

# COLNAGHI



A PAIR OF MASSIVE CHOIR STALLS,  
BRUTALLY DEFACED  
WITH CHISELS AND AXES

Central France, c.1475

Oak (Some splitting to the timber along its grain on both stalls.  
A modern (nineteenth century) fillet runs vertically  
along one edge of the stall with a Dominican monk.

Each stall approx. 119.5 x 72.5 x 10 cm; 47 x 28 ½ x 4 in.

---

Provenance

Private collection, Suffolk.

---

# COLNAGHI



---

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

# COLNAGHI

These massive carvings were commissioned for a wealthy religious house in the late fifteenth century, and originally decorated the two eastern ends of a pair of monumental choir stalls. They both take the form of upright rectangular panels composed from multiple planks of thickly cut oak, and whose upper and outer edges are softened by way of slender columns and curved mouldings. Their front faces are dominated by full-length figures standing within arched niche-like spaces. One shows the first pope of the Catholic Church, Saint Peter, wearing a three-tiered papal tiara and holding his traditional attribute of a key. His counterpart appears in the robes of the Dominican order, and may represent the Order's founder, Saint Dominic (1170-1221). Smaller figures grouped into pairs straddle the horizontal mouldings which cap both panels' upper edges. Both panels are carved on their reverse faces with a pattern of rebated grooves originally used to join them to the timbers of a long run of stalls, which would have included rows of hinged seats (of a type known for their often mischievously decorated misericords), sloped back rests and bracing, structural rails.

Because choir stalls are typically positioned on the boundary of a choir space, physically bracketing its entrances and framing its central area, the primary faces of our carvings would have been clearly visible to anyone entering from the nave or aisles, and would have acted as symbolic guardians as well as didactic tools. Their prominent placement and central role in the liturgical life of the building meant that many such stalls were singled out during periods of iconoclasm, leading to their brutal disfigurement. Our stalls stand as startling and vivid witnesses to the iconoclasts' passion; all six figures had their faces chiselled off in a bitter echo of the carver's art.