

St Mary's in the Middle Ages – 1

In 1873 was published the 3rd *Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, which includes a valuable summary of the Bridgwater Borough Archives.¹ It includes the following transcription of an inventory of the vestments and plate of St Marys, October 1447. It is written in medieval English, so I have modernised each entry to make them better understood.

Of special interest is the amount of colour and ornamentation of the vestments. The church walls and statuary would have been vibrant colour. At this time there were a number of Chantry chapels in the church. All this was lost at the Reformation, of course.

A newspaper report at the time of the Victorian re-ordering noted that traces of colour could still be seen in the carvings of the Tudor pulpit. But all this was carefully scraped away then and the wood blackened.

Service books are mentioned as well as choristers. The enormous collection of the Borough Archives, now in the archive office at Taunton, contains detached sheets from medieval service books used to bind later Borough records. Some scholars suggest they came from Glastonbury Abbey at the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Perhaps they are wrong and they came from St Mary's.

The Borough Archives contain much more about St Mary's then, including a series of Churchwardens' Accounts detailing building work.

Tony Woolrich. 01/09/2019



A paper writing, in the form of an Indenture, to the following effect. —

“The delyverauns of the Goodys of the Chirchis of Briggwater, by the Vycary William atte Well, Johan Sely, and others, to Johan Martyne and William Snothe, Wardens of the seide chirche, the yere of oure Lord MCCCCXLVII the iiii day off October :

The deliverance of the Goods of the Church in Bridgwater by the Vicar, William at Well, John Sely and others to John Martyn and William Snothe, Wardens of the said church, in the year of our Lord MCCCCXLVII [,] [1447] the 3rd day of October.

“In primis, i crosse with ii ymages of Mare and Johan, of sylvere and gylte — *First, 1 cross with images of Mary and John, of silver and gilt.*

Item, I ffote and i staffe to the same crosse, of coper and gylte. — *1 foot and staff to the same cross in silver and gilt.*

Item, i demonstracion [monstrance, or ostensory] for the Sacrement, off sylvere and gylte. — *1 monstrance for the Sacrament of silver and gilt.*

Item, ii sensurys off sylvere, with ii casis. — *2 sensuraries of silver with 2 cases.*

Item, iiii chalys of sylvere and gylte. — *2 chalices of silver and gilt.*

Item, ii crewetes of sylvere. — *2 cruets of silver.*

Item, ii candelstikkis of sylvere. — *2 candlesticks of silver.*

Item, i crismatory of sylvere gylte. — *1 chrismatory of silver gilt.*

Item, i schip [incense boat] off sylvere. — *1 incense boat of silver.*

Item, ii crossis of latone and gylte. — *2 crosses of brass and gilt.*

Item, vi corporas — *6 corporas. [Communion cloth]*

Item, iiii casis. — *4 cases.*

Item, i rede purse of veluet with i corporas therin. — *1 red purse of velvet with 1 corporas therein.*

Item, i relique of Seynt Stephyn, closed in sylvere. — *1 reliquary of Saint Stephen, closed in silver.*

Item, ii coupis of sylvere for the Sacramente. — *2 copes of silver for the Sacrament.*

Item, i box of latone for the Sacrament. — *1 box of brass for the Sacrament.*

Item, ii candelstikkis of latone. — *2 candlesticks of brass.*

Item, broke syivere in a box. — *broke silver in a box.*

Item, i holy waterboket, with a spryngell of latone. — *1 holy water bucket with a brass sprinkler.*

Item, iiii massebokys. — *3 massbooks.*

Item, a Grayles “[Gradal]. — *a Gradual.*

Item, ii Proceessionaries. — *2 Processionaries.*

Item, i Pystolar [Epistolar]. — *1 Epistolar.*

Item, i Colitare [Collectary]. — *1 Collectary.*

Item, i Mortylage [Martyrology]. — *1 Martyrology.*

Item, i Antihoner tofore Seynt Mare preste. — *1 Antiphony before St Mary's priest.*

Item, i Portas [Portehors, or Portifory] of the bequest of Will. Hurste. — *1 Portifory of the bequest of Will. Hurste .*

Item, i Antiphoner before the Dekyn. — *1 Antiphony before the Deacon.*

Item, i Manuell. — *1 Manual.*

Item, i Ordynall. — *1 Ordinal.*

Item, i seute of vestementes callid the gylte seute. — *1 suit of vestments called the gilt suit.*

Item, ii copis, i chesepill [chesuble], ii tunyclis with other ornamentes of blew veluet, with lipardys hedys of golde, that Alexander Hody yaffe inne [gave in]. — *2 copes, 1 chasuble, 1 tunic with other ornaments of blue velvet, with a leopard's head of gold that Alexander Hody gave in.*

Item, i cope of white damaske with eglis of gold displayed, that Johan Cosyn yaf inne. — *1 cope of white damask with gold eagles displayed that John Cosyn gave in.*

Item, i hole scute of clothe of golde callid Bonndys seute. — *1 whole suit of cloth of gold calle Bonndys suit.*

Item, i seute of grene sylke, callid Hursty's vestementes. — *1 suit of green silk called Hurst's vestments.*

Item, ii rede copis for chauntours. — *2 red copes for choristers.*

Item, ii yelow copis for chauntours of borde Alexander [Perhaps] colour of sandal wood] — *2 yellow copes for choristers a with border of Sanders Red.*

Item, i seute of grene sylke withoute cope. — *1 suit of green silk without cope.*

Item, iii copis, i chesepill, ii tunyclis with sterris [stars] of sylke. — *3 copes, 1 chasuble, 2 tunics with stars of silk.*

Item, ii olde grene copis. — *2 old green copes.*

Item, i olde pall of sylke. — *1 old pall of silk.*

Item, i olde cope of purpur. — *1 old cope of purple.*

Item, i auter clothe of rede damaske. — *1 altar cloth of red damask.*

Item, i veyle for Lente. — *1 veil for Lent.*

Item, alle thapareyll for the hye auter of conterfet damaske, with lipardes of golde. — *All the apparel for the high altar of counterfeit damask with gold leopards.*

Item, i clothe to hange aboue the hye auter with the xii Appostolis. — *1 cloth to hang above the high altar with the 12 Apostles.*

Item, ii dox [desk] clothis. — *2 desk cloths.*

Item, v auter clothis, with v frountelles. — *5 altar cloths with 5 frontals,*

Item, i seute of ray [striped] grene sylke. — *1 suit of striped green silk.*

Item, i Sepulchre clothe. — *1 Sepulchre cloth.*

Item, i peynted clothe of rede, with i ymage offe oure Lady. — *1 painted cloth of red with 1 image of our Lady.*

Item, iii coverlytes, bad and gode. — *3 coverlets, bad and good.*

Item, xvi pilowys of sylke. — *16 pillows of silk.*

Item, x auter clothis of playne and napery. — *10 altar cloths of plain and napery,*

Item, xviii towelles playne and diaperid. — *18 towels plain and diapered.*

Item, ii auter clothis dysteyned, of the Assumpcioun offe oure Lady. — *2 altar cloths destined for the Assumption of our Lady.*

Item, i auter clothe of the Passioun." — *1 altar cloth of the Passion.*

The above is written in a firm clear hand; the following is added, in two hands of inferior merit:

i peyre of white vestementes for Lente; — *1 pair of white vestments for Lent.*

i white cloth for the hie auter for Lente, with ii curteyns of bustian to the same; — *1 white cloth for the high altar for Lent, with 2 curtains of fustian for the same.*

i white tynacle of fustian; — *1 white tunic of fustian.*

i white cloth for the high auter, with a crosse of blew bokeram; — *1 white cloth for the high altar with a cross of blue buckram.*

i stenyd cloth to hang by fore the auter, yn the rode lofte. — *1 stained cloth to hang before the altar in the rood loft.²*

Item, there lackyth iii towellys. — *there lack 3 towels.*

Item, there lackyth ii helyngys [coverlets]. — *there lack 2 coverlets.*

Item, there (lackyth) ii aubys [albs]. — *there lack 2 albs.*

Item, there [lackyth] iiii amycys." — *there lack 4 amices.*

In a fourth hand is added. —

i white cloth to hang, by fore the crosse yn the rode lofte; — *1 white cloth to hang before the cross in the rood loft*

i old Lent cloth to be put uppone Sent George." — *1 old Lent cloth to be out upon St George.*

Endorsed — "Bonorum Ecclesiae de Brigwater." — *The Church goods of Bridgwater*

Notes

1 The text of the full Royal Commission reports may be found on the Bridgwater Heritage website — <http://www.bridgwaterheritage.org.uk/bridgwaterarchives.org.uk/Archives/Archives.html>. The archives between 1200 and 1485 were transcribed by the Bridgwater historian, T. Bruce Dilks, (1865-1949) and published in 5 volumes by the Somerset Record Society in 1933-1971. The introductions provide a valuable insight into the development of the medieval town. He also wrote a series of papers about the medieval town which are also posted here.

2. The Rood loft was at the chancel arch, and had its own altar. The hook from which the Rood (a sculpture of the crucified Christ) was suspended can still be seen. In 1700 an organ was placed here, and the entire loft and screen was removed in the Victorian re-ordering, opening up the east end of the church.

