

“ BREAD IRON ”

Turning over the “ Connoisseur, of April, 1903, Page 283, Vol. VI, I came across an illustration of a “ Bread Iron ” found near Shrewsbury. It is an Intaglio, measuring $4\frac{3}{8}$ in. in length, and $2\frac{3}{16}$ in. in width.

Bread iron was used in pre-Reformation days to stamp the Eucharistic wafers. The obverse has designs of scriptural character, “ Bard playing on the harp and St. Michael slaying the Dragon.” The reverse a simple geometrical figure. Bread irons are rare in this country.”

Possessing a leaden object of similar size—I sent it up to the British Museum. This specimen had been preserved by my Father, but I do not remember that he ever referred to it.

The Museum described it as “ The triumph of the Church, showing a car drawn by two unicorns, and figures of Faith, Charity and Obedience ; at the back sits a female figure with the Keys of St. Peter, surmounted by the Dove representing the Holy Ghost. It is German, second half of the 16th century. I am almost certain that we have it in the Museum, but our collection and records are stored for safety and I cannot verify this, (B.M., March 19th, 1940).”

Hart’s Ecclesiastical Records calls the iron stamp “ ferrum oblatarum, and the plate of lead, covered with silk, to put on the bread to flatten them when unconsecrated.”

Fosbroke (Antiquities ii 690), citing Du Cange, refers to “ (a) the stamped iron on which the Host was baked and (b) the iron mould used in making oblatæ, *i.e.*, the bread not consecrated, which was given to monks before their meal when they had not communicated.” It might therefore have also been used for the Holy Bread.

This “ Iron ” may have been in use in Buxhall Church—as also an old spoon, with fleur-de-lys stamp, of 1565 date—or thereabouts which may have been an “ anointing ” spoon. It was found very near the Church.

H. COPINGER HILL,

Buxhall Rectory.



Model for a "Bread Iron," c.1550. *German Work.*