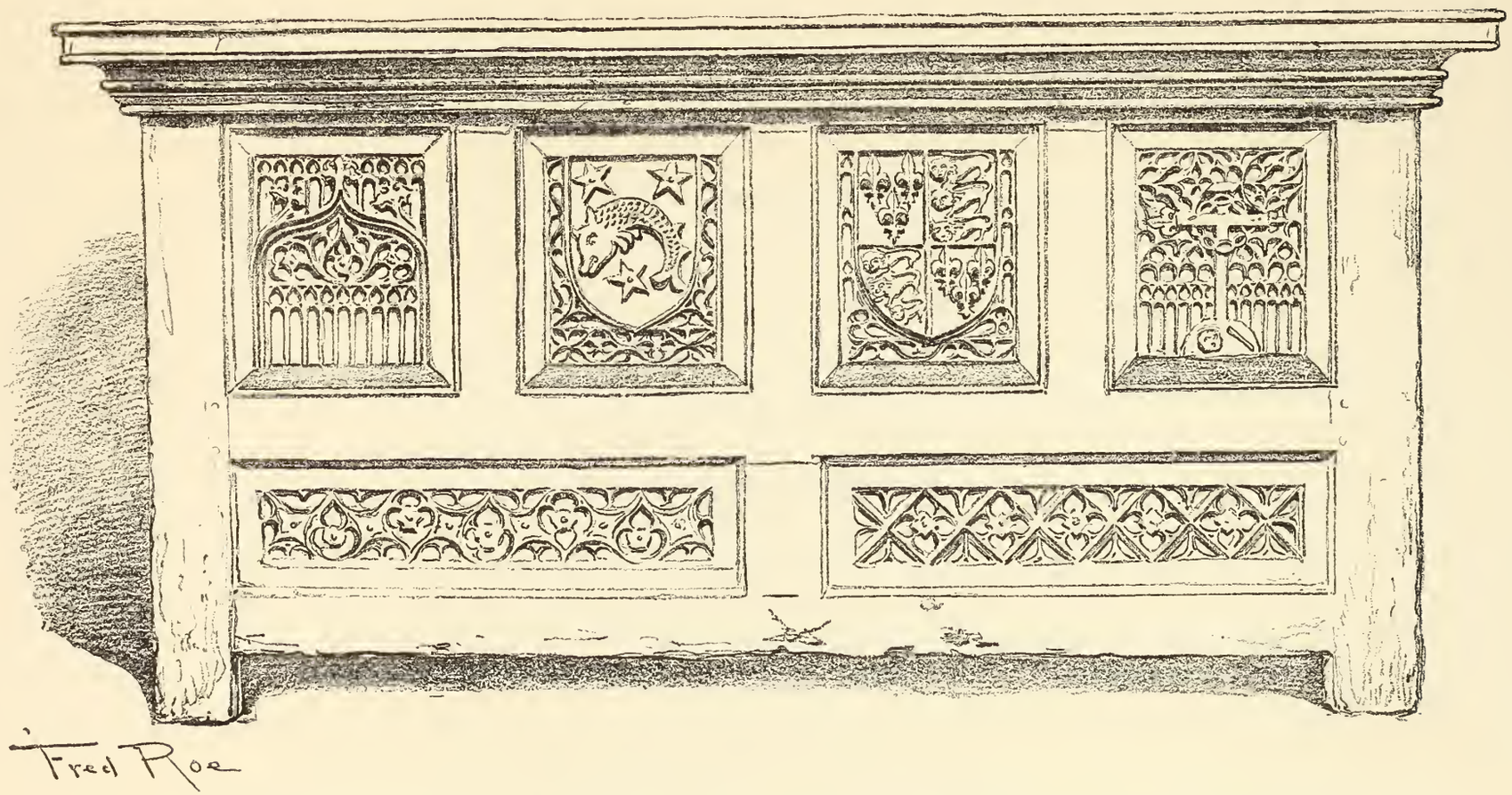


ARMOIRE IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

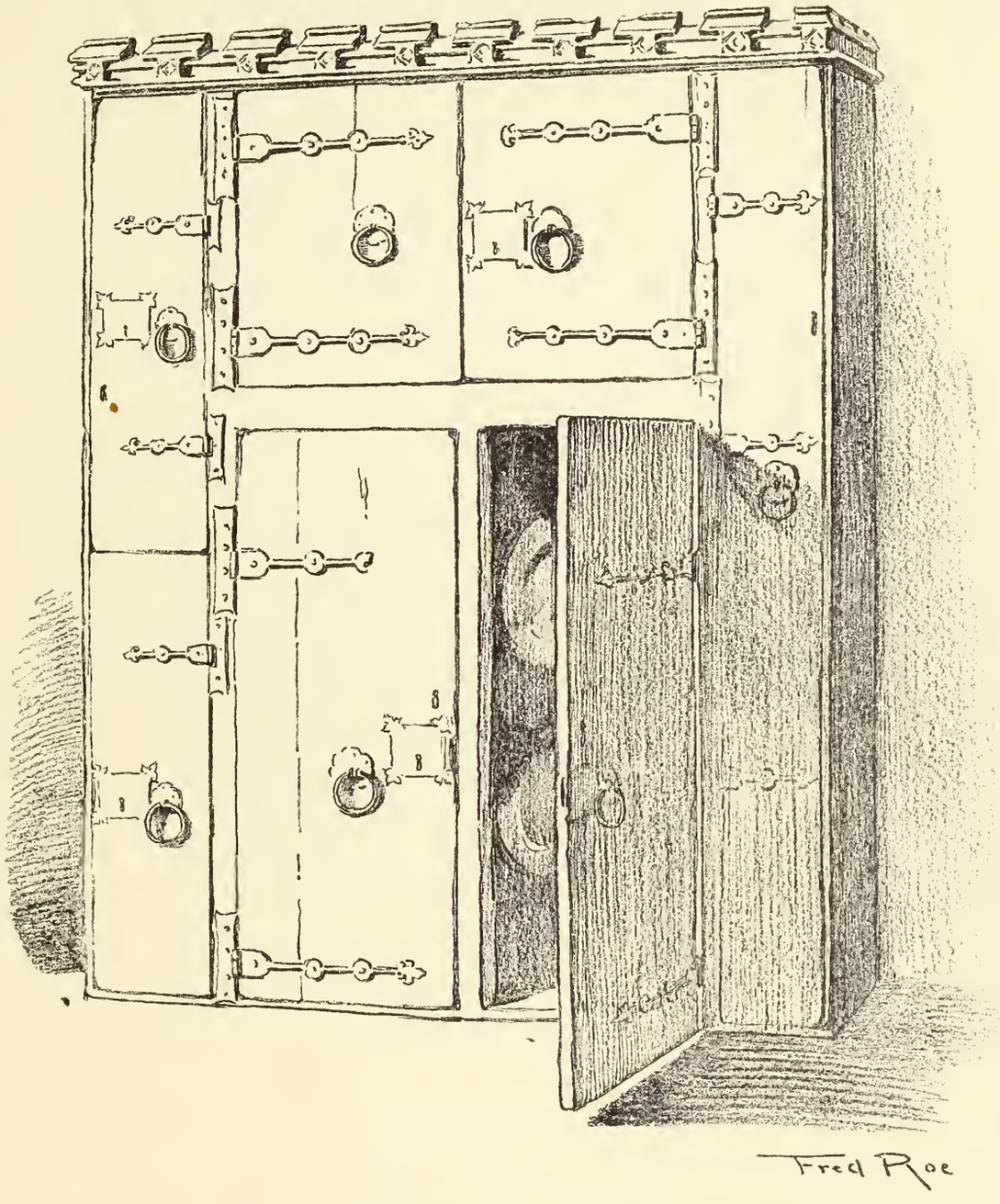
German. Fifteenth Century



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLEMISH CUPBOARD IN MINEHEAD CHURCH, SOMERSETSHIRE (OBVERSE)



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLEMISH CUPBOARD IN MINEHEAD CHURCH, SOMERSETSHIRE (REVERSE)



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ARMOIRE IN YORK MINSTER

Height 5 feet 9 inches; length 4 feet 10 inches; depth 1 foot ½ inch

CABINET DOORS

In the collection of Seymour Lucas Eyre, R.A. German. Commencement of the Sixteenth Century

It is strange that such rare and interesting relics as this coffer should not be mentioned in local guides or descriptions. They never are, unless some special history is attached to them, and then often unduly so. The plain and late chest used in the same church in connection with Sir Thomas White's Charity has been many times noticed and described, while its infinitely finer and rarer companion is passed over unnoticed.

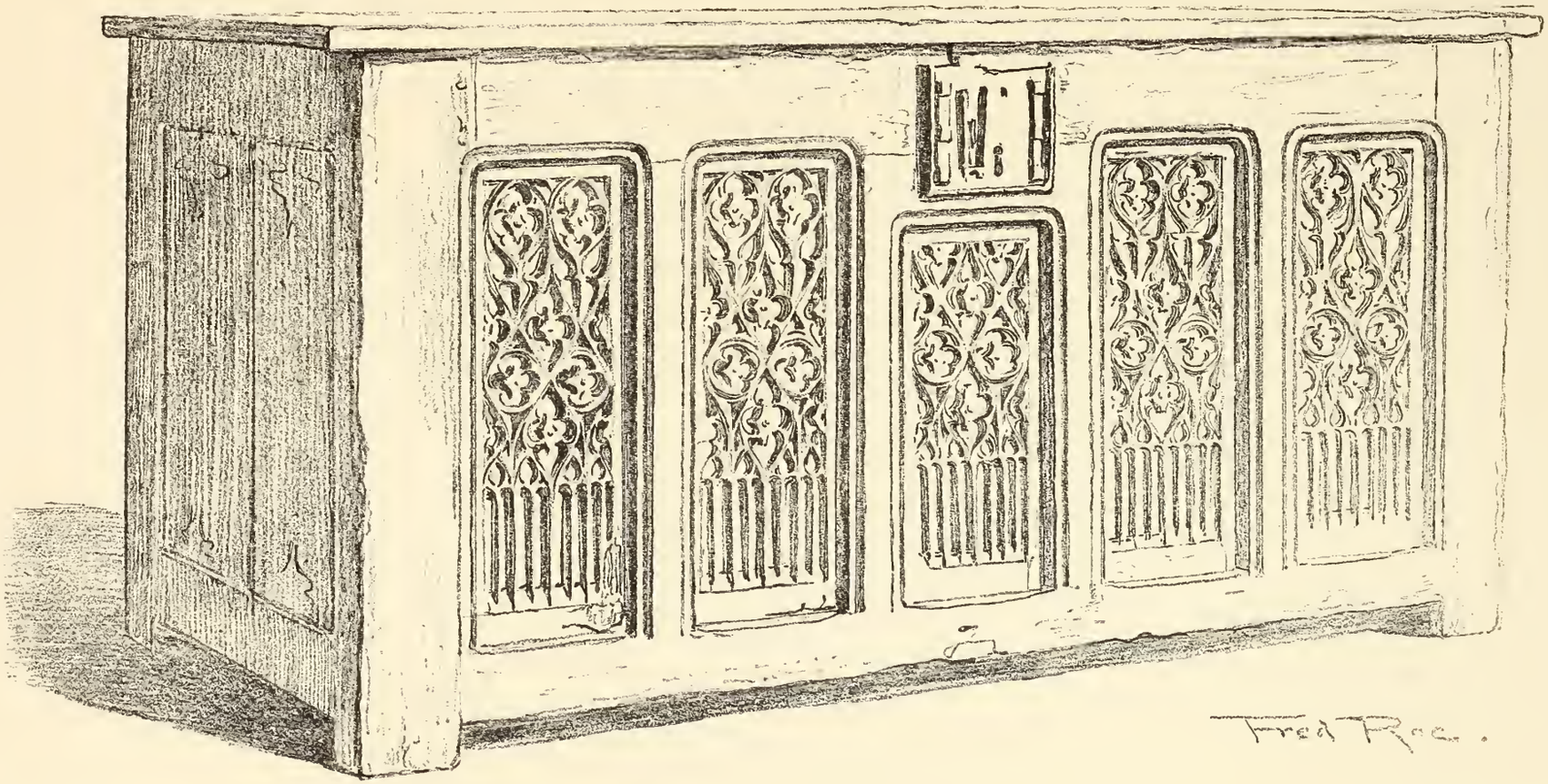
The piece in St. Mary's Hall is the remains of a fine coffer of entirely different character and perhaps slightly later date. It was converted into a sideboard during the seventeenth century, and at the same time embellished with two caryatides and a carving of the town Arms. One of the terminal figures has now gone, as well as other portions, and the whole thing presents a nondescript appearance. Shaw mentions another chest with precisely similar details as standing in another part of the hall, and states that the armour used in the annual processions had been kept in it ever since the Restoration. The armour now hangs aloft on the Musicians' Gallery, and the second chest has totally disappeared.

Some excellent specimens of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century credences and cupboards are possessed privately. The collections of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, Bart.; Morgan Williams, Esq., of St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire; The Hon. Mr. Justice Eady; Edward Barry, Esq., of Ockwells Manor; and Seymour Lucas, Esq., R.A., contain several examples. The fifteenth-century armoire at York—perhaps the only one remaining—is one of the rarest of our ecclesiastical possessions of this date. Two almeries in Carlisle Cathedral also belong to the same period. The latter are painted with conventional representations of the thistle, and have long strap-hinges with pierced ends, under which may be traced remains of crimson velvet. One of these almeries is painted round with a border of rosettes, inclosing the initials T. G., probably those of Thomas Gondibour, who was Prior in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

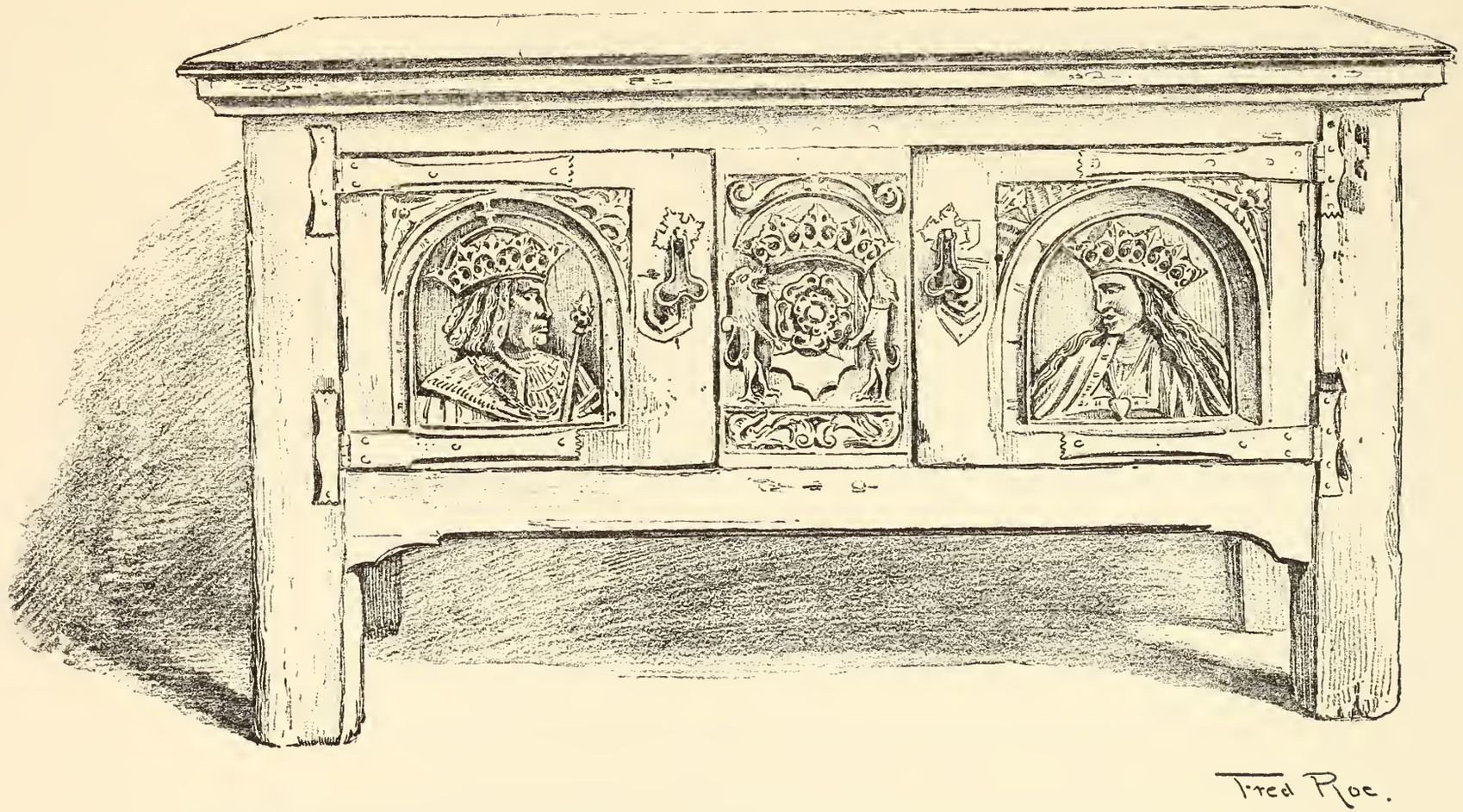
In the Parish Church of Louth, Lincolnshire, is a fine cupboard dating from the latter part of the fifteenth century. This piece of furniture has the rare advantage of possessing a history which is in some sort known. To this day the piece is called by the name of "Sudbury's Hutch," and it is said to have been given to the church by one of the vicars of Louth. Two vicars of that name held office in Louth during the fifteenth century, viz. John Sudbury, who was incumbent in 1450, but the date of whose institution has not yet been discovered, and Thomas Sudbury, who succeeded the former on his resignation in 1461. Thomas Sudbury died on the 18th of September, 1504, and may be regarded, without doubt, as the donor of the hutch. A bequest to "Sudbury Hutche in Louth" occurs in the will of one Jarrat Allandale, tanner, dated 26th January, 1586, which directs that forty shillings shall be "imployed according to the will of Vyckar Sudbury to the benefit of the poore people in Louth" (see note 29). From this and other references which crop up in old documents, it is evident that the hutch was used for charitable purposes. Various entries occur in the Wardens' Accounts, by which

we learn that the hutch was used for keeping money in as well as doles of coals and candles. It also appears, from certain items, to have been repaired in 1565 and 1666. In the latter year the sum of five shillings was disbursed to "Goody Blackey for a piece of wood," and fourteen-and-fivepence was also "payed Shorte for works about Sudbury Huch." This most valuable and interesting relic is in a fair state of preservation, and retains all its original ironwork. It possesses few architectural details, and the carving shows strong indications of the Renaissance. The doors are carved with heads of the reigning sovereign and his queen, evidently Henry VII. and Elizabeth of York. That of the king, with its long, straight nose, cunning smile, and clipped hair, bears a great resemblance to the portrait of Henry VII. in the National Portrait Gallery. Over the heads are semi-circular arches with Gothic spandrels. The panel between the doors is ornamented with a shield charged with a rose and supported by two animals, the whole being surmounted by a crown. The device on the shield is probably the badge of the combined York and Lancastrian Rose, crowned (see note 30). The sinister supporter is clearly a talbot, and, judging from his tail, the dexter must be a lion, though a queer specimen, indeed except for the tail, he would appear to be meant for a boar. The custom of carving portrait heads on the doors of cabinets continued well into the sixteenth century. During the reign of Henry VIII. it was very prevalent, and it continued to be carried out, in some instances, even during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I., though geometrical inlay and strap-moulding had almost entirely superseded it. The heads were likewise more grotesque and barbarous in execution, and lacked the decorative qualities of the earlier style. The Louth specimen is one of the earliest known, and in spite of its tendencies towards the Renaissance, there is a true Gothic flavour about the treatment of the heads, their ornaments, and the long flowing tresses of the queen. This example should be compared with the later specimen of similar character in the collection of Mr. Morgan Williams.

Louth Church also possesses a strong iron-bound Peter's Pence box, which will be dealt with in the chapter on Plain Coffers.



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH CHEST IN THE COLLECTION OF THE HON. MR. JUSTICE EADY



FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CUPBOARD, KNOWN AS "SUDBURY'S HUTCH," IN LOUTH CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE

COURT CUPBOARD TEMP HENRY VIII

In the collection of Sir Charles Lawes-Wittewronge, Bart.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

TO attempt a complete description of the change which took place at the close of the fifteenth century in the decoration of woodwork would be to write a history of the Renaissance. The first efforts of the Renaissance were purely Italian. Guizot calls it a breath from the grand old pagan life of Greece and Rome, and this sums up in a nutshell the revolution that dawned about the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As usual, the change was inducted by the French. The victory of Foronovo not only forced a passage for the French back to their native country, but (strange anomaly) carried back the style of the vanquished across the Alps. Later campaigns also contributed their share, and the departure from the pointed styles was confirmed. At first the changes were merely ornamental, structural differences being but slowly overcome. As yet the Gothic shell was only trimmed with Italian ornament, often intermingled with details of the previous style. There is no doubt that in England royal patronage was one of the prime causes of the great influx of Italian artificers which followed. Then came the storm of religious reform and the Italian immigrants disappeared, leaving their methods to be replaced by others of a more national type.

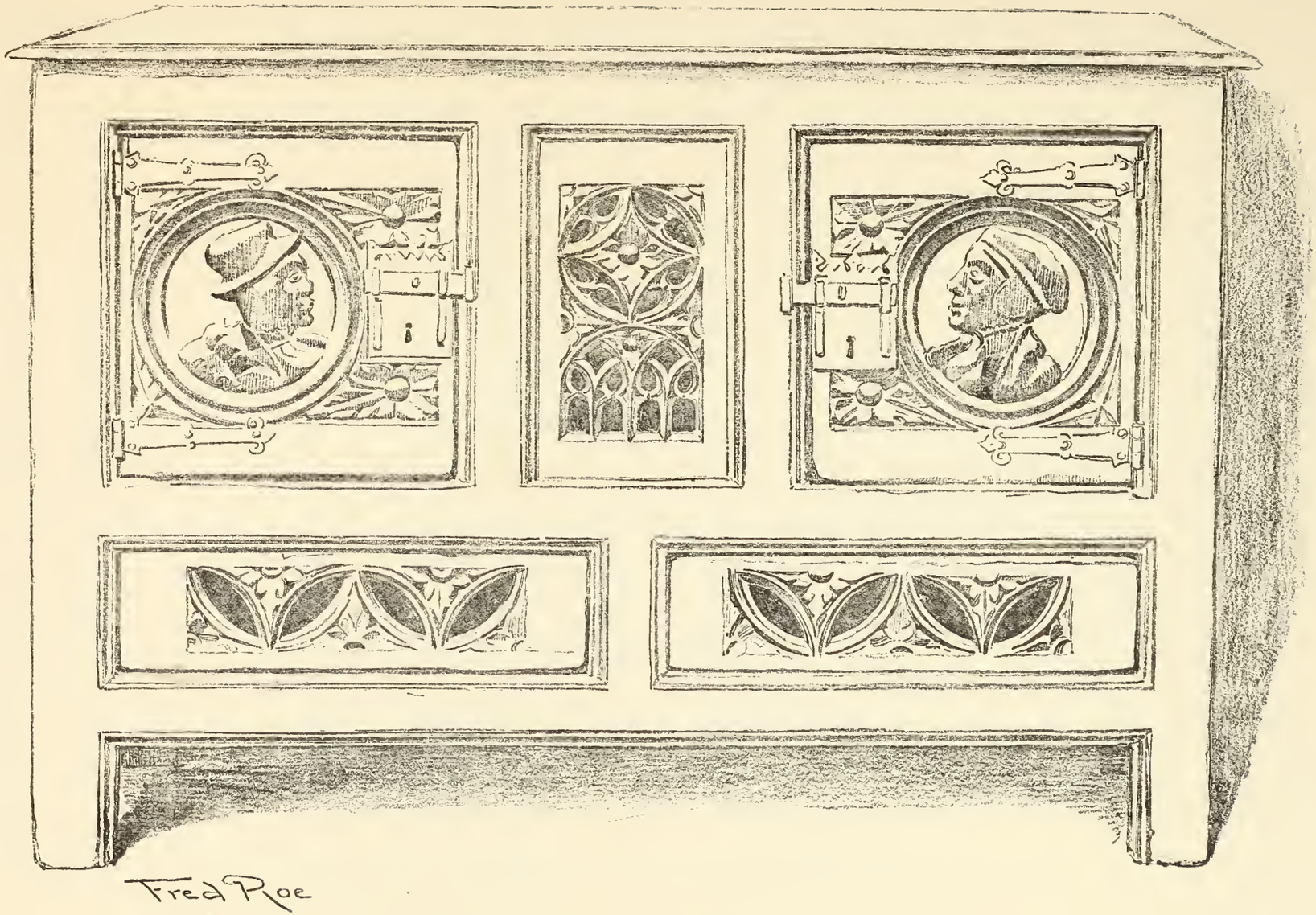
Before the fifteenth century had passed the custom arose of carving heads upon the doors of hutches and cupboards. This custom became popular during the first half of the succeeding century, but with this exception. Whereas the heads were formerly surmounted by arches or canopies, they were now inclosed within roundels or medallions. These medallions frequently retained a trace of the old Gothic feeling by being surrounded with ornaments of an earlier type, such as the spandrels on the carved portrait of Henry VIII., by Holbein, in Sudeley Castle. The heads themselves were often very grotesque, especially those emanating from France and Flanders. At times, however, as has been just noticed, portraiture was attempted, and occasionally a piece will be found, the panels of which represent with considerable force and character the features of various members of the family for whom it was executed.

Though the tall many-storied buffets of the fifteenth century had ceased to be

made, hutches and credences continued their old outline, and in many respects the same details. There is a well-known French credence in the Cluny Museum, in which the combined modes of decoration are pushed to the verge of excess. Other French Gothic chests of the sixteenth century exhibited there have the *guilloche* carved on their stiles. The almery in Coity Church, Glamorganshire, is also a good national instance of local lingering of the old style. In outline and design it is decidedly Gothic, but Gothic that instinctively reminds us of the staircase at Christchurch College, Oxford. There is none of the freshness of Mr. Barry's credence about it. The coped and crocketed lid is exceedingly rare, but in spite of this, and the tracery with which the piece is lavishly adorned, the circular wreaths which surround the sacred emblems surely announce a date not prior to Henry VIII.'s. time. The thinness of the framing is singularly noticeable and would seem to place the almery towards the end of Henry's reign, after which the framework of panelled receptacles was considerably reduced in size.

Some curious anomalies resulted from the intersection of two such opposite styles as the last Pointed and the Classic revival. The town-made or East Coast specimen, with little sign of anything save the fresh vigour of the Renaissance, is often older than the survival of the Gothic that lingered on the borders of Wales or in the West Country. Yet it is rare to find pieces of the date of Sudbury's Hutch which exhibit tokens of the change. In this case the position of Louth on the eastern coast-line may again supply the explanation. This piece appears to have been bequeathed by Vicar Sudbury, and to have been in use during his lifetime, Sudbury died in 1504, more than a year after the decease of Henry's queen, whose portrait appears on one of the doors. This would place Sudbury's Hutch, by the lowest computation, at the very beginning of the sixteenth century, though it may actually be some years earlier. The hutch owned by Mr. Morgan Williams is very similar in outline, but its decoration is mainly Gothic in character. The pierced window in the centre and the strap ornaments on the doors are relics of the fifteenth century, nevertheless the portraits are inclosed in roundels and are habited in the costume of Henry VIII.'s time. This piece was discovered in an out-of-the-way part of Devonshire some few years back.

Another fine instance of the fusion of the styles may be seen in Mr. Barry's credence. This is unique, and one of the most beautiful pieces of antique furniture in existence. In it the finesse of the best Italian work mingles with our last period of Gothic. The low cupboard is supported on scaled and moulded legs, and the recess beneath is canopied with two depressed arches with a pendant between them, while above these is a roping with a double twist running round the structure. The cupboard possesses only one door, like many pieces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The door and the panels on either side are bordered with a wide but very delicate moulding, the whole being surmounted by a Classic cornice decorated with leaf pattern. This credence was discovered by Mr. Seymour Lucas some few years



LATE GOTHIC CUPBOARD, PIERCED WITH TRACERY

In the possession of Morgan Williams, Esq., St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire

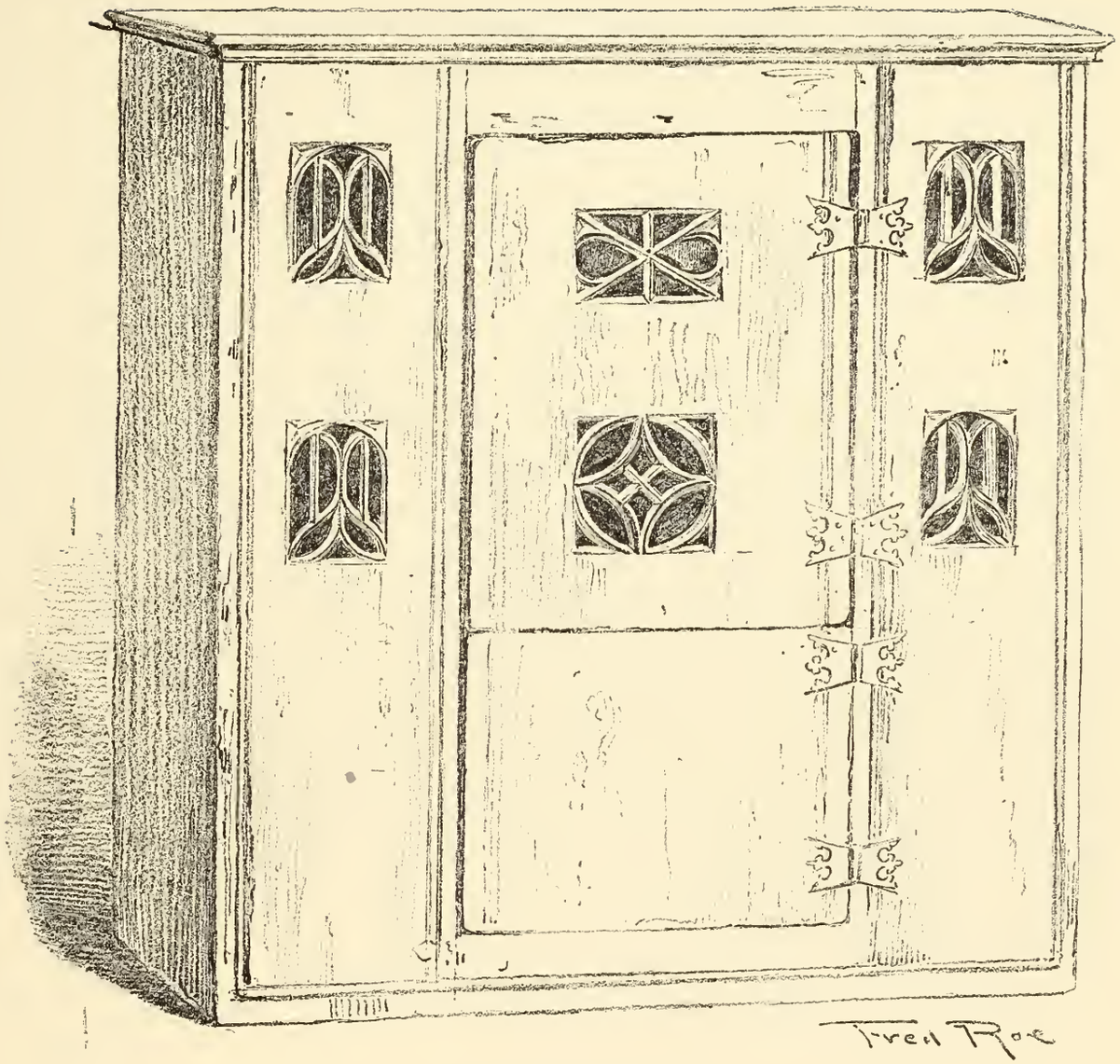
Height 2 feet 11½ inches; length 4 feet 5 inches; depth 1 foot 7½ inches

TWO CARVED PORTRAIT PANELS IN COURT CUPBOARD (A)

Temp Henry VIII. In the Author's Collection

TWO CARVED PORTRAIT PANELS IN COURT CUPBOARD (B)

Temp Henry VIII. In the Author's Collection



LATE GOTHIC ALMERY

In the collection of Morgan Williams, Esq., St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire

Height 3 feet 4 inches; length 3 feet

GOTHIC CREDENCE IN THE MUSÉE DE CLUNY, PARIS

Date about 1500

ALMERY IN COITY CHURCH, GLAMORGANSHIRE

Sixteenth Century

back in a very neglected condition at Hereford. It dates probably from the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

In the same collection is a very interesting English cupboard of the time of Henry VIII. This, from certain indications, appears to have been merely a wall cupboard or locker, which was converted into a portable piece of furniture during the seventeenth century. On the front are two heads, evidently rough portraits of the original owners, and between them on the door are the initials A. W. and a barrel or tun, upon which a flower is climbing. The last was most probably a rebus on the owner's name, Walton for instance. The heads as well as the rebus are carved in very bold relief, as though thrusting themselves out from the surface of the panels Heads treated in this way are peculiar to the age and appear at no other time. They are to be met with in wall-panelling, but when placed on armoires or cupboards do not occur except on the upper doors. The method adopted was by leaving a raised plane, the outline of the head, and then fitting the wood from which the mask was carved upon it. By these means the features sometimes project a couple of inches from the surface of the panels. These heads may have been originally intended as handles, though, as the locks are spring fasteners in nearly every case, this may be regarded as doubtful. The mode of placing a single small door in the centre, as was so often done about this time, must have been exceedingly inconvenient. Articles of furniture so treated, however artistic, are of little practical value. The pin-hinge was again introduced about this time, though it was never arranged for the lids of chests as in the thirteenth century, but perpendicularly in the case of small doors of cabinets or cupboards. The locks and hinges of this period often have a decidedly Germanic appearance. Chests of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries often stood upon two detachable bars of wood, which extended from back to front and served as strengthening clamps when weighty articles were contained therein.

One of the finest Flanders chests which we have in the country dates from the time of Henry VIII. It is preserved in the Church of East Dereham, in Norfolk, but was evidently not made for the position which it now occupies. On the lid is a brass plate engraved with the following inscription :—

"As a token of Respect towards his Native Place, Samuel Rash, Eqre., on the 1st day of Jany., 1786, Presented to the Church of East Dereham THIS CHEST for the Purpose of keeping together and Preserving the Deeds, Records, and other Writings belonging to this Parish. Tradition says this Curious Chest (and lock) is upwards of Four Hundred Years Old, was taken out of the Ruins of Buckenham Castle, and many Years since the Property of the Noble Family of the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk, and supposed to be used by them for Depositing their Money and other Valuables."

Mr. Rash's amusing description is incorrect in many ways. The chest is undoubtedly a piece of sixteenth-century work, which the costumes of the heavy Flemish figures, the mouldings, and ornamentation all abundantly testify. For the

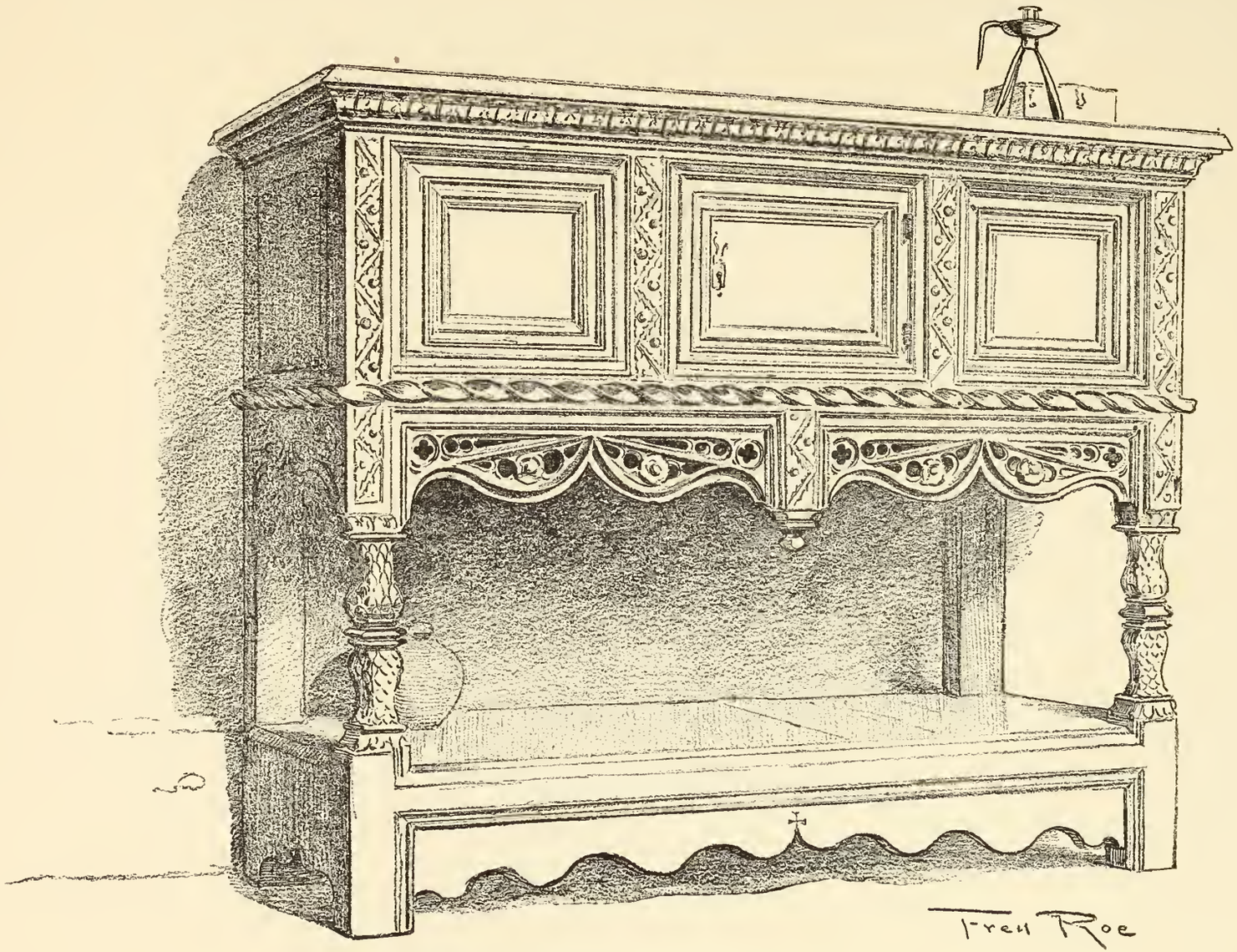
rest the chest was probably made for some City Guild, as the figures on its front and sides all hold symbols of the various arts and crafts. The figures are all female and stand beneath semi-circular arches, a baluster or impost of Italian design separating each. The lock, as is often the case, bears traces of an earlier style, being a most beautiful piece of purely Flamboyant art. Beneath the lock is a smaller panel than the rest, carved with a figure subject. The chest could never have been found as described. Its condition at the present time—over a hundred and twelve years since the inscription was engraved—being marvellously good and perfect.

The coffer in Shanklin Church, Isle of Wight, which is so beautifully engraved in Shaw's book, is an instance of a conventual piece of furniture enriched with the fanciful lettering of the early Renaissance. The name of the original owner, Prior Thomas Silksted, with his initials, the Arms of the Priory, and the date, 1519, appear on the front. This Thomas Silksted was forty-fifth Prior of Winchester, his office continuing from 1498 till his death in 1524. He was much in favour with Bishop Fox, and assisted that prelate to found Corpus Christi College at Oxford, and also to beautify Winchester Cathedral. The chapel bearing his name was built by him, and it is said that he is buried therein (see note 31).

Linen panelling in all its various forms was freely used in the manufacture of cupboards and chests about this time. Its introduction has been erroneously attributed to Hans Holbein, who, by the way, was born in 1498, a date probably subsequent to the appearance of this decoration in England. Linen-panelled chests, early or late, can be obtained without difficulty up to the present day; their importation and manufacture must have at one time literally glutted the market. Good cupboards of this kind, however, are scarcer, many of them having been broken up on any suspicion of craziness, the doors alone being saved. A perfect mania for destroying old receptacles seems to have existed till lately, even at the present time it is not wholly extinct. During what is known as the Abbotsford Period, and throughout the fifties much wanton destruction was committed. The portion which was decorated with carving was alone considered worthy of being preserved. It entered not into the shallow minds of these vandals that the parts must necessarily be more valuable when connected as a whole. The dealer, however, has at last learnt wisdom, and no longer dissects cupboards and chests for the sake of saving charges on the carriage. It is high time, for such ravages have reduced the number of untouched specimens appreciably, within the memory of man, and the probability of further discovery is now well-nigh hopeless.

A very excellent linen-panelled cupboard of fine proportions is in the possession of Mr. Guy F. Laking. It is of French or Flemish workmanship, and apparently dates from the first quarter of the sixteenth century. This cupboard is said to have come from Plessis-les-Tours. The character of its fittings, however, indicates a date subsequent to the lifetime of the tyrannical builder of that den.

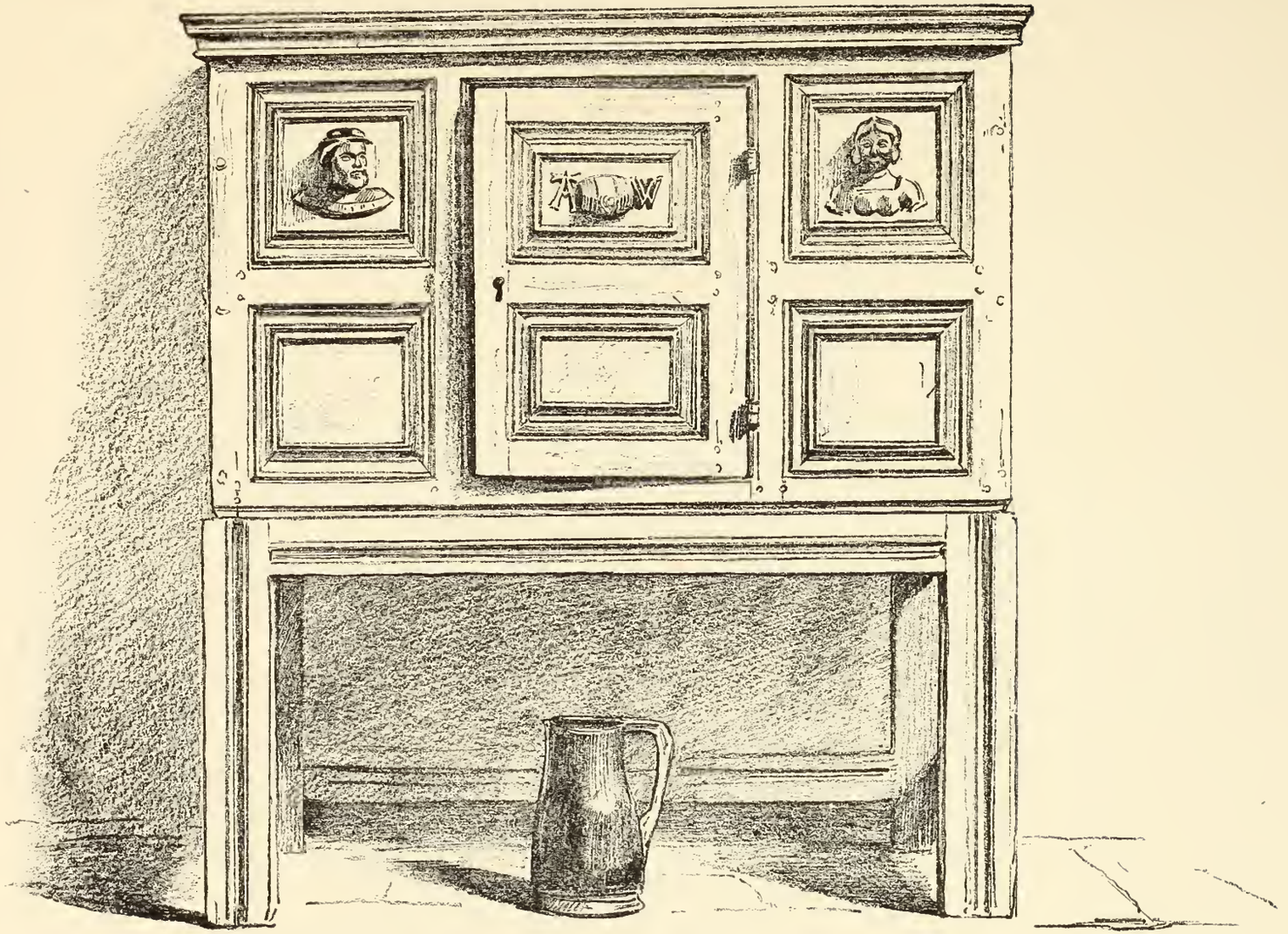
The art of inlaying furniture with different coloured woods was first introduced



EARLY SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CREDENCE

In the collection of Edward Barry, Esq., Ockwells Manor

Height 3 feet 10½ inches; length 4 feet 2 inches; width 2 feet

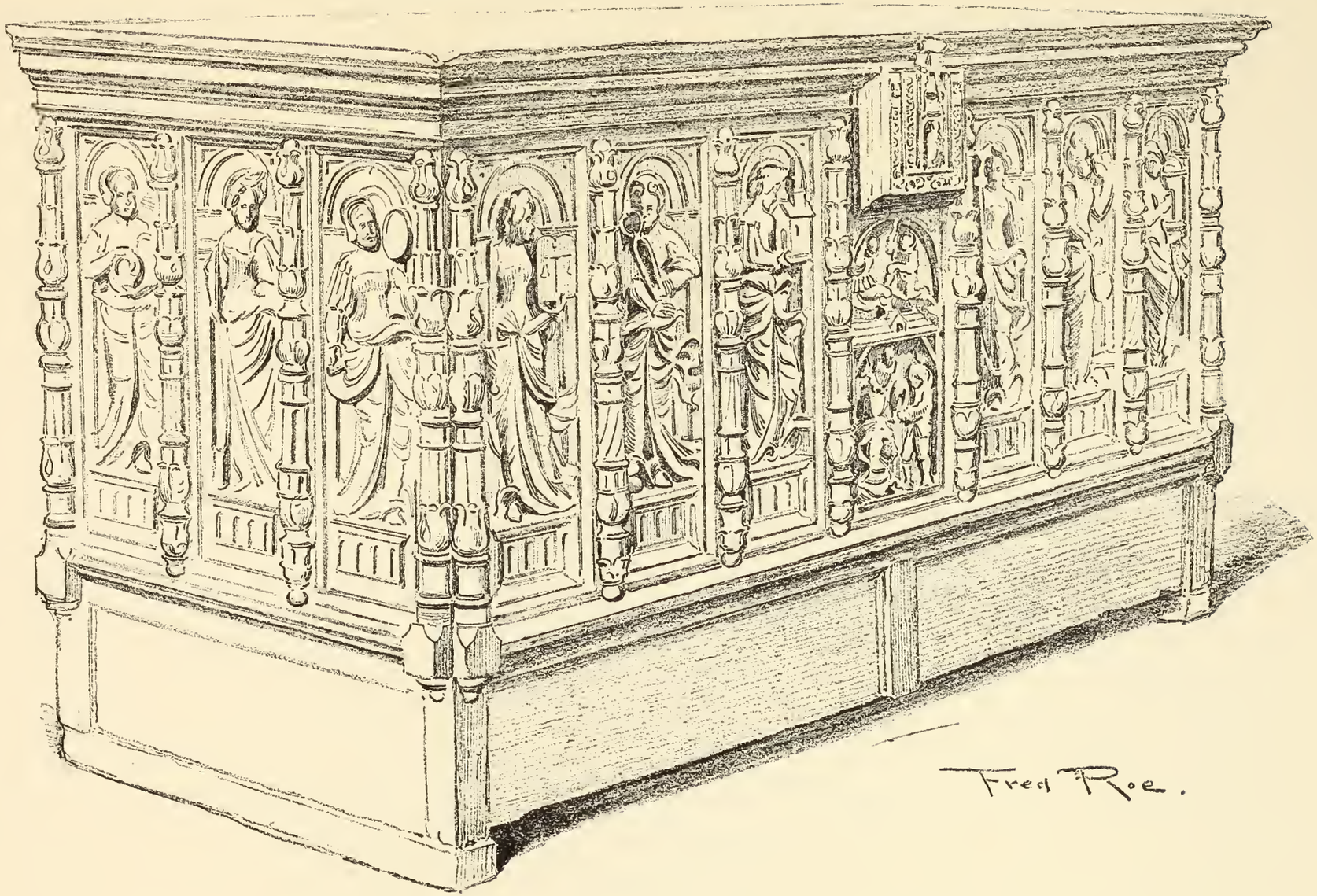


Fred'k Roe.

CUPBOARD, TEMP. HENRY VIII.

In the collection of Edward Barry, Esq., Ockwells Manor

Height of cuphoard 2 feet 10 inches; total height 5 feet 3 inches length 4 feet 7 inches; depth 1 foot 6¼ inches



SIXTEENTH-CENTURY "FLANDERS CHEST" IN EAST DEREHAM CHURCH, NORFOLK

Height 3 feet 9 inches; length 6 feet; width 2 feet 6 inches

SIXTEENTH CENTURY CUPBOARD IN THE COLLECTION OF MORGAN WILLIAMS, ESQ.

St. Donat's Castle, Glamorganshire

Height, 4 ft. 6 in. Length, 4 ft. 10 in. Extreme Width, 2 ft. 1½ in.

SILKSTED'S COFFER, IN SHANKLIN CHURCH, ISLE OF WIGHT

Dated 1519

Height, 2 ft. 3 in. Length, 4 ft. 4½ in. Width, 2 ft. 2½ in.

into England by Italian artists in the sixteenth century. It is doubtful if any of the earliest inlaid designs are the work of native artists. Cabinets so decorated are mostly protected by a falling flap and supported on detached stands, a new departure in shape, which sufficiently indicates their origin.

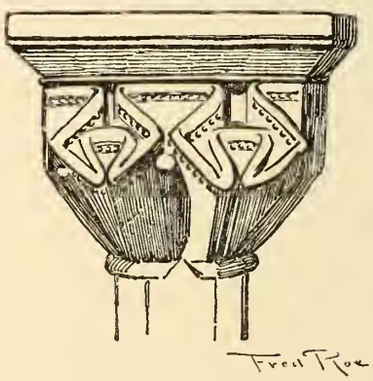
The custom of covering trunks and caskets with Genoa velvet was also introduced into England during the sixteenth century. At Kimbolton Castle, Hunts, there still exists a travelling chest which once belonged to Katharine of Aragon, and which is covered with crimson velvet decorated with the queen's initials, K. R., surmounted by a crown. This chest has remained at the castle ever since Queen Katharine's translation from Bugden in 1535.

MEDALLION PANEL
French early sixteenth century

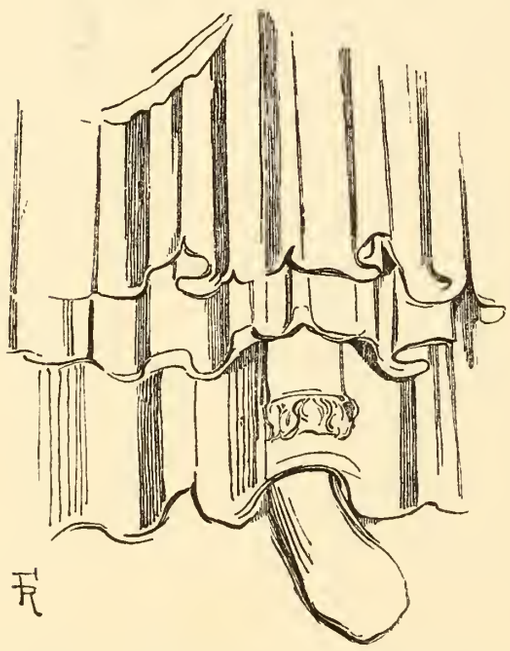
CHAPTER VIII

THE LINEN PANEL

DURING the Middle Ages, in almost every branch of Art, our ancestors appear to have been impressed with a sense of formal beauty existing in the folds and convolutions of their robes and garments. From this feeling seems to have sprung what is now known to us as the "Linen Panel," one of the last traces of Gothic art that loitered into the Jacobean period. So remarkable was this inclination, that we not unfrequently find the most prominent feature in mediæval sculptures and paintings to be a very careful and minute elaboration of modelling of the details of drapery. Curiously enough, the garments of most early effigies are represented as though the figures are actually standing erect, and there is little doubt that they were in the first instance sculptured from living models in that attitude and afterwards laid prone, the inconsistency of the straight, parallel folds seeming to have attracted no unfavourable notice after the positions of the effigies themselves were altered. The repeated insistence of this quaint formality was not without its effect upon decorative design (see note 32).



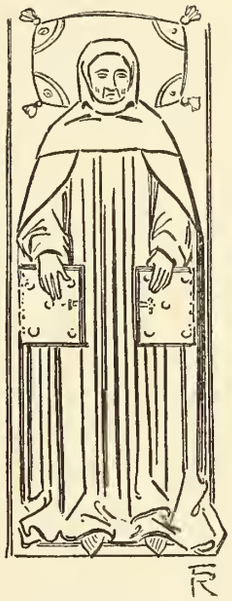
NORMAN CAPITAL
Bridlington Priory, Yorkshire



DETAILS OF DRAPERY ON RECUMBENT EFFIGY OF ARCHBISHOP GREY, IN YORK MINSTER
Thirteenth century

A tradition exists that the style originated in Flanders, the people of that country being the great manufacturers of fine linen during the fifteenth century. Now, as a matter of fact, the earliest types of linen-fold occur in France, and though variations of the pattern were used, as we know, extensively in the case of dower chests (being evidently considered as a suitable decoration on receptacles

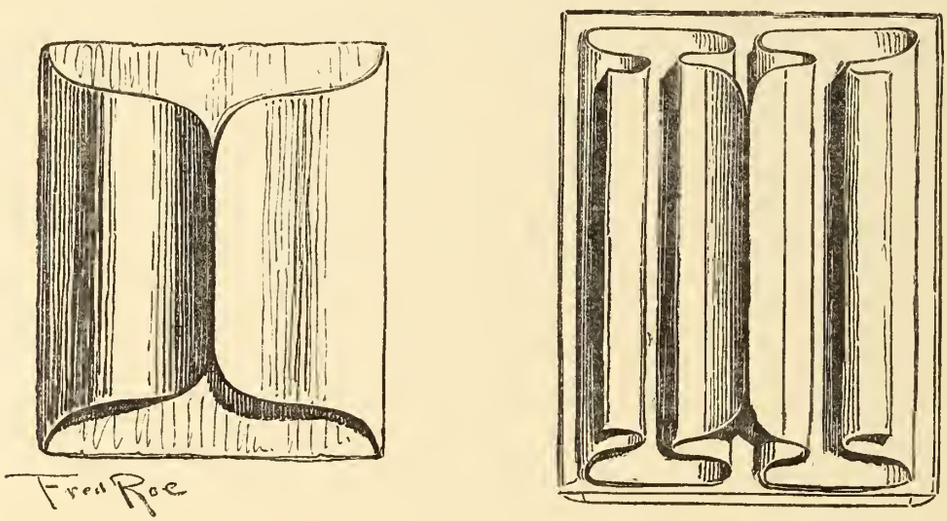
for household linen), yet this may be considered as purely a chance circumstance, and not the influence of a particular industry upon design. Representative types of developed linen panelling were fully in vogue during the reign of Louis XI. (1461–83), and in one of the ancient illustrations to *Froissart's Chronicles* a fine specimen of a bench or settle, with simple linen-panelled ends, is to be seen (see note 33). This picture is described by Racinet, who states that "according to the custom of the time in which it was executed, the figures are not habited in the dresses of the period which they are supposed to represent, but in the fashions of Charles VII.," Louis' predecessor. Other authorities, with more certainty, attribute it to the work of a Flemish artist residing in Paris subsequent to 1460. The advent of the "linen pattern" in England dates from the time of Henry VII. (1485–1509), and its appearance in Flanders seems to have been contemporaneous, or at any rate very little earlier. It is most probable that the notion originated in France, the fashion later on being imported into this country, either through Flanders or direct, during the first few years of peace and international commerce in the early part of Henry's reign. Roughly speaking, the linen pattern continued to be used as a panel decoration for about eighty years in England and rather longer on the Continent; and while Art generally assumed the florid grotesqueness of the Early Renaissance Gothic, conventionality in the treatment of draperies survived to a great degree. However, in the second half of the sixteenth century more stilted fashions in wearing apparel became the mode, the base skirt disappearing from male attire, while with female dress the introduction of the farthingale almost obliterated the existence of folds altogether. Whether any real influence can be traced from this, or whether both arose from a gradual but general degeneration of taste, it remains a fact that the most beautiful forms of linen panelling ceased to be produced, being replaced by incised patterns of infinitely less merit, both in design and execution. But in those days of difficult communication obsolete types and methods still lingered in the country, far away from the great towns, and it is not uncommon to find rough "farmhouse pieces" of a later date bearing strangely debased specimens of the linen fold and other early characteristics.



TOMB IN THE CEMETERY, BOLOGNA
From Pugin's *Continental Sketches*

The simplest type to be found, and one which was extensively used abroad, is fashioned in the form of a single fold. It is usually moulded in very low relief, and has a ridge running down the centre, the top and bottom edges of the napery being shaped to resemble a low ogee or "hare-lipped" arch, showing no returns. In a fine French MS. in the British Museum, executed about the year 1470, are pictured some exceedingly interesting and beautiful examples of furniture, panelled with this particular type (see note 34). One of these is a credence of graceful

design, with a single door opening in the centre and a drawer underneath. It has an upright back, ornamented with a double row of three linen panels and surmounted by small statuettes carved at the top of the uprights. Another piece is a settle or bedstead (see note 35). This, like the former, has been drawn from the actual object, but though depicted in a different plate it is evidently, which is most interesting, one of the same set of furniture, the panels being of precisely the same pattern, as well as the ornamental crocketing at the top. In the Chronicle of Montstrelet, a Flemish MS. likewise in the British Museum, is a painting commemorating the interview of Joan of Arc with the Dauphin at Chinon. The walls of the apartment in which the event is taking place are represented as being



FRENCH AND FLEMISH EXAMPLES

covered with linen panelling of a similar pattern. It should, however, be mentioned that this illustration was not executed until late in the fifteenth century, some seventy years after the event, and gives not the Flemish fashions of 1430, but those of the date in which it was painted.

A development of this plain type is formed by the addition of a couple of folds, through which the ogee ending is faintly suggested.

A curious type, and one which is not common, is that which has the edges of the napery indicated by angular instead of curved lines. In these an almost imperceptible inflection in the edges is suggested by the elevations and depressions in the surface of the linen folds when viewed laterally. They are not unfrequently bordered with a diapered pattern, and the general effect is very elegant and pleasing (see note 36). Comparing the various specimens given with draped statuary of the mediæval times one cannot help remarking how freely some Italian sculptures lend themselves to

LINEN-PANELLED CUPBOARD

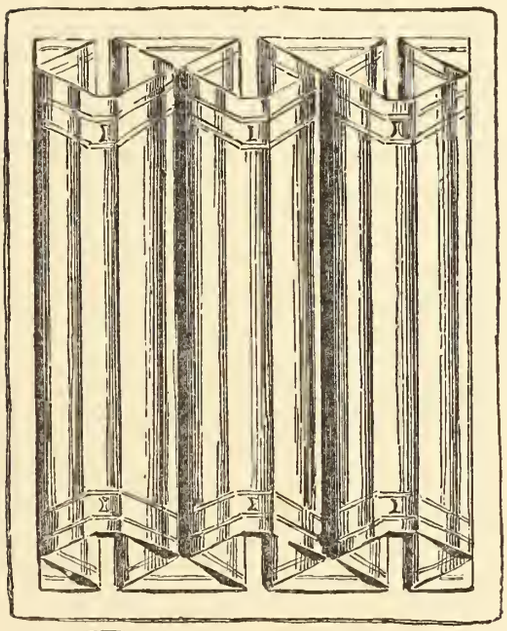
In the possession of Guy F. Laking, Esq.

This piece of furniture traditionally came from Plessis-les-Tours

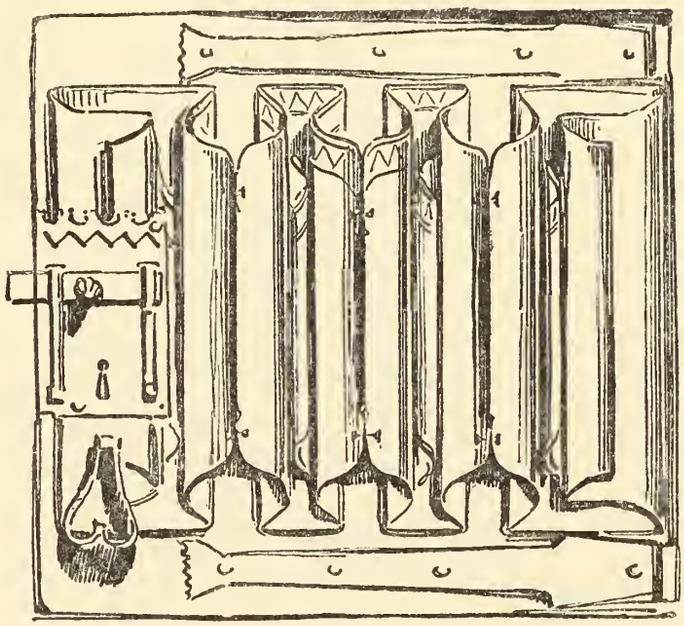
French. Early Sixteenth Century

the perfection of this species of ornament, in spite of the fact that Italy was never the home of Gothic art.

As the linen-fold pattern progressed it became customary to enrich it with the addition of fruit or flowers in conventional forms, as well as fringe, tassels, etc. The specimens of carving on the Hispain or window shutters in the Mont de Piété, at Malines, are a good example. At Louvain, also, the lobbies of the Church of St. Pierre are decorated with panelling of a very similar character, though the proportions are different. As regards the feature last mentioned, it is sometimes



ANGULAR LINEN PANELLING IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

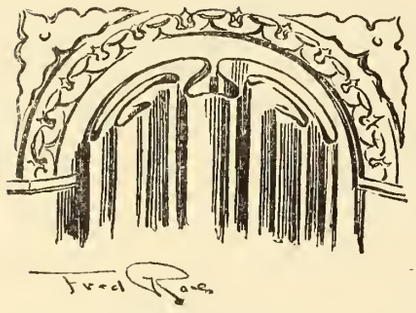


LINEN-PANEL DOOR IN CUPBOARD
In the collection of Edward A. Barry, Esq.
The decorative bordering on the edge of the fold has never been finished

puzzling to find a close resemblance between specimens in Flanders and others of English nationality undoubtedly existing *in situ*. It is likely, however, that if the actual objects themselves were not imported that Flemish workmen were, and with them Flemish designs, which would account in a great measure for the similarity just noticed. The origin of loose specimens is often extremely difficult to determine on this account.

Not satisfied with ornamenting the wainscoting of their apartments with linen and other patterns, the effect was in many instances still further heightened by a lavish application of gold and colours. This would seem to be a very fair illustration of the phrase "gilding the lily," and though such as have remained so to our time are interesting from the fact of their being in an untouched state, their effect considered

as a whole is less restful and pleasing than when the natural surface of the wood is retained. During their first freshness this exaggerated splendour must have been considerably more obvious.

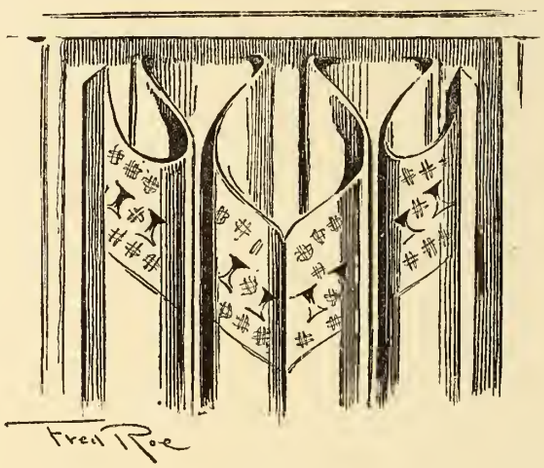


ARCHED LINEN PANEL

On coffer in the Musée Historique, Orleans

Differences of form and character might be multiplied indefinitely, both as regards the linen panel and its accessories, but it will be sufficient to specify some of the most pronounced features. In the early days of English Renaissance a run of wainscoting thus decorated was sometimes surmounted by oblong panels carved with arabesques. Also it occasionally happened that the linen pattern was headed or inclosed with a Gothic cusped arch fitted to its framing. A magnificent roomful of the first may be seen at the "Neptune Tavern" (formerly a merchant's residence) at Ipswich, and specimens of the latter were extant till a few years ago at the "Marquis of Granby" at Colchester (see note 37).

In some cases the upper edge only of the linen pattern was shaped or finished. This peculiarity is exhibited in those panels which in wainscoting were placed nearest the floor, it being probably only an instance of unwillingness on the part of the early decorators to spend too much labour on a portion of the work which was level with their ankles. A superb run of panelling, exhibiting this omission, remained, until a few years since, in a farmhouse of the fifteenth century at Kingstone, near Taunton. The house is now destroyed, but a portion of its contents has found a home in the Victoria and Albert Museum (see note 38). It consists of a single row of tall panels enclosed in their original framing, the top rail of which is carved and finished with Gothic roping, denoting the height to which the wainscoting was originally carried on the walls. This amounted to some thirty-eight and a half inches only, so that the panelling in question formed nothing more than what is now termed a dado.

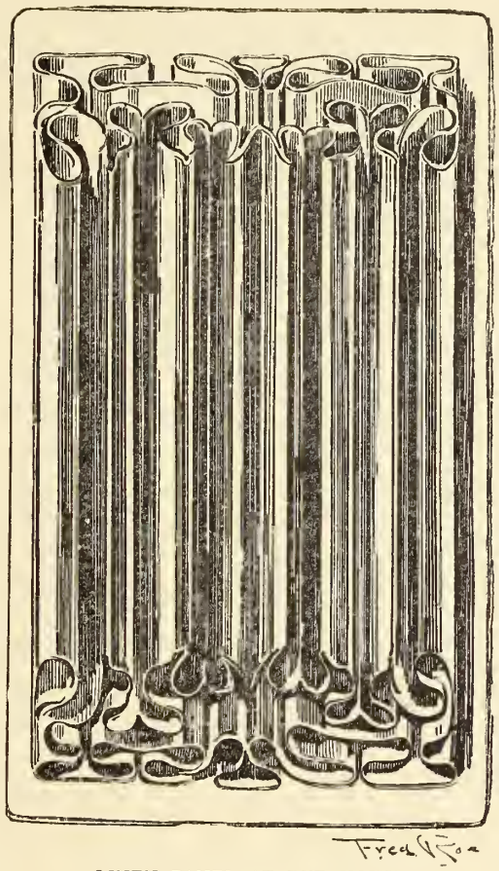


LINEN PANELLING

From an old house at Kingstone, near Taunton. Now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington

These panels, which are bordered on the upper edge only, measure 25 inches in height. The one depicted is 7¾ inches wide; others, in which there are additional folds, measure 9½ inches in width.

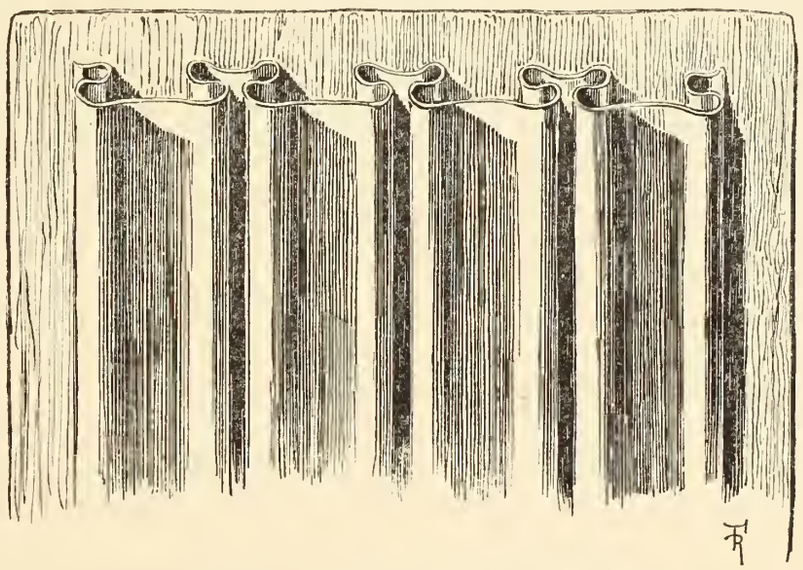
Some exceedingly fine specimens of the most ultra-developed types of linen panelling may be seen at the inn at Rye House, where they have evidently been removed from the ruined mansion adjoining. Much variety of design is displayed in these, there being barely two instances of absolute uniformity. The folds are undercut



LINEN PANEL AT RYE HOUSE
Size 1 foot 2½ inches × 8 inches

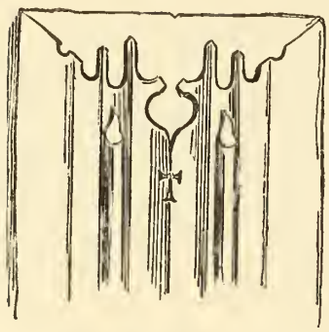
to a great degree, and the whole development is so remarkable as to approach floridity. The singularly fantastic edges, in fact, suggest a likeness to the Elizabethan ruff. It is probable that they were made when this form of decoration had been pushed to the utmost and had reached the verge of its decline.

A curious revival would appear to have taken place during the decadence of the linen pattern. For instance, at Hampton Court Palace (erected originally between the years 1513–30) there are in the earliest portions of the Tudor building some specimens of flowing linen fold which are typical of the period, and appear to have been fitted there as panelling on its completion. In contrast to these we find that others of an earlier type, having a distinctly Gothic flavour about them, exist in their original position in that part of the Palace which was built during the reign of Elizabeth. Similar instances could be mentioned. It may be argued from this that the latter example was nothing more than an ordinary Elizabethan style after all. This is not the case. When Elizabeth filled the throne the linen-fold decoration was



PANELLING AT HAMPTON COURT PALACE
Size of panel 21 × 10 inches

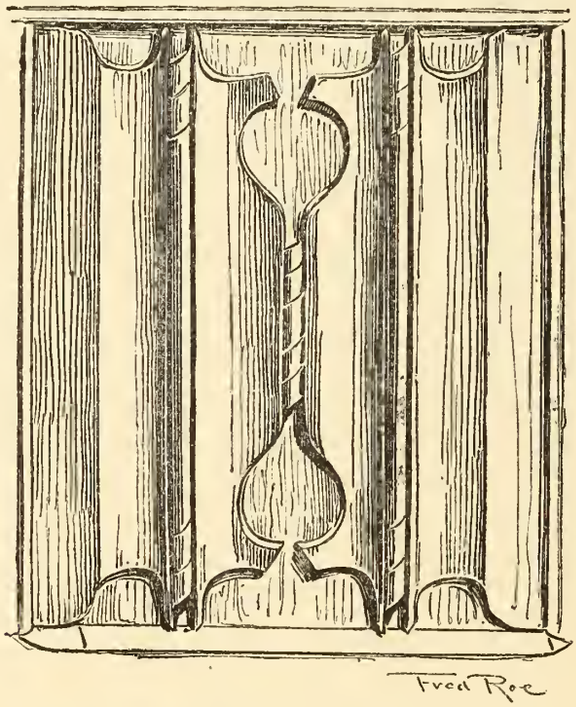
perishing, even in the country, while here the revival of a purely Gothic type occurs, singularly enough at a royal palace, the index and home of fashion.



PANEL AT HAMPTON COURT
Size 20×9½ inches

An unusual and rather remarkable feature is the division of the napery by a repetition of the edge folds, the conjunction of which forms a central ornament of Gothic design.

The more debased types of linen pattern are hardly worth describing in detail, for when the animating spirit had departed the productions no longer became things of beauty. It is certain that linen panelling continued to be made in isolated cases as late as the first half of the seventeenth century, though at that time the style was completely out of vogue. These decaying efforts were usually either forced and vulgar, or else flat, and charged with a suspicion of some later design. They are even known to be found covered with Jacobean scoop moulding (see note 39).

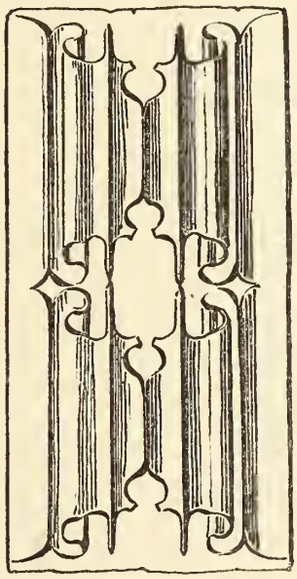


FLEMISH LINEN PANEL IN AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

The very last trace of what had once been the linen pattern crops up in the form of a grooved and faceted panel in the time of Charles II. It is almost unrecognisable in this phase, and needs no special description (see note 40).

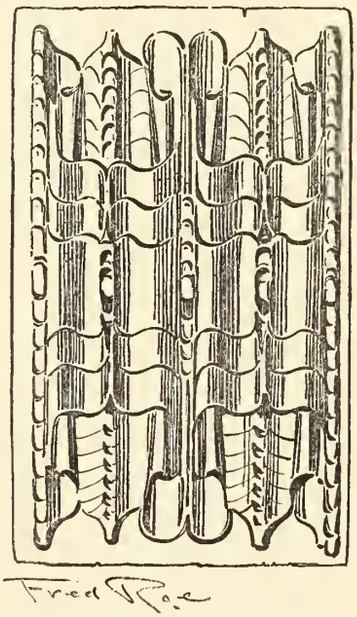
In common with most other things, the making of linen panelling nowadays has

undergone a change, it no longer being worked on the old system. The perpendicular ridges or folds are run out in lengths by machinery, and the edges finished after the material has been cut up into the desired sizes. It is needless to say that this mechanical method precludes to a great degree any chance of that delightful freedom which characterises the old work.



DOUBLED LINEN-PATTERN PANEL

FINIS OF THE LINEN PANEL

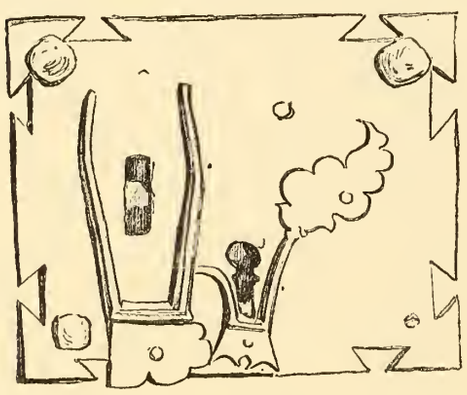


LATE LINEN PANEL (DATED 1642)
In the possession of Arthur Radford, Esq.

CHAPTER IX

PLAIN COFFERS

IT is occasionally no easy matter to assign a date to the plain iron-bound coffers which are used for municipal and ecclesiastical purposes. The earliest productions of this class remaining in our own country probably rank among those rude receptacles which are hollowed out from the trunks of trees, and their outer surface roughly dressed with the adze. Still, there is reason to believe that this primitive method of construction lingered in remote parts of the country till late mediæval times, for some objects of this description bear vague evidences which would seem to assign them to that epoch. Others, however, are so barbarous in every way that no means of ascertaining their age can possibly be arrived at. An approximate date can hardly be guessed, but in the eyes of European civilisation they are regarded as being of very great antiquity. A good specimen of this kind standing in the ambulatory of Wimborne Minster is said to date from Saxon times. A coffer at Minster Church, in Kent, is said to have been given by William the Conqueror. Again, a joined specimen in Chichester Cathedral is assigned to Saxon times, and said to have been brought from the original foundation of the See at Selsea with other undoubted relics which exist in different parts of the building. Granted the strength of oral tradition, such legends can hardly be taken seriously. The Minster example is a late production of the roughest description, the only singularity of which is that its lid (a solid half of a tree-trunk) is of oak, while the shell of the box is composed of elm. The Chichester coffer is certainly a most peculiar relic, measuring eight feet eight inches in length, though only some sixteen inches in height and depth respectively. The character of its locks, however, sufficiently proves that its date is not earlier than the latter part of the fourteenth century, and may even be later. The real locks are three in number, besides two false locks which are placed alternately between the others. The



LOCK-PLATE ON COFFER IN CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

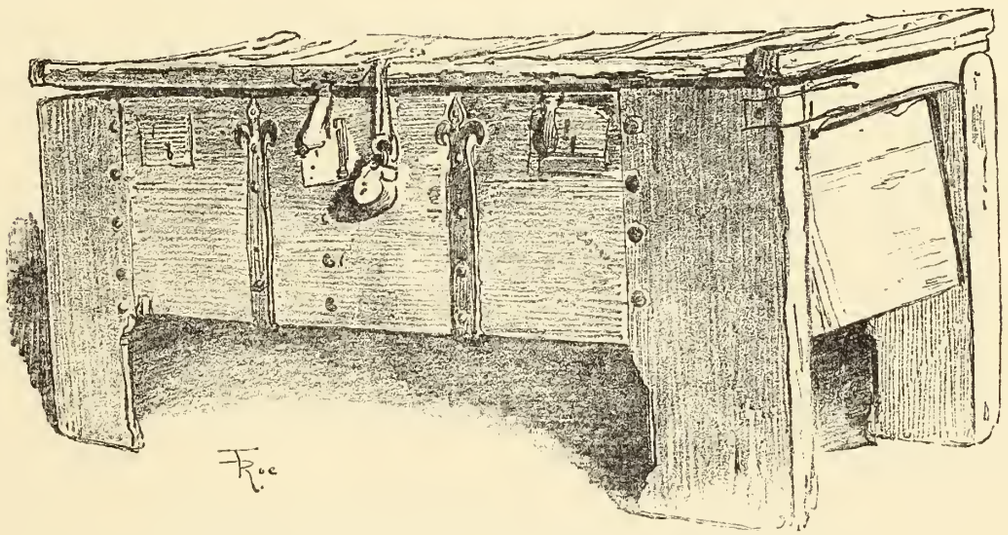
IRON-BOUND PETER'S PENCE BOX IN LOUTH CHURCH, LINCOLNSHIRE

Sixteenth Century

STRONG COFFER IN THE POSSESSION OF THE GLOVERS' COMPANY AT PERTH, N.B.

unusual shape of this suggests that it was originally intended to contain a crozier.

In Durham Castle is a more than usually huge and massive iron-bound coffer of the debateable type. Circumstantial histories are always greedily received and easily believed about such relics, and many people assert that this is the original coffin in which the incorruptible body of St. Cuthbert was placed on his decease in the seventh century. This it certainly is not. The coffer has some connection with the saint's memory, but, unfortunately for the truth of the afore-mentioned theory, a description of the original coffin was written by one Reginald, a monk, in the twelfth century, not long after the saint's body was transferred to the Norman Cathedral and placed within the shrine of marble and gold built to receive it.

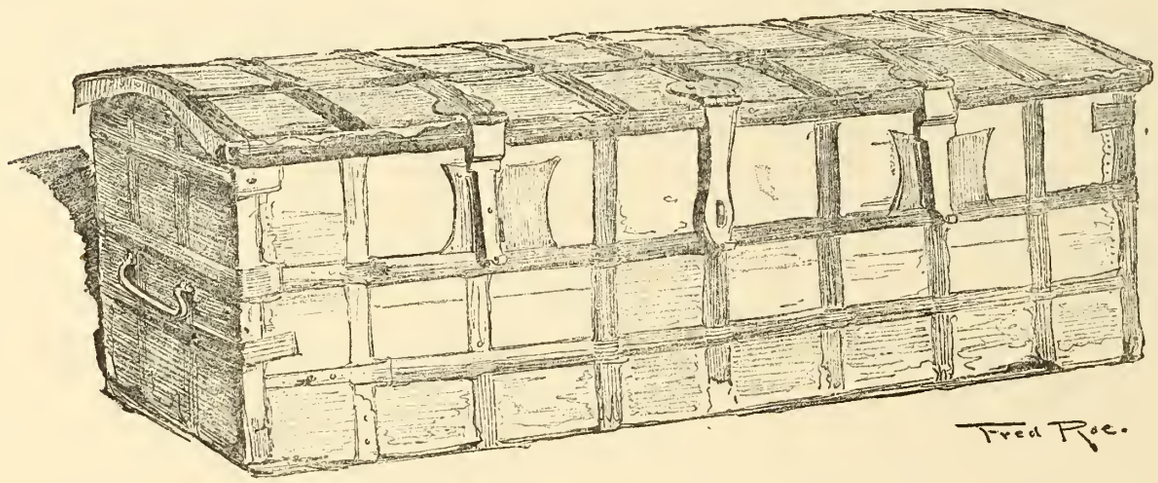


THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN CHOBHAM CHURCH, SURREY

Again, at the time of the Reformation a very exact record was drawn up, which shows that on the destruction of the shrine the remains were broken open, and after examination were inclosed within a *new* coffer, which was then buried beneath the spot where the shrine formerly stood. Here they rested undisturbed till 1827, when the remains were again exhumed. The fragments of the original coffin and a case which had surrounded it were placed among the relics in the Chapter House, while the outer receptacle (that dating from the Reformation) was deposited in the Castle, where it can now be seen. There is no doubt whatever of the accuracy of this. The fragments of the original Saxon coffin have quite recently been taken from the drawers in which they had lain since 1827, and cleverly pieced together. Crumbling though they are, the incised figures of saints and inscriptions in Runic and Roman can still be seen on them. (See Chapter II.) It is to these that the student of Anglo-Saxon work must look. The ponderous sarcophagus in the

Castle buttery is some nine hundred years later. The coffer in question has an arched lid, and is literally sheathed in iron straps. What scanty evidence is visible in the way of detail gives additional testimony that the work is not older than the sixteenth century.

In the crypt of Wells Cathedral is another of these so-called "Saxon" coffers, a work actually of late date, and of the rudest construction. In most cases can these Saxon *cists* be disproved, the name being applied by the ignorant to define something which is really beyond their comprehension. At Orleton, in Herefordshire, however, exists a coffer of the gouged-log type which can be more definitely dated, the character of its iron strap mounts showing that it belongs to the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. A plain coffer which has iron straps with trifoliated



SIXTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN ATTLEBOROUGH CHURCH, NORFOLK

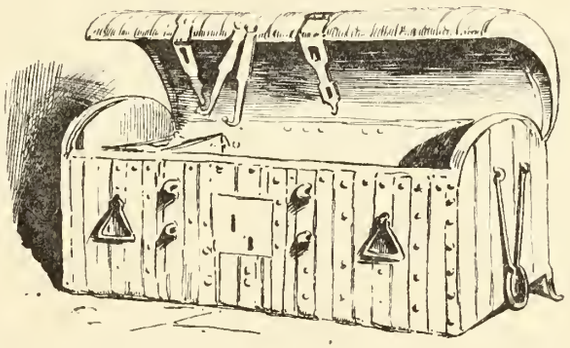
Length 5 feet 6 inches; height 1 foot 8 inches; greatest height 1 foot 10 inches; width 1 foot 10 inches

terminations is preserved in Chobham Church, Surrey. This specimen has the pin-hinge and slightly moulded uprights, and undoubtedly dates from the thirteenth century.

Plain iron-bound coffers exist in great plenitude all over the kingdom: Norfolk alone possesses a goodly share. At Attleborough is a coffer of this type with a sloping lid. It was formerly covered with leather, remains of which can be seen between the strap bands which cross it. At Blickling is another very interesting coffer, with a black-letter inscription remaining on it. Up North visitors to Cawdor Castle are shown a strong coffer in which it is asserted Thane William transported his treasure when the castle was built, in the middle of the fifteenth century. The box is really one of the so-called "Armada" type, and was probably made some century and a half after its supposed date.

Two ancient and exceedingly interesting specimens of the iron-bound strong-box remain in the Chapel of the Pyx, at Westminster. This chapel, the ancient treasury

of England's kings, is little known, and access is even now jealously guarded. The building itself dates from the time of Edward the Confessor, and it is an unquestioned fact that from an early period in the Conqueror's reign till two hundred and thirty years later, it was used as a depository for the wealth of our sovereigns. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, while "Edward the Lion" was busy

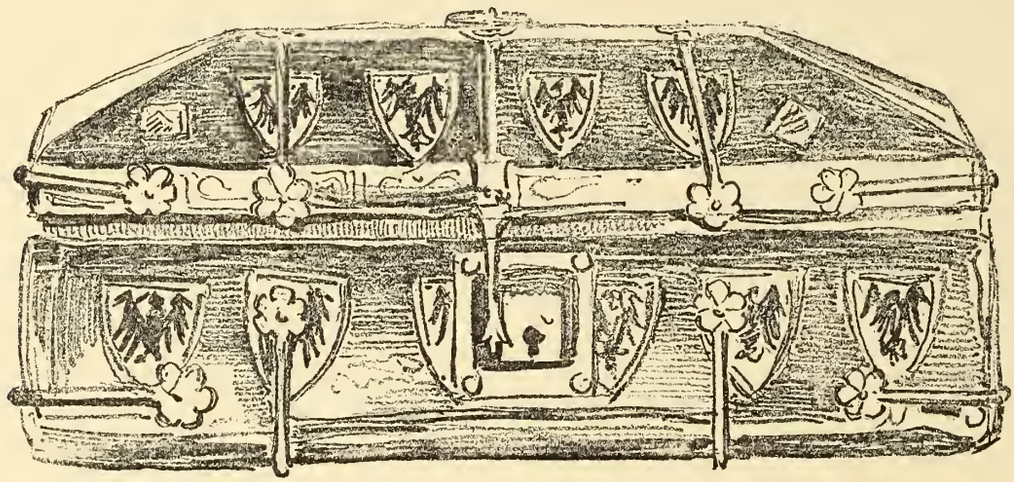


TREASURE COFFER IN THE PYX CHAPEL, WESTMINSTER
Said to have belonged to Edward III.

hammering the Scots, a strange and mysterious robbery caused the translation of the royal treasury to a more secure place. One hundred thousand pounds in English money alone is said to have disappeared, besides jewellery and plate, the thieves cunningly avoiding appropriation of the regalia and other equally incriminating objects. The theft to this day remains a mystery, but suspicion at the time pointed strongly to the monks, and the Abbot, Walter de Wenlok, and forty-eight of the Brethren were promptly sent to the Tower. Chroniclers differ as to the immediate result of the trial, or indeed as to whether one ever took place. It appears, however, that two years afterwards the King, who had come to Westminster to return thanks for his triumph over the Scots, ordered that those who still remained in prison should be released. From that day forth the Pyx Chapel was applied to other purposes. It indeed for some time contained the regalia, but was mainly used as a storehouse for relics and disused lumber, to be opened officially at quinquennial intervals for the ceremony of testing the national coin, known as the "Trial of the Pyx."

The audacious breach of law which has just been mentioned is known even now by the name of the "Great Robbery." The chests which contained the treasure are said to have been broken asunder by force, and if this was the case, fresh receptacles would be provided to replace those that had been wrecked. Far from being the coffers which figured in this affair, these can hardly have been made for some considerable time after. Details are scanty, but the outline of one is suggestive of a build which was frequently used in the manufacture of certain diminutive caskets covered with *cuir-bouilli* during the fifteenth century, and it probably belongs to that date. The other box, which is vaguely reputed to have

been the travelling-coffer of Edward III., has a dome or barrel lid, which, with the fashion of its hasps, seems to place it in the sixteenth century. It is fitted with triangular handles on back and front, and at the ends are rings depending from movable bars. When required for purposes of transport, a pole would be passed through these rings and the coffer would be slung across the backs of two mules. This attachment is really an early feature, and may be seen on an undoubted thirteenth-century coffer in the museum at Ypres. There is another feature in the Pyx coffer which should not pass unnoticed. The piece was originally



Fred Roe

CASKET COVERED WITH "CUIR-BOUILLI"

Stamped with shields of spread-eagles and lozenges with the arms of Castille, bound with iron clamps
German, fifteenth century
Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington

supported on bent-iron feet, splaying outwards, of which the two at the back still remain. This detail is probably unique (see note 41).

An inventory of the effects in the Tower Arsenal, drawn up during the reign of Henry VI., mentions that some "old great coffers bound with iron and lacking keys were cast out of an old house in the Tower because they would serve for nothing."

The fifteenth-century carved cupboard known as "Sudbury's Hutch," at Louth, Lincolnshire, has been already described. At the same place is an iron-bound Peter's Pence box, which has for its base a solid block of oak of immense thickness. This part was formerly buried in the earthen floor, thus rendering the coffer immovable. The box, which is closely interlaced with iron straps, does not appear to be older than the sixteenth century.

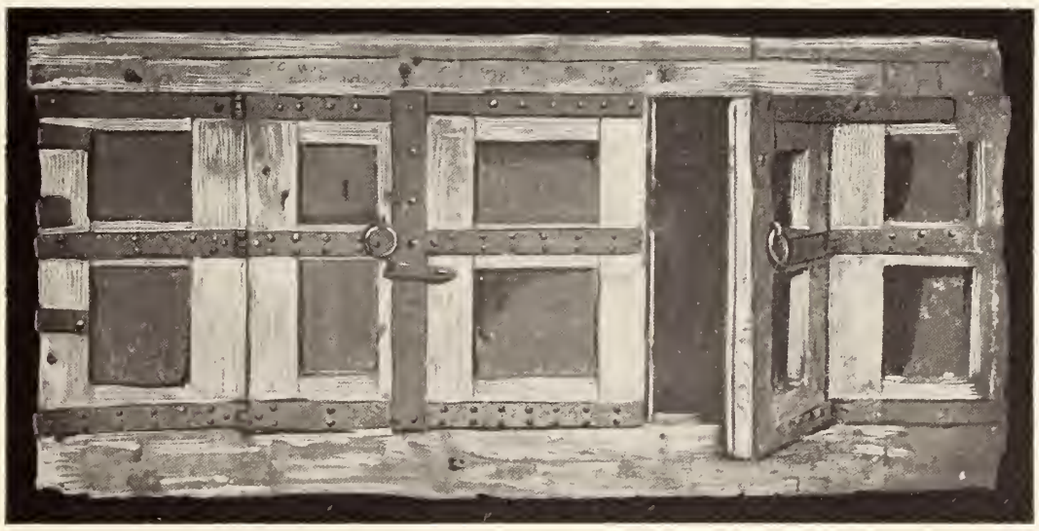
At Cley-next-the-Sea, in Norfolk, is a curious hutch which goes by the name

COFFER IN THE CASTLE BUTTERY, DURHAM

Temp Henry VIII

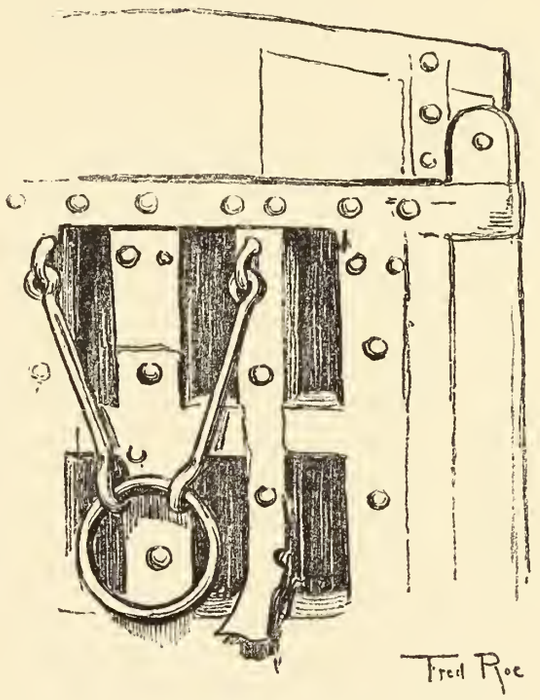
Length, 7 ft. 10 in. Extreme Height, 2 ft. 5½ in. Width, 1 ft. 11 in.

Constructed of wood 3½ inches thick



"THE STRONG CHEST." CLAY-NEXT-THE-SEA CHURCH, NORFOLK

of the "Strong Chest." The doors are square and of solid oak, about three inches thick, and the whole structure is bound with iron studded bands. The "Strong Chest" is in the parvise over the south porch of the church, where it must have been constructed, or it could not occupy its present situation. This is one of the very few certain instances known of a receptacle retaining the position for which it was made some centuries back.



SIDE VIEW OF THIRTEENTH-CENTURY COFFER IN YPRES MUSEUM
Showing rings for transport

* * * * * *

In closing this work we cannot refrain from expressing an earnest wish that it may in some way assist towards the preservation and proper recognition of the irreplaceable value of many examples of mediæval work, which, in spite of civil war and ignorant vandalism, have tided over centuries, only to be treated by their proper custodians in our day with something worse than neglect. The true connoisseur is pleased to know that facilities for what is practically Church robbery are not what they were some few years ago; but still there too often remains among those who ought to be the most zealous guardians of such treasures an apathy concerning their treatment which is deplorable. Suffolk owns a notable fourteenth-century coffer which is degraded into a receptacle for paint-pots. Kent possesses a tilting coffer—one of the rarest forms of decoration—which is exposed recklessly to the alternate extremes of dry heat and damp. One of our finest examples of thirteenth-century art, in Surrey, some five years since, had its fitting lid-flange broken off and thrown inside. A few minutes' work would have sufficed to repair the breakage, and to this the writer twice drew attention. Eighteen months ago it still remained in the same condition, and the part will probably in time be mislaid and vanish. The relation of similar instances could be multiplied. It is the mission of antiquaries, artists, and lovers of art, to call attention to facts such as these, for their persistent continuance must inevitably result in the disappearance of national memorials which modern ingenuity can never replace.

NOTES

Note 1 (p. 2).—No. 733, Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, an oak coffer bound with iron scroll-work, and having its base shaped in the form of an Early English flat-topped door-head. The ironwork in its character greatly resembles the Norman door-hinges formerly a feature at St. Albans Abbey Church. This piece was included in a collection of mediæval oak originally formed by M. Peyre, a well-known French collector. The South Kensington Museum authorities endeavoured many years back to purchase this collection, but without success. It was, however, finally acquired in 1895, and since then has been partly distributed in various parts of the kingdom. It is not at all improbable that this and other debatable specimens belonging to the collection are actually of English origin, as M. Peyre is known to have followed his pursuit in England for some time, though no evidence of his purchases is believed to exist.

Note 2 (p. 2).—A contemporary appellation for the floor-space below the daïs was the "marsh" of the hall. This state of things was the origin of the foot-bar being placed beneath tables.

Note 3 (p. 2).—1. Beket, a.d. 1300. 1925. 2. Baret, a.d. 1598. Theor Warres.

Note 4 (p. 5).—British Museum, Harleian Collection.

Note 5 (p. 10).—From the Treasury of which the casket probably came.

Note 6 (p. 10).—*Old Northern Runic Monuments*, by George Stephens, F.S.A.

Note 7 (p. 14).—This is merely conjecture, from want of specimens.

Note 8 (p. 25).—Cluny Museum, No. 1,324.

Note 9 (p. 39).—This change is believed to have been completed about the accession of Richard II., 1377, and owing to the slowness of imitative wood-carving, those chests which have perpendicular insertions, however slight, in their tracery can hardly be earlier than this date.

Note 10 (p. 40).—This chest is mentioned in the Inventory of Goods and Ornaments at Faversham Church, taken in A.D. 1512. It has often since been described, wrongly, as of Flamboyant work.

Note 11 (p. 51).—Such pieces are additionally valuable and interesting from the fact that their correct date can often be nearly ascertained by the clothing and equipment of the figures on them. Wood carvers might imitate the tracery of the preceding style, but the representation of costume never lied.

Note 12 (p. 52).—"Dagging." A vandyked border that was sometimes fashioned into the shape of oak leaves, letters, and other fantastic devices. The fashion arose in England during the reign of Richard II., and, in spite of the statutes subsequently promulgated by Henry IV. for its suppression, continued in popularity well into the fifteenth century. Some statues at the Castle of Pierrefonds, in France, executed in 1386, show the pitch to which the custom attained in that country.

Note 13 (p. 52).—It was then that the King honoured William de Selby with the title of Lord Mayor, which has ever since been retained by his successors.

Note 14 (p. 55).—The two examples are so singularly alike in this feature as to suggest the idea that the walled city was a representation of some actual place. Owing to the reversal of the design, the town which appears on the right of the Kensington piece is in the York coffer depicted on the left.

Note 15 (p. 56).—In an article on this coffer in the *Archæologia Cantana*, by Mr. W. A. Scott Robertson, this chest is attributed to Germany or the Low Countries, from the peculiar tilting saddles which the knights use. Mr. Robertson, however, admits that such saddles were used in England. See representation of a tournament held before Richard II. at Smithfield, depicted in the Chronicle of St. Albans, Lambeth Palace Collection.

Note 16 (p. 56).—See Note 1.

Note 17 (p. 60).—See the picture of St. George and the Dragon, by Tintoretto, in the National Gallery.

Note 18 (p. 60).—The male figure on the left-hand upright wears an interesting specimen of the *gipcire*, or purse of the period.

Note 19 (p. 60).—The sculptured effigy of Sir Hugh Calverley in Bunbury Church, Cheshire, presents an analogy to the equipment of St. George on the Ypres coffer.

Note 20 (p. 63).—Froissart.

Note 21 (p. 68).—Surtees.

Note 22 (p. 69).—Surtees.

Note 23 (p. 70).—No. 36, 1887. Given by Starkie Gardner, Esq.

Note 24 (p. 72).—Statutes, first of Richard III., 1483.

Note 25 (p. 72).—The church screen at Monniekedam has a decidedly German stamp about it. It dates from the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

Note 26 (p. 79).—A fine Spanish chest, of late fifteenth-century work, is loaned to the South Kensington Museum by Mr. Mark, sometime British Consul at Majorca, from whence it was procured.

Note 27 (p. 84).—A local legend, which is wanting in support, asserts that the expression "Under the Rose" originated in Coventry, where secret meetings of both factions were held as the struggle fluctuated, secrecy being enjoined by a large painting or boss representing the party rose which was placed on the ceiling.

Note 28 (p. 84).—In all representations where the figures are crowned the nimbus is omitted. Dugdale says that he supposes St. Mary's Hall to have been erected about the beginning of Henry VI.'s reign. No actual evidence of this, however, exists.

Note 29 (p. 91).—Feoffees' Account Book, 1576–1798.

Note 30 (p. 92).—It seems that badges were sometimes placed on shields, *e.g.* the second seal of Henry IV., 1411, which has three ostrich feathers on one of the shields depicted, and the tomb of Edward the Black Prince at Canterbury, which has the same device alternating with the Arms of England. The Rev. J. E. Cussans, in his *Handbook of Heraldry*, published in 1869, says that it was the custom for knights at tournaments to display two shields, one with arms and one with badge, and that challengers touching the latter were understood to wish to fight with the arms of courtesy only.

Note 31 (p. 104).—Dugdale's *Monasticon*.

Note 32 (p. 112).—Pietro Torregiano, the author of the tomb of Henry VII. at Westminster Abbey, was one of the few sculptors who represented the garments of recumbent effigies in the natural folds produced by the horizontal position. This is specially noticeable in the figure referred to.

Note 33 (p. 113).—A house near St. Aignan's Church at Orleans, which was both built and inhabited by Louis XI., used formerly to contain some good specimens of linen panelling. The house has recently undergone considerable restoration and is now to let. I am unable to say whether the panelling still remains there.

The illustration mentioned is in the portion which exists in the Bibliothèque, Paris. Our British Museum portion contains a very interesting picture—Jehan de Varrenes preaching from a pulpit which is panelled with linen-fold. A pulpit similar to this exists in one of the side chapels of King's College, Cambridge.

Note 34 (p. 113).—A translation by Gouart de Moulins of the *Historia Scolastica* of Pieter Commestor. The Hôtel de Ville at Brussels contains a magnificent Gothic retable, dating from the latter half of the fifteenth century. In one of the compartments, which is carved with the Annunciation, a tall, straight-backed chair and a bedstead, both panelled in this way, may be seen.

Note 35 (p. 114).—Possibly both combined. Early furniture was often made so as to be adaptable.

Note 36 (p. 114).—A curious instance of partial bordering occurs on the door depicted on page 115. The linen-fold, which is of the most beautiful description, is decorated round a portion of the edge only, leaving one to suppose that the piece has for some reason or other remained in an unfinished state. This cabinet is now in the possession of Edward Barry, Esq., of Ockwells Manor, Berks.

Note 37 (p. 116).—In the Musée Historique at Orleans is a coffer of early sixteenth-century work and singular design, exhibiting arched linen panels under semi-circular canopies. The toile is delicately cut, but on the whole the effect is the reverse of beautiful. At Minster Church, in Kent, an aumbry with a similar door exists.

Note 38 (p. 116).—No. 539, 1892.

Note 39 (p. 118).—The course of the linen-fold decoration appears to be the usual one taken by all fashions: (1) Simplicity of design, (2) development, (3) an excess of elaboration, (4) degeneration.

Note 40 (p. 118).—The reversion to Classic taste having caused it to assume an indistinct and bastard resemblance to the Doric triglyph, for which it might be mistaken by a superficial observer.

Note 41 (p. 124).—Most of these early crypts were flooded at intervals. This may account for the elevation of the coffer, which was probably made for the place.

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