

EAST COMBE TREASURE TROVE

During the demolition of some thatched cottages at East Combe, near Bishops Lydeard, early in 1957, workmen employed by the Somerset County Council found ten silver spoons. These had been concealed in the thatch and it was during its removal for burning that their presence was discovered. A quantity of the thatch had already been removed and burnt before the first spoon was noticed and it may well be that others had been hidden but taken away in the thatch and consequently lost in the fire.

It was some weeks before I heard of their discovery and upon enquiry I learnt that the constable in the Dulverton area had collected all ten from the workmen and had handed them over to the Police Headquarters at Taunton.

Through the co-operation of H.M. Coroner, Western Division, Mr. P. E. G. Smith, and Superintendent Hamer, I was given the opportunity to examine them and authorised by the Coroner to take them to the British Museum¹ for examination and valuation.

Subsequently a treasure trove inquest was held in Taunton with a jury empanelled from residents in the East Combe and Bishops Lydeard area, and on the evidence given the verdict of the jury was that they were "treasure trove" and the coroner seized them on behalf of her Majesty the Queen.

A find of this kind is of considerable importance to a County Museum and it was felt that every effort should be made to acquire them if they were not wanted for the National Collection. The British Museum most generously waived its right to them so that the Museum could purchase them. The figure of £500 was fixed by the British Museum on behalf of the Treasury. An appeal for the money was made to members of the Society. Through the most generous actions of three or four members the major part was not long in forthcoming. The Spoons were acquired and will, in due course, be exhibited in the Museum.

It is interesting to note that this find is the largest number of 17th century spoons ever found as a hoard, and details of them are as follows :

(1) Apostle spoon of St. Mathias carrying an axe and with a holy dove nimbus. The back of the bowl pricked with initials I.S. and C.P. 1641.

London Hall-marks. The date letter P is of an uncertain cycle but may be for 1612/13. Maker's mark R.O. (or R.C.) with three pellets above and a star below all in a shield.

An apostle spoon with London Hall-marks for 1635/36 with the same maker's mark was in the Goddard Collection. (Jackson, p. 119).

(2) Apostle spoon of the Master giving the blessing with his right hand. The plain nimbus is pricked with initials M.N. and M.P. and the date 1638.

Hall-marked in the bowl with a "T." The same mark appears on the back of the stem together with the leopard of England and a large D.

(3) Apostle spoon with uncertain attributes and plain nimbus pricked with initials C.B. and C.P. and date 1640.

Hall-marked as No. 2. Jackson does not attribute the T mark to any locality although a somewhat different T he attributes to Truro.²

(4) Seal-top spoon with baluster chased with foliage. Seal pricked with initials S.S. and R.P. and date 1632.

Hall-marked in the bowl with a crowned X between pellets in a circle for Exeter. Maker's mark : E over A for Edward Anthony. Both marks occur c. 1620.

(5) & (6) A pair of seal-top spoons with baluster chased with foliage. Seals pricked 1643 I.S. and I.P. : H.P. 1643 I.P.

Each hall-mark once in the bowl and thrice on the back of the stem with the same circular mark containing a foliated cross, equal-armed, between four pellets. It appears to be unrecorded.

(7) Seal-top spoon with baluster chased with foliage. Seal pricked : M.D. 1638 M.P.

Marked with same mark a monogram T.C. (or T.G.) in a shield ; once in the bowl and three times on the back of the stem.

(8) Seal-top spoon with baluster chased with foliage. Seal pricked with initials G.L. and the back of the bowl with the initials G.P. and 1636.

Marked with the mark R.W. once in the bowl and three times on the back of the stem.

(9) Seal-top with baluster chased with foliage. Seal pricked A.N. and G.P. 1638.

Marked three times on the back of the stem with the same mark as No. 8.

(10) Small slip-top spoon. Pricked on the back of the bowl: 1636 G.L. G.P.

Marked once in the bowl and three times on the back of the stem with the same mark as No. 8.

Each spoon has pricked initials and date and a number of them bear West Country marks. It has not been possible to ascertain the original family to which the initials applied. It may well be that the spoons had been stolen and not necessarily from the immediate locality. Alternatively, they may have been hidden for safety during the troublesome days of the mid 17th century.

R.C.S.

1. Dept. of Antiquities, British Museum.
2. English Goldsmiths and Their Marks.

Sir C. J. Jackson—1949.

