

1535 Inventory of the Hospital of St. Mary

Now the Maison Dieu

—Tim Boyton-Adams—

'The Inventory of all such goods and cattalls as be in the house called the MEASON DE DIEU, of DOUVER ...'

was subsequently enlarged and re-edified by the famous Victorian architect, William Burges, in the Neo-Gothic style.

Thus begins the 1535 inventory, taken on January 23rd of that year by John Antony for his master, Thomas Cromwell, and now in The National Archives, of the Hospital of St. Mary, commonly called the Maison Dieu or Domus Dei, Dover. The majority of us know it today as Dover Town Hall, currently undergoing extensive restoration and archaeological investigation of its Grade I listed structure. It originally functioned as a 'hospital' for the reception of poor priests, pilgrims and strangers, looked after by a master and brethren.

The chapel of 1227 was converted into a court room in the 19th century, but the inventory gives us a wonderful insight into what worshippers and visitors would have seen within its walls in the late mediaeval period. Even today, nearly 500 years later, armed with a copy of the inventory and standing in the court room, it is possible to get a better picture of its contents at that time. What the inventory doesn't mention, however, is the painted wall decoration that would have been evident, common-place at the time. Neither does it mention the windows, filled as they would have been with glass, either 'white' (clear) or coloured in image form and set in frames of lead.

An ancient foundation, the Hospital of St. Mary was established sometime in the very late 12th or, more likely, early 13th century, by Hubert de Burgh, Justiciar of England and Earl of Kent (c1170 - before 5th May 1243). It was first officially mentioned in 1221, when a grant of protection was issued for the brethren. It had a fine and spacious chapel in the Early English Style of Gothic Architecture completed in 1227, dedicated to St. Mary, with King Henry III attending its consecration that year. A further altar was dedicated to St. Edmund of Abingdon by St. Richard of Chichester in 1253, with King Henry III once again in attendance.

The Maison Dieu was a wealthy foundation. The five brethren that signed the 1535 inventory owned 1600 sheep, 119 bullocks and cows, 15 mares and colts, along with 14 horses and geldings and had, in ready money, £24 7s 6d. The chapel was richly furnished, too - the altar was hung around with '... iii Cortens of grene sylke', and although the inventory mentions '... ii candelstycks of sylver, parcel gylt, waying xx uncs ...', no doubt for the use of the main altar, they were to be found in the 'VESTRIE' at the time of John Antony's visit. The reference to 'parcell gylt' is a reminder that mediaeval silver was often partly gilded in gold to enhance the silver. There is also mention of '... a Crosse of Coper and gylt, with certeyn sylver plate about the same', the latter probably a reference to applied silver images attached to the body and arms of the cross.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the late 1530s, the Maison Dieu ceased its religious and charitable function in 1544, becoming a supply base and store for the Army and Navy until c1830. From 1834, after being purchased by the Corporation of Dover, it became Dover's Town Hall and

The inventory also lists '... iii chalyces of sylver and gylt, and one other of coper and gylt, waying xiii uncs', used in the celebration of the Mass by the priest at the altar to contain wine. He celebrated with his back to the congregation, lifting both the paten (a small plate holding the Host and doubling as 'lid' for the chalice), and the chalice itself high above his head at the Elevation for all to see and revere, as he uttered the words of Our Lord at the Last Supper, (the priest at that point in persona Christi), accompanied by the ringing of the Sacring Bell. During the mediaeval period, congregations took communion only once during the year, at around Easter-time, and then only under one kind, the consecrated host. Hence the bowls of mediaeval chalices were very small, since only the priest drank the contents. Attendance at Mass regularly to witness the Elevation was considered sufficient and as good as receiving Communion, it was widely believed.

The inventory also mentions a '... a paxe of sylver, parcel gylt, waying xv uncs' - the 'paxe' was a tablet of precious metal, which often included an image of the crucified Christ, passed about for the congregation to kiss. Paxes originated in the early Christian custom of members of the congregation giving each other a kiss of peace. At an uncertain date, but no later than 1250, the custom was modified in England and the paxe became an object which was passed around the congregation to be kissed, known variously as an *osculatorium* or a *tabula pacis*. Very few of them have survived, though there is one dated c1400, showing the crucified Christ accompanied by Our Lady and St. John, in copper alloy, in the museum at Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. Numerous mediaeval literary references to quarrels over the order of precedence for the kissing of the pax survive. Attacked by English Protestants,

the ceremony was finally abolished during the latter 16th century.

The inventory records '... ii Sensers, and a ship of sylver, parcel gylt, waying ixxv uncs'. The burning of incense was a fundamental part of mediaeval devotion, and a censer or thurible, swung from chains by the thurifer, enabled the cloud of incense to rise high during services, taking the prayers of the devout heavenwards. The 'ship of sylver' was a container for the incense to supply the censer when required - they are still often referred to today as incense boats. Interestingly, a reference is also made to '... ii cruetts, whereof one is of byrrall, garnyshshed with sylver and gilt, and the other of silver and gylt, waying vii uncs'. A cruet was a container to hold water or wine and often came in pairs for the priest to use during the celebration of Mass. The reference to 'byrrall' almost certainly refers to beryl - both a precious stone and a form of natural glass.

The vestments used by the clergy are itemised in some detail in John Antony's inventory, for example '... ii Copes of black velvet, with a vestment for a preyst, decon, and subdeakon ...'. A cope was a large half circle cloak, used in processions by the celebrant, accompanied by deacon and sub-deacon, each wearing vestments (Mass-robos) appropriate for the occasion and liturgical season, black being almost exclusively worn for funerals. Also mentioned are '... v copes of cloth gold, with a vestment for a priest, decon and subdeakon, with thappurtenances the grownde of blew velvett'. Cloth of gold was a very expensive material, using pure gold strands in the weaving process - 'thappurtenances' refer to the items worn by the celebrant under the chasuble (vestment) consisting of alb, amice, stole, maniple and girdle. The inventory mentions other vestments variously made

of 'crymson velvett', 'grene clothe of bawdekyn', 'whyte sylke, embrodered with byrds of grene sylke', 'red sylke embrowdered with byrds of golde', 'olde whyte fustian, with a Grosse of red saye'. Some of these cloths may need some explanation for the modern reader – 'bawdekyn', a rich cloth made of gold and silk threads, originally from Baghdad, 'Fustyan' was a thick hard-wearing twilled cloth and. 'Saye' an English woollen cloth made in the East Anglian region around Sudbury. No doubt all of these copes and vestments would have been stored in specially constructed cope chests, like those that survive in the Pyx Chamber at Westminster Abbey, dating from the late 12th and 13th centuries, heavy and iron-bound to safeguard against theft. Of course, all of these expensive materials would only have been on show for High Days and Holy Days - the vestments used every day would have been like those recorded, touchingly, I think: '... ix olde vestments, with all thyng thereto belonging, occupied dailye'.

Finally, the entry for the chapel concludes with the following '... iiii aide carpets, of tapestreye, to be laid before the aluter' ... ii carpets of red wollen, and ii whyte wollen and iii other carpets, to be laid before alters' and, my favourite, '... ii cusschons made of an olde cope, and ii other olde cushions'. The reference to cushions made from an old cope is interesting; people in the Middle Ages, up to the middle of the 16th century, often bequeathed expensive items of clothing in their wills to churches and religious houses for re-working as Mass vestments or cushions for the priest to sit upon in his stall. In this instance, however, it was the reworking of an old cope to provide that all-important priestly cushion.

This is what inventories of the past provide for us today - a window through which we can view a long lost world, colourful and lively, irrespective of their matter-of-fact recording on a particular day, in a particular month, in a particular year.

Dover Wombles

Deborah Gasking

Dover Wombles is growing; we now have over two dozen members in our WhatsApp group. Also, we have recently launched a public group on Facebook. This too is attracting new members.

Our latest projects:

Planting 500 geraniums and ten yucca plants in Pencester Gardens in time for the Jubilee Party in the Park. These are in the arc behind the bus stops, and look rather splendid

Alongside the River Dour, near the carpark at the rear of the Town Hall carpark, there are some concrete planters. Dover Town

Council allowed us to bring life into them.

We weeded, then collected several sacks of manure which were dug in and watered again, offering the worms access to the dry soil below. This was left for a few weeks to allow everything to settle and mingle.

Then we planted bulbs and some small shrubs - which looked a little inadequate. Jemma Jenkinson, Morrisons' Community Champion has come to our rescue and has offered several more shrubs, which I will grow on in my back garden before planting out.