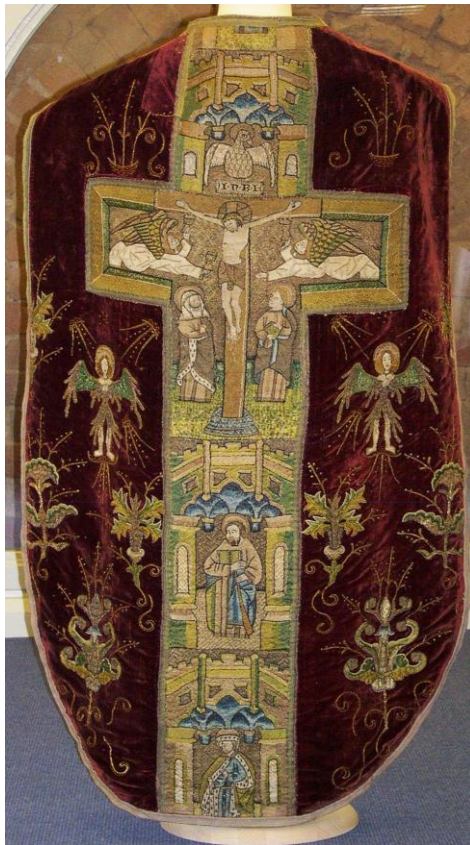


**THE MEDIEVAL CHASUBLE
AT
ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST
R.C. CHURCH
POULTON-LE-FYLDE**





Rev. Fr. John M. Walsh

Foreward.

The theme of our church centenary celebrations has been "the old and the new".

Nothing reflects "the old" better than having in our Parish the ancient Chasuble which has been dated to c.1485.

We are greatly indebted to the advisors and volunteers who have devoted many hours of their time to carry out the skilled work and historical research necessary to ensure that it will now be preserved for future generations.

As with all projects of this kind there were costs to be met and we are grateful for the advice and financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It is a fitting climax to the efforts of all those involved that Bishop Michael Campbell OSA of Lancaster re-dedicated the Chasuble at our Centenary Mass.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Father John Walsh". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Father" and "Walsh" being capitalized and prominent.

Rev. John M. Walsh

Parish Priest

8th September 2012.

An account of the history, construction
and conservation of the Medieval
Chasuble in the possession of the
Roman Catholic Church of St John the
Evangelist, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire.

Prepared and published to coincide with
the centenary celebrations of the
Church building.

September 2012

Compiled by Anne Robinson, lead
volunteer on the conservation in
collaboration with
Christine Storey of the Poulton-le-Fylde
Historical and Civic Society.



Supported by

The National Lottery[®]
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



CONTENTS

Introduction

Early History

Known History

How was it made?

The Conservation

Glossary

Acknowledgements

CHASUBLE STORY

INTRODUCTION.

WHAT IS A CHASUBLE?

A Chasuble is a vestment worn by the priest celebrating Holy Mass. It is usually part of a set of matching vestments and altar furnishings. The colours can vary according to the liturgical calendar and could be green (for Ordinary time); purple (Lent and Advent); red (Martyrs and Pentecost) and white (Special Feast Days and Saints).

England was famous for its production of vestments, particularly for the type of liturgical embroidery known as 'Opus Anglicanum'*. This included gold work of such amazing quality that it came to the attention of Pope Innocent IV. In 1246 he asked the Abbots of all the Cistercian monasteries in England to send these sumptuous gold embroideries to him to decorate his own vestments - a request which pleased the London merchants.

The chasuble at St. John's is a typical example. Very few of these vestments survive and even fewer are in such good condition. Hopefully the conservation will ensure that it will be around for many more decades - if not centuries.

PART 1

EARLY HISTORY

The Chasuble is a survivor.

Dating back to the later years of the fifteenth century it has existed through major upheavals in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

Probably first used around 1485 its early years would have been fairly uneventful but when Henry VIII broke away from the established church and founded the Protestant Church in 1533 the chasuble would have experienced a number of changes.

Henry's only son Edward became king at the age of 10 but died six years later. He had been brought up in a Protestant environment.

Edward was succeeded by his sister, Mary, who had remained Catholic.

She was followed by Elizabeth who was Protestant.

She was succeeded by James I (James VI of Scotland) – Protestant but tolerant towards Catholics.

The next Monarch was Charles I. He was Protestant, married to a Catholic.

Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan, replaced Charles.

10 years later Charles II – Protestant but sympathetic towards Catholics – returned to claim the throne.

He was followed by his brother, James, a Catholic.

James' daughter, Mary, a Protestant, was married to William of Orange, also a Protestant and they ruled jointly.

In 1689 the Bill of Rights declared it illegal for a Catholic to rule the country and so Protestants have ruled since then.

However in the early 19th century the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed and Catholicism again became an acceptable part of the religious life of Great Britain.

The various monarchs, according to their differing beliefs, changed the laws regarding religion each time they occupied the throne. Life for any relics, vestments and artefacts as well as the population became a see-saw.

THE REFORMATION

Henry VIII decreed that any items connected to the Catholic faith should be destroyed and buildings demolished. The celebration of Mass was outlawed and death was the punishment for anyone caught in the act. Priests were treated particularly harshly with

torture widespread. Anyone found sheltering priests or hiding religious artefacts was imprisoned and their property burned to the ground. Dissolution of the Monasteries and the destruction of many priceless objects was the result of Henry's activities.

Staunch Catholics were determined to continue to practise their faith and took many risks protecting themselves, their possessions and hiding priests. People bought goods, or stole them, to keep them safe until Catholicism returned.

A decree of 1538 declared each parish must purchase a Bible; extinguish all lights apart from those on the altar, in the rood loft and before the Easter sepulchre; and remove any images that had been 'abused with pilgrimages or offerings'. In January 1553 instructions were to seize all surviving goods except linen, Chalices* and bells. All other goods had to be sold and the money – with all the plate and jewels – sent to London.

Many vestments were hidden, either in the church or in the homes of local Catholic gentry families. Others were even restructured to serve as a covering for the altar table.

There are several examples of local Catholic families taking chalices and vestments out of churches at the time of the reformation to protect them for the future. In safer times these were again placed in

Catholic churches, usually fairly near their original church.

Few textiles of this period survive as they are easily damaged by damp, insects or prolonged exposure to light. Only the most precious have tended to survive in England, often secretly kept by Catholic families.

In 1648 Fr. Philip Holden was saying Mass at Chaigley, near Stonyhurst, when Cromwell's soldiers invaded the church and murdered him. Family members who were present rescued his severed head and bloodstained vestments and kept them in secret until 1823 when they were given to St. Robert's church at Catforth where they have remained.

Besides setting an example of steadfastness in adversity, keeping in touch with other Catholic strongholds around the country, and offering safe houses to priests, such families made funds available and later operated practical schemes as the establishment of endowments for apprenticing Catholic boys and girls.

The survival of vestments in contemporary collections is therefore almost exclusively the result of religious resistance.

The survival of the 15th century vestment at St John the Evangelist, Poulton-le-Fylde, in such wonderful condition is very unusual. Although it has been altered at some point to change it from the original

semi-circular shape to the 'fiddle-back' design, it still has the original background fabric to which the Orphreys are attached. In many other cases the background fabric has been judged to be so worn that the Orphreys have been removed and attached to another piece of suitable fabric. At least two Chasubles are attributed to Mary Queen of Scots who attached 15th century Orphreys to material originally intended to be made into a dress.

Whalley Abbey was a powerful Cistercian monastery founded in 1170. At the Reformation vestments made between 1415-35 for the Abbey were taken for safe keeping by the Towneley family, who kept, and occasionally used, the vestments over the following four centuries. In 1922 a set of the vestments was sold at Sotheby's by a descendant of the family. Some items were purchased by Burnley Town Council and are now on display in Towneley Hall Burnley. Coincidentally, the Conservation Officer supervising the work on St. John's Chasuble also worked on the Whalley Abbey Vestments.

Tradition says that a chalice at Cloughton once belonged to the parish church of Poulton le Fylde. In the troubled times of the Reformation it fell into the hands of the Heskeths of Maynes Hall and when the Heskeths succeeded to the Cloughton estate they took the chalice with them. In 1782 Mr James Hesketh Brockholes the last survivor of the line, gave it to the Rev John Barrow, then priest of the missions of Cloughton, where it remains.

St Mary's Leyland has a chalice with the words 'restore mee to Layland in Lankeshire' on the back of the bowl. It was restored to St Mary's in 1845 when the first mission was established there; it is possible that it had originally come from the pre-Reformation St Mary's. At Fernyhalgh is a chalice, possibly rescued from the Franciscan convent in Donegal by a Lancashire General. A chalice engraved 'restore me to Caton' is at Hornby and is known to have been used by the historian Lingard during the time he was priest there, between 1811 and 1851.

A chalice is easier to hide than a vestment. When repair work was being done in Warrington parish church, a hidden staircase was discovered probably once leading to the rood loft. On the steps was a richly embroidered chasuble, now kept at St Alban's Catholic Church.

The various Acts of Uniformity during the reigns of Edward VI & Elizabeth I forbade the wearing of traditional Catholic vestments during worship. St. John's Chasuble must have been successfully hidden away until the rule of Queen Mary when the Catholic Church was re-established and an edict proclaimed that Mass could now be celebrated without fear of punishment and all vestments and artefacts used again. There is evidence that St. John's chasuble had suffered some form of attack and repairs were made to it at the time it was re-shaped.

The re-establishment was short lived as it was reversed by Elizabeth when she succeeded Mary and the Protestant Church became the Church of England. She enforced this by law although she showed some tolerance towards the Catholic Church. However, she was excommunicated by the Pope, survived a number of assassination plots by Catholics, and declared that any priest ordained during her reign was to leave the country within forty days. Any who disobeyed or who re-entered England, would automatically be guilty of high treason. Any lay person who 'willingly and wittingly' sheltered a priest was liable to the death penalty. Anyone who sent money to English colleges and seminaries abroad could lose their goods and suffer imprisonment.

The Lancashire laity were able between them to sustain the practice of their faith, especially through a network of gentry and minor gentry families. The enforcement of these laws was spasmodic – the Protestant gentry were mindful of their Catholic neighbours, and government officials acted with circumspection.

In 1603 Elizabeth was succeeded by James VI of Scotland who became James I of England. He united the two countries which then became Great Britain. A more peace-loving monarch than his predecessors he managed to control religious and political factions for the next 22 years inducing a small degree of stability between Catholics and Protestants.

In 1626 he was succeeded by his son Charles. Married to a Catholic, Charles, a Protestant, preferred a High Anglican form of worship. This did not please most of the population especially the Puritans and once again disputes between Protestant and Catholic factions arose. Financial problems also added to unrest and the outcome was the Civil War which led to the rise to power of Oliver Cromwell.

Cromwell had embraced Puritanism and was intolerant of Catholic ceremonies although he did not outlaw them. He became more fanatical about Puritanism and allowed his armies to rampage almost out of control against the established church and the Catholic communities so once again Catholic artefacts had to be hidden. The armies were particularly active in the north of England and the Battle of Preston took place at Penwortham. Cromwell's popularity weakened and eventually he was forced out of power.

After spending many years in exile Charles II, the eldest surviving son of Charles I, returned to claim the throne and, although a Protestant, sympathised with the Catholic church and tried to legalise tolerance towards Catholics and Non-conformists but Parliament would have none of it.

The plague and the Great Fire together with wars against the Dutch did nothing to endear him to Parliament but negotiating subsidies with the French and increasing trade abroad helped him to maintain

an even relationship. He married his niece to the Protestant William of Orange in the hope of improving his standing with Parliament but the discord between religious factions continued and the Catholic and Non-conformist communities still struggled against the established power of the Protestant church. Charles eventually converted to Catholicism on his death bed in 1685.

He was succeeded by his brother, James, who had converted to Catholicism in 1669 and took a stand against religious intolerance. James faced rebellion from Charles's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth who laid claim to the throne but this was crushed. However this conflict together with James' efforts to give equality to Catholics caused more problems with parliament. He tried to promote Catholics to prominent positions and declared complete religious tolerance. His wife gave birth to a son and fears of Catholic succession prompted a group of Protestants to appeal to William of Orange, husband of James' daughter Mary who was a Protestant, for help. William raised an army and James fled abroad. Parliament declared an abdication and crowned William and Mary. James helped by French support, returned with an army and landed in Ireland but was defeated at the battle of the Boyne. James again went into exile and never returned.

The hopes of Catholics were once again dashed.

Now approaching the 18th century and under staunch Protestant rule Catholics faced more intolerance. The Bill of Rights of 1689 increased the power of parliament and declared it illegal for a Catholic to become King or Queen.

Only in the early 19th century when Catholic Emancipation was established was it safe to bring out all the vestments and articles which had been hidden.

From around this time the Chasuble at St. John's has been regularly used - and more repairs carried out - until recently when it was obviously deteriorating and a decision was taken to preserve it.

Advice was sought from the Lancashire Conservation Studios in Preston and with the help and supervision of the Textile Conservation Officer, conservation work has been carried out; the Chasuble has been saved and will be around for many more years.



The Catforth Relics

PART II

KNOWN HISTORY

To date three references to the vestment have been found – in the Lancaster Diocesan Directory for 1938, in Dom Blundell's 'Old Catholic Lancashire' Vol. 2, also published in 1938, and an article in the Gazette and Herald for April 30th 1938.

Of these three the original source seems to be the Lancaster Diocesan Directory for 1938 which introduced '*a series of historical sketches of the churches and chapels of the Diocese..... thanks to the parish priests who have provided the material*'.

The description of St John's concludes: '*There are two interesting relics at St John's.*' [here follows a description of an old bell] '*The other is a very old red vestment dating certainly beyond penal times. Its history is uncertain but it is said that about ninety years ago the vicar of the Protestant church handed it over to the Catholic priest because it was 'papist*'.

This description of St. John's in the 1938 Directory which includes this reference to the vestment must therefore have been provided by Fr. Harker who was at St John's between 1935 and 1942, having succeeded the inimitable Canon Vaughan. It was Fr Harker who involved the V & A in trying to give a date

to the vestment but, as the museum pointed out, it was rather difficult for them to do so from the black and white photographs provided. From the photographs the V & A said '*it is one of the most perfect pre- Reformation specimens in existence*' and dated it as 1534. More recent research into medieval vestments suggests that it could have been made as early as 1470. Illustrations of identical vestments appear in books dealing with the history of medieval embroidery. The use of 'Opus Anglicanum' – used on St. John's Chasuble – ceased towards the end of the 15th century.

This therefore seems to be the source of the story of the vestment. So where might Fr Harker have found the information? The date is fairly specific – 'about 90 years ago' - that would be around 1848. It is possible that he might have got the information from an elderly parishioner who was repeating a grandparent's memories. The priest at St John's at that time was Fr Philip Orrell who was there between 1834 and 1862.

The other two references:

Dom Blundell's 'Old Catholic Lancashire' vol 2 - simply repeats the text from the 1938 Directory virtually word for word. However an interesting report in the Gazette and Herald for April 30th 1938 sheds some light. On April 23 1938 – St George's Day – Fr Harker wore the vestment at the Mass held in celebration of the patron saint of England. The writer comments '*it is probably 50 years since this famous ceremonial*

garment was worn in public'. This implies it was possibly last worn in the 1880s. Again who provided this date to the journalist - possibly an older member of the congregation?

Was the vestment in Singleton?

The journalist comments *'there are many of the old inhabitants of Poulton who are under the impression that it originally came from the old Catholic church at Singleton when it was demolished in 1813.'*

In fact the old Catholic church in Singleton was not demolished in 1813. In 1749 the new lord of the manor of Singleton, who owned the building which the Catholics had been using as a chapel, gave it to the Bishop of Chester to be used as a chapel of ease to Kirkham. About 1770 a new Catholic chapel was built in Singleton and this was used until the new chapel was built in Poulton in 1813. The Singleton Catholic chapel was again in use between 1832 and 1860. In 1809 the old Protestant chapel of ease was demolished and replaced by a new Protestant church and it in turn was replaced by the present St. Anne's Church in 1861.

Was the vestment in Poulton?

The vestment appears to come to St John's around 1848. It is recorded in St Chad's Churchwardens' accounts for 1846 that a good deal of work was done on the interior of the church: the ceiling was raised; the inside walls were replastered and repainted; new pews for the churchwardens and the singers

were erected; the vicar's pew was enlarged and the pulpit placed a little further back; the font was brought in front of the reading desk; the commandments were repainted and a painted window introduced at the east end. Was it at this time of major internal re-ordering that the hidden vestment was discovered in St Chad's and given to St John's? However this raises the question as to where it would have been stored in St Chad's, which was re-ordered in the 1750s into a simple rectangular Georgian 'preaching box' with galleries on three sides and the pulpit placed in the centre. This design gives little storage space - other than the tower.

The vestment is in remarkable condition, particularly when compared with other old vestments in Lancashire which have been in constant use and are very badly worn. This may suggest that it was used very infrequently over its life time; is it more likely that during times of trouble it was stored in the house of a local Catholic family rather than in a church?

PART III

HOW WAS IT MADE?

Most of the following information is the result of extensive research by, and the knowledge and expertise of, Eleanor Palmer, Textile Conservation Officer at the Lancashire Conservation Studios.

In the medieval period a sumptuous display of fabrics in dress was as important in the local parish as it was for royalty and aristocracy. The use of rich fabrics and silver and gold threads together with pattern books of designs which included birds and beasts, all contributed to the development of designs which were used for both manuscripts and embroideries.

The high cost of the materials, precious silk and fine embroidery, especially containing metallic threads, led to them being used economically and were often recycled.

St. John's Chasuble is made from dark red silk velvet heavily embroidered in silk and couched gilt threads as well as tiny gilt spangles (sequins) and applied motifs depicting angels, seraphim with wings of peacock feathers and foliage enclosing pineapples. Sprays, originally worked in silver gilt threads,

embroidered directly onto the velvet with spangles probably represent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The fabric is probably of Italian origin as velvet was not woven in England until the middle of the 16th century. It is in exceptionally good condition for its age – approximately 540 years.

Dated to the late 15th century it would originally have been bell shaped. (The word *chasuble* derives from *casula* which is latin for 'little tent'). Because the weight made it difficult for the priest to raise his arms at the consecration it became customary to cut away the sides and the shield or fiddle shape evolved.



Chasuble back – the partial embroidered motifs at the edges indicate that the shape has been changed.



Chasuble Front – the green shaded area indicates the original shape before being cut away into the fiddle back shape.

As silk velvet was a costly fabric it was used sparingly so the pieces were linked together by embroidered panels known as Orphreys* on the centre front and back. The Pillar Orphrey on the front consists of three sections from the neck to the lower edge and contains images of two saints one at the top, thought to be St. Matthew, and one at the bottom, thought to be St. Thomas, with the figure of a nobleman in the centre.

Forming the central part of the back of the chasuble the Cross Orphrey reaches from the neck to the lower edge and depicts, from the top, the Holy Spirit in the form of a Dove; I N R I* above a Tau*-shaped crucifix

with Christ; Angels catching His Holy Blood in cups; mourning figures of the Virgin Mary with the disciple, John, holding a book; a Saint with a book and club believed to be the image of St. James the Less who was murdered by being beaten with a fuller's club; and part of the image of a nobleman. The amount of ermine trimming this nobleman's cloak and hat suggests that he could have been of royal descent – maybe even the king. The ruling house around the time St. John's chasuble was made was the house of Lancaster.



Underside of front showing the two velvet sections
joined by the Pillar Orphrey

Heavily embroidered with silk thread in many colours and with large areas of couched silver gilt the Orphreys would originally have had a very rich, ornate appearance. The facial features and the hands and feet are very clearly defined although some stitches are missing.



Beautiful stitch detail

Assembled in a traditional manner the Orphreys consist of sections of embroidered architectural backgrounds with images chosen by the recipient added to the design. The backgrounds to the images and the saint's halos were mostly embroidered in

silver gilt (now unfortunately tarnished) creating a very rich effect.

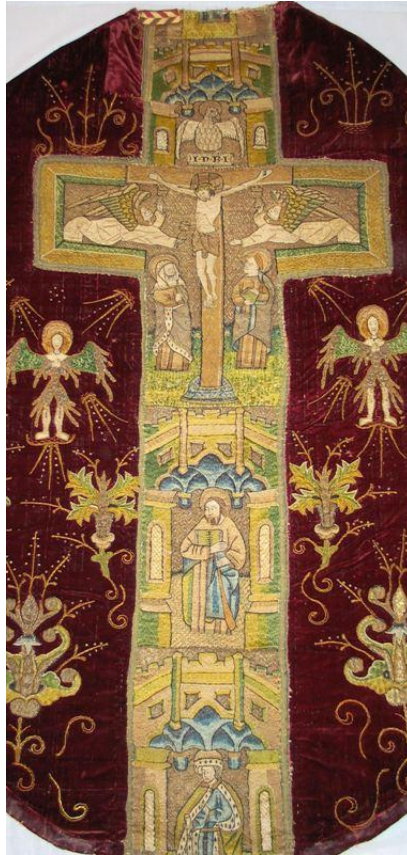
The velvet most probably had had a previous life as it was the custom for rich patrons or members of the nobility to give their robes to priests or parishes to be converted into vestments. Faint vertical lines of wear have been identified which might indicate gathers in a robe. Velvet was a very costly fabric, not woven in England until the middle of the 16th century. It was most likely produced in Italy and imported. It may also have arrived in England in the form of robes. Silk fibres richly dyed were used and the cost would be well beyond the resources of local parishes. Only the wealthy cathedrals of Europe would have been able to afford new vestments.

Because silk velvet was so precious it was used sparingly and regularly recycled. It was woven in narrow lengths and the use of the Orphreys served to cover seams or to bridge the gaps.



Pillar Orphrey

There were two designs of Orphrey – a straight panel known as the Pillar Orphrey for the front of the Chasuble



The Cross Orphrey

and the Cross Orphrey for the back which would be dedicated to the crucifixion. This Orphrey was always larger and more ornately decorated than the Pillar Orphrey so that it would be seen by everyone in the congregation at the elevation of the sacraments. This sight would have been quite breathtaking as the

flickering candle light would pick out the silver gilt embroidery and the tiny spangles on the velvet.

The Orphreys themselves were constructed in small workshops – usually by men. The architectural backgrounds followed traditional patterns and motifs chosen by the recipient such as images of saints and noblemen were included in the embroidery. The figures of Christ on the cross and those of St. John and Mary were appliquéd later. Among the embroidered motifs were figures richly robed in ermine which suggests nobility and could possibly be images of the benefactors. The features of the figures were precisely stitched and details on the clothing can still be seen clearly.



Lavishly ermine trimmed robes of a nobleman.

Finished sections would be chosen by the priest or parish according to their requirements and these would be stitched together. To add strength to these seams paper interfacing was used.



Medieval paper interfacing used to support seams

A sample of the paper was removed and examined by the paper conservation officer who said it had been made from vegetable fibres. Some of the straw like fibres were found among the paper residue.



Paper sample with piece of straw

On St. John's Chasuble the embroidery on the velvet is typical of *Opus Anglicanum* – English Work – which was acknowledged across England and the continent as of the finest quality and craftsmanship during the medieval period.



Seraphim with stylised peacock feather wings
(*Opus Anglicanum*)

Fine gilt thread and silk yarns were used and tiny gilt spangles (sequins) were applied. Many of these spangles are still in place and small marks on the velvet indicate where they had once been stitched. Most of them are now tarnished but some have retained their original brightness. Once assembled the Chasuble would have been lined with blue linen and then trimmed with woven silk ribbon around the perimeter and all around the Orphreys. This silk ribbon also had silver gilt in it.



Detail of Embroidery with Spangles
(*Opus Anglicanum*)

The luxury of the silk velvet and silver gilt threads of the embroidery contrasts greatly with the underlying fabrics such as the interfacing of the Orphreys and the interlining of the vestment. These materials were obtained from varying sources. The coarse, fibrous yarn used in the interfacing of the Cross Orphrey is similar to sacking and the linen of the interlinings, whilst fairly strong, is unevenly woven. A tiny seed found nestling among the fibres of the interfacing is similar to illustrations of seeds of a flax plant normally found in the tropics which leads to the question “could the sacking type material have arrived wrapped around cargo on a ship?”

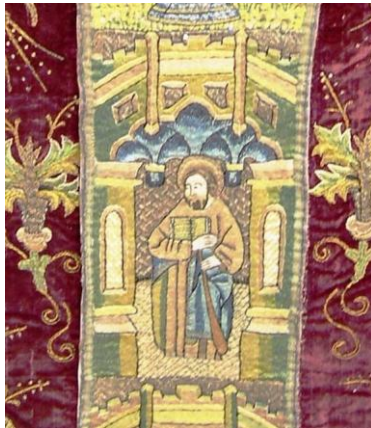


Coarse material used for interfacing



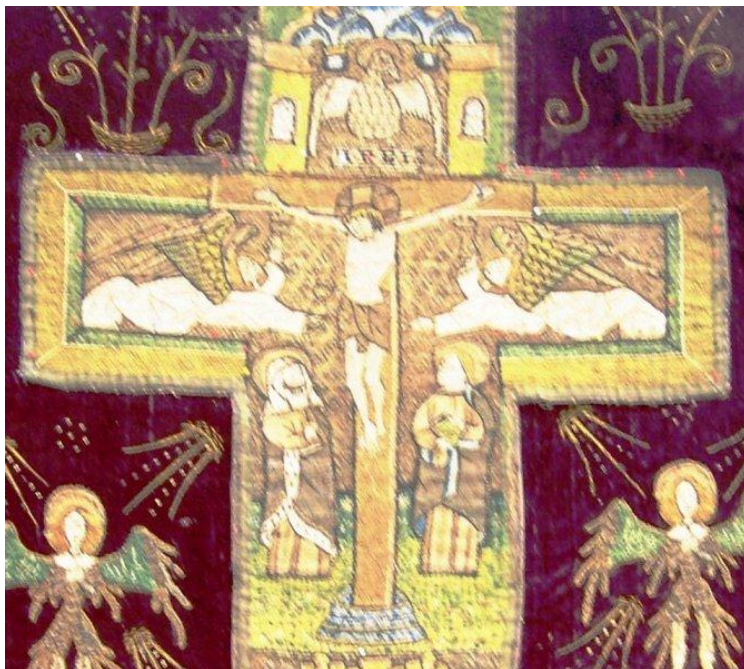
Tiny seed – possibly from flax plant used to make
coarse fabric

More recent research by the author has revealed the possible identities of the saints depicted on the Orphreys. Saints are usually illustrated carrying the implement of their martyrdom as well as an object which represents their life. It is almost certain that the figure on the Cross Orphrey in the lower middle section is St. James the Less. He is holding a book – suggesting a teacher or preacher - and a club. History records that an attempt to assassinate him failed but he was subsequently beaten to death with a fuller's club. This is a tool used by cloth producers to beat the rough fibres of yarns to a smooth finish.



St. James the Less

The two figures at the foot of the cross are St. John and Mary, the mother of Jesus, mourning their loss.



St. John and Mary, mother of Christ, at the Cross.

Note the angels catching Christ's blood and the detailed flowers and grass surrounding the foot of the Cross.

The cloaks worn by the figures of John and Mary were embroidered in silver gilt thread (now tarnished) emphasising their importance.

On the Pillar Orphrey it is thought that the lower saint may be St. Thomas as he was martyred with a spear. The saint depicted at the top of the same Orphrey may be St. Matthew as he was thought to have been beheaded with an axe head attached to a halberd and in his left hand he is holding what appears to be an axe.



Possibly St. Thomas and St. Matthew
The details of their features are still very clear

The two richly robed figures – one on the centre front and the other at the lower back – are unknown but the amount of ermine trimming their cloaks indicates high ranking noblemen. If it could be proved that the chasuble had spent its whole life in Lancashire then these figures could be connected to the Duchy of Lancaster.

Various repairs have been carried out over the centuries. There is evidence that the chasuble suffered some form of attack before it was hidden away during the Reformation. On the back in the area of the Angel's wing on the right hand side of the Cross Orphrey can be seen a clear cut as if made with a sharp knife or dagger. This had been overstitched but the stitches were causing distortion so it was decided to remove the stitches and leave the cut visible.



Damaged

Angel's Wing



Undamaged



Clean cut on Wing

On the left hand side of the Cross Orphrey in the upper section a length of the Orphrey was badly frayed and the silk ribbon border was missing. Alongside this section a piece of velvet had been inserted possibly replacing a damaged area. The difference in the shading of the velvet pile can be clearly seen. It is thought that this piece of velvet must have been cut from the surplus when the front of the chasuble was reshaped. It is noticeable that some of the embroidered motifs on the outer edges of the velvet are incomplete. This could only have been as a result of reshaping.



Early repair of possible damage from attack



Earlier repair – underside revealing damaged coarse interfacing consistent with having been slashed with a sharp blade.

Two widths of woven silk ribbon were used. The wider one had been previously used to cover and protect the badly frayed (narrower) lengths on the borders of the Pillar Orphrey.



The wider ribbon used to protect the damaged narrower ribbon.

It is thought that when the chasuble was reshaped the wider ribbon around the perimeter had been used for this purpose.

To complete the conservation the surviving lengths of this wider silk ribbon have been used around the perimeter over the shoulders. The remaining edge has been finished using replica tape painted to match the original.

PART IV

THE CONSERVATION



Textile Conservation Officer, Eleanor Palmer, explaining the embroidery; how the chasuble was constructed; its age and original shape and what needed to be done to restore and conserve it.

The first step was to remove the red lining and the chevron braid which had been put in place during the 20th century. There is no doubt that these repairs had helped to preserve the chasuble but were inappropriate both in the choice of materials and in the use of a sewing machine. The bright colour of the materials overpowered the rich medieval embroidery

and the silk velvet and it was feared that the machine stitching would leave permanent marks on the velvet. The original lining would have been dull blue linen matching the blue silk embroidery and the chevron braid was disproportionately wide catching the viewer's eye before the embroidery was noticed.

A team of volunteers painstakingly snipped and extracted every machine stitch after which the chasuble was taken to the Conservation studios in Preston for further assessment.



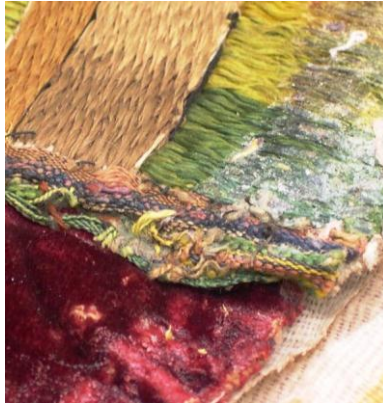


When the lining and braid were removed it became possible to examine in more detail the condition of the vestment.



Back of Chasuble after removal of braid – embroidery appears much brighter.

The borders of the two Orphreys were trimmed with woven striped silk ribbon in colours matching the embroidery. Fortunately these borders had not been removed. The perimeter of the vestment should have been trimmed with a similar silk ribbon but disappointingly this was missing. Furthermore some kind of adhesive had been used on this edge to hold the chevron braid in place before machine stitching.



White residue of adhesive

On the Pillar Orphrey the silk ribbon border had become unstitched in a number of places and another layer of silk ribbon could be seen. This layer was badly frayed and was undoubtedly original. A contributory factor to this fraying was the deterioration of the weft threads which originally would have been black. The few remaining weft threads had faded to brown and become very weak. The black dye used to colour the silk yarn contained a mordant* which gradually destroyed the threads.

The velvet contained diagonal folds running from the edges of the Orphreys down to the curved lower edges of both back and front. Some repairs – possibly 16th or 17th century – had been carried out. This was indicated by the use of brighter coloured silks and gold coloured wire having been applied to the embroidery on the velvet as well as the stitching having penetrated the interlining.

On the Cross Orphrey on the back the wings of the two angels did not match and the underside of the one on the right had been crudely overstitched (see p.21/22). When these stitches were removed a clean cut about 3cm long appeared and was evidence of some form of attack with a sharp blade. This gap was left open but protected with bobbinet so that this bit of history could be seen. More evidence of some sort of attack could be seen on the opposite side of the cross where a piece of velvet had been inserted alongside a section of very badly damaged embroidery on the Orphrey. The original silk ribbon was also missing here (see p.33).

The embroidery on the central area of the Pillar Orphrey was badly worn, caused by the abrasion of the priest's torso against the altar. Together with the badly frayed silk border in the same area this is evidence of prolonged and regular use during the first fifty years of its life.



Worn embroidery on centre front

All these details were discussed with the Conservation Officer and she recommended that repairs would not be a practical idea as they would hide evidence of the history of the vestment as well as risk causing further damage and that we should aim for conservation rather than restoration. The damaged embroidery and the frayed silk ribbon were due to wear and tear and together with the evidence of attack were part of the chasuble's history and should be left to illustrate this.

Using conservation techniques and materials it would be possible to prevent any further deterioration and the chasuble could be returned to how it would have looked when it was first made. She advised against any further use of the chasuble as a vestment at Mass but to work towards displaying it in a custom made cabinet with controlled lighting and humidity to stand as a tribute to the survival instincts of the catholic population.

Since April 2011 slowly, painstakingly and very carefully, most of the non-original stitches were removed. Only those which had been used to carry out repairs during previous centuries were left in place. To make it easier to work on and reduce any stress to the chasuble it was separated at the shoulder seams and the interlinings were removed.

The adhesive residue around the perimeter had to be removed. This was carefully broken down by gentle manipulation into granules which were then removed with tweezers.



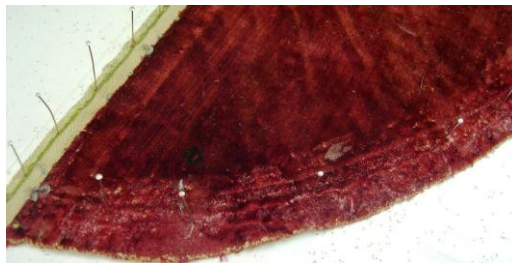
Adhesive residue encrusted in embroidery



After removal of adhesive



Adhesive residue on velvet



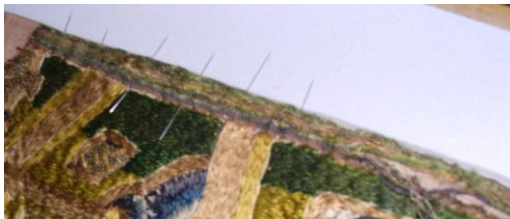
Velvet after removal of adhesive residue

The velvet was then steamed and smoothed by brushing with a badger hair brush. Any loose embroidery threads were caught in place with very fine silk filament.

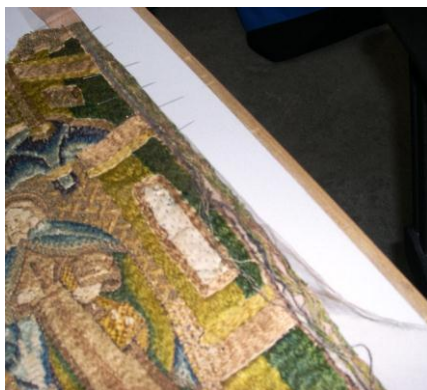


Silk filament finer than a human hair was used to secure any loose embroidery threads.

On the front the Pillar Orphrey was separated from the two sections of velvet so that the frayed silk ribbon border could be straightened out and enclosed in bobbinet. This would ensure that no further fraying could occur.



Aligning the frayed warp threads, holding them in place with fine pins.



Enclosing them in bobbinet* which is almost invisible so does not hide the threads whilst still conserving and protecting them.



The two edges of the Pillar Orphrey before (right) and after (left) conservation.

The edges were also strengthened with dyed cotton tape to provide a firm edge to stitch back to the velvet.



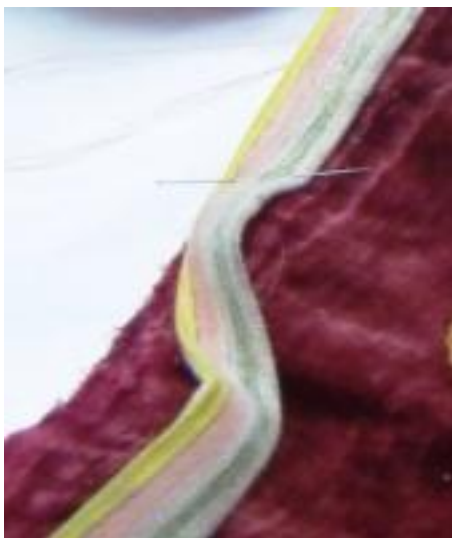
White cotton tape dyed with a solution of coffee, tea and salt (as a mordant) to achieve a compatible shade.

The two sections of velvet were rolled, velvet side out, in sheets of acid free tissue paper to try to reduce the creases and left like this whilst the conservation work was carried out on the Orphrey. On the back it was possible to conserve the short sections of damaged silk ribbon bordering the Cross Orphrey without separating it from the velvet. Dyed cotton tape was also attached to the edges underneath the silk ribbon to strengthen it. Weakness and holes in the yoke and shoulder seams were strengthened with fine cotton lawn before the seams were stitched back together. The missing silk ribbon edging was replaced with hand painted cotton tape as it had been impossible to find suitable silk ribbon. Two volunteers painted six metres of cotton

tape with fabric paint pigments in stripes to replicate the surviving silk ribbon.



Experimenting with pigments to match the original silk ribbon (lower right).



Hand painted tape to replicate the original silk ribbon.



Old silk Ribbon (above)
New hand painted tape (below)

Two lengths of surviving silk ribbon were stitched back in place around the perimeter at the shoulder areas of the chasuble. Another length was placed around the back neck and the other short piece replaced over the damaged section at the upper left

hand side of the cross. The replica tape was used around the rest of the perimeter and at the neck edge.

A new lining had to be found to replace the red taffeta and various linen manufacturers were contacted but for a number of reasons suitable blue fabric could not be supplied. It was decided to produce our own and lengths of unbleached linen from conservation studios stock was dyed with a commercial dye to the exact colour needed.



After much rinsing followed by drying and pressing the lining was cut to size – a single piece each for the back and the front and separate sections for the yokes. Bias cut strips 6cm. wide were joined to fit the neck edge. All the pieces were securely attached to the interlinings to ensure there would be no slipping.

The perimeter edges were trimmed to leave 1cm.
turning ready for the ribbon edging to be attached.



Front Lining in place



Front and Back linings secured to yoke seams



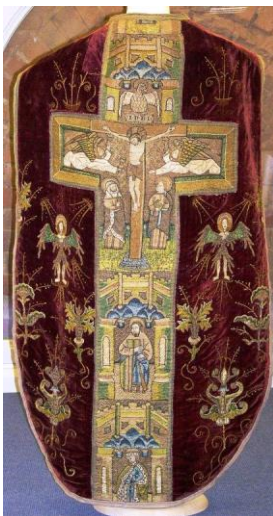
Final lining pieces in place - the yoke section

and the neck facing.





Finishing touches – attaching the ribbon edging.



And finally – DONE!!!!

THE FUTURE

A full and detailed record, both written and photographed, of the conservation has been produced for future generations to use in research and reference in case of further necessary conservation.

Copies of this will be kept at St. John's church, the Lancashire Records Office and the Diocesan Archive both in Preston.

The Chasuble will spend the rest of its days in a specially built light and humidity controlled display cabinet inside St. John the Evangelist church.

GLOSSARY

** Opus Anglicanum – English Work. Embroidery used on ecclesiastical vestments and furnishings throughout the medieval period.*

**Orphrey – ornately embroidered panel.*

** I N R I stands for IESU NAZARENUS REX IUDEORUM – Jesus the Nazarene King of the Jews.
Tau is the Greek letter T.*

**Chalice – Usually gold or gold-plated and embellished with precious or semi-precious stones a Chalice is a cup shaped vessel used for the precious blood at Mass.*

**mordant – a substance used in dyeing to make the dye colourfast. Salt is a modern day mordant used for many pigments but some colours require other substances – arsenic is an example.*

**Bobbinet – a fine, dyed conservation grade net used widely by Conservators in protecting delicate fabrics and furnishings.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eleanor Palmer – Textile Conservation Officer, at the Lancashire Conservation Studios.

The technicians at the Lancashire Museums Service

The Heritage Lottery Fund

Christine Storey and the Poulton-le-Fylde Historical and Civic Society.

**Margaret Pannikker at
Talbot Library, St. Walburges Preston**

All volunteers who willingly gave their time.

The Heritage Lottery Fund Project Team – Eleanor Palmer; Anne Robinson; Catherine Woodcock; Bill Robinson; Christine Storey; Graham Dowling; Gary Jackson-Smith and Gordon Worden.



Supported by

The National Lottery®
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



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September 2012