

THE PEWTER COLLECTING BOXES AT BUNBURY CHURCH

By
MAURICE H. RIDGWAY, F.S.A.

The history of Christian collecting boxes must surely date from the bag which Judas held at the Last Supper. It is not the purpose of this paper to trace that history, but rather to describe two pewter collecting boxes which, along with two others, appear to be unique in the country. Since however there is often confusion when references are made to such things as alms dishes, offertory boxes, collecting pans, shovels and plates, it is well first to give a brief introduction to the subject to unravel in part the different functions often ascribed to the various receptacles. An all embracing definition would have to be, "something into which money is placed". There was, and of course still is, a particular significance attached to such money in the Church. In Catholic practice, Anglican and Roman, it forms part of the Offertory in worship, consequently the ways in which it has been collected from the faithful and offered have varied considerably down the ages, and have often moulded the very shapes and convenience of such containers. There is for example the 'Poors Box' or 'Poor Men's Box'. Originally this box was not used as it is today, for the odd coppers of occasional visitors, for the rubric of the 1552 Prayer Book directs.....

Then shal the Church wardens.....gather the devotion of the people, and put the same into the poremens boxe.....

The final resting place of the money was probably the iron bound chest near the first step of the presbytery having three locks, ordered by the injunctions of 1547. In 1549, at the time of the first Prayer Book in English it seems the congregation actually went to the box and deposited their alms whilst the offertory sentences were being read at Mass. The confusion which this must have caused may have accounted for the new direction in the second English Prayer Book a few years later, whilst in 1662 a new rubric appears directing the Churchwardens to.....

.....receive the Alms for the Poor and other devotions of the people in a decent Bason, to be provided by the Parish for that purpose and reverently bring it to the Priest who shall humbly present and place in upon the holy Table.....

Here again we are being introduced to another form of receptacle.

Throughout this period Bunbury had a Poors Box and the Churchwardens' accounts refer to it and how it was at times treated.....

1657 It Pd. to a joyner for mendinge the Church Booxe
8/-.

1658 Pd to Richard Nixon for mendinge the Poore Mans
Box 1/-.

1659 Pd for two locks for the Poore mans boxe 2/-.

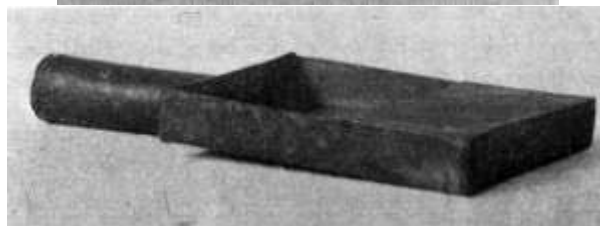
1708 Paid Ralph Povall for lock & keys for the poores
box.....

(these are half accounts)

The word "bason" which occurs in the rubric is a curious one and it is abundantly clear in inventories that the same word does not always refer to the same article. At other times the same article appears to have gone by different names even in the same locality. This happens over the two pewter collecting boxes at Bunbury. The Wardens refer to the earlier one (in 1692) as a box to collect in, but in 1732 when another was made to match it they refer to it as 'a new bason to gather briefs'. Almost a hundred years later when the same design was copied in oak by the local joiner George Large the account reads.....

1830/1 Paid George Large's Bill for 10 collecting boxes at 2/- £1.

Unfortunately very few early collecting boxes and plates have survived, but Bunbury has an interesting variety, commencing with the two pewter boxes, a small stack of pewter dishes of various types and probably domestic in origin, two silver offertory plates made by Richard Bayley of London in 1737 and the ten oak collecting boxes mentioned above. It is fortunate that the Wardens' accounts have preserved a clue to the use to which at least one of the pewter boxes, was put at Bunbury namely 'to gather briefs'. Having been lost for many years the two pewter boxes were found about 1900 boarded up in a 17th century table which had in some way been converted into a vestry cupboard. They were then kept in the home of the sexton Mr. Samson Mosford and later passed into the keeping of the late Mr. Charles Cummins of Gosland Green Farm, who very fortunately preserved them until they were restored to the church once more in 1950. Their reappearance made it possible for them to be exhibited at a private meeting of the Society of Pewter Collectors at Chester in July 1953 where their importance was immediately recognised. The Malpas and Tushingam boxes were exhibited at the same time. No further specimens in pewter are known to exist and the maker's marks on the Bunbury boxes had not before been recorded.



The earlier Bunbury box measures 20.5 cms by 13.2 cms wide and 3.3 cms deep. The bottom and two longer sides are made from one sheet of pewter the ends being added. 8.5 cms is covered in forming a pocket on which is the inscription engraved with amateur flourishes in cursive script.....

Daniel
Craven

Churchwardins

Thomas
ffinchit
1692

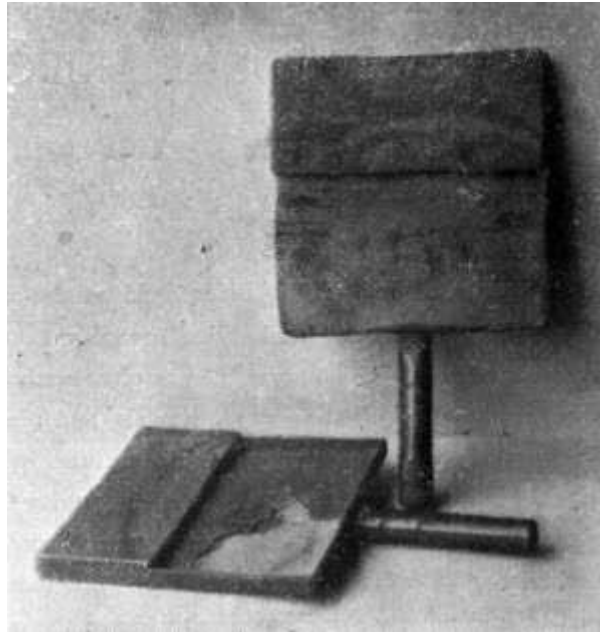
The box weighs 2 lbs.2.5 ozs The round handle is 12.5 cms in length with a diameter of 4 cms splaying out towards the end to 4.4 cms and is hollow. It carries three sets of simple raised bands and is strengthened within the hollow core by a platform 5.6 cms from the end. The handle has been damaged. To give added strength the handle is constructed so that a tongue of pewter passes beneath the box to a distance of 7 cms.



The small touchmark of the maker is stamped on the floor of the box and consists of a five petal Tudor rose surmounted by a crown. The Roman capitals R S are placed one on each side of this device, and the whole is set within a circle of 34 small pellets. This mark has not before been recorded. The Wardens' accounts record the purchase of this box as follows.....

1692 It for one box to collect in 6/6 (half account).

The later Bunbury specimen was made in 1732, the design being based upon the 1692 box though it differs in certain points of construction, the end opposite the handle being part of the sheet from which the base and sides were formed.



The box measures 19.8 cms by 12.8 cms and is 3.1 cms deep. 8.4 cms of the box is covered in forming a pocket. This has been repaired at some time but retains the inscription which reads.....

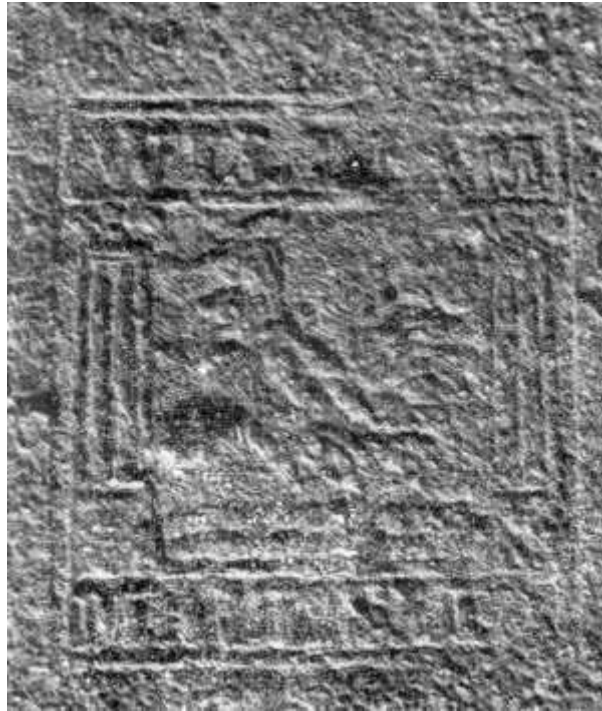
John Fenna

Churchwardins

James Done

1732

The box weighs 1 lb. 11.5 ozs. The hollow handle is 12.3 cms in length, the end being stopped. Two, simple narrow raised bands terminate the handle. A strengthening tongue extends beneath the box to a distance of 6.9 cms. The maker's mark is stamped on the floor of the box. It consists of a square containing a cock facing left and standing between two fluted columns with captials. Above in Roman capitals is the name WILLIAM and below in similar characters is the surname MAUDSLEY.



The mark which measures 1.9 cms by 2 cms has not before been recorded. The late Howard H, Cotterell in his monumental work 'Old Pewter, its Makers and Marks' 1929, refers to William Maudsley of Nantwich though he gives no example of his mark, and also no indication of the source of the information that Maudsley was 'insolvent in 1737'. The Bunbury Churchwardens' accounts give some further information about the place of origin and the use of this box.

1732 Pd for a new Bason to gather briefs and repairing ye old 1's 3/-. Spent at taking them to Namptwich & fetching them home 6d. (this is a half account).

A search of the Nantwich Church Registers discloses the following information about the Maudsley family.....

Matrimony. Feb. 1730/1 William Maudsley & Martha Becket by licence from Mr. Harwar, dat Feby 18.

A daughter of this marriage was baptised Feb. 3 1731/2. Mary dau of William Maudsley Pewterer.

No further mention of the family can be found in the Registers and if Cotterell's information is correct William Maudsley probably ended his days elsewhere.

The mention of 'old 1's, and 'them' in these accounts is puzzling, and yet the double mention of the plural does not seem to indicate a slip on the part of the Wardens when making up the accounts. The price for this 'brief bason' is remarkably low at 6/- compared with the earlier one at 13/- Small wonder William Maudsley did not prosper!

We may assume that both boxes were for collecting briefs, the additional collections made especially in 17th and 18th centuries (see Bunbury Paper No. 2) as the result

of Letters Patent being issued, taking the place of what would now be termed the week's good cause.

This paper seems to present a good opportunity for putting on record a description of the two other known pewter collecting boxes. These are now in separate parishes, but both once belonged to the Parish of Malpas, Cheshire, where one still remains. The other is at Tushingham, once part of the Parish. As both these boxes were gifts to the Parish no reference is found to them in the Malpas Churchwardens' Accounts. They were made at the same time by the pewterer whose mark is identical on each box. These marks seem to indicate that they were the work of either Thomas Smith or John French, both London pewterers, but without the main touch (which is lacking) the secondary marks of these men cannot be distinguished at present.

The pocket of the Tushingham box has the inscription in cursive script.....

Ms Jane Brereton of Tushingham Widdow gave this box for the use of this Parish 1678.

That of the Malpas box.....

Samuel Grafton Freeman of London and Whitechurch gave this Box for the use of this Parish 1678.

(the missing words have been worn away and recently published suggestions that one was 'Mayor' are obviously wrong).

The outstanding characteristic of these boxes is their very shallow depth of only 1 cm; Bunbury, presumably with greater faith in man's generosity, made their's three times deeper. In all other respects the boxes are the same. 16.5 cms by 17 cms and 1 cm deep with the pocket covering 7.2 cms of the box. The handle appears to be solid and extends 11 cms with a strengthening tongue passing beneath the box for 8 cms. Diameter of handle 2.3 cms without any ornament. The box has in each case been pieced together from several strips of sheet pewter 2 mm in thickness. The four imitation silver marks are on the floor of the box, and each weighs 2 lbs. The Tushingham box is damaged, and needs repair to one side which has become detached. The pewterer's marks have become so heavily scaled with oxide that without the other box for comparison it would have been extremely difficult to decipher the marks at all.

The Author wishes to thank the Society of Pewter Collectors for their encouragement, and especially the Librarian, Ronald F. Michaelis, for considerable help in preparing this Paper. He also wishes to thank Donald Good, of Tattenhall, for supplying three of the photographs which illustrate this Paper.