Flagon - The Thirkleby Flagon

Object: Flagon

Place of origin: London (made)

Date: 1646-1647 (made)

Artist/Maker: Blackwell, Richard (maker)

Materials and Techniques: Silver

Credit Line: Given by Art Fund

Museum number: M.537-1956

Gallery location: Sacred Silver & Stained Glass, Room 83, The Whiteley Galleries, case 2A

Public access description
This elaborate flagon was made for domestic use but then given to a church, to hold the communion wine. It bears the arms of a Dutch merchant, Francis Tyssen, who was an elder of the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, London. It was later owned by the Frankland family of Thirkleby, Yorkshire, who gave it to their parish church.

The pair to the flagon is at Temple Newsam, Leeds.

Descriptive line
Silver, London hallmarks for 1646-7, mark unidentified.

Physical description
Cylindrical body finely chased with a dolphin and sea monster each on a cartouche against a ground of scrolling foliage and flowers. Spreading moulded foot with border of acanthus foliage. Lid decorated with three panels of birds, against a ground of foliage; moulded knob. Beaded scroll handle ending in a cartouche with a cherub.

Dimensions
Height: 27.5 cm, Length: 14.8 cm, Weight: 1143 g

Museum number
M.537-1956

Object history note
Originally, one of a pair, the other is now at Temple Newsam House, Leeds.

Historical significance: This flagon, one of a pair, was originally made for secular use and later given to their local parish church by the Frankland family of Thirkleby, Yorkshire.

For the earlier history of ownership see Gordon Balderston, e-mail 8 June 2018

The relevant passage of Tyssen’s will reads ‘I give and bequeath unto my said sonne Francis Tyssen my great silver bason with my coate of arms and crest on it, my silver gilt outlandish flaggon, two silver plates whereon my coate of arms and crest are engraven, a silver tankard whereon my coate of arms and crest are also engraven, my gold ring with my arms and crest on it, my silver tea pott, and my steele seales, silver tooth picker case and picker within with my coate of arms and crest on them, my coate of arms painted upon cloth which hangs in a wainscott case in the dining roome and all that shall be found at my decease in my cabbinett in my closett’ (not punctuated, but commas added here for ease of comprehension) [Kew, National Archives, PROB 11/456/284 (online ref.), probate transcript of will of “Francis Tyssen the elder of the City of London esq.”, dated 5 May 1690, proved 30 July 1700; scanned online at ancestry.com]

I have not been able to identify any of Tyssen’s silver in the wills of later generations of the Tyssen/Thyssen family; nor a connection with the Frankland family, whether by marriage, bequest or acquisition.

Francis Tyssen was naturalized/became English subject in June 1657.

I do not profess expertise in heraldry or silver marks. But, with regard to dolphin on V&A/Temple Newsam flagons, ‘The dolphin embowed of the Franklands of Thirkleby is worked into the ornament of the barrels’, according to www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/north/vol2/pp55-58 and illustrated there.

Historical context note
Gifts to the Church
Gifts were the most important source of English church plate in the 17th century. The donor was usually a prominent member of the community, which in country parishes often meant the local landowner. But gifts came from other sources too. Many were given by women, showing their active involvement with the church. Churchwardens also took pride in commissioning new silver and often contributed to the cost. Occasionally, gifts like Lord Hertford’s chalice and flagon were made to win support for a political cause.
Not all of these gifts were new. Old-fashioned domestic plate, often richly decorated with secular ornament, was welcomed and used for the service of communion or the collection of alms.

Francis Tyssen, a Dutch merchant and elder of the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, London, became a British citizen in 1687 when he was granted armorial bearings which were engraved on the pair of silver flagons then in his ownership. When this flagon (along with its pair) became the property of Thirkleby Church, North Riding, the cartouches engraved with the Tyssen arms were covered over with plain plates. Though the arms were only granted to Francis Tyssen in 1687, he may have been using them for some time before.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O104271/the-thirkleby-flagon-flagon-blackwell-richard/