



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

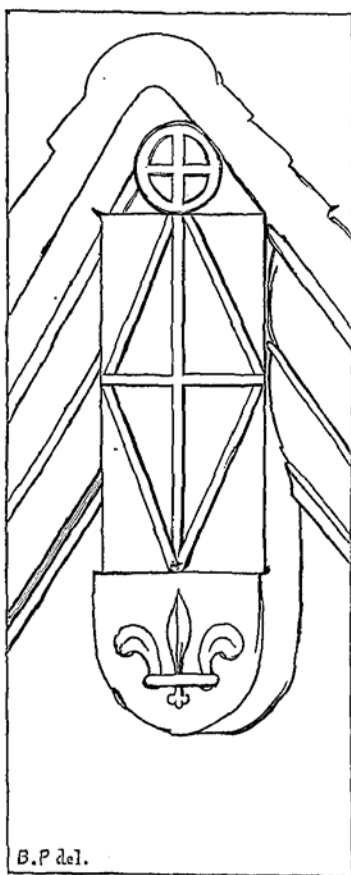
Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

SYMBOLISM OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN IN FORMER AGES AS REPRESENTED BY AN ANCIENT CARVING AT MAIDSTONE.

BY BEALE POSTE.

THE designation here assumed may be thought to be sufficiently borne out by the accompanying delineation, which represents a carving on a pendant to a gable of an ancient house, in Earl Street, Maidstone, and is about three feet and a half long. It is not easily seen from the street, by reason of some other buildings intervening; and at the time it was first noticed, in the beginning of the year 1858, perceiving that there were some delineations of an unusual character, and that it was not a common coat-of-arms that was intended, I wrote to a friend, then resident at Northampton, now at Maidstone, who, I well knew, be-



sides a knowledge of antiquities, was very intimately versed in heraldry and its collateral studies, and received a very satisfactory answer. His letter was dated February 2nd, and I here transcribe part of it, having permission so to do.

"My dear Sir,—It is doubtful if the very curious ornament on the pendant, of which you sent me the description, be the arms of any family. But as symbolism was as prevalent in those days as in the present with ecclesiologists, it may have had a religious origin. . . . On the accession of Queen Mary on the death of Edward VI., when Cranmer was examined before Broke, Martin accused him among other things of putting down the arms of Christ, and setting up the lion and the dog. The first of these particulars alluded to the Rood, and the second to substituting the royal arms, as indicative of the superseding of the papal authority by the royal supremacy. . . . Heraldically speaking, your pendant device would probably mean, emblematically, the arms of our Lady, with the fleur-de-lys, or lily, as the badge. . . . It is the fleur-de-lys that induces me to think it a symbolical affair; with the lozenge(-shaped) shield, and cross surmounting it, as well as the cross in the shield, etc.—Yours, etc., E. PRETTY."

This explanation of Mr. Pretty's fully meets my own ideas, and I feel that I cannot add anything to it with advantage to make it clearer. Nevertheless, two or three remarks may be suggested to confirm the appropriation.

In the first place it is sufficiently evident that the delineations on the pendant were not meant to be separate and unconnected objects, but to be combined together in one representation, whatever it might be. Secondly, there is no appearance of the usual escutcheon of a coat-of-arms, as hinted at before; which accordingly may be put out of the question.

It remains to say something respecting the house, which till about the last thirty years has always been a private dwelling, and is not a house of a large class, but of moderate size; such a one as would be suited to families of the middle station of life, whose pretensions were not high. It is mentioned in the Maidstone Manor Survey, in 1650, made for the then Earl of Winchilsea, when it was entered as belonging to Thomas Fletcher. However, a prior survey of the manor for the years 1510 and 1511, marked No. 1025 in the Lambeth Library, shows it to have been at that time, late the property of William Lille (Lilly), then deceased. It has been the property, in modern times, of Mr. Hodges, and since 1833, has been converted into a public-house, with the sign of "The Jolly Waterman," and is now belonging to Mr. Fremlin, having been purchased of the late Mr. Heathorne's executors. It is probably this William Lilly, or one of his family, whom we may regard as the setter up of the pendant and its emblems.

The relative situation of this building in the town of Maidstone is not without some import. It stood about eighty-one yards north-east of the ancient Brotherhood Hall of Corpus Christi, then in high repute and authority, and closely connected with the government of the town; there having been at that time no Act of Parliament obtained for its incorporation. This its position may perhaps have somewhat influenced the ornamentation of the house.

The motives of William Lilly, admitting him to have been the originator of this architectural ornament, were no doubt pious and reverential. But further, according to the fancies of that age, he was perhaps not displeased that the fleur-de-lys on the pendant formed a rebus to his name. His family, it is believed, had no armorial bearings.

The state of preservation of the carving, notwith-

standing the long time which must have elapsed since it was put up, is remarkably fresh and good.

There are mouldings on the verge-boards of the pediment to which the pendant belongs; also others on a projecting wall-plate at the base of the pediment. These all sufficiently bespeak the Tudor period, and therefore agree well with the date at which William Lilly lived.

The scope and design of the Brotherhood were, of course, to uphold the doctrine of the Real Presence, but the species of symbolism delineated on our pendant would be considered congenial. The reader may perhaps have observed in the accompanying woodcut, the ledge towards the lower part of the pendant, between the emblem of the fleur-de-lys and the lozenge-shaped shield; this is about one inch and three-quarters wide, a space broad enough to place sockets, or small stands, for tapers, such as were found during the alterations made in Maidstone Church in 1845, or otherwise small lamps may have served the purpose. These may be understood to have been placed here and lighted, at the usual annual festival of the Fraternity, which was held the Thursday after Trinity Sunday; the pendant and its symbolism being in as direct and full view from the Brotherhood hall as could possibly be.