

MEDIEVAL GOLD AND SILVER PLATE

Many testators bequeathed silver or silver-gilt cups, bowls, basins and ewers, plates, salt-cellars and spoons for domestic use. Some had silver pieces for religious purposes, such as chalices, paxes and stoups for holy water.

Flowers and animals were favoured decorative motifs:

A standing cup covered parcell gilt and chaced with a facon on the knopp ... A little lowe cup of silvere and gilte with roses aboute the fote ... A silver standing cup and cover with the figure of an eagle on the top ... My salte saler of silvere with borders gilt with the covereyng therto of silvere with a squyrell sett on the knopp of the same covereyng ... A standing cup of silver and parcel gilt worked with *hony sokills*, roses and *fleures de lices* ... a maser standing on three lions of silver and gilt ... a silver gilt cup with a cover engraved with dragons ...

Heraldic devices were also used:

I woll that my wif have ... a bason of silvere in myddes whereof is her armes and myn and an ewer of silver to the same upon the keveryng whereof been myn armes ...

Religious motifs are often found:

A standyng cupp kevered chaced silvere and parcell gilt with a trynyte in the botom ... my flat cupp kevered of silvere graven with Ave Maria ... a maser standing on three lions of silver and gilt and the cover belonging to it garnished with silver, with a silver and gilt image of St George placed at the top ... a maser with a silver gilt bonde and with a bossell with the name of Jesus enamelled upon it ... a large flatt basyn of silver with a gilt holy lambe in the botome ...

Occasionally there is a reminder of pagan symbols:

To my son William twelve silver spoons with *woodwoses* on *lez knoppes* ...

The piece's pedigree may be set out:

To the reverend lady the abbess of Shaftesbury a silver and gilt cup which the noble Duke of Clarence gave to me out of his goodwill ... My grete parise pece with the coveryng, the which pece and coveryng I have of my brother, the which he hadde of one sir Thomas some tyme parson of Flamsted in Hertfordshyre but I wott not veryly how my brother come thereby ... To my son William a goblet which Walter late abbott of Keynsham his godfader yaf me for hym ...

Occasionally, the piece is reverting to its original female owner or her daughter:

to Dame Margarete my wiff ... all the plate and goodes which I hadde with her ... To Isabell my wiff ... a goblett of silver and gilt ... which was heir moders veyng Lvij unce and an half ...

Some men were concerned that plate should remain within the family:

To each of my kinsmen and relatives ... a silver spoon weighing one ounce ... and I will that all those spoons remain with my kindred as long as they last. If anyone should wish to give, bequeath or sell a spoon, he should give, bequeath or sell it to another of the family, or kin, so that it is not removed from our blood relatives ...