

THOMAS SILKSTEDE'S RENAISSANCE-STYLED CANOPIED WOODWORK IN THE SOUTH TRANSEPT OF WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

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ABSTRACT

Winchester Cathedral is justly famed for its collection of renaissance works. While Silkstede's woodwork has previously been described, such studies have not taken full account of the whole piece, nor has account been taken of the important connection to the recently published renaissance frieze at St Cross. The two sets of woodwork should be seen in the context of artistic developments in France in the early sixteenth century rather than connected to terracotta tombs in a renaissance style in East Anglia.

INTRODUCTION

Bishop Fox's pelican everywhere marks the architectural development of Winchester Cathedral in the early sixteenth-century with, occasionally, a reference to the prior who held office for most of Fox's episcopate – Thomas Silkstede (prior 1498–1524). Bishop Fox would have needed the priory's support and, indeed, express permission to rebuild, in particular, the presbytery and quire because it was the priory (not the bishop) that was responsible for the cathedral and its fabric. The prior, however, had to rely upon the resources of the monastic estate to fund any work on the cathedral. While Silkstede had substantial resources that were greater than those available to many contemporary bishops, these were insignificant compared to the huge income that Fox, as bishop, received from the Winchester episcopal estates. It is only in the south transept that we find Silkstede's name standing alone and marking this area as one he, as prior, took responsibility for developing.

Thomas Silkstede's canopied woodwork with its renaissance frieze has always been rather overshadowed by the presence of Bishop Fox's

presbytery screen, carved in a renaissance style, and the mortuary chests that are placed upon it. In another context, and alone, Silkstede's work might have attracted greater attention. This has been compounded by the nineteenth century alterations to the woodwork, which has led some commentators to suggest that much of the work here dates to that period, rather than the earlier sixteenth century (Jervis 1976, 9 and see Biddle 1993, 260–3, and Morris 2000, 179–211).

SILKSTEDE'S RENAISSANCE FRIEZE

Arranged along the south wall and part of the west wall of the south transept in Winchester Cathedral is a set of wooden canopied stalls with benches. The back of this woodwork is mostly panelled in linenfold arranged in three tiers divided by stiles and rails reaching up to the canopy (fig 1). The linenfold panelling in the eastern part of the south section is here arranged in two tiers with pilasters carved with renaissance motifs between pairs of panels (fig 2). Fronting the canopy is a frieze of panels with, at each end and in the angle between the two sections, a medallioned profile head. The stallwork is punctuated by doors, neither of which belongs to the original scheme. The main point of interest here are the panels that make up the frieze.

The 21 panels (hereafter numbered 1 to 21 reading from left, or east, to right) that make up the frieze are filled with designs that are based on renaissance models. These designs include the letters TS and the arms of the see of Winchester supported by fantastic creatures and antique work, which clearly identifies an association of



Fig. 1 West side of the south transept showing Silkstede's frieze above three tiers of panelling with early nineteenth-century door and frame.

this woodwork with Thomas Silkstede. Amongst these panels are at least two that are of nineteenth century date, panels 10 and 11, and these have carved on them the initials TR and the date 1816. These refer to Thomas Rennell (dean, 1805–40), whilst the date presumably indicates either a substantial refurbishment of the stalls, or, as is more likely, a general rearrangement which included the provision of a new doorway through the west side of the woodwork into a newly formed chapter room. Rennell's alterations probably also included changes to the doorway leading southwards from the transept (Biddle 1993, 261–2). The full extent of Rennell's work remains unknown, but it is clear from earlier descriptions of the cathedral that woodwork with Silkstede's

initials carved on the cornice was present in the south transept from before the 1760s (Warton *c.* 1760, 98, and see also Ball 1818, 101 and Milner 1839, 2, 78). This is not apparent in the earliest drawing of the transept, a view by John Coney of 1817, which shows stallwork, doors and finials along the top of the frieze but, curiously, does not show any carved panels in the frieze itself (fig 3). This may perhaps be simply explained by suggesting that Rennell's renovation lasted longer than appears to be the case and was completed at some point after Coney's drawing.

The dominant renaissance feature of this woodwork is the series of oblong panels set as a frieze along the upper edge of the canopy. Along the south side there are 15 panels (two, as noted



Fig. 2 Silkstede's renaissance frieze over the canopied stalls showing the decorated pilasters in the south section.

above, are nineteenth-century) with a further six panels along the west side. The renaissance character of the frieze is echoed by the presence of seven pilasters with capitals that are set amongst the linenfold panelling in the eastern part of the southern section beneath the frieze. The use of renaissance motifs on just the frieze and pilasters echoes the arrangement at St Cross (Smith and Riall 2002) where the renaissance work is confined to the frieze and desk ends. Both sets of woodwork appear to have been panelled in plain linenfold.

A common overall design was used in the decorative scheme here: a central motif or element with affronted supporters which, mostly, merge outwards into scrollwork. This basic theme was developed, in the playful renaissance manner, into a range of specific images taking individual

central motifs or differing supporters to create a range of images that conform to a central theme, thereby producing four sets of designs. The panels are all carved in low-relief on single boards, although the execution of these designs was not as accurate as might have been expected in such a scheme for a setting of this quality. There are lapses in the symmetry which seem surprising and which were surely not intended, together with minor omissions of detail, when panel is compared to panel, which is similarly unexpected. These relatively minor discrepancies have not been taken into account in this analysis, but are of importance when considering the craftsmanship of this work. As we shall see, it is in the fine detail that so many of the clues as to the origins of this piece lie.

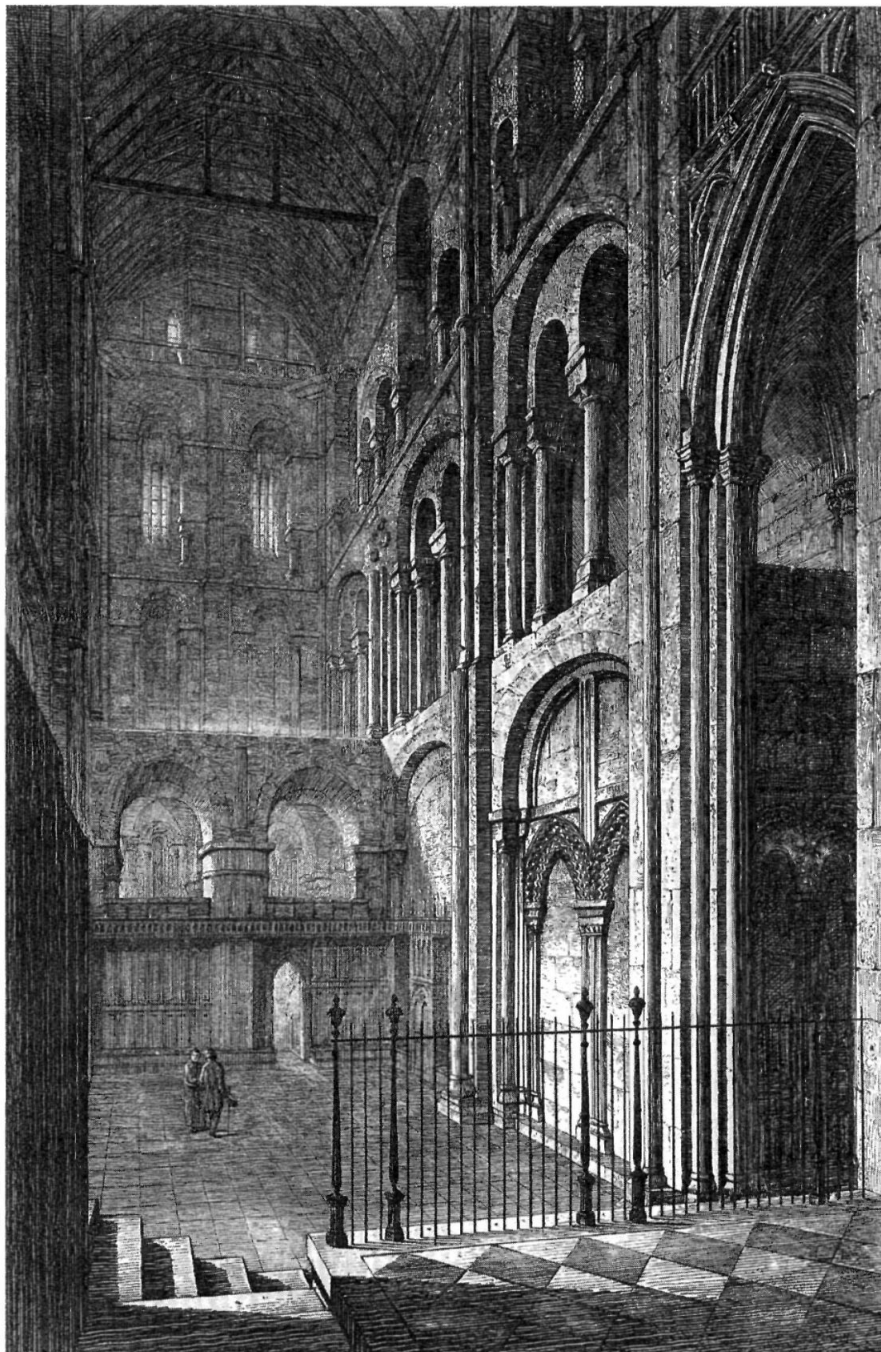


Fig. 3 'Winchester Cathedral, south transept' as drawn and engraved by John Coney *c.* 1820.
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The following sections consider in turn the constituent motifs of dolphin with urns, heraldic shields, Silkstede's initials and rebus, medallions, pilasters and capitals.

Dolphins with urns (1 and 2).

The most frequent motifs in this frieze are shown in the dolphin and urn panels. Much of the south section, panels 1–9, along with panels 16 and 21, comprise panels carved with a central motif of an urn supported by affronted dolphins. These 11 panels can be divided into two groups based on close examination of the urns and of the detailing of the scrollwork around the dolphins.

1) Dolphin and urn 1 (panels 1–5): the central motif is a lobed urn with a beaded rim resting on a foliate stand with a central foliate motif emerging from the mouth of the urn. Either side are affronted and horned dolphins, the horns having an ear-like characteristic, whose beaks rest on the urn rim (fig 4). The dolphin bodies are drawn out into scrollwork leading to a form of cornucopia from which emerges further scrollwork that terminates in a floral design – perhaps intended to represent a Tudor rose. Slashed scrollwork emerges from beneath the dolphin and is returned towards the urn. The significance of the horned dolphins' heads will be discussed below.

2) Dolphin and urn 2 (panels 8, 9, 16 and 21): this is a simplified version of the last design, the horned dolphin is replaced with a plain version and the overall design is asymmetrical (fig 4). The same lobed urn is used, though here it is narrower and taller. The affronted dolphins are accompanied by a less complex layout of scrollwork. Close examination of the dolphins with their scrollwork reveals a consistent asymmetrical character to these panels that is unusual in renaissance contexts. This is especially noticeable in the treatment of the scrollwork emerging from the dolphin bodies, with the left quite different to the right.

Both the dolphin and urn were common motifs in the renaissance repertoire and are frequently to be found in classical settings. It should also be pointed out that, in Christian iconography, the dolphin was used to represent eternal life and the urn might be associated with the eucharistic chalice. Thus the two motifs could well have

appealed to Prior Silkstede because of their Christian affinities, much as they would have done to Bishop Fox in his choice for his frieze at St Cross.

Heraldic shields

3) Arms of Winchester with supporters (panels 13, 15, 17 and 19): four panels bear the arms of the see of Winchester in two versions of supporters (fig 5), affronted dolphins (panels 13 and 15) and affronted griffins (panels 17 and 19). The dolphins in these two panels are the same as those employed on the right-hand side in the dolphin and urn 2 series. The griffins are shown with strings of beads terminating in tassels emerging from their mouths (these beads representing perhaps a rosary, but are also a frequent renaissance motif); the griffins are otherwise relatively plain compared to the treatment of the dolphins. A curious inconsistency amongst these panels is the depiction of the arms of the see of Winchester. Panels 13, 15 and 17 show the keys running from bottom left to top right, with the sword crossing from the right, whereas panel 19 shows this arrangement reversed.

The arms of the see of Winchester were depicted many times in settings in Winchester Cathedral during the early part of the sixteenth century. They appear in the Lady Chapel and Langton's Chapel, on bosses in the vaults over the presbytery and aisles, in Fox's chantry chapel and on Fox's presbytery screens together providing over 25 examples. This reveals almost equal numbers of each form of the see arms, showing the crossed keys and sword depicted crossing one way or the other. Depiction with Fox's pelican, with Langton's arms or alone, seems to have no bearing on the matter. Indeed the see arms are depicted both ways side by side on the vault of Fox's chantry chapel. The arms, depicted as on panel 19, also appear on a chest now in the church of St Blasius, at Shanklin on the Isle of Wight, and which bears Silkstede's name and the date 1519 (or perhaps 1512?), and is surrounded by renaissance detail (Smith 2002, 14–20).

Silkstede's initials and rebus

4) The initial TS with supporters (panels 12, 14, 18 and 20): in these panels the central motif is formed



Fig. 4 Dolphin and urn design 1 and , below, design 2

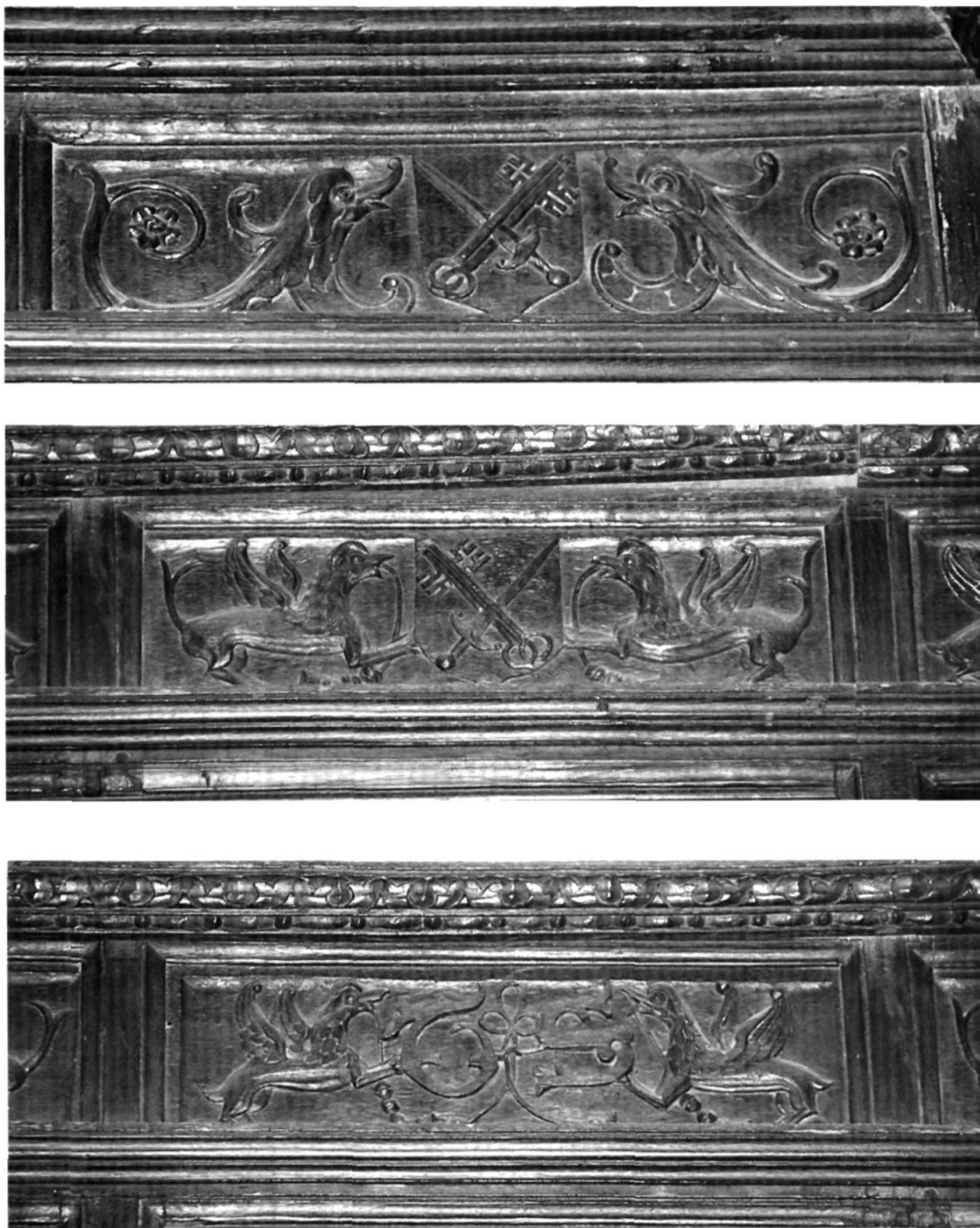


Fig. 5 Shields with the arms of the see of Winchester and, bottom, Thomas Silkstede's initials and rebus

by the initials TS, for Thomas Silkstede, tied together with a skein of silk (Silkstede's rebus) formed by rope set in a clover-leaf design terminating in tassels, supported, in panel 12, by dolphins and by griffins in the remainder (fig 5). The initials TS are carved in a cursive style reflecting the early sixteenth century development of a display script based on Romanesque originals that were being produced to replace the long-used black-letter forms (Gray 1986, 148–50). Similar lettering, if with significant differences, appears on the adjacent screen to Silkstede's chapel, on the faces of the south presbytery screen, and on Silkstede's chest.

The treatment and design of the griffins varies from one panel to the next, so that there are minor variations in the placement of these beasts' paws, the treatment of their heads and their tails. In panels 18 and 20 the tail is almost non-existent. Like the panels with the arms of the See, the griffins here have ropes with beads terminating in tassels with, from one panel to another, minor variations of detail.

Medallions

Three medallions are included in the frieze; one at the eastern end, one at the junction between the two sections and the third at the end of the west section. All three feature male heads in profile within medallions set into a square field, with floral decorative motifs in the corners (fig 6). The carving of all three is relatively crude, with little attention to detail or attempt to give these profiles any character. The first medallion shows a male head facing right. He wears a cloak or toga and is wearing a plumed helmet with neck piece. A similar, but much later image, is included in the Winchester College frieze, now displayed in the City's Westgate museum (Lewis 1995, 137–165). The medallion is framed with a laurel wreath emphasising a classical connection. The second medallion, here shown with a plain slashed rim, shows a male head emerging from a clothed shoulder and wearing a soft cap or hat. He is shown with square cut hair and would seem to be a contemporary figure, perhaps intended to represent Silkstede himself (*cf.* the medallion by Torrigiano of Sir Thomas Lovell in Westminster Abbey). The last medallion, again within a plain slashed frame, depicts a bearded male figure facing left with,

co-joined, another face facing right. While this could be identified as a classical parade helmet, an alternative identification suggests that this medallion represents the Roman god Janus here shown facing two ways as the god of doorways and passages, and also of beginnings and endings.

The pilasters and capitals

The pilasters on the backs of the woodwork in the south range are decorated in low relief with a range of motifs that includes foliage, strapwork, ribbons, urns, drums and beads, set, candelabra-fashion, one above the other. While there is strong sense of conformity about both the pilasters and capitals, close inspection again reveals a surprising level of differences, so that they are not in fact all similar, but reveal a set of three pairs (pilasters 1 and 7, 2 and 6, 3 and 4) with a fourth design, pilaster 5 (fig 7).

The pilasters do not extend the full length from capital to the mid-rail in the panelling, but have been cut some 200 mm above the mid-rail; the lower, undecorated, section of timber is a later addition. This suggests that in its original form, and assuming that the pilasters were used to divide the panels in the back of the original woodwork, there was a horizontal rail set across the base of the pilasters, echoing the arrangement in the frieze at St Cross, which must lead us to conclude that the linenfold panels now present cannot have been in this position, if at all, in the original layout.

The capitals also all conform to a similar design theme, a renaissance-styled Corinthian capital, but there are subtle differences to each, so that no two are exactly alike. The capitals project very slightly forwards to provide carved surfaces on three sides, again a design feature to be found at St Cross. Each capital has a pair of in-turned volutes rising from leaves, presumably acanthus, with a beaded rim that is occasionally surmounted by a flower (fig 8). The volutes are all slashed and, in form and style, reflect the scrollwork emerging from the dolphins in the panels of the frieze.

Running across the panelling above the capitals is a length of rail carved with egg and dart decoration. A similar piece of rail is present along the top of the frieze in the west section. The remainder of the rails are otherwise undecorated lengths of

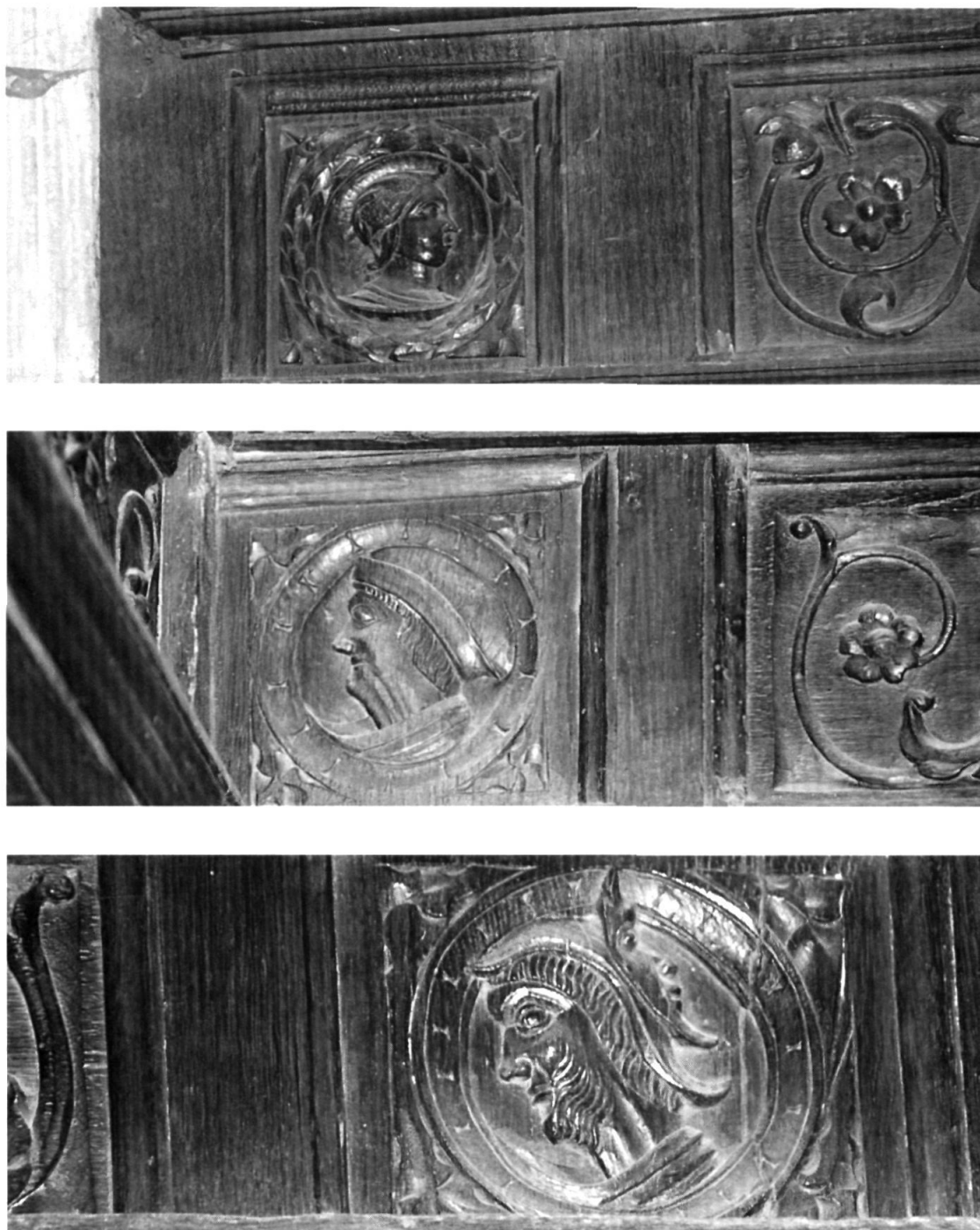


Fig. 6 The three medallions: a classical figure, a sixteenth-century figure that may be a portrait of Silkstede and a two faced head which may represent Janus.

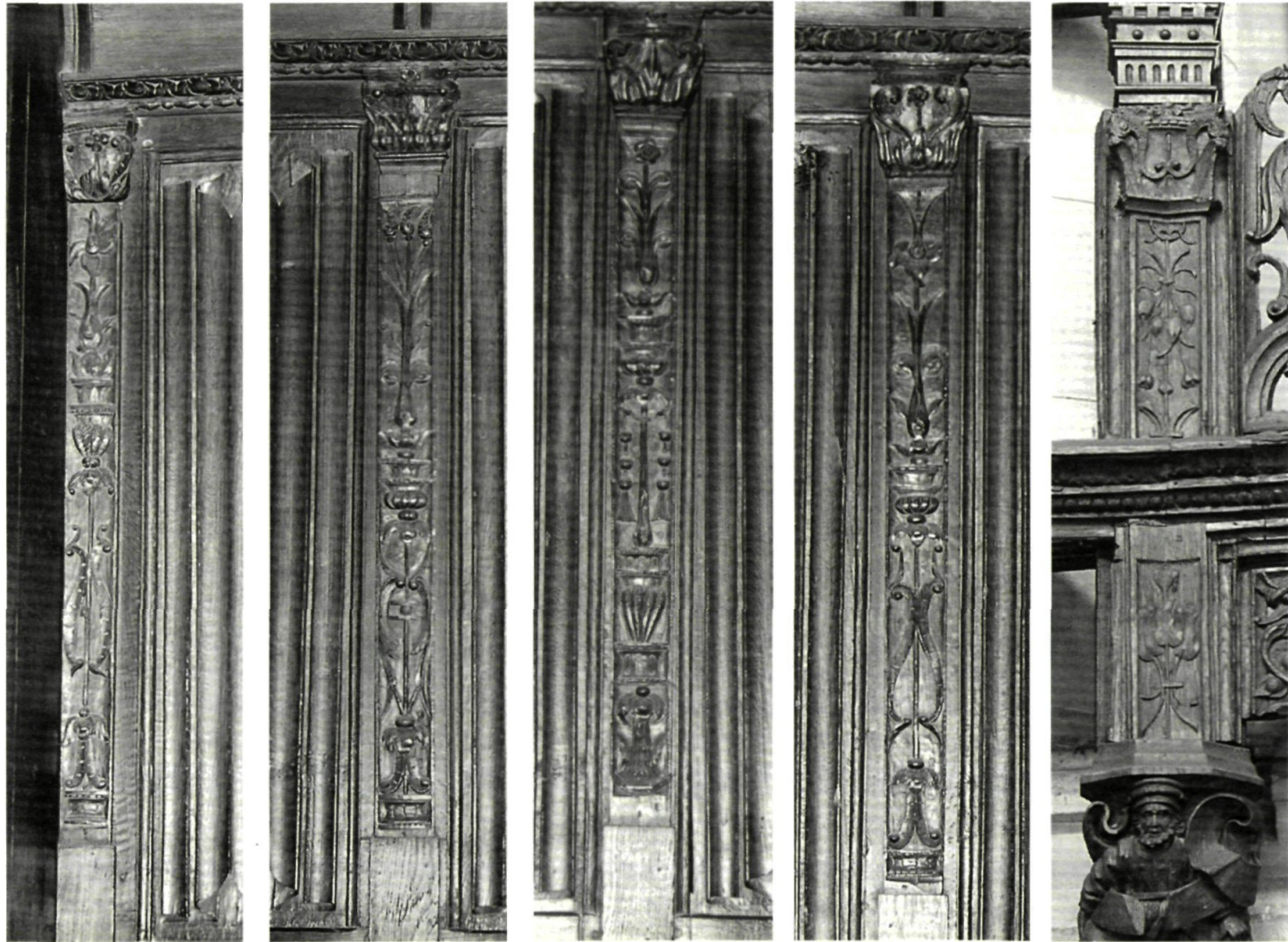


Fig. 7 The pilasters showing the four designs present in Silkstede's stalls, from left, pilasters 1, 2, 4 and 5 with, far right, pilaster and capital from St Cross.

moulded architrave and are most likely to be part of Dean Rennell's nineteenth century renovation. The rail above the capitals and pilasters appears to be integral and incorporates a series of horizontal mouldings for the tops of panels, but the treatment of the vertical mouldings either side of the linenfold panels is different, further emphasising the probable changes to the original scheme. From this we might perhaps conclude that the panels of the frieze, canopy and the pilasters and capitals, together with the egg and dart moulded rails, comprise the remnants of Silkstede's woodwork.

THE SOUTH TRANSEPT

A problem that needs to be resolved is the difficulty presented by Silkstede's work in the south transept and Bishop Fox's apparent ambition to rebuild both transepts (Willis 1845, 47–8; Draper and Morris 1993, 189). When Fox rebuilt the presbytery aisles, his pelican badge and other heraldic devices feature heavily on the vault, the work included an arcade of new windows which, at the western end, extend beyond the east wall of both the north and south transepts. Additionally, the roofs over the transept aisles were stripped away, and new timber work erected to produce a new, lower profile to these roofs with the presumed intention of creating more space for larger windows at the clerestory level looking down into the transepts. It seems probable that this work was also initiated by Fox. When did this happen and why did Bishop Fox seemingly abandon this project leaving it incomplete?

There are virtually no documentary records that chronicle, or account, for the expenses incurred in Fox's work in the east end of the cathedral. That said we can gain some insight from the work he did and suggest some dates by which some of the work must have been completed. A critical date in all this is 1513, when an indenture was drawn up between Bishop Fox and the prior and convent that fixed the position of the bishop's chantry chapel (Smith 1988, Lindley 1993). Work on building this chapel began, probably, that year and the chapel was complete by 1517. This implies that the new walls with their arcade of windows for the presbytery aisles had been completed, along with the vault and roof

before 1513. This would accord well enough with the remainder of Fox's work which must have begun with remodelling the east window soon after 1501. This was followed by placing new windows above the presbytery and perhaps adding a new roof. To this was attached a wooden vault, the heraldry of which indicates that this was erected between 1503 and before 1509 (Smith 1996, and see Lindley 1993). With the vault over the presbytery complete, the programme of work would have moved on to remodel the presbytery aisles which, as noted above, seems originally to have been intended to include the rebuilding of the transepts.

In 1513 Bishop Fox was embroiled in Henry VIII's invasion of France, indeed it is entirely likely that work on his chantry was bound up with Henry's demand that Fox accompany him to France. Fox, by now an old man, settled his affairs and made arrangements for his burial, believing that he was unlikely to return from France alive. Following his return to England, Fox's interests seem to have undergone a shift in emphasis; he appears to have lost interest in remodelling the cathedral and instead devoted his time and interest to other projects, especially his college of Corpus Christi at Oxford. The resources of the priory were insufficient to take on the project that Fox had begun and the 'temporary' timberwork supporting the transept aisle roofs remain in place to this day.

With Fox's work brought to an abrupt conclusion, Silkstede was able to transform this part of the cathedral by converting one of the aisle chapels into what was surely intended to be his own chantry chapel and by installing a substantial piece of wooden furniture in the body of the south transept for the use of the monks and adjacent to the night stair leading from the dormer into the cathedral.

PURPOSE AND ARRANGEMENT

In its present arrangement the canopied frieze with its renaissance ornament forms part of a stallwork that extends across south end of the south transept. It is by no means clear that this was its original function. Early historical descriptions of the south



Fig. 8 Capitals from the Silkstede stalls, top, and from the frieze at St Cross, below.

transept describe, if in very sparse detail, Silkstede's woodwork (Warton 1760, 98; Ball 1818, 101; Milner 1839, 2, 78). Ball's account mentions,

'... the ancient presses which are ranged along the south wall of the transept. These presses are carved in scrolls and terminate in canopies, bearing on the cornice the initial and device of Prior Silkstede, by whom they were probably erected for the purpose of containing the rich vestments worn on all solemn occasions by monks of the cathedral'.

It follows from this that while it is possible that, in part, Silkstede's woodwork in the south transept incorporated some stalls or benches, its main purpose was to serve as a cupboard to house the monks' clothing. That canopies with richly ornamented friezes were occasionally attached to such pieces of furniture can be seen in a piece, on a smaller scale, drawn in c. 1527 by Hans Holbein in his *Study for the Family Portrait of Sir Thomas More*; another cupboard, now in the Burrell Collection, made for John Wyn ap Maredudd of Gwydir in c. 1525, also features a canopy fronted with a frieze and this is set above a large cupboard with six doors and two drawers.

Thomas Silkstede's name displayed in carved stone letters, T h o M A s S, along the external face of the frieze his chantry chapel has been linked with the woodwork bearing his initials and device (Jervis 1976, 35; Biddle 1993 262; and see Tracy 1993, 240). It seems this stone screen was originally created for Bishop Adam of Orleton (bishop 1333–45), but was appropriated by Silkstede, who added the frieze. This screen has on its inner frieze face motifs that include the dimidiated rose and pomegranate for Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, which clearly places this work within the later years of Silkstede's life. While the surviving length of wooden frieze in the transept suggests there is enough material present to create a suite of stalls for the chapel, the physical layout of the chapel itself makes this improbable. The doorway into the chapel is both very narrow and offset to one side and is not central; additionally, the massive Romanesque piers project deep into the chapel making this a very awkward area to fit out with a formal suite of

stalls in any conventional way such as the stalls in the Lady Chapel and Langton chapel in the east end of the cathedral. This would appear to mitigate against any suggestion that Silkstede intended to create a set of stalls for his own chapel and, with the early descriptions of the cathedral clearly indicating a practical use for the woodwork, we might conclude that this was indeed Silkstede's purpose. Silkstede was anyway buried elsewhere in the cathedral.

It would therefore seem possible that Silkstede took the opportunity presented by Fox's abandonment of rebuilding the transepts to make his own mark here. The possible choice of Janus as one of the medallions indicates that this – a place of passageways and doors – had always been Silkstede's choice of location for his woodwork.

DISCUSSION

The similarity of the images on Silkstede's furnishings, especially the fantastic creatures with urns, has led to this work being paralleled with similar images to be found on terracotta tombs in East Anglia (Biddle 1993, 263), the most important of which are those of the Marneys at Layer Marney in Suffolk and the Bedingfeld chapel at Oxburgh in Norfolk (Baggs 1969, 296–301, and see Whinney 1964, 5–6). These are thought to have perhaps been the work of Flemish artists and created either in East Anglia or in Flanders and perhaps based on printed images (Howard 1987, 130–5). All the East Anglian pieces appear to belong to the mid 1520s. The 1st Lord Marney died in 1523 and his son in 1525, leaving incomplete their spectacular brick and terracotta house, on which dolphin motifs are also to be found (Morris 2000); their house stands beside the church in which they lie buried. Dolphin supporters were also extensively used at Sutton Place, the house built by Sir Richard Weston sometime after 1522, when Weston was granted the land (Howard 1987, 129–35). Sutton Place has a profusion of terracottas. These include a frieze of panels bearing part of Weston's rebus, a tun, supported by dolphins with scrollwork that are not dissimilar to those in Silkstede's frieze. Weston's house was also furnished with terracotta window frames decorated with renaissance motifs in candelabras which are

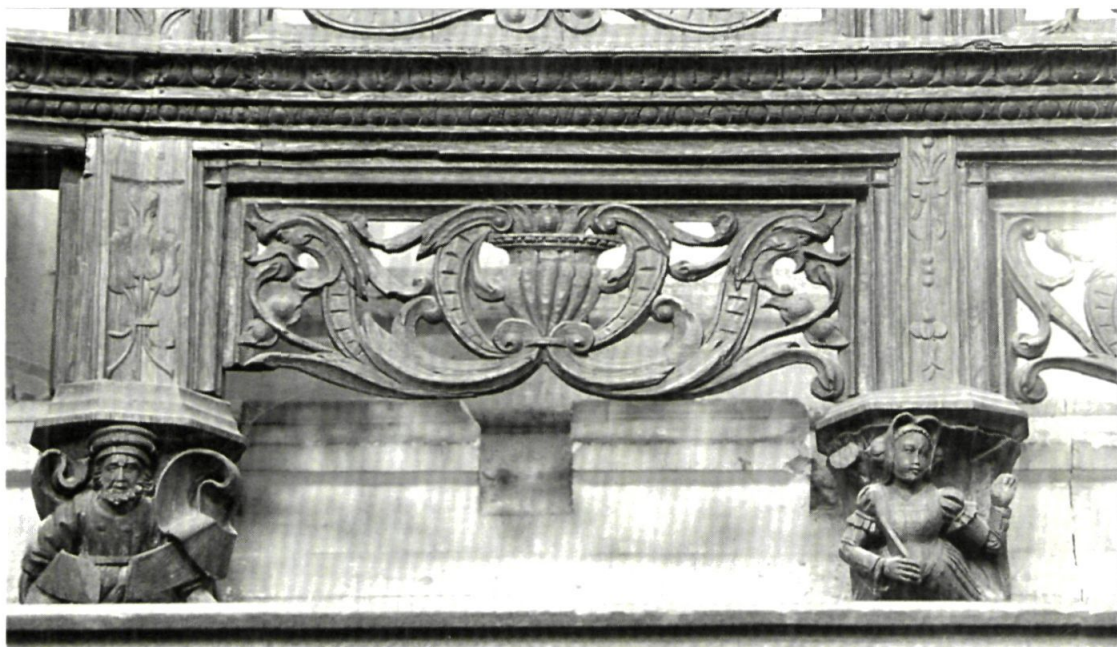


Fig. 9 Horned dolphins supporting an urn from the St Cross frieze.

very similar to pieces found at Hampton Court and believed to belong to Wolsey's original construction (Lindley and Gunn, 1991, 32–4; Foyle pers comm). However, it is rather more likely that Silkstede was able to look closer to home for inspiration.

Silkstede was Prior from 1498 until 1524 and thus present in Winchester for all the work that Bishop Fox undertook in the cathedral, especially those with a renaissance theme. Moreover, he would have been well aware of another important renaissance frieze, created through the patronage of Bishop Fox, the remains of which are in the chancel of the church of the Hospital of St Cross. Neither frieze had, until recently, attracted much attention and neither has been adequately fitted into a general chronology of the development of renaissance art in southern England during the early sixteenth century (the St Cross frieze is discussed by Smith and Riall 2000). The links between both sets of woodwork and French parallels had similarly not been explored, although Anthony Blunt recognised there were connections

between the renaissance character of Fox's work in Winchester Cathedral and France, especially the archiepiscopal palace at Gaillon in Normandy (Blunt 1969, 17–29). It would appear that Blunt did not examine the stallwork in St Cross nor recognise the connection to the stallwork from the chapel at Gaillon now to be found in the basilica of St Denis in Paris.

The St Cross stallwork, with its renaissance frieze, provides an essay in renaissance ideas drawn directly from Italian sources with a hint of the late French flamboyant gothic style. The basic design of the St Cross frieze was to provide a series of panels carved in openwork taking a medallion as a central motif. The medallion was suspended from an ogee arch that was foliated and crocketed in a flamboyant manner, with the medallion being supported and surrounded by pairs of fantastic creatures, many with putti astride them, all of which are festooned with swirling scrollwork in an upper tier with, below, a second tier of smaller panels taking a central motif sup-

ported by birds, masks or dolphins with yet further scrollwork and, often, putti. All of the panels are set in a framework of posts, these covered with a wide range of motifs, set candelabra-fashion, and capped with decorative capitals, the principal feature of which are inturned volutes, and rails that are carved with egg-and-dart and water-leaf decoration. This frieze was erected above canopied stalls with benches and associated with desks which feature dolphin terminals on their end boards. Much of the stallwork and the desks are panelled in linenfold. The presence of Fox's pelican device and the arms of the see of Winchester identify Bishop Fox as the patron of this frieze. The St Cross frieze was detached from its stallwork sometime in the nineteenth century, and a quantity of the original work has been lost, but the surviving twelve bays point to a piece of work that was once remarkable.

The St Cross frieze was fashioned with painstaking accuracy to ensure not only a strong sense of symmetry within each panel, but also a harmony that draws together the entire composition. The medallions and the composition of motifs on individual pilasters are the only features that were intentionally unsymmetrical though this has little noticeable effect on the whole design. The remnants of Silkstede's frieze have this same quality, although the execution of the design is less assured.

One feature that occurs in both Silkstede's and Fox's frieze are panels which depict a centrally placed urn supported by dolphins (fig 9). At St Cross these panels, here in the lower tier, are arranged in an alternating sequence of six panels, in which the dolphins are first affronted and then addorsed either side of a narrow, tall lobed urn followed by a low, wide lobed urn. The presence of horns on some of the Silkstede dolphins provides a further tie with the St Cross frieze. This feature seems to be quite rare in renaissance work in southern England, although it is clear that the horned creatures in the St Cross frieze were an important feature of this design. They are carved with a sensitivity and an awareness of their aesthetic setting in the whole modelling of each creature. This is less the case where they occur on Silkstede's frieze and, in the few examples to be seen in counties outside Hampshire, they become

more ear-like and flaccid, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the originals. The horned dolphins, along with virtually all the images to be seen in the St Cross frieze, derive from motifs and images to be seen in the choir stalls built for Cardinal Georges d'Amboise sometime before 1510 by Italian and French craftsmen (Chirol 1952, Liou 1997). The Gaillon canopied stalls provided individual tipping seats and misericords, the only feature retained from earlier Gothic models, but are otherwise a spectacular product of renaissance craftsmanship with every surface covered in carved detail or marquetry. The underside of the canopy of the Gaillon stalls is decorated with a series of urns supported by dolphins, and like those at St Cross and Silkstede's, the urns are alternated from tall and narrow to short and wide. The Gaillon stalls are carved in low relief, although to a standard far in excess of that seen in Silkstede's stalls.

Biddle drew attention to the in-turned volutes of the capitals, suggesting these may have been based on printed designs as there were no parallels amongst the terracotta work in East Anglia. Similar capitals appear in the St Cross frieze, indeed the comparison is striking (fig 8). Similar capitals can be seen in the stonework in the courtyard at Gaillon, but not on the exterior faces of the west gate, on woodwork from the Gaillon chapel and especially pieces from the chapel screens which are now in the Musée de la Renaissance at Ecouen, near Paris. Further examples can be seen in woodwork in Rouen, especially a fireplace from the abbey of Saint-Amand which, additionally, features horned dolphins and parallels to the motifs on the pilasters at St Cross and in Silkstede's woodwork. By contrast, the designs of the motifs on the pilasters on Silkstede's stalls do not fully compare to those at St Cross although they are in the same spirit.

The similarities between the Gaillon woodwork and that at St Cross is so strong, down to very fine details, that there can be little doubt that the two sets of stallwork are intimately connected. The connection between the two arose from personal contact between Cardinal d'Amboise and Bishop Fox, who are known to have met on several occasions in both France and England. Bishop Fox was himself in France for a number of years, first as a student in

Paris and then later in the entourage of Henry Tudor, before becoming a bishop in England following Henry's success at Bosworth Field.

Precisely when and how the St Cross stalls and frieze were created remains something of a puzzle. There is no documentary evidence for its creation, nor is there any for Silkstede's work. The St Cross frieze may have been carved in France to designs drawn by Italian artists, or carved in Winchester, although this would almost certainly have required skilled craftsmen to have been brought over from France for the purpose. By contrast, the stalls and desks at St Cross were more likely have been the work of English carpenters; the dolphins on the desk end-boards at St Cross are much cruder than those in the frieze, suggestive of less-skilled, although undoubtedly very able, craftsmen. These same carpenters may also have created for Prior Silkstede his suite of woodwork and used some of the design ideas in the St Cross frieze to create a relatively simple frieze for Silkstede. This would possibly explain the differences in quality of the carving of Silkstede's frieze compared to that of Fox's St Cross frieze. This divergence in quality is further emphasised by the clear symmetry of the St Cross frieze, whereas Silkstede's is less accomplished and technically inaccurate.

Similar problems surround the dating of both the St Cross frieze and Silkstede's. It is thought likely

that the St Cross frieze was created after Cardinal d'Amboise's death in 1510, perhaps by craftsmen who were, as a result, no longer employed at Gaillon, though there was plentiful work for them in France for both royal and aristocratic patrons, the chateaux in the Loire being a case in point, and probably before 1517 when St Cross was chosen as the setting for the inaugural reading of the statutes of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Thomas Silkstede's stalls most likely date to a roughly similar period and a date range 1510–15 is suggested. Both pieces are amongst the earliest known surviving examples of renaissance work in England and it may well be that Bishop Fox, rather than his royal master Henry VIII, was the first significant patron of this art form (Lewis 1996, 146–51).

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