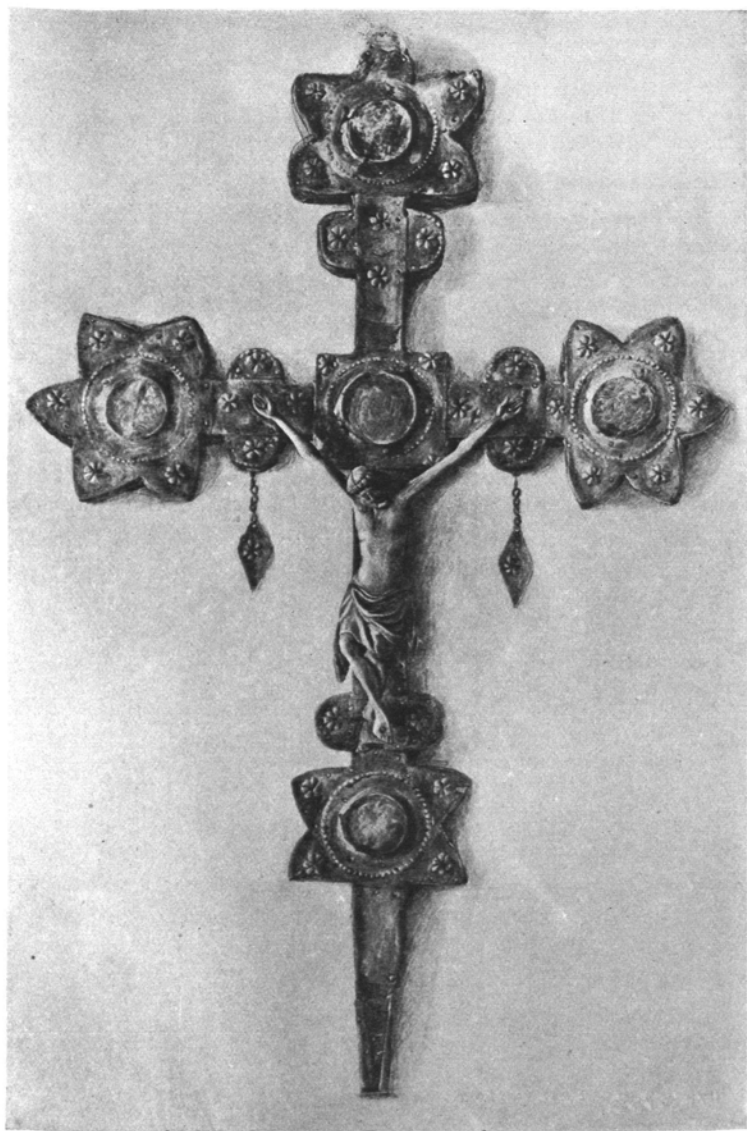




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CRUCIFIX FOUND AT WEST FARLEIGH.

A CRUCIFIX FROM WEST FARLEIGH.

BY AYMER VALLANCE.

THE Rev. Howard Chadwick, M.A., writing from Tunbridge Wells, kindly draws attention to a mediæval crucifix, which formerly belonged to West Farleigh Church, but which, since it has for thirty years past been kept in the British Museum, is likely enough to be overlooked as an antiquity associated in any way with the county of Kent.

It was found on 26th December, 1832, by the parish clerk, in the process of digging a grave in West Farleigh Churchyard, at a spot some 20 to 25 yards north of the north-east angle of the church. It lay in a niche or crevice in a wall, six feet below the surface of the ground. There, presumably, in days of iconoclasm it had been deposited for safe keeping by some person or persons, who meant it to stay only in temporary hiding until the danger should be over ; which in fact did not occur during their lifetime, so that the secret died with them, and lay buried in obscurity until the nineteenth century, when accident brought the crucifix to light again.

At the time of the discovery the Vicarage of West Farleigh was held by the Very Rev. Robert Stevens, D.D., Dean of Rochester, who, seeing that the woodwork which formed the basis of the cross had all perished, caused it to be renewed in oak as carefully as might be, under his personal superintendence ; the metal plates or laminations being then refixed to the new cross in the same way in which they had been fitted to the original. Dean Stevens was Vicar of West Farleigh until 1870. In February, 1898, his son and executor, Rev. C. A. Stevens, offered the crucifix to the Trustees of the British Museum, where it may now be seen in King Edward VII's gallery, Bay XIX, in a glass case

standing out from the north wall of the building. It is there labelled English work of the fifteenth century.

In construction, shape and detail, however, the cross is not of the type most commonly met with in native art of the period. It is not entirely of metal, but of thin sheets of brass or latten, covering a wooden foundation, or framework, of corresponding outline (the total thickness of wood and metal together slightly exceeding half an inch), a mode of treatment more familiar in Continental, especially Italian, than in English examples. The lobe-ended transverse pieces, and the five-pointed floriated extremities, again, are not features usual in English design. It is not easy to determine the exact date of the work, but it cannot be earlier than the fourteenth, nor later than the first quarter of the sixteenth, century. The cross has no base of its own, but is pointed or, in heraldic language, "fitched," to drop into the socket of a processional-cross staff or into the foot of a standing altar-cross. It was not unusual in the middle ages to make one and the same cross thus do duty for both purposes.

The dimensions are as follow :—total height $23\frac{1}{4}$ inches, including the five-inch-long point at the bottom ; while the traverse, or cross-arm, measures 15 inches wide. A rare feature is a pair of pendants or drops of metal, lozenge-shaped, hanging each by a short chain from the underside of the traverse.

The figure of the Christ is modelled in the round, and of solid bronze or latten, cast. The head, surrounded by a torse for crown of thorns, is bowed. The spear-wound is on the right side. The arms are stretched upward obliquely, so that the body hangs low, bringing the head considerably below the central point of the cross. The loin-cloth depends to the knees, and the feet are crossed over one another for fastening with a single nail.

There are five discs or medallions, one at the intersection, and one each at the extremities of the four limbs of the cross. These discs, chased and gilt, are protected by roundels of thickish glass, held in narrow bands of metal setting. The central disc measures $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter,

while the remaining discs are $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter. The subject of the central one is quite undecipherable ; but it is evident, from the remains extant, that the smaller discs should display the evangelistic symbols. The St. Mark, on the left hand of the Christ, is very clear ; while the lowest disc undoubtedly represents St. Matthew, leaving the other two (now no longer distinguishable) to occupy the normal positions, viz., the St. John at the top, and the St. Luke opposite to St. Mark.

The metal lamination has been described as decorated with repoussé, but it cannot be said that any coherent scheme of design is followed, the ornament simply consisting of little sexfoil rosettes punched at intervals with a die ; together with series of punched convex dots or pin-heads, which form an intermittent border to parts of the rim of the cross ; while a ring of similarly executed dots encircles each medallion.

If the front of the cross is in a fair state of preservation, the back is unfortunately not so sound. Much of the lamination at the back is defective—unmistakable evidence of the cross having formerly lain subjected, during its concealment, to the corroding action of damp.

The treatment of back and front respectively is not identical. There is no trace of a figure ever having been attached to the back, although, at the intersection, there is a round disc chased with a cruciform nimbus. The four extremities of the back are chased (in place of the glazed roundels of the front) with foiled circles of six sepals apiece.

An account of the crucifix, accompanied by an illustration in colour, is to be found in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Volume XXVIII (1872) ; but, as might be expected at such a date, the text is in many ways misleading and generally of little or no value, the writer, the Rev. S. M. Mayhew, instead of affording an accurate and matter-of-fact description of the object in front of his eyes, preferring to wander off and to indulge his fancy in unscientific speculation as to far-fetched symbolic interpretations and such-like futile conjectures.

The photograph for the accompanying illustration has been supplied by the Rev. Howard Chadwick, to whom grateful acknowledgment is hereby tendered; as also to Mr. O. M. Dalton, M.A., F.B.A., F.S.A., late keeper of British and Mediæval Antiquities in the British Museum, for his courtesy in allowing me facilities to handle and to examine the crucifix itself.