

The Wixey Jug

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The jug used for filling the font at St James's Church has been in use as a baptismal jug in Chipping Campden for almost exactly 100 years. It is Arts and Crafts era, made in copper, 43cms high, inscribed with the words 'The Gift of Herbert Wixey, 1920' and chased in Celtic script with a quotation from Matthew 19 v.14 **'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven'**.

It is a copy of a royal medieval English ewer made in the 14th century bearing the royal coat of arms, which somehow found its way to West Africa, to be acquired for the British Museum in 1896. This would tie in with Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft metal workers seeing it as a model, either before or after their move to Campden.

Herbert Wixey owned and ran Wixey's Stores on the corner of Church Street which was established in 1863. A newspaper advertisement described Herbert Wixey as a 'high class family grocer, an export tea blender and a provision merchant'.

He was a pillar of the local business society, a Sunday School teacher and involved in most of the local committees and activities. He often appeared in Evesham Journal newspaper reports.

'At the 1883 meeting, in responding to the toast "The Town and Trade of Campden", which was new to the Society's list of toasts, grocer-baker-bank manager Herbert Wixey said Campden was well represented in every class of business, and his experience proved that he could get work done there much cheaper than in large towns. He urged the tradesmen of the place to exert themselves to keep the trade in their own hands and said that he never spent a shilling elsewhere that he could spend in Campden'.¹



Left: Wixey's Stores on the corner of Church Street

Herbert's son Francis took over the business in 1915 and sold to Joseph Burton and Company in March 1920. His parents had both died in 1919². So, was this arranged by Frank as a memorial to his father or in planning before his death? Annoyingly the Parish Magazines for this era are missing from the Muniment Room Archive collection. This date would

¹ Information and images from Chipping Campden History Society

² Herbert Wixey on 6th May 1919 and Annie Wixey on 6th November 1919, living at Bank House, Leysbourne, Campden.

also seem to point to the jug being made in Campden by one of the surviving Guild members, most probably Harts.



Left: Herbert and Annie Wixey.

Right: inscription.



The story of the Ashanti jug in the British Museum, on which this is based, is fascinating in itself. It is described as follows: Jug; copper alloy; on the front of the spouted jug are the royal arms of England as used in the period 1340 to 1405, with a crown above and two lion supporters; on each side of the neck of the jug are three roundels with a falcon spreading its wings, the roundels nearest the spout with the falcon looking to the front, the others with the falcon looking to the back; around the belly of the jug are three lines of lettering within a moulded band; these are read from the bottom and form two mottoes: '+ HE THAT WYL NOT SPARE WHEN HE MAY HE SHALL NOT /

SPEND WHEN HE WOULD DEME THE BEST IN EVERY / DOWT TIL THE TROWTHE BE TRYID OWTE' (He that will not spare when he may he shall not spend when he would / Deem the best in every doubt until the truth be tried out); the seven-sided lid on each facet with a lion facing left and a stag couchant, without chain, facing right; on the lip are three lions facing left and a stag in a circle facing right; the handle terminating in a scrolled quatrefoil.

Right: Museum number 1896,0727.1. Title Object: The Asante Jug. Cultures/periods: Late Medieval, 1390-1399 (circa) British Isles: England. Findspot Africa: sub-Saharan Africa: Ghana: Asante Region

Curator's comments: 'The heraldry and badges could apply to either Edward III or Richard II, but the badges on the lid indicate a date in the reign of Richard II. The presence of the stag indicates a date between 1390 and 1400. The lid is original and its survival, together with the jug, is fascinating. It is not known how or when the jug arrived in West Africa.'³

This is the honest opinion of scholars, but how on earth did it end up there then? In recent years there has been much controversy about how items from West Africa came to be 'acquired' by eminent museums, most notably the British Museum, and many others, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford having a large collection.



Unfortunately, the answer lies in looted objects from the many Colonial Wars, the Asante Wars of 1874, and 1896, when numerous objects of gold were taken, including the Golden Throne, the Sack of Benin in 1897, when a large collection of the famous bronze heads was taken along with many other items of royal and religious significance. This item is most unusual in that it came from England in the first place at an unknown, probably early date. Could it be that it came to West Africa as an example of European craftsmanship to the extensive bronze industry thriving there at the time?

³ Text from Alexander & Binski 1987. All above information courtesy of the British Museum website and copyright.