

NOTES ON THE SHRINE OF ST. SWITHUN

BY JOHN DOLBEL LE COUTEUR AND D. H. M. CARTER.

The shrine of St. Swithun was, next to that of St. Thomas, at Canterbury, one of the most famous and important in the South of England. Indeed, many of those on pilgrimage to Canterbury broke their journey at Winchester in order to pay their vows to this shrine, and to rest their weary limbs for a day or two in the Guest House of St. Swithun's Monastery.

It is, therefore, all the more surprising that no description of the shrine itself should have been preserved. It is quite possible, of course, that some record was taken, or even a drawing made, only to be destroyed, either during the confusion caused by the suppression of the monastery in 1538, or in the sack of the Cathedral Library by the Parliamentary forces in 1642 and again in 1645.

What is certain, however, is that none of the many writers and historians, both mediæval and modern, who have dealt with the history of Winchester, or with its many antiquities, have been able to produce any picture or description of the once famous shrine, neither does anyone seem to have seriously entertained the idea that some pieces of the structure itself might have escaped destruction.

In the spring of 1921 the Dean, by the advice of Mr. G. McN. Rushforth, F.S.A., decided to move from the "feretory" behind the High Altar of Winchester Cathedral the mass of architectural and other fragments accumulated there. The more interesting pieces were re-arranged, with the assistance of Mr. T. D. Atkinson, F.R.I.B.A., in the North Transept; the rest placed in the crypt.

The greater portion of the remains now in the North Transept consist of heads and other portions of statuary that survived the iconoclasm of Robert Horne, Bishop of Winchester from 1560 to 1579, who, during the nineteen years of his episcopate, caused every statue in the Cathedral to be cleared from its niche, together with much of the rich painted glass from the windows.

But, in addition to these, there are several pieces of carved Purbeck marble, of somewhat unusual character, which call for much closer attention than they have yet received from antiquaries.¹

These pieces are:—

1. A piece of thirteenth century arcading, 2 feet 6 inches long and 14 inches high, containing one complete bay or arch, together with considerable portions of the adjoining bays (Fig. 1). The complete bay measures 17½ inches in length. It consists of a semi-circular arch with recessed orders, those in the middle

¹ At the time of writing (January, 1924), these fragments are carefully preserved in the "feretory" by the special instructions of the Dean.

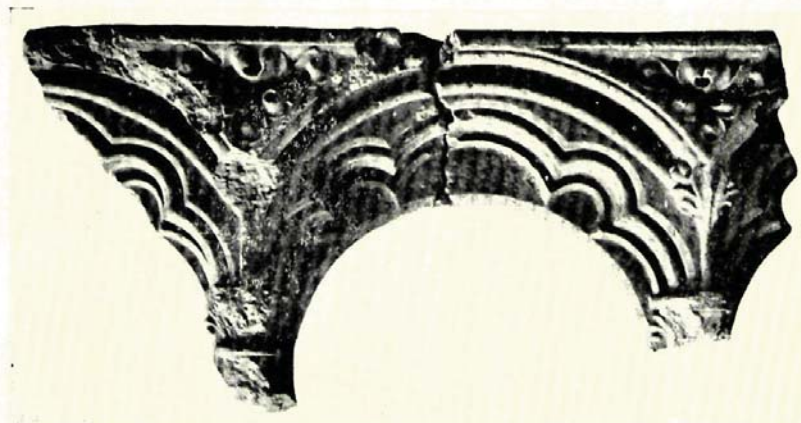


Fig. 1. PIECE OF THIRTEENTH CENTURY ARCADING.

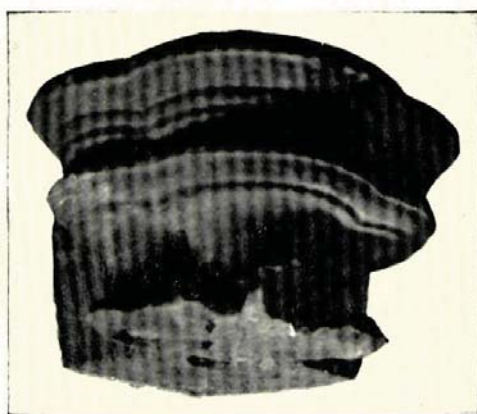


Fig. 2. CAPITAL OF A CORNER SHAFT.



Fig. 3. FRAGMENT OF CAPITAL.

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Fig. 4. PIECE OF PANELLED LOWER TIER.

[Between pages 370 and 371]



Fig. 5. PIECE OF STONE WITH CARVED HEAD.



Fig. 6. REVERSE OF FIG. 5 WITH DEFACED CARVING OF A HEAD.

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Fig. 7. SECTION OF FOUR-STRAND CABLE SHAFT.



Fig. 8. PIECE OF FOUR-STRAND CABLE SHAFT AND CAPITAL.

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Fig. 9. SECTION OF THREE-STRAND CABLE SHAFT.



Fig. 10. PIECE OF THREE-STRAND CABLE SHAFT

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being cusped in cinquefoil, and the topmost cusp being about twice the width of the side cusps. The spandrels are filled with conventional foliage, and at their lower point is a spray of similar leaves and fruit rising from the capital below. The outer orders are supported on stiff leaf capitals, of which the upper diameter is $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches and the lower $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches; the columns beneath being $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches across. The inner arch runs straight down without being stopped by the capital, and the columns are half engaged. This fine piece has at some time been broken in two, the point of fracture occurring near the apex of the complete bay.

2. The capital of a corner shaft, quarter-engaged and quatrefoil in plan (its diameter being 9 inches), with a quatrefoil-shaped depression, 5 inches in diameter, to receive the shaft (Fig. 2).

3. A fragment of a similar capital (Fig. 3).

4. A large piece of Purbeck marble in a very crumbling and weathered condition which was found in the crypt (Fig. 4). This piece measures $17\frac{1}{4}$ inches square and $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick. It is ornamented on one side by a slightly sunk sexfoil within a circle, and with moulded spandrels at the corners. In length, this piece agrees exactly with the one complete bay of the above-mentioned arcading.

5. An irregularly-shaped piece of stone, its greatest height and width 8 inches, its thickness $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. On one side (Fig. 5) it is carved with a cowed tonsured head in high relief, this carving measuring 6 inches high by 5 inches across. On the reverse (Fig. 6) are some remains of a similar head, completely defaced and cut almost level with the stone, its condition suggesting a failure and a second and more successful attempt.

6. Five pieces of deeply-moulded cable shaft, each of four strands, so arranged that a section cut shows a quatrefoil (Fig. 7). All these pieces fit exactly into the depression of that shape in piece 2 (Fig. 8).

7. Two pieces (Figs. 9 and 10) of cable shaft of equal thickness, 5 inches, to the others, but of three strands only, and with angular projections in the hollows of the strands.

It should be added that all these pieces are now in a very crumbling and brittle condition; also that they have completely lost their polish. The question may now be asked: To what monument or structure did these pieces originally belong? They evidently agree closely in date and in style one with another, and it is surely more than a mere coincidence that the span of the one complete bay of arcading should agree so exactly in length with that of the piece of panelled work. In date, these pieces would appear to be not much later than the middle of the thirteenth century, by which time the treatment of foliage in

English architectural sculpture had begun to change from conventional to naturalistic.

But what was the monument of which these pieces formed a part? Is it too much to suggest that they represent all that remains of the stonework base of St. Swithun's shrine?¹

In order to answer this question, it is necessary first to explain briefly the architectural composition of a shrine base, several of which still remain in this country, notably at Westminster Abbey, and in the Cathedrals of St. Albans, Ely, Chester and Hereford. It was always an elaborate erection constructed of stone, Purbeck marble being a favourite material, and consisted of at least two tiers. The lowest was usually fitted with one or more apertures. Thus, at St. Albans, the lower tier of the shrine base of that saint contains on its north side two diamond-shaped openings, one of which extends right through to the south side, wherein sick or diseased pilgrims could insert their arms or legs, or even their heads. The shrine of St. William of York, formerly in York Minster, seems to have closely resembled that of St. Alban in type. It is illustrated several times in the famous St. William window at York Minster (given by the Roos family, probably in memory of John and William Roos, killed in action at the battle of Beaugé, on March 22nd, 1421).² One panel shews a number of pilgrims crowding round it (Plate 11), whilst a second depicts a cripple kneeling at it, and placing his hands thereon.

Or, if the shrine base were of the type of St. Edward the Confessor's, at Westminster Abbey, or those of St. Thomas the Martyr, formerly in Canterbury Cathedral, and St. Cuthbert's, once in Durham Cathedral, it would contain a series of niches, wherein sick and ailing folk could kneel or crouch themselves, in order to receive the healing virtue that radiated from the saintly relics in the coffer above, and which was supposed to permeate the entire structure. The Confessor's shrine is fitted with seven such niches, three on either side, and one at the east end, each large enough to accommodate one person, whilst we learn from the Rites of Durham that the shrine of St. Cuthbert, which was "exalted with most curious workmanship of fine and costly (green) marble, all limned and gilded with gold," was fitted with "four seates or places convenient under the shrine, for the pilgrims, or laymen (lame, or sicke men) 'sittinge on their knees' to leane and rest on, in time of their deuout offeringes."

¹ As far as the twisted columns are concerned, it is only fair to say that this suggestion was first made in the spring of 1922 by our friend Mr. Arthur Llewellyn-Smith (Scholar of Winchester College, from 1917 to 1922), although it was impossible to carry out further researches at that time.

² *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* for 1887; and *Transactions of Yorkshire Philosophical Society* for 1914 (p. 105).

³ *The Rites of Durham*, edited by the Rev. Canon J. T. Fowler. (Publications of the Surtees Society, vol. cvii, p. 4.)



Fig. 11. PILGRIMS ROUND THE SHRINE OF ST. WILLIAM OF YORK, FORMERLY IN
YORK MINSTER.

FROM THE "ST. WILLIAM" WINDOW—PAINTED SHORTLY AFTER 1421.

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This base was surmounted by a second tier, usually of open arcading, sometimes surmounted in turn by a cornice. This second stage supported the flat top, or platform, whereon was placed the chest, or "feretory," as it was properly called, actually containing the saint's bones.

With this description to guide us, let us now see what these fragments of Purbeck marble actually represent. The large piece of stonework (No. 4) 17½ inches square, enriched on one side with a sunken sexfoil within a circle, is thus at once revealed as part of the bottom tier. No doubt it had a moulded plinth below the row of square panels, whilst immediately above them was, perhaps, a frieze of heads, of which piece 5 is the only survivor. This bottom tier would support a flat top, as at St. Albans, and at St. Werburgh's, Chester, wherein the offerings made by the pilgrims may have been laid.

That this really was the practice at some places we know from a miracle¹ recorded as taking place at the shrine of St. Edmund, at Bury St. Edmunds. It appears that a certain woman often visited that shrine under the mask of devotion, not with the design of giving, but of stealing. It was discovered that while she bowed in apparent veneration to kiss the shrine, she licked up the money and carried it away in her mouth. This deceit was discovered by the said miracle, for it came to pass that one day, whilst thus stealing, her tongue and lips adhered to the stone, forcing her to remain in that attitude during the greater part of one day.

The second or upper tier of St. Swithun's shrine base obviously consisted of open arcading, of which the large fragment (piece 1), now broken into two portions, forms the only remains.

It would once have rested upon columns, which, by applying the rules of architectural proportion we may venture to say were about 1 foot 6 inches in height. This, added to the 12½ inches of the arcading itself, gives a total ascertained height of 2 feet 6½ inches for the second tier. Above, again, was almost certainly a cornice, as at St. Albans, surmounted by a second flat platform, so that allowing 2 feet 6 inches to be the minimum height of the bottom tier, it is evident that, in all, this stone base was close upon 6 feet in height.

The perfect capital (piece 2), also of the same date, material and workmanship, is the next piece to be considered. As already noted, the lower part is quatrefoil in plan, and as we have already remarked, each of the five pieces of four strand cable shaft fit exactly into the depression marked out therein. The most probable place for these cable shafts would be at each corner of the shrine base. Furthermore, having regard to their thickness,

¹ The story is told in Mr. J. C. Wall's book, *Shrines of British Saints*, Methuen's Antiquary Series, p. 222.

it is probable that they reached to the top of the second tier, being attached to the structure only at their capitals and bases.

This arrangement may be paralleled to a certain degree at the Confessor's shrine in Westminster Abbey. There, each corner of the lofty bottom tier with its overhanging cornice was originally ornamented by a twisted column, also only attached to the structure at capital and at base.

The other pieces of cable shaft (Figs. 9 and 10), though they differ in design (being of three strands only grouped about a triangular centre), are yet of the same thickness as the pieces of four strand shaft just mentioned; they probably formed portions of isolated columns set on either side of the shrine base to serve as candlesticks, an arrangement paralleled at St. Albans, and formerly at Westminster Abbey. At the former shrine there were six such isolated shafts, three on either side, also of Purbeck marble, whilst, at the Abbey, we are told that in the year 1289 three marble columns, costing 46s. 8d., were made and placed around the shrine of St. Edmund the Confessor. These may have been isolated something like those at St. Albans, and may have supported lights.¹

It is evident therefore that St. Swithun's shrine base, when complete, would somewhat have resembled the structures of St. Albans and St. William of York, although less ornate in detail. Figure 12 is an attempt to reconstruct it.

The fragments remaining are, unfortunately, far too scanty for us to form any opinion as to the actual size of the structure, beyond the somewhat tentative suggestion based upon the measurements of the surviving fragments that it was at least 6 feet high. It is reasonable to suppose that it was composed of at least four bays of arcading, each 1 foot 5½ inches across, and of two bays in width, which would give a total length of close upon 6 feet, and a width of practically 3 feet, for the other dimensions of the shrine base when complete.

It is important to compare these estimated measurements with the known dimensions of some of the other greater shrine bases still remaining in this country. That of the Confessor, the most famous of all, is perhaps an exception to the general rule, for it was constructed by Italian designers and craftsmen at the cost of a King (Henry III), who could, and did, spare no expense in causing it to be made the most ornate and sumptuous work of its kind in England.

Of this once glorious structure, which still bears some traces of the gorgeous mosaics with which it was richly encrusted, only the lower tier still remains. This part measures 9 feet in height,

¹ Professor Lethaby's *Westminster Abbey and the King's Craftsmen*.

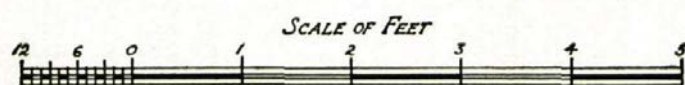
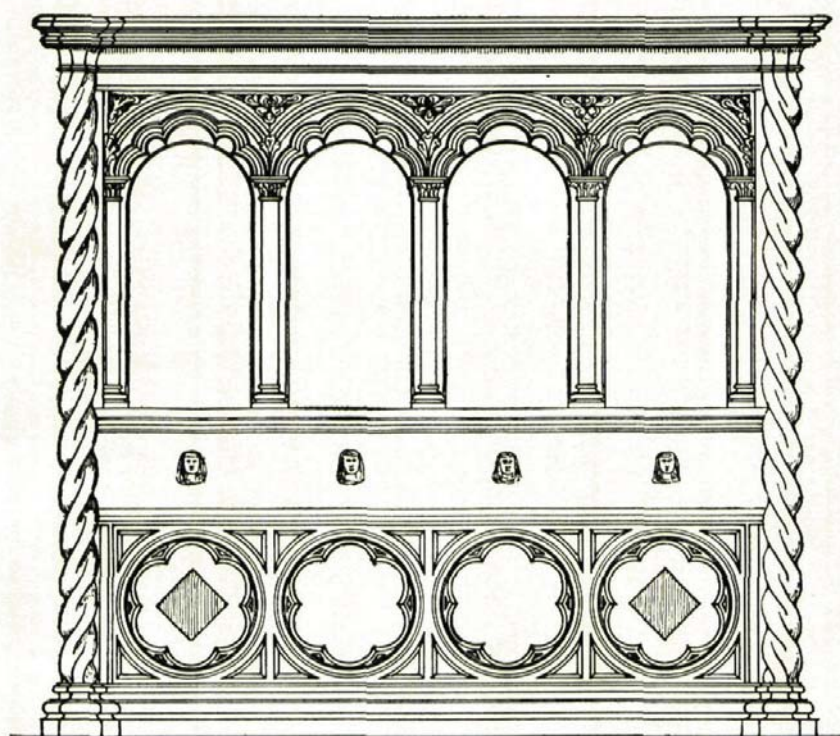


Fig. 12. THEORETICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF ST. SWITHUN'S SHRINE.
Based on a Sketch by Mr. D. H. M. CARTER.

11 feet 6 inches in length by 6 feet 9 inches in width.¹ The rest of the base is a poor reconstruction by the last Abbot, John Feckenham, made during the brief Marian revival.

But of the other greater shrine bases still available for purposes of comparison, that of St. Alban (reconstructed, in 1872, from some 2,000 fragments by the late Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite, F.S.A., assisted by the then Clerk of the Works of St. Albans, Mr. Chapple) measures 8 feet 7 inches long by 3 feet 2 inches wide, and 8 feet high. Another shrine base in St. Albans Cathedral, that of St. Amphibalus, measures 7 feet 7 inches high by 4 feet wide and 6 feet long, whilst that of St. Frideswide, at Christ Church, Oxford, also a partial reconstruction from fragments, measures 6 feet 9 inches in length by 3 feet 4 inches in width and 6 feet 2 inches in height.²

It may reasonably be objected that these pieces of Purbeck marble cannot have formed any part of St. Swithun's shrine, for the reason that they are much too late in style for the known date, 971, of the translation of the Saint's bones from the Churchyard into the shrine prepared for their reception in the Church itself. That is perfectly true. They do not, and could not, form any part of the original structure, concerning the design of which nothing is known.

But we know that during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it became the practice to discard the original tomb of a saint, and to move the bones into a much more ornate structure. Thus, at Westminster Abbey, King Henry III and Abbot Richard Ware were jointly responsible for causing to be erected, between 1241 and 1269, a most superb shrine, of which the lower part alone remains, built chiefly of Purbeck marble, inlaid with the richest mosaics, but deprived, alas! at the Suppression, of its costly enrichments of gold and jewels.

Again, in 1326, at Old St. Paul's, the relics of St. Erkenwald, third Bishop of London, were translated into a new shrine, which had been given, in 1314, by Bishop Gilbert de Segrave.³

Or, to quote one more example, we find at St. Frideswide's, Oxford, that in 1289, on the Sunday next after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, Prior Robert Ewelme again translated the relics of St. Frideswide with all due honour into a new and more precious shrine, which had been in preparation for several years.⁴ Considerable portions of the stonework base of this shrine were discovered in 1875 in the lining of a well, outside the West end of the Church, with the result that it was possible to make a partial reconstruction.

¹ We are indebted to Mr. Drake, Dean's Virger at the Abbey, for these measurements.

² We are indebted to our friend Mr. J. Nowell L. Myres (Scholar of Winchester College from 1916 to 1921) for these measurements of St. Frideswide's shrine.

³ *Shrines of British Saints*, J. Charles Wall, p. 105.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

In the absence of documentary evidence, it is impossible to say definitely when the new stonework of St. Swithun's shrine was erected, but, as has been said, the conventional treatment of the foliage in the spandrels would suggest a period, circ. 1250, as the date of its erection. Mention should here be made of a statement which occurs in the excellent guide book to Winchester, published by Messrs. Warren & Son, of that city, and which it seems was originally furnished by the late Mr. Francis Joseph Baigent,¹ crediting Cardinal Beaufort (Bishop of Winchester from 1404 to 1447) with the erection behind the feretory in 1440, "of a magnificent marble shrine and ivory casket for the remains of St. Swithun." This statement was copied by Dr. Radford (now Bishop of Goulburn, Australia) into his book on Cardinal Beaufort.² It may at once be said that the description of the coffer differs diametrically from that given in 1538, both by the Prior of St. Swithun's monastery, in his inventory of the Church's treasures, and by Cromwell's Commissioners, who appropriated the greater part of them, including the shrine itself, "for the King's use."

The most probable explanation of the puzzle is that the costly marble shrine and ivory casket, "given by Cardinal Beaufort," was intended to contain, not the actual bones of St. Swithun, but merely some vestment or other such minor relics connected with the saint. This practice was of frequent occurrence in pre-Reformation days, and several examples can be cited. Thus, Durham Cathedral is mentioned in 1383 as possessing "an ivory casket containing a robe of St. Cuthbert," together with "other ivory caskets with divers relics."³ Again, at Canterbury Cathedral we find that some relics of the murdered Archbishop, St. Thomas, including his mitre, were preserved in an ivory box.⁴

On the top of the upper flat platform of the shrine base rested the "feretory," or chest, actually containing the bones of St. Swithun. This feretory, which was described in the inventory of the Priory treasures, drawn up in 1538 by the Prior and his monks, as being of "silver, plated with gold and garnished with stones," had been given by King Edgar in 971. Despite an incident in the year 1241, when a "flabellum" (whatever that may have been) falling from a tower above inflicted such damage that the bones within were exposed,⁵ this coffer seems to have been retained until the end. Indeed, Cromwell's Commissioners seem to have been, on the whole, disappointed with the plunder

¹ I am indebted to Mr. Frank Warren, J.P., for this information as to the source of the above statement.

² *Henry Beaufort, Bishop, Chancellor, Cardinal* (Dr. L. B. Radford), p. 292. (Makers of National History Series, edited by Dr. W. H. Hutton.)

³ *Ivories*, by A. Maskell (The Connoisseur's Library).

⁴ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, vol. xxii (1907), p. 28.

⁵ Rudborne's *Annales Ecclesiae Wintoniensis*. Quoted on p. 77 of Professor Earle's *Gloucester Fragments*, published in 1861.

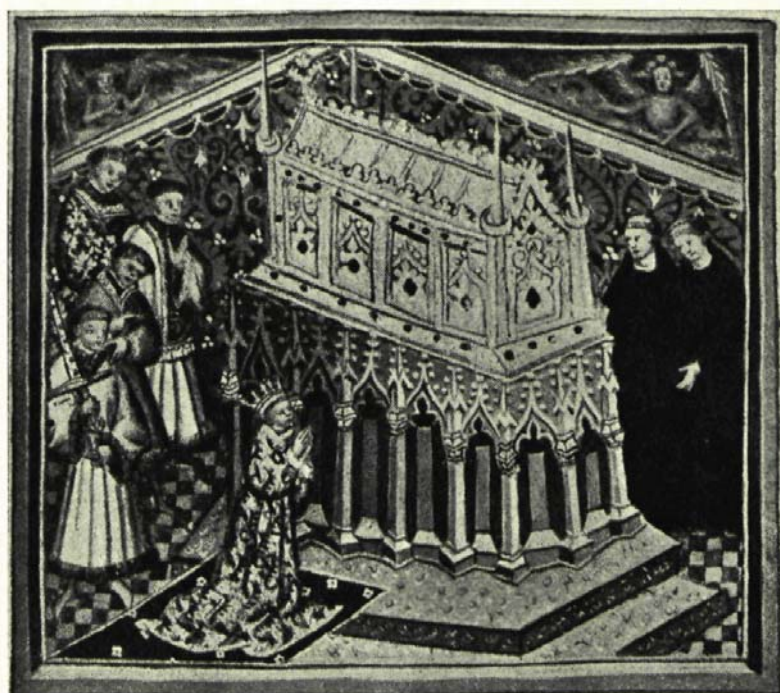


Fig. 13. KING HENRY VI PAYING HIS DEVOTIONS TO ST. EDMUND'S SHRINE
AT BURY ST. EDMUNDS.

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obtained from the shrine,¹ for we find Thomas Wriothesley writing to his master that "the shrine here" contained "no piece of gold nor one ring or true stone, but all great counterfeits." Nevertheless, "he thought, the silver alone will amount near to 2,000 marks."

What the feretory was actually like we have now no means of ascertaining, but we may very reasonably imagine that in general appearance it resembled those formerly in Canterbury Cathedral and at the great Benedictine monastery of Bury St. Edmunds (of which illustrations have been preserved), namely, an oblong chest, with a gabled roof very elaborately worked and chased, and fitted at each side with rings to enable it to be borne on men's shoulders by means of poles on the occasions of great processions (see Fig. 13).

That it was the practice to carry in procession the coffer containing a saint's bones we know from the writings and drawings of mediæval chroniclers and artists. A description of such a procession is actually given in the "Rites of Durham," and is of sufficient interest to be quoted at length:

"The next morninge being Hallowe (Holy thursdaie), they had also a general procession wth two crosses borne before theme. Upon theis great festivall daies the Prior hadd two great crosses borne before hym, the one of ye crosses the staffe and all of gould, the other of sylver and pcell gilt, both ye crose and the staffe wth Saint Cuthbert's Banner that holy Reliquie wch was borne formest in the procession wth all the Riche copes that was in ye church, every mouncke had one,² and the Prior had a marvellous riche cope on of clothe of ffyne pure gould,³ the which he was not able to go upright wth it, for the weightines thereof, but as men did staye it and holde it up of every side, when he had it on, he went with his crutch (crosier) in his hand wch was of sylver, and duple gilt, with a rich myter on his head, also Seint Beedes shrine yt holy Reliquie was caryed in the said procession with iiij mounckes on there shoulders,⁴ and certain other mounckes did cary wth them in ye saide procession dyvers other holy Relicks, as the picture of Saint Oswald of silver and gilt, and Saint Margaret's Crosse, of sylver and duple gilt, which procession did goe furth of the north dore of the Abbey

¹ Compare this with the letter written by Williams, Pollard and others to Cromwell from Bury St. Edmunds, where the shrine was described as "rich and very comberous to deface," and where 1,553 oz. of gold and 10,433 oz. of silver were seized from the Abbey alone.

² The custom of holding processions with every monk vested in a cope probably explains in some measure the enormous store of copes in possession of the Prior and Convent of St. Swithun's, Winchester. Refer *H.F.C. Proceedings*, vol. viii, part I, pp. 15-19. (Church Goods in Hampshire, A.D. 1552.) Refer also Professor Earle's *Gloucester Fragments*, published 1861, which gives the Inventory drawn up in 1538.

³ St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester, possessed "one principal cope of needlework wrought with gold and pearles," which may have been that worn by the Prior on the occasion of great processions such as that described above.

⁴ The Reliquary containing the bones of St. Bede was carried in the said procession on the shoulders of four monks.

Church and thorowe ye church yeard and down Lyegaite by ye Bowe church end and up the south baley, and in at ye Abbey gates where a grete number of people did stand both men, women, and childrene wth great reverence and devotion wch was a goodly and a godly sight to behold, and so went thorowe ye Abbey garth . . . and so thorow ye cloister into ye church."¹

A pictorial representation of a shrine being carried in procession appears in a Cottonian MS.² It shews the feretory of St. Alban being carried by poles, supported on the shoulders of two monks; two others walking behind to steady the burden, if necessary.³ (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. 'ST. ALBAN'S FERETORY BEING CARRIED IN PROCESSION.

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The only part of the shrine of St. Swithun of which we have absolutely no record is the movable cover under which it was kept locked when not actually on show. This cover was probably of wood, doubtless (as at Durham) elaborately painted and gilded. We know from the account given in the "Rites of Durham" that the famous shrine of St. Cuthbert was protected by a cover, "all gilded over and of eyther side was painted fower lively Images curious to ye behoulders and on the East End was painted the picture of our Saviour sittinge on a Rainebowe to geive Judgment very lively to ye behoulders, and on the West side of itt was ye picture of Our Lady and Our Saviour on her knee. And on the topp of ye Cover from end to end was most fine Brattishing of carved worke cutt owte wth Dragons and other beasts most artificially wrought and ye inside was Vernished wth a fyne sanguine colour that itt might be more perspicuous to ye beholders, and att every corner of ye Cover was a locke to-keepe itt close, but att such tymes as was fitt to show itt."³

¹ *Rites of Durham* (Surtees Society edition, pp. 105-106).

² Cottonian MS., Nero D.1. Illustrated on p. 39 of Mr. Wall's *Shrines of British Saints* (Methuen's Antiquary Series).

³ *Rites of Durham*, p. 5.

A representation of a shrine, that of St. Thomas of Canterbury, with its cover down, is given in a Cottonian MS.¹

To this case or cover was attached a rope running through a pulley on the roof above, thus enabling it to be hauled up or let down as required. At Durham, six little silvery bells were attached to the rope that raised the cover over Saint Cuthbert's shrine, "so that when ye cover of ye same was drawing upp ye belles did make such a good sound yt itt did stirr all ye people's harts that was wth in ye Church to repair unto it, and to make their praiers to God and holy St. Cuthbert."²

It is reasonable to suppose that the same arrangement existed here at Winchester, as an entry in the Sacristan's Roll for 1536-37 records payments for mending "bells, locks, doors, and the shrine itself," the context at least suggesting that the first three items were connected with the last.³

The position which St. Swithun's shrine occupied in Bishop Walkelin's Cathedral at the outset is not known. It is possible that originally it was placed immediately behind the High Altar, in what is now known as the "feretory," being moved further east upon the completion of Bishop Godfrey Lucy's spacious Early English retro-choir, erected during the later years of his episcopate (1189-1204), no doubt for the special purpose of receiving the shrine, and to accommodate the ever-increasing crowds of pilgrims, who came from all parts to pay their devotions to Saint Swithun's relics.

We find exactly the same arrangement at Canterbury Cathedral, and formerly at St. Augustine's Abbey, in the same city.⁴ In the former church is a large quire, and to the east of it, just behind the High Altar, a lengthy and spacious retro-quire, the full width of the building called the Trinity Chapel, where the great shrine of St. Thomas the Martyr was situated. Its exact situation is still clearly indicated by the deep groove worn in the stone floor by the tread of the feet of countless pilgrims. At St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, the shrine of the patron saint was placed at the easternmost extremity of the retro-quire, the other shrines being arranged around the walls.

At Winchester, where the shrine was described in the Inventory of 1538 as being "abroad in the Church," the most probable place for it would be in the wide central space immediately between the later chantry chapels of Cardinal Beaufort

¹ Cottonian MS., Tib. E. viii, f. 269 (reproduced in Mr. Wall's book, p. 162).

² *Rites of Durham*, p. 4.

³ The whole entry (translated from the original Latin) runs, "But in payment for mending bells, locks, doors, and the shrine, together with hire of a carpenter, a goldsmith and sawyers, and with repair of the High Altar and hangings in the Choir with a purchase of red lead and other necessities for the said office, as appears in detail in the said officer's book." *Documents relating to the Foundation of the Chapter of Winchester*, Hampshire Record Society (1889), p. 30.

⁴ MS., Trinity Hall, Cambridge, Wall, p. 20.

and Bishop Waynflete. It is significant that in the centre of this space is a large section of plain tiles, also that prior to the recent repairs to the floor (December-January, 1924-5) most of the tiles round this patch were in a very worn and uneven condition.

On either side of the site of St. Swithun's shrine stands a chantry chapel; upon the south side being that of Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester from 1404 to 1447, whilst that of his successor, William of Waynflete (1447-1486), is situated upon the north. The space between the two chapels is only 20 feet. This erection of a chantry chapel or tomb in close proximity to the principal shrine of the Church was considered one of the greatest honours that it was possible to bestow, and was, therefore, usually only conferred upon royalty. By far the most notable example of the practice is, of course, that of Westminster Abbey, where, round about the Confessor's shrine, which stands in the centre of the spacious retro-quire—the Holy Place of the whole English race here and overseas—are grouped the tombs of no less than five of our kings, namely, Henry III, Edward I, Edward III, Richard II and Henry V, together with three queens, Eleanor of Castille, Philippa of Hainault and Anne of Bohemia.¹

Other examples may be cited, namely, at Canterbury Cathedral, where the Black Prince lies buried upon the south side of the site of Becket's shrine, or Worcester Cathedral, where King John secured a position for his tomb between the shrines of St. Oswald and St. Wulstan, in order that he might derive the greatest possible benefit from the intercession of the many pilgrims who came to worship there.²

In accordance with general custom, St. Swithun's shrine was entrusted to the care of a special guardian, known as "The Keeper of the Shrine," and chosen from among the brethren of the monastery. The last holder of that office is mentioned, although not by name, in the Compotus Roll of the Sacristan (one Brother John Buriton) for the year 1536-37,³ and it is interesting to find that, though the shrine itself had ceased to become either a place of pilgrimage or a source of revenue to the Church, yet the Keeper of the Shrine was still being paid his yearly salary of £1 6s. 8d.⁴

We are not told what status or rank the Winchester "Keeper" held among his brethren, but at Durham, the famous shrine of St. Cuthbert, to which reference has already been made, was under the care of the "Third Prior" or "Prior's Chaplain." From the "Rites of Durham"⁵ we learn that the duties of the

¹ *Westminster Abbey*, Francis Bond, p. 229.

² *Shrines of British Saints*, J. C. Wall, p. 24.

³ *Documents relating to the Foundation of the Chapter of Winchester* (A.D. 1541-47), Hampshire Record Society, vol. 1, pp. 19-31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵ *Rites of Durham*, p. 94.

Keeper of the Shrine, or "feretrar," as he was called there, were to keep "ye holy sacrede Shrine of Saint Cuthbert, his office was that when any man of honour or worshippe weere disposed to make there praiers to God and to St. Cuthbert: or to offer anythinge to his sacred shrine, yf they requested to haue yt drawen and to se yt, then streightwaie ye clarke of ye fereture called George Baytes did give intelligence to his Mr. Maister deece prior, ye keeper of ye feiriture, and then ye said Mr. dyde bring ye keys of ye shrine wth him, geving them to the clarke to open ye lockes of ye shrine. His office was to stand by, and to se it drawen, commaunding ye said clarke to drawe yt . . . and when they had maid there praiers and dyd offer anything to yt,¹ yf yt weare either gould, sylver, or Jewels, streight way it was hung on ye shrine. And if yt weyre any other thing as unicorne horne (probably the tusk of the narwhal or sea unicorn), Eliphant Tooth, or such like thinge, then yt was hung within in the fereture at ye end of ye shrine, and when they had maid there praiers, the clarke did let downe ye cover thereof, and did locke yt at every corner, gyving the keies of ye shrine to ye Deece Prior againe."

In addition, the Keeper had to see that the shrine and its fittings, such as locks, keys and movable cover, were kept in good repair, and also to be responsible for its safety. It was a charge of no mean responsibility, for not only were the offerings most valuable, but the relics themselves were a great temptation to thieves. Indeed, such was the morality of the Middle Ages, that people who would scorn to steal a jewel would not hesitate to avail themselves of an opportunity of gaining possession of the actual relics.² To guard against this form of robbery, therefore, the Keeper of the Shrine in a great monastery often had retainers to assist him, whilst at Canterbury Cathedral, the famous shrine of St. Thomas the Martyr, which, in the opinion of a Venetian visitor to England at the beginning of the sixteenth century, "surpassed all belief,"³ was actually guarded during the winter months by a troop of fierce hounds.⁴

In some monasteries a watcher's gallery was erected near the shrine for the convenience of the custodian. Examples still remain at St. Albans and at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. That at St. Albans has two stories; the lower fitted with cupboards, in which vestments and relics were formerly kept; the upper, reached by an oaken staircase, consisting of a room where the "custos feretri" sat watching the shrine, day and night,

¹ All who visited the shrine were expected to make at least some small offering in money. This was dropped into a box secured by two locks, one key being kept by the Shrine Keeper and the other by his colleague.

² Wall, p. 30.

³ *England under the old Religion*, by Cardinal Gasquet (J. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1912), p. 23.

⁴ Ellis's *Original Letters*, Third Series, iii, p. 64, quoted by Mr. Wall in *Shrines of British Saints*, p. 30.

guard, of course, being changed at intervals.¹ Whether Winchester Cathedral actually possessed a watching chamber, we have now no means of ascertaining. Certainly no trace remains to-day of such a structure. It has, however, been suggested that the broad platform, with its almost breast-high rails, surmounting the screen at the entrance to the Lady Chapel, might have been used as a watcher's gallery, and, indeed, it seems in every way admirably suited for that purpose.

The shrine of St. Swithun is referred to several times in the few surviving Obedientiary Rolls² of the Priory, particularly in that of Walter Frost, "custos operum," in the year 1532-33, which records sundry extensive repairs to that part of the building wherein it was situated, notably to the stone vaulting, but gives no particulars of the shrine itself. This entry is helpful, however, in determining the original position of the shrine, as it mentions the purchase of blocks of chalk plaster of Paris and yellow ochre; also of payments to a mason for working on the repairing of a stone roof. Thus it is evident that the shrine stood, not in the "Feretory" behind the High Altar, which was surmounted by Fox's wooden choir roof, but in some part of the building which was vaulted with stone, and which could only be the retro-quire.

Another reference is found in a document³ preserved in the City Archives, which describes in detail the most stately ceremony enacted at the christening of Prince Arthur, eldest son of King Henry the Seventh and Queen Elizabeth of York. From this account we learn that, after the infant Prince had first been christened by "the Bisshopp of Worcester, Lord John Alkok,"⁴ and then confirmed⁵ by the Bishop of Exeter (Peter Courtenay),⁶ the procession wended its way to "Seynt Swythen's shryne, and offerede wher was another Travers, then Iste Confessor with an Antyme of Seint Swythyne, was songen and spices and 'Ipocras, with other swete Wynys (Wines), [were served in] great plenty, which doone, the Prince retournede and was borne home by my Lady Cecill."⁷

The account is of much value in throwing some light upon the ritual observed at this particular shrine. At Canterbury

¹ *Cathedral Church of St. Albans*, Rev. J. Perkins (Bell's Cathedral Series), pp. 75-76.

² *Compotus Rolls of the Obedientiaries of St. Swithun's Priory* (Hampshire Record Society, 1892), p. 217.

³ Reprinted in *Transcripts from the Municipal Archives of Winchester*, by Charles Bailey, Town Clerk (published 1856), pp. 136-141.

⁴ John Alkok, or Alcock, Bishop of Worcester, 1476 to 1486, had been an intimate friend and counsellor of the three successive Yorkist monarchs, Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III. In 1483 he was tutor to Edward Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward V). It was no doubt on account of his intimate relations with the Queen's family that he was invited to christen the infant Prince.

⁵ In the Middle Ages it was customary to confirm an infant in arms. The ceremony is illustrated in a panel of mediæval domestic glass, circ. 1500, now in Leicester Museum. Here a child wrapped like a mummy in swaddling bands is receiving the rite of Confirmation (Arch. Journal, 1918).

⁶ Translated to Winchester in 1487, died 1492.

⁷ Sister to Queen Elizabeth of York. Died 1503.

Cathedral, it seems to have been the custom for the pilgrims, having first paid their devotion to the many minor shrines and relics, to gather round the great shrine of St. Thomas (which stood in the centre of the spacious retro-choir) whilst the cover was raised, probably to the chiming of the little silvery bells attached to its rope. As soon as the "feretory," or coffer, blazing with gold and encrusted with the most gorgeous and costly jewels, was actually exposed, everyone present knelt. Then one of the monks stood by pointing out with a white wand the most precious of its many enrichments, telling their value and marvellous qualities, and lauding the donor by name. This recital was probably in English, but French was sometimes used also for the benefit of foreign pilgrims.¹

The end of St. Swithun's shrine came in September, 1538, by which time it had entirely ceased to attract pilgrims. This is made quite clear by the receipts and payments entered in the Sacristan's (John Buriton) Roll for the year 1536-37, one item of which reads: "From offerings at St. Swithun's shrine this year—nothing."² The tragic story of its destruction, together with that of the pillage at the other great monasteries of Hyde and Nunnaminster, is related in a letter written by one of the Commissioners, Thomas Wriothesley, to Cromwell himself. It is worth quoting in full; the spelling has been modernised.³

"Pleaseth your lordship to be advertised, that this Saturday morning about three of the clock we made an end of the shrine here at Winchester. There was in it no piece of gold nor one ring or true stone, but all great counterfeits. Nevertheless we think the silver alone thereof will amount near to 2,000 marks. We have also received into our possession, the cross of Emeralds, the cross called Jerusalem, another cross of gold, two chalices of gold with some silver plate, parcel of the portion of the vestry; but th' old prior made the plate of the house so thin, that we can diminish none of it and leave the prior anything furnished. We found the prior and all the convent very conformable; having assistants with us at the opening of our charge to the same, the Mayor with eight or nine of the best of his brethren, the Bishop's Chancellor, Mr. Doctor Crawforde, with a good appearance of honest personages besides, who with one voice most heartily gave laud and praise to God, and to the King's majesty, thinking verily that they do all as much rejoice of his majesty's godly and most Christian purpose herein as can be devised. We have also this morning going to our beds ward viewed the altar,⁴ which

¹ Dean Stanley's *Memorials of Canterbury Cathedral*.

² Hampshire Record Society, 1889, vol. 1, p. 29.

³ *Historic Winchester*, Bramston and Leroy, pp. 215-216.

⁴ According to the Inventory drawn up by the Prior and his monks, the High Altar was a most magnificent piece of work. "The nether part was of plate of gold, garnished with stones. The front above was of brodering (embroidered?) work and pearls, and above that a table of images of silver and gilt, garnished with stones (i.e., jewels)."

we purpose to bring with us. It will be worth the taking down, nothing thereof seen; but just such a piece of work it is, that we think we shall not rid it doing our best, before Monday night or Tuesday morning, which done we intend both at Hyde and St. Mary's (Nunnaminster) to sweep away all the rotten bones that be called relics; which we may not omit, lest it should be thought we came more for the treasure than for avoiding of the abomination of idolatry. Other things as far as we can learn there be none for us in these places; which things done and our things set outward, we shall attend upon your lordship with diligence.

"I, Thomas Wriothesley humbly beseech your good lordship to pardon the rudeness of this letter written in haste in the church when I was weary; and in like manner I beseech your lordship to be good, lord, to the poor man the bearer of this letter.

"From St. Swithun's in Winchester this Saturday morning.

"Your Lordship's

"Most bounden.

"RICHARD POLLARD.

"THOMAS WRIOTHESLEY.

"JOHN WILLIAMS.

"To the Right honourable and
"our singular good Lord,
"my Lord Privy Seal."

From another source,¹ we learn that the plunder obtained from Winchester, including the treasures seized at Hyde and at St. Mary's, was 1,035½ ounces of gold, 13,886 ounces of silver gilt, 300 ounces of silver and parcel gilt. Even this makes no mention of a large quantity of jewelry spoken of by the Commissioners in their letter to Cromwell.

In conclusion, we would offer our grateful thanks for valuable help during our investigations. Especially do we wish to thank the Very Reverend Dr. W. H. Hutton, Dean of Winchester (for granting us every facility to examine the pieces), Messrs. Herbert Chitty, F.S.A., Fred Crossley, F.S.A., J. A. Knowles, J. Nowell L. Myres (College, 1916-1921), Sydney Pitcher, of Gloucester, (who so kindly photographed the pieces for us), Arthur Llewellyn-Smith (College, 1917-1922), G. McNeil Rushforth, F.S.A., and J. Charles Wall (the last named for permission to quote from his most valuable book on "Shrines of British Saints").

On going to Press, we regret to record the death of Mr. J. D. Le Couteur. The very valuable services which he rendered to the Hampshire Field Club and Archæological Society will be greatly missed.

¹ Cardinal Gasquet's *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*, pp. 406-7.