

# A medieval domed chest in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums

A medieval chest, previously held in store in the Burrell Collection, has been selected for display when the museum, currently closed for a major refurbishment, re-opens in Spring 2021. Purchased by Sir William Burrell from the London dealer, S. W. Wolsey, in 1954, with no details of provenance, the chest was described by Wolsey as East Anglian c. 1350. This attribution was on the basis of similar chests in Suffolk churches, published by Cescinsky and Gribble, *Early English furniture and woodwork*, vol. II (1922).

Using Chris Pickvance's analysis of domed chests in Kent, Suffolk and some Continental museums, the Burrell chest can be seen to fall in his Type B category, with six or more vertical iron straps, forming a grid and

dating to c. 1400–1500 (see Pickvance, C. G., 'Medieval domed chests in Kent: a contribution to a national and international study', *Regional Furniture*, vol. 26 (2012), pp. 105–47, fig. 6). He argues that the distinctive features of the domed chests point to a Continental tradition. They were probably produced in parts of Poland or Germany which were then Prussia, imported from the Baltic area to England through eastern ports.

Recent conservation by Lyndsay MacKinnon, Project Furniture Conservator, involving removal of surface dirt and some stabilisation, has revealed punched decoration on areas of the ironwork and in the underlying wooden substrate where the metal is lost. Grooves on the inner box end indicate the former presence of a till. The box is made from pine boards and the dug-out hinged lid is hollowed out from a trunk also made of light hardwood. The chest is held together and given extra protection by nine vertical iron straps, forming a grid over the four horizontal straps which wrap around the corners, over



Burrell Collection chest (14.375), front view. H 25½ in (65 cm), W 52¾ in (134 cm), D 23½ in (60 cm). © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection



Burrell Collection chest, left hand end view showing punched decoration. © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

angle irons with linear punched decoration; the box ends have three vertical iron bands with two staples through which suspension chains with ring terminals are fixed; an iron flange also decorated with a punched linear pattern covers the end grain of the lid. The nails that fasten the iron bands to the chest are of two types: round-headed nails and nails with a rectangular head and two angled faces, known as gabled nails, used to attach the lid bands. The chest had a single central lock, of which the lock plate survives but not the lock flap, and on either side staples over which two hasps hinged to the lid would have fitted; one staple survives but neither of the hasps are present. The lock plate is plain, deeply concave-sided with a flared hasp guard above an oval finial with notched edge.

With thanks to Lindsay Gordon, Conservator of Furniture, Glasgow Museums, for her advice. For further information please email [lindsay.gordon@glasgowlife.org.uk](mailto:lindsay.gordon@glasgowlife.org.uk)

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