

York Minster

Friday afternoon, 16 July

The furniture and woodwork in the Minster lived up to our high expectations and Jane Geddes's book, *Medieval Decorative Ironwork* (1999) proved helpful in understanding it. The fine scrolling ironwork on the outside of the lattice-braced door to the chapter house, dated by Geddes to 1285, seemed never to have been detached (as seems to have occurred on the Chester Cathedral armoire). The pierced wooden tracery doors which lead to the chapter house had three hinges which were not in use, suggesting at least a refitting.

The pair of cope chests with elaborate decorative ironwork attracted great interest. The left hand one (Geddes's Chest II) had signs of red paint on the curved side. The side is made from a single bent board and the lids are of five boards. The right hand chest (I) has leather on top and underneath the lid, and the lids are of a single board. Geddes dates both chests to the 1280s but considers that the ironwork of chest I ('decidedly coarse and heavy [and] in immaculate condition', p. 114) is 14th century. She dates the detached, tall, crenellated, dark-stained armoire in the consistory court and the sets of unstained (built-in) aumbries in the adjacent Zouche chapel to c.1400, based on building evidence and their metalwork. Their long thin strap hinges with rosettes and ending in fleurs-de-lys are finer than those on the cupboard in the Westminster Abbey muniments room, which is of similar date. Members felt the consistory court cupboard had been an aumbry and that it had an added tall, undivided, section on the right side: Geddes considers it has always been free-standing.

The clamp-fronted 1m 90-long St George and Dragon chest was the high point of the visit for me. It has



Cope chest. This chest can be compared with the cope chest at Wells Cathedral (see Newsletter 52, Spring 2010)



Detail of the scrolled ironwork on the chapter house door

undergone some adaptation and regrettably was locked. Its carving is of the same quality as the similar, smaller Harty 'tilting' chest. The timber is in surprisingly good condition, the lock-plate is original, and it has the inward-sloping front, back and sides seen on the 'Kentish Gothic' and Litcham chests. Considered Flemish (there are two similar chests in Belgium), it has similarities with the Boughton Monchelsea chest sold at Christie's SK in November 1999 and dendro- dated to c.1445 (see Victor Chinnery's catalogue note). The lid has a solid frame with true mitre joints and stopped chamfering. This was unexpected given that in English furniture and woodwork true mitre joints are considered a post-c.1540 development and may support the Flemish attribution.

Last, and most intriguing, was a 2m 70-long low piece of furniture with five cupboards opening on either side or at one end. It lacks a top that may have been used as a table or counter. It has heavy moulded framing with mason's mitre joints and, given the long thin strap hinges, must be a rare example of pre-1500 framed furniture (framing was used in fixed woodwork such as church screens much earlier).

There were other interesting pieces such as a trapezoid travelling chest with decorative ironwork (see Sherlock, *Suffolk Church Chests*, p. 101 suggesting a German 17th century origin), and 17th century mural cupboards, but a 16th century X-framed chair was away being conserved.

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