

# **Animals in English Wood Carving**

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## Introduction to the Digital Edition

This text was prepared for digital publication by David Badke in June 2004. It was scanned from the original text. Version 2, with corrected Druce biography, was produced in August, 2004.

**Author:** George Claridge Druce was born in Surrey, England and lived there and at Wimbledon until 1923, when he retired from managing a distillery company and moved to Cranbrook, Kent. He was a member of the Kent Archaeological Society from 1909, as Secretary from 1925 to 1935 and then Vice-President until his death. He was a member of the Royal Archaeological Institute (1903-48, Council member 1921-28) and of the British Archaeological Association, joining in 1920, serving on its Council 1921-38 and then as Vice President (1938-48). He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (F.S.A.) of London in 1912 and served on its Council 1923-6. Druce travelled extensively (by bicycle) with his camera, and built up a unique collection of photographs and glass lantern slides, which in 1947 he presented to the Courtauld Institute in London. Although interested in almost all branches of antiquarian study, he specialized in the study of the bestiary genre, and was widely recognized as an authority on the influence of bestiaries on ecclesiastical sculpture and wood carving. He also studied manuscripts both in England and elsewhere. He contributed articles to various scholarly journals, presented many lectures, and in 1936 produced a translation of *The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, a Norman-French manuscript which dates from 1210-11. Druce died in 1948.

— Adapted from an obituary written by Canon Sydney William Wheatley, F.S.A. in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series, 11 (1948), 80.

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## ANIMALS IN ENGLISH WOOD CARVINGS

By G. C. DRUCE

THE treatment of animals and birds in ecclesiastical carvings hardly seems to have received sufficient attention in the past. In common with other unobtrusive details they are liable to be passed over in favour of more imposing architectural features, but they are deserving of study, as we are able to gather from them evidence of the practice of the English carver in the department of natural history and the influences affecting his work.

Despite continual losses the amount of figure sculpture in stone and wood in our churches is large, and the subjects display the greatest variety. There are scenes from the Bible, from romances and legends, animals, birds and reptiles from the Bestiaries, events of everyday life, and grotesque creatures in profusion; and incidentally there are innumerable details of mediaeval manners and costume which present a large field for study. The sources of this miscellaneous collection are to be found mainly in illuminated manuscripts—in the Psalters, Apocalypses, Bestiaries, and other manuscripts to which the carvers had access, and which they freely copied or at least got ideas from. In the case of animals, with which we are now concerned, the Bestiaries provided many models. They form the pictorial link between the old system of symbolic teaching of the early Biblical commentators, founded upon the appearance and habits of animals and birds, and the carvings of animals in churches. The texts of the Bestiaries were only in part original. They were in the main compiled from the works of Ambrose, Basil, and Eustathius on the six days of the Creation, entitled *The Hexameron*, the *Moralia* of Gregory, from Isidore's *Etymology*, the *De Universo* and treatises on Leviticus and Deuteronomy of Rabanus, and the *De Bestiis et aliis rebus* in the Appendix to the works of Hugo de Sancto Victore. These had in turn borrowed largely from classical writers on natural history such as Pliny, Solinus, and Aelian. The masons of the twelfth century were no doubt well acquainted with the symbolism expressed in the Bestiaries, and used the subjects in the same religious or moral sense. The most important carvings of this class are to be seen upon the south doorway of Alne Church (Yorks.), where the various beasts and birds have titles corresponding with those in the manuscripts, and without which they could not be identified.

Little is known of the sources whence the illustrators of the Bestiaries obtained the material for their pictures. They professed to represent nature, [58] but we have only to turn over the pages of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century manuscript to see how little they knew of the anatomy of many of the animals depicted, and how much they adhered to types. In the case of fabulous creatures such as the griffin, syren, or centaur, they had classical originals to work upon, and this was also probably the case with some of the rarer beasts, such as the tiger, hyena, camel, or crocodile, which they were not likely to have seen; but they were evidently well acquainted with the forms of some wild beasts such as the lion or bear, and in the case of domestic animals there was no difficulty. Where there was no model available, there was no alternative but to compose the animal from the description in the text, and this at times led to curious results. Pictures of such beasts as the hippopotamus, mantichora and eale, described by Pliny, were no doubt produced in this way. The hippopotamus is but seldom illustrated in the Bestiaries and appears, so far as we know, only in one group, the best illustration being in MS. 22 of the thirteenth century in the Westminster Chapter Library (fig. 1). The artist was ignorant of its shape and composed his picture from the text, which was taken from the *Polyhistor* of Solinus; he produced from the various points given a cross between a horse with boar's tusks and a dragon with twisted body and horsetail. It will be seen from the legend 'Explicit de Piscibus' below the miniature that it is classed with the fishes. Carvings of hippopotamus are also very scarce in churches, but an interesting attempt may be seen upon a misericord of about 1480 in date at St. George's Chapel, Windsor (fig. 2). The carver knew that it was a four-legged



# PLATE LI



Fig. 1 HIPPOPOTAMUS MS 22  
Westminster Chapter Library

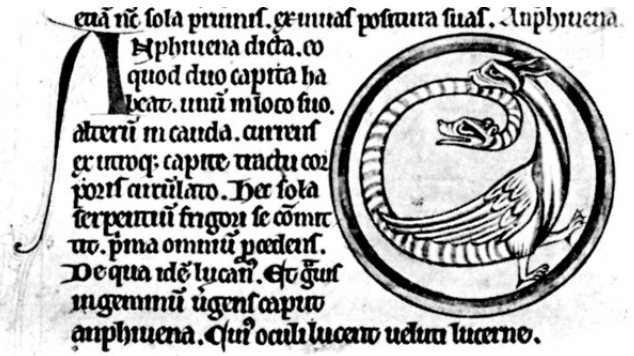


Fig. 3 AMPHISBAENA  
MS. Harl. 4751 (B M)



Fig. 2 HIPPOPOTAMUS  
St. George's Chapel, Windsor

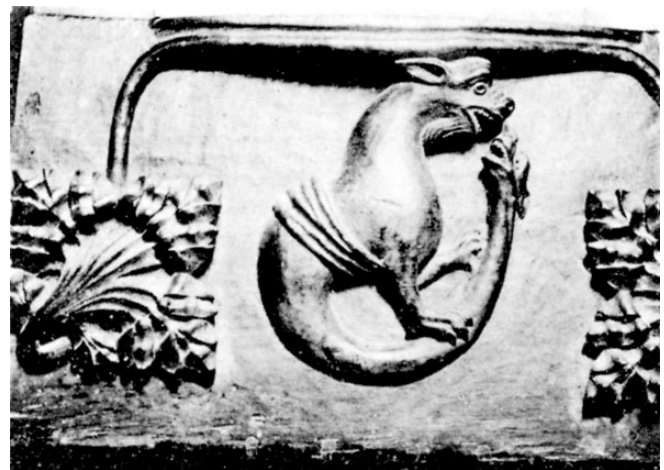


Fig. 4 AMPHISBAENA  
Lincoln Cathedral

beast, but was influenced by the established description, and incorporated the features mentioned; he also appears to have had some knowledge of the rhinoceros, and confused the two, for he has given it the horn of the latter. In a carving of a hippopotamus of about the same date upon a poppy-head at Eynesbury (Hunts.) the head is more naturally reproduced.

There are cases in which the influence of the Bestiary may be very closely traced, for instance in the carvings of the amphisbaena, which are fairly common from the twelfth century onward. The carvers could not have seen this creature. It is always drawn in the manuscripts as a winged dragon with a second head upon the end of its tail, as in MS. Harl. 4751 (B. M.) (fig. 3), and the carvings show the same features. There is an excellent example in stone upon the twelfth-century font at Hook Norton (Oxon.). The best in wood known to us is upon a misericord at Limerick Cathedral (fig. 4); in both these cases the tail-head is bent round towards the main head in a menacing way, as in the manuscript illustrations. There are other good instances upon misericords at St. George's Chapel and Halsall (Lancs.), upon a boss at Southwark Cathedral, and on a bench-elbow at Stonham Aspell (Suff.) (fig. 6). At the last place the main head somewhat resembles that of the basilisk.

The amphisbaena in nature is a legless lizard, but the creature which the [59] ancients called by that name, whether the same or not, was regarded by them as a deadly serpent and believed to have a second head upon its tail; and, as its name implies, to possess the power of moving forwards or backwards. It is mentioned in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, and described by Nicander and later classical writers on natural history. There was a controversy continually going on in the Middle Ages as to whether it had two heads or not. Its special characteristic and evil reputation caused it to have a considerable influence in ecclesiastical art and painting, as may be seen in manuscript Apocalypses and in the painting by Margaritone in the National Gallery, where its tail-head is applied to the dragon as the Devil.<sup>1</sup>

Reference may be made here to the large number of dragons in carvings from the twelfth century onwards. It is customary to describe them all by the generic name of 'dragon', and in view of the manner in which they are drawn we do not see what else can be done. It is, however, clear from the evidence of the Bestiaries that they represent a variety of serpents, the carvers having followed the lead of the artists in putting them all into dragon form. There are about twenty different serpents and lizards thus depicted in the manuscripts besides such creatures as the scorpion, and this accounts for their prevalence in architecture. The one type of winged dragon for all precludes identification, except in a few cases where a special feature exists, such as the basilisk with the cock's head at Exeter Cathedral, the asps curled up with their ears pressed against the ledge and stopped by their tails at Chichester Cathedral (these are exceptionally in snake-form), and the amphisbaena with its two heads. It affords evidence of the strong devotion to type on the part of both artists and carvers. An examination of the misericords at Carlisle Cathedral is an object-lesson in this respect. Individuality in treatment, however, sometimes bubbles out, for instance in the remarkable dragon at Weston-in-Gordano (Som.) (fig. 5), which seems to betray a local and not over-skilful hand. The whole arrangement of the seat is most unusual.

As many references will be made to misericords it may be pointed out that the great dividing line between the English and Continental practice is the presence of wing subjects, which occur very rarely abroad. At Albi Cathedral there are one hundred and twenty stalls of late fifteenth-century date, thirty-seven of which have small wing carvings of foliage or animal heads on the misericords. The central subject throughout is foliage of simple but bold design except in two cases, in one of which the misericord is plain and in the other it bears a very quaint dragon. Wing subjects are rarely absent in this country, the most important place being Gloucester Cathedral, where the fourteenth-century seats are of unusual design.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full account of this 'serpent' vide *Archaeological Journal*, vol. lxxvii, p. 235.

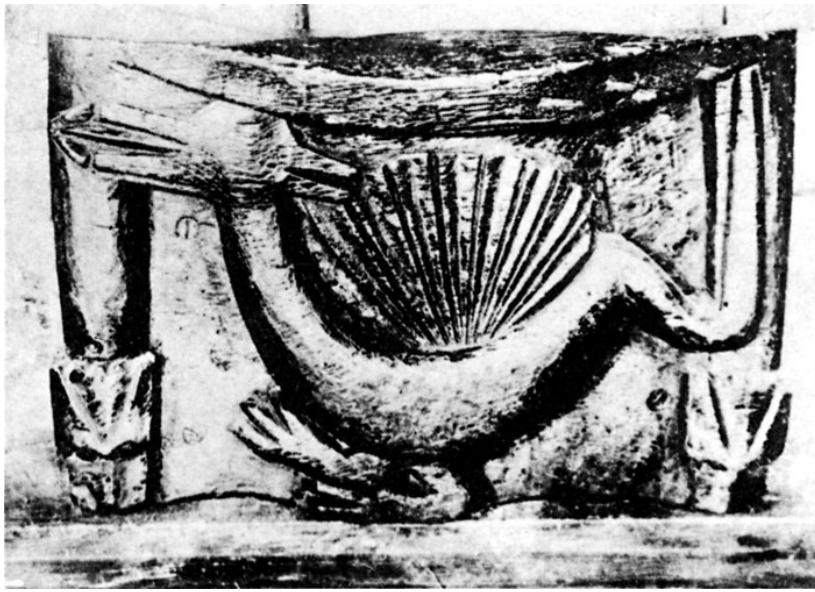


Fig. 5

DRAGON

*Weston-in-Gordano*



Fig. 6

AMPHISBAENA

*Stonham Aspell, Suffolk*



Fig. 7

FROG

*Edlesborough*

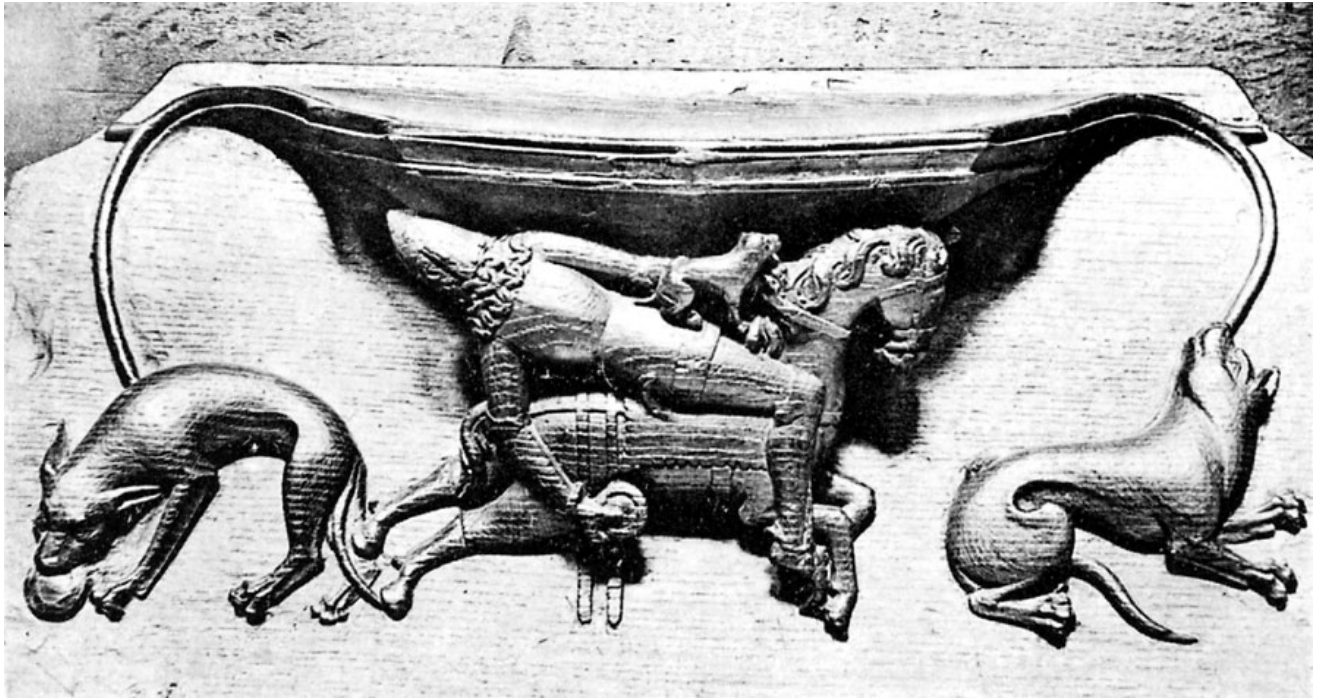


Fig. 8

TIGER AND MIRROR  
*Chester Cathedral*

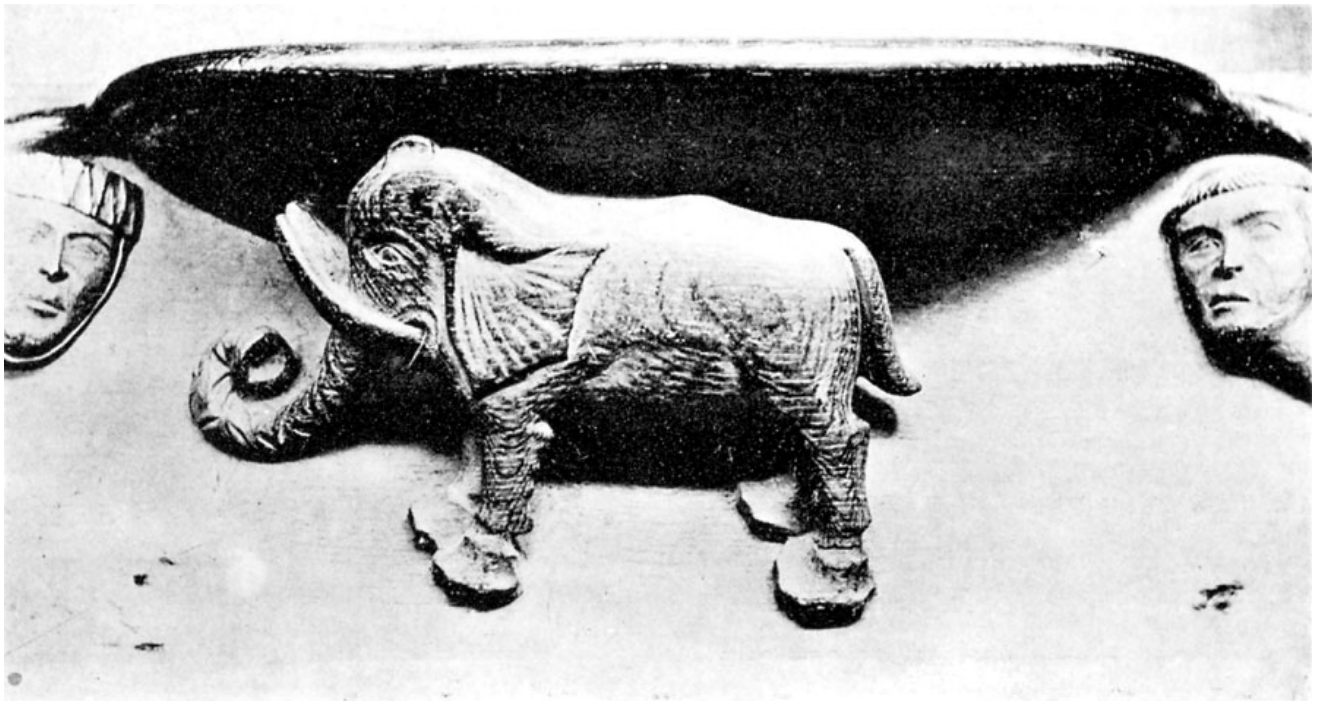


Fig. 9

ELEPHANT  
*Exeter Cathedral*



[60] It is not to be supposed that the wood-carvers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries took the same serious view of the text and symbolism of the Bestiaries that the earlier stone-masons had; they regarded them in common with other manuscripts of a religious character rather as a happy hunting ground from which to obtain suitable decorative subjects. In some of the Latin Bestiaries there are upwards of one hundred and fifty illustrations, and we can well understand how convenient such books would be to work from. The extent to which actual copying of details took place would depend upon the carver's knowledge of any given animal. There were occasional opportunities for seeing wild beasts. In Henry I's time there was a collection of some kind at Woodstock, and in 1235 the Emperor Frederick sent three leopards (? lions) as a present to Henry III in allusion to the Royal Arms. They were kept at the Tower. In 1252 a white bear arrived from Norway and the Sheriffs of London were charged with the payment of 4d. a day for its maintenance. They were further ordered to provide a muzzle and strong iron chain to hold it when out of the water, and a strong rope to hold it when fishing and bathing in the 'water of Thames'. In 1255 Louis sent King Henry an elephant, the first ever seen in England, and Matthew Paris tells us that the people of England flocked together to see the novel sight.<sup>2</sup> This beast was kept at the Tower and died in 1259. There are many subsequent references in the Close Rolls to lions and other animals kept there, being mostly payments for their food and wages for the keepers.<sup>3</sup>

It is in the group of well-known and domestic animals that we should expect the carvers to be more independent of the manuscripts and to follow their own inclinations. The misericords of Wells Cathedral, where there are many natural history subjects, may be studied in this respect. Their date is about 1330,<sup>4</sup> and there are indications that the carver was acquainted with the misericords at Winchester Cathedral, some few years earlier in date. His work is unusually refined in treatment and delicate in execution, and yet he was evidently much affected by adherence to type and was guilty of anatomical errors. The former is displayed in the similarity in the heads of different animals, the heads of the lions being especially weak. The arrangement of the hair over the forehead is stiff and corresponds with that of men and animals at Winchester, and the Cathedral and St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester. The domestic animals, however, as the hound, puppies playing, cat and mouse, and cock, are delightfully natural, and the foliage the same. Carelessness in anatomical details was general, even when it might have been avoided, for at both Wells and [61] Edlesborough (Bucks.) the bat has only three toes and at the latter place the frog has all four feet webbed (fig. 7). This is inexcusable in the case of creatures so accessible, and it suggests that the carvers, accustomed to reproduce so many animals and birds that were foreign to them and the shape of which they were not sure of, became indifferent to accuracy. They always seem to have been in difficulties over the feet, and it must be admitted that the Bestiaries gave them a bad lead; for in the manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the feet of wild beasts and other clawed animals, except perhaps the bear, are nearly always drawn with three toes. Similarly at Exeter, Norwich, and Limerick the lions and other animals have only three toes, and at Christchurch the dog gnawing a bone the same. The feet of camels, dromedaries, and ostriches are either cloven or hooved, more often the former, and in MS. Bodl. 764 the three dromedaries, ridden by the Magi crowned as Kings, are shod with nails. At Stratford-on-Avon the camel has hoofs and the ostrich long cloven feet; at Windsor the latter has hoofs. The antelope of the Bestiary, which is variously drawn and sometimes approximates to a wild beast of the tiger class, has cloven or clawed feet indifferently, as

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<sup>2</sup> Luard, *Chronica Majora*, vol. v, p. 489.

<sup>3</sup> Vide H. Sands, 'Extracts from the Documentary History of the Tower of London,' *Archaeological Journal*, vol. lxi, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Vide *Archaeologia*, vol. lv.

PLATE LIV



Fig. 10

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

*South Lopham, Norfolk*

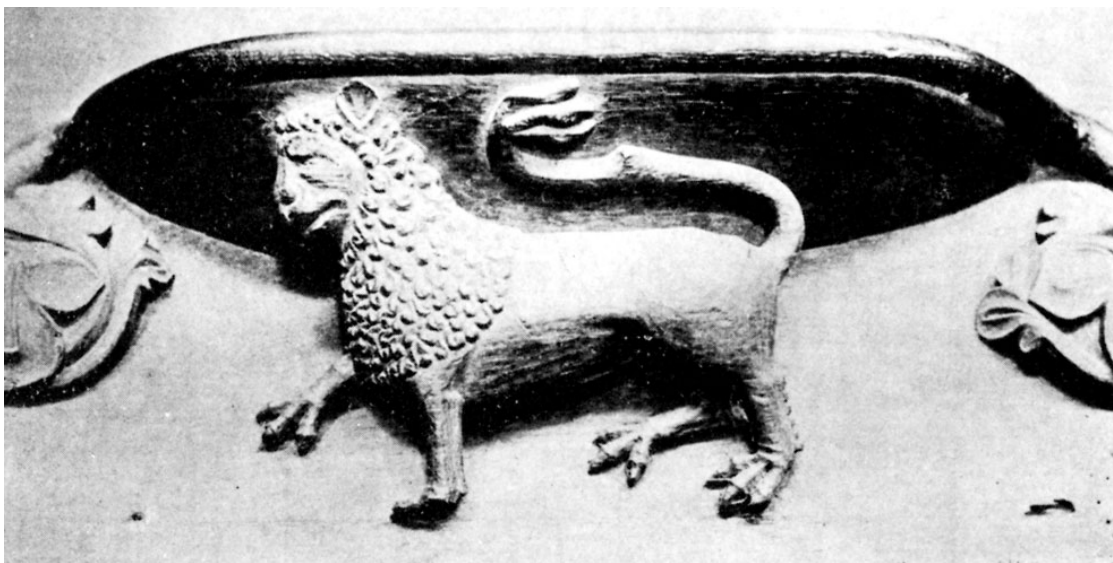


Fig. 11

LION

*Exeter Cathedral*

in MS. 12 F. XIII (B. M.), where they are clawed, and in the Westminster Bestiary, where they are cloven. At Manchester and Limerick it has feet with three toes. At Norwich Cathedral a hairy animal which we cannot identify has clawed fore-feet and cloven hind-feet.

However closely the carvers might be disposed to follow the manuscripts, there were factors which tended to modify the treatment, such as the necessity of adapting the subject to conditions of space and to the requirements of symmetry. This applies particularly to misericords and poppy-heads. It led to much suppression of detail, as it was seldom possible to render in stone or wood everything that could be drawn with pen and ink. In the stone carvings at Alne the subjects are reduced to their simplest elements. At Newton (Yorks.) the animals which are attracted by the sweet breath of the panther in the Bestiary are omitted; at Boston in the syren scene the ship with mast and sail is reduced to a simple boat, and elsewhere is left out altogether. There is a charming composition upon a bench-end of the fifteenth century at South Brent (Som.), where the carver has happily filled the high and narrow panel with a tree, upon the top of which in a fork he has placed a pelican with its nest. The same arrangement is found in manuscripts, the tree being the *Lignum Vitae*. The structure of the pelican's nest provides another link between the Bestiaries and carvings, for in both it is shown as made of plait or basket work. Excellent examples of this may be seen at Kidlington (Oxon.) and Cartmel (Lancs.). At Trent (Som.) the carver was not so happy. He had the more difficult task of arranging a stag and hound in a vertical panel, and produced a singularly awkward composition. A tree is by far the best subject for a bench-end, [62] unless the latter is divided by a transom. Similarly the need of symmetrical arrangement is apparent on all sides. It caused the carver to duplicate his tigers on the misericord at Chester Cathedral, only one being required by the story (fig. 8), and a good instance is afforded at Boston in the treatment of a pair of knaves who are holding cats and biting their tails to make music. The balancing of the two wing subjects on the same misericord is well shown at Winchester in the pairs of human heads, squirrels and cocks, and at Stratford-on-Avon, where a swan and ostrich face each other.

The earliest carvings of animals in wood in ecclesiastical buildings in this country are on misericords at Exeter Cathedral, dating from about the middle of the thirteenth century. There are subjects from the Bestiary among them, including the elephant (fig. 9), lion, centaur, and syren. This elephant is an interesting beast. It has been suggested that it is due to the presence in England of the elephant recorded by Matthew Paris, and which is illustrated in the second part of the MS. *Chronica Majora* in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The latter is very well drawn, whereas there are anatomical errors in the beast at Exeter. Its tusks project upwards from the lower jaw, as in a wild boar, instead of downwards from the upper jaw, and it has the legs of a horse. This throws an interesting light upon the question as to how far the carvers worked from nature, for here anatomical features of well-known animals are applied to one rarely or never seen. Both artists and carvers went badly astray over the elephant's tusks and legs. Of five illustrations of elephants in manuscripts that we have before us, the only one approaching to nature in these respects is in the Corpus Christi MS. In MS. Roy. 20 B xx, a French romance of the fifteenth century, the elephants' feet are cloven. It is probable that the carver of the elephant at Exeter worked from an incorrect picture, as they are common in the Bestiaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Horses' legs on elephants are quite usual; they may be seen at Gloucester and Chester Cathedrals and Cartmel, and upon the Vernon brass at Tong; and the difficulties of a carver over both legs and trunk are well displayed on a poppy-head at South Lopham (Norfolk) (fig. 10), where the elephant has neither ears nor tusks.

The artists of the Bestiaries showed a preference for the elephant with the castle, which they drew full of armed knights in accordance with the text, which says that the Persians and Indians fight with darts from towers placed upon their backs. The carvers followed this lead, and amongst the remaining examples those at Beverley Minster and St. Mary, Ripon Cathedral, St. George's

PLATE LV

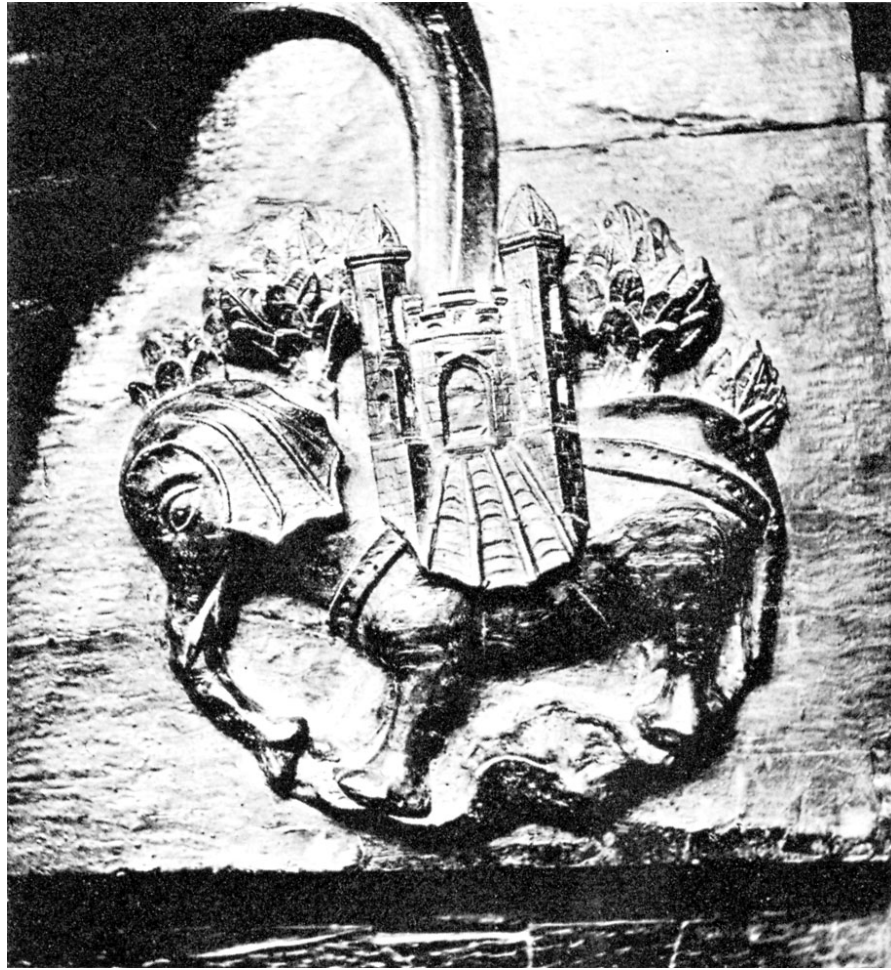


Fig. 12

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE  
*St. George's Chapel, Windsor*



Fig. 13

LION  
*Wells Cathedral*



Chapel (fig. 12), St. Katherine's, Regent's Park, and Manchester Cathedral may be especially mentioned. The elephant at Beverley St. Mary, though a cumbersome beast and with the tusks in the wrong jaw, has considerable approximation to nature. The fighting men are usually omitted, but there are figures in the [63] castle in a few cases, and at Ripon the elephant is holding a man in its trunk. The most elaborate castles are at Manchester, Ripon, and St. George's Chapel. There is an interesting account of fighting with elephants in the first Book of the Maccabees, ch. vi, and many references in Marco Polo.

The text and symbolism given in the Bestiaries relate to two scenes which are not often illustrated in the manuscripts, and have not as yet been reported in ecclesiastical carving so far as we know. The first is where the elephants, wishing for children, go to Paradise, where man was first placed, and there the female gives to the male the fruit of the mandragora-tree, whereupon she conceives; and when the time for bringing forth comes they go into a pool, and the male elephant guards the female for fear of the dragon, which is its enemy and would kill its young one. The other illustrates the story of the elephant having no joints in its knees, so that if it falls down it cannot get up and has to sleep standing, leaning against a tree. The hunters being aware of this cut a slit in the tree, so that when the elephant leans against it, it gives way and both fall down together. Thereupon it trumpets loudly, and first a single great elephant comes and then twelve elephants, but they are unable to raise it; lastly there comes a little elephant, which thrusts its trunk under that which was fallen and enables it to rise. The first of these scenes symbolized the Fall of Man, and the second his Redemption. Christ as the small elephant was able to raise fallen man, which the Law and the Prophets, the great elephants, had failed to do. A good illustration of four elephants, the dragon, and the mandragora-tree together may be seen in MS. Sloane 278 (B. M.). The scarcity of elephants in carving other than with the castle may be due to a preference for the direct representation of the Fall.

The hostility between the elephant and dragon comes out in another way, in the scene of the great fight which is described and illustrated in the Bestiaries under the heading of Draco and carved upon a misericord at Carlisle. This episode is graphically recorded by Pliny (Book viii, chs. 11, 12). The miniatures and carving alike show the dragon trying to suffocate the elephant, which is enveloped in its coils. In the carving the latter has a curious trunk and cloven feet.

The attitude of the lion at Exeter (fig. 11) may be compared with the illustrations in MSS. Add. 11283 and Harl. 3244 in the British Museum. Both show a maned lion with a fierce expression standing with its tail curled over its back. In the second manuscript the heading runs: 'De leone rege bestiarum'. The lion is the king of beasts, and is therefore a type of Christ. Its various points—its courage, as indicated by its firm, square breast; its endurance, by its head; its weaker hind-quarters, its claws, and other characteristics, are all used as types of various qualities in our Lord. There are many stories told of the lion in the Bestiaries, mostly based on Pliny, but [64] carvings which correspond are difficult to find. The lion sleeping with its eyes open, in the Bestiaries a type of the dual nature of Christ, is represented upon a misericord at Ripon Cathedral, and may be intended at Wells (fig. 13), Henry VIII's Chapel, and other places, where it is lying or crouching down. Both artists and carvers had to portray it as asleep and yet being on the alert, which was not easy and which meant a compromise. The illustration in MS. 12 F. XIII may be studied with advantage. The lion erasing its track with its tail when hunted and bringing its dead cubs to life again by breathing on them are not yet reported here in either stone or wood carving; but the latter subject is well shown on the cornice on the north side of Strasburg Cathedral.

The Bestiaries also enable us to distinguish the carvings of unicorns. These occur in two forms, which agree with the two forms illustrated and described in the manuscripts. The first is where the unicorn is alone, as upon a poppy-head at Westwell (Kent) (fig. 14), on misericords at Beverley Minster and Durham Castle chapel, and in the two spandrels of a bench-front at Great Gransden

(Hunts.). This beast is ‘monoceros’ of the Bestiary, and represents what the ancients called the Indian ass. It is probably the rhinoceros.<sup>5</sup> The description, with some slight variation, is taken from Solinus, and says that it is ‘a great beast with a terrible bellow, the body of a horse, the feet of an elephant, a tail very like that of a stag (but Solinus, ‘cauda suilla, capite cervino’), and a horn in the middle of its forehead, which projects with an astonishing magnificance to the length of four feet, and is so sharp that anything that it strikes is easily pierced by the blow. It does not come alive into man’s power, and it can be killed indeed but cannot be captured.’ There is a particularly good illustration of ‘monoceros’ in MS. Harl. 4751. The carving at Westwell is rude, and suggests an unskilled and perhaps local hand.

‘Monoceros’ is not to be confounded with ‘Unicornis’ of the Unicorn and Virgin legend, which is found also in carving fairly frequently. Good examples of the latter may be seen on misericords at Boston (fig. 15), Nantwich, Ely, Chester, and other places. In the Bestiaries the two animals are separately described and illustrated. In MS. Harl. 3244 they are carefully distinguished in the headings, which are respectively: ‘De monocerote secundum quod aliud est quam unicornu’ and ‘De Unicornu vel Rinocerote’. In Marco Polo, after a description of the rhinoceros in Java Minor, we get: ‘They are not of that description of animals that suffer themselves to be taken by maidens, as our people suppose, but are quite of a contrary nature’ (Bk. iii, ch. 12). The unicorn of the legend is described as a small animal like a kid, with a horn in the middle of its forehead, and is so exceedingly swift that no [65] hunter can capture it. It is taken by a trick. A young virgin is brought to the wood where its haunt is and is left alone there, when the unicorn runs to her, lies down and places its head in her lap and falls asleep. The hunter then comes up and kills it. By this story the incarnation and death of Christ at the hands of the Jews is signified. The manuscript illustrations and carvings alike show the girl seated clasping the unicorn round the neck, and a hunter spearing it. The artists seem to have been confused as to its nature, as it is variously drawn as a woolly sheep, calf, deer, or horse. In carving it usually resembles a horse. At Boston the work is rough, and the attitude of the hunter much affected by exigencies of space.

The antelope is another interesting animal, partly because of its obscure origin and partly because there was a remarkable development of it as a heraldic device. The natural antelope was apparently imperfectly known in the Middle Ages. Pliny has but little to say about it, and it does not figure as such in the Bestiaries. It is not surprising, then, that examples in carving are scarce, and this makes it all the more necessary to record the beautiful instance upon an elbow of the stalls in the church of St. Nicholas, King’s Lynn (fig. 17). It has long slender horns and mane.

The antelope of the Bestiary differs from the natural antelope in its horns, and from internal evidence it is likely that its story came from an Eastern source. It appears under the name of Antalops, the etymology of which is unknown. The manuscripts describe it as so swift that no hunter can approach it. It has long horns ‘after the semblance of a saw, so that it can cut down great trees and cast them to the ground. When it is thirsty, it goes to the great river Euphrates, and there is a bush there which is called in the Greek language “herecine”,<sup>6</sup> having tender and wide-spreading shoots; and it begins to make play with its horns in the bush, and while it plays its horns become entangled in the shoots. Then the hunter hearing its cry comes up and kills it.’ The antelope is man, and its two horns are the two Testaments by which he may cut off and destroy all vices, bodily and spiritual. The water and the bush are types of drunkenness and luxury. The miniatures show the

<sup>5</sup> For arguments as to its identity see *Ancient India described by Ctesias*, by J. W. McCrindle, M.A., 1882. Pliny describes the ‘monoceros’ in Book viii, ch. 31 (21) and the Indian rhinoceros in ch. 29 (20), but his sources of information as to the two are clearly different. Solinus also gives separate descriptions.

<sup>6</sup> Probably a Latinized form of *ἐρείκη*, heath, heather; a taller and more bushy species than our common heather (Liddell & Scott). Pliny mentions it in Book XI, ch. 15 (16).

PLATE LVI

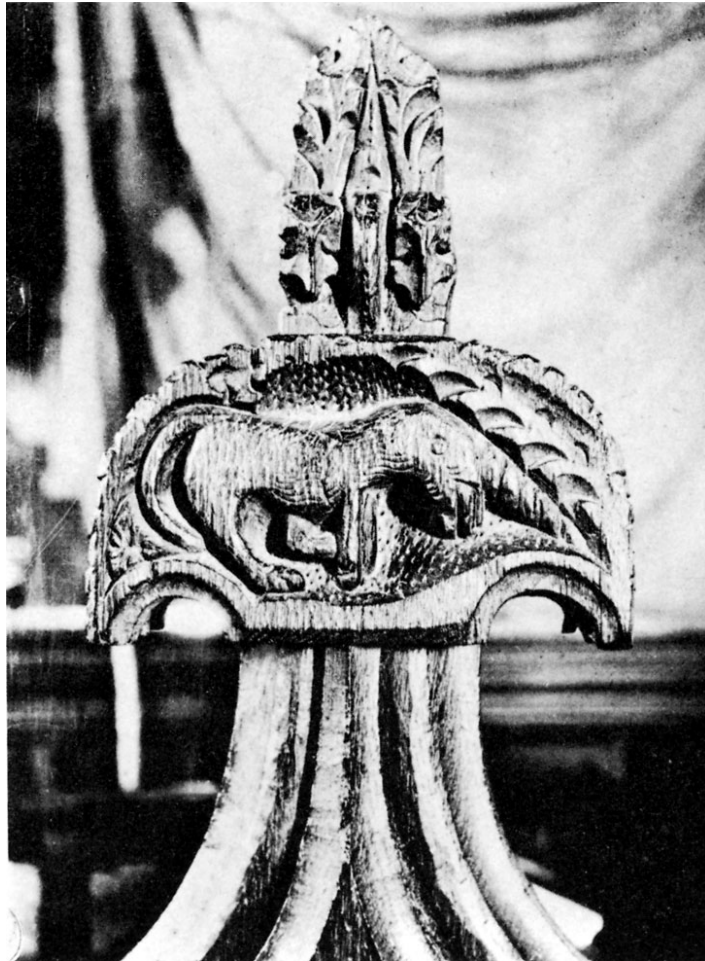


Fig. 14

MONOCEROS  
*Westwell*



Fig. 15

UNICORN  
*Boston*

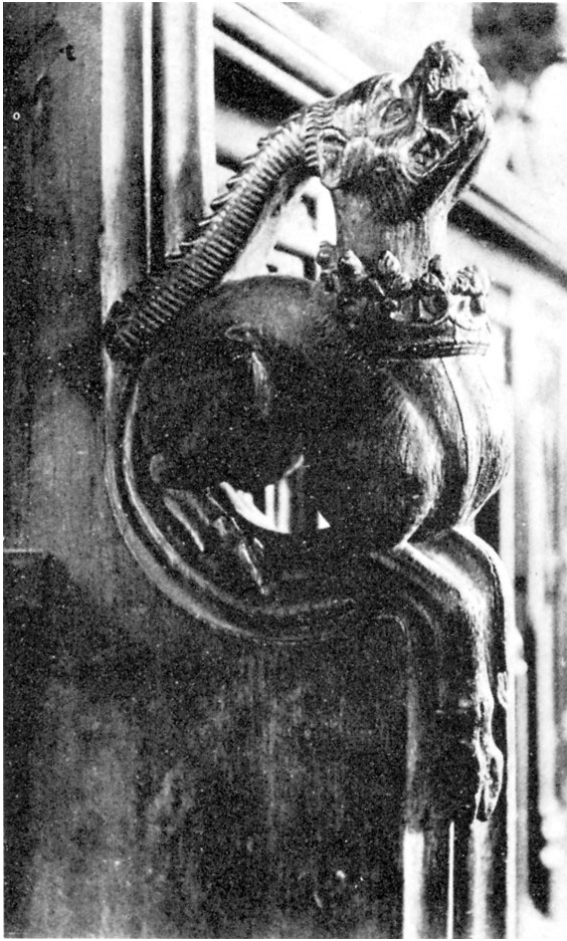


Fig. 16      HERALDIC ANTELOPE  
*King's Lynn*



Fig. 17      NATURAL ANTELOPE  
*King's Lynn*



Fig. 18      ANTELOPE  
*Eynesbury*



PLATE LVIII

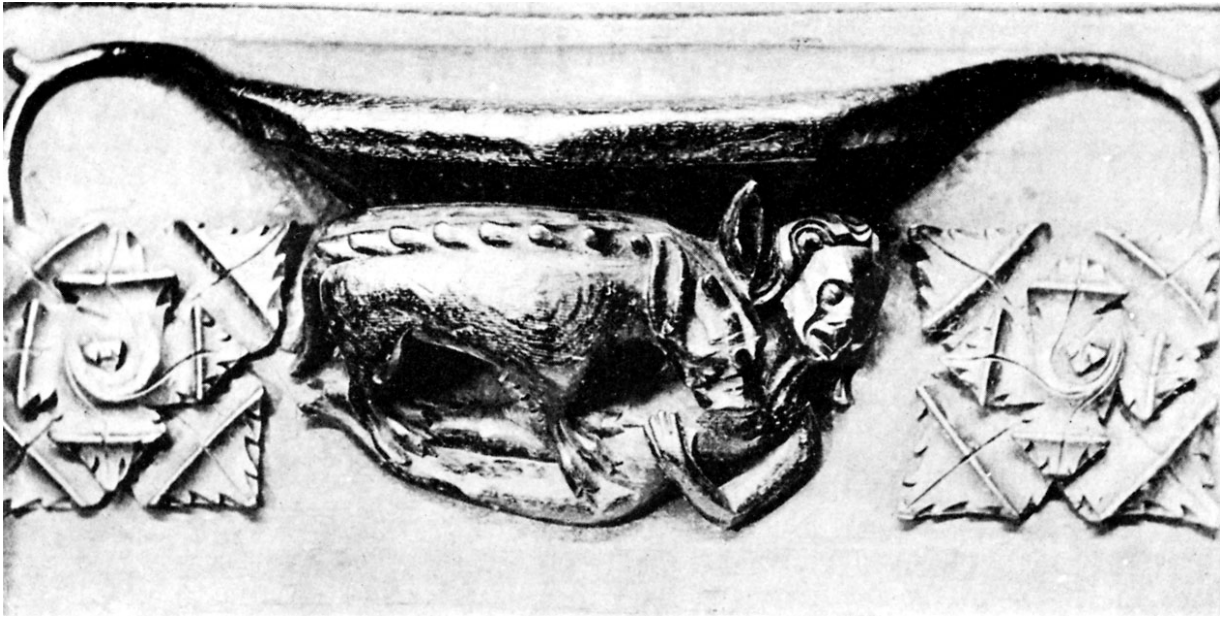


Fig. 19

HYENA  
*Carlisle Cathedral*



Fig. 20

CAMEL  
*Ufford*

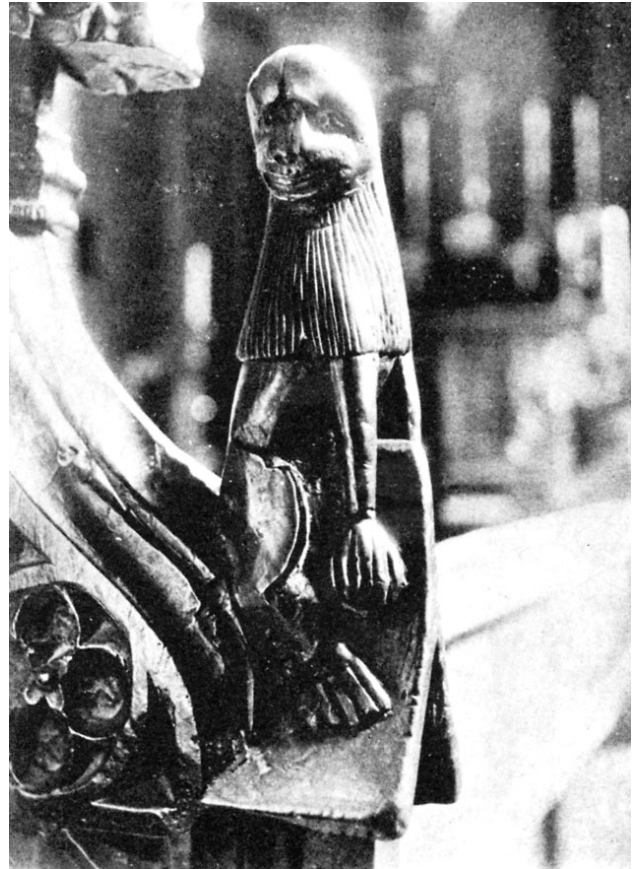


Fig. 21

CALLITRIX  
*Ufford*

antelope with serrated horns entangled in the bush, and being speared or hacked by a hunter, who is sometimes in mail. This scene is difficult to find in architecture, the nearest approach to it being upon the misericord at Manchester Cathedral, already mentioned, where the antelope is either sawing a tree or entangled in it. The hunter is omitted. The antelope alone, with serrated horns, appears upon a poppy-head at Eynesbury (fig. 18), where there are many carvings of animals similar in type, and on misericords at Norwich Cathedral, Limerick, and Durham Castle.

[66] From this beast was developed the heraldic antelope, a very common device in stone and wood carving of the fifteenth century. No instances of it are recorded prior to that time so far as we know, and there is a strong presumption that it was composed for Henry V himself; hence it became generally popular. It usually appears with serrated horns, boar's tusks, cloven feet, and a crown round its neck, to which a chain is attached. The tusks, which Antelops of the Bestiary never has, were no doubt added by the heralds to give individuality. In shape it is by no means uniform. It may be anything from a graceful antelope-like creature, with well-defined corrugations and serrations upon its horns as at King's Lynn (fig. 16), to a maned lion-like beast as upon a misericord at St. George's Chapel. Other examples may be seen on misericords at Ripon and Canon Pyon (Hereford), on cornices at Burwell (Cambs.), and on bench-ends at Ufford (Suff.) and Soham (Cambs.). The most important, perhaps, is in stone on the vault above King Henry's own tomb at Westminster. The clever way in which the Lynn carver has disposed his two antelopes on the elbows will be noticed.<sup>7</sup>

The misericord at Chester, with the legend of the tiger and mirror (fig. 8), has been referred to as an instance of the regard paid to symmetry; it will be seen from the story how well the carver has arranged his subject. The Bestiary tells us that the tiger is so fierce that the hunter who wishes to obtain the cubs is unable to do so without recourse to a trick. He waits until the tigress leaves her den, when he goes in and takes the cubs, and on his departure leaves mirrors in the path or hanging upon the trees. The tigress returns, and finding her cubs gone, starts in pursuit of the thief; but catching sight of herself in one of the mirrors, stops as if spell-bound, thinking that she sees her cub. Realizing that she is deceived, she resumes the pursuit, when the horseman finding himself being overtaken drops another mirror. The tigress stops, and seeing herself again reflected in it, fondles it as if it were her cub. This is repeated, and the time gained enables the hunter to reach a place of safety. This scene occurs regularly in the Bestiaries, and is based on Pliny's account (Bk. viii, ch. 25 (18)), in which, however, he does not mention the mirrors, but says that the hunter drops one of the whelps and thus delays the pursuit. The symbolism is given in MS. 3516 in the Arsenal Library, Paris 'We are the tigers, and the cubs are our souls. The hunter is the Devil, who tempts us with the pleasures of the world to forget the care of our souls, which he seizes and carries off to hell.'

The misericord at Chester appears to be the only instance which shows the full scene. The hunter is in armour of the camail period, and holds the cub in his left hand. The carver has arranged his subject very adroitly, for in order to get the tall rider comfortably under the ledge he has made him bending [67] down in the act of dropping the mirror. The lack of proportion between rider and horse will be noticed, and the similarity of the tigers to dogs. One of them is biting the mirror. The subject occurs in an abbreviated form upon the cornices at Burwell, and occasionally upon poppy-heads. It is well known in heraldry, and may be seen in the spandrels of the fireplace in the lower room at Little Mote, Eynesford, the home of the Sybill family.

The hyena is another very scarce beast. There is an early stone carving of it with title at Alne, in which it is biting what we know from the Bestiary to be either a bone or the limb of a corpse. By far the best example in wood carving is upon a misericord at Carlisle (fig. 19). It shows the hyena with long ears and hog-mane standing over and biting a corpse which it has dragged out of a tomb, but

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<sup>7</sup> For notes on the history of the heraldic antelope see *Archaeological Journal*, vol. lxxviii, p. 173.

the carver has omitted the latter. Otherwise he has followed the manuscripts faithfully. The text repeats Solinus and Pliny, who give many wonderful items of information, one being that the hyena is male and female in alternate years. It was therefore held to be a filthy beast, and in the French version of Philip de Thaurin, written about 1121 (MS. Nero A. V. Brit. Mus.), this is used by the moralist to signify a man who is covetous and luxurious, and who imitates the manners of a changeable woman when he should be firm. In the Latin Bestiaries it is a type of the Jews who at first served the living God and then gave themselves up to luxury and idolatry. The hyena occasionally appears upon a poppy-head, as at Swavesey (Carobs.), where it is seated on its haunches, and there is no corpse. In such cases it can only be identified by its mane.

Carvings of camels are fairly frequent, but they are lacking in skilful treatment, except in one instance. It is doubtful if the carvers saw the live animal. The camel with single hump appears upon a misericord at Beverley Minster, a bench-end at Ufford (Suff.) (fig. 20), and upon a poppy-head at Isleham (Cambs.). There are others with two humps upon bench-ends at Swaffham Bulbeck (Cambs.) and Eynesbury, and upon misericords at Stratford-on-Avon and Boston (fig. 22). The latter is by far the best-executed carving of a camel known to us and is fairly naturally drawn, including the feet. The carver had to fit it into a small space and has done it very cleverly by putting it into a kneeling attitude. We should like to think that he worked from the natural animal, but the probability is that he had a good picture, as he has carved a very quaint crocodile close by, which could not possibly have been done from nature. These carvings are altogether superior in execution to the unicorn scene and would not be by the same hand. The camels at Ufford and Boston have woolly humps which closely correspond with illustrations in the Bestiaries, as in MS. Harl. 4751. The different kinds are described; the Arabian camel is said to have two humps and the Bactrian one. This mistake may be traced to the text of the *Polyhistor*, in which Solinus seems to have misread Pliny. The mistake was repeated by the commentators, as in Isidore's *Etymology*, and passed into [68] the Bestiary, but which way the carvers regarded it we do not know, as they produced both kinds.

There is a full account of the camel in the Bestiaries, and the symbolism is given. Christ is the spiritual camel, for as it lies down to receive its load, so He humbled Himself to bear the sins of the world. The dromedary is also described, and there are pictures of it being ridden, sometimes by the Magi. In MS. Harl. 3244 directions are given about strapping the rider on, 'lest the ligaments of his limbs be dislocated by the pace;' and we learn that it was on dromedaries that the Magi came to Bethlehem, traversing the most distant parts from the East in twelve days. There is a late example of a dromedary with rider upon a bench-end at Sefton (Lancs.).

Apes are very common in wood carving. They occur in many different scenes, most of which come within the class of satirical subjects, such as the ape posing as the doctor. A well-carved but ill-proportioned ape appears as a decorative feature on a stall-arm at Southwold (fig. 23). There is an attractive story of the ape and its beloved and hated twins in the Bestiaries, but it does not seem to be directly represented in ecclesiastical carving. It is a type of the Devil, and its two young ones carried in its arms in front and clinging to its back are the bad and good people respectively. The former, whom the Devil loves, are carried off to hell, but the latter, whom he cannot influence, remain behind to go to heaven. In the chapter-house at York there is a stone carving of the thirteenth century, in which an adult ape is driving a young one in front of it with a swish, which may be founded on this story. Elsewhere the ape is a symbol of the hypocrite.

The great apes are also represented in wood carving, the Satyrus being perhaps the most important. It got its name from a supposed resemblance in appearance and habits to the classical Satyr, and as the artists of the Bestiaries did not know what it was like, they drew it as a Satyr. Thus we find them in the manuscripts as little bearded men with horns, horse-tail, and human or goat

PLATE LIX



Fig. 22

CAMEL  
*Boston*



Fig. 23

APE  
*Southwold*



Fig. 24

SATYRUS  
*Lincoln Minster*





Fig. 25

GRIFFIN  
*Norwich Cathedral*

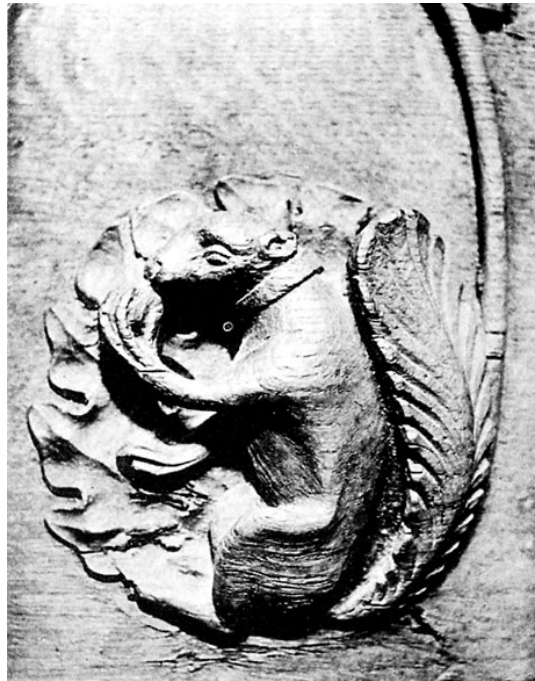


Fig. 26

SQUIRREL  
*Norwich Cathedral*

legs, holding various objects such as a thyrsus, branch, snake, vase and goblet, or axe and shield. A good illustration may be seen in MS. Harl. 3244. The description was taken from Solinus, and merely says that there are apes which are called Satyrs, with faces in a manner pleasing, and in gesture and movement restless. The Satyrus is probably the orang-utan, and Aelian gives an interesting account of how they run up to the tops of the hills when hunted and throw rocks down on the hunters and kill them, and that they cannot be caught unless old or sickly (Bk. xvi, ch. 21). He alone mentions their tails.

The Satyrus is carved upon a misericord of the fourteenth century at Chichester Cathedral. It is semi-man, semi-goat in form, but has no horns. It is holding its tail. A more interesting carving, a little later in date, exists in a quatrefoil of the stalls at Lincoln Minster (fig. 24), where there are many [69] animal and bird subjects. Its form is so like a natural ape of the orang-utan kind that it suggests that the carver had seen one, but on the other hand he was evidently influenced by conventional treatment, for he has given it a wonderful pair of horns, which he must have borrowed from a sheep. This ape holds its tail as at Chichester.

The Callitriches, or smooth-haired apes, are also described and occasionally illustrated in the Bestiaries. They are said to have a beard and a bushy tail, and to live nowhere but in Ethiopia; and they may be easily caught. An illustration is given in MS. Harl. 4751 in the same panel as the Satyrus, and a good carving occurs upon a bench-end at Ufford (fig. 21), in which the beard corresponds closely with that in the manuscript. The tail is omitted as it did not fit in with the ape's position on the bench-end. The Cynocephalus, the dog-headed ape or baboon, is carved on the same bench.

The misericords at Norwich Cathedral provide many examples of skilful carving. The plan of the seats suggests work of two different dates, the earlier being of the second half of the fourteenth century, but the style of the carving hardly suggests a long interval. The heads of the animals are cast very much in one mould and indicate that the carver worked to type. The misericord of the man, attired in tight-fitting 'cote', attacking a griffin which has seized a sheep (fig. 25) is one of the older set and shows a combination not often seen, for the griffin is usually standing alone, as at Chichester Cathedral and Limerick, or holds an animal, limb, bambino, or man in its grasp. Examples in stone and wood carving are numerous in churches and follow the Bestiary pictures closely, the idea in both being to display the griffin as a particularly powerful and ferocious creature. The text of the Latin manuscripts is based on the well-known story of the warfare between the griffins and the Arimaspi, and says that the griffin has a great aversion to horses and tears men to pieces. In MS. Harl. 4751 it is grasping a horse. In Mandeville it is strong enough to carry off a horse or two oxen yoked together. The Arsenal version says that it can fly away with a live ox, and the symbolism is founded upon this. The griffin and its young ones are the devils in hell; the ox is the man who lives in mortal sin. When it is time for him to die the griffin comes seeking food, and carries off his 'caitiff soul' and throws it to its young ones in the darkness of hell, where it remains in the power of its enemies for ever.

Of the wing subjects on the misericords at Norwich Cathedral there are two which are well rendered: the squirrel and a large fish swallowing a smaller one. The squirrel is one of those subjects for which we should hardly expect the carvers to go beyond the natural creature for a model, but this is by no means certain. Its treatment is practically constant; in both manuscripts and carvings it is seated cracking a nut. There is an excellent example upon a misericord at Winchester Cathedral, c. 1300, where it is seated on a branch, [70] and another at Lincoln in a quatrefoil of the stalls. Abroad at Ulm it is treated in the same way. The carving at Norwich (fig. 26) shows the squirrel seated upon a leaf, for which there may be some reason apart from its serving as a background. It probably illustrates its method of crossing a river as told in the Bestiary. So far we have

PLATE LXI

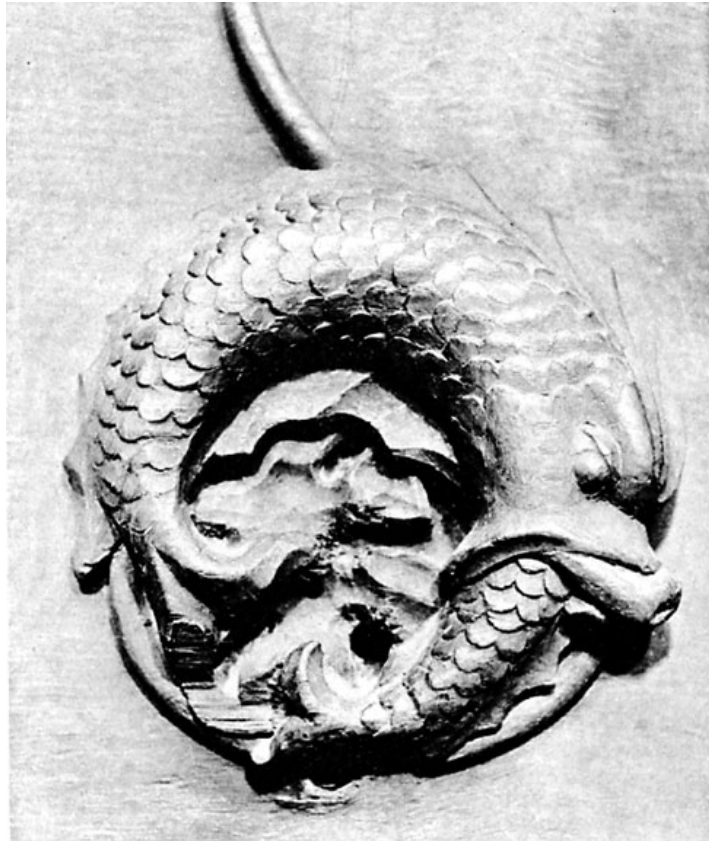


Fig. 27

ASPIDO

*Norwich Cathedral*



Fig. 28

MERMAN

*St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester*



Fig. 29

SYREN

*Cartmel*



Fig. 30

SYREN

*Carlisle Cathedral*



found the squirrel in only one group of manuscripts, under the name of *Cyrogrillus*, the best illustration being in MS. 22 at Westminster. In a manuscript in the Cambridge University Library its voyage across a river is shown. The account is pretty and worth repeating: 'They say of this creature that as often as it wants to cross a river or torrent, it either spreads out a leaf of a tree for itself for a vessel, or hollows out a mushroom or some dry integument of the kind into the shape of a shell, in which it embarks, and paddling with its fore-feet or raising its tail for a sail, with its little bark laden with nuts, is conveyed across to the other shore.' We know of no symbolism connected with the squirrel.

The other carving probably represents a sea-monster called the *Aspido-Chelone*, the sea-tortoise or turtle. It is swallowing another fish (fig. 27). There are other good instances on bench-panels at Kidlington and Great Gransden, and on poppy-heads at Isleham and Swaffham Bulbeck. The carving at Norwich is composed in a circular form, as is usual in the wing subjects there. Although *Aspido* is often more or less curved, this special requirement seems to have led the carver to make use of the dolphin in its conventional attitude of leaping as a model. It has spines, following the description in Pliny and the *Bestiaries* of the spined dolphin of the Nile, which kills the crocodile by cutting it underneath. We cannot, however, recall any instance in manuscripts of the dolphin swallowing another fish. There is an excellent picture of dolphins leaping in MS. Harl. 3244, but their heads are badly drawn. In the Westminster *Bestiary* the dolphin is straight, with a blunt, almost human-looking face. In both these cases they have fish-scales. At Swavesey there is a poppy-head composed of a fish bent round, but it is not necessarily a dolphin on that account: it is so arranged to suit the position.

The *Aspido-Chelone* must not be confounded with *Balena*, the whale, although it is sometimes compared with it. The illustrations in the manuscripts show the former with a ship anchored to it and a fire with cooking-pot upon its back, which one of the sailors is usually blowing up with quite modern-looking bellows. A shoal of small fish swims into its mouth, a feature that the carvers adopted. The story is well known. The beast spreads the sand of the sea over its back and rising to the surface remains motionless. The sailors thinking that it is an island anchor their ship to it, land and light their fire, when the monster feeling the heat plunges down and drowns them. Similarly when it is hungry it opens its mouth and gapes, and from its mouth proceeds so sweet a smell that the little fish swim in and are swallowed. *Aspido* is the Devil [71] who deludes careless people and those who are attracted by the pleasures of the world; when they are entered into his power, they are soon destroyed.

The merman and mermaid or syren are well represented in wood carving. The latter is perhaps the most frequently used of the symbolic subjects introduced through the *Bestiary*, but the merman or Triton is not mentioned in it so far as we know. He seems to have been introduced into carving by way of companion to the syren. They occur together in a few cases, as at Winchester, where they form the wing subjects upon a misericord. The merman holds a fish, and the syren a double comb and mirror. Another good instance is at Stratford-on-Avon, where they are side by side as the central subject. The merman alone is carved upon a misericord of the beginning of the fourteenth century at St. Mary's Hospital, Chichester (fig. 28), where the work is very good. He is in a hood, the tip of which is brought over to the front, and holds his fishtail. Carvings of the syren alone are so numerous that they are difficult to select for notice. The most interesting, perhaps, is at Cartmel, where the treatment is very curious (fig. 29); the carver must have been a person of some originality or had an unusual model to work from. He has composed his syren as a garish female with double fish-tail, as in classical representations of Scylla; her hair is long and wavy, that falling on her left being plaited, that on her right being loose. In one hand she holds an ornamented comb with both fine and coarse teeth, and in the other a mirror with richly chased rim. On the Exeter misericords the syrens and some of the animals have tails composed of foliage, which is also seen on animals in the

thirteenth-century Bestiaries. On the north side of Henry VII's Chapel there is a syren of early sixteenth-century date, which is differently treated and unlike English work. Instead of the graceful forms that we usually have she is decidedly coarse, and the setting of rocks and trees is quite uncommon. The mirror which she holds has a foot.

In some manuscripts the ship is shown. In MS. Harl. 4751 the mast and sail have fallen overboard; one man is steering and another is stopping up his ears. The syren in fish form hovers above, holding the vessel's prow and a fish. The scarce instance of the ship in carving at Boston has been alluded to.

The classical source of the syren is shown by its inclusion among the birds in the Bestiaries. In the early manuscript in the Bibl. Roy. Brussels (MS. 10074), dating from the tenth century, there are three of them in bird form, two of whom are tearing a man to pieces, while the third plays a musical instrument resembling a guitar. In the Arsenal manuscript they are in both bird and fish form. The bird form is rare in carving here, but the feet and feathers combined with the fish-tail may be seen on misericords at Carlisle (fig. 30) and All Saints, Hereford. In carving, feathers and scales are often very much alike. Bird syrens with musical instruments may be seen in the [72] second vase-room at the British Museum, and the fish form upon the pavement (cast) from the Roman Villa at Halicarnassus, in which Venus, holding her locks and a mirror, rises from the sea supported by two mermaids with curled fish-tails.

Three examples at least exist in wood carving of another scene, in which a syren is suckling a lion. They are upon misericords at Wells, Norwich, and Edlesborough. Up to the present we have found no reference to this in any manuscript, and are unable to express any opinion as to its meaning.

The owl teased by birds, upon one of the misericords at Norwich, shows a composition in which regard for symmetry was paramount (fig. 32). Nothing could be more exact. It is the finest of the carvings of this subject, but other good examples at St. George's Chapel (twice), Beverley Minster, and Gloucester Cathedral should not be passed over. There are but few illustrations of this scene in the Bestiaries, but miniatures occur in MS. Bodl. 764 and MS. Harl. 4751. The owls are there classified, according to Pliny, under the names of *Noctua* or *Nicticorax* the night-hawk, *Ulula* the screech-owl, and *Bubo* the horned or eared owl, but neither the artists nor carvers adhered to it, as they are drawn indiscriminately. It is *Bubo* that is mobbed; it is a type of the sinner who, when his ill deeds come into the light of day, has to bear the reproofs of good people. *Noctua*, with a rat in its mouth, is also carved at Norwich Cathedral, as a wing subject; as a bird of night it is a type of the Jews who loved to remain in spiritual darkness.

The bat is also included in the list of birds in the Bestiaries; and as it is a common object in nature, we should expect it to be well represented in carving, but it does not occur very frequently. It is usually shown full face on misericords for reasons of symmetry, as at Wells and Edlesborough (fig. 31).

The bat at Wells is beautifully carved, but in some ways the example at Edlesborough is the more interesting. In both places the carvers disregarded natural features. At Wells, besides the mistake in the number of toes already mentioned, the membranes project beyond the feet and are not joined to them; at Edlesborough the arms are distorted and the long ears are those of a dragon close by, but the keel-like chest has been fairly successfully reproduced. Abroad the bat is carved among other bestiary subjects on the canopies of the thirteenth-century stalls in the cathedral of St. Pierre, Poitiers.

The illustrations of bats in the Bestiaries are as a rule poor. They approximate to mice with wings, and are not usually full face. The texts describe the bat as an '*avis ignobilis*', and yet as a quadruped and viviparous and provided with teeth, 'qualities such as are not usually found in other

PLATE LXIII



Fig.31

BAT  
*Edlesborough*

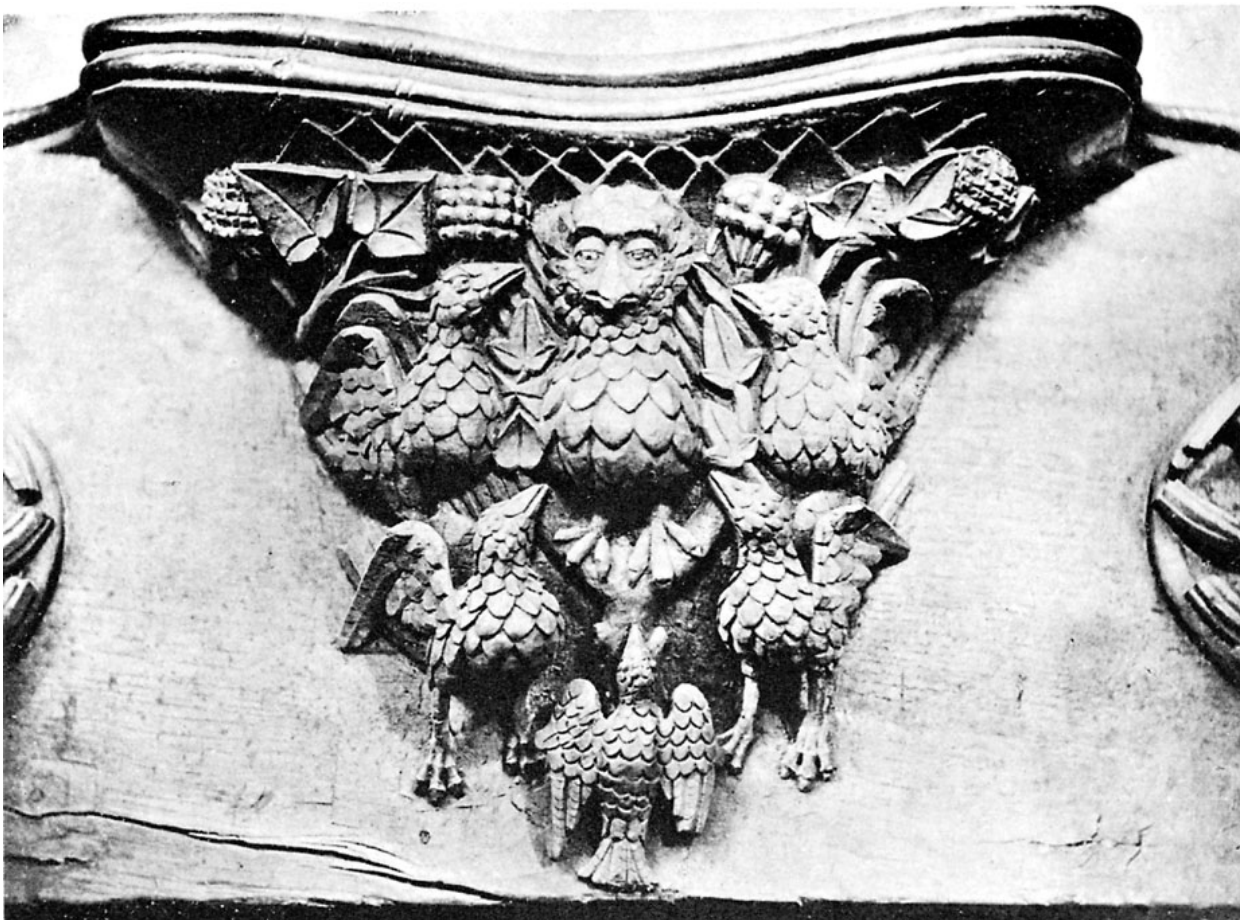


Fig. 32

OWL TEASED BY BIRDS  
*Norwich Cathedral*

birds.' Its form is that of a mouse, and it emits a sound 'which is not so much like a cry as a squeak'. The formation of its wings and manner of flight are described, and its habit of suspension is used for purposes of symbolism: 'And [73] this mean creature has such a nature, that they cling to each other and hang from any spot like a bunch of grapes, and if the one at the top should let go, all of them are scattered, which comes about by a kind of bond of sympathy which is difficult to find in men of this world.'

It will be seen from this short survey that the subject may be approached from various points of view, viz. Natural History, Archaeology, or Craftsmanship. As to the men who did this figure carving, there are no sources of information known to us; probably large series of misericords and bench-ends were done in the 'shop' by established carvers, but there must have been much local work done in small places by less skilled men, who produced unicorns and dragons of the class seen at Westwell and Weston-in-Gordano. The illustrations in this paper have been chosen as being typical rather than especially fine examples of carving. The work at many places could not of necessity be included. At Ely, where the misericords are of the fourteenth century, there are comparatively few animals among the central subjects, and the same applies to Worcester. On the whole the success of the mediaeval carver in reproducing natural features is not very striking, although the execution is often good. The inclination to work from books from motives of convenience was no doubt too strong for them.

Our acknowledgements are due to Mr. Philip M. Johnston, F.S.A., for kindly allowing us to reproduce his photograph of the amphisbaena at Limerick; to Mr. F. H. Crossley for the tiger at Chester and syrens at Cartmel and Carlisle; to Mr. Jas. Barr for the hyena at Carlisle; and to Mr. S. Smith for the ape at Lincoln.