

## The Ivory Fragment from Orchard House.

BY SIR EDGAR WIGRAM, BART.

THE excavations at Orchard House may be said to have resembled the traditional lady's letter in the fact that the postscript was the most important part of the whole.

In the spring of 1921, six months after the excavations described in Mr. Page's paper had been filled in, Mr. King's gardener was filling in a hollow place in the garden path with some of the fragments of tile and stone which had been thrown up by the excavators. In spreading and levelling the fragments his eye was caught by a tiny piece of carving to which he called Mrs. King's attention, and this little gem of 12th century art, which had eluded the searchers in the summer, was rescued from its 400 years' burial and restored to the honours that were its due.

The illustration which we give from a block kindly lent by Mr. Ernest Woolley, F.S.A., may exempt us from the necessity of giving any description of the design. The fragment is of ivory, about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches square, and with a slightly convex face; elaborately carved with pierced scroll-work of an extraordinary delicacy of craftsmanship—such as we are more apt to associate with the deft fingers of Chinese or Indian artists rather than with the coarse hands of 12th century Englishmen. The figure is full of life, but appears to have been merely introduced decoratively and not as filling a place in any coherent group.

Mr. O. M. Dalton read a paper on the subject at a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries on May 12th, 1921, pointing out that symmetrical foliate scrolls, with men, animals and monsters entangled in them, formed a very favourite motive in mediæval decorative design. They are executed sometimes in stone, sometimes in bronze, ivory or illuminations; and the fashion was so widespread that the character of the design can be taken to afford no guidance as to the origin of any portable example.

The fragment probably formed one arm of a cross which was affixed to the cover of a Missal, and the holes for the rivets which held it are still distinctly seen. A pair of similar arms (as Mr. Dalton points out) are in the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington; and a

second pair in the Musée des Augustins at Toulouse. Both examples are ascribed to the latter half of the 12th century. Mr. Dalton also notes as an interesting fact (but one that should not be stressed too earnestly) that the design is very similar to certain illuminated initials in a St. Albans Manuscript of Josephus which is now in the British Museum.

Was the fragment then, carved at St. Albans? It is of course impossible to determine. But as it was found at St. Albans perhaps we may fairly claim first call. At



(Actual size, 2 5-16 by 2 7-16 inches).  
CARVED IVORY FRAGMENT DISCOVERED AT  
ORCHARD HOUSE, ST. ALBANS.  
(From a block lent by Mr. Ernest Woolley, F.S.A.,  
made from his photograph by Mr. Emery Walker,  
F.S.A.)

all events we may safely predicate that no other Art School in Europe had workmen more capable of carving it than those in St. Albans at that day.

Richard de Albini, our second Norman Abbot, in the very first years of the 12th century, is recorded to have "made" a casket of silver gilt and ivory to contain the relics of saints. Another "glorious" reliquary "of wonderful workmanship" was begun in 1124 by Abbot Geoffrey de Gorham to contain St. Alban's bones.

Abbot Geoffrey could command the services of a master artist—the earliest whose name is recorded—Anketil,

an Englishman who had worked for seven years as goldsmith to the King of Denmark, and who had now returned home again to take the cowl in his native land. Under him worked Solomon of Ely, his pupil and almost his rival; and these made the "Feretry" for St. Alban's shrine, the super altar of gold and silver set with "chosen gems," and other magnificent church plate. Much of this was melted down later by Abbot Geoffrey to relieve the poor in a famine; but all that he melted he replaced by more magnificent pieces later on.

When Robert de Gorham went to Rome in 1155 to congratulate Adrian IV. on his elevation to the Papacy, he presented him with three mitres described as "of admirable workmanship." Later on he sent a pair of candelabra—not (as Matthew Paris assures us) to secure a favourable ruling in his dispute with the Bishop of Lincoln, but merely because he had promised them on the occasion of his former visit!—and the Pope admired them greatly, returned "immense" thanks for them, and presented them to St. Peter's at Rome.

For Abbot Symon (1166-1183) worked John the Goldsmith and his rival artificer Baldwin. The former made the Shrine of St. Alban, of which a full description is extant, and which was apparently the same that was lost at the Dissolution. The latter, amongst other works, made the great golden chalice, than which Matthew Paris (who was no mean judge) "had seen none nobler in the realm of England."

But it was in the Abbacy of John de Cella that the art of St. Albans reached its zenith, in the last years of the 12th century and the first of the 13th. Then flourished Walter of Colchester, "the incomparable sculptor and painter," his brothers William and Symon, and his nephew, Richard, Symon's son. Walter carved the image of the Virgin (an "elegantissima Mariola"), the great Cross over the High Altar, and the pulpit with its crucifix and its images of St. Mary and St. John. Some forty years later, in 1249, King Henry III. wished to present a pulpit to Westminster, and could only bid John of St. Omer (the then head of the school at St. Albans) to make one "like that at St. Albans, or more beautiful if it could be so!" The making of this regal oblation occupied the whole school for a year.

So high stood Walter of Colchester's reputation that he was called in, with Elias of Derham, to design and make the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury, a commission which must have been coveted by all the most eminent artists in Europe. And the Abbots and Bishops who selected him must have had the opportunity of seeing the best work of all the best artists of the period, for most of them (like the Abbot of St. Albans) had to visit Rome every three years.

We have still some poor faded remnants of the work of these four great kinsmen in the dim, tarnished, mangled pictures which they painted on the piers of the nave. And if to our modern eyes these seem rather rude and barbarous, let us remember that they were painted at the latest about 1220, and that Cimabue was not born till 1240, nor Giotto till 1276. The only contemporary school of that day was the decadent Byzantine; and it is interesting to observe how the English artists were actually anticipating the great Italians in attempting to free their art from the fettering traditions of stiffness, flatness and conventionality.

Nor must we forget Matthew Paris, best remembered now as the Great Chronicler, but known to his own generation as one of the greatest artists of his time, of whom his contemporary could write that "there was in him such cunning craftsmanship in gold and silver and in other metal work, in sculpture and in painting, that he is thought to have left none like him in all the Latin world."

What regrets are awakened in us now by this catalogue of artistic treasures! Yet we have not mentioned the half of them; and the richly embroidered vestments, the illuminated Missals and Manuscripts, make a total that reads like the inventory of the fittings in Solomon's temple. Of the Missals and Manuscripts we still retain some specimens, now carefully treasured in museums; but the vestments have mouldered into dust; the images are burned or pulverised; and all those priceless masterpieces of the work of mediæval goldsmiths, represented, to the spoilers of the Dissolution, only so many ounces of precious metal! The very burglars now-a-days would be ashamed to rob so unintelligently. Possibly even a Soviet Commissioner would have a better eye to the main chance.

And can it be that this fragment dug up in Orchard House garden is an actual specimen of the work of one of those great artists who flourished in St. Albans during the latter half of the 12th century? As archæologists we dare not assert it, but as human beings we can hardly refrain from cherishing the hope. They must at least have seen and admired it, and exhibited it as a model to their pupils; and if they did not actually make it, they must have made much of the same kind.

The actual fragment itself is now in the British Museum. Mr. H. H. King felt that he could not combat the director's representations that one of the national collections was the only fit home for such a work. But a replica is in Mr. King's possession, and a second is in the County Museum at St. Albans, so that none who are curious on the subject need have any difficulty in examining it.

Mr. King has kindly allowed us to make use of the following account given by him, in a paper read before the Society of Antiquaries, of other articles of interest which were found in his garden during the course of excavations already referred to. The articles mentioned were mostly identified for him by the late Director of the Herts. County Museum, Mr. G. E. Bullen, F.R.Hist.S.

“Among the metal objects, the most important is the fragment of a dagger, believed to be a ‘*dague à rouelles*,’ with the lower grip ring still *in situ*, a type constantly represented in illuminated manuscripts of the early fifteenth century, and which there is reason to believe remained the ‘knightly misericord’ as late as the second battle of St. Albans in 1461. An arrow head of iron, fairly perfect, measuring probably  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches between the extremities of the barbs and now  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length, is also attributed to the fifteenth century.

Among objects of other materials were a fragment of a clay tobacco pipe with a very small bowl and flattened heel, probably of the period of Elizabeth or James I.; fragments of table knives of the seventeenth century, a snaffle, probably of the eighteenth, two brass horse ornaments, the pan of a moneyer's balance, and the tusk of a boar. The pottery comprised a large number of fragments of tiles, large pitchers, drinking vessels, and a fragment of a shallow bowl. These include a number

of fragments of what appears to have been completely unglazed work in pitchers of fairly large size, chiefly in light buff and grey earthenware, fragments of pitchers in a fine red earthenware, exceptionally well potted, with the fronts lead glazed and showing the characteristic green specks of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and with the handles in certain instances decorated with small depressions such as would be made with the point of a knife; a few fragments of early green glazed ware, in which the oxide of copper has more perfectly fused with the galena; four fragments (none showing evidence of glazing) of a pitcher with a very dark green body, slightly decorated with yellowish slip; a few fragments of sixteenth century Siegburg ware, small drinking pitchers of the common form; one fragment of Bellarmine, and a triangular fragment, lead glazed, showing two perforations not at right angles with the run of the wheel, the nature of which has not been determined.

Among the tiles is one  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches thick, with a red body and imperfectly glazed surface, exhibiting characteristics similar to Cistercian ware. This is interesting in view of the fact that two drinking vessels of similar character (now in the Herts County Museum), were discovered in St. Albans and Kensworth, quite distinct from fragments of the manganese dioxide ware which is of common occurrence. There are also a fragment of a plain green glazed tile, two very poor examples of encaustic tiles of a pattern similar to those in the Abbey, and fragments of pale yellow glazed tiles  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches in thickness."

A careful examination of the sides of the trenches seemed to show beyond question that the whole area had been used as a dump for rubbish from the Monastery during a long period, and that, comparatively recently, the various heaps of rubbish had been roughly levelled. This is proved by the fact that nothing was found except in a badly broken condition, and that in some cases the more ancient fragments lay above those of more recent date, while the strata of disintegrated clunch sloped in all directions.

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