

*Economic History*

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# Silver in England

Philippa Glanville



ECONOMIC HISTORY

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SILVER IN ENGLAND

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FINANCE, MONEY AND BANKING

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# SILVER IN ENGLAND

PHILIPPA GLANVILLE

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# SILVER IN ENGLAND

ENGLISH DECORATIVE ARTS

SILVER IN ENGLAND

*Philippa Glanville*

ENGLISH GLASS

*R. J. Charleston*

JEWELLERY IN ENGLAND

*Shirley Bury*

ENGLISH DECORATIVE ARTS

SILVER IN  
ENGLAND

*Philippa Glanville*

*Assistant Keeper  
Department of Metalwork  
Victoria & Albert Museum*

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## PREFACE

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SILVER is unique among the decorative arts in that its raw material is both inherently valuable and infinitely reusable. Its ownership has been a social bench-mark and its form has exercised the skills of sculptors, designers, chasers and engravers, but ultimately it could be, and normally was, melted down and refashioned quite without sentiment. Because of this constant recycling, the survival of any individual object is quite random and unrelated to its uniqueness or otherwise in its period. Hitherto plate historians have focused on individual objects almost to the exclusion of the context – social or economic – from which they came but now that context is seen as crucial in understanding historic plate. So in the first section of this book each chapter considers contemporary attitudes and usage.

Departing from the pattern of Charles Oman's and Gerald Taylor's classic studies of English silver, this historical introduction is balanced by other approaches. In the past twenty-five years scholars have broadened their focus on material culture to consider design sources, working methods and goldsmithing in the less well-documented centres away from London. Under the spur of the social anthropologists, the sociological role of silver is another theme discussed here, with the significant shift from complete unsentimentality towards old plate to the prevailing collector's and curator's attitude of reverence.

This is not a book about bottle tickets, racing trophies, silver toys or caddy spoons; small silverware, which has attracted collectors for over a century, has its own rich literature to which the bibliography pays tribute. Nor does it discuss gold. Every grand household owned some gold vessels but their artistic significance, as tableware at least, is not great. Gold vessels were, by and large, grander, heavier, more expensive and more prestigious versions of silver, or rather silvergilt, ones. A very few gold objects survive to emphasise the point: a tumbler cup at the Cooks' Company, the Marlborough wine coolers at the British Museum, or Beckford's entirely conventional teapot in Birmingham.

Confusingly the term goldsmith customarily encompassed all those engaged in the craft, whether bankers, retailers, manufacturers, jewellers or plateworkers, although gold was so small a proportion of their raw material. The records of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, which has governed the craft since the twelfth century, hold the clues to these relationships which are gradually being elucidated in successive volumes of their history.

Because many aspects of this enormous subject have already been amply covered, this book does not pretend to an equal treatment of all topics: the evolution of church plate, for example, is conveniently discussed in just two publications, Charles Oman's *English Church Plate* (1957) and the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition catalogue *Victorian Church Art*

⇒ PREFACE ⇒

(1971). In other areas, such as the domestic use of silver before the Reformation, some care has been taken to adjust the common impression that silver was not widely used in England until the later sixteenth century. Another popular truism, 'that all the old silver was melted down in the Civil War', again appears less certain when set beside the reality, which shows that shifts of fashion and taste, especially the Stuart revolution in dining and drinking, were far more devastating. Because research on provincial goldsmiths is sometimes hard to find, I make no apology for summarising the recent work of G.N. Barrett, Tim Kent and Canon Ridgway.

The manuscript was completed in the autumn of 1984, although some additions have been made to the bibliography.

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Others who have contributed in various ways, perhaps sometimes without realising it, include Claude Blair, John Davis, Robin Emerson, Godfrey Evans, Martin Gubbins, Brand Inglis, Titus Kendall, Jessie McNab, Jeremy Pearson, Anna Somers Cocks, Tim Schroder, Hugh Tait, Peter Waldron, Tim Wilson and my colleagues in the Department of Metalwork.

I was fortunate to have known and worked briefly with the late Charles Oman, who made a unique contribution to the study of English silver and had stimulating exchanges with John Hayward, Hugh Jessop and Tom Lumley whose recent deaths have so depleted the silver world.

I should like to thank Lionel Tollemache both for his hospitality and for allowing me to quote from the Dysart and Tollemache family papers at Buckminster. For permission to quote from other manuscripts I am grateful to Westminster Abbey Muniments.

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In gratitude for their tolerance and encouragement, I dedicate this book to Gordon, James and Matthew.

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## FOREWORD

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IT is now over one hundred years since Wilfrid Cripps wrote the first comprehensive account of English silver following the first publication in 1863 by William Chaffers, the London dealer, of *Hallmarks on Gold and Silver Plate*. The ability to date and recognise the creators of the great heritage of English silver in communal and private hands must have sent a thrill of discovery through all interested in the crafts of the realm, and to every generation since then the interest and pleasure of recognition and artistic assessment remains viable.

The last thirty years or so have seen a remarkable acceleration in the study of the subject stimulated by a series of illuminating exhibitions at Goldsmiths' Hall and elsewhere and literary productions from 'Dial-a-Mark' dictionaries to period studies and biographies of leading goldsmiths, who are now seen as prominent exponents of the decorative arts and major contributors to the taste and social manners of their day. In her present book, the author of *Silver in England* has shown herself a most receptive student of her predecessors' and contemporaries' mining in the gold-bearing veins of original sources and artistic influences that have raised our knowledge and appreciation of the subject to its present extent. There is little doubt that her work will speedily be recognised as a fascinating and valuable conspexus of what may fairly be styled 'The Present State of English Silver Knowledge'.

*Arthur Grimwade*

PART I

# HISTORY

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## MEDIÉVAL

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EARLY English silver is extraordinarily rare; fewer than 300 pieces made before the 1520s survive, a figure which is put into perspective when we consider that one London goldsmith, Robert Amadas who died in 1532, left more than 300 items in stock. For a more positive picture of the importance of silver from the early Middle Ages we must turn to contemporary documents, fleshing out their dry descriptions with examples drawn from the handful of surviving pieces.

### *Silver in the Early Middle Ages*

First the Danes, and then their successors the Normans, virtually swept clear the monastic treasuries of Eastern and Southern England, with the result that curiously we are better informed about the goldsmithing of the pagan Saxons than their Christian successors, particularly through discoveries of burials at Sutton Hoo, Kingston and Taplow.

The custom of equipping dead kings and noblemen with rich grave-goods has, despite later grave-robbing, preserved goldmounted drinking horns and armour, jewellery, buckles and basins which together make up an overwhelming contribution to our picture of early Anglo-Saxon art. But this source died abruptly once the conversion to Christianity had taken hold, and there is pathetically little visual evidence to bring to life the glowing references to treasure of gold, silver and jewels, in Anglo-Saxon literature from the eighth century onwards, apart from chance survivals. A hoard found by tin workers at Trewhiddle near S. Austell, Cornwall in 1774 was deposited about AD 875. It contained a parcel-gilt chalice and paten; a silver hanging bowl found in the last century in the River Witham near Lincoln (and now slipped from sight again) enables us to say that niello, engraving, cloisons of enamel, filigree, parcel-gilding and cast figures were all techniques used by Anglo-Saxon goldsmiths in the eighth century, although it should be pointed out that a rather larger number of jewels, which are smaller and so more easily lost and found again, have been recovered to illustrate this aspect of the goldsmith's craft. The Alfred Jewel at the Ashmolean Museum, dated to between 871 and 899, is one; another (seventh century) found in Kingston-on-Thames is now in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.<sup>1</sup>

From the earliest times horns were used as drinking vessels. They were particularly popular with the Anglo-Saxons since they lent themselves to competitive drinking; once filled, they could not be put down until emptied. A group of seventh-century graves found at Taplow in Berkshire in 1883 yielded six horns, one with silvergilt mounts and settings for gems, and seven were buried with the Sutton Hoo ship.<sup>2</sup>

Drinking vessels were inevitably the most personal and most adorned of a man's possessions and in later periods form the bulk of surviving objects. But more is known about Anglo-Saxon church art; chalices, statues, reliquaries and crosses of gold, studded with gems, and silver fronts to altars are all described in English wills and in lists of gifts to cathedrals. One masterpiece produced by a goldsmith working in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, if not actually an Englishman, belongs to Kremsmunster Abbey in Austria. This coppergilt chalice, made for Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria, between about 777 and 788, is engraved with Christ and the Evangelists in ovals, with chipcarved palmettes and interlace between. This scheme of decoration, carried out in silver and gilding, covers the entire surface area; its intricacy and the combination of techniques demonstrates why Anglo-Saxon goldsmiths' work was so highly regarded that the popes of the eleventh century delighted in its possession. This is clear from the lists of their holdings in the *Liber Pontificalis*, although none of their goldsmiths' work, as opposed to Anglo-Saxon needlework, can now be traced.<sup>3</sup>

Open-handedness was a prime Anglo-Saxon virtue and much of our information about their goldsmiths' work, as Professor Dodwell demonstrates, comes incidentally in accounts of gifts to religious houses. When King Cnut presented a group of relics to the New Minster in Winchester, they were encased in a gold cross; he is depicted with his wife in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript making the presentation. His other gifts included six-branched silver candlesticks and two large-scale effigies 'finely adorned with gold and silver', as the chronicler William of Malmesbury described, so that 'the amount of precious metal fills visitors with awe and the splendour of the gems dazzle the eyes of the beholders'. The description is typically imprecise; nothing remotely like this has survived and the illustrations in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts are not much help, since they lack a sense of scale. However, one of Christ's Temptation by the Devil shows a drinking horn, a cup, a bowl, a silver-mounted sword and torcs for neck and arms, all examples of typical Anglo-Saxon work. The Norman William of Poitiers, writing shortly after the Norman invasion of 1066, described the native goldsmiths' work of England in hyperbolic terms, claiming that it would impress even the metal workers of Byzantium. More practically, he commented on their liking for drinking horns ornamented with silvergilt; Cnut is said to have used one of gold. The Atheling Athelstan left a silver-mounted trumpet to S. Swithin's shrine and gold-sheathed, or at least gilded, furniture is shown in several Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.<sup>4</sup>

In his stimulating study of Anglo-Saxon art, Dodwell has stressed both the enormous significance this society attached to precious metals and jewels, to the extent that they became a touchstone of beauty and were constantly used metaphorically by English writers, and the many factors which militated against Anglo-Saxon goldsmiths' work surviving. In 1066 the religious houses suffered a new rule and one that was disastrous for all works of art composed of precious metals, whether gold or silver vessels, embroidered textiles, chalices, reliquaries, or book bindings. Apart from the official depredations of William the Conqueror and William Rufus (to benefit their favourite home abbey of Caen) which stripped those abbeys which had stood out against the Normans, the incoming Norman abbots also removed treasures, sometimes to alleviate local disasters such as famine and fire, but more frequently to spend on their ambitious building programmes. Ely, for example, was despoiled in 1071

and again in 1076, losing among other treasures a life-sized statue of the Madonna and Christ child. Relics of England's Anglo-Saxon saints and kings were not spared; in a generation all the royal gifts of Cnut and Edgar to Winchester were destroyed.

Given the scale of this destruction or removal of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, it is hardly surprising that we have virtually nothing to show. The situation is little better after 1100, although we can at least consult the monk Theophilus (Roger of Helmarshausen) who wrote a handbook of techniques for goldsmiths, to see what goldsmiths working in England might be capable of. The exhibition on English Romanesque Art (1984) brought together from across the world an astonishing assemblage of items in both precious metals and base metal made between 1066 and 1200, bearing out the descriptions he gives of niello, lost wax-casting, inlay, gemsetting and enamel. A silver flask of about 1130–40, a unique secular survival, now in the treasury of the Abbey of S. Maurice d'Agaune, Switzerland, incorporates several of these; it is engraved with dragons with foliate tails found in English manuscripts of the twelfth century.<sup>5</sup>

Base metal objects (almost all made for liturgical purposes) can demonstrate the techniques and ornament found in the precious metals too. The inhabited scrolls and cast openwork of the coppergilt Gloucester candlestick (VAM), about 1104–13 and given to the abbey of Gloucester by Prior Peter, may be presumed to have had silvergilt precursors. A small group of coppergilt ciboria (standing bowls for the Host) of the late twelfth century, the Balfour and the Warwick in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Malmesbury Abbey in the Pierpont Morgan Library, depict scenes from the Old and New Testaments while a unique silver ciborium (c.1200–10) also in the treasury of S. Maurice d'Agaune, Switzerland, has an unexpected mixture of classical and biblical imagery, with three Virtues in ovals on the foot and ten medallions with scenes from the Infancy of Christ on the bowl and cover; the finial is a three-dimensional group of Chiron and Achilles. The closest, indeed the only parallel for all these scenes are English manuscript paintings of about 1200 and it is clear that a model book was used common to several workshops.<sup>6</sup>

But the recent exhibition of Romanesque art emphasised the difficulty of ascribing nationality to metalwork, since both craftsmen and styles crossed the channel both ways. Two twelfth-century drinking cups found in a hoard on the island of Gotland, Sweden, are thought to be English work, one most unusually signed by a goldsmith called Simon working for a Slav patron called Zhalognev. Itinerant Limoges craftsmen visited England to make enamelled objects, like the Thomas à Becket *chasse* (box) on loan to the British Museum.<sup>7</sup>

### *Church Plate after the Norman Conquest*

Virtually no secular silver and only a few liturgical pieces survive from before 1300. There is a gradual build-up of information from other sources – marginal drawings in manuscripts, for example – but only chalices and spoons provide more than a dozen examples before 1500. However, a fairly clear impression emerges of later medieval silver, that is after about 1400, even though it is impossible to be sure whether a given shape was new for its time, or already well established. Ironically, because of the depredations of Henry VIII and his son Edward,

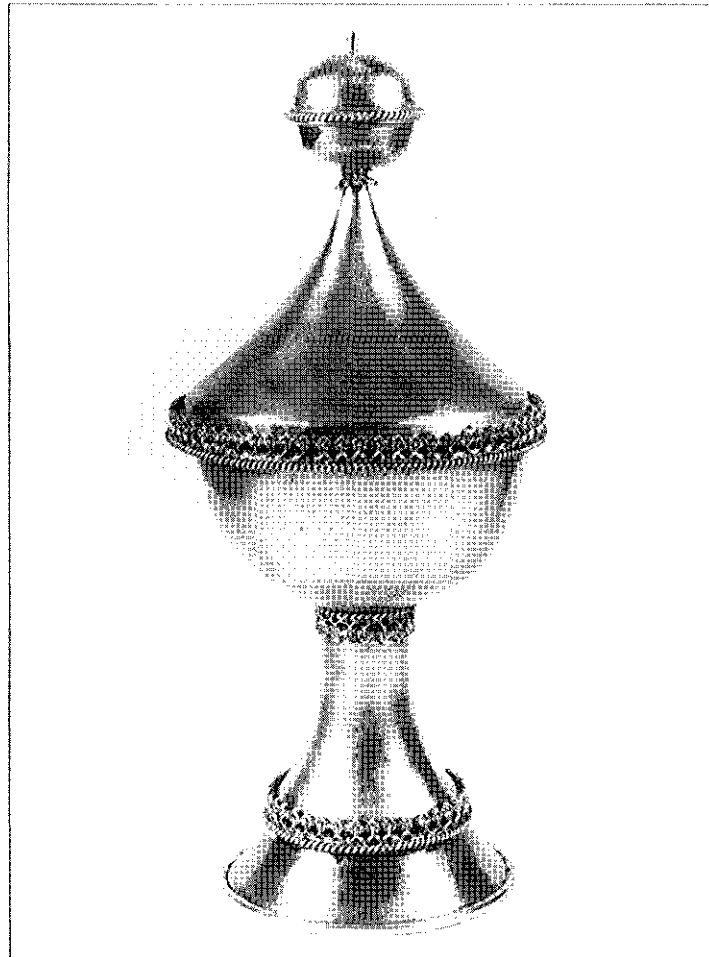
which required full inventories, more is known about ecclesiastical than about domestic silver; but even these descriptions can only push back the history of English plate half a century or so.

None of the early (pre-1400) chalices and cups now known survived the Reformation in church use; either they have been rediscovered in episcopal graves, or turned up as chance archaeological discoveries, or they were given later, perhaps preserved in a private family chapel. This position was reversed with domestic silver of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which has been preserved from refashioning only because it was given for church use.<sup>8</sup>

Several extraordinarily elaborate and beautiful chalices survive in Ireland, such as the Ardagh (eighth century) and the recently discovered Derrynaflan (early ninth century, found with a metal detector in 1980), but the finest medieval example made by an English goldsmith is the Dolgellau chalice and paten of about 1250, found by a country road in 1890 and now exhibited at the National Museum of Wales. This superb piece is unusual not only in its ornament (it is both engraved and embossed) but because it is signed 'Nicol'us Me Fecit de Herfordie'; this is probably not the name of the goldsmith but of the dignitary, perhaps a bishop, who had the piece made. The largest group of medieval chalices to have been preserved are those found in bishops' and archbishops' graves, notably at York Minster, at S. David's, at Salisbury, Canterbury and Chichester.<sup>9</sup>

However, these are usually simple in form and either made specifically for the burial rite or chosen as the plainest in the cathedral treasury or the bishop's private chapel. They do not enable us to visualise the more elaborate chalices, monstrances, ewers and basins commonly used on the altars of the great cathedrals. The dry inventories of Henry VIII's commissioners can be supplemented, for Canterbury at least, by an account of a visit there by the humanist Erasmus.<sup>10</sup> He was particularly struck by the contents of the cathedral treasury, which were regularly shown both to pilgrims and to visitors with more secular interests; many of the items – relics and elaborate plate – he describes can be identified in inventories preceding his visit and at the time of dispersals a few years later. But most of the pre-Reformation church plate preserved is of no great artistic merit, standard items produced by goldsmiths to customary designs, as similarity between chalices from Coombe Keynes, Nettlecombe and the private chapel of the Bedingfield family, all of which date between the mid-fifteenth century and the 1530s, makes clear. Of rather higher quality is the late fifteenth-century cup from Lacock Abbey (on loan to the British Museum; Fig. 1), but this is secular in origin.

Common to these late medieval chalices are the bands of gilding to contrast with the burnished silver surface. It is clear from the Edward VI inventories that those who could afford it preferred gilt to white silver; a chalice gilt overall cost substantially more than one silver parcel (partly) gilt. Often additional ornament was added, such as an engraved panel on one cusp of the foot, normally showing a crucifixion. This cusped foot, on which there were six in-curving segments, lent itself to the use of cast applied terminals at the toes. These have rarely survived the attentions of later reformers and on the chalice from West Drayton, Middlesex (1507) the bowl was altered too, presumably to make it appear more like that of a 'decent communion cup'. These shaped feet on chalices were a new feature in the fourteenth century to assist in draining the tilted cup and prevent it from rolling. For 600 years at least,



*Fig. 1 The Lacock cup*

Parcel-gilt c. 1450–80. The cresting, trumpet stem and high foot remained standard until the late 1520s.

*British Museum*

English chalices had customarily stood on circular feet, as can be seen in the earliest known, the ninth-century chalice from Trewiddle in Cornwall and in the late twelfth-century chalice from Berwick S. James, Wiltshire (in the British Museum).<sup>11</sup>

A decorative element adopted by goldsmiths from contemporary architectural forms was the openwork gallery or arcade. One occurs on the stem and foot of the communion cup of S. Martin, Ludgate, originally made as part of a monstrance. Given by Stephen Peacock, citizen and once mayor of London, in 1530 it bears the hallmark for 1507 – it was clearly taken to the

goldsmiths when the Bishop of London required the refashioning of mass chalices into communion cups, the offending top knocked off, and a decent Protestant trumpet-shaped communion bowl made and set on the stem to replace it. A collar of battlements and buttresses is found also on the 1527 chalice at Trinity College, Oxford, and another of two years earlier at Wylce in Wiltshire. The Oxford one was given by the college founder, Sir Thomas Pope. It is to be presumed that he, as one of Henry VIII's commissioners for the dissolution, had acquired it in the course of his official duties.<sup>12</sup>

Another Oxford college, Corpus Christi, retains the gold chalice given by Bishop Foxe, but, like the Lacock cup, this shows little artistic originality and is of interest primarily because of its associations and as the only English gold chalice known. These were not uncommon before the Reformation, both in private chapels and cathedrals; Salisbury (Old Sarum) had been given a gold chalice within a generation of the Conquest, plus seven silver gilt chalices, six candlesticks, crosses and reliquaries, all from its Norman bishop S. Osmund. By 1500 the new foundation owned far more, but still placed the reliquary containing the armbone of S. Aldhelm (Osmund's gift) on the high altar for services.<sup>13</sup>

A handful of outstanding survivals, such as the Dolgellau chalice and paten, may or may not represent the general quality of work for the court – we simply do not know. Given the competitive energy of donors it is likely that many were not content to follow standard designs, and descriptions of the altar plate given to chantry chapels in the larger and more popular churches are breathtaking. At S. Paul's Cathedral, for example, the chantry chapel established by Cardinal Beaufort in memory of John of Gaunt in 1446 was lavishly equipped. Figure sculpture was characteristic of altar crosses and candlesticks. Richard III gave York Minster a 'great cross standing on six bases, having six angels in the pinnacles of these bases and two angels on bases holding in their hands reliquaries'. A processional cross in the 1534 inventory of S. Mary's Guild, Boston, had two branches supporting gilt and enamelled images of Our Lady and S. John, 'with a sovereign of gold thereto nailed and offered by John Rede'; its carrying shaft of silver had a gilt roll and three gilt knots, 'everyone hath six roses enamelled with azure', in reference to the Virgin.<sup>14</sup>

Private chapels were often far more lavishly equipped than guild chapels or parish churches; Sir John Fastolf's contained over a thousand ounces of altar plate, plus some gold, in 1459.<sup>15</sup> Equipment for the Mass became more complex through the later Middle Ages; after Corpus Christi or the Feast of the Holy Sacrament was instituted in 1254, a monstrance to display the Host in procession became necessary. The crocketed monstrance containing S. George's heart which the Emperor Sigismund gave Richard Beauchamp, depicted in the Beauchamp Pageants about 1490, is convincingly similar to contemporary examples, although none of English make has survived. It seems that late medieval manuscript illustrations are relatively reliable as a source. Other Mass plate gradually appearing on the altar included candlesticks, a ciborium or covered vessel for wafers, cruets and the pax or tablet on which the priest passed the kiss of peace around the congregation. But poor churches might own merely a minimum of chalice, paten and pyx (for the Host) and that in copper gilt, not silver.

It is impossible to assess the value of the silver and to a lesser extent gold locked up in the holdings of churches, chantry chapels and monastic houses before the mid-sixteenth century.

No precise figure can be set on the Dissolution confiscations, although it has been estimated that bullion, plate and other treasures worth over a million pounds were sent to the Mint between 1536 and 1540. A further massive quantity was removed from the parish churches by Edward VI's commissioners in 1552 and more trickled quietly away, often taken surreptitiously by churchwardens, hoping for better times, in advance of the commissioners' visits.<sup>16</sup>

The wealth of plate owned by a prosperous town church such as S. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, before the Reformation can now only be reconstructed from inventories. This church, with its several side-chapels, owned several thousand ounces of silver and silvergilt; the largest and most elaborate piece was the processional cross which weighed 166 ounces; the arms were set with enamelled medallions, and figures of the saints and of the donor and his family stood around the base. Of the three pyxes (boxes to contain the Sacrament), one was made from an ostrich (or 'griffin's') egg, an exotic material more valuable even than the silvergilt in which it was mounted.<sup>17</sup>

When S. Mary's Guild at Boston in Lincolnshire made an inventory of its goods in 1534 shortly before it was dissolved, the jewels alone, that is all the altar plate, including six chalices, an engraved silvergilt cover for the Gospel book, an enamelled processional cross with images of Our Lady and S. John, and so on, came to 1,022 ounces of silvergilt. That was 100 ounces more than the corporation owned (and sold) 300 years later. In addition, there were reliquaries stored in the vestry and domestic silver (mostly gifts) in the chantry house. The guild had part of the finger of S. Anne 'closed in a hand of silver and gilt' and a point of another of her fingers 'with certain bones of the Innocents' plus a parcel gilt case containing three stones from the Mount of Calvary, the Sepulchre and the stone from which Christ ascended into Heaven. A silvergilt case with the image of Our Lady contained some drops of her milk.<sup>18</sup>

Church collections were not static and were treated, like private holdings, as potential liquid reserves. S. Christopher le Stocks in the City of London pledged a monstrance in 1530, as security for a loan. It was redeemed six years later, to be sold finally in 1538. Although the value of gifts to churches is inestimable, the bequests of George Talbot, fourth Earl of Salisbury, who died in 1538 may stand as an indication of their scale. This 70 year old courtier left sixpence each for a thousand priests to say masses, three priests for twenty years were to pray at his parish church in Sheffield and cloth-of-gold vestments were to be made for the Prior of Worksop and for his own church, with a long list of other gifts to churches and religious houses. John Lord Marney, the builder of Laver Marney, left £100 to buy three pairs of basins, cruets, sacring bells and candlesticks for his house chapel and his chantry chapel (which also had a chalice) with careful instructions as to their security, in 1525.<sup>19</sup>

However, after the Reformation for two generations there was no church building and all those resources were diverted to secular ends. The enormous and visible increase in expenditure on domestic comfort, particularly on plate, which was characteristic of the lesser gentry and bourgeoisie, was fuelled largely through this transfer.

### *What Men Owned: the Holland Inventory, 1447*

Normally before the sixteenth century too few documents exist for us to be able to trace the history of a family or an institution's accumulated plate. Nor are medieval inventories usually more than brief lists recording weight and whether the object is silver, parcel-gilt or gilt, since these distinctions determined its bullion value. However, in the royal household or where a particularly important estate was concerned, such as that of John Holland, Duke of Exeter, the knowledgeable London goldsmiths were brought in as appraisers, they gave the inventory clerks rather fuller descriptions and also, from their specialised knowledge, quoted a range of resale values which hint at the degrees of elaboration of the various cups and salts listed.<sup>20</sup>

John Holland, Duke of Exeter and Earl of Huntingdon, died on 5 August 1447 after a life on active service in France. He had married three times and had several royal appointments commensurate with his status as one of England's premier nobleman, including serving as Lord High Admiral and Constable of the Tower. As a man of great personal wealth he had followed the normal custom and pledged some of his plate, to Richard Joynour, grocer of London, as surety for a loan to the king of £1,000. In addition he had large personal debts so when he died the king moved fast; all Holland's goods of any value, that is the finest of his plate, his clothing and his beds, were removed to S. Martin le Grand in the City so that once the sums were done his creditors could collect their due in kind, if not in cash. The resulting inventory, in the Westminster Abbey Muniments, was taken a month after his death and annotated with creditors' names and the goods they had taken. It lists a mouthwatering series of twenty-nine gold cups with a total value of over £900; in every case the bowls were of crystal, chalcedony or jasper, garnished with 'stone and pearl'.

It was customary to name distinctive and outstanding pieces of plate; one cup, called the Shepherd, made of gold and crystal and garnished with stones, weighing 40¾ ounces, was presumably a figural piece like the Huntsman salt in Oxford. Another was called the Swan, perhaps a heraldic device in reference to his first wife. Exeter's life story – marriage alliances, his reward of the French comte of Ivry and royal appointments – is reflected in his plate. One gold cup, ensuite with a ewer, was perhaps commissioned to mark his constableness; it was embattled with a castle in the top and weighed just over 43 ounces. One set of three cups had the arms of Huntingdon and of Stafford, the family of his first wife who had died fifteen years earlier. His second wife, Beatrice, was a natural daughter of King John of Portugal and widow of Thomas, Earl of Arundel but her arms – Portugal and Arundel – occurred only on silver gilt basins and a spice plate. The most highly valued pieces were set with jewels – 'stone and pearl'. Several were 'chased Wreathwise' and enamelled; values for the gold cups ranged from 28s to 22s the ounce, a clear indication that the valuers were considering resale rather than melt figures.

Very little white silver occurs in the Holland inventory but a great pan 'with the Arms of Exeter in the four quarters' was valued at only 2s the ounce, the lowest figure quoted. Armorial plate was clearly less desirable, although the device of removing an earlier owner's arms and substituting one's own was commonly adopted. Some plate handed over to the

widow, or collected by the new duke from S. Martin's before the appraisal took place, gave the clerks problems of nomenclature, when presumably the goldsmith-appraisers were not on hand to advise. 'A great high charger with a basin thereto called a Chavying dish with My Lord's Arms' might be either a chafing dish or shaving dish, since both were normal equipment for a nobleman at the time.

The terms for drinking vessels also caused problems; the gold cups were, with the exception of one 'for the sacrament' with a 'cressent', all described merely as cups, although the decoration was specified, but distinguishing between the twenty-three silvergilt ones was clearly easier since they covered a wider variety of shapes. Most were covered and comprised 'bowl cups', cups with low feet 'enamelled in the bottom', plain without a knob and a standing cup 'with the pommel chased upright'. A set of five had no knobs and one cover only, as ceremonial use required. One described as 'a low cup for sweet wine pounced' may have been for banqueting use and sounds like the font cups familiar fifty years later; others of white silver are described as of 'Rone' or Rouen fashion.

The Holland plate list was made with an eye to the most valuable and saleable items and so includes little in the way of cupboard plate, apart from three gold ewers *en suite* with cups and a ewer 'covered with a spout for a cupboard called a layer chased'. With the exception of spice plates, there is no serving or dining plate at all and there are no spoons. It may be contrasted with that made at the death of his near contemporary, Sir John Fastolf. Fastolf was a self-made man, profiting by his retainerships, and his plate clearly reflects this status; the arms of his royal and noble patrons occur on several pieces.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Fastolf Inventory, 1459*

Although the original inventory made after the death of Sir John Fastolf in 1459 has disappeared, it was transcribed by the Norfolk antiquary Blomefield over 200 years ago and is one of the most complete and evocative descriptions of the household effects of a fifteenth-century adventurer. He left each of his houses lavishly equipped with plate and other rich furnishings. His newly built mansion at Caister, Norfolk, his principal residence, contained some gold plate and over 13,000 ounces of silver. At S. Benets Abbey, Holme, of which he was a patron, he had deposited a further 3,000 ounces for safekeeping in accordance with contemporary practice, and at his town house in Bermondsey there was another 2,500 ounces of silver.

One essential 'garnish' of Fastolf's serving plate, that is 12 dishes, platters, saucers and 3 chargers, alone came to more than 500 ounces. Virtually every piece, however otherwise decorated, bears a badge, device or coat of arms; many are those of Fastolf himself, like the 'six bowls, all gilt, with one cover, and a rose in the top, each enamelled in the bottom with my master's helmet'. Others indicated an earlier owner, like the basins and quart pots with gilt 'verges' or bands with the arms of Sir Robert Harling, Fastolf's companion-at-arms who was killed in the French Wars in 1435. Fastolf's long residence in France presumably accounts for his French-made silver and base metals. The finest were '6 Parys Cups of silver of the Months with no feet, the borders gilt'. Other pieces bore the badges of the Lancastrian kings and of Margaret of Anjou, whose columbine flower was enamelled on six gilt cups 'like

fountains'. Fastolf's own arms and badges occur also on candlesticks, both coppergilt and silver.

In this great list there is little variety; the repetitive details of gallon and pottle pots, cups, flat pieces, basins and bowls is broken by one particularly handsome spice plate 'well gilt like a double rose, my master's helmet in the amell, with red roses of my master's arms' and a silver toasting iron. Two massive salts of architectural form remind us that this was a constant decorative element in fifteenth-century plate. One was shaped like a tower or 'bastel' and gilt, with roses, weighing seventy-seven ounces and the other, 'with many windows', weighed eighty-six ounces.

We simply do not know enough about medieval plate to be able to attribute Fastolf's silver to London rather than Paris. Undoubtedly, given English opportunities in the Hundred Years War, a proportion of the highly decorated plate owned by great English magnates emanated from France, as did the Royal Gold Cup (in the British Museum). Made in a Paris court workshop about 1380, perhaps as a gift for King Charles V, it came into the hands of John, Duke of Bedford who left it to King Henry VI in 1435. The Founder's cup, purchased by Oriel College, Oxford (with another) for £418s1d in December 1493, was almost certainly made in Paris in the previous century, although it has also been described as English too.<sup>22</sup>

A rare survivor of an aristocratic order for plate is a gilt covered cup presented to Christ's College, Cambridge by its founder, Lady Margaret Beaufort. Already 60 years old, it bears inside the bowl the arms of Humphrey Duke of Gloucester and his second wife. Although the Foundress's cup was presumably English-made, it is clearly in the mainstream of Northern European gothic design. Almost exactly similar covered cups are to be seen in manuscript paintings of feast scenes in the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duke de Berry. That there were recognisable differences we know since, to the clerks compiling fifteenth-century inventories, Rouen cups and Paris bowls were clearly distinguishable from English ones and it is unlikely that this was based merely on the ability to recognise marks. An inventory of Henry VIII's plate and jewels taken in 1521 lists plate of Flanders and the Rouen touch (hallmark), of Bruges-making, Paris plate, plus Almain-fashion (German) and Spanish-fashion. Although Almain-fashion, it has been suggested, referred only to a particular design known by that name, this is unlikely since the 'Spanish-fashion' pieces were gifts to Henry from the Spanish-born Queen Katherine of Aragon. The London touch was specified in only one of the 887 entries; either it was taken for granted or much of the plate was not fully marked. The date letter system and a general tightening of assay and marking procedure came in only a generation before this (1478).<sup>23</sup>

Lacking actual objects from which to make stylistic judgements, we are forced to depend on the accuracy of the inventory clerks. While some pieces in the Fastolf inventory are identified as being French – 'of the Parys touch' – the inventory clerk did not always try to pick out foreign-made plate. When Fastolf's bequests to his retainer William Paston were in dispute some years later, household servants deposed that a gridiron, a great charger and a pair of covered gilt basins 'pounced and embossed with roses and with great large amells in the bottom with certain beasts embossed standing within an hedge of silver and gilt upon the said amells' were all 'of the Parys touch'. None of these was so described in the earlier list.<sup>24</sup>

Only from the late fifteenth century can we identify with certainty the products of English workshops, with the additional, if ambiguous, support offered by hallmarks. Although many of the craftsmen were aliens, it is reasonable to call a piece English if it bears English hallmarks, since these indicate that it was made or offered for sale to an English customer.

There was effectively no legitimate export trade in wrought silver and licences were required even to take abroad the minimum personal allowance of plate and jewels, because of the constant fear of a negative bullion balance. English plate which travelled abroad, and inevitably a quantity did, went as diplomatic gifts or occasionally in payment of debts, not as trade goods; unfortunately the relative purity of our gold and silver coinage made both very desirable across the Channel.

Royal and some noble households are reasonably well documented but much less is known about the holdings of plate of the lesser nobility and gentry, men of the standing of, for example, Sir Richard (Dick) Whittington (d.1421). Collections of wills tell us what men valued and chose to give as specific bequests, but by definition these are treasured family pieces, not necessarily indicative of what was in everyday use; for example, the will of Sir Richard Weston of Sutton Place (1542) mentions only one bequest of silver, a 'Pownse Cup' but his inventory lists forty-eight cups of various types. Wills also rarely give any indication of weight or size and cannot be relied on to distinguish between an older item or a recent purchase, nor do they normally indicate where the plate was made. We cannot use them as evidence for when certain vessels first emerged, since we have neither dated examples nor adequate descriptions to rely on.

What is clear is the great wealth of ornament, lavished on relatively few forms, and the enormous quantities of plate required by magnates. But all, or virtually all, types except drinking vessels, salts and basins have vanished. Surviving objects are no true guide as to what was regularly in use before the seventeenth century and we are dependent on inventories to fill out the picture. To quote a slightly later instance, the plate inventory of Sir Richard Weston included that essential toilet article, a silver shaving basin, but the earliest identifiable such basin is over a century later.<sup>25</sup>

When the stewardship of Peterborough Abbey changed hands in 1460, the household goods of Abbot Richard Ashton were carefully listed. He had a good, but not lavish, stock of plate with no gold and no fashionable mounted crystal. The principal ornament was the arms of S. Peter, which appear on both cups and basins. Distinctions of rank were carefully maintained in the monastery as in lay households and expressed through both the placing and the dressing of tables. The prior and the abbot each had a set of six silver cups, presumably for those sitting at the second table in their respective chambers. The abbot had, as was customary, several sets of salt cellars, in pairs with one cover apiece, the largest of the sets for his own table in his chamber. Fourteen small salts, uncovered and weighing six ounces each, were presumably for the squires' table in his hall. It is not possible to be sure when the eight mazers were used, whether they were intended for casual or bedtime drinking outside formal mealtimes. One was inscribed 'Ave Maria', a standard motto found, for example, on the fifteenth-century mazer at the Ironmongers' Company and on a coconut cup at New College, Oxford.<sup>26</sup>

While a probate inventory does not necessarily survive for every will, there is a large group

from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury at the Public Records Office (about 800 before 1660) which inform us about those Englishmen and women who died owning property worth more than £5, in more than one diocese. This selection, while not statistically valid, does catch a cross-section of the non-noble but prosperous silver-owning classes. The inventory of John Alfegh esquire of Chiddingstone, Kent, taken in 1489, demonstrates that a man's silver could be his most valuable possession. Alfegh owned a newly-built house, well equipped with tapestries, bed hangings and furniture. Apart from his chalice and paten and his 'paxbrede graven with a crucifix, Mary and John', he possessed only a ewer and basin, 'a Paryse Boll (Paris bowl) with a cover chased codde round' and twenty-four spoons, but together these items were valued at £16, whereas his fifty-one cows in milk were worth only £15 6s.<sup>27</sup>

A list of plate pledged by William Paston on 24 October 1474, probably represents the holdings typical of a middling gentleman who had benefited through his service with a greater man, Sir John Fastolf. It consisted of standing cups, goblets, salts, a basin and ewer and spoons with 'oke knoles' (knops), all pledged against a loan of £40 which had to be repaid within two months. Many of the items had come from Fastolf's estate.<sup>28</sup>

Domestic plate below the aristocratic level was normally confined to vessels for drinking and washing, spoons and the cruets, pax bowls and chalice for the chapel. Another list of Paston plate of slightly later than 1479 includes, most unusually, a tiny egg spoon and six socket candlesticks with removable branches.<sup>29</sup>

Not much greater variety is to be seen in the plate holdings of Robert Amadas, citizen and goldsmith of London, who died in 1532. Although a man of exceptional wealth who lived in considerable style – he took on a family connection as supplier to the Jewel House and was by far the largest London contributor to the 1522 forced loan – his household plate is dominated by drinking vessels – thirty-three, all but four gilt. His chapel was richly equipped but his domestic gilt plate consisted only of spice plates, ewers, pots, candlesticks and salts. His white plate was severely practical – a porringer, a posnet, a chafing dish, a candlestick, saucers, platters and two flagons. He had only six silver spoons and none of the mounted glass or other composite pieces currently popular at court, except for some coconut cups (blacknuts). His household was large and it is possible that some of the many mazers (he had twenty-one of one sort and twelve of another) were for his household servants and not shop stock. The significance of this rather limited but massive collection of plate to his estate is apparent. He left movable goods worth £3,800; setting aside £2,000 owed to him, he had plate valued at almost £1,000 in stock in his counting house. His household plate, at just under £300, was therefore about a third of the total value of his goods.<sup>30</sup>

### *What Survives?*

Of the medieval secular silver remaining today, by far the greater proportion is drinking vessels. Among these survivors, mounted pieces (horns, mazers and coconut cups) bulk large not because they were the most commonly used or most valued, but because the light weight and low value of their mounts has protected them from stripping and melting down. Most belong to institutions but this is misleading; there was no form of vessel peculiar to, say,

colleges rather than private households before the seventeenth century. Most silver-owning households were both large and mainly masculine, and silver vessels for drinking, even before eating, were universally called for.

By contrast with the documentary evidence for plate holdings, a pathetic remnant of actual specimens survives. While many forms found later were already familiar – Count Amadeus of Savoy bought a silver urinal when staying in London in 1292, a coconut cup is first mentioned in a will of 1254, and salts, cups and spoons were in use from ancient times – we have virtually no idea of whether there was an English national style, even at court level. A continuity in both form and usage is evident until the mid-sixteenth century.

### *Drinking Vessels*

The most spectacular piece of medieval secular plate is the so-called King John's cup, which was made about 1360 and already belonged to the town of King's Lynn in 1548. Its previous



*Fig. 2 The Studley Royal bowl*  
 Gilt c.1350–80. H. 14 cm. Engraved with a black letter alphabet, divided by leafy branches. A drinking vessel, this formerly belonged to Studley Royal Church, Yorkshire.  
 VAM

history is not known, but there is no connection with King John. This brittle but elegant confection of translucent enamel and silver gilt has a bell-shaped bowl on a tall knopped stem, rising from a cinquefoil foot. The disc within the bowl depicts a woman with a hawk. Although the cup has been repaired and re-enamelled, most heavily on four occasions in the eighteenth century, and the present finial with its miniature steeple apes those on Jacobean standing cups, it is still a unique piece of secular goldsmiths' work. It has long been treasured as part of the 'regalia' of Lynn and appears in a trophy with the mace and the civic sword on a town map of 1725. Every surface, from the five flanges around the base, the knob and the sides to the cover is enamelled, a characteristic of medieval secular plate (Plate 5).<sup>31</sup>

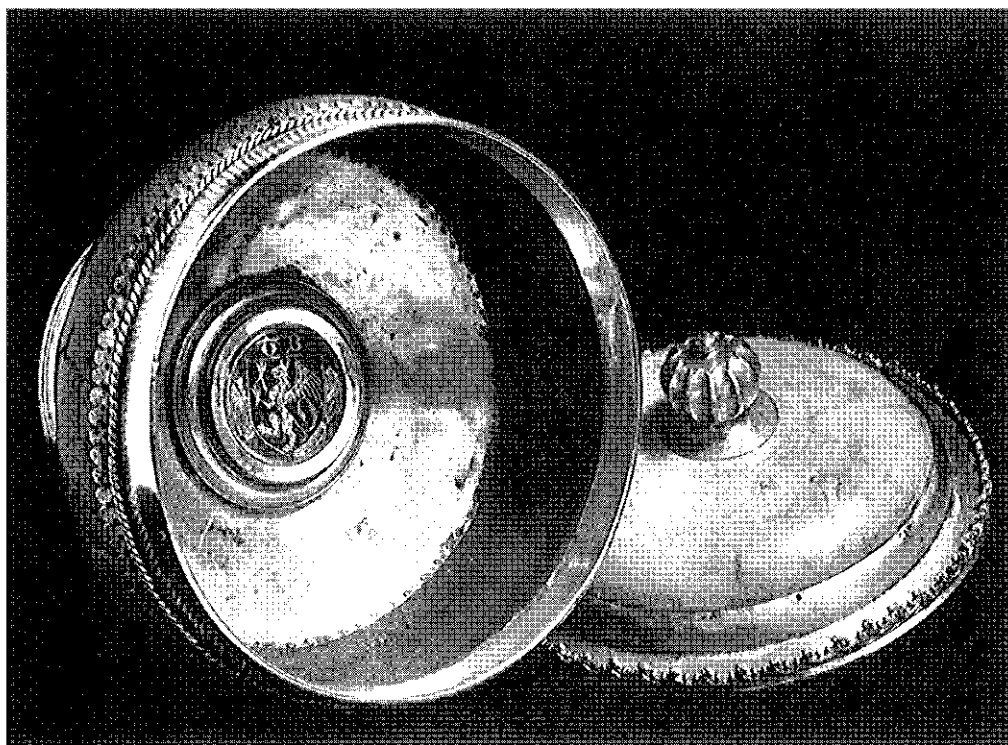
A later fourteenth-century piece is a covered bowl, which belonged for many years to Studley Royal Church in Yorkshire until bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 2). It is engraved all over with a black-letter alphabet. Even the spaces between the letters are filled with floral sprays and the foot ring is pierced. Until the early sixteenth century, a print of clear enamel over an engraved silver disc or an enamelled boss was the typical central ornament for all cups, mazers and basins. Drinking vessels, whether mounted maplewood or totally of silver, were often also engraved with a possessory inscription or invocatory phrase, which led to their being referred to by name.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Mounted Cups: Wood, Horn, Coconut*

Mazers, turned maplewood bowls, followed standard forms; they were often made with tall stems which were sometimes detachable. One shown in the Beauchamp Pageants had been taken from its stand. Although mazers fell out of fashion in the sixteenth century, institutions with no pressing wish (or ability) to overhaul their plate collections retained them in regular use; several belonging to Harbledown Hospital can be seen in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Three of the mazers in the abbot's lodgings at Peterborough in 1460 had covers and gilt feet but the other five, described as 'wide', were flat-bottomed, four with silver rims and one without. The last may be compared with the late fourteenth-century Swan mazer at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, which originally had a cover resting on three projecting strawberry leaves above the vertical lipband.<sup>33</sup>

Mazers conformed to standard sizes and their central prints or bosses also adopted certain popular subjects. They were usually enamelled over engraved or cast silver discs, with the Virgin and Child or S. George and the Dragon, or personal devices. The Saffron Walden mazer of 1507, from which Pepys drank, bore the Virgin and Child on its print; a Gloucester merchant in 1454 left his son one mazer with a dolphin in the bottom and another with 'John' on it.

Inscriptions were used on certain types of cups. They might be invocations with magical connotations, like the Jasper, Balthazar, Melchior on the Corpus mazer, or a grace; the plain silver cup at Peterborough in 1460 engraved with 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' was perhaps a grace cup. At Boston, one religious guild had a great mazer 'with an image of Almighty God sitting at the Judgement in the midst of four evangelists' plus seven others 'with various devices and legends and inscriptions' but only one large 'standing cup'; this was much heavier (46½ ounces) and so more costly to the donor.<sup>34</sup>



**Fig. 3 Covered mazer**

Maplewood and gilt c. 1440. Given by Thomas Ballard Esq. whose arms are enamelled on the print.  
Unusually this has retained its cover mounts, although the wood is a replacement.  
*All Souls College, Oxford (on loan to Ashmolean Museum)*

The horn was a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon drinking vessel – the Bayeux Tapestry depicts Harold's men at Bosham drinking from horns while the Normans drink from bowls, and William of Poitiers found it another example of English barbarity. Drinking horns retained their popularity well into the sixteenth century and were often elaborately mounted, appropriately enough in view of their ceremonial function. Some were associated with feudal dues such as cornage; the best known of these is perhaps the Pusey horn (Victoria and Albert Museum) associated with Cnut's grant of land to the Pusey family of Berkshire in gratitude for services they rendered. Although the silver-gilt mounts at present on the horn are no earlier than the mid-fifteenth century, the tradition might well be authentic; it was cited as such in 1684 when the Lord Chancellor gave judgement that the horn should pass with the land to the heir.<sup>35</sup>

Another horn, now in the British Museum, has been associated with the Stewardship of Savernake Forest at least since the late sixteenth century but was probably originally a

cornage horn, from its decoration. It retains mounts of two different periods, the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. The earlier panels of French *basse taille* enamel depict hunting scenes with a king and a bishop, while the arms of the Earldom of Moray (extinct by 1347) appear enamelled on thirteen plates on the baldric. It was booty from Scotland, perhaps acquired by the Earl of Hertford after Henry VIII's campaign there in 1544.<sup>36</sup>

From the fourteenth century, several mounted horns are preserved; one at Cambridge was given to the brothers of the Guild of Corpus Christi before 1347 and passed to the college on its foundation in 1352. This, like the Pusey and the Eglesfield horns, is fitted with a silvergilt band and feet – although it has lost its cover. The mounts are battlemented and the horn is capped with a silvergilt turret. The improving hand of later stewards has added to both the Corpus Christi and Eglesfield horns (the latter is at Queen's, Oxford) but essentially these can stand as examples of a commonly-used ritual drinking vessel.

The large capacity of a horn made it peculiarly suited to communal drinking at festivals; in 1406 a Somerset man, William Carent of Montacute, left his son a horn with a cover of silvergilt 'In which I was accustomed to drink at the feast of the Nativity' and John Goldcorn gave the Corpus Christi horn with the stipulation that it be used 'fairly freely' on Corpus Christi day. As on so many medieval drinking vessels, phrases of good cheer are also incorporated; the mounts of the Eglesfield horn are inscribed *WACCEYL* in several places. The Guild of S. Mary at Boston, the premier fraternity of that prosperous town, had been given by 1534 both a hunting horn harnessed with silver, and a drinking horn 'ornate with silver and gilt, with 2 feet of silvergilt, set with a stone'.<sup>37</sup>

The Earls of Cawdor now own a horn which is said to have been presented by Henry VII to a Cardiganshire family in 1485. Its original appearance was recorded by an antiquarian visitor, Colonel Dineley, in 1684 when it was at Golden Grove, the home of the Vaughan family; it was then supported by the Tudor red dragon and the greyhound of York on an oval base chased with roses; the heraldic message confirms the likelihood that this was a royal gift from the newly installed king. But unfortunately the present horn bears little resemblance to the drawing of the late fifteenth-century original; presumably it was damaged, or otherwise disposed of, and a copy made some time between the 1680s and 1840 when the next illustration was published. The Tudor supporters and badges of a portcullis and a rose occur frequently on other pieces made at the order of the Jewel House as gifts, or for the royal household; a copy of the statutes for Henry VII's chapel, deposited with the dean and chapter of S. Paul's Cathedral in 1507, has both its silver seal boxes and its clasps so enamelled, and an elaborately decorated cabinet in Henry VIII's privy chamber was 'harnessed' with silvergilt and enamelled badges. The heraldic message is most clearly spelt out today in the metal grille in his father's chapel in Westminster Abbey.<sup>38</sup>

Another fifteenth-century horn has survived, although altered. The footed horn at Christ's Hospital was already at the school in 1567 and apparently had a new rim added at the expense of the hospital's benefactor Thomas Banckes in 1602. It is of no great artistic merit and probably typifies the standard of craftsmanship applied to the great majority of mounted horns by the late fifteenth century. A contemporary will shows that a canon of Wells Cathedral regarded his mounted horn as a fitting bequest for his servant in 1498.<sup>39</sup>

Although the earliest coconut cups we have, for example those belonging to New College,



*Fig. 4 Coconut cup*

Gilt c. 1490. Probably given to the college by Robert Dalton, admitted 1472 and later Prebendary of Chichester. Note the Lombardic D's. The nut is held by six oakbranches, growing from a paled enclosure, probably for rabbits. One of seven coconut cups owned by the college in 1508.

*New College, Oxford*

Oxford and Gonville and Caius, Cambridge, are late fifteenth century, they were popular from early in the Middle Ages, combining the exotic and the practical, and continued so into the seventeenth century. When the stock of Robert Amadas, royal goldsmith to Henry VIII, was valued in 1532, he had mounted mazers, listed for their metal mounts at so much each, but his 'black nuts' were more highly valued, since the nuts themselves were worth as much as their weight in silvergilt. A little closet in his working shop contained 'old broken mazer trees small and great, old nuts, shells black and painted' stripped of mounts or ready for mounting. Nuts were often painted before mounting, although the only trace of this is a red internal coat on a nut in the Victoria and Albert Museum with marks of about 1625. Clearly there was the possibility of deception, of so thickly coating a nut before painting it as to increase the weight and the price paid.<sup>40</sup>



*Fig. 5 Standing cup*

Gilt 1493. Mark an escallop below a baton. H. 14 cm. One of the earliest secular vessels with the London date letter, introduced in 1478. Formerly in use at S. Andrew's Church, Middleton, Yorkshire.  
*Goldsmiths' Company*

Since the nuts were valuable in themselves, the mounts were sometimes carefully designed with imagery personal to the owner, as a coconut cup at New College demonstrates (Fig. 4). Clasped by six oak branches arising from a paled enclosure, the nut was probably the gift of Robert Dalton (known to have given a coconut cup), to whom the collar of Lombardic 'Ds' refers. The air of woodland fantasy of this piece is reinforced by small holes or burrows in the oakroots; cast rabbits, now lost, no doubt originally played about within the paling. This is a characteristic late medieval combination in both English and French silver; many pieces are described as having a field or bank of grass enamelled on the foot, with animals and birds or even human figures in a bower. But only the Huntsman salt at All Souls stands as a comparison today.<sup>41</sup>

The other New College coconut cup, also was about 1500, one of seven it owned in 1508; it is no less unusual in its mounts. Three demi-angels with scrolls, on turreted stands, form the feet; the stem of scales and feathers is like the near-contemporary flagon at Magdalen College. A black letter inscription 'ave maria gracia plena tecum benedicta' surrounds the rim, a standard late medieval drinking grace, and the cresting around the foot and at the base of the nut is crudely cast when compared with the crisp cast work on Warden Hill's salt, in the same collection, or Bishop Foxe's salt at Corpus Christi.<sup>42</sup>

Standing cups sometimes took fanciful forms. Albrecht Durer engraved a gourd-shaped cup on a twisted stem, which as a result is considered an early sixteenth-century German innovation; this design retained its popularity in England into the 1600s, but it had a longer ancestry. Cups 'like costards' (apples) occur in fifteenth-century inventories.<sup>43</sup>

There were in every large household sets of smaller (and cheaper) cups, often without covers and only a few inches high; these are either quite plain, like the Kimpton cup of about 1480 (VAM), or gadrooned, like one shaped like an eggcup at the Goldsmiths' Company (1493); (Fig. 5). These two little cups have survived the melt only because each belonged for many years to a church, whereas the handful of grander cups among the 'Founder's plate' owe their existence to their associations. Four sets of six cups at the Drapers' Company in 1489 had only one cover to each set; the individual cups weighed from only ten to twenty-two ounces.

### *Spoons*

Spoons make up by far the largest category of surviving secular silver and cover the widest range of dates. Apart from those dated by context, examples with the leopard's head mark of the fourteenth century are known; marked spoons run more or less continuously well into the sixteenth century, when other types of silver exist for comparison. Although the artistic merit of spoons is small, they survive in sufficient numbers for us to know that they were produced to standard sizes and designs, by specialist spoonmakers, well before the end of the middle ages; they also provide a body of material from which to comment on decoration and craftsmanship. As a man's personal property, his spoon travelled with him and so was far more at risk of casual loss or theft than domestic or altar plate – which was carefully stored away when not in use – hence many of the chance discoveries. Those other spoons which were passed on as heirlooms, and survived into the eighteenth century, were by then probably protected from melting by their antiquarian interest.<sup>44</sup>

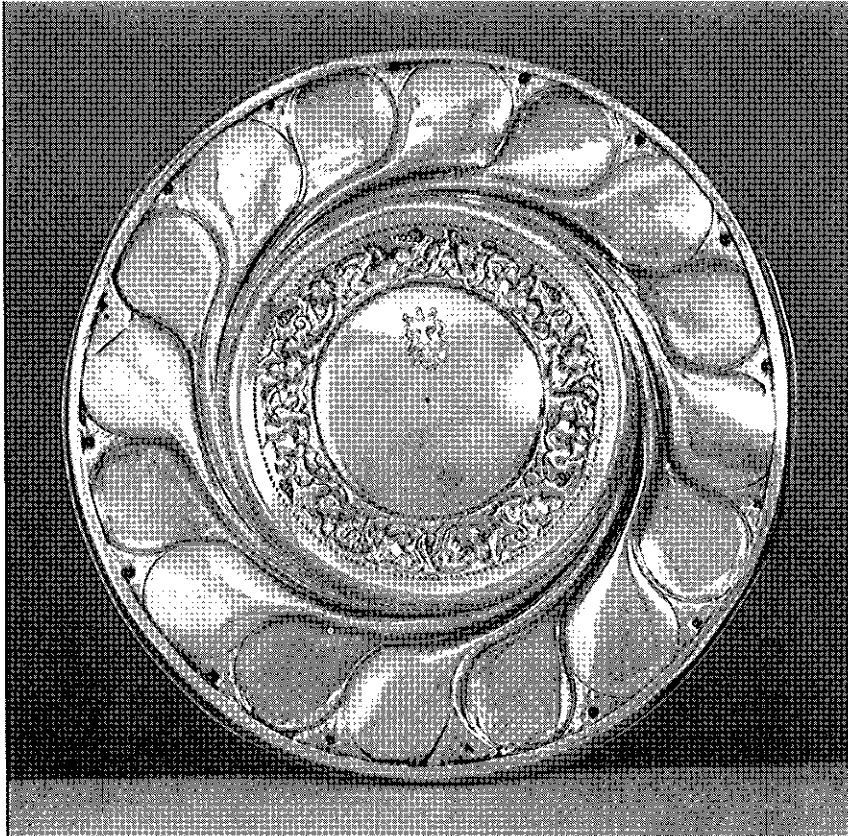
Although the fig-shaped bowl was more or less uniform in profile into the sixteenth century, there are tremendous variations in the shape of the knop. Several types are recognisable by 1500; already in the fifteenth century terminals are described as wrythen, acorn, slip, 'perle' and figurative, presumably referring to the owner's crest or other heraldic device. Apostle spoons appear by the mid-fifteenth century, with 'woodwoses' (wild men) a little later. About thirty years ago Commander and Mrs How attempted a complex dating classification by the shape of the leopard's head mark struck in the spoon bowl, which was to become in effect the London hallmark. But there are too few closely-dated specimens for this to be quite satisfactory and in any case by no means were all spoons so marked. This is one area in which new evidence does appear from time to time. A few years ago great publicity surrounded the sale of a diamond-point spoon, which had been found in the rafters of a Devon farmhouse. This fetched a record price for a single spoon. More recently, an unrecorded woodwose spoon – the wild man or green man of medieval literature – of the fifteenth century turned up in the United States, still owned by the family of Cornish extraction whose ancestress had taken it across the Atlantic in 1846. Mudlarks working on the Thames foreshore have also added to our stock of early spoons, although their discoveries are confined to spoons of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>45</sup>

The most famous medieval English spoon, the anointing spoon still shown with the regalia at the Tower, apparently survived the Commonwealth. It was in 1660 repaired at a cost of £2. Although it has been argued that this spoon was entirely remade at some point, there seems no reason to doubt that much of it is twelfth century; the stem is decorated with interlace like that on contemporary Scottish spoons.<sup>46</sup>

Spoons were recognised as a means of marking entry to the senior membership of a society, whether a craft guild or a college, and some institutions were well stocked before 1500. Eton College owned a total of 200 spoons by 1456, although admittedly five dozen were from a single benefactor, and the Drapers' Company had eleven and a half dozen in 1489. So overstocked were the Drapers that by 1509, and probably long before, they had commuted the customary gift of a spoon to a payment called 'Sponesylver'. Set at 3s4d, this reflected the price of a spoon half a century or more before; by 1509, 3s4d would scarcely buy an ounce of silver and the spoons presented were normally well over an ounce in weight.<sup>47</sup>

### *Silver about the House*

Turning to more utilitarian plate, a handful of basins, two at Corpus Christi, Oxford from Bishop Foxe's gift and one belonging to a London church, probably a post-Reformation gift – represent the simplest late medieval form of this useful vessel, with gadroons or 'bolyons' radiating from a central enamelled boss. But these date only from 1480 or later and more ornate versions no doubt existed before. The Foxe basins are interesting not for their ornament, which is confined to a central enamelled boss, but for the dog-faced spout which emerges below the rim of one. This basin, filled with scented water, was tilted above its pair to enable the user to wash his hands in the falling water. The gemellion, or twinned basin, is familiar in base metal and references occur in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries – there is one set in the 1521 royal inventory and another in a Pembroke plate inventory of 1561 – but



*Fig. 6 The Bermondsey dish (the reverse)*

Parcel-gilt c. 1330–50. The central boss was originally coated with translucent enamel. The front of the dish is illustrated on the cover.

*S. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey (on loan to VAM)*

the method was superseded by the far more convenient ewer and basin even before 1500 and Foxe's pair, which were originally domestic plate, survived only because they were given for use in his college chapel.<sup>48</sup>

In church of course a basin could be used to collect alms even when its liturgical significance as a priest's ablution basin was dropped altogether. A 1524 basin now belonging to S. Magnus the Martyr, City of London, bears the later inscription 'for the ewse of the poorre 1564' and when the dean and chapter of S. Paul's Cathedral listed their minimum requirements for worship in the reforming days of 1547, their 'Certain thinges of necessary use' included two pairs of basins 'for to bring the Communion Bread and to receive the offerings for the poor'. The silver pair was for everyday use, the gilt for festivals.<sup>49</sup>