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# Late Medieval Roof Bosses in the Churches of Devon

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**LATE MEDIEVAL ROOF BOSSES IN THE CHURCHES OF DEVON**

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Faculty of Arts

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**Susan Andrew**

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**Abstract**

The extensive survival of late medieval bosses in the roofs of many parish churches in Devon has long been recognised. These carvings escaped the widespread destruction of images during the Reformation through their relative inaccessibility, and yet most have never before been recorded; nor has systematic study been made of their design, their positioning within a sacred space, or the ways in which they may have been viewed and used by a largely illiterate audience. This thesis rectifies this oversight in its detailed documentation and photography of figural roof bosses and contextual information from 121 churches across the county, appended as a gazetteer, and in its thorough analysis, which considers the varied interactions between the people of the parish and their carvings.

The thesis reviews the literature on roof bosses in Britain, particularly the work of C.J.P. Cave whose studies have hitherto dominated the field, before considering materiality and method, namely the properties of oak, the dating of the timber, the carvers and the carving process, and the surface finish and visibility of roof bosses. The social, religious, and decorative context is then discussed, especially the role of ecclesiastical authorities in the life of the parish church and its people, and the motivation of patrons, clergy and laity in the decoration of their parish church. An exploration of motifs carved on roof bosses follows, with these motifs linked to other images within the parish church, the cathedral and the wider world, to the words of the sermon and the confessional, and to scriptural texts and popular literature. Medieval understandings of vision are considered, as are the circumstances in which roof bosses may have been seen and used. The thesis argues, in particular, that many bosses may have served as mnemonic devices and aids to prayer in a penitential process which sought to cure the soul of sin. The thesis concludes with case studies of six parish churches from across Devon which confirm that these carvings should be recognised as a significant resource for our understanding of the late medieval parish church and its people in the Diocese of Exeter and beyond.

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**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented.

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Signed.....

Date.....

## Chapter One

### Introduction and aims

This thesis sets out to make its contribution by recording the majority of late medieval figural roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, it documents bosses in 121 churches across the county, with photographs and contextual information on each being presented in a gazetteer. Most of these bosses have never before been documented, and the thesis therefore breaks new ground in collating this corpus.

The thesis also seeks to broaden the study of roof bosses, which, hitherto, has focused on the sculpture of cathedrals and great churches, and has had a strong methodological emphasis on traditional art-historical concerns of style and iconography. Through examination of bosses in parish churches using methodologies which consider their production, the institutional practices that may have influenced their creation, their audience and their function, as well as their style and iconography, it is hoped to demonstrate that figural bosses are a significant resource for enhancing our understanding of the parish church and its people in late medieval Devon.

The thesis builds on the legacy of Charles John Phillip Cave (1871–1950) whose contribution to the study of roof bosses in Britain is unparalleled. Cave's early interests lay in the field of meteorology (he was president of the Royal Meteorological Society twice: 1913–15 and again 1924–26), and he enjoyed a

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<sup>1</sup> Figural here includes carvings of human and animal figures, and also heraldic devices and badges, initials, and any other design which cannot be described as foliate/floriate or interlacing/patterned.



fine reputation as a photographer of cloud formations.<sup>2</sup> Cave's study of roof bosses, by his own admission, 'began rather by chance', as a result of his experimentation with telephotography in Winchester Cathedral.<sup>3</sup> He noted that roof bosses 'owing to their position...have not only remained undisturbed during periods of iconoclasm, but...have partially escaped the ravages of the nineteenth-century restorer' and that 'the reason for their preservation has also been the reason for their neglect'.<sup>4</sup> Cave determined to rectify this neglect through the publication, over a period of almost twenty years, of a series of papers on roof bosses in archaeological journals. In 1948 Cave published his *magnum opus*, *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches: An Aspect of Gothic Sculpture*.<sup>5</sup> This work was the culmination of his examination and documentation of hundreds of churches across Britain, including many parish churches. Many of Cave's papers, including a file of his church visits, and photographs, of which he claimed to have taken over 8000, are now housed in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London, of which he was a Fellow.

Cave's book remains, to date, the only national survey of medieval roof bosses in Britain and is still widely referenced in academic books and papers. It is, however, as would be expected, a work of its time in terms of Cave's analysis, which is largely concerned with the style of the carvings and identification of their subject matter. Cave himself recognised other limitations, writing in its preface:

I am acutely aware of how much still remains to be recorded and even discovered... I have examined the cathedrals, but know nothing of parish

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<sup>2</sup> Obituary C.J.P. Cave, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, Vol. III, 1951, p.155.

<sup>3</sup> Cave, C.J.P., *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches: An Aspect of Gothic Sculpture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, preface vii.

<sup>4</sup> Cave, 1948, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Cave, 1948.

churches over a great part of the country, and even those counties that I know best have only been partially explored. Friends have told me of many churches where I should find roof bosses, others I have found by my own explorations, but there must be hundreds more of which I know nothing.<sup>6</sup>

Cave hoped that his book would 'awaken an interest in the subject and result in the recording of many more roof bosses', but this has not proved the case.<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent studies have focused on re-examination of the sculpted bosses of the great churches and cathedrals already documented by Cave and little new material devoted to the oak roof bosses of parish churches has been forthcoming.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of art-historical interest in medieval wooden roof bosses is surprising given their extraordinary survival, particularly in the wagon roofs of the parish churches of south-west England. The reasons for this are several. It might, perhaps, have been assumed that cathedral bosses are somehow more significant iconographically than those of the parish churches, by virtue of their production for a clerical literate élite whose high level of intellectual sophistication was believed to be reflected in the great church art of the medieval period. Differences in the architectural function of cathedral and parish church bosses may also have contributed to the lack of interest. While the stone bosses of the great churches are structural and perform a significant function as keystones, the wooden bosses of the parish churches of Devon are non-structural, being carved to cover joints of the roof timbers rather than to lock

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<sup>6</sup> Cave, 1948, preface vii.

<sup>7</sup> Cave, 1948, preface vii.

<sup>8</sup> Material that has emerged is considered below in the Literature Review. Various motifs have come under scrutiny, most notably the foliate head, but these studies do not specifically relate to roof bosses and many are popular rather than academic in nature. The advent of digital photography and the internet has seen the posting of photographs of roof bosses online although it appears that little has been done to analyse these bosses in any sustained way.

them into place. The stone bosses, given their material and their structural role in the great churches, might therefore be considered as part of a western category of 'high art', which encompasses architecture and sculpture, while the wooden bosses, found in parish churches and non-structural, might be considered as 'low art', a 'folk art' or 'popular art' associated with craft skills rather than artistry.

Within a traditional connoisseurial art-historical framework which privileges expensive materials and high levels of technical accomplishment, it is likely that the wooden bosses of parish churches have simply been considered unworthy of study. As Malcolm Jones notes:

In the study of the applied arts of the Middle Ages, and sad to say, in England above all, one is still too often forced to the conclusion that ancient snobberies, of the sort which have historically divorced the connoisseur's objet d'art from the archaeologist's artefact, and high art from folk art, are still alive and well.<sup>9</sup>

Peter Kidson comments on the differences between an art-historical and archaeological approach to the architecture of the medieval period:

The long-term effect of art-historical dalliance with the symbolism of architecture has been to aggravate a quite deplorable split among students of medieval buildings. On the one hand the armchair art historians have gone their own way, busily dreaming up iconographical fantasies that all too often could never have been taken seriously by any practising architect, even if they were actually put to him; while on the other the down to earth archaeologists have resolutely turned their backs on all such nonsense, but are so myopically obsessed with mason's marks and masonry breaks that they scarcely ever attend to larger issues.<sup>10</sup>

Roof bosses in parish churches have, then, by virtue of their material, their lack of structural function, and a perceived lack of iconographical sophistication,

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<sup>9</sup> Jones, M., *The Secret Middle Ages*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, paperback edition, 2004, preface, xviii.

<sup>10</sup> Kidson, P., 'Panofsky, Suger and St Denis', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 50, 1987, pp.1–17, on p.2.

been excluded from serious study. It is interesting to recall that C.J.P. Cave's initial involvement with roof bosses was prompted not by intellectual curiosity but by his interest in photography, and that his focus throughout was primarily on the great churches.

In a seminal paper published in 1999, Paul Binski examines, more broadly, the reasons for *lacunae* in studies of the English parish church and its late medieval art.<sup>11</sup> Binski comments that the major studies on the English parish church in recent years have been produced by cultural, social and religious historians rather than by art historians and that these studies 'are marked by a sophistication and depth of approach seldom matched by art historians'.<sup>12</sup> He suggests that the failure of art historians to engage with the art of the parish church is embedded in 'the professional structures and reward systems of the art-historical academy', noting that the 'incentives to study...are still geared very much to the glamour of the great churches, which are then, if at all, regarded as points of departure for parish churches'.<sup>13</sup>

Binski notes that 'the ways in which resources are organized and spent in England continue to favour fragmentation along old lines of art-historical enquiry', and he cites the use of the surveys of medieval glass (*Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*), of wall painting by David Park, and of Romanesque sculpture (*The Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*).<sup>14</sup> While Binski recognises the value of these surveys, he suggests that they:

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<sup>11</sup> Binski, P., 'The English Parish Church and its Art in the Later Middle Ages: A Review of the Problem', *Studies in Iconography*, Volume 20, pp.1–25, 1999, downloaded via Wilson Web.

<sup>12</sup> Binski, 1999, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Binski, 1999, p.1.

<sup>14</sup> Binski, 1999, pp.1-2.

leave open...the intellectual agenda; how, and in what ways, we might place the imagery of the parish church at the centre of the study of medieval visual culture rather than seeing it as some unfathomable, and perhaps embarrassing, epiphenomenon of something that was “really” going on elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

Binski notes, however, signs of subtle change. One important issue that has recently come to the fore in the study of medieval religious art is the ‘recognition that the images and installations that still survive in churches, parochial or otherwise, had a constitutive, rather than representational, role in the making of religion itself’.<sup>16</sup>

Binski later expands this, stating that:

Between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries, images played a role (which historians are beginning to admit to their discussions) in the construction not only of religious sensibilities but, also, more widely, of subjectivity itself.<sup>17</sup>

In 2004, Richard Marks published a ground-breaking study of devotional images in late medieval England which considers the parish church and addresses Binski’s criticisms. For Marks, ‘devotional images occupied an active place in individual and collective religio-cultural responses and were one of the means by which selfhood and communal identities were constructed’.<sup>18</sup>

As an art historian, Marks seeks to foreground the image in his study although he also employs tools from a range of disciplines including social and local history, theology, and folklore, believing that ‘it is only through adopting a multi-disciplinary approach that the subject can be illuminated across all its facets’.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Binski, 1999, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Binski, 1999, p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Binski, 1999, p.12.

<sup>18</sup> Marks, R., *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> Marks, 2004, p.2.

In a marked shift away from orthodox art-historical concerns with style and iconography, Marks focuses on:

the interactions between devotional images and their locations and presentation; between these artefacts and their makers, commissioners and, above all, users (these categories are not mutually exclusive); and between users as members of their communities and individuals.<sup>20</sup>

For Marks, ‘the devotional image is seen as a cultural object firmly embedded in the socio-economic fabric of the parish and rooted in communal and individual life’.<sup>21</sup>

This study, then, responds to Cave in its collation of a corpus of roof bosses from parish churches, and it acknowledges Binski and Marks in its adoption of a broad analytical approach which considers the many different facets of roof bosses, including their dynamic role in the religious experience of the people of late medieval Devon.

### **Collation of the corpus**

The first stage in the process of the study was to gather evidence of the surviving medieval roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon.<sup>22</sup> In order to determine which of over four hundred churches containing medieval material should be visited to search for figural bosses, four main sources, besides Cave’s published work and his archive in London, were consulted. The first work to be examined was Cherry’s and Pevsner’s *The Buildings of England: Devon*.<sup>23</sup> While this was a useful starting point as it generally makes mention of

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<sup>20</sup> Marks, 2004, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Marks, 2004, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Bosses have also been recorded in collegiate and prebendal churches, as their naves were used by the people of the parish, and also in a few larger medieval chapels which have since become parish churches. The medieval status of these churches is made clear in the gazetteer.

<sup>23</sup> Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (eds.), *The Buildings of England: Devon*. 2nd edition. London: Penguin, 1991.

the church roof, it does not always offer dating of the roof, nor does it always refer to bosses.<sup>24</sup> Rarely does the volume offer any description of the bosses. Where it does, the information has to be treated with some caution. At Sampford Courtenay, which has one of the finest sets of medieval bosses in the county, is noted: 'Good wagon roofs throughout. Among the bosses a wheel of three rabbits and a sow and piglets...(cf Branscombe)'.<sup>25</sup> There is no sow and piglets boss at Branscombe, although there is a sow and piglets boss at Braunton. This reference to Branscombe is repeated in the entry for Ugborough church which also has a sow and piglets boss.<sup>26</sup> For ease of examination, however, and as a convenient guide to the church, the Cherry and Pevsner volume proved valuable.

The second source was the description of churches from the statutory lists of historic buildings, consulted online through English Heritage's *Images of England* website.<sup>27</sup> The listing details are variable in quality, many quite brief and dating from the 1950s and 60s. In the listings the Sampford Courtenay bosses, a very fine collection, are described simply as 'large carved bosses of various designs'.<sup>28</sup>

In a listing description for Widecombe church, dated 23 August 1955, the bosses, again a good collection, receive no mention at all, the description of the

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<sup>24</sup> For example, it may state that the roof is a wagon roof, but it does not always specify whether it is medieval or a modern replacement.

<sup>25</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.714.

<sup>26</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.879.

<sup>27</sup> [www.imagesofengland.org.uk](http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=93055&mode=adv>. Accessed 30.12.07.

roof referring only to 'wagon roofs throughout'.<sup>29</sup> The listings are useful, however, for dating various parts of the church, though not always the roof.

Two unpublished sources have proved extremely valuable and have, on occasion, provided detailed information on the bosses. These are notes on the churches of Devon by James Davidson, and those by Beatrix Cresswell, both now held in the Westcountry Studies Library in Exeter.<sup>30</sup>

James Davidson's *Church Notes on Devon*, in five volumes written between 1826 (e.g. Membury, Kilmington) and 1850 (e.g. Dunsford), are important as they document many of the churches of Devon prior to Victorian restoration. A newspaper cutting dated 1857 (source unknown) is pasted to the opening page of Davidson's *Church Notes on Exeter*. It states:

A gentleman of this county has accomplished an arduous but interesting task. He has visited every Church and Episcopal Chapel in the County of Devon, to the number, including the Cathedral, of five hundred and fifty-nine; and has taken notes of the architectural features of the structures, of all the monuments, with every inscription, and of all the armorial bearings, with their multiplied quarterings. The result of his labours is comprised in five quarto volumes of manuscript, with an index to every name, a work which perhaps does not exist for any other county in the kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

Davidson notes the 'ceilings' of the churches he visits, although on occasions, perhaps due to lack of light, he incorrectly identifies the bosses as being all foliate when some figural bosses are present.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=442034&mode=adv>. Accessed 12.07.07.

<sup>30</sup> Davidson, J., 5 volumes of manuscript notes: *North, South, East and West Devon*, and *Exeter* – see bibliography; Cresswell, B., 24 volumes of typescript notes, arranged according to deanery, with 2 further volumes published – see bibliography.

<sup>31</sup> Davidson, J., *Church Notes on Devon*, Volume 3, Exeter.



Between 1908 and 1925, Beatrix Cresswell compiled 24 volumes of typescript notes, with two further volumes published, from church visits and from reference to Davidson's notes and published works on the churches of Devon. Occasionally she illustrates figural bosses. Cresswell's notes are generally more informative than Davidson's regarding the roof structure and the bosses. However, she writes after much restoration work has been carried out in the nineteenth century but before losses caused by bombing in the Second World War.

Other works which were consulted in the initial phase of research, and in the compilation of the gazetteer, are John Stabb's three volumes *Some Old Devon Churches*, published between 1909 and 1916, and W.G. Hoskins' *Devon*, published in 1954.<sup>32</sup> Stabb's volumes are useful for descriptions of the churches he visits, and also for his many photographs of church interiors. Hoskins visited every parish church in the county, and his work, as well as providing a good introductory essay on the ecclesiastical history of the county, includes a parish gazetteer. Neither of these sources, however, makes much mention of roof bosses.

Church guide books have also been consulted as these sometimes provide a good description of roof bosses, and, occasionally, photographs. A work on *Ilfracombe Parish Church* by F. Nesbitt, published in 1906, has photographs of 'two oak bosses formerly in the church roof'.<sup>33</sup> These bosses now hang above the north door of the church.

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<sup>32</sup> Stabb, J., *Some Old Devon Churches*, Vols. I, II and III, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1909, 1911, 1916; Hoskins, W., *Devon*, London: Collins, 1954.

<sup>33</sup> Nesbitt, F., *Ilfracombe Parish Church*, Ilfracombe: Twiss Brothers, 1906, p.19.

For churches in the north of the county, Hussell's *North Devon Churches: Studies of Some of the Ancient Buildings*, published in 1909, proved valuable.<sup>34</sup> In the preface to this book, Thomas Wainwright notes that the author of this work 'possesses two special advantages – the professional knowledge of an architect with the skill of an artist, and thorough local knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> Hussell describes the bosses in some of the churches he surveys and sketches several.

Through study of all the sources outlined above, it was possible to compile a list of 193 churches to be visited.<sup>36</sup> It is, of course, possible that in dark recesses of the roofs of churches not visited some medieval figural bosses may survive. Although no claim can therefore be made that the gazetteer details every medieval figural boss in the parish churches of Devon, it is believed that it represents the great majority.

It was realised early on in the study that extant foliate bosses significantly outnumber figural bosses, although the numbers of each vary from church to church. The reason for this is not known, although it may be that lay parishioners were more actively involved in the choice of images in some churches than in others, with foliate bosses being the standard unless particular figural images were specified. Certainly carving a series of foliate bosses is likely to have been less time consuming (and therefore less costly) than designing and carving individual figural bosses. It is possible that in some churches the carvers may have been given *carte blanche*, as were carvers of

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<sup>34</sup> Hussell, A., *North Devon Churches: Studies of Some of the Ancient Buildings*, Barnstaple: Herald Press, 1909.

<sup>35</sup> Wainwright in Hussell, 1909, preface.

<sup>36</sup> From 409 parishes which were in existence by 1535. Orme, N., 'The Medieval Parishes of Devon', *The Devon Historian*, Vol.33, October 1986, pp.3–9 on pp.6–7.

misericords recorded in surviving Flemish manuscripts.<sup>37</sup> However, many lay parishioners, whose responsibility was the nave of the parish church, were keenly interested in its decoration, a point explored in some detail in Chapter Three.

Given the geographical extent of this study and the numbers of bosses involved, it was decided not to photograph and record the details of foliate bosses on the grounds that it would have been an impossible task within the available timeframe to document each and every one.<sup>38</sup> While the position of foliate bosses is listed in the gazetteer, it is felt that many of these are likely to have served a purely decorative function, while this thesis will argue that figural bosses, while also serving as decoration, made a significant additional contribution to the religious life of the medieval church.

After compilation of the list of churches, each was visited, and in the 121 churches where medieval figural bosses were found to be present, the following information was recorded and is presented in the gazetteer:

- i) Parish name and its number on accompanying maps.
- ii) Photograph of exterior of church.
- iii) Date photographed.

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<sup>37</sup> Jones, M. 'Misericords' in Lindahl, C., McNamara, J. and Lindow, J. (eds.), *Medieval Folklore. A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.274–5 on p.274.

<sup>38</sup> For the purposes of this study, floriate and foliate bosses are recorded as one, unless there is any firm evidence to suggest that the flower depicted has a specific iconographical connotation, e.g. a lily in a pot on a roof boss at Coldridge presumably references the purity of the Virgin Mary. There are some bosses which appear to represent roses; however, for the most part, it is not clear whether these have any additional Marian or other significance besides their decorative one. In one church, however, Harford, three bosses are almost certainly carved with Tudor roses. These are discussed in a case study of that church in Chapter Six.

- iv) Medieval dedication of the church, noted from Nicholas Orme's *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Devon and Cornwall*.<sup>39</sup>
- v) Medieval patron/s of the church, noted from Beatrix Cresswell's *Notes on Devon Churches*.<sup>40</sup>
- vi) Outline of the main areas of the church.
- vii) Information on the church roofs and their bosses.
- viii) The position of figural, foliate and patterned bosses within each separate roof space.
- ix) Photograph of each of the figural bosses.

### **Outline of the thesis, methodologies and key sources**

In its methodologies, the thesis seeks to strike a balance between traditional art-historical approaches, which focus on the physical properties of bosses as objects, and on their iconography, and 'new' art-historical approaches which consider their social and religious context, and how they were viewed and used. The thesis thus blends the empirical with the theoretical. Each chapter is outlined below, with appropriate analytical techniques discussed, and key sources identified.

### **Chapter Two: Materiality and method**

Chapter Two examines roof bosses as material objects assessing physical evidence relating to their authenticity and date, their style, and the methods employed in their carving and finishing. Visual analysis of bosses *in situ* was key here, although this was often made difficult due to the current dark surface

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<sup>39</sup> Orme, N., *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Devon and Cornwall*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Cresswell, 26 volumes, 1908–1925.

finish of many roofs and bosses, the modern painted surface of others, and the lack of light, a factor acknowledged by those who have attempted studies of roof bosses thus far. Where the roof space was particularly dark, site lights were used for illumination and photographs were taken which were subsequently analysed in detail on a computer screen to determine to which period the bosses should be assigned, to assess their style, and to examine surface finish.

C.J.P. Cave acknowledged that progress in photography and in lighting techniques made a crucial difference to the study of roof bosses, and the development of digital photography has improved matters further since images can be stored in digital format and are easily edited.<sup>41</sup> However the medium of photography creates its own problems. While a close-up image of the boss enables detail to be seen, the examination of a relief carving in two dimensions is not altogether satisfactory. The use of flash in particular can flatten the appearance of the carving, especially if the surface finish is unpainted wood. Photography from the floor does not allow an examination of the upper face of the boss, which is, in any case, hidden from view. While it is recognised that photography of the bosses is an essential component of this study, its limitations must also be acknowledged.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cave, 1948, p.2.

<sup>42</sup> A further problem with the use of photography is that the bosses are removed from their context in the roof space and are no longer viewed as they would be from floor level. These aspects receive comment in a letter to C.J.P. Cave from W.A. Call:

I should like to take this opportunity of saying how much I appreciate your splendid photographs of the bosses, and also the interesting notes you have written...on your method of obtaining these. I was expressing great satisfaction after seeing some of your prints to an architectural photographer who I met when I was doing some work at Southwell last year, and he was evidently very jealous of your work, as all he could say was that the lighting was not natural, and consequently not as you would see them from the ground. I pointed out to him that unless they were shown up by your method, nobody would ever see them at all, except on the very rare occasions when there is a scaffolding erected for roof repairs. I consider this most useful work, and it is quite a

In addition to visual analysis, written accounts relating to the scientific analysis of oak, the material used for the medieval wooden bosses of the parish churches of Devon, have proved valuable since accurate dating of the church roof is dependent upon knowledge of the growth patterns of this species, and an understanding of its durability and density is important with regard to its survival and carving. F.W.B. Charles' *Conservation of Timber Buildings* has been a valued source here.<sup>43</sup>

The reports of Ian Tyers on the dendrochronological analysis of the roofs of Braunton and Milton Abbot churches, and that of Arnold and Howard on the roof of Alwington church, provide evidence for their dating.<sup>44</sup> Although these roofs represent only a tiny fraction of those studied in this thesis, and the results refer to core samples from the structural timbers rather than the bosses themselves, nevertheless, the tree-ring data is essential in proposing a *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* for the bosses.

Written accounts have also been useful in understanding the construction of church roofs. In Howard's and Crossley's *English Church Woodwork* of 1919, the authors make the point that:

few lovers of ancient woodwork appear to study the roofs of the churches they visit, and it is strange how many otherwise admirable accounts of medieval buildings either fail to mention the roofs at all, or describe them

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treat to be able to examine them at close quarters. Letter to C.J.P. Cave from W.A. Call, 29.04.1932, Misc. Correspondence Roof Bosses, Society of Antiquaries MS 943/6.

<sup>43</sup> Charles, F.W.B., *Conservation of Timber Buildings*, London: Hutchinson, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Tyers, I., *Tree Ring Analysis of Oak Timbers from St Brannock Church, Braunton, Devon. English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report 81/2004*, 2004; Tyers, I., *Tree Ring Analysis of Oak Timbers from the Nave Roof of the Church of St Constantine and St Aegidius, Milton Abbot, Devon. English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report 115/2002*, 2002; Arnold, A. and Howard, H., *St. Andrew's Church, Alwington, Devon. Tree Ring Analysis of Timbers from the South Aisle and Nave Roofs, English Heritage Research Department Report Series no. 42*, 2009.

in such a dubious and uncertain way that their account is almost unintelligible.<sup>45</sup>

Howard and Crossley offer descriptions of the many different roof types of the parish churches of England, including the wagon or cradle roofs which are common in Devon, and they provide diagrams of methods of construction.

However, the most useful analysis of roof construction in Devon as regards this study is found in 'The Spire and Roofs of Hatherleigh Church: Investigations following the Storm Damage of 1990' by K. Westcott which was published in the *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*.<sup>46</sup> This article offers a thorough description of the church and its wagon roofs and is accompanied by diagrams, two of which are reproduced in this thesis for their clear explication of the construction of a wagon roof.

Although this thesis does not attempt to document all the roof bosses of Exeter Cathedral (since several studies of the cathedral are already available – see Literature Review below), it does refer to many of the bosses there, especially in relating motifs in the cathedral to those in the parish church. Information on the carvers and carvings from the cathedral's medieval Fabric Rolls, edited and translated by Audrey Erskine, is therefore of significance since it indicates that both makers and bosses were the subject of considerable investment by the church authorities.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Howard, F. and Crossley, F., *English Church Woodwork*, London: Batsford, 1919, p.87.

<sup>46</sup> Westcott, K.A., 'The Spire and Roofs of Hatherleigh Church: Investigations following the Storm Damage of 1990', *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*, No. 50, 1992, pp.61–89.

<sup>47</sup> Erskine, A. M. (ed. and trans.), *The Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral, 1279–1353*. Part 1: 1279–1326, Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol. 24, Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1981; *The Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral, 1279–1353*. Part 2: 1328–1353, Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol. 26, Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1983.

Information on carvers working in wood in the parish churches of Devon, though not specifically on bosses, has been gleaned from transcriptions of pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts and also accounts written during the reign of Mary Tudor when many images destroyed during the Reformation were replaced. The accounts from Morebath church, as transcribed and quoted by Eamon Duffy, and those of South Tawton church, transcribed by Ethel Lega-Weekes, have proved especially useful in suggesting local links between the carvers and the parish.<sup>48</sup>

In the absence of contemporary written documents on the carving process of oak bosses in medieval Devon, the writings of ecclesiastical woodcarver Harry Hems (1842–1916), particularly his *Woodcarving*, offer a helpful account of materiality and carving techniques.<sup>49</sup>

However, most of the evidence offered in Chapter Two on the style and carving of oak bosses and their medieval surface finish is as a result of visits to churches, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, and its restoration laboratories, and a woodcarver's workshop, Beckford's Art Works, in the company of specialist conservators of medieval woodwork and polychromy. The advice of those actively involved in analysis, conservation, and restoration in these fields has been invaluable in contributing to an understanding of the materials and methods used in the production of roof bosses in the late medieval period. This advice has been supplemented by an unpublished report by Hugh Harrison on the roof of Braunton church, reports by Elizabeth Cheadle,

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<sup>48</sup> Duffy, E., *The Voices of Morebath. Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001; Lega-Weekes, E., 'The Churchwardens' Accounts of South Tawton, Part II', in *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, Vol. 39, 1907, pp. 302–336.

<sup>49</sup> Hems, H., *Woodcarving*, publisher not known, 1903.



with paint analysis by Catherine Hassall, on Braunton, Bishops Lydeard and Alwington churches, and an account of conservation work carried out by Andrea Karstädt, under the supervision of medieval polychrome conservator Eddie Sinclair, on a late medieval woodcarving from the Hems' Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter.<sup>50</sup> Correspondence with Eddie Sinclair and master carver Laurence Beckford has also proved most helpful in assessing the carvings and their finish.<sup>51</sup>

### **Chapter Three: People and Practice**

Chapter Three shifts the focus from the bosses as objects, to their religious, social and visual context in the medieval period. Although many bosses are still *in situ* in the church roof, their context in other respects has changed markedly and it is important for further interpretation that as much of their original context as possible is reconstructed. However, as Willibald Sauerländer asserts: 'At best art functions only indirectly as a mirror of the past because art has its own language. Any effort to put medieval works of art back into historical or social context faces delicate problems of translation'.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, awareness of the framework of patronal and clerical control which ordered the 'cognitive map' of the church interior and controlled access to sacred space, and an understanding of how and why various groups and

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<sup>50</sup> Harrison, H., *Report St Brannock, Braunton, Fire Damage to Ceilings*, 07.01.04; Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St Brannock's Church, Braunton, Devon. Report Following Conservation and Restoration of Twelve Fire Damaged Roof Bosses in the Nave*, January 2005; Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St Mary the Virgin, Bishops Lydeard, Somerset, Report on Painted and Gilded Roof*, June 2007; Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *Preliminary Investigations into the Painted Layers on the Bosses and Timbers of the South Aisle Ceiling*, February 2008; Andrea Karstädt, pers. comm. 15.02.10.

<sup>51</sup> Eddie Sinclair, pers. comm., 24.03.09, 29.10.09; Laurence Beckford, pers. comm. 19.10.09, 20.10.09, 28.10.09.

<sup>52</sup> Sauerländer, W., 'Review: Age of Chivalry. London. Royal Academy', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1019, Special Issue on Gothic Art (Feb., 1980), pp.149–151, on p. 149.

individuals gave to their parish church, is an essential part of this study.<sup>53</sup> The work of C. Pamela Graves, particularly her *Form and Fabric of Belief. An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk and Devon*, has been influential in this chapter and throughout the thesis.<sup>54</sup> Graves notes that 'archaeologists and architectural historians have tended to study church buildings to the neglect of the religious practices they were built to house'.<sup>55</sup> To resolve this issue, Graves examines the physical remains of churches in these two counties to ask 'what the material remains of past religious practices allow us to reconstruct of their social effect'.<sup>56</sup> Graves examines the way in which light and vision work within the medieval church and she attempts to reconstitute patterns of movement and access both within and around the building. Graves adopts an interdisciplinarity of approach which she feels is necessary in order to consider both the practice and place of late medieval religion.

Chapter Three uses a similarly wide-ranging approach to examine the context of the bosses through written records, including the literature of the period, and through a study of extant medieval imagery.

The statutes of a synod held in Exeter in 1287 by Bishop Peter Quinel offer important evidence of the ways in which this bishop, and almost certainly his successors throughout the pre-Reformation period, sought to regulate the parish church in medieval Devon.<sup>57</sup> The regulations are lengthy and detailed

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<sup>53</sup> The term 'cognitive map' is used by C. Pamela Graves in 'Social Space in the English Parish Church', *Economy and Society* XVIII/3, 1989, pp. 297–322, on p.309.

<sup>54</sup> Graves, C. P., *The Form and Fabric of Belief. An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk and Devon*, Oxford: John and Erica Hedges and Archaeopress, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Graves, 2000, p.17.

<sup>56</sup> Graves, 2000, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> Barlow, F. (transcription), '16 April 1287 Synodal Statutes of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel for the Diocese of Exeter' and 'Summula of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel of Exeter' in Powicke, F.M., and Cheney, C.R., (eds.) *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the*

and cover, among other aspects, the behaviour and functions of the clergy, and the list of 58 Holy Days (not including ordinary Sundays) which they would be expected to celebrate. The duties of the laity are also set out, as is a catalogue of 'ornaments' which the church was expected to hold. However, there are many areas regarding the decorative interior of the church which the statutes do not cover, including rood screens and roof bosses, and as Boggis notes:

The record of the proceedings is perhaps a little disappointing, for it deals more with generalities than with local events and circumstances, and therefore does not shed as much light as we should desire on the condition of the Church in the Diocese of Exeter.<sup>58</sup>

Whether the statutes were adhered to in every respect is not known, although it may be assumed that there were variations in levels of compliance throughout the diocese. Yet, as Nicholas Orme states, as far as 'ornaments' are concerned: 'the evidence shows that clergy and parishioners were not too far adrift from what they were supposed to provide, and that the authorities tried, at least occasionally, to keep them up to the mark'.<sup>59</sup>

Orme's contribution to the study of the medieval church in the Diocese of Exeter is exceptional. His article on 'The Medieval Parishes of Devon', and his books *Unity and Variety: A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Devon and Cornwall*, and *Cornwall and the Cross: Christianity 500–1560*, have been invaluable in helping to establish a context for bosses.<sup>60</sup>

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*English Church II, A.D. 1205–1313*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, Part II 1265–1313, pp.982–1077.

<sup>58</sup> Boggis, R.J.E., *A History of the Diocese of Exeter*, Exeter: William Pollard, 1922, p.151.

<sup>59</sup> Orme, N., *Cornwall and the Cross. Christianity 500–1560*, Chichester: Phillimore and Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2007, p.57.

<sup>60</sup> Orme, N., 'The Medieval Parishes of Devon', *The Devon Historian*, Vol. 33, October 1986, pp. 3–9; Orme, N. (ed.), *Unity and Variety. A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*,

Late medieval literature has also proved useful throughout this study, particularly a text from the late fourteenth century, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*.<sup>61</sup> This has been especially helpful in its articulation of the social and religious attitudes of the period, although it is recognised that the attitudes expressed are not universally applicable.

With reference to the late medieval visual context, the best evidence is extant material in the church building and, for imagery now lost, pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts. It is important to be aware of the full range of this imagery, and to try to understand how, why and by whom it was funded, since the bosses did not exist in isolation and written evidence for their commission is scant.

As regards material remains, the stained glass of St Neot's church in Cornwall has been a most useful source for this chapter for its inscriptions detailing benefaction in the early sixteenth century. Although not a Devon church, St Neot is less than fifteen miles from the Devon border and, with the rest of Cornwall, was part of the Diocese of Exeter in the late medieval period. Its stained glass can therefore be considered representative of similarly wealthy parishes in Devon.

The problem with the glass at St Neot, though, is that it has been fragmented and re-ordered over many years so that the present glazing arrangement is not that which existed in the early sixteenth century. Relying on visual analysis

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Exeter Studies in History No. 29, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991; Orme, 1996; Orme, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Langland, W., *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, edited by A. V. C. Schmidt, Oxford World's Classics paperback edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

alone then, would be misguided, and an account of research conducted by Joanna Mattingly on the original glazing scheme has been vital in confirming who contributed to this decoration and in which area of the church their windows were originally installed.<sup>62</sup> This has facilitated a discussion in Chapter Three on social stratification within the church building, involving both groups and individuals. Other churches where inscriptions record benefaction, and which have therefore proved to be rich sources for this chapter, include Tiverton, Cullompton and Spreyton.

A church which has lost nearly all of its medieval imagery, but where a partial reconstruction of its pre-Reformation decoration is possible through examination of its parish accounts, meticulously kept by its priest Sir Christopher Trychay over a period of 54 years from 1520–1574, is Morebath in north east Devon. Eamon Duffy offers a sympathetic appraisal of the religious concerns of the families of this small isolated community in his imaginative reading of the Morebath accounts, and reveals how these concerns were made manifest in the decoration of their parish church.<sup>63</sup>

Duffy's own Catholic faith is well-known and reviewers of his work have pointed out that 'the emotional force of [his] vision...can sometimes be...misleading'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mattingly, J., 'Stories in the Glass – Reconstructing the St. Neot Pre-Reformation Glazing Scheme', *Royal Institution of Cornwall Journal*, Truro: 2000, pp.9–55.

<sup>63</sup> Duffy, 2001.

<sup>64</sup> Wooding, L., Review of Duffy, 2001 (Review no. 266), URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/266>. Date accessed: 19.06.10. Wooding notes specifically that:

Duffy seems to take it for granted that the symbolic value of all these church ornaments was immense, and that the network of parish organization that helped to sustain the finances of the parish was about 'the construction of community'. This may indeed be true. It seems to have been the view of Sir Christopher, from the way in which he wrote the parish records; but can we be sure that his parishioners thought exactly the same way? The author has to conclude, reluctantly, that in fact his sources cannot tell us anything about the piety of the Morebath parishioners; they reveal only the facts of parish expenditure. The clear implication, however, is that for them, as for Duffy, the

Yet Duffy's discussions of piety and how it may have been made manifest, both in *The Voices of Morebath*, and his earlier seminal *Stripping of the Altars*, are essential in assessing the dynamic role of images in pre-Reformation worship.<sup>65</sup> As a practising Catholic himself, it can be argued that Duffy is well placed to offer such an assessment. Duffy's work has been invaluable to this study and although his main focus is on text rather than image, his approach has been strongly influential in the framing of this thesis.

#### **Chapter Four: Iconography**

The fourth chapter examines the motif carved on the boss and relates it, where possible, to examples in other media: stained glass, wall paintings, graffiti, manuscript illustrations, stone carvings (capitals, corbels etc.), and to other examples of medieval woodcarving. It also relates the carved motif to the spoken as well as the written word, particularly to sermons and the confessional. In adopting this approach, this chapter seeks to resolve some of the problems associated with traditional iconographical analysis, which has tended to assume that images have an inherent meaning, encoded by their commissioners and/or makers, which can be decoded through reference to literary themes. A broader approach which seeks to identify areas of association between images, and between words and images, rather than to identify inherent meanings, makes allowance for those factors which affect the

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symbolism of these material objects was self-evident. The black vestments for requiem masses are described as if they were a physical manifestation of the Catholic doctrines concerning death and salvation. Duffy makes little distinction between monetary bequests to the images of the saints, and a belief in the intercessory powers of those saints. But the reader is left wondering whether these connections would have been as clear to the parishioners as they were to their priest, or to the author telling their story. Were these parishioners demonstrating an impressive level of religious devotion, or were they merely following the usual custom?

<sup>65</sup> Duffy, E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992.

reception of an image, namely the 'locality, display, appearance [and] embellishment' of the image itself, and the 'age, social status, gender, occupation, health, wealth or poverty, literacy or illiteracy [and] personal history' of its viewer.<sup>66</sup>

The list of sources for this chapter is potentially vast. However, bibliographies already compiled for medieval iconography, which have proved useful, include *Medieval Iconography: A Research Guide* by John B. Friedman and Jessica M. Wegmann, a volume in the Garland Medieval Bibliographies series, and *Iconography: A Checklist of Some Useful Sources for Scholars and Students of Medieval Art and Drama*, compiled by Clifford Davidson and available for consultation online.<sup>67</sup>

Many of the designs of the figural roof bosses of medieval Devon appear to be related to animals or hybrids found in medieval bestiaries. Bestiaries which have been consulted for this study include Richard Barber's translation of MS Bodley 764 and Aberdeen University Library MS 24, the Aberdeen Bestiary.<sup>68</sup> It is very unlikely, however, that parishioners in rural Devon would have had direct access to a bestiary and so their mode of introduction to these birds and beasts must be found elsewhere. G.R. Owst suggests in his *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* that the laity came to an understanding of bestiary creatures through the language of the pulpit.<sup>69</sup> Owst's work is valuable for its discussion of

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<sup>66</sup> Marks, 2004, p.25.

<sup>67</sup> Friedman, J.B. and Wegmann, J.M., *Medieval Iconography: A Research Guide*, New York: Garland, 1998; <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/research/edam/pdf/Iconography.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Barber, R., *Bestiary. Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Bodley 764*, London: The Folio Society, 1992; Aberdeen University Library MS 24, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/>

<sup>69</sup> Owst, G.R., *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1961, pp.57–58.

many other sermon themes which also appear on roof bosses, including horned headdresses, backbiting and the devil Tutivillus.

'Tutivillus' is the subject of a study by Christa Grössinger.<sup>70</sup> Grössinger's paper and others in the same volume, notably that by Hugh Harrison on 'Technical Aspects of the Misericord' and Terry Pearson on 'The Mermaid in the Church', have been valued sources for this thesis.<sup>71</sup>

By far the most frequently occurring motif on figural bosses in the churches of Devon is the foliate head. Because of its frequency, Chapter Four of this thesis devotes a lengthy section to its discussion. Useful sources for the study of this motif include Kathleen Basford's *The Green Man* and Roy Judge's essay 'The Green Man Revisited'.<sup>72</sup> Scriptural references may be crucially important to an understanding of the motif, as may be the story of Adam and Seth from the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, quoted in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*.<sup>73</sup>

With reference to wall paintings, a medium which shared motifs with roof bosses, Miriam Gill's recent unpublished thesis: *Late Medieval Wall Paintings in England: Content and Context (c.1330–c.1530)* has been valuable, particularly for its discussion of reading and reception of these images, although Gill notes that the surviving evidence is sparse and often hard to interpret.<sup>74</sup> Gill's essay

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<sup>70</sup> Grössinger, C. 'Tutivillus' in Block, E., et al (eds.), *Profane Images in Marginal Arts of the Middle Ages*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2009, pp.47–62.

<sup>71</sup> Harrison, H., 'Technical Aspects of the Misericord' in Block, 2009, pp. XIX–XLII; Pearson, T., 'The Mermaid in the Church' in Block, 2009, pp.105–121.

<sup>72</sup> Basford, K., *The Green Man*, Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1978; Judge, R. 'The Green Man Revisited' in Hutchings, J. and Wood, J., (eds.), *Colour and Appearance in Folklore*, London: The Folklore Society, 1991, pp. 51–55.

<sup>73</sup> Ryan, W.G., (trans.), Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, Vol. I, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.277.

<sup>74</sup> Gill, M.C., *Late Medieval Wall Painting in England: Content and Context (c.1350–c.1530)*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2002, p.153.



'Reading Images: Church Murals and Collaboration between Media in Medieval England' is also very useful for an understanding of how images in different media, and words and images, may have worked together in the medieval church.<sup>75</sup>

Studies in carvings on misericords which have informed this study include Christa Grössinger's *The World Upside-Down* and G.L. Remnant's *Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain*.<sup>76</sup> Richard Marks' *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages* is a valuable source for designs in this medium, while V. Pritchard's *English Medieval Graffiti* has proved helpful in associating motifs carved on roof bosses with this oft-ignored art form.<sup>77</sup>

## **Chapter Five: Seeing Sin and Salvation**

Chapter Five focuses on the audience of the bosses in parish churches in Devon, and speculates on the circumstances in which it may have viewed and used these carvings.<sup>78</sup> Since understanding of vision is historically contingent, an awareness of theories of vision in the late medieval period is essential, as this may have had an effect on the types of images carved. For an exposition of

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<sup>75</sup> Gill, M., 'Reading Images: Church Murals and Collaborations between Media in Medieval England' in Bigliuzzi, S. and Wood, S. (eds.), *Collaboration in the Arts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, pp.17–31.

<sup>76</sup> Grössinger, C., *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords*, London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997; Remnant, G. L., *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain with an Essay on Their Iconography by M. D. Anderson*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>77</sup> Marks, R., *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages*, London: Routledge, 1993; Pritchard, V., *English Medieval Graffiti*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, digitally printed version, 2008.

<sup>78</sup> It is important to be aware, however, as Thelma Thomas notes, that:

To some degree "audience" is understood to be no more than a convenient fiction. Often, especially in the case of medieval audiences, the evidence for viewership is incomplete or inconclusive and, even when the audience can be relatively fully characterised, meaning cannot be definitively circumscribed; the intersubjective spaces between art work and individual viewer or collective public continually nuance the specific impact of the work.

Sears, E. and Thomas, T., (eds.), *Reading Medieval Images. The Art Historian and the Object*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p.100.

medieval vision the main source used is David C. Lindberg's translation of John Pecham's *Perspectiva communis*, a highly influential treatise on medieval optics.<sup>79</sup> Michael Camille's essay 'Before the Gaze. The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing', also proved extremely useful for its discussions on how image making was influenced by theories of vision in the medieval period.<sup>80</sup>

Medieval understandings of the way in which the brain processed information that it received through the eye are ably discussed by Mary Carruthers in her *Book of Memory*.<sup>81</sup> This work, together with *The Craft of Thought*, and personal correspondence with Professor Carruthers, has been crucial to this thesis since Carruthers' methodology has opened up new possibilities regarding the role of roof bosses in the parish church.<sup>82</sup> As Michael Camille explains in his review of *The Craft of Thought*:

Art historians tend to be always looking through images to somewhere else, to texts that will explain content, to iconographies and ideologies or contexts where the visual can be emptied out. By contrast Carruthers constantly takes up and uses images to think about problems, beliefs, stories, and sites so that the image in her own argument becomes exactly the kind of tool for thought that she is projecting.<sup>83</sup>

A reference to a key text on medieval prayer, Peter the Chanter's *De penitentia et partibus eius*, discussed in Richard Trexler's *The Christian at Prayer*, and provided by Professor Carruthers in correspondence, has been a valuable

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<sup>79</sup> Lindberg, D.C. (ed.), *John Pecham and the Science of Optics. Perspectiva communis*, edited with an introduction, English translation, and critical notes.

<sup>80</sup> Camille, M., 'Before the Gaze. The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing' in Nelson, R.S. (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance. Seeing as Others Saw*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.197–223.

<sup>81</sup> Carruthers, M., *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Carruthers, M., *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edition, 2000; Carruthers, M., pers. comm. 18.04.08 and 25.04.08.

<sup>83</sup> Camille, M. Review [untitled], *Modern Philology*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (Aug., 2000), pp.3–6 on p.4. The University of Chicago Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/439290> Accessed: 20/06/2010.

source in speculating on the circumstances in which roof bosses may have been viewed in the parish church.<sup>84</sup>

As regards the social and religious function of the bosses, Chapter Five turns once again to a source which threads its way through much of this thesis: the statutes of Bishop Peter Quinel of Exeter, particularly a section on the sacrament of penance and a *summula*, which the bishop attached as a handbook for the use of priests in his diocese.

The section on the sacrament of penance has not yet been published in translation, appearing in its original Latin in Powicke's and Cheney's *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church II: AD 1205–1313*.<sup>85</sup> For this study, a translation of several relevant chapters was carried out by Dr Carolinne White.<sup>86</sup> The *summula*, however, has been recently translated and published in Shinnars' and Dohar's *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England*.<sup>87</sup>

A useful essay which gives an overview of some of the recent critical writings on medieval confession is Masha Raskolnikov's 'Confessional Literature, Vernacular Psychology, and the History of the Self in Middle English', published online in 2005.<sup>88</sup> Raskolnikov concurs with Michel Foucault's argument in *The History of Sexuality* that a significant change in thinking about the self came

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<sup>84</sup> Trexler, R.C., *The Christian at Prayer. An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d.1197)*, Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, Volume 44, 1987.

<sup>85</sup> Barlow, 1964, pp.991–995.

<sup>86</sup> Dr Carolinne White, <http://www.oxfordlatin.co.uk>.

<sup>87</sup> Shinnars, J. and Dohar, W.J. (eds.), *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, pp.170–185.

<sup>88</sup> Raskolnikov, M., 'Confessional Literature, Vernacular Psychology, and the History of the Self in Middle English', *Literature Compass* 2 (2005) ME 128, 1–20, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00128.x.

after the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, which required annual confession by every baptized Christian over the age of twelve.<sup>89</sup> Raskolnikov notes the proliferation of texts designed to help in the process of preparation for confession and, usefully, discusses many of these.

A discussion of a confessional text, Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, by Gregory Roper, offers interesting insights on the use of penitential handbooks which are also relevant to this study of figural roof bosses.<sup>90</sup>

This chapter closes with a discussion of perhaps the most widely used prayer of the medieval church, the *Pater Noster*, and how this may unlock the penitential potential of the carvings on some roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon. The main source used here is a homily on the prayer from John Mirk's well-known collection, the *Festial* (c. 1380s).<sup>91</sup>

## **Chapter Six: Carving and Community**

The sixth chapter reviews the themes of the thesis through case studies of six churches from across Devon. The intention here is to demonstrate how the study of the interactions between particular communities and roof boss carvings contributes towards a wider understanding of the late medieval parish church and its people in Devon. The chapter also highlights some of the problems encountered in the study and discusses how these problems have been managed. As would be expected, the key sources for this chapter are the

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<sup>89</sup> Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, London: Allen Lane, 1979.

<sup>90</sup> Roper, G., 'Dropping the Personae and Reforming the Self: The Parson's Tale and the End of The Canterbury Tales' in Raybin, D. and Holley, L.T., *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson's Tale*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000, pp.151–175.

<sup>91</sup> Erbe, T., (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, Early English Text Society, London, 1905. Unaltered reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997.

church buildings, although churchwardens' accounts, post-medieval recordings of each building, and other historical studies have also proved valuable.

A brief conclusion follows Chapter Six.

### **The literature on roof bosses**

In order to assess the contribution of this thesis, it is necessary to be aware of the literature on roof bosses to date, particularly that which considers bosses in the Diocese of Exeter. The remainder of this chapter reviews this literature beginning with early twentieth-century studies of the bosses of Exeter Cathedral. The latest bosses at the cathedral probably date to around 50 years before the earliest wooden bosses recorded for this study, so it is important to consider their possible influence. The review also considers some material from outside the diocese which confirms that recent studies of roof bosses have not been particularly innovative in terms of their methodology.

E.K. Prideaux and G.R. Holt Shafto were the first to publish a series of photographs of the Exeter roof bosses in 1910.<sup>92</sup> An earlier booklet, published by W. Cotton in 1900, had featured watercolours of the bosses, although, according to Prideaux and Shafto:

the work was but fragmentary and the illustrations can only be considered as, at best, very 'free renderings' of the original lovely texts in stone. In colour, outline and detail, considerable departures from the actual were allowed; no systematic explanation or arrangement was attempted; in too many cases incorrect descriptions occur, and there are many obvious errors for which it is not easy to account.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Prideaux, E. K., and Holt Shafto, G.R., *Bosses & Corbels of Exeter Cathedral: An Illustrated Study in Decorative & Symbolic Design*, Exeter: Commin; London: Chatto & Windus, 1910.

<sup>93</sup> Cotton, W., *Bosses and Corbels in the Cathedral Church of St. Peter, Exeter*, 1900; Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, pp. 2–3.

Prideaux and Shafto recognise the difficulties of their enterprise, noting that 'many of the bosses are very inaccessible, some buried in the gloom and others vexed with cross lights', but they assert that 'all our illustrations have at least such accuracy as the careful employment of photography can ensure'.<sup>94</sup> They note, however, that:

many of our explanations of the bosses and interpretations of their subjects or symbolism are put forward with much hesitation. In these matters we can only hope that the illustrations themselves may serve to make the way easier for others who may be inclined to devote to the question the attention it deserves.<sup>95</sup>

*Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral* is divided into nine chapters, the first of which discusses the function of the roof boss, its origin and development. Prideaux and Shafto offer a useful explanation of the complexity of the architectural function of roof bosses as keystones in the stone-ribbed vaults of the cathedral, noting that:

The boss with its short projecting arms is... a multiplex keystone, cut out of one block of stone; and no small skill was required to prepare this very responsible member so that when it was put in place it should be an exact fit in all directions. Thus the Gothic architects had not merely the skill necessary for the accomplishment of this, as of other far more wonderful feats of masonry; they had in addition a sound artistic ideal which led them to the practical principle that decoration found its most appropriate and telling place where it emphasised some important point of construction.<sup>96</sup>

Prideaux and Shafto note, however, that when bosses first appear in Norman work they are neither prominent nor much decorated. In Early English work, bosses are usually sculpted with foliage although on occasion, small figures or animals are introduced. It is only with the Decorated style that the boss

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<sup>94</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, preface; Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p.3.

<sup>95</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p 3.

<sup>96</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p.7.

becomes prominent and is carved with foliage, figures, masks, symbols, and armorial bearings.<sup>97</sup>

Prideaux and Shafto assert that the bosses in Exeter Cathedral were not carved *in situ* since 'in the position they were intended to occupy the sculptor's work would have been almost impossible'.<sup>98</sup> They note, however, that carving in a workshop has some disadvantages, 'as where figures and faces are turned upwards at too great an angle to be seen from below'.<sup>99</sup>

Prideaux and Shafto divide the subjects carved at Exeter into three main groups. Their first category comprises those which they regard as being purely decorative and into this group fall the majority of the bosses of the cathedral – those carved with flowers, fruit and foliage, sometimes with the inclusion of small figures. Their second category is the pictorial which includes bosses depicting scriptural scenes and those which they identify as portraits. Their final category includes those bosses which they consider symbolic and into this group are incorporated those considered grotesques.<sup>100</sup>

By far the greater part of *Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral* is devoted to a description and discussion of the bosses in various parts of the cathedral according to these three categories, and numbered and sequenced on a plan of

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<sup>97</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p.7.

<sup>98</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p.8.

<sup>99</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, p.10.

the vaulting. This numbering was subsequently used by Cave in 1953 and again by Henry and Hulbert in 2001.<sup>101</sup>

Three years prior to the publication of Prideaux's and Shafto's work, Ethel Lega-Weekes had documented the roof bosses of South Tawton church, photographs of the bosses appearing in her article of 1907 on the churchwarden's accounts, published in the *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*.<sup>102</sup> Lega-Weekes briefly discusses the iconography of the bosses although much of what she proposes is clearly not based on substantive evidence.<sup>103</sup>

In *Bosses and Corbels in the Church of Ottery St Mary*, written by Frances Rose-Troup in 1922, the author notes that 'Owing to the dimness of lighting and their distance from the ground, it is rather difficult to study the details of these bosses, so a full description of them is worth recording'.<sup>104</sup> Rose-Troup's short book is, in effect, a guide to the central bosses and she refers widely to an earlier book on the church by Canon Dalton and also to Prideaux's and Shafto's book on the bosses of Exeter.<sup>105</sup> Rose-Troup discusses the style and iconography of the bosses, noting Bishop Grandisson's influence, and includes photographs of the central bosses.

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<sup>101</sup> Cave, C.J.P., *Medieval Carvings in Exeter Cathedral*. King Penguin, 41. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953; Henry, A.K. and Hulbert, A.C., *Exeter Cathedral Keystones and Carvings. A Catalogue Raisonné of the Medieval Interior Sculpture and its Polychromy*, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907.

<sup>103</sup> The roof bosses of South Tawton church are investigated in some detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>104</sup> Rose-Troup, F., *Bosses and Corbels in the Church of Ottery St Mary, Exeter*. Commin, 1922, p.1.

<sup>105</sup> Dalton, J.N., *The Collegiate Church of Ottery St Mary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917; Prideaux and Shafto, 1910.



In 1937, G.C. Druce presented a paper on 'Queen Camel Church. Bosses on the Chancel Roof' to the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.<sup>106</sup> After discussing the identification of the subject matter of the bosses with C.J.P. Cave, and with use of Cave's photographs, Druce relates the oak carvings in the chancel to the medieval bestiary, noting that the patrons of the living, the monks of Cleeve Abbey, 'may well have possessed or had the use of' such a work.<sup>107</sup> Druce states that:

The bosses would have been carved in a workshop, the craftsmen perhaps having the book at his side. We may imagine him turning over the leaves and selecting the pictures or parts of them which took his fancy, or they may have been chosen for him. The bestiaries were very popular books. Many stone and wood carvings in our churches were derived from the pictures in them, for the carvers were in want of suitable subjects, and the fact that the bestiaries were religious books teaching religious and moral lessons provided them with the justification needed for the use of such pictures in ecclesiastical architecture.<sup>108</sup>

Although it is highly unlikely that a richly decorated and highly valued bestiary would have found its way into a carver's workshop, as Druce suggests, his article is useful since bestiary subjects are encountered on bosses in Devon, notably in the church of Holcombe Rogus in east Devon, where the bosses are similar in style to those at Queen Camel.

As noted in the Introduction, the greatest contribution to the study of roof bosses in Britain is that made by C.J.P. Cave. His *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches* opens with a general survey in which Cave conducts his own brief literature review. Prior to 1948, with the exception of W. Cotton's work on the bosses of Exeter Cathedral which he describes as a brochure, Cave states that

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<sup>106</sup> Druce, G.C., 'Queen Camel Church. Roof Bosses on the Chancel Roof', *Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, Proceedings during the year 1937*, Vol. LXXXIII, Taunton: Barnicotts, 1938.

<sup>107</sup> Druce, 1938, pp.89–106.

<sup>108</sup> Druce, 1938, pp.89–90.

only two books have been published on the subject – a volume by Dean Goulburn, published in 1876, on the roof bosses in the nave of Norwich Cathedral and the volume on the bosses of Exeter Cathedral by Prideaux [and Shafto], published in 1910.<sup>109</sup> Cave comments that Goulburn's photographs 'are naturally not as good as those that can be taken to-day' and comments that the images used by Prideaux and Shafto 'are no better, if as good as those from Norwich' but qualifies this by stating that Goulburn's images were taken from scaffolding while the Exeter images were taken from the floor.<sup>110</sup>

Cave acknowledges papers published in the journals of archaeological societies on the subject: James on the bosses in the cloisters and the Bauchun Chapel at Norwich cathedral; Griffin on the heraldic bosses in the cloisters at Canterbury; St. John Hope on those in the Divinity Schools at Oxford; and the accounts of Wilson on the cloister bosses at Worcester, and Venables on those at Lincoln.<sup>111</sup>

Cave's first chapter is a general study of roof bosses with the remaining six chapters devoted to the subject of the bosses as identified by the author:

- i) the Trinity and the life of Christ
- ii) the life of Our Lady, saints and angels

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<sup>109</sup> Cotton, 1900; Goulburn, E. M., *Ancient Sculpture in the Roof of Norwich Cathedral*, London: Autotype Fine Art Company, 1876; Prideaux and Shafto, 1910.

<sup>110</sup> Cave, 1948, p.1.

<sup>111</sup> James, M. R., *The Sculptured Bosses in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral*, Norwich: Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, 1911; James, M.R., *The Sculptured Bosses in the Roof of the Bauchun Chapel of Our Lady of Pity in Norwich Cathedral*, Norwich: Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, 1908; Griffin, R., 'The Heraldry in the Cloisters of the Cathedral Church of Christ at Canterbury', *Archaeologia*, Vol. 66, 1915, pp. 447–568; St John Hope, W., 'The Heraldry and Sculptures of the Vault of the Divinity School at Oxford', *Archaeological Journal*, Vol. LXXI, 1914, pp. 217–60; Wilson, D.D., 'Notes on some of the Bosses in the Cloisters of Worcester Cathedral and in particular on the Jesse Tree in the South Cloister', *Reports and Papers read at the Meetings of Archaeological Societies*, Vol. XXX, part II; Venables, E., 'The Bosses of the Eastern Walk of the Cloisters of Lincoln Cathedral', *Reports and Papers of the Associated Architectural Societies*, Vol. XX, part I, 1899, pp.179–93.

- iii) men and women
- iv) heads
- v) beasts, birds and fish
- vi) foliage, flowers and miscellaneous objects

Like Prideaux and Shafto, Cave discusses the development of the carved stone boss from its Norman beginnings. He notes that in many instances of Norman vaulting the carving of the ribs continues across the keystone with no other ornament at the point of intersection.<sup>112</sup> In some places, small carvings of foliage or beast heads are applied directly to the ribs where they intersect. In others, small flat medallions are carved on the lower side of the boss which are in turn carved with foliage or human or beast heads. At Iffley, Oxfordshire, one boss is carved with a coiled dragon. Cave records that prior to the advent of Gothic architecture, bosses had already begun to assume decorative importance with some examples being carved over the whole of the lower surface. 'The real beginning of large roof bosses in the new style' he states 'was in the quire at Canterbury [cathedral], and here we are fortunately able to date them exactly owing to the account of the rebuilding of the quire that has come down to us from the pen of Gervase.'<sup>113</sup>

Cave is uncertain whence the craftsmen of William of Sens, builders of the cathedral of Canterbury, took their inspiration, commenting that the carvings at Sens are 'small and unimportant'. Although there are twelfth-century bosses in France which are elaborately carved with foliage and, in some cases, angels, Cave suggests that these are rare and that most of the early bosses in France

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<sup>112</sup> Cave, 1948, p.4.

<sup>113</sup> Cave, 1948, p.5.

are flat plaques. He concludes therefore that: 'William of Sens...developed his own style of roof bosses at Canterbury, which William the Englishman later took over and transformed' and that:

Canterbury seems to have set the fashion to the rest of England, and almost all subsequent buildings in this country had their keystones carved with foliage or figures in a style quite distinct from that which was developed on the Continent.<sup>114</sup>

Cave states, however, that although he believes the idea of richly carved bosses might be attributed to Canterbury, he discerns their particular style in only a few churches.<sup>115</sup> While he declares that in the early Gothic period foliate bosses are more numerous than figural bosses, he notes that in the late medieval period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries figural bosses become more and more common, although he offers no explanation for this.<sup>116</sup> Series of storied (narrative sequenced) bosses are, however, rarely found, with Norwich unique in having five.<sup>117</sup>

Cave differs markedly from Prideaux and Shafto in his assertion that stone bosses were probably carved *in situ*. He declares that it would be extremely difficult to ensure an exact fit between the vaulting ribs and the boss if this was not the case, and cites evidence from Mr E. Luscombe, clerk of works at Exeter Cathedral. Cave notes that:

Mr Luscombe had to superintend the building of a few bays of the cloisters at Exeter, and himself carved the bosses after they were in place; but he was also instructed to insert a few old bosses which had survived; he told me that he had far more difficulty with these bosses than with all the new ones put together.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Cave, 1948, p.6.

<sup>115</sup> Cave, 1948, p.7.

<sup>116</sup> Cave, 1948, pp.10–11.

<sup>117</sup> Cave, 1948, p.12.

<sup>118</sup> Cave, 1948, pp.2–3.

Cave's work of 1948 contains a useful appendix listing churches having roof bosses, although he qualifies this by stating that the list does not 'aim at completeness but mention is made of cathedrals and churches in Great Britain which are known to me to have bosses of some interest or importance'.<sup>119</sup> Cave recognises that 'for the greatest profusion of wooden bosses one must go to the wagon roofs of the West country' and the appendix constitutes the most useful work on the roof bosses of the parish churches of Devon to date.<sup>120</sup> Of 208 cathedrals and churches recorded across Britain, 28 are from Devon.<sup>121</sup> Of 368 photographs published in Cave's book, 37 are from Devon, 18 of which are from Exeter cathedral and Bishop Grandisson's great collegiate church of Ottery St Mary.<sup>122</sup>

A further 14 churches in Devon containing roof bosses are recorded in notes on a card index in Cave's archive at the Society of Antiquaries Library in London.<sup>123</sup> However, not all of the churches of Devon included in the appendix and card index had been personally examined by Cave, while others have foliate or modern bosses and many of the notes are extremely brief.

C.J.P. Cave died in 1950. His posthumously published *Medieval Carvings in Exeter Cathedral* of 1953 notes that its roof bosses are among the most

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<sup>119</sup> Cave, 1948, p.181.

<sup>120</sup> Cave, 1948, p.15.

<sup>121</sup> The churches of Brixham, Broadclyst, Broadhembury, Buckland Monachorum, Chagford, Cheriton Bishop, Chumleigh, Exeter Cathedral, Hartland, Hatherleigh, King's Nympton, Lifton, Meavy, Milton Abbot, North Bovey, Ottery St Mary, Payhembury, Plymouth St Andrew, Plympton St Mary, Sampford Courtenay, Spreyton, Stoodleigh, Tavistock, North Tawton, South Tawton, Thorverton, Ugborough, Widecombe-in-the-Moor.

<sup>122</sup> The photographs are from North Bovey (3), Broadhembury (2), Exeter Cathedral (14), King's Nympton (2), Meavy (5), Ottery St Mary (4), Sampford Courtenay (6), Stoodleigh (1).

<sup>123</sup> Awlescombe (sic), Berry Pomeroy, Branscombe, Cullompton, Dunsford, Exeter St Laurence (sic) (since destroyed by bombing), Exeter St Martin, Holcombe Rogus, Modbury, Newton St Cyres, Sidbury, Tawstock, Tiverton, Whitchurch.

important in the country.<sup>124</sup> In this short book, as with his earlier work, Cave focuses on the style of the bosses, the quality of their carving and their iconography. The Exeter bosses illustrate, according to Cave, 'the whole period of the middle Gothic style, of which they are perhaps the best surviving collection'.<sup>125</sup> Cave notes a difference in the overall quality of the bosses between the earlier carvings of the east end chapels and in the presbytery and the later work throughout the cathedral.<sup>126</sup>

Cave's account of Exeter is useful for his discussion of 'how the subjects were selected, what models the sculptors had to work from, and whether the subjects were chosen for them, or whether they carved their figures according to their own fancy'. However, Cave notes that 'we have nothing quite definite to go on and can only give probable answers to these problems'.<sup>127</sup> Even in a relatively well documented cathedral, therefore, lack of written evidence has proved problematic for those attempting to study roof bosses.

Prideaux, Shafto and Cave recorded roof bosses in the first half of the twentieth century and interpreted their findings within the somewhat restricted art-historical framework then employed. They relied on close visual analysis through the medium of photography to describe each boss, to comment on its quality and to search for models and meaning through a process which involved deciphering pictorial conventions. They also considered the architectural function of the roof boss, its origins and development. There were aspects relating to roof bosses, however, which they barely considered. For Prideaux,

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<sup>124</sup> Cave, 1953, p.5.

<sup>125</sup> Cave, 1953, pp.5–6.

<sup>126</sup> Cave, 1953, p.11.

<sup>127</sup> Cave, 1953, p.17.

Shafto and Cave, meaning was inherent in the motifs used and, other than comments on the difficulties of seeing detail in the carvings from floor level, questions of audience and reception were largely ignored. Although the rise in number of figural bosses in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was noted by both Prideaux and Shafto and Cave, no investigation was made of broader historical concerns which might have influenced this.

However, writers on roof bosses after Cave all acknowledge their debt to his work, and there is little deviation from his methodology, although there is, perhaps, slightly more of an emphasis on a broader range of models.

A booklet *The Roof Bosses of Bristol Cathedral* was written by art historian M.Q. Smith in 1979.<sup>128</sup> Smith had written an earlier article in which he had documented 'The Roof Bosses of Norwich Cathedral and Their Relation to the Medieval Drama of the City'.<sup>129</sup>

Smith's work of 1979 recognises an earlier study of the cathedral by Cave, published in 1935, and again focuses on descriptions of the bosses and their quality.<sup>130</sup> Smith offers a revision of some of Cave's interpretations and notes that the subject matter of the bosses may be compared with that found in embroidery, stained glass, misericords and illuminated manuscripts.

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, M. Q., *The Roof Bosses and Vaults of Bristol Cathedral*, Bristol: Bristol University for the Friends of Bristol Cathedral, 1979.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, M.Q., 'The Roof Bosses of Norwich Cathedral and their Relation to the Medieval Drama of the City', *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. 32, Pt.1, 1958, pp.12–26.

<sup>130</sup> Cave, C.J.P., *Roof Bosses of Bristol Cathedral*, Bristol: Friends of Bristol Cathedral, 1935.

In the same year as Smith's booklet was published, Exeter Cathedral published a similar booklet: *Roof Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral*.<sup>131</sup> Written by Michael Swanton, the booklet is produced in much the same format but, unlike Smith's booklet which is generously footnoted, Swanton's is not. Both booklets are clearly intended as guides leading the reader through the various parts of the cathedral buildings and discussing building phases and styles.

Christopher Brighton's study of the bosses of Lincoln cathedral cloister of 1985 follows earlier studies by Venables and Cave, and is also intended as a guide.<sup>132</sup> Accordingly, much of the text is devoted to a description of the bosses and identification of their subjects and style. This methodology is also adopted by Angela Smith in her booklet on the bosses of Winchester Cathedral, published in 1996. Smith notes that Cave's earlier work on the bosses at Winchester is reliable, but states that her intention, prompted by a series of new photographs, is 'to re-write [the text] in a slightly more detailed and accessible fashion'.<sup>133</sup>

Martial Rose's *Stories in Stone*, a work on the bosses of Norwich cathedral with photography by Julia Hedgecoe, was published in 1997.<sup>134</sup> Hedgecoe had been approached in 1989 to make a complete record of 1100 roof bosses in the cloisters and interior of the cathedral. Months of planning followed, in which Hedgecoe worked out a method for photographing the bosses which would

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<sup>131</sup> Swanton, M., *Roof Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral*, Exeter: Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral, 1979.

<sup>132</sup> Brighton, C., *Lincoln Cathedral Cloister Bosses*, Lincoln: The Honeywood Press, Lincoln Cathedral Library Publications, 1985.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, A., *Roof Bosses of Winchester Cathedral*, Winchester: The Friends of Winchester Cathedral, 1996.

<sup>134</sup> Rose, M., and Hedgecoe, J., *Stories in Stone. The Medieval Roof Carvings of Norwich Cathedral*, London: Herbert Press, A&C Black, 1997.



reveal their subject detail and also some idea of the depth of the carving. *Stories in Stone* discusses the architectural function of the roof boss, the building phases at Norwich, the carvers and the narrative sequences of the bosses in various parts of the cathedral. Although it does not cite M.Q. Smith's paper of 1958, it also discusses 'Drama and the Roof Bosses', noting that descriptions of medieval drama (derived from nineteenth-century redactions of eighteenth-century copies of sixteenth-century originals) give details of properties, masks, wigs and costumes which appear to relate to depictions in some of the bosses.<sup>135</sup>

In 1999, Rose followed up *Stories in Stone* with *The Norwich Apocalypse. The Cycle of Vault Carvings in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral*.<sup>136</sup> Featuring the photographs of Ken Harvey, this work, after a brief introduction, is entirely devoted to a discussion of the iconography of the bosses.

In 2001, Avril Henry and Anna Hulbert brought to fruition the result of many years work in an extensive website: *Exeter Cathedral Keystones and Carvings: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Sculptures and Their Polychromy*.<sup>137</sup> The website states that it:

offers a complete, explanatory record of the medieval bosses, corbels, label stops, figurative capitals (and a few other interior carvings) which are an integral part of the medieval interior construction of Exeter cathedral...[describing] the carvings' architectural context together with their significance both as indicators of the sequence by which a Norman

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<sup>135</sup> Rose and Hedgecoe, 1997, pp.123–139.

<sup>136</sup> Rose, M., *The Norwich Apocalypse. The Cycle of Vault Carvings in the Cloisters of Norwich Cathedral*, Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1999.

<sup>137</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Information on the site references Hulbert's earlier paper 'An Examination of the Polychromy of Exeter Cathedral Roof-Bosses (*sic*), and its Documentation' in Kelly, F., (ed.), *Medieval Art and Architecture at Exeter Cathedral*, *British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions*, 11 (for the Year 1985). Oxford: Oxbow Books for the British Archaeological Association, 1991, pp.188–198.

cathedral was refashioned into a Gothic one, and as objects of great beauty and interest in their own right.<sup>138</sup>

The website is:

designed primarily for art historians and medievalists, but also...intended to enable lay people to enjoy the wonderful medieval work which can often be seen more clearly here than is possible within the building, even through binoculars.<sup>139</sup>

The website documents, where possible, the types of stone used for the carvings and makes tentative attributions to masters or schools of carving. As with previous works on Exeter, it discusses the importance of the cathedral's Fabric Rolls, the architectural function of the bosses, and the building sequence of the cathedral.

Due to the particular interests of Anna Hulbert, conservator and medieval polychrome specialist, a significant section is devoted to a discussion of the use of medieval pigments on the bosses. 48 of Exeter's bosses retain their fourteenth-century colour almost intact and the authors note that there is an unrivalled opportunity 'to see at first hand what the medieval artists intended their work to look like'. The authors note the difficulties posed by the loss of much medieval material and suggest that 'the bosses cannot be accurately assessed in their present polychrome isolation'.<sup>140</sup> They do, however, briefly consider the original visual context of the bosses in the light of evidence from the Fabric Rolls.

Importantly, Henry and Hulbert resolve, once and for all, the question of where the bosses were carved. They note that the 'Fabric Rolls make it absolutely

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<sup>138</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>, Introduction.

<sup>139</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Introduction.

<sup>140</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Introduction.

clear that the bosses were carved before being put into position. In many cases there is irrefutable internal evidence that the painting, though not the gilding, was also far advanced at ground level'.<sup>141</sup> Henry and Hulbert therefore confirm Prideaux's and Shafto's theory rather than that put forward by C.J.P. Cave, stating that 'It is ... inconceivable that any sculptor would choose to work with his normal use of the weight of the mallet precluded by gravity, and stone-dust falling in his eyes'.<sup>142</sup>

For Henry and Hulbert the sculptural quality of the bosses is just as important as their subject matter and they assert that 'its range extends from the pitiful modern replacement bosses in the Chapel of St James to the superb work of the Botanical Master at the east end, and of the Master of Lions in the east bay of the Nave and the Crossing area'.<sup>143</sup>

Henry's and Hulbert's study is complemented by extensive footnotes and an excellent bibliography, although its approach does not differ markedly from that of Cave nearly 50 years before, relying largely on analysis of architectural function, style, content and quality. However, Henry's and Hulbert's study has been extremely useful to this thesis for the breadth of its documentation throughout the cathedral, and for its catalogue of bosses, some of which share motifs with bosses in the parish churches of Devon.

It is telling, though, that in this recent study, attention focuses once again on the bosses of the cathedral and that, since Cave's explorations, little academic study has been attempted of roof bosses in parish churches anywhere in the

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<sup>141</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Introduction.

<sup>142</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Introduction.

<sup>143</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.htm>. Introduction.

country.<sup>144</sup> It is noteworthy, also, that where recent analysis has been carried out in great churches and cathedrals, and published in booklet form or in journal articles, it follows a largely traditional art-historical or archaeological approach.<sup>145</sup> While recognising the great contribution made to their study by C.J.P. Cave and others, a review of the literature on roof bosses reveals *lacunae*, both in terms of the documentation of bosses, and in analysis of the role of bosses in pre-Reformation religious experience. This thesis intends to make good that lack for the county of Devon.

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<sup>144</sup> A booklet on the roof bosses of Somersham church, Cambridgeshire, written by Andrew Lee, *Cardinal Adam Easton O.S.B And The Roof Bosses Of St John's Church, Somersham*, Huntingdon: Even Handed Licensing Ltd, 2003, makes highly speculative, and almost certainly erroneous, assertions on the iconography of the bosses in that church, and certainly cannot be described as being academic in nature. A short article by Bob Trubshaw, 'The Green Men of Warmington', published in *Northamptonshire Local History News*, Vol. III No.9, Spring 1996, and available online: [http://www.warmington.org/church/green\\_men.htm](http://www.warmington.org/church/green_men.htm), discusses the oak foliate head bosses in the parish church at Warmington, Northamptonshire, but again is popular rather than academic in nature. In 1999 the architect Birkin Haward published a book on '*Suffolk Medieval Church Roof Carvings*'. This, however, refers to carvings on hammerbeam roofs and not to roof bosses. Haward's work is in the form of a photographic survey, and he includes 38 churches in a gazetteer. Haward discusses the principal carved subjects, the carvings, and carvers, and includes a map of distribution. Haward, B., *Suffolk Medieval Church Roof Carvings: a Photographic Survey of Carvings on Hammerbeam Roofs*, Ipswich: Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 1999.

<sup>145</sup> For example, Martial Rose's booklet, written in 2006, on the bosses in the chantry chapel of St Helen's, the Great Hospital, Norwich focuses heavily on their style and iconography. Rose, M., *A Crowning Glory. The Vaulted Bosses in the Chantry Chapel of St Helen's, the Great Hospital, Norwich*, Dereham: Larks Press, 2006. A booklet on the *Roof Bosses in the Nave of Tewkesbury Abbey*, c. 2000, features a shorter version of an article by Richard K. Morris, published in *Church Archaeology*, Vol. 3, 1999. This article is, as would be expected, archaeological in its approach.

## Chapter Two

### Materiality and Method

#### The development of the parish church in Devon

The earliest known churches in Devon were minsters served by canons and the churches of monastic communities of monks.<sup>1</sup> Religious houses of this type existed in Exeter as early as the 680s, and later in the north of the county at Hartland, in the south at Plympton, in the east at Axminster, in mid-Devon at Crediton and Cullompton, and in the west at Tavistock, among other places.<sup>2</sup> Orme notes that these churches acted as 'regional centres of Christianity' to which the devout would travel and from which itinerant clergy would depart on missions.<sup>3</sup>

The topography of Devon often made these journeys long, difficult and dangerous, and, by the eleventh century, many smaller local churches had developed under manorial influence so that lords might care for the spiritual needs of their estates.<sup>4</sup> Once a 'church of the manor' had been established, it was incumbent on neighbouring manors to follow suit lest tenants should attend churches and develop allegiances outside their own manor.<sup>5</sup> As the principal influence on the establishment of a parish was therefore manorial, parish

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<sup>1</sup> Orme, N., 'The Medieval Parishes of Devon', *The Devon Historian*, Vol.33, October 1986, pp. 3-9, on p.3.

<sup>2</sup> The Saxon St Boniface, born in Crediton in 680, was educated at a monastery in Exeter. Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (eds.), *The Buildings of England: Devon*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Penguin, 1991, p. 38; Orme, 1986, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Orme, 1986, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Turner suggests a variety of ways in which the early medieval churches in Devon and Cornwall were founded: some, for example, were sited in ancient burial grounds, while others probably began as small hermitages. Others were associated with saints' cults. Turner, S. (ed.), *Medieval Devon and Cornwall. Shaping an Ancient Countryside*, Macclesfield: Windgather Press, 2006, p.31-40. Orme, however, notes that 'most of the smaller churches were associated with manors and were founded and operated by lords of manors for the benefit of their tenants'. Orme, 1986, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Orme, 1986, p.3.

boundaries tended to follow those of the manor, with the result that parishes, like manors, varied widely in size and wealth.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the thirteenth century, Devon was fully parochialised.<sup>7</sup> At that time, the number of parishes in Devon stood at around 405, with a very small increase to 409 by 1535 indicating that the parish system continued almost unchanged in the county throughout the late medieval period.<sup>8</sup>

The parish church became the focus of the life of the community during this time, although little remains of the fabric of these early churches. Cherry and Pevsner estimate that perhaps 95% of pre-Victorian churches in Devon are predominantly Perpendicular in style and date to the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> During this period, often referred to as the Golden Age of church building in Devon, the early parish churches were radically transformed by extensions to nave and chancel, by the removal, in many places, of the chancel arch and by the addition of aisles and porches.<sup>10</sup>

Fig. 2.1, drawn by C. Fryer Cornelius in 1946, shows the general plan of development that many churches followed in the late medieval period, although it must be stressed that each building differed in its detail as each was dependent on the wealth and motivation of diverse patrons, clergy and parishioners. A few churches remained aisleless, some saw the addition of a single aisle, while others in wealthier parishes had new aisles to north and

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<sup>6</sup> Orme, 1986, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Orme, 1986, p.4.

<sup>8</sup> Orme, 1986, pp.6–7.

<sup>9</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.43.

<sup>10</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, p. 42; Slader, J.M., *The Churches of Devon*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1968, p. 53.

south of the nave and chapels to north and south of the chancel. Exceptionally, outer aisles were added to those already in existence.

The great rebuilding required the construction of new roofs to which were applied the roof bosses of this study. This chapter focuses on the materiality, the construction, and the dating of these roofs, discussing the survival of the bosses and the ways in which their carving and surface treatments impacted upon their visibility. It also considers aspects of the method of production of the bosses and gives some account of roof bosses now presumed lost. The primary medium under consideration is wood, since this is the material of the great majority of roofs and bosses in parish churches in Devon. The carving of stone bosses is, however, discussed with reference to Exeter Cathedral, and stone bosses are recorded in the gazetteer and their iconography discussed in Chapter Four, as are the lead bosses of Cullompton church.

## **The church roof**

### **i) The material and its survival**

The timber used in the construction of medieval roofs of the parish churches of Devon is oak. There are two native species, pedunculate (*Quercus robur* or *pedunculata*), known as the English oak, and sessile (*Quercus sessiflora* or *petraea*), both of which can grow to forty metres in height. The trees may grow alongside each other and can be identified by differences in the stalks of acorn and leaf. The pedunculate oak has stalked acorns but no stalks to leaves, while the sessile has stalked leaves but its acorns are tight to the twig. Charles states

that both share the same properties for building and that, in this context, their wood is indistinguishable.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding the structure of the tree is important with regard to the survival of the material in churches and also its dating. The tree is composed of the pith, which forms the core of the tree's stem; the harder heartwood, which surrounds this and contains dead cells; softer sapwood, which lies beyond the heartwood and contains some living cells; the cambium, which is the layer of cells beneath the bark responsible for the annual increase in the girth of the tree; and finally the bark itself.

Oak is a hardwood renowned for its strength and durability and Charles notes that, given the right conditions, 'it will outlast most kinds of stone'.<sup>12</sup> Problems occur mostly when the wood is subjected to constant dampness and lack of ventilation. This encourages wet or dry rot and also insect attack, particularly by the common furniture beetle (*Anobius punctatum*) or the death-watch beetle (*Xestobium rufovillosum*). The softer sapwood is particularly vulnerable as, when green, it contains much more moisture than the heartwood.

Many medieval church roofs in Devon have lost structural timbers and bosses to rot or insect attack. A large number were restored or completely replaced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it is likely that, at some stage, every medieval church roof in Devon has had some degree of post-medieval intervention. The roofs at Wembworthy church are a case in point. The chancel, which appears to have been completely rebuilt in the nineteenth century, has a roof which is wholly nineteenth-century. In the nave roof, the trusses at the east

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<sup>11</sup> Charles, F.W.B., *Conservation of Timber Buildings*, London: Hutchinson, 1984, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Charles, 1984, p. 44.



end are also nineteenth-century with bosses apparently also dating from this period. The middle section of the nave roof appears to have its original medieval timbers with original bosses, while the section at the west end has its original trusses but with nineteenth-century bosses applied. In the north aisle, the section at the east end appears to have been replaced, with one boss bearing the date 1865. The section towards the west end, however, appears medieval with only one boss having been replaced.

A guidebook to Chagford church reports that:

On Remembrance Sunday 1931, as the Reverend Cecil Holmes and the visiting preacher were leaving the church, part of the ceiling collapsed. It was discovered that death-watch beetle had damaged the ceiling laths and supporting beams...All the ceiling had to be removed, the roof stripped and re-slatted, defective timbers replaced, damaged moulded bosses renewed and the whole treated with infestation liquid. The work was completed in 1933 at a final cost of £2,584.99 (*sic*). However, the ceiling panelling was only replaced in the chancel and sanctuary. The roof was again treated against death-watch beetle in the early 1960s and it is recorded that 'we cannot complete the restoration by replacing the plaster until we are satisfied that the beetle is no longer active'.<sup>13</sup>

In 1965 the medieval roof at Broadwoodwidge church was found to have death watch beetle which 'was so severe that the church had to be closed for a period and the whole roof renewed in the old barrel-vaulted style at a cost of £10,000'.<sup>14</sup> New bosses were carved at this time, including one of a tractor, of relevance to a rural community in the mid-twentieth century.

The extent of restoration certainly adds to the difficulties of understanding roof bosses in Devon. In some churches, medieval bosses now appear alongside nineteenth- or twentieth-century carvings which may be copies of decayed originals. In Atherington and Kelly churches, modern copies exist of original

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<sup>13</sup> *The Parish Church of St Michael the Archangel, Chagford*, no name, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *The Church of St Nicholas, Broadwoodwidge, Devon*, no name, no date.

medieval bosses *in situ* elsewhere in the church roof (Figs. 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). These bosses are unpainted and it is relatively easy to distinguish the new wood from the old.

Where bosses are painted, however, it can be much more difficult to differentiate between medieval and modern. In Widecombe church, there are two bosses, of a pelican feeding her young, which appear to date from different periods (Figs. 2.6 and 2.7). One is likely to be original but the other, which is sharper in appearance, is probably a replacement. Painted bosses of foliate heads at Dunchideock church are also likely to be ancient and modern (Figs. 2.8 and 2.9), the church having been thoroughly restored in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The carving on the probable modern boss appears more defined and deeply carved than that on the probable medieval boss, which has clearly suffered some damage, and upon which the foliage is more randomly arranged and the carving less clear cut.

There exists too the possibility that some bosses may not be in their original positions in the roof, although many restorations were carried out with great care. At Sampford Courtenay, for example, the nave roof was removed entirely (Fig. 2.10) before being reconstructed. A newspaper report, dated 26 May 1899, notes that:

The restoration of the fabric is being carried out on thoroughly conservative lines, and the committee have every hope that everything worth preserving will be found by those who seek it in its proper place. Antiquarians will be glad to learn that every piece of old carving which it has been possible to use again has been put back in its old position (and the roof is singularly rich in carving).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Newspaper report, 'Sampford Courtenay Church Restoration', 26.05.1899, source unknown, pasted into Sampford Courtenay Parish File, Sheet A4, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

A boss of a shield at Broadhembury is marked in pencil LAST SOUTH indicating its position in the south aisle roof (Fig. 2.11). The roofs at Broadhembury were largely reconstructed by Harbottle Reed in 1930.<sup>16</sup>

Where roofs have been completely replaced, however, many bosses have certainly been lost as demonstrated at the collegiate church of Crediton. In her notes on the church, Beatrix Cresswell states that: 'The vaulting shafts, both in the nave and choir, now seem superfluous for the roofs that they uphold. Formerly they supported a timber roof of a character worthy of the rest of the building.'<sup>17</sup> Cresswell quotes Polwhele's description of this roof: 'The old ceiling, which has been lately taken down, was ornamented with a profusion of carved work representing birds, beasts and figures of angels, some of which were supporting the armorial bearings of Bishop Stapledon.'<sup>18</sup>

Cresswell notes that:

The destruction of this ancient roof about 1793 is one of the worst losses the church has sustained. It appears to have become unsound through neglect, and was entirely removed to save the expense of repairs. The carved timbers were used to light the fires when the Governors' dinners were prepared and served in the Chapter House; and for warming the Governors' Room. It is said that when the fire was getting low one of them would say to the sexton "Put on another angel William".<sup>19</sup>

Between 1848 and 1877 the church was restored according to the designs of architect John Hayward. During this period, a flat plastered ceiling, which seems to have replaced the medieval roof over the nave, was itself replaced with a tie-

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<sup>16</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.217.

<sup>17</sup> Cresswell, B., *The Collegiate Church of Holy Cross Crediton with the Parochial Chapel of St. Swithin's, Sandford*, 1918, p.38.

<sup>18</sup> Polwhele's description, presumably from the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth centuries, is quoted in Cresswell, *Crediton*, 1918, p.28. If the Arms of Walter Stapledon were indeed portrayed on shields in the roof, then this roof was presumably erected during his episcopacy (1307–1326).

<sup>19</sup> Cresswell, *Crediton*, 1918, pp.38–39.

beam roof with vertical struts by William Dart of Crediton.<sup>20</sup> Of the medieval roof, only two bosses survive, now kept in the Governors' Room (Figs. 2.12 and 2.13). According to a brief report written by conservator Anna Hulbert in 1976, the bosses 'appear to be in splendid condition with the original polychrome only slightly grubby'.<sup>21</sup>

James Davidson's *Church Notes*, which were written during the early to mid-nineteenth century and therefore pre-date many of the major restorations that took place later in that century, record many figural bosses that may also have been destroyed. On a visit to Kilminster in east Devon in 1826, Davidson records:

The roof of the aisle has wooden ribs the intersections of which are ornamented with sculptures roses and knots, the device of Lord Stafford and among 2 (*sic*) which appear to be meant for crests, representing a bird pecking a wheatsheaf.<sup>22</sup>

Beatrix Cresswell later noted that:

[The] tower, dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century is the only ancient part of the church now remaining, as, with this exception, it was entirely rebuilt between 1861, 1862 (*sic*), and re-opened for public worship on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1862. The new work was done under the direction of Mr C. Edwards of Axminster, Architect, and Mr Downes of Sherbourne, Builder. Although it is quite evident that the church was then in a state of considerable dilapidation early descriptions show that this drastic reconstruction was not carried out without the loss of many ancient and interesting features.<sup>23</sup>

Cresswell goes on to cite Davidson's earlier description of the church.

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<sup>20</sup> Cresswell, *Crediton*, 1918, p. 38–39; Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.296.

<sup>21</sup> The information from Anna Hulbert's report was relayed to me by local historian Keith Barker on a visit to Crediton church, 10.03.10. Also present was medieval polychrome conservator Eddie Sinclair who noted that the colour scheme was unusual for the medieval period and might, therefore, be later in date. However, without scientific analysis, it is impossible to be sure.

<sup>22</sup> Davidson, *East Devon*, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Cresswell, *Honiton*, Vol.2, 1920, p.24.

In September 1829, Davidson noted at Honiton church: 'rude bosses...in the ceiling which represent human heads [and] may be considered of an early date'.<sup>24</sup> Cresswell recorded that on March 27, 1911, a 'disastrous fire' gutted the whole of the interior and that the 'roof [was] entirely burnt'.<sup>25</sup>

In August 1843, Davidson himself recorded the loss of medieval bosses at Broadclyst church:

The noble church of this village with its lofty and handsome tower...was repaired and its ruinous parts restored in the style in which they had previously existed in the year 1833, a new roof of cast iron being at the same time put up...The ceilings are coved and ribbed formerly with oak, now with plaster (*sic*) of the same design as before.<sup>26</sup>

The bosses too appear to be of plaster, yet Cherry and Pevsner refer to 'flat aisle ceilings with ...spidery metal bosses'. The English Heritage listing states: 'All ribs of plaster with medievalised bosses'.<sup>27</sup>

Visiting Chudleigh on 31 July 1840, Davidson noted that 'the ceilings are coved, and that of the nave is ribbed and ornamented with carved bosses of mens' faces, a king and a monk'.<sup>28</sup> The church was re-roofed by Henry Woodyer during a restoration of 1868-9 and the boss of the monk is now missing.<sup>29</sup> The boss of the crowned head, however, survives over the crossing, and is probably one of the most technically accomplished bosses in a parish church in Devon (Fig. 2.14).

Davidson also records figural bosses at two churches in Exeter no longer extant. The church of St Mary Major, demolished in 1865, was visited on 16

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson, *East Devon*, p.81.

<sup>25</sup> Cresswell, *Honiton*, Vol.1, p.96.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson, *East Devon*, p.529.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=88378&mode=adv>. Accessed 21.03.10.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*, p.289.

<sup>29</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.262.

September 1840. Davidson states: 'The ceilings are coved and ribbed with wood having bosses of human heads and foliage at their intersections'.<sup>30</sup>

The church of St. Lawrence, lost in the blitz of 1942, had a ceiling 'divided by ribs into quadrangular compartments with bosses at the intersections representing angels, foliage, heads and in two instances shields'.<sup>31</sup> C.J.P. Cave also recorded details of this ceiling on a card index now held in the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Cave noted:

A West Country wagon roof with 21 gilt bosses and 16 half bosses. The central line has alternate foliage and head bosses, the latter rather crude with mouth foliage. The N. and S. purlins have small angels with shields, very peculiar. Some of the half bosses have demi faces.<sup>32</sup>

Davidson did not always notice or record the figural bosses in church roofs, perhaps due to lack of time or available light. It is almost certain that many more bosses besides those he recorded were lost during nineteenth- and twentieth-century restorations. Nonetheless, pre-Reformation figural bosses survive in around 30% of the medieval parish churches of Devon, making the corpus significant and worthy of the attention that it has hitherto not received.

## **ii) Dating of the timber**

The most precise method for dating ancient timber is through dendrochronological analysis. Oak is a long-lived tree which has the advantage of being sensitive to climate change, and its rings, which reflect its growing conditions, are strictly annual. The tree-rings form a pattern which can be overlapped with patterns from successively older specimens to allow the

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<sup>30</sup> Davidson, *Exeter*, p.141.

<sup>31</sup> Davidson, *Exeter*, p.161.

<sup>32</sup> Cave, C.J.P., Card index for the church of St. Lawrence (*sic*), Exeter, Society of Antiquaries Library, London, MS 943/8.

establishment of long chronologies. Precise dating relies on samples containing both the older heartwood and the younger sapwood through to bark-edge as this contains the last growth ring before felling.

The county of Devon is recognised as a 'difficult' area for dendrochronological analysis.<sup>33</sup> In many cases, the absence of surviving sapwood and bark-edge, either removed before construction or lost through insect attack, prevents the definition of a precise felling date. The method is expensive and tree-ring dating is not routinely carried out but tends to be commissioned during programmes of repair. Of those churches studied for this thesis, four have had samples taken from their roofs for dendrochronological analysis.<sup>34</sup>

At Hatherleigh, the late medieval timber spire blew down in a storm in January 1990. Although tree-ring analysis was commissioned, the samples proved unsuitable for dating.<sup>35</sup>

At Milton Abbot, tree-ring analysis was commissioned by English Heritage during a programme of repairs to the church roof in 2002. Twelve timbers were sampled, one of which was rejected in the laboratory as it had too few rings for reliable analysis.<sup>36</sup> Of the remaining eleven samples, only four matched reference chronologies and could therefore be dated, although missing

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<sup>33</sup> Groves, C. quoted in Tyers, I., *Tree Ring Analysis of Oak Timbers from the Nave Roof of the Church of St Constantine and St Aegidius, Milton Abbot, Devon. English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report 115/2002*, 2002, p.3.

<sup>34</sup> A fifth church, Crediton, had samples taken from the clock tower and Governors' Room. <http://www.creditonparishchurch.org.uk/history/timbers-of-holy-cross/>. Accessed 13.01.10. Although the timbers in the ceiling of the clock tower were cut before 1540, this information adds little to this study since the boss-bearing medieval roofs of the main body of the church have long since been destroyed.

<sup>35</sup> Westcott, K.A., 'The Spire and Roofs of Hatherleigh Church: Investigations following the Storm Damage of 1990', *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*, No. 50, 1992, pp. 61–89, on pp. 85–86.

<sup>36</sup> Tyers, 2002, p.2.

sapwood prevented a precise felling date. After applying an estimate for the number of missing sapwood rings, Tyers suggested that the datable samples had been felled between 1504 and 1536.<sup>37</sup>

At Braunton, the church was badly damaged by fire in July 2003. During the process of cleaning and restoration, tree-ring analysis was commissioned by English Heritage and samples were taken from ten timbers in the nave roof.<sup>38</sup> Three of these proved unsuitable for dating and although none of the samples was complete to the original bark surface, preventing an exact felling date being given, it was possible to use evidence from seven of the samples and to estimate a felling date between 1388 and 1413. Tyers notes that:

The dated timbers are integral parts of the original construction of the present roof since they are fully pegged and the original carpenters' numbering sequence is identifiable...Although no samples could be taken from the upper parts of the roof because of the conditions and difficulties of getting equipment into these areas, it is likely that this result is applicable to the entire nave roof, except for the readily apparent nineteenth and twenty-first century repairs.<sup>39</sup>

Tree-ring analysis of the nave and south aisle roofs of Alwington church was commissioned by English Heritage in 2009. Ten samples from the nave roof revealed that the timber was likely to have been felled between 1401 and 1426. Nine samples from the south aisle roof were analysed, with an estimated felling date of 1499–1524.<sup>40</sup>

Tree-ring dating from Braunton, Milton Abbot and Alwington churches thus indicates a range of felling dates for oak timbers in the roofs of nearly 150 years

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<sup>37</sup> Tyers, 2002, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> Tyers, I., *Tree Ring Analysis of Oak Timbers from St Brannock Church, Braunton, Devon. English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report 81/2004*, 2004, pp.3–4.

<sup>39</sup> Tyers, 2004, p.4. The bosses at Braunton are discussed in some detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold, A. and Howard, H., *St. Andrew's Church, Alwington, Devon. Tree-Ring Analysis of Timbers from the South Aisle and Nave Roofs, English Heritage Research Department Report Series no. 42*, 2009, p.2.



(1388–1536). Dating the roofs of these churches, however, depends on establishing the time lapse between felling and the use of the timber in construction.

In the medieval period it has been suggested that oak used in building was largely unseasoned.<sup>41</sup> F.W.B. Charles comments on the workability of oak, stating that although the wood may be pliable for a few months or even years after it is felled, it hardens with age until it is almost impossible to saw or axe across its grain.<sup>42</sup> ‘Technically’ he states:

unseasoned timber is the best to work with. It will cleave, saw, hew and cut with ease, and even bend in the final structure to take up irregular loading or movement through drying. But this movement is extremely slight as each component is firmly secured within a completely interlocked frame – the best way to season timber.<sup>43</sup>

A letter addressed to John Thoresby, Archbishop of York, in January 1355/6, does, however, emphasise the benefits of allowing some drying of the timber before its use in building:

All the timber as yet obtained, which was supposed would be sufficient for quite a long time, is in the hands of the carpenters, prepared for setting up, if God will, in the near future; and unless new timber is cut during the winter season, so that it may dry off (*exsiccati*) during the summer, the carpenters and our other workmen employed on the building of the said work will, for lack of timber, stand absolutely idle throughout the next winter season. Be so kind, therefore, as to order the delivery of suitable timber, which consists more of bent trees than of those of greater price and value which grow straight up, to be cut during this present winter time.<sup>44</sup>

Tracy and Harrison note that:

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<sup>41</sup> Harvey, J., *Medieval Craftsmen*, London: Batsford, 1975, p. 115.

<sup>42</sup> Charles, 1984, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Charles, 1984, p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> Salzman, L.F., *Building in England Down to 1540. A Documentary History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 239.

The Fabric Accounts for Exeter Cathedral record that in 1312–13 trees for making the bishop's throne were immersed in mill ponds at Chudleigh, Devon. Belief in such a practice was apparently still current in the 1970s when an old craftsman explained to the writer that timber should be seasoned in flowing water as a means of driving out the sap, since the sap was thought to be the main agent that caused timber to expand and contract.<sup>45</sup>

However, Salzman asserts that 'by modern standards most of the timber was definitely green when set in position' in the medieval period, even though some contracts, such as that for the roof of Halstead church, Essex, in 1413, specified the use of heart of oak which was '*bene siccato et indurato*'.<sup>46</sup>

Assuming that the timber used in building the roofs of churches in Devon was green, then the felling dates proposed as a result of dendrochronological analysis represent reliable construction dates for the church roofs. Although the bosses themselves have not been subject to analysis, and probably would not provide adequate samples for tree-ring dating, many appear to be coeval with the roofs.

There is, in a few cases, additional evidence which helps date the bosses in particular churches. Some may be dated through the coats of arms with which they are carved. A boss in the north aisle of Tavistock church, carved with the arms of Bishop Lacy of Exeter, can probably be dated to between 1420 and 1455, the duration of his episcopate. A boss of the Stafford knot in the north aisle of Nymet Rowland church may refer to Edmund Stafford, Bishop of Exeter from 1395 until 1419, although the roof is said to be late fifteenth- to early

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<sup>45</sup> Tracy, C., and Harrison, H., *The Choir Stalls at Amiens Cathedral*, Reading: Spire Books, 2004, p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> Salzman, 1952, pp. 238–239.

sixteenth-century.<sup>47</sup> An inscription carved into the ribs and purlins of the chancel roof at Spreyton dates this roof to 1451, and another recorded on the wall plate of the chancel at Harford church dates the roof there to 1539.<sup>48</sup>

Evidence may also be gleaned from written records: in 1436, Bishop Lacy granted 'forty days indulgence to all contributing to the reparation and building of the parish church of Harberton'.<sup>49</sup> Slader asserts that 'it is to this date that the roofs must be attributed' although this cannot be confirmed without scientific analysis.<sup>50</sup>

Close dating from the style of headdresses worn in many of the bosses may be unreliable. Although Grössinger suggests that the headdresses carved on misericords often help to date them, these tend to be found in the relatively wealthy churches of towns and cities where it might be expected that the latest fashions would be displayed. Rural Devon may have adopted these fashions considerably later. Grössinger also notes that the popular 'hennin' with veil, known as the 'horned headdress' and the subject of condemnation in sermons because of its associations with pride and the devil, was fashionable between c.1420 and 1440 but continued to be used after this time to make a moral point.<sup>51</sup> This type of headdress appears on several roof bosses in Devon.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=95609&mode=adv>. Accessed 14.07.09. However, there is an alternative suggestion for the Stafford knot at Nymet Rowland – see 'Stafford knot' in Chapter Four.

<sup>48</sup> Howell, R., *A Guide to Harford Church*, 1992, p.2. The bosses at Spreyton and Harford churches are discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Slader, 1968, p.58.

<sup>50</sup> Slader, 1968, p.58.

<sup>51</sup> Grössinger, C., *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords*, London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997, p.158.

Dating bosses with reference to the style of carving of foliage may also be unreliable. Charles Tracy examined four bosses from the roof of Berrynarbor church, north Devon, which are now housed in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, having been removed from the church probably in a restoration of 1887. 'The juxtaposition of conventional "stiff-leaf" ornament with naturalistic motifs is reminiscent of the treatment of the Exeter Cathedral misericords of the mid 1240s' states Tracy, dating the Berrynarbor bosses to the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>52</sup> However, this early date is at odds with the extensive rebuilding of the church in the fifteenth century. It is, of course, possible that material from an earlier church was reused (there is possibly eleventh-century fabric in the reset north transeptal arch and thirteenth-century fabric in the chancel) but it remains the case that the nave, north transept, south aisle, west tower and south porch all date from the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries and it is probable that all roofs were rebuilt at this time.<sup>53</sup>

The medieval bosses of the parish churches of Devon have not been securely dated, although given all the available evidence, a date range of 1388–1539 seems reasonable. However, attribution to the late medieval period in this thesis has largely been made on grounds of their association with ancient timbers, the apparent integrity of the roof, and the appearance of the bosses in terms of insect damage or decay and sharpness of carving. Close photographic analysis of the bosses has been invaluable in this process.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Tracy, C., *English Medieval Furniture and Woodwork*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988, p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=97008&mode=adv>. Accessed 05.07.10

<sup>54</sup> This requires the use of a computer where it is possible to zoom in on particular features.

### **iii) Construction**

The primary function of a roof is to protect a building from the elements. The methods employed across England in the medieval period in fulfilment of this function were many and varied. F.E. Howard asserts that: 'The design and construction of roofs is a branch of mediaeval church woodwork in which the skill and ingenuity of the mediaeval craftsman is seen at its best.'<sup>55</sup>

In Devon, most medieval church roofs, particularly those of the nave and chancel, are of a type known as wagon, barrel, or cradle roofs. The frame consists of pairs of rafters pitched against each other, collared for stability, and fixed to the top of side walls either on a wall plate or on a series of transverse pieces known as sole pieces.<sup>56</sup> The rafters are supported on curved braces with every fourth (or fifth) pair increased in size and strength. The whole is linked longitudinally by a crown purlin and side purlins, which comprise many short lengths of timber. The intersections between the braces (or ribs) and purlins are then covered with carved bosses giving the roof a unified appearance. The pattern of construction of the wagon roof, as shown at Hatherleigh church (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16), was used widely throughout Devon.

Although many aisle roofs are also of the wagon or cradle type, others are of a type known as beam roofs, flat as in the north aisle roof at Ugborough, or slightly pitched as in the north and south aisle roofs at South Tawton. Again the intersections of the timbers are commonly covered with bosses.

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<sup>55</sup> Howard, F. and Crossley, F., *English Church Woodwork*, London: Batsford, 1919, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> Howard and Crossley, 1919, p.102.

Detailed studies of carpentry techniques employed in medieval roof construction are available elsewhere and it is not necessary to repeat that information here.<sup>57</sup> It is perhaps useful though to reproduce a diagram drawn by C. Fryer Cornelius in 1946 which demonstrates the types of roof common in the churches of Devon (Fig. 2.17).

In general, church roofs in Devon are relatively modest in height, ranging approximately between 6.5 metres and 10 metres from floor to crown purlin, an important factor when considering the visibility of the figural roof bosses.<sup>58</sup> Nearly all of the churches in Devon lack a clerestory (with a few exceptions, for example at Crediton, Cullompton, North Molton, Pyworthy and Tiverton): an upper fenestrated part of the nave wall which rises above the aisle roof and which is more common in the churches of East Anglia. Many of the roofs of the main body of the church are also continuous from west to east, there being no chancel arch.

There is some debate regarding boarding or ceiling of the church roof. In the revised edition of *Buildings of England: Devon*, Bridget Cherry states that it is uncertain whether the ceiling or plastering of the spaces between the timbers of wagon roofs 'was a medieval or a later practice'.<sup>59</sup> The ceiling at South Tawton church was taken down during the restoration of 1881, it having been discovered that the plaster was unsafe. The Reverend Charles Burton, who published an account of the church in 1934, held the view that: 'When the roof

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<sup>57</sup> Howard and Crossley, 1919, p.87–130; Westcott, K., 1992.

<sup>58</sup> The recording of accurate floor to ceiling measurements proved problematic in this study. Floor to ceiling at North Molton was measured as the nave of the church was scaffolded. This church has a clerestory and therefore the floor to ceiling measurement of nine metres is unusually high. A laser measure did not prove effective since wagon roofs which are plastered are curved and a laser measure works best against a flat surface.

<sup>59</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p. 46.

was constructed, laths, plaster and whitewash were used to fill up the square panels formed by the intersecting carved timbers, thus considerably lightening and showing up the beauty of the carving'.<sup>60</sup>

However, in the *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society* for 1847, the Reverend J.L. Fulford appears quite certain that the roofs of South Tawton church were not originally ceiled. He states that: 'plaster ceilings are not after the original design' and points out:

that in almost every case mouldings or other ornaments are found beneath the plaster; at St Andrew's Church, South Tawton, and All Saints, Winkleigh, one half of the four-leafed flower so prevalent in the Perpendicular era is thus concealed.<sup>61</sup>

Fulford also points out potentially negative effects of plastering the panels of the roof: 'To what purpose is this lath and plaster? Surely it only serves to lessen the height of the building, to prevent the possibility of detecting any decay, until serious consequences are close at hand.'<sup>62</sup>

Harcourt and Harcourt, discussing the refectory roof at Cleeve Abbey, just across the Devon border in Somerset, state:

The close spacing of the trusses may not have been visible, since the principal and intermediate trusses and the purlins are rebated to take ceiling boards or laths which would have hidden the common rafters. No trace of ceiling boards has been found [and]...[t]here is no surviving evidence as to whether ceiling boards were actually fitted, as the rebates in the purlins and main trusses are clean, presumably raked out at the time of 1950s repairs. The edges of the rebates show some wear but not enough damage to prove conclusively that boards had been inserted. Neither is there any trace of limewash or paint; it is evident that many if not all of the timbers were wire-brushed while they were down in the

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<sup>60</sup> Burton, Rev. C., *An Account of the Parish Church of St Andrew, South Tawton and the Chapel of St Mary South Zeal*, 5th edition, Gloucester: The British Publishing Company Ltd, 1966, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Fulford, J.L., 'Open Roofs' in *The Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Volume II, Exeter, 1847, pp.41–51, on p.42.

<sup>62</sup> Fulford, 1847, p.43.

workshop. Late 19<sup>th</sup>-century photographs show the boards were not present then. All that can be concluded is that provision for ceiling boards or laths was made.<sup>63</sup>

The Harcourts publish a photograph showing an experiment of 1981 in which ceiling boards were positioned in the south-west corner of the refectory roof and lime-washed, thereby highlighting the carving of ribs, purlins and bosses.

Evidence from churchwardens' accounts suggests that at least part of the roof at South Tawton was boarded or ceiled in the medieval period. Ethel Lega-Weekes reports that the accounts for 1557–8 record a payment of eightpence 'for taking downe of the pycters on the Rowffe of the chourche'.<sup>64</sup> This is unlikely to have referred to a celure, the canopy of honour over the rood, as these survive elsewhere in Devon, for example at Hennock and Lapford, and contain no overtly Christian imagery which would have warranted their destruction. The pictures referred to may therefore have been painted on the chancel ceiling as at Gyffin church, Gwynedd. Here the late fifteenth-century chancel ceiling is divided into sixteen panels painted with full-length images of saints against a foliate background, although it must be said that survival of such painted ceilings is extremely rare.<sup>65</sup>

Further evidence of ceiling of the church roof may be provided by a newspaper cutting, dated February 1849, and pasted into James Davidson's *Church Notes on Devon*. The cutting states:

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<sup>63</sup> Harcourt, J., and Harcourt, T., 'Appendix 5: The Survey of the Refectory Roof in 2003', pp. 140–160, in Parker, W., Ives, T., and Allan, J., 'Excavation and Building Study at Cleeve Abbey, 1995–2003' in *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History*, 2006, pp. 73–167, on p. 142.

<sup>64</sup> Lega-Weekes E., 'The Churchwardens' Accounts of South Tawton, Part II', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, Vol. 39, 1907, pp. 302–336, on p.329.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/43691/images/ST+BENEDICT%27S+CHURCH%2C+GYFFIN>  
Interestingly, an unusual detail of one of these panels, the Man in the Moon, is found on a single roof boss in Braunton church, discussed in detail in Chapter Four.



A portion of the ceiling in the southern aisle of St. Andrew's Church, Ashburton, having been some time in a decayed state, was taken down a short time since. On the old panels were discovered various emblematical paintings, with foliage, stars *et cetera*.<sup>66</sup>

It is unclear, however, whether this ceiling was medieval in origin but, if so, it is unlikely to be a celure as it was found in the south aisle and so could not have been placed over the rood.

At Cullompton, the wagon roofs in the nave and north and south aisles were ceiled and probably painted, although the embellishment of the roof here is not matched by any other surviving roof in Devon. Much of the colour probably dates from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, although some early colour is thought to survive.

## **The bosses**

### **i) Dimensions**

The choice of figural motifs on bosses may have been partly determined by the dimensions of the bosses and by the distance from which each was viewed. In only two churches has it been possible to access bosses *in situ* to measure their dimensions: North Molton and Langtree. In North Molton, the ceiling was scaffolded in 2009 following the fall of one of the bosses. Four figural bosses in the nave roof were measured, their heights and widths ranging from 23cms to 25cms. In Langtree, the entire church was scaffolded in 2010 to facilitate a major programme of restoration. Six figural bosses were measured in the nave with heights and widths ranging from 19cms to 23.5cms.

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<sup>66</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*.

A wider range of bosses was, however, accessed at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. These bosses form part of a collection of medieval woodwork which was purchased by the museum from the estate of sculptor and carver Harry Hems (1842–1916) in 1938. Hems established ‘one of the most prolific ecclesiastical workshops in Victorian England’ carrying out repairs and restoration to churches across Britain.<sup>67</sup> In the course of his work, Hems accumulated a fine collection of over three hundred examples of medieval woodwork, much of it from Westcountry churches. This was displayed and used in his workshop in Longbrook Street, Exeter, to train his carvers in medieval techniques. The bosses from the Hems’ Collection were examined in detail on 25 July 2007 before the museum closed for refurbishment later that year. Provenance of the bosses is not specified although, in all probability, they originated in churches in the south-west, and, in particular, Devon.<sup>68</sup>

30 bosses (of which 28 were foliate or floriate) displayed in the roof of the museum’s medieval gallery were examined with the aid of a scaffold tower and each was measured for height and width. As regards height, the maximum recorded measurement is 33 cms while the maximum width recorded is 30 cms. The minimum recorded measurement for a full boss is 18 cms height by 16 cms width. Nearly all of the bosses are roughly square to within 2 or 3 cms, with the exception of a boss of a crowned male head which is 9 cms greater in height than width (33 cms x 24 cms). Most of the square bosses ranged between 22 and 28 cms in diameter. It was not possible to measure accurately the depth of

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<sup>67</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.101.

<sup>68</sup> *The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder*, October 14 1892, has a photograph of Hems’ workshop. The accompanying text states: ‘Upon the walls and attached to the beams above, are hung a multitude of plaster casts, all of ancient examples, as well as innumerable specimens of old wood carving, the collection in many respects being wholly unique’. Cutting pasted into Volume 9, 1891–1894, Hems’ scrapbooks, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

each, although this was estimated at between 7 and 16 cms. Measurements and photographs of these bosses are to be found in the gazetteer.

Two further bosses held in store were also examined and measurements taken accordingly. These examples provided an excellent opportunity to examine the upper side of the bosses and to see how they had been shaped to fit over ribs and purlins. Photographs of the upper and lower sides of each, together with their dimensions, are also in the gazetteer.

The two surviving medieval bosses from the nave roof of Crediton church were also measured. These were unusually large, both measuring 47cms height by 55 cms width, but Crediton was a collegiate church in the pre-Reformation period (although its nave was used as a parish church by the local community), and its decoration cannot therefore be considered in the same light as that of most parish churches of the time.

## **ii) Style of carving**

The bosses of the parish churches of Devon are varied in form: a few are round plaques as in the nave at Atherington, and at Braunton, Cheldon (Fig. 2.18), Stoodleigh and Warkleigh, where the ribs and purlins are carved out to accommodate the bosses; others, such as those in the north aisle at Landkey (Fig. 2.19) and in the chancel at Atherington, have a figural carved centre with foliate spikes emerging from the four corners; those at Chagford (Fig. 2.20) are roughly square, considerably deeper and are chiselled or gouged out on their upper face to fit around the ribs and purlins. Most of the bosses in Devon conform to this latter type with some, such as those at North Molton (Fig. 2.21), more rounded and displaying more of what are termed 'wings', that is 'the part

of the carving climbing up into the angles between the arch-braces and the purlins'.<sup>69</sup>

One boss at Buckland Monachorum, of the Coronation of the Virgin (Fig. 2.22), may not have been carved as a roof boss at all. Hugh Harrison has suggested that this fine, detailed and unusually large rectangular carving may originally have formed part of a reredos.<sup>70</sup> Two bosses in the chancel at Sampford Courtenay (Figs. 2.23 and 2.24) may also have been carved originally for some other purpose. Each is flat and quite different in style from the other fine bosses of the chancel ceiling, that of the crowned head having moulding along three sides.

As no bosses in Devon are definitively dated it is impossible to gauge the development of bosses over time, but it is interesting to note that at Braunton, where the roof timbers were felled between 1388 and 1413, most of the bosses are of the flat plaque type, whereas at Milton Abbot, where timbers were felled between 1504 and 1536, the bosses are much more deeply carved. At Alwington, however, where the nave roof is dated to the early fifteenth century and the south aisle roof is dated to the early sixteenth century, the carving is relatively shallow throughout.

The bosses of the parish churches of Devon vary considerably in technical accomplishment, but since every parish church was the product of the wealth and motivation of its patron, clergy and parishioners this is not unexpected. Assessing the merit of the bosses according to the quality of their carving is, however, not the object of this thesis, since the most successful figural boss in

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<sup>69</sup> Harcourt and Harcourt, 2006, p.154.

<sup>70</sup> Hugh Harrison, pers. comm, 11.05.06.

terms of function might not have been that which was the most finely carved, but that which most clearly and effectively stimulated a response in its viewer.<sup>71</sup>

The function of the bosses will be discussed at length in Chapter Five.

### **iii) Carvers and carving**

When a new church roof was required, a contract was drawn up between the churchwardens and other individuals or groups having a financial interest, and the carpenters involved. Although no such contract appears to be extant for roofs in parish churches in Devon, Salzman records a specification, which may be part of a contract, for the making of a new roof at St Benet's Church, Cambridge, in 1452.<sup>72</sup> The agreement between 'Thomas Byrd and Thomas Wrangyll otherwise called Thomas Richardesson Cherghe Revys of the Parysshe of seynt Benettys of Cambrigg' and 'Nicholas Toftys of Reche in the shire of Cambrigg Carpenterere' details the number of beams required, the thickness of wood to be used, and the inclusion of 'selyng boord by twene euery sparre'.<sup>73</sup> The specification also outlines the decoration of the roof: 'Item atte euery joynt of the Crest tre atte the Principalls and sengulers shalbe half Angells. Also atte euery joynt of the somere trees shalhaue (sic) a boos'.<sup>74</sup> The St Benet's agreement mentions bosses but there is no detail on their design, and it is not possible to know whether Nicholas Toftys, who is described as a 'Carpenterere', carved the bosses himself, or whether he sub-contracted to a specialist carver.

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<sup>71</sup> This point is discussed with reference to the bosses at Stoodleigh church in Chapter Six.

<sup>72</sup> Salzman, 1952, pp.530–531.

<sup>73</sup> Salzman, 1952, pp.530–531.

<sup>74</sup> Salzman, 1952, p.531. An agreement for making a new roof for the chapel of St John at Bury St Edmunds also survives, stipulating that the carpenter, John Heywood 'gives a bond of £20 for performance'. Salzman, 1952, pp.512–513.

Though contemporary accounts relating to medieval roof bosses in parish churches in Devon are sadly lacking, useful information on the carving of bosses, and on their polychromy, may be gleaned from the Fabric Rolls of Exeter Cathedral. While the earliest bosses at the cathedral probably pre-date the earliest in the parish churches of Devon by around one hundred years, it is probable that the decoration of the cathedral in Exeter influenced that of parish churches, a point which will be developed further in Chapters Four and Six.

The survival of a broken, and in some years fragmentary, series of 36 account rolls at Exeter, dating from 1279 through to 1353, gives a unique insight into the various building phases of the cathedral. Jean Givens notes that in the early cathedral accounts, from 1301 to 1318, there are 'specific references to the carving of bosses, corbels, capitals and bases that stand apart from the vast majority of references to the labor of masons'.<sup>75</sup>

During Easter Term, 1302, a payment of 14s was made 'for carving 4 bosses' and a payment of 8s 8d was made 'for carrying the same from Hamdon', identified by Erskine as Ham Hill in Somerset.<sup>76</sup> Givens notes that these payments for carving were made to sculptors working outside the cathedral yard on a contractual basis.<sup>77</sup>

Other payments, however, from the records of 1303–4 seem to imply that stone was brought from Dorset by sea and carved afterwards, perhaps at Exeter. In the Midsummer term of 1304 the account rolls record:

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<sup>75</sup> Givens, J., 'The Fabric Accounts of Exeter Cathedral as a Record of Medieval Sculptural Practice', *Gesta*, Vol.30, No.2, 1991, pp.112–118, on p.113.

<sup>76</sup> Erskine, A. M. (ed. and trans.), *The Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral, 1279–1353, Part 1: 1279–1326*, Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol. 24, Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1981, p.22

<sup>77</sup> Givens, 1991, p.113.

The cost of stones and the great bosses (*magnorum clavorum*). For 18 great stones bought at Portland for bosses together with 61 bases and capitals with carriage by sea (*xviiij magnis petris apud Portlond ad claves emptis una cum lxx basis et capitralis cum cariagio per mare*) £4 16s 8d. For carving 30 great bosses (*xxx magnis clavis taillandis*) £7 10s, 5s a boss. For carving 6 bosses in the aisles (*clavis in alis*) 21s.<sup>78</sup>

During this period, painting of bosses is also documented. In Midsummer term, 1302, the account rolls record that:

For painting 49 bosses 8 corbels and other portions of the vault (*in xlix clavis viij sursis et aliis particulis volture depinguendis*) together with gold silver azure and other colours bought for the same (*una cum auro argento azuro et aliis coloribus ad idem emptis*) £26.<sup>79</sup>

The use of precious metals and azurite on the bosses is an indication of their importance in the cathedral at Exeter.

By 1312, detailed records for the Michaelmas term link payments to a named sculptor with specific sculptural activity:

In wages of William de Monteacuto for 4 days carving 2 capitals and one head of free stone (*talliant' ij capitral' et unum capud franch' petre*) 20d.' and 'In wages of William de Monteacuto carving one great corbel, one great boss and 2 bab[wins?] at task (*talliant' j magnam sursam j magn' clavem et ij bab...ad tascam*) 5s.<sup>80</sup>

Givens suggests that although the record of 1312 is the first to make such a link between a named sculptor and specific work, circumstantial evidence indicates that William was at work in the cathedral ten years previously where he is distinguished in the Fabric Rolls from the other cathedral craftsmen by the high wages he is paid.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.35.

<sup>79</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.24.

<sup>80</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.63.

<sup>81</sup> Givens, 1991, p.114.

In Easter term 1313, another sculptor, Richard Digon, is recorded as receiving 2s 9d for 'carving 2 large bosses at task (*talliant' ij magnas claves ad tascam*)'.<sup>82</sup> The oak bosses in the towers are probably those referred to in the same term, when 11d is paid for 'iron fittings made for the high wooden bosses'.<sup>83</sup> In Midsummer Term 1318, £6 is paid for 'carving 18 wooden bosses' and in Easter term 1320, a payment of 2s 2d is made for 'one gallon of oil for priming (*aprimand'*) wooden bosses (*claves ligneas*)'.<sup>84</sup> In Midsummer term 1324, separate payments of 5s and 3s are made 'For carving ... heads for the vault of the cloister'. As with the payments made in 1312, the subject matter of the carving is identified here.<sup>85</sup>

It is clear from payments made in the Fabric Rolls that 'ornamental carving was accorded a privileged status'.<sup>86</sup> In parish churches, as in cathedrals, the skilled work of carvers is recognised in their enhanced remuneration. J.C. Cox notes from the accounts for St Mary at Hill in the City of London, that: 'In 1496–7 the old rood-loft was reconstructed at a cost of about £7. A "master workeman" received 21d for three days labour, whilst several "karvers" were paid at the rate of 8d a day; ordinary labourers' wages were 5d a day'.<sup>87</sup>

Given the great variety in technical accomplishment of bosses in Devon, it is likely that, in some churches, specialist carvers were employed in carving bosses (for example, at Ugborough and South Tawton), while in other churches, the work may have been left to relatively unskilled workers (for example, at

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<sup>82</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.67.

<sup>83</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.79. Oak was used for the vault and bosses in the towers as the central boss and part of the vault needed to be removed when the bells were hung. John Allan, pers.comm, Symposium on Devon Buildings, 20.10.07.

<sup>84</sup> Erskine, 1981, p.97; Erskine, 1981, p.117.

<sup>85</sup> Erskine, 1981, pp.151-2.

<sup>86</sup> Givens, 1991, p.112.

<sup>87</sup> Cox, J.C., *Churchwardens' Accounts*, London: Methuen, 1913, p.177.



Stoodleigh).<sup>88</sup> These specialist carvers may have been brought in from outside the local community as it is known that some carvers worked on projects some distance from their homes.

John Daw, carver, of Lawhitton, Cornwall and John Pares, a carver from Northlew, were contracted in 1531 to make a roodscreen, roodloft and parclose screens for Stratton church in Cornwall.<sup>89</sup> The distance to Stratton for both men from their homes was roughly 20–22 miles. This was a long-term project as the final payment for the work was not made until 1539.<sup>90</sup> Matthy More, a Plymouth-based carpenter and joiner, was contracted in 1491 to make seating with carved bench-ends, a pulpit, and roodscreen at a cost of £92 for Bodmin church in Cornwall, approximately 33 miles away.<sup>91</sup> In a few churches, carvers from continental Europe may have been employed, as some parclose screens (for example at Colebrooke and Coldridge) display Franco-Flemish, possibly Breton, influence.<sup>92</sup>

Don White argues that ‘carvers make appearances in Devon primarily as itinerants’.<sup>93</sup> However, both Richard Marks and Eamon Duffy suggest that many of the carvers were probably local men. Marks, referring to devotional images, states that:

Wills and churchwardens’ accounts confirm that at least by the early sixteenth century most carvers served their immediate neighbourhood.

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<sup>88</sup> The carvings at Stoodleigh are examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

<sup>89</sup> Harvey, J., *English Medieval Architects. A Biographical Dictionary Down to 1550*, Revised Edition, Gloucester: Allan Sutton Publishing, 1984, p. 79, p. 228.

<sup>90</sup> Harvey, 1984, p.79.

<sup>91</sup> Harvey, 1984, p. 207; Mattingly, J., ‘The Origins of Devon Bench-Ends – The View from Cornwall’ in *Devon Buildings Group Newsletter* No. 25, Summer 2007, pp. 8–11, on p.10.

<sup>92</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.274; Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.276.

<sup>93</sup> White, D., ‘Elaboration: Artisans and Ideas in the Devon Parish’ in *Regional Furniture*, XXIV, 2010, pp.121–178, on p.134.

They were not specialist image-makers but turned their hands to other ecclesiastical fittings and furnishings.<sup>94</sup>

Regarding the church at Morebath, Duffy states that 'Most of the workmen were local, none of them coming further than from Tiverton', a distance of just under ten miles.<sup>95</sup> Duffy notes that some craftsmen, like Harry Dey who received payment for an enterclose (screen) in 1529, appear only once or twice in the accounts.<sup>96</sup> Other craftsmen, however, were regular visitors, like Thomas Glasse, carver, who was contracted to make an image of the Nativity of the Virgin for the church in 1530 and a new image of St George and his horse in 1531. Payment for each of these images was £5, although Glasse was to have the old George in part exchange.<sup>97</sup> Glasse was also commissioned in 1546 for a major building project which involved the carving of new screenwork.<sup>98</sup>

Another local carver at Morebath, William Popyll, was tasked, in 1535, to make a celure over the rood, which he was also instructed to carve, along with figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist.<sup>99</sup> This celure would probably have been decorated with small foliate bosses, as on celures which survive at Hennock and Lapford, though this level of detail is not recorded in the churchwardens' accounts. The complex funding arrangements for this project are recorded, though, and are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

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<sup>94</sup> Marks, R., *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004. p. 249.

<sup>95</sup> The only exception being Sir Thomas Shorcum, the priest responsible for making and maintaining the parish's vestments, who came from Dunster in Somerset. Duffy, E., *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.78.

<sup>96</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.77; Erskine Binney, J., (ed.), *The Accounts of the Wardens of the Parish of Morebath, Devon 1520–1573*, Devon Notes and Queries, Supplementary Volume 1903–1904, Exeter: James A. Commin, 1904, p.13. Full payment for the enterclose in 1529 is recorded as xl & xiiij<sup>s</sup> & ij<sup>d</sup> – presumably £10.14s.2d. Part payment of 26s 8d had been made for making of the enterclose in 1526–7. Erskine Binney, 1904, p.6.

<sup>97</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.78–9.

<sup>98</sup> Although the contract no longer survives, details are recorded in the churchwardens' accounts for Morebath. Duffy, 2001, pp. 76–77, 81, 113.

<sup>99</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.78.

At Ashburton, a local man Peter Kerver, alias Rowallyng, made the ‘tabernakell above the altar of St John’ in 1523–4, for which he was paid 8s.4d.<sup>100</sup> Rowallyng also received payment of £16 for his part in making “le rodeloft” and the partition between the chancel and the aisle of St Thomas and between the aisle of Blessed Mary there on the north side of the church’ in 1525–6.<sup>101</sup> The carver was paid 10s. in 1526–7 ‘for mending the chancel door and other things’, and 5d. in 1535–6 ‘for mending of the rodelofte’.<sup>102</sup> In 1538–9 Rowallyng received 9s. ‘in part payment of a greater sum for making the image of Saint Christopher’.<sup>103</sup>

Another carver in the locality of Ashburton was Martyn the ‘kerver’, who made the ‘rode and hys appurtenances’ in 1556–6, for which he received 40s., and a ‘boxe upon the high aulter’, at a cost of 10s.4d., between 1556 and 1558.<sup>104</sup>

However, William Somer and Geoffrey Dunpayne, who were paid £13.6s.8d. in 1521–22 for making ‘le rodeloft’ at Ashburton, were, according to Don White ‘specialized itinerants’.<sup>105</sup>

At South Tawton, the carver Roger Conybeare appears to have been a permanent resident in the community. Ethel Lega-Weekes notes that he is ‘probably the man who in 1555 was paid the munificent sum of “xxxiii<sup>s</sup> for carveng the Rood”.<sup>106</sup> She suggests that he was probably paid 3s. in 1556 for carving the face of St Peter, which appears to have been damaged during the

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<sup>100</sup> Hanham, A., *Churchwardens’ Accounts of Ashburton, 1479–1580*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol. 15, Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1970, p. 72.

<sup>101</sup> Hanham, 1970, p. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Hanham, 1970, p. 78; p.97

<sup>103</sup> Hanham, 1970, p. 104.

<sup>104</sup> Hanham, 1970, p. 134; p.138.

<sup>105</sup> Hanham, 1970, p.68; White, 2010, p.155. A further payment is recorded in 1522–23 of 46s 8d ‘for reward to William Somer and others for making le rodeloft besides 20 marks paid them before’. Hanham, 1970, p.70.

<sup>106</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p. 314.

Reformation, though not beyond repair. The original image had probably been carved in 1525 by John Comb who had been paid 3s. 4d.<sup>107</sup> In 1557, Conybeare is paid £1 for completing an image of St Andrew with a further payment of 10d. in 1565 'for making the scaffold'.<sup>108</sup> In his old age, Lega-Weekes notes, 'he is given the job of keeping dogs out of the church'.<sup>109</sup>

Much of the carving for the parish church, then, took place within the local community, where it might be overseen by parishioners. At Ashburton in 1525–6, a payment of 5s.15d. (*sic*) is made to cover rent for a house wherein Peter Rowallyng and his assistants could make the parclose screen.<sup>110</sup> Master Carver Laurence Beckford states that bosses should be pre-fitted closely to the ribs before the lower visible surface is carved, so it is probable that many roof bosses were carved in, or at least nearby, the church.<sup>111</sup> This would accord with an image of carvers taken during the restoration of Winkleigh church c.1900 (Fig. 2.25). Although this image is clearly staged for the camera, the work bench and tools were, no doubt, used during the making of new bosses for the church.

It is possible, however, that some bosses, especially if they were flatter and therefore did not require shaping around ribs and purlins, may have been carved in workshops at some distance from the church building. This may have been the case particularly in urban areas where craft guilds held sway. Contemporary depictions of carvers of choir-stalls and misericords, both associated with larger, richer churches, appear to show craftsmen in a

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<sup>107</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, pp. 314.

<sup>108</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p. 314.

<sup>109</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p. 314.

<sup>110</sup> Hanham, 1970, p.76.

<sup>111</sup> Beckford, pers. comm. 28.10.09. Beckford's work includes the renewal of ceiling bosses in the fire-damaged State Dining Room and Octagon Dining Room at Windsor Castle. See <http://www.beckfordsartworks.co.uk/>

workshop environment. A thirteenth-century choir-stall end from Hanover, Germany, shows a carver at his bench working on a choir-stall seat. He uses a mallet and chisel, while a compass, set-square and gouges hang on the wall within arm's reach (Fig. 2.26).

Misericords in Great Doddington and Wellingborough, both Northamptonshire, also show carvers at work carving rosettes, probably for misericords, with a variety of mallets, chisels and gouges (Figs. 2.27 and 2.28). Tracy suggests that these misericords were both made by the same artist.<sup>112</sup> A misericord in Beverley Minster shows two carvers locked in combat, their weapons being a mallet and chisel.<sup>113</sup>

A fine misericord, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum but originally from the church of St Nicholas, King's Lynn, Norfolk, and dated to c. 1419, shows a master carver seated at his bench with his dog at his feet (Fig. 2.29). The carver is designing with the aid of a square and dividers, while two apprentices carve at a bench to his left and a third carries a jug. In the back of the workshop, carvings in various stages of completion are shown. The supporters of the misericord are formed by twisted ribbons enclosing, to the left, a saw and, to the right, a gouge. In Devon, an early sixteenth-century bench end at Abbotsham church is carved with a mallet, chisel and another damaged tool which may be a gouge, and a square and dividers (Fig. 2.30).

Richard Marks notes that:

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<sup>112</sup> Tracy, C., in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400*, exhibition catalogue edited by J. Alexander and P. Binski, London: Royal Academy of Arts with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p.391.

<sup>113</sup> Grössinger, 1997, p.169.

For all craftsmen, of whatever ability, image-making was a sacred task, a simulacrum of God's creation of the physical universe and mankind...Before starting work, ... [the carvers] should have gone to a priest to be shriven, do penance, make a vow to fast, pray or undertake a pilgrimage and ask him to pray that they 'have the grace to make a faier and a devoute ymage'.<sup>114</sup>

Marks probably refers specifically to devotional images here, and many roof bosses do not fall into this category, but nevertheless, the carvers of the bosses were no doubt keenly aware of their responsibilities not only to God but also to the clergy and laity who commissioned their work.<sup>115</sup>

The carving process itself began with blocks of timber cut from oak logs. Having selected his wood, Laurence Beckford states that the carver has to be able to visualise the three-dimensional shape of his intended composition in the timber before he begins removing any of the material.<sup>116</sup> He may have sketched an original design or, in the case of the medieval carver, perhaps have been working from a pattern book.<sup>117</sup> The carver uses charcoal or pencil to mark the wood and act as a visual guide. These lines are then cut away and the marking process repeated throughout until the final cleaning up stage. The wood is removed with gouges of varying sizes and depths, and an increasing range of other tools is used for detailing.<sup>118</sup>

Hugh Harrison points out that although woodcarvers' tools have not altered greatly in shape since the Middle Ages, the material from which they are made,

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<sup>114</sup> Marks, 2004, p.248.

<sup>115</sup> Commissioning of works for the parish church is discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

<sup>116</sup> Laurence Beckford, pers. comm., 19.10.09.

<sup>117</sup> Although no pattern books from the medieval period are known to survive from Devon, it is likely that they were used in the county. A pattern book belonging to plasterer John Abbott II (1639–1727), of Frithelstock in north Devon, which was probably compiled in the 1650s and 1660s, has drawings of real and fantastic beasts, many of which would have been familiar to a medieval audience. Bath, M., 'The Sources of John Abbott's Pattern Book', *Architectural History*, Vol.41 (1998), pp. 49–66.

<sup>118</sup> Laurence Beckford, pers. comm., 19.10.09.

modern steel rather than iron, means that they are harder and the corners of the blades stronger.<sup>119</sup> This might help to account for the sharpness noted in modern copies of ancient roof bosses.

In a manual on woodcarving written in 1903 when he was still closely involved with the restoration of many Devon churches, Harry Hems notes the effect that the viewing point should exert on the choice of tool:

Although a mallet is not so necessary a tool to a wood-carver as it is to the carver in stone, to whom it is an actual essential, its use cannot be too systematically cultivated. All roughing out should be done with it, and bosses, cornices, and other work intended to be fixed at a height from the eye should invariably be finished with the mallet. When engaged on these classes of work the mallet should never leave the carver's hand; for the cut left by the chisel with the mallet behind it is always the most effective when looked up at from the ground. Further, by the free and continuous use of the mallet the work is got over in half the time it would otherwise take. In architectural carving the great end to be attained is general good effect. If it is to be successful, the lights and shadows, the outlines, and general grouping must be happy and telling when seen from the real point of sight – i.e. the floor. Half-a-dozen strokes judiciously administered, may make a really effective patera; whereas, half-a-day's minute work upon a bench may produce something which, when placed in position upon the wall-plate at the springing of a roof, will not only be disappointing, but practically invisible.<sup>120</sup>

In Cassell's *Wood Carving* of 1911, a discussion of three late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century roof bosses taken from the north aisle roof of Braintree church, Essex, echoes Hems' statement:

These bosses present some points of interest to the wood carver. Their treatment has been considered in relation to the ultimate position they had to occupy. There is no delicate finish, and no careful tooling; but there is a strength and vigour, obtained by intelligent 'roughing out' with a mallet and tools, which was indeed essential to the position each boss eventually had to fill. Twenty feet above one's head is no place to perceive delicate and minute effects. A broad, strong play of highlights and strong shadows is required, and the bosses show these effects in a marked degree. It should be noted that the cuts produced by means of

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<sup>119</sup> Harrison, H, 'Technical Aspects of the Misericord' in Block, E., (ed.), *Profane Images in Marginal Arts of the Middle Ages*, Turnhout:: Brepols, 2009, pp. XIX –XLII, on p.XXXIV.

<sup>120</sup> Hems, H., *Woodcarving*, Exeter: publisher not known, 1903, p.13.

the mallet and the tools are more effective than those smoother cuts resulting from continuous hand pressure; therefore, for high-relief work the mallet should always be used.<sup>121</sup>

However, Hugh Harrison states:

I completely agree with HH [Harry Hems] but have NEVER seen any boss carved in this manner ...which is very interesting. All bosses seem very beautifully carved with never a hint of a chisel mark. The reason he suggests the use of a mallet is to produce sharply faceted carving, a smooth curve produces a tone of shadow grading from light to dark, a series of facets produces a series of defined shadows which at a distance makes the carving look lively. The problem is that this is incredibly difficult to do, only a very talented carver can be free with his individual cuts and still produce flowing curves and delicacy.<sup>122</sup>

During restorations at Cleeve Abbey in Somerset in 1958, Berta Lawrence noted the opinion of the carpenters who worked on the refectory roof that the bosses there had been 'carved almost entirely with the gouge, as few chisel marks are in evidence'.<sup>123</sup>

#### **iv) Completion and attribution**

In the estimation of the carpenters working on the restoration at Cleeve Abbey in 1958, 'a whole boss would take a man a week to carve'.<sup>124</sup> Obviously the time taken depended on the complexity of the carving, but Laurence Beckford confirms that a week seems a reasonable time to allow for the carving of a roof boss.<sup>125</sup> If all the roofs in a parish church were decorated with bosses, this represented a significant expense for those who commissioned the work. Atherington church, for example, has 105 bosses in the wagon roofs of its chancel, nave, north aisles and south transept.

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<sup>121</sup> Hasluck, P. (ed.), *Manual of Traditional Wood Carving*, New York: Dover Publications, 1977, being a republication of *Cassell's Wood Carving*, originally published by Cassell and Company, London, 1911, p.158.

<sup>122</sup> Hugh Harrison, pers. comm. 11.01.09.

<sup>123</sup> Lawrence, B., 'Restoration of Cleeve Abbey' in *The Monumental Mason*, February 1958, pp. 106-110, quoted in Harcourt and Harcourt, 2006, p.154.

<sup>124</sup> Lawrence, 1958, quoted in Harcourt and Harcourt, 2006, p. 154.

<sup>125</sup> Laurence Beckford, pers. comm., 19.10.09.



As regards attribution, with reference to the refectory roof at Cleeve Abbey, Jane and Tony Harcourt concluded that the bosses 'were carved by several individuals who varied in experience and expertise', and yet they note the uncertainties:

certain bosses have characteristics in common indicating the work of one man, but others display no particular features which would point to an individual carver. Whilst one group of bosses may share the same characteristics, the same craftsman may also have been responsible for another group: the 'ivy' craftsman could well be the same as the 'vine' craftsman, just tackling a different subject.<sup>126</sup>

Laurence Beckford confirms that it is difficult to attribute carvings to a particular craftsman, stating that it is possible 'to tell to a point that one carver carved several bosses but it is in no way assured'. He himself carves copies of damaged woodwork and is therefore well placed to make such a judgement. By his own account, he suggests that he might one day carve a wonderful example and then the next day produce work which is not as accomplished. He notes particularly that medieval bosses are very difficult to attribute to specific carvers, stating 'I'd like to know who can and for them to explain to me how'.<sup>127</sup>

Given these difficulties and uncertainties, no attempt to attribute bosses to individual, unnamed, carvers will be made in this thesis. However, it must be noted that similarities in the carvings do appear. For example, bosses of a pelican feeding her young, the pelican in her piety, are configured in the same manner in the churches of Buckland Filleigh (Fig. 2.31), Lifton (Fig. 2.32), Pyworthy (Fig. 2.33), Stowford (Fig. 2.34), and Clawton (Fig. 2.35), all in west Devon, and also in Morwenstowe across the border into Cornwall.<sup>128</sup> Bosses of a wounded heart surrounded by a coiled circlet, probably intended as a crown

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<sup>126</sup> Harcourt and Harcourt, 2006, p.154.

<sup>127</sup> Laurence Beckford, pers.comm., 28.10.09.

<sup>128</sup> Cave, 1948, p.200.

of thorns, are carved in the same manner in Rose Ash, George Nympton and Kings Nympton churches (Figs. 2.36, 2.37, 2.38). Bosses of heads in the chancel at Atherington church bear a marked resemblance to those in the north aisle at nearby Landkey (Figs. 2.39, 2.40, 2.41, 2.42).

Whether this means that they were carved by the same carver, or team of carvers, or that parishioners were aware of the decoration in the roofs of neighbouring parish churches and wanted designs copied for their parish church, is open to debate.

#### **v) Surface finish and visibility**

Many of the medieval bosses in the church roofs of Devon now appear dark stained and when set against timber boarding, which is also dark stained, their detail is very difficult to see.<sup>129</sup> In a work on the medieval choir stalls of Amiens cathedral, Tracy asserts that: 'Almost every instance of dark oak to be seen nowadays is the result of 18<sup>th</sup>- or 19<sup>th</sup>-century romantic "antiquing"'.<sup>130</sup> Chemical treatment to preserve the timber may also have had a darkening effect.

When first constructed, the roofs of the churches of Devon would have been relatively light in colour. Oak is a pale wood when first cut, eventually darkening to a light golden brown. When weathered it turns silver-grey in colour. Set at the height of most church roofs in Devon and left in their natural state, detail on the bosses would have been relatively easy to see from floor level. It is by no means certain though that all the bosses, when fixed in the church roof, were left in a natural state. Stacy Boldrick states:

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<sup>129</sup> It is noteworthy that many churchwardens and clergy encountered in the process of collation of material for this thesis were completely unaware of the figural carvings on bosses in their churches.

<sup>130</sup> Tracy and Harrison, 2004, p.136.

[The] expectation of sculpture – that the viewer should be able to see the primary material out of which the form was made, whether cast, carved or constructed – comes from the post-medieval assumption about ‘truth to materials’ that arises out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic attitudes. By contrast, in the Middle Ages, viewers did not consider the interior, primary material to be the true form, but rather the exterior polychrome layers that constituted the completed ideal.<sup>131</sup>

While there is material and written evidence of polychromy of the bosses at Exeter Cathedral, the evidence for polychromy of bosses in the parish church is more limited. Many church roofs were restored in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and it is certain that, in some churches, ribs, purlins and bosses were stripped of their colour, although it is not known whether this was original or later.

James Davidson visited IIsington church on 24 June 1847 and noted that:

The ceiling of the nave is coved, those of the aisles flat, all are ribbed with wood painted blue with bosses at the intersections painted red some of them curiously carved to represent human faces, lions, birds, one of them a group of hares and at the springing of those in the central roof where the transepts cross the nave are twelve niches occupied by statues of the apostles carved in wood and painted.<sup>132</sup>

These bosses and the figure carvings are now unpainted, although some tiny traces of red colour may be seen in photographs.

Following a visit to Harberton church on 27 October 1847, Davidson recorded:

‘The ceilings are coved and ribbed with wood and have bosses carved in foliage and human heads at the intersections of the ribs painted red and blue’.<sup>133</sup>

It is uncertain whether Davidson refers to colouring of the ribs here or to the bosses or both. The bosses are now coloured with much gilding not mentioned by him. It may be that the bosses have been repainted at some point since Davidson’s visit.

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<sup>131</sup> Boldrick, S., Park, D., and Williamson, P., (eds.), *Wonder. Painted Sculpture from Medieval England*, Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2002, p.20.

<sup>132</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*, p.193.

<sup>133</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*, p.637.

Having visited Buckland Monachorum church on 14 August 1848, Davidson recorded that:

The ceilings are coved and ribbed with mouldings of wood and have bosses carved in foliage at the intersections of the ribs – of the bosses in the nave seven on each side are carved in large figurines of angels holding musical instruments of various sorts. On the central boss of the nave is a square tablet sculptured with two seated figurines crowned – a king crowning a queen – or perhaps the coronation of the Virgin Mary. All are painted in bright colours.<sup>134</sup>

The angels on the wall plate and the bosses are now unpainted.

In some churches, the roofs, when Davidson examined them in the mid-nineteenth century, were ‘whitewashed’ (probably a soft distemper or lime wash). He records at Chittlehampton church in May 1849 that:

The ceilings are coved, those of the aisles panelled with mouldings of wood having bosses carved with animals foliage and various devices at their intersections, but the whole are loaded with whitewash and are now receiving a new coat of the same.<sup>135</sup>

All of this wash has since been removed and the bosses are now unpainted.

Davidson notes the same treatment at Ashburton in 1847: ‘The ceiling of the nave is coved and ribbed with wood, those of the aisles are flat, with ribs and bosses at the intersections all richly carved in foliage and heads but loaded with whitewash.’<sup>136</sup>

The wash has been removed from all the bosses at Ashburton, with those in north and south aisles now unpainted, while those of the north aisle chapel are painted with modern paint.

The removal of ‘whitewash’ was encouraged in a note published in the first volume of the *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society* in 1843. This states:

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<sup>134</sup> Davidson, *West Devon*, p.589.

<sup>135</sup> Davidson, *North Devon*, p.329.

<sup>136</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*, p.505.

It is obvious, from the restorations already effected in old roofs, that in a multitude of instances the whitewash might be easily removed, and the chief part of the timbers would still be found undecayed, and if now denuded of their incrustation, and repaired, they would still last many centuries more.<sup>137</sup>

This 'restoration', through cleaning or brushing, may well have had the unfortunate effect of removing medieval polychrome beneath, especially if this was a soft porous distemper rather than the more expensive durable oil paint.

Avril Henry and Anna Hulbert note the attitude of 'restorers' of the bishops' throne in Exeter cathedral:

Freeman says of the throne: "Buried in brown paint and varnish ... this magnificent structure had long concealed the fullness of its beauty. Only the natural surface can ever rightly exhibit the peculiar merits of artistic work in carved oak, and consequently...the Throne could not fail to gain vastly from a plunge into the necessary bath. And it came forth thence in so fine a condition that all idea of reviving the colouring of which traces were found was well rejected." He makes an undisguised claim that the Victorian restorers knew more about the proper treatment of a work of art than the artists who made it. Similar claims made today still lead to the destruction of fine medieval surfaces. At that date, caustic soda was normally used for cleaning paint and varnish off woodwork.<sup>138</sup>

In a report following conservation and restoration of twelve fire damaged roof bosses in the nave of St. Brannock's church, Braunton, Elizabeth Cheadle noted that paint analysis 'showed the present scheme to be 20<sup>th</sup> century decoration...and, although extensive analysis was not undertaken, no evidence was found of an earlier scheme'.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Unattributed note included in a description of the plates of open roofs in *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Vol. 1, 1843, p.173.

<sup>138</sup> Freeman, P., *The Architectural History of Exeter Cathedral*, 2nd edition, with additional notes by E. V. Freeman, Exeter and London, 1888, p. 99, cited as footnote no.8 in Henry and Hulbert, 2000.

<sup>139</sup> Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St. Brannock's Church, Braunton, Devon. Report Following Conservation and Restoration of Twelve Fire Damaged Roof Bosses in the Nave*, January 2005, p.2.

Cheadle also undertook analysis of roof bosses in the south aisle of Alwington church, noting that there was no evidence to suggest that the bosses were originally painted. However, they have since been coated with 'at least four layers of white limewash or soft distemper' which in turn have been overcoated with two coats of pale brown distemper. The present scheme is a layer of oil paint made from lead white, tinted with yellow ochre and black, probably dating from the late nineteenth century.<sup>140</sup>

Cheadle's analysis of the celure, the canopy of honour over the rood, at Bishops Lydeard church in Somerset did reveal medieval polychromy as well as two further full schemes of decoration and a possible intermediate scheme. The original medieval scheme was based on vermilion and gold leaf. The second scheme was probably applied in the nineteenth century when 'the whole celure (*sic*) was grained to imitate a dark timber, possibly oak'.<sup>141</sup> A thick layer of cream oil paint was used to cover the existing colour and act as a ground for a dark brown glaze, which was then finished with a layer of resin varnish.<sup>142</sup> The present scheme of the celure probably dates from the later nineteenth century and incorporates the use of French ultramarine, vermilion and gilding.<sup>143</sup>

The use of a graining scheme to imitate wood is particularly interesting as many of the bosses extant in roofs in Devon appear to have been coated with a dark brown varnish. This is very noticeable at Dolton where the bosses are so dark their detail is extremely difficult to see from floor level.

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<sup>140</sup> Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St Andrew's Church, Alwington, Devon. Preliminary Investigations into the Painted Layers on the Bosses and Timbers of the South Aisle Ceiling*, February 2008, pp.2-3.

<sup>141</sup> Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St Mary the Virgin, Bishops Lydeard, Somerset. Report on Painted and Gilded Roof*, June 2007, unpaginated.

<sup>142</sup> Cheadle, 2007, unpaginated.

<sup>143</sup> Cheadle, 2007, unpaginated.

The bosses in the Hems' Collection at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter have also been coated with a uniform dark substance, which Exeter Cathedral archaeologist John Allan suggests may have been done when the collection entered the museum.<sup>144</sup> Alternatively the collection may have been thus coated by Hems, who was concerned with the carving of the pieces rather than their surface finish.

Andrea Karstädt, under the supervision of medieval polychrome conservator Eddie Sinclair, examined and cleaned an angel from the Hems' Collection which was originally taken from the wall plate of the chancel roof of Bere Regis church, Dorset. The carving was found to have had three decorative schemes, dating from c.1500, c.1800 and c. 1900 or later. The figure had its top coat of shellac and dye (Fig. 2.43) removed to reveal the second scheme of c. 1800 (Figs. 2.44, 2.45), although further work was halted due to time constraints. However, enough traces of the medieval polychromy were visible to allow a reconstruction of the original scheme (Fig. 2.46).<sup>145</sup>

On a visit to Rougemont House, Exeter, where the Hems' Collection is stored, Eddie Sinclair noted traces of red pigment in protected corners of many of the bosses.<sup>146</sup> This may be red ochre which was used as a base coat in the medieval period or red oxide which was used in the nineteenth century. Although few traces of medieval polychromy appear to survive on the bosses of parish churches in Devon, this is perhaps not surprising given the extent of

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<sup>144</sup> John Allan, pers.comm., 19.01.10.

<sup>145</sup> Andrea Karstädt, pers. comm., 19.01.10.

<sup>146</sup> Eddie Sinclair, pers.comm., 24.03.09.

restoration and the nineteenth century ideal of 'truth to materials'.<sup>147</sup> It also remains the case that very few bosses have been extensively analysed since the process is expensive and roof bosses are low on the list of priorities for most churches.

Other evidence suggesting that some bosses were coloured in the medieval period can be found on bosses at Chittlehampton, Clyst St Lawrence, Nymet Rowland and Awliscombe, among other churches. The bosses which are now unpainted are carved with flat shields which probably once bore coloured coats of arms.

Where bosses are now coloured, the paint is modern and often ill applied. This is particularly noticeable on a boss of a male head in Drewsteignton church (Fig. 2.47) where the Reverend Tim Jones used a long ladder to access and paint the bosses of the north aisle in the 1970s, and on a boss of three hares in the chancel at Widecombe (Fig. 2.48).<sup>148</sup> The bosses of East Budleigh have fared somewhat better, a sensitive repainting being carried out in 1974 by Peter Stoff of Vienna.<sup>149</sup> The striking effect of this colour can be seen when a boss of a female head from the nave of East Budleigh church (Fig. 2.49) is compared with an uncoloured boss, carved with the same subject, from the north aisle at Ugborough church (Fig. 2.50).

It seems likely that some roofs and bosses in the parish churches of Devon were decorated with polychrome, but how widespread this practice was in the

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<sup>147</sup> Traces of colour may be seen on bosses at Bampton, Burrington, Coldridge, Hatherleigh and Sampford Courtenay among other places, but it is not known whether this is medieval or later. The colour on the two remaining bosses from the nave roof at Crediton would need to be scientifically analysed to establish whether it is medieval or post-medieval.

<sup>148</sup> *Drewsteignton Holy Trinity Church and Parish Guide*, no name, 2005, p.1.

<sup>149</sup> *All Saints East Budleigh. A Guide to the Church*, 2nd edition, 1991, p.20.



medieval period cannot now be determined. The extent of colour may simply have depended on the wealth and priorities of patrons, clergy and lay parishioners who funded such work. What is certain, however, is that, when originally fixed into position, the figural roof bosses of the parish churches of Devon would have been more visible than many have since become. Carved to be seen from a distance, the figural bosses would have stood out against the backdrop of timbers and foliate bosses with which they were interwoven.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ruth Mellinkoff states that 'roof boss imagery was too high for worshippers to have seen it' and suggests therefore that its purpose was apotropaic – it was intended for demons. Mellinkoff, R., *Averting Demons: the Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes*, Los Angeles: Ruth Mellinkoff Publications, 2004, p.139. However, while some bosses in cathedrals are certainly positioned at great height (notably the nave at Norwich), it cannot reasonably be claimed that the roof bosses in the churches of Devon could not be seen. Even in Exeter Cathedral it is possible to discern detail, especially if the subject matter is already familiar. The function of roof bosses is discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

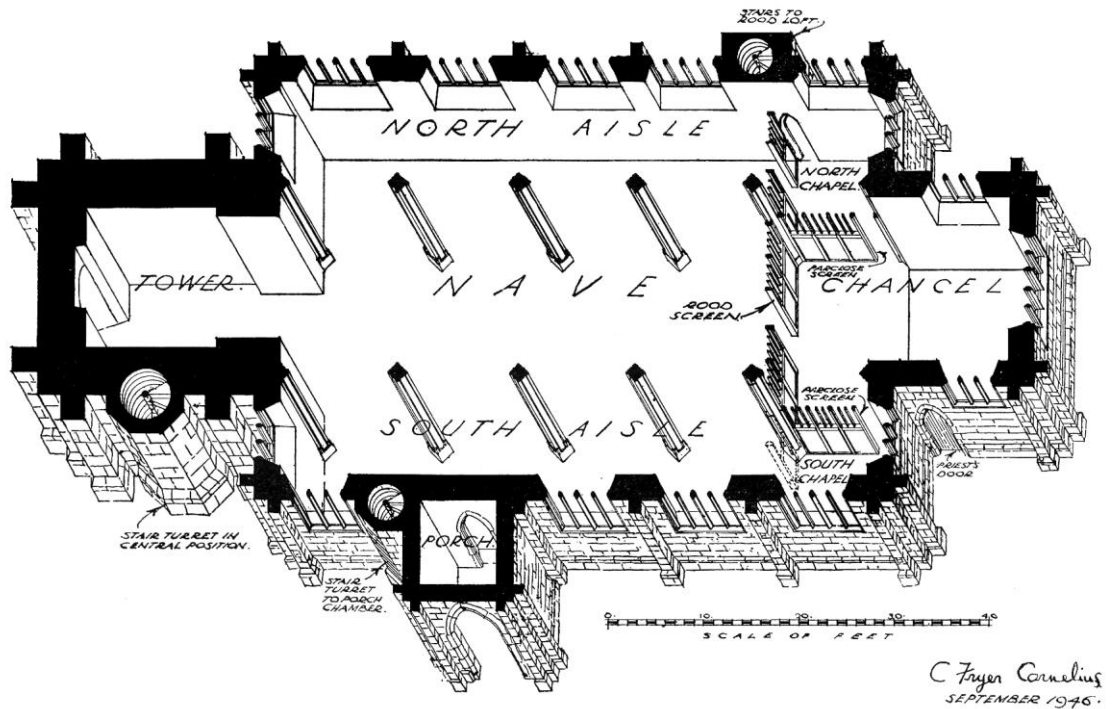


Fig. 2.1  
Plan of the development of the parish church in Devon  
during the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

From Cornelius, C.F., 'Ancient Devon Parish Churches within a Ten Mile Radius of Newton Abbot', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, Vol. LXXVIII, 1946, p.124.

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Fig. 2.2  
Suckling dragon, roof boss,  
Atherington north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.3  
Suckling dragon, roof boss,  
Atherington nave, 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.4  
Three hares, roof boss,  
Kelly north chancel chapel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.5  
Three hares, roof boss,  
Kelly north aisle, 20<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.6  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Widecombe nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.7  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Widecombe nave,  
19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.8  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Dunchideock north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.9  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Dunchideock north aisle,  
19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.10  
Sampford Courtenay church during restoration in 1899.  
Photograph copied, from an original, by Don Miles c.1970s.  
The whereabouts of the original is unknown.

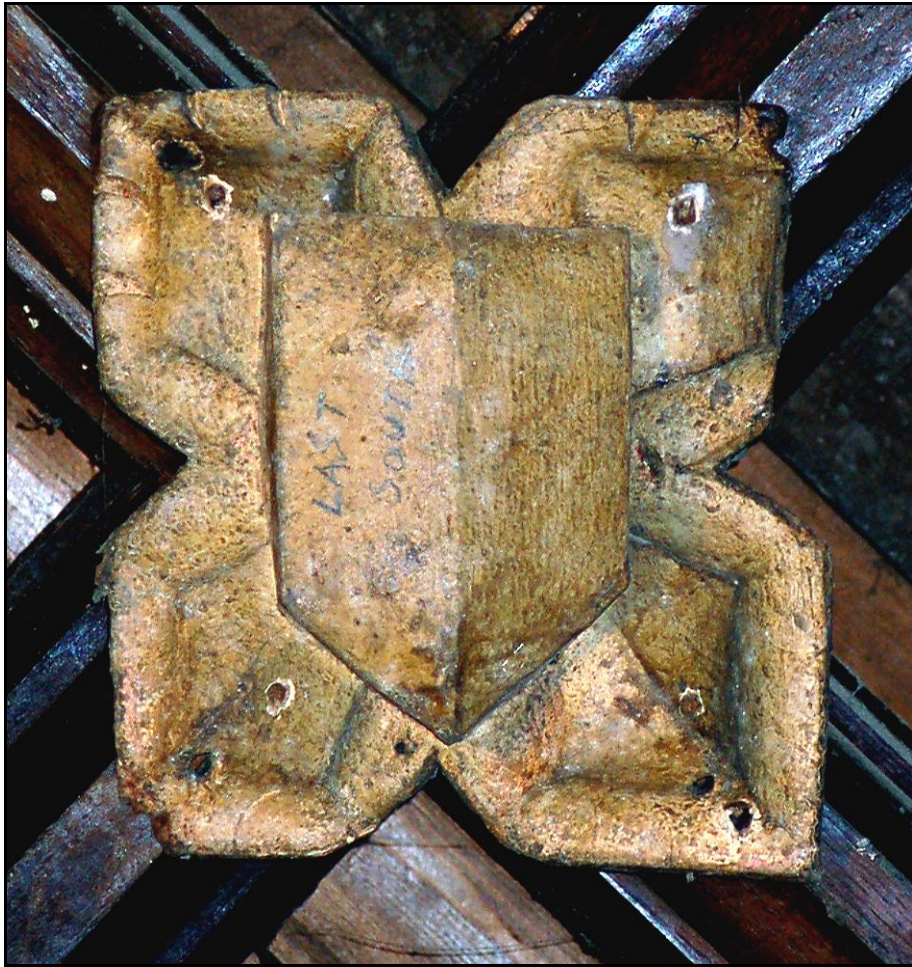


Fig. 2.11  
Shield marked LAST SOUTH, roof boss,  
Broadhembury south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.12  
Angel holding shield, roof boss,  
now in Governors' Room, Crediton church, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.13  
Angel holding shield, roof boss,  
now in Governors' Room, Crediton church, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.14  
Crowned head, roof boss, Chudleigh crossing, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



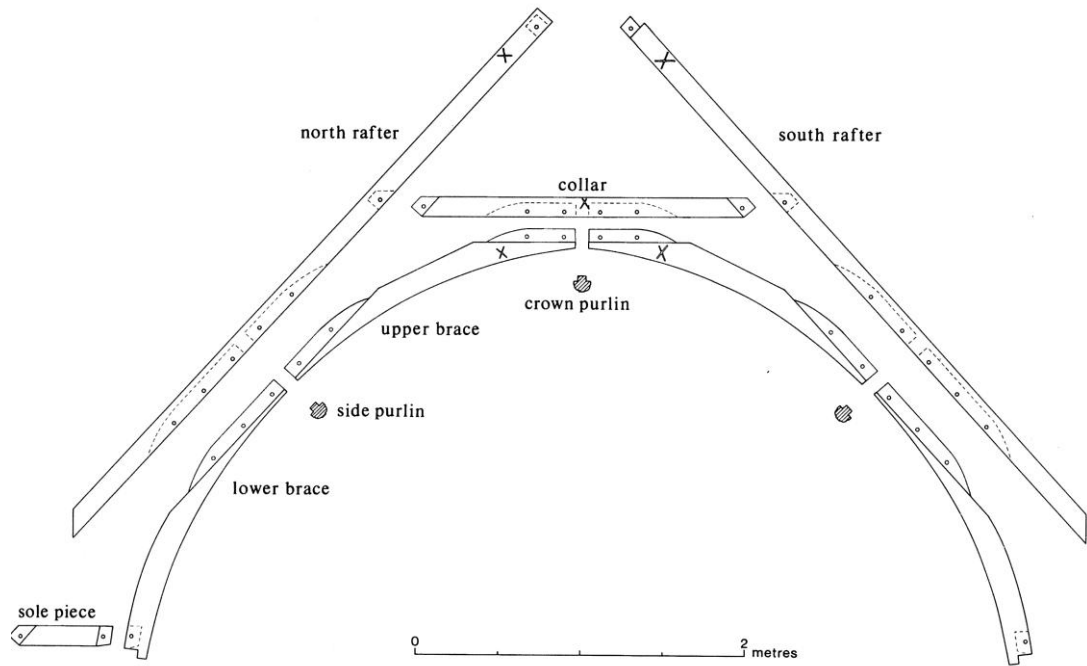


Fig. 2.15  
Exploded elevation of a typical common truss from the nave roof,  
Hatherleigh church.

From Westcott, K., 'The Spire and Roofs of Hatherleigh Church:  
Investigations following the Storm Damage of 1990' in  
*Devon Archaeological Society: Proceedings No. 50*, 1992, p.75.

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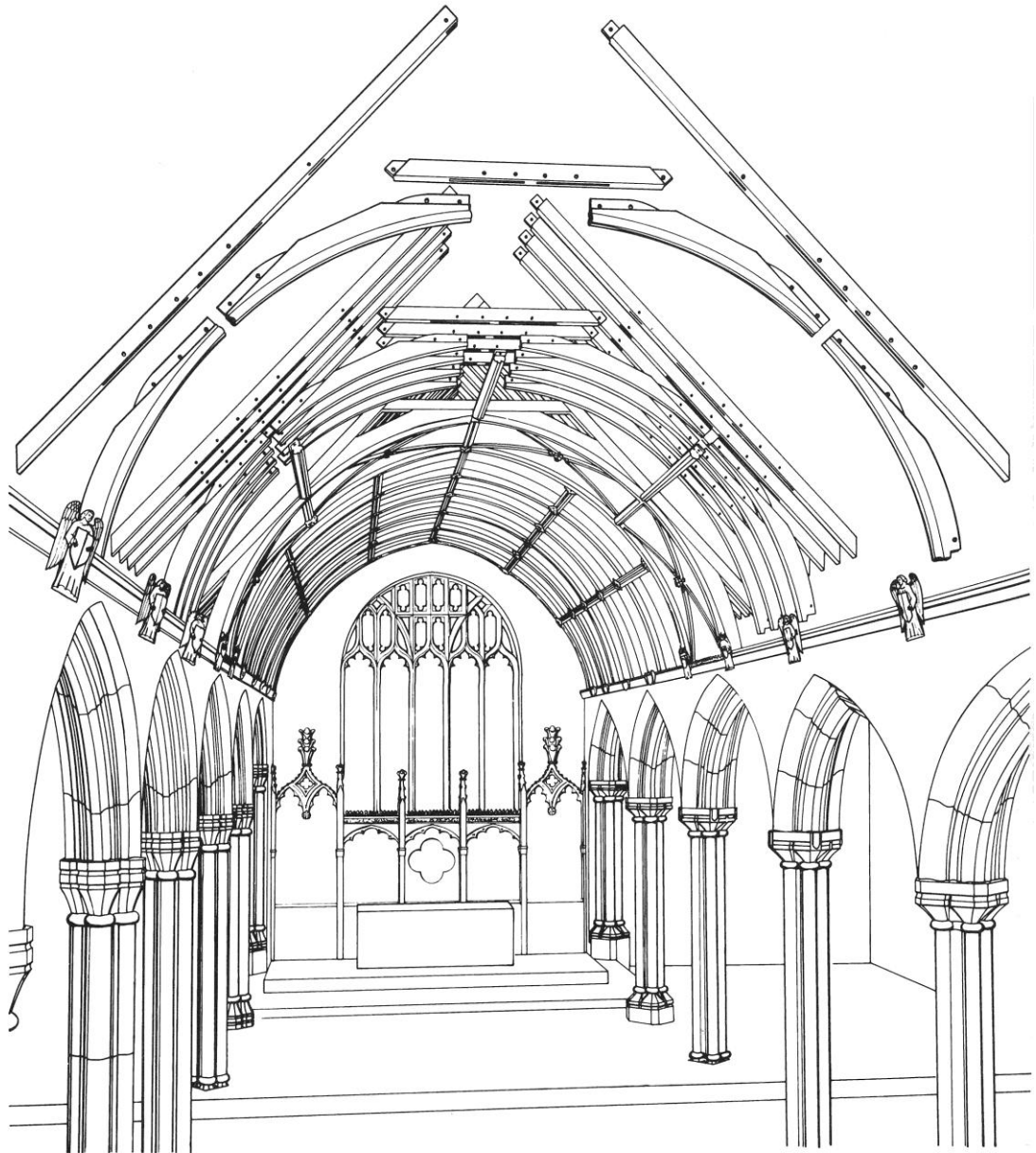


Fig. 2.16  
Perspective view of the nave showing the roof structure,  
Hatherleigh church.

From Westcott, K., 'The Spire and Roofs of Hatherleigh Church:  
Investigations following the Storm Damage of 1990',  
*Devon Archaeological Society: Proceedings* No. 50, 1992, p. 76.

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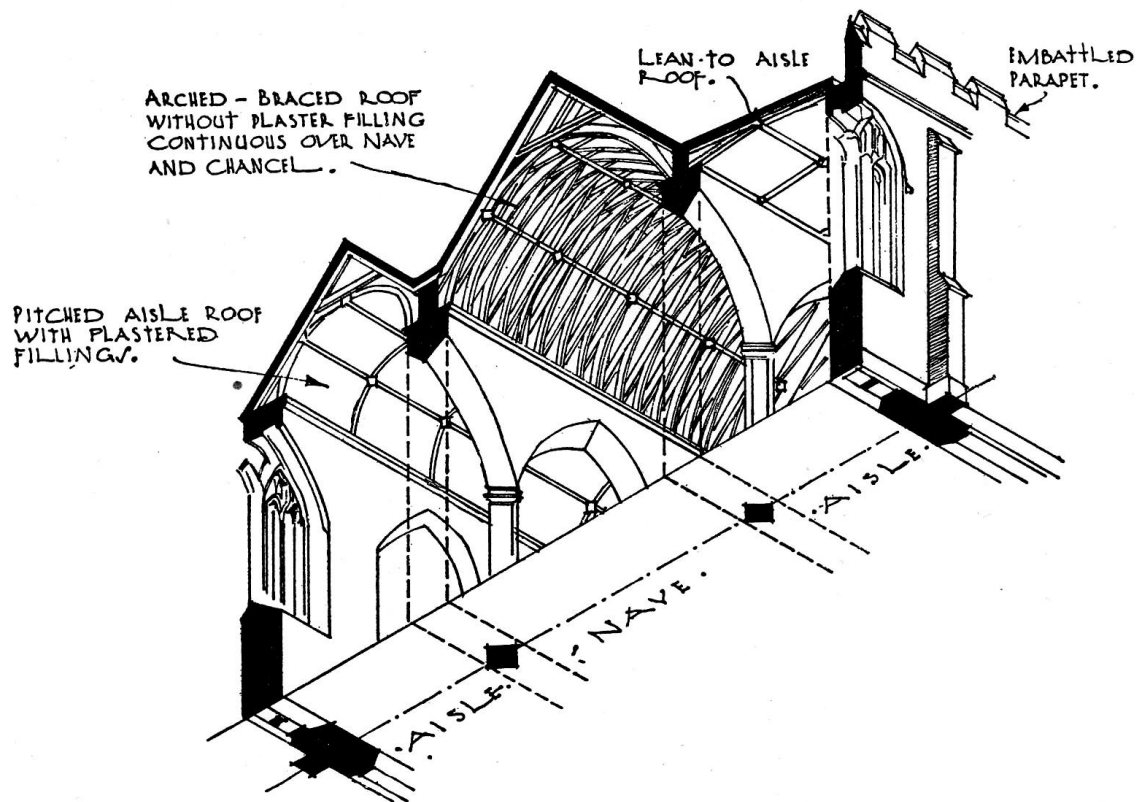


Fig. 2.17  
 Diagram of typical 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> C. roof structures in parish churches in Devon,  
 as seen from below.

From Cornelius, C.F., 'Ancient Devon Parish Churches within a Ten Mile Radius of Newton Abbot', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art*, Vol. LXXVIII, 1946, p. 128.

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Fig. 2.18  
Angel holding scroll,  
round plaque roof boss,  
Cheldon chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.19  
Bishop's head,  
roof boss with figural carved centre and foliate spikes,  
Landkey north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.20  
Three hares, roughly square roof boss  
shaped to fit over ribs and purlins,  
Chagford south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.21  
Head, roof boss carved with 'wings'  
reaching up into the angles between ribs and purlins,  
North Molton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.22  
 Carving of the Coronation of the Virgin,  
 now used as roof boss in Buckland Monachorum nave,  
 possibly originally part of a reredos, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.23  
 Carving of foliate head,  
 Sampford Courtenay chancel,  
 probably not originally intended  
 as a boss, 15<sup>th</sup> C. (?) with later  
 restoration

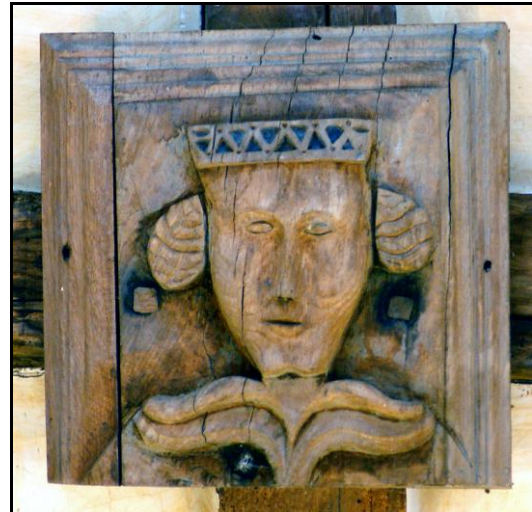


Fig. 2.24  
 Carving of crowned head,  
 Sampford Courtenay chancel,  
 probably not originally intended as a boss,  
 15<sup>th</sup> C. (?)



Fig. 2.25  
Carvers at work on roof bosses outside Winkleigh church, c.1900.  
Photograph by Edward Saunders (?).

© Beaford Arts. Reproduced with the permission of Beaford Arts.

**Fig. 2.26 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 2.26

Carver, a monk or lay brother, with tools, choir-stall end,  
Hanover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum; from the former  
Praemonstratensian Monastery of Pöhlde in the Harz mountains;  
commissioned by Heinrich Probst in 1284.

From Grössinger, C., *The World Upside-Down*, London: Harvey Miller, 1997,  
Plate 27, p.25; footnote 12 on p.174.



**Fig. 2.27 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 2.27  
Carver carving rosette, misericord, Great Doddington, Northamptonshire,  
14<sup>th</sup> C.

From Wood, J., *Wooden Images. Misericords and Medieval England*,  
London: Associated University Presses, 1999, p.24.  
Image by Charles Curry.

**Fig. 2.28 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 2.28  
Carver carving rosette, misericord, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire,  
14<sup>th</sup> C.

From *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*. Exhibition  
catalogue edited by J. Alexander and P. Binski, London: Royal Academy  
of Arts with Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p.391.

**Fig. 2.29 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 2.29

Master carver, misericord from St Nicholas' Chapel, King's Lynn, Norfolk,  
now in Victoria and Albert Museum, London, c.1419.

From Tracy, C., *English Medieval Furniture and Woodwork*, London: Victoria  
and Albert Museum, 1988, plate 30, p.65.

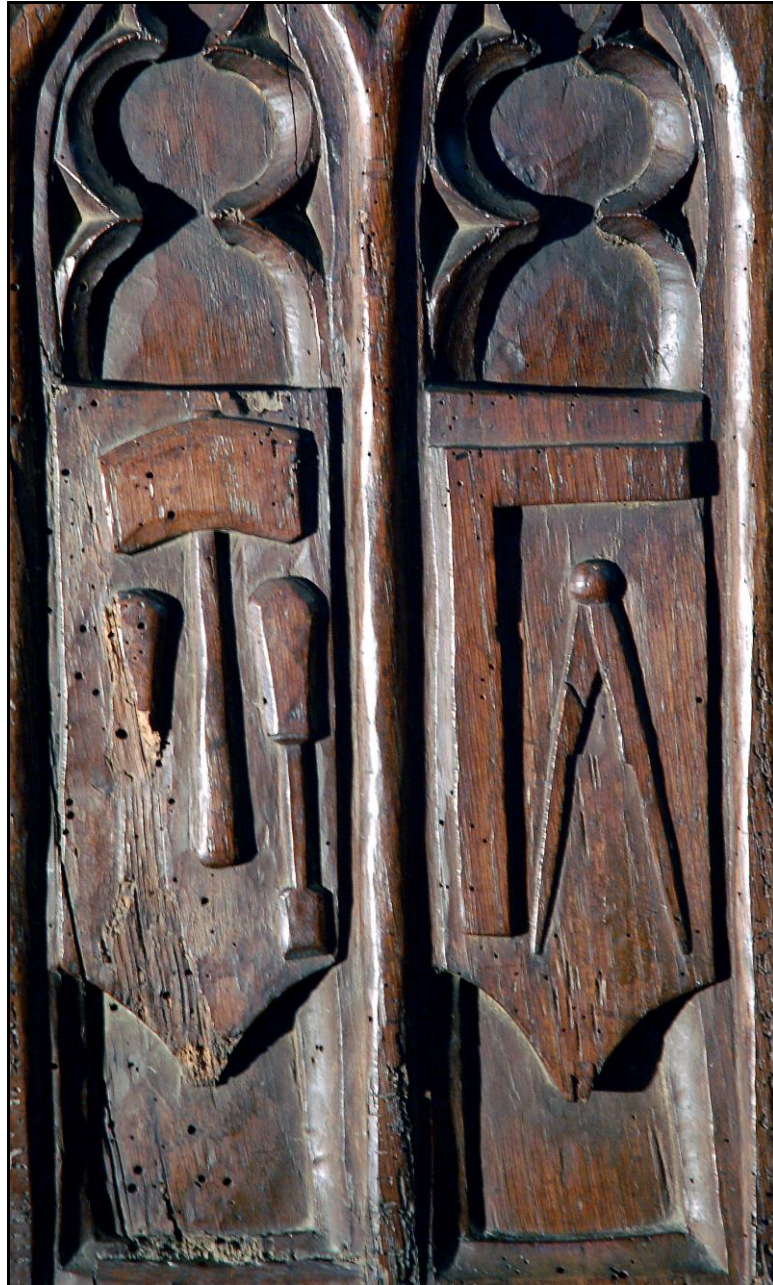


Fig. 2.30  
Carpenter's tools carved on bench end,  
Abbotsham nave, 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> C.

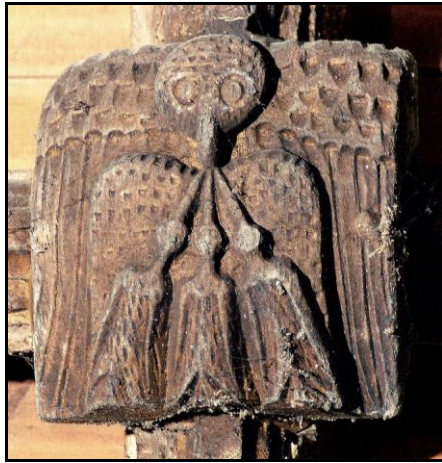


Fig. 2.31  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Buckland Filleigh north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.32  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Lifton chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.33  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Pyworthy south porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.34  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Stowford south chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.35  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Clawton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.36  
Wounded heart with crown of thorns,  
roof boss,  
Rose Ash north chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.37  
Wounded heart with crown of thorns,  
roof boss,  
George Nympton north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.38  
Wounded heart with crown of thorns,  
roof boss,  
Kings Nympton south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.39  
Bearded head, roof boss,  
Atherington chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.40  
Head of old man, roof boss,  
Atherington chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.41  
Bearded head, roof boss,  
Landkey north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.42  
Head of old man, roof boss,  
Landkey north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.43  
Bere Regis angel, Hems collection,  
Royal Albert Memorial Museum,  
Exeter, before conservation.



Fig. 2.44  
Bere Regis angel, Hems collection,  
Royal Albert Memorial Museum,  
Exeter, after conservation.



Fig. 2.45  
Bere Regis angel,  
second paint layer  
c.1800.



Fig. 2.46  
Bere Regis angel,  
first paint layer  
c.1500.

Images © Andrea Karstädt.



Fig. 2.47  
Head with modern paintwork, roof boss,  
Drewsteigton north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.48  
Three hares with modern paintwork,  
roof boss, Widecombe chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 2.49  
Female head with horned headdress and devil,  
roof boss, East Budleigh nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 2.50  
Female head with horned headdress and devil,  
roof boss, Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

### **Chapter Three** **People and Practice**

Chapter Two discussed roof bosses through the relatively narrow focus of materiality and method. This chapter broadens the focus to consider their wider context within the complex religious, social and visual landscape of the parish church. It addresses, in particular, two key areas which are likely to have had an influence on the commissioning of figural bosses: the role of the church in the lives of its parishioners and the role of patrons, clergy and parishioners in the development and decoration of their parish church.

The chapter considers the regulatory role of ecclesiastical authorities and the religious rituals which marked the lives of every parishioner. It also considers specific examples of benefaction by individuals and groups, in a range of media, in parishes from the Diocese of Exeter and beyond. Since there is little indication of benefaction on bosses in the parish churches of Devon, other than heraldic devices, it is hoped that in considering donation more broadly, some sense of the motivation of patrons, clergy and parishioners, which might also be applicable to bosses, will be forthcoming.

Two churches in particular have proved to be remarkably rich resources for this chapter: the parish church at St Neot in Cornwall for its material remains, and the parish church at Morebath, in north east Devon, for written accounts of its pre-Reformation imagery. It is important to be reminded, however, of the fragmentary nature of both material and textual sources and of the dangers of trying to reconstruct a complete edifice from disparate parts. It is hoped, though, that this chapter will provide the necessary context for more detailed discussion of the bosses in subsequent chapters.

### **Ecclesiastical authority: the Statutes of Bishop Peter Quinel, 1287**

The role of the parish church in the late medieval period is set out in the statutes of a synod held in Exeter by Bishop Peter Quinel in 1287. Fifty-five chapters detail episcopal regulation regarding the church building, its furnishings and the religious practice of its people. Although they reveal what was expected rather than what was necessarily achieved, the fact that every church was ordered to hold a copy of the statutes on penalty of a fine, and that each was to be subjected to an annual visitation, demonstrates the bishop's determination to ensure that his regulations were met. Although there were, no doubt, lapses by clergy and laity, the church in Devon did not face any sustained challenge to its authority as happened further east from the followers of John Wycliffe. There are no records of any Wycliffites or Lollards in Devon in the fifteenth century, and even in the early sixteenth century, only three cases of heresy are recorded.<sup>1</sup>

Frank Barlow examined twelve copies of Quinel's statutes, all from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and stated that these 'do not seem to be other than chance survivals of the many which must have been produced within and without the diocese'.<sup>2</sup> Two further manuscripts containing all or part of the statutes and *summula* have since been identified.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These cases involve John Atwell of Walkhampton in 1506; Otto Corbyn of Exeter in 1515, and in the late 1520s, William Strowde of Axminster. Only two heretics were burned in the Diocese of Exeter, Thomas Benet from Cambridge in 1532, and Agnes Prest of Launceston in 1558. Orme, N. (ed.), *Unity and Variety. A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, Exeter Studies in History No. 29, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991, pp.69–70.

<sup>2</sup> These manuscripts are Exeter, D.& C. Archives, 3522; Exeter, D.& C. Archives, 3523; Exeter, D.& C. Archives, 3524; BL Harley 220; BL Harley 3850; Bodleian, Rawlinson C. 565; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 443; Bodleian, Digby 35; Bodleian Rawlinson C. 314; Bodleian Rawlinson C. 323; National Library of Wales, Peniarth 162; and BL Additional 24057. Barlow also identifies four further manuscripts which contain Chapter 29 of the statutes and notes that an extract from Chapter 9 is quoted in the register of Archbishop Brantingham (d. 1394); Barlow, F. (transcription), '16 April 1287 Synodal Statutes of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel for the Diocese of Exeter' and '*Summula* of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel of Exeter' in Powicke,

Although the early provenance for most of these copies is unknown, four of the manuscripts do appear to have links to specific parishes within Devon. One manuscript, Exeter, D.& C. Archives, 3522, which dates to the first half of the fifteenth century, contains in a late fifteenth-century hand a note of twelve lines regarding 'the order of parishioners of Bere Ferrers for the sins-to-be-confessed'. This note is significant in that it documents a programme of attendance for confession at Bere Ferrers church, probably during the first three weeks of Lent.<sup>4</sup> This manuscript was presented to Exeter Cathedral in 1763 by John Snow, the rector of Bere Ferrers.<sup>5</sup> Avril Henry suggests that the manuscript had, in all probability, belonged to preceding rectors of the parish.<sup>6</sup>

National Library of Wales, Peniarth 162, is marked *Constat Honynton*, while Exeter, D.& C. Archives, 3524, belonged to George Stydston of Tamerton (either Tamerton Foliot or King's Tamerton) in the sixteenth century, and BL Additional 24057 may have links to the east Devon village of Payhembury.<sup>7</sup> Given the evidence of the dates of the extant manuscripts, Henry proposes that there was a continuous tradition of distribution of Quinel's statutes throughout

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F.M., and Cheney, C.R., (eds.) *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church II*, A.D. 1205–1313, 2 Vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, Part II 1265–1313, pp. 982–1077, on p.383.

<sup>3</sup> Exeter, D.& C. Archives 3549a in Wasson, J. (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Devon*, Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1986, p. 437; Longleat MS. 37A in Henry, A., 'Silver and Salvation: A Late 15th-Century Confessor's Itinerary Throughout the Parish of Bere Ferrers, Devon, England (Exeter Dean & Chapter MS 3522)' in *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and the Arts*, Vol. 133, 2001, pp. 17–96 (+ map) on page 62.

<sup>4</sup> Orme, N., 'Confession in a Fifteenth-Century Devon Parish' in *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and the Arts*, Vol. 134, 2002, pp. 57–68, p.67; p.61. Henry, 2001, and Orme, 2002, dispute the purpose of this list. Henry claims that the list is an itinerary for a penitencer to visit various locations in Bere Ferrers parish and to take confessions there. Orme argues that the list is an attendance list for parishioners to come to the church to make their confessions. Orme's argument is more convincing.

<sup>5</sup> Henry, 2001, pp. 23 and 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> Henry, 2001, footnote 33 on p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Henry, 2001, p.63.

the late medieval period.<sup>8</sup> Thus it is probable that the statutes served as a handbook for parochial administration from the end of the thirteenth century until the changes wrought by the Reformation in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Quinel's statutes drew on a wide range of sources, including a previous set issued in the Diocese of Exeter by a predecessor, Bishop William Brewer (r. 1224–1244), probably sometime between 1225 and 1237, and the statutes of recent provincial councils, notably the Wells statutes of c. 1258.<sup>9</sup> These councils had been instituted in the wake of the reforming Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215 by Pope Innocent III, which presented seventy decrees or canons, notably on the dogma of Transubstantiation (Canon 1), on the conduct of the clergy (Canons 14–18) and on the requirement for all who had reached the age of reason to confess to their own priest at least once a year and to receive the Eucharist at least at Easter (Canon 21). Other canons were concerned with prohibitions against marriage (Canon 50), the sale and exhibition of relics (Canon 62), the free administration of the sacraments (Canon 66) and the treatment of Jews and Saracens within Christian provinces (Canons 67–70).<sup>10</sup>

As the Reverend R.J.E. Boggis writes in his magisterial *History of the Diocese of Exeter*:

There was ample precedent, then, for the Synod of Exeter, the more immediate incentive being supplied by the Council of Lyons in 1274, and

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<sup>8</sup> Henry, 2001, p.28 and footnote 33, p.63. Henry's statement is supported by an observation by former National Library of Wales Librarian Daniel Huws.

<sup>9</sup> Brewer's statutes only survive in fragmentary form. For other influences on Quinel's statutes, see Barlow, 1964, p. 984, and Campbell, W.H., '*Dyvers kyndes of religion in sundry partes of the Ilande*': *The Geography of Pastoral Care in Thirteenth-Century England*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2006, p. 250.

<sup>10</sup> Medieval Sourcebook <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>. Accessed 11.01.10.

by Archbishop Peccham's [*sic*] Councils at Reading and at Lambeth, held respectively in 1279 and 1283.<sup>11</sup>

Quinel introduces his statutes thus:

God created medicine from earth (Ecclesiasticus 38.4) and this should first and foremost be understood as meaning the medicine of the soul, whose doctor is Christ. And the disease of the soul is sin, according to that saying of the prophet: heal my soul for I have sinned against thee. And this spiritual medicine cures the soul by means of the efficacy of the words of the holy synod, according to the words of the prophet: he sent his word and healed them.<sup>12</sup>

Quinel goes on to discuss further the channels through which the soul might be healed: 'And he cures not only by the efficacy of words but also by the workings of the sacraments flowing from the springs of the saviour, that is from the wounds of Christ.'<sup>13</sup>

At the outset, then, Quinel declares his interest in the cure of souls. He states that he is acting on behalf of Christ and following in the footsteps of St Paul, the doctor of the Gentiles, in calling together his synod to set forth rules and regulations for the spiritual health of his diocese.<sup>14</sup> As Nicholas Orme affirms, late medieval parish worship was therefore intended to be medicinal rather than educational.<sup>15</sup> This is of crucial importance for this study, especially in the light of 'the prevailing view of the great majority of twentieth-century scholars of medieval art', exemplified by Emile Mâle, that, in the Middle Ages:

art was didactic. All that was necessary that men should know – the history of the world from the creation, the dogmas of religion, the examples of the saints, the hierarchy of the virtues, the range of the sciences, arts and crafts – all these were taught them by the windows of the church or by statues in the porch...Through the medium of art the

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<sup>11</sup> Boggis, R.J.E., *A History of the Diocese of Exeter*, Exeter: William Pollard, 1922, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.984–5, trans. C. White.

<sup>13</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

<sup>14</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

<sup>15</sup> Orme, N., *Cornwall and the Cross. Christianity 500–1560*. Chichester: Phillimore and Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2007, p.101.

highest conceptions of the theologian and scholar penetrated to some extent the minds of even the humblest of the people.<sup>16</sup>

With an emphasis on healing in the parish churches of Devon, rather than teaching, Mâle's assertion might be questioned.<sup>17</sup>

The statutes begin with an exposition of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, marriage and ordination), since, Quinel states, 'the sacraments of the church have been instituted by God as a means to salvation and their dispensation is the principal ministry of priests, all of whom are responsible for the cure of souls'.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore paramount that priests:

should understand the sacraments and know how to administer them properly to the people in their charge and know that they must be more careful with regard to their administration, the more useful and necessary they are for salvation.<sup>19</sup>

Quinel therefore expounds the sacraments 'for the sake of those [priests] who are less well educated'.<sup>20</sup>

Quinel states that, of the seven sacraments, only two are absolutely necessary for salvation and these are baptism and penance. Baptism, he states is the 'door to all the sacraments and those who undergo it are referred to as entering because it sanctifies those entering and strips the person both of original and actual sin and cleanses him'.<sup>21</sup> Although both baptism and penance were

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<sup>16</sup> Duggan, L.G., 'Was Art Really the "Book of the Illiterate?"', *Word and Image*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1989, pp. 227–51, on p.241; Mâle, E., *The Gothic Image. Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, translated by Dora Nussey, New York: Harper and Row, 1972, preface, pvii.

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of this point see Chapter Five.

<sup>18</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

<sup>19</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

<sup>20</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

<sup>21</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.985, trans. C. White.

essential for salvation, only one of these sacraments was repeatable: penance, which consisted of three parts, contrition, confession and satisfaction.<sup>22</sup>

Of penance, Quinel states:

God's mercy is wondrous and of many different forms. It comes to the assistance of human sins in such a way that not only by the grace of baptism but also by the medicine of penitence, the hope of life eternal is repaired so that those who have violated the gifts of regeneration, condemning themselves by their own judgment, can come to the forgiveness of sins.<sup>23</sup>

Quinel notes the key role of the church in the administration of penance:

The mediator between God and men, our Lord Jesus Christ who was a man, has granted this power to those who are in charge of the church so that they might give the satisfaction of penitence to penitents who confess their sin, according to these words of the Gospel: 'if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them', etc. (John 20.23) and in another passage, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests' etc. (Luke 17.14).<sup>24</sup>

Penance, then, was essential to spiritual health and, in order to ensure that the priests in his diocese were suitably equipped to guide their parishioners in penitential matters, Quinel attached a *summula* on confession to his statutes. The *summula* had, in fact, been written nearly fifty years before, in 1240, to accompany the statutes of Bishop Walter Cantilupe of Wells.<sup>25</sup> However, Quinel's reissue of this work, together with his prologue and chapter on penance in the statutes, serves to emphasise not only his concern for the cure of souls in the Diocese of Exeter but also the importance that he placed on the role of the clergy in its effective administration.

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<sup>22</sup> Penance was generally repeatable except for solemn penance, the most severe category of all, inflicted for the worst offences only, notably for adultery, murder, and idolatry, the "capital sins". Barlow, 1964, p.987, trans. C. White.

<sup>23</sup> Barlow, 1964, p. 991, trans. C. White.

<sup>24</sup> Barlow, 1964, p. 991, trans. C. White.

<sup>25</sup> Goering, J. and Taylor, D., 'The *Summulae* of Bishops Walter de Cantilupe (1240) and Peter Quinel (1287)', *Speculum*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 1992, pp. 576–594. Quinel added his own prologue and a paragraph of instructions to Cantilupe's *summula*. Goering and Taylor, 1992, p.584.



This thesis will contend that the influence of the sacrament of penance may be seen in many of the figural roof bosses of the parish churches of Devon, and this sacrament, and Quinel's *summula*, will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five.

Of the remaining sacraments, three: confirmation, the eucharist and extreme unction, were not requisite for salvation, but their reception offered additional grace and increased spiritual strength against the attacks of the old enemy, the devil, 'who does not cease to go round the world, roaring like a lion, seeking a prey among men that he may devour'.<sup>26</sup> These sacraments, therefore, should not be omitted 'out of contempt'.<sup>27</sup>

The Eucharist (Mass) was, as Eamon Duffy notes, 'at the heart of the liturgy', for in this sacrament Christ himself, who had died for the sins of man, 'became present on the altar of the parish church, body, soul and divinity, and his blood flowed once again to nourish and renew Church and world'.<sup>28</sup> By means of the words 'For this is my body' the bread became the body of Christ, and Quinel noted that 'the priest should not raise the host until he has finished saying these words, in case the people should venerate something created rather than the Creator'.<sup>29</sup>

The main parish mass took place on Sundays in the holiest part of the church, the chancel, and although the laity in the nave were distanced from the ceremony, Quinel instructed that the host was to be 'raised aloft in such a way

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<sup>26</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.986, trans. C. White.

<sup>27</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.986, trans C. White.

<sup>28</sup> Duffy, E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p.91.

<sup>29</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.990, trans. C. White.

that it can be seen by the faithful' in order that 'by this means the devotion of the faithful will be stimulated and will be rewarded with an increase in faith'.<sup>30</sup> For the adult laity therefore, their most frequent encounter with the host was visual and they may have received the consecrated wafer on the tongue only once a year, at Easter. Their community in the church was strengthened, however, by the exchange of a greeting of peace in the form of the pax, a small tablet or disk bearing a sacred emblem. The pax was circulated among the laity by a clerk after it had first been kissed by the priest; it was then kissed in turn by the people.<sup>31</sup> At the end of the Mass, the people would also share in a loaf of bread which had been solemnly blessed for the occasion.

Quinel states that the last two sacraments, marriage and ordination, are 'voluntary and spiritual because each person is free to receive them or not to receive them'.<sup>32</sup> Quinel notes that: 'By means of these two sacraments sin is not forgiven but by means of marriage the sin of fornication is avoided; by means of ordination, if it is worthily and properly administered, virtues and gifts of grace are increased'.<sup>33</sup>

The sacraments marked the lives of each parishioner from birth through to death and provided the religious ritual around which parish life revolved. As Eamon Duffy states:

These were ceremonies which gave new meaning to the fundamental bodily experiences of human kind – birth and marriage and dying, light and water, food and drink – transforming these things into channels of access to the Godhead, in which sin and its consequences were wiped away and the material order was spiritualised and renewed. For those

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<sup>30</sup> The frequency of mass appears to have varied. In many parish churches it took place daily. See Duffy, 1992, pp.98–99; Barlow, 1964, p. 990, trans. C. White.

<sup>31</sup> Orme, 2007, p.101.

<sup>32</sup> These sacraments were dependent on gender and profession. Clearly women could not take orders and priests were not expected to marry. Barlow, 1964, p.986, trans. C. White.

<sup>33</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.986, trans. C. White.

who accepted this offer and conformed their lives to the will of God in holiness, there would be an eternity of blissful union with God; for those who rejected it and remained in sin, there would be an eternity of misery and self-inflicted suffering.<sup>34</sup>

In Doddiscombsleigh church, stained glass, made around 1480, depicts all seven of the sacraments linked to the wounds of Christ by streams of red glass symbolising his blood.<sup>35</sup> The window is a valuable record of liturgical practice in medieval Devon (Fig. 3.1). The central image in this window is, however, an insertion by Clayton and Bell of 1877. Showing Christ seated and crowned, the Victorian image does not reflect the suffering Christ who was very much a feature of late medieval devotion. Here Christ is serene, powerful and apparently untroubled by the wounds to his hands, feet and side. A figure of Christ from another fifteenth-century seven sacraments window, now otherwise lost, does survive in Cadbury church in Devon (Fig. 3.2). This figure and the Doddiscombsleigh windows were painted by the same glass-painter, identified by David Evans as the 'Cadbury Master'.<sup>36</sup> Standing with head bowed, crowned with thorns, and with blood dripping from his wounds, the Cadbury figure reveals the suffering and humanity of Christ. It is possible to unite this figure with the Doddiscombsleigh sacraments to give an impression of how both would have appeared originally (Fig. 3.3). Here the bloody link between Christ's wounds and the sacraments vividly reinforces the teaching that each sacrament 'derived its virtue from Christ's sacrifice'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Duffy, E., 'Religious belief' in Horrox, R., and Ormrod, W., *A Social History of England 1200–1500*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp.293–339, on p.294.

<sup>35</sup> Evans, D., Thomas, R. and Rosewell, R., 'Medieval and Modern at Doddiscombsleigh' in *Vidimus* no. 10, September 2007 at [http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue\\_10\\_2007/issue\\_10\\_2007-04.html](http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue_10_2007/issue_10_2007-04.html). Accessed 14.01.10.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, D., Thomas, R. and Rosewell, R., 'Medieval and Modern at Doddicombsleigh' in *Vidimus* no. 10, September 2007 at [http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue\\_10\\_2007/issue\\_10\\_2007-04.html](http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue_10_2007/issue_10_2007-04.html). Accessed 14.01.10.

<sup>37</sup> Marks, R., *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.79.

In order to administer the sacraments with due reverence, Quinel instructed that each church and its clergy were required to have a minimum number of 'ornaments', some of which are pictured in the Doddiscombsleigh window. Among these 'ornaments' were: at least one silver-gilt chalice; a communion cup of silver or tin/pewter for the sick; two complete pairs of vestments, one for feast days and another for ordinary days; four towels for the large altar, at least two of which should be blessed and one of them with embroidered decoration; two surplices and one rochet; a Lenten veil; a wedding veil; palls for the dead; a frontal for each altar; and twelve books for the services or for different parts of the service, namely a good missal, gradual, troper, a good book of forms prescribed for the sacrament, a *legenda*, a book of antiphons, a psalter, an ordinal, a music book for invitatories, a hymn book, a book of collects and a copy of the statutes (which was to be in each church before Michaelmas).<sup>38</sup>

Also required was a chest for books and vestments; a silver box or at least an ivory one with a lock for the sacrament; a tin/pewter chrismatory (for holy oils) with a lock; a board for the paxbread; a box for the wafers; three cruets; a stone piscina that could not be moved; a thurible (for incense); a vessel for blessed water; a candle frame for funerals; a paschal candlestick and two crosses (one portable for processions and the other fixed).

In addition, each church was to have an image of the Blessed Virgin, and another of its patron saint, a paschal candle, two processional candles, a canopy over the altar, a hand bell to be carried to the sick and to be used at the elevation of the body of Christ, a lamp, a lantern, hand bells for use at funerals,

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<sup>38</sup> Barlow, 1964, pp.1005–6, trans. C. White. The *legenda* is probably the *Legenda Aurea*. See below p.145 n.99.

a bier for the dead, a stone font with a lock, and sufficient glass windows in the chancel and in the nave of the church.<sup>39</sup>

Quinel instructed that the lay parishioners should be responsible for the nave, while the rector, who received tithes from the parish equivalent to a tenth of all the animals and crops grown on parish land, should be responsible for the chancel.<sup>40</sup> This is of interest as regards roof bosses since it indicates who commissioned bosses in these distinct areas.

By the fifteenth century, and possibly before, the lay parishioners invested in elaborate roodcreens, sometimes of stone, but usually of carved wood, to mark the division between nave and chancel. Access to the chancel was restricted to members of the clergy and, perhaps, the patron of the church and his family. Orme suggests that the ordinary laity might also enter on specific occasions, such as at the blessing of a marriage and for confession, although this latter point appears uncertain as confession may have taken place just to the west of the roodscreen rather than just to the east.<sup>41</sup>

While Quinel's statutes banned the congregation, other than church patrons and nobility, from reserving seats because there were often arguments which disrupted the service, it is probable that the nave and aisles were divided along gender lines and also according to social status, a point which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.<sup>42</sup> This separation of the sexes may have had some

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<sup>39</sup> Barlow, 1964, p. 1006, trans. C. White.

<sup>40</sup> Orme, 2007, p.21; Barlow, 1964, p.1003, trans. C. White.

<sup>41</sup> Orme, 2007, p.103; Nichols, A.E., 'The Etiquette of Pre-Reformation Confession in East Anglia', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 17, No.2, Summer 1986, pp.145–163, on p.155.

<sup>42</sup> Barlow, 1964, pp.1007–1008, trans. C. White; Aston, M., 'Segregation in Church', in Sheils, W., and Wood, D., *Women in the Church. Studies in Church History*, Vol. 27, Oxford: Basil

influence on the decoration, including roof bosses, of their respective parts of the church.

### **Donation and decoration**

The role of patron, clergy and parishioners in the decoration of their parish church and in the complex organisation of its religious and social space is amply demonstrated in the original glazing scheme at St Neot in Cornwall. The church at St Neot has, according to Joanna Mattingly, a 'remarkable and rare survival of a pre-Reformation glazing scheme. Among British churches, only the Renaissance scheme at Fairford in Gloucestershire is more complete'.<sup>43</sup>

The St Neot windows survived a mid-seventeenth century campaign of iconoclasm through being whitewashed over, a technique which obscured the offensive images but which allowed light into the church and which was also used at Fairford. However, the windows were heavily restored between 1825 and 1829 by J.P. Hedgeland, and much of the glass was moved to other locations within the church. Nevertheless, through various antiquarian records, Mattingly has been able to reconstruct most of the original scheme which probably spanned a period of fifty years from c.1480 to c.1530.<sup>44</sup>

Mattingly's work reveals that the original glazing of the chancel incorporated images of Saints Peter and Paul, founders of the Christian church, who appear together on the seal of Montacute Priory which was the pre-Reformation rector

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Blackwell, 1990, pp. 237-294; Orme, 2007, p.103. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, payments are recorded by churchwardens for 'seats sold in church', see, for example, Hanham, A., *Churchwardens' Accounts of Ashburton, 1479-1580*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Vol. 15, Torquay: Devon & Cornwall Record Society, 1970, p.80.

<sup>43</sup> Mattingly, J., 'Stories in the Glass – Reconstructing the St Neot Pre-Reformation Glazing Scheme', *Royal Institution of Cornwall Journal*, Truro: 2000, pp. 9-55, on p.9.

<sup>44</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.10.

of St Neot.<sup>45</sup> Three windows on the south side of the church, which is embattled as opposed to the plainer north side, were donated by families of local gentry. All contained either donor figures, or coats of arms identifying the donor, and inscriptions calling on the saints depicted to pray for them. Another window glazed with images from the legend of St George may have been donated by a Guild of St George, although no donor figures or inscriptions are noted in antiquarian records.<sup>46</sup>

The north chapel, the privileged area adjacent to the holiest space of the chancel, was funded by the Tubb and Callaway families, who were related by marriage. Both families were local landowners and were involved in tin mining, from which they appear to have made a good living.<sup>47</sup> Robert Tubb, vicar of St Neot from 1508 until 1544, and therefore the incumbent during the period of glazing of the north aisle, was pictured kneeling before an altar (Fig. 3.4) in the east window of the north chapel below a main light image of St John the Evangelist.<sup>48</sup> This window, now in the south aisle, bears the inscription '*Ste Johannes ora pro nobis*'. Other Tubb donors occupied similar positions beneath figures of Christ and saints and a Callaway window in the north chapel also had similar donor figures and inscriptions.

Just to the west of this chapel, in the north aisle flanking the nave, a window includes 'one of only three known portraits of an English glass-painter', Ralph

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<sup>45</sup> Orme notes that where a religious house had been granted the advowson, it could, with the bishop's approval, appoint itself rector, ensuring that it received the rector's income from the benefice - a process known as appropriation. It would then appoint a vicar to fulfil the necessary spiritual duties. The vicar received a stipend which, Quinel ordered, should be at least £3 6s 8d per annum. Orme, 2007, p.51.

<sup>46</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p. 37. This glass is now in the west end of the north aisle.

<sup>47</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.21.

<sup>48</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.41.

Harry or Harys, who is pictured kneeling in prayer with his wife (Fig. 3.5).<sup>49</sup> Harys was probably from Tiverton in Devon and he and his son, also pictured with his wife, wear livery hoods, indicating to Mattingly that they were 'liveried retainers of a wealthy nobleman, probably the Earl of Devon'.<sup>50</sup> That Harys both made and donated the window at St Neot is confirmed by records of its inscription.<sup>51</sup>

Three other windows in the north aisle all bear inscriptions revealing that they were 'donated by single sex groups within the parish'.<sup>52</sup> The windows were placed in the western half of the aisle, so a darker and less favourable area, the sunnier south aisle being more favourable. Their inscriptions all begin: '*ex sumptibus...*', 'by the collections of...', and the windows were donated by the wives of the western part of the parish (1528) (Fig. 3.6), the sisters, who are thought to be the young women of the parish (1529) (Fig. 3.7), and the young men (1530) (Fig. 3.8).<sup>53</sup> The donor figures in both the wives' window and sisters' window entreat Christ, the Virgin Mary and universal and local saints who are pictured in the lights above, to pray for them.<sup>54</sup> The window donated by the 'young men', who were the bachelors of the parish probably aged between 14 and 26, depicts the legend of St Neot.<sup>55</sup> Due to the many scenes from the life of the saint, there was no space for donor images in this window, and unusually, the inscription does not seem to have contained a plea for prayer, recording only the group donation and the date, 1530.

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<sup>49</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.20.

<sup>50</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.20.

<sup>51</sup> Mattingly suggests that he and his team were also responsible for glazing the other windows in the north aisle as they are similar in style. Mattingly, 2000, p.20.

<sup>52</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.21.

<sup>53</sup> Mattingly acknowledges that the sisters might belong to an unidentified guild. Mattingly, 2000, p.22.

<sup>54</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.45.

<sup>55</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.22.



The three windows in the north aisle at St Neot are remarkable in their documentation of benefactions by social groups or companies, which raised money through social events such as ale feasts, collections, or the keeping of sheep or bees.<sup>56</sup> Mattingly notes that: 'the ability of such groups to pay for church windows depended on large memberships' and that: 'these groups must have once been universal although documentation of them is poor'.<sup>57</sup>

Orme notes that guilds, like companies, are also poorly documented, although it is known that membership of some guilds was restricted to particular craftspeople who would maintain an image within the church and pay for prayers for dead members.<sup>58</sup> In many cases, therefore, guilds were probably dominated by adult working men. In the town of Bodmin, less than ten miles from St Neot, J.C.Cox notes that there were five trades or craft guilds who were involved in the rebuilding of the church of St Petrock between 1469 and 1472: that of St Petrock, for skimmers and glovers; of SS Dunstan and Eloy for smiths; of St Anian for shoemakers; of St Martin for millers; and a guild of St John the Baptist for drapers and tailors.<sup>59</sup> However, guilds might also be formed by people who lived in a particular area. In Bodmin, there were guilds in Fore Street, Reyn Street, Bore Street and Pole Street. Cox recounts that: 'The women of the congregation had a special collection on Easter Eve: the

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<sup>56</sup> Orme, 2007, p.106. Church ales, in particular were lucrative for the parish. Wardens, or groups such as the young men of the parish, brewed ale which was sold, together with food, at ale feasts held in church houses adjoining the churchyard. As Duffy notes: 'Parishioners were expected to attend and spend their money, and official representatives came and supported from surrounding parishes, a favour which had to be returned when the parishes concerned held their own ales.' Duffy, E., *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.6–7.

<sup>57</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.22.

<sup>58</sup> Orme, 2007, p.107.

<sup>59</sup> Cox, J.C., *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, London: Methuen, 1913, p.82.

“maidenys yn Forstret” contributed 6s, and the “maidenys of the borestret Xvij d”.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to companies and guilds, both of which were formed through social groupings, images might also be supported through stores which were simply warden-managed funds to which individuals (or groups) would donate money, sheep, cattle or bees, whose wax was used to make lights in the church. Stores could be assigned to the parish church itself, often in the name of its patron saint, or to individual images of saints. Bequests of rosaries or jewellery to ornament the tabernacle which housed an image were not uncommon.<sup>61</sup>

To return to St Neot, the glazing of windows in the church reflected the social stratification of the parish: the vicar’s window was positioned closest to the holiest space of the chancel in the east window of the north chancel chapel, with those contributed by members of his wealthy family on the north side nearby.<sup>62</sup> Windows given by the local gentry were situated in favoured positions in the south chancel chapel and south aisle, while the companies of wives, sisters and young men were gathered together in the darker western half of the north aisle. In donating their respective windows, however, there is a shared concern throughout: all the donor figures kneel in prayer and all were accompanied by inscriptions reading ‘*ora pro nobis*’, ‘pray for us’ or ‘*orate pro animabus...qui istam fenestram fecerunt vitrea fieri*’, ‘pray for the souls of...who caused this window to be glazed’.<sup>63</sup> While ensuring that the position of their windows reflected their social standing in this world, the vicar, gentry and

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<sup>60</sup> Cox, 1913, p.82.

<sup>61</sup> Duffy, 2001, pp.75–76.

<sup>62</sup> The east window in the south chancel chapel had been glazed with scenes from the Creation prior to Vicar Tubb’s incumbency.

<sup>63</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.24.

parishioners appear to have been largely motivated by a desire for the salvation of their souls in the next.

Such conspicuous displays of benefaction were not always well received, however. Although ostensibly demonstrating religious devotion, the figures and inscriptions might be viewed with a critical eye, as expressed by William Langland in his late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*. The corrupt Friar Confessor, who has just given Lady Meed absolution for her sins upon payment of a gold noble, remarks that:

We have a window being built, which is going to set us back a fairly steep sum. Now if you were willing to provide the glass for this gable – and, of course, allow your name to be engraved on it – you could rest assured that your soul would reach heaven by that route!

Lady Meed responds that as long as the friar casts an ‘indulgent eye’ on her lustful nature, then:

as far as I’m concerned ...well, I’ll have the roof of your friary-church repaired, your walls plastered, and the windows filled with glass; and, of course, have a stained glass panel installed depicting the kind donor, so that all and sundry will notice I’ve become an honorary sister of your worthy Order!<sup>64</sup>

At this, Langland offers a ‘singular authorial intervention [which] suggests the strength of...[his] hostility to the friars as promoters of a carnal or worldly attitude to religious matters’:

Yes; but what does *God* think of these things – inscriptions in glass that trumpet your benefactions? God forbids all the truly virtuous to meddle with any such thing. And why? For fear pride should set up its home there, and with it, worldly minded complacency. Your inner intentions and deepest desires are as open to the eyes of God as the precise details of the cost, and the greedy self-regard that declares who financed the whole thing. So my advice to the nobility is – give up this practice of recording your benefactions in windows!<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Langland, W., *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, edited by A. V. C. Schmidt, Oxford World’s Classics paperback edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.24.

<sup>65</sup> Langland, 2000, Schmidt’s note on p.265; Langland, 2000, p.25.

Yet, despite Langland's fourteenth-century warning, the practice of recording benefactions continued. In an article on 'Painted Roofs in East Anglian Churches', Edward T. Long records the following on donor inscriptions:

There is a notable instance at Isleham, in Cambridgeshire, near the Suffolk border, where a running inscription in carved and raised lettering, records the date of the erection and the name of the donor: "Crystofer Peyton did mak thys rofe in the yere of our Lord MCCCCLXXXV being the 4 (*sic*) yere of Kinge Henry the VII". Blomfield, the Norfolk historian, tells us that the now demolished church of Garboldisham All Saints had a panelled roof in the nave painted with the names of Jesus and Mary, together with the following quaint inscription:- "Betwex syn yis and ye Rode Loff ye yongling hav payd for yis cost". This inscription is interesting, as showing that the cost of work was borne by different persons, and in this case the young people of the parish evidently made themselves responsible for what was probably the most decorated portion of the roof, i.e. the part over the rood.<sup>66</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that in some instances benefactors were at pains to point out that their interest was not 'greedy self-regard', but rather a desire for spiritual benefit. A Latin inscription carved into the ribs and purlins of the roof of the chancel at Spreyton church in 1451 translates:

Henry le Maygne, Priest, Vicar of this Church, caused me to be built in the year of our Lord 1451. Robert of Rouen of Becdenne, Prior of Cowyk, and Richard Talbot, Armiger, Lord of Spreyton, gave of their goods for my building... This Henry was born in the land of Normandy, and himself wrote all these words with his own hand...

Perhaps mindful of the danger of pride, le Maygne goes on to strike a cautionary note: 'Witness, O Christ,...that he has not written this now that praise to himself be given, but that his soul be remembered...'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>There is a discrepancy in the date recorded here since Henry Tudor became King Henry VII in 1485. Long, E. T., 'Painted Roofs in East Anglian Churches', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 55, No. 317 (August 1929), pp.74–81, on p.75.

<sup>67</sup> Unattributed translation of inscription, framed on north wall in Spreyton church. This inscription will be discussed at length in Chapter Six. A similar inscription recording the benefactors of Long Melford Church in Suffolk ends with John Clopton stating: 'may Christ be my witness, this is displayed not to earn praise, but that the soul may be remembered'. Duffy, 1992, p.302.

The evidence from St Neot and Spreyton emphasises a deep concern for the fate of the soul by both clergy and laity in the Diocese of Exeter and lends support to Christopher Daniell's statement that: 'The key to medieval religion is the fate of the individual's soul after death'.<sup>68</sup>

### **Judgement**

The fate of the soul was depicted in the late medieval parish church in Judgement scenes which were often painted on the chancel arch or on a tympanum behind the Rood. Where there was no chancel arch, as in many of the churches in Devon, the Judgement may have been depicted in stained glass at the west end or perhaps painted on the panels of the rood loft. In Exeter Cathedral, a Judgement was painted on the pulpitum and Charles Tracy notes evidence from Bedfordshire and Wales where the rood lofts of parish churches may have been similarly decorated.<sup>69</sup>

In these scenes, Christ, accompanied by angels and saints, and sometimes by the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist kneeling as intercessors, is portrayed in judgement over the souls of the dead. Naked or shrouded souls rise from their graves often in an agitated state, for, while some are deserving of the keys of Heaven, others, who have failed to make amends for their sins, are forced into the flaming Mouth of Hell by grinning demons. Fragments of a Judgement scene in fourteenth-century stained glass survive in the church at Bere Ferrers, Devon. A figure of Christ showing his wounds (Fig. 3.9) is now

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<sup>68</sup> Daniell, C., *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066–1550*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Sekules, V., 'Early 14th century Liturgical Furnishings' in Swanton, M. (ed.), *Exeter Cathedral: A Celebration*, Exeter: Southgate Publishers for the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, 1991, pp.111–115, on p.111; Tracy, C., 'Three Rood-Screens in South East Wales' in Kenyon, J., and Williams, D., (eds.), *The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions XXIX, Cardiff: Architecture and Archaeology in the Medieval Diocese of Llandaff*, Leeds: British Archaeological Association, 2006, pp.161–201, on p.170.

situated in the east window, as are figures of souls rising from their graves: a man, possibly a priest, wrings his hands and another raises his hands in supplication (Fig. 3.10), a couple cling together in fear and trepidation (Fig. 3.11), and a naked female soul tears at her hair (Fig. 3.12).

These Judgement scenes do not appear to reference Purgatory, the temporary destination after death of all but the saintly. However, all were well aware of its pains through sermons and the revelations of those who had witnessed its horrors in visions. As Eamon Duffy notes, in the late medieval period ‘the overwhelming preoccupation of clergy and laity alike [was] with the safe transition of their souls from this world to the next, above all with the shortening and easing of their stay in Purgatory’.<sup>70</sup>

The church benefited enormously from this preoccupation. Duffy asserts that: ‘it was the single most influential factor in shaping both the organization of the Church and the physical layout and appearance of the buildings in which men and women worshipped’.<sup>71</sup> Chantry chapels were established with priests ordained to offer masses and prayers for the souls of the dead, and, as has been seen at St Neot, the church received a substantial investment in its redecoration since good works, particularly those devoted to beautifying the worship of God, lessened time spent in Purgatory.

While Eamon Duffy notes a desire among the wealthy families who donated to the rebuilding of the great wool churches of East Anglia to remind their neighbours of their status and riches, he asserts that ‘first and foremost, their benefactions were prompted by a concern to erect before God a permanent

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<sup>70</sup> Duffy, 1992, p.301.

<sup>71</sup> Duffy, 1992, p. 310.

witness to their piety and charity which would plead for them at the Judgement Seat of Christ'.<sup>72</sup>

This appears to be the prime motivation in Devon too. In Cullompton church, the outer south aisle was built for John Lane, a cloth merchant, c.1526 (Fig. 3.13). The aisle is decorated with references to the source of his wealth, including tuckers' shears and teasel frames and, on the outside of the aisle, ships. An inscription frieze along the west wall of the aisle, written in English, reads:

In honour of God and his Blessed Mother Mary remeb the soulis of John Lane w a pat nst and ave mari and the sawle of Thomsyn his wife to have in memory with all other ther children and friendis of youre owne chryty which were founders of this Chapell and here lyeth yn Sepulther. The yere of ower Lorde god a thousand five hundrith syx and twynth God of his grace on ther boyth sawles to have mercy and finally bring them to the eternall glory Amen for Chryty.<sup>73</sup>

Lane also donated money to a further one hundred churches on condition that they entered his name on their bede-rolls 'to pray for me in their pulpits'.<sup>74</sup>

Similar concerns are expressed in Tiverton Church by the cloth merchant John Greneway and his wife, Joan. Greneway, like Lane, died in 1529. His outer south chantry chapel (Fig. 3.14), of c.1517, is richly decorated with the arms of the London Drapers' Company, of which Greneway was Warden, wool-packs and staple-marks. Above the windows are twenty scenes from the life of Christ, which focus particularly on his Passion. Below these, there is a frieze of ships, perhaps carrying Greneway's cargo of woollen cloth. There are several carved inscriptions in the chantry, one of which dedicates the chapel to the honour of

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<sup>72</sup> Duffy, 1992, p. 302.

<sup>73</sup> Graves, C. P., *The Form and Fabric of Belief. An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk and Devon*. Oxford: John and Erica Hedges and Archaeopress, 2000, p.143.

<sup>74</sup> Whiting R., *The Blind Devotion of the People. Popular Religion and the English Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.19.

Saints Christopher, Blaise and Anne. Greneway's interest in these particular saints was no doubt prompted by the areas of patronage with which they were associated: St Christopher protected travellers, St Blaise was patron of wool carders and St Anne, patron of married people and childbirth.<sup>75</sup>

Other inscriptions appeal for prayers for the Greneways: 'Of your charitie pray for the souls of John Greneway and his wife'; 'Lord o all grant John Greneway good fort'n and grace and in Heaven a place'; 'God sped J.G'; and this appeal was repeated on their tomb: 'Of your charite prey for the souls of John and Joan Grenway his wife, which died 1529, and for their faders and moders and their friends and their lovers; on them Jesu have mercy; amen. Of your charite say *Pater Noster* and *Ave*'.<sup>76</sup> Greneway and his wife are sculpted in a panel in the porch devoutly kneeling at prayer desks before an image of the Assumption of the Virgin (Fig. 3.15).

Duffy notes that Greneway's chantry chapel was but half of his religious bequest to Tiverton, for he also built an almshouse for five old men in honour of the five Wounds of Jesus. These men were required to pray daily for the founder with an inscription on the almshouse chapel entreating:

Remember the poor  
Have grace ye men and ever pray  
For the sowls of John and Joan Greenway  
Rest a whyle ye that may  
Pray for me by nyite and day<sup>77</sup>

While the Lanes and the Greneways are remembered in the parish churches where their names are inscribed in their respective aisle and chapel, a major benefaction by Constance Coffyn to Tavistock church in 1445 is not so well

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<sup>75</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.69.

<sup>76</sup> Duffy, 2001, pp.69–70.

<sup>77</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.70.



remembered. The register of Bishop Lacy records that, on November 6, 1445, the bishop:

issued an indulgence to those offering prayers “for the souls of John Voyse (Wyse), Robert Bonefas and Maurice Berde, esquires, husbands in their lifetime of the honourable woman, Constance, daughter of William Coffyn and Alice, his wife, and for the health of the said Constance, while she lives and for her soul after she dies, and for all the faithful departed, in the Aisle or Gild of St. Thomas the Martyr in the Parish Church of Tavistock, which Aisle or Gild was built by the said Constance”<sup>78</sup>.

The aisle funded by Constance Coffyn is unusual in being a second south aisle to the parish church and is now known as the Clothworkers’ Aisle, as it is reputed to have served as a chapel for the clothworkers of Tavistock. If Constance and her departed husbands were ever named in their aisle, perhaps in stained glass, of them now there is no trace (Fig. 3.16).

While some major benefactions were recorded in a highly visible manner in the church building, the great majority of donations to churches, and the motivations for these, were not recorded in this way. Elsewhere in the country, wills provide a rich source of information but, unfortunately, much of the testamentary evidence for Devon was lost in the bombing of the Exeter Probate Registry in 1942.

Useful sources for smaller bequests, however, are parish accounts, usually kept by churchwardens. Of surviving sets of these for the pre-Reformation period, the most illuminating for an understanding of the rural parish church and the concerns of its people in late medieval Devon are the parish accounts for

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<sup>78</sup> Translation of entry regarding Constance Coffyn from the Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420–1455. Newscutting from *Western Morning News*, November, 1945, on Sheet R1, Tavistock Parish File, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

Morebath, a small farming community of around 150 souls, situated on the southern fringes of Exmoor. The value of these accounts has long been recognised since they were first transcribed by a former vicar of Morebath, J. Erskine Binney, in 1904, but nowhere have they been more sensitively explored than in Eamon Duffy's *The Voices of Morebath*.<sup>79</sup>

Duffy is careful to note that 'Tudor England had no such thing as a typical village', but it remains that many of the experiences and concerns of the parishioners of Morebath must have been replicated in similarly isolated rural communities across Devon.<sup>80</sup> The Morebath accounts were kept on behalf of the churchwardens by its priest, Sir Christopher Trychay, from his arrival in Morebath in 1520 until his death in 1574. While most sets of accounts detail the minutiae of church income and expenditure but offer little more, Trychay's accounts 'are packed with the personality, opinions and prejudices of the most vivid country clergyman of the English sixteenth century, and with the names and doings of his parishioners'.<sup>81</sup> The accounts offer, therefore, 'a unique and vivid insight into a rural world which has otherwise left little trace'.<sup>82</sup>

Unlike St Neot, Cullompton and Tiverton, Morebath was a relatively poor parish without resident gentry, although, interestingly, medieval roof bosses still extant in the north aisle bear the knot of the Bouchier family, who were Lords of the Manor at nearby Bampton in the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>83</sup> This aisle

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<sup>79</sup> Erskine Binney, J., (ed.), *The Accounts of the Wardens of the Parish of Morebath, Devon 1520–1573*, Devon Notes and Queries, Supplementary Volume 1903–1904, Exeter: James A. Commin, 1904; Duffy, 2001.

<sup>80</sup> Duffy, 2001, preface XV.

<sup>81</sup> Duffy, 2001, preface XIII.

<sup>82</sup> Duffy, 2001, preface XV.

<sup>83</sup> The roofs in the nave and chancel are modern replacements.

must have been completed before Sir Christopher Trychay became priest at Morebath, although he does not mention the bosses.

Although the parish church was small, consisting of the chancel, nave, north aisle, west tower and south porch (Fig. 3.17), it housed an astonishing array of furnishings and imagery, nearly all of which is now lost. As Quinel had decreed, Morebath had a statue of the Virgin Mary which stood in the chancel on the south side of the high altar. On the north side, Morebath's patron saint, George, was carved in an elaborate scene which included his horse, the dragon, the princess whom he rescued and her parents, the king and queen.<sup>84</sup>

At the east end of the north aisle, and therefore directly below the Bouchier knot roof bosses, stood the only other altar in the church where requiem and weekday masses were celebrated.<sup>85</sup> Situated above this was an image of Christ, possibly holding a globe as '*Salvator Mundi*'. Not long after his arrival in Morebath in 1520, Sir Christopher Trychay presented his parish church with a statue of an Exeter saint, Sidwell, a Saxon virgin said to have been decapitated with a scythe by farmworkers at the instigation of her jealous stepmother. Sidwell was given an exalted position next to the image of Christ, where Sir Christopher appears to have encouraged special devotion to this holy maiden, who had lived and died not far from Morebath, and whose veneration, rooted in the local environment, might therefore inspire a 'sanctifying of place, of the local'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Duffy, 2001, pp.24–25.

<sup>85</sup> The positioning of heraldic roof bosses is discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>86</sup> Duffy, 2001, pp.73–74.

Other images of the Virgin, Christ and saints were chosen by the people and were placed against walls and pillars in the nave and aisle of the church ensuring a closeness which was not possible with the images in the chancel. Duffy notes that these images 'all have an immediate and obvious resonance in the lives of the people of a farming community like Morebath'.<sup>87</sup> Of particular relevance to the working men of the community were images of St Loy or Eligius, the patron of blacksmiths and carters, who was usually depicted holding a horse's leg, horseshoe or hammer, and St Anthony, healer of animals and men, who was usually depicted with a pig. The women of the Morebath community might offer prayers before the image of St Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, who was barren until miraculously cured, and the Virgin as Pietà, weeping over the dead body of her son.

An image of the Sunday Christ also stood in the nave at Morebath. This was a figure of Christ wounded by implements used on a Sunday and served as a warning against Sabbath breaking.<sup>88</sup> The image reflected Bishop Quinel's statutes regarding parishioners' attendance at church on Sundays:

The pages of both the Old and New Testaments set aside the seventh day of the week for man's rest; and so the Jews, according to the letter, and we, according to the spirit of the letter, keep the Lord's day free from manual work so that when the Christian people come together in the church they may hear the divine service and learn the rules for living. And the more that various secular occupations prevent the parishioners from attending services on other days, the more they should each be obliged to be present, with all diligence, on these days, so that while they have worked for their physical bread which will perish within a few days, for six days of the week, on the seventh at least they should be revived in a more healthy way with spiritual bread which does not perish, namely the words of the sermon. Therefore we give orders to all the parish

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<sup>87</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.72.

<sup>88</sup> Images of the Sunday Christ are still to be found in wall paintings in three churches in Cornwall: Poundstock, Breage and St Just-in-Penwith. Uniquely, a window glazed with the Sunday Christ survived at St Neot, although it was removed by Hedgeland, and is now on display at the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro. Mattingly, J., 'The Warning to Sabbath Breakers from St Neot Church', *Vidimus* no. 36, January 2010. [http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue\\_36\\_2009/issue\\_36\\_2009-03.html](http://www.vidimus.org/archive/issue_36_2009/issue_36_2009-03.html). Accessed 18.01.10.

priests that they should advise their parishioners diligently and effectively persuade them to try to attend their church on feast days, and especially on Sundays, to hear the divine service and receive with humility the instructions for living correctly. Those who are in the habit of absenting themselves should be punished by the local bishop or his deputy. And so that the opportunity for absenting oneself should be removed, we strictly forbid, on penalty of excommunication, markets from being held in our diocese on Sundays, apart from those that sell food which can be lawfully sold on these days as well as on others, as long as it is after mass has been celebrated; otherwise we decree that those who buy and sell other things should be subjected to a severe penalty of penance.<sup>89</sup>

In their choice of the Morebath images, Duffy detects parochial concern for the alleviation of hardship and suffering in both this world and the next.<sup>90</sup> Thus St Eligius might be invoked for help with sick horses and St Anthony with pigs, cattle and sheep, while the Virgin Mary would be entreated to intercede at the Day of Judgement. The figure of the Sunday Christ (also known as St Sunday) would help to ensure that the community would come together, at least on Sundays, to pray and witness the mass and to resolve their differences before kissing the pax and sharing the parish loaf.

Bequests to the saints continued in Morebath until the Reformation, those to Saint Sidwell being noted by Sir Christopher with particular delight. These included painted cloths for her altar, lamp basins to maintain a light before her image, a hive of bees whose wax would provide lights, rosaries to hang upon the statue or the tabernacle in which it stood, and a wedding ring which was melted down to help make a silver shoe with which the image was adorned as a mark of devotion.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.1020, trans. C. White.

<sup>90</sup> Duffy, 2001, p.73.

<sup>91</sup> Duffy, 2001, pp.74–75.

The communal investment of the people in their parish church reached its apogee in the provision of the rood, its attendant figures, its loft and screen. In Morebath none of these survive, but Sir Christopher Trychay records details of the complex funding arrangements for a new rood, figures of Mary and John and a new celure, or canopy of honour. In the Morebath parish accounts for 1535, Trychay notes that the parishioners contracted a carver, William Popyll, to make this new work for their church instructing that the new rood should be 'accordyng to y<sup>e</sup> patent of Brussorde or better', Brushford being a village situated some two miles from Morebath in Somerset.<sup>92</sup> Trychay's statement reveals that community pride influenced commissions, even within the most humble parish church.

Popyll was to be paid £7 in total for the work: 40 shillings at the outset with a further 40 shillings to be paid on Lady Day (25 March) the following year. The final payment of 60 shillings was to be made on completion which was to be in time for the patronal festival, St George's Day, 23 April 1536.<sup>93</sup>

The parishioners themselves would provide the timber for, and set up, the beam and the wall plates to support the rood group, and they commissioned, separately, two craftsmen and their assistants to paint and gild the figures.<sup>94</sup> The first payment to the carver was made by the Young Men's or Grooming Store, with the painting and gilding of the completed carvings being paid for by the Maiden's Store. It appears, though, that the painter ran out of money before

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<sup>92</sup> Erskine Binney, 1904, p.70; Duffy notes that 'The churchwardens of Yatton in Somerset in 1446–47 rode to Easton in Gordano to inspect a model rood loft with a gallery and to enquire about costs before commissioning their own work' and that a similar arrangement operated at Stratton in Cornwall. Duffy, E., 'The Parish, Piety and Patronage in Late Medieval East Anglia: the Evidence of Rood Screens', in French, K.L., Gibbs, G.G., and Kumin, B.A., (eds.), *The Parish in English Life 1400–1600*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997, pp.147–148.

<sup>93</sup> Erskine Binney, 1904, p.70.

<sup>94</sup> Erskine Binney, 1904, p.70; Duffy, 1997, p.140.

completing the project and Sir Christopher Trychay stepped in with an advance of twenty shillings from his own funds. Duffy notes that this was done:

without clearing the payment with the wardens, an act which, despite the generally good relations between priest and people at Morebath, was resented by his parishioners because it was done 'agaynst the p[a]rysse wyll'. The vicar was eventually reimbursed from the funds of the Maiden Store, but in view of the tension caused by his unilateral action he donated the money to another parish project.<sup>95</sup>

Consultation between clergy and parish was clearly important. At St Neot and Morebath, the vicars, Robert Tubb and Sir Christopher Trychay, may have offered advice on the decoration of nave and aisles, particularly in matters of iconography, but the approval of parishioners was necessary if good relations were to be maintained.

The Morebath accounts offer an unrivalled textual record of the level of parochial involvement in the decoration of the rural parish church and give an indication of the motivation of those who financed it, but all the imagery noted by Sir Christopher Trychay is now lost. In Holne, like Morebath a small moorland community, though situated on southern Dartmoor, the medieval rood screen survives (Fig. 3.18) and has recently been conserved by medieval polychrome specialist Eddie Sinclair. Although now stripped of its rood, attendant figures, and its loft, the screen is especially rich in its medieval colour and gilding which dates to c. 1480–1500.<sup>96</sup>

Images of forty saints decorate the dado of the screen which stretches across the nave and north and south aisles. As with the saints of St Neot and Morebath, these are both universal and local and might be invoked for the trials and tribulations of this life and the next. The central doors of the screen, which

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<sup>95</sup> Duffy, 1997, pp.140–141.

<sup>96</sup> Eddie Sinclair. Information board on screen restoration in Holne Church.

provide its focal point, are painted with a scene of the Coronation of the Virgin (Fig. 3.19), highlighting the special relationship with her son that made her role as intercessor so effective.<sup>97</sup> On the main chancel screen, among other universal saints, are depicted Saints Peter and Paul, founders of the Christian church; the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and the Four Latin Doctors, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose and Augustine, all of whom represent the teaching and authority of the church.

Among the saints on the north aisle screen are St Sidwell with her scythe, St Anthony with his pig and St Sebastian, whose body is pierced by arrows (Fig. 3.20). Sebastian was known as a heavenly protector against the plague, a disease which had ravaged the population of Devon in the early months of 1349 and had revisited with further devastating effect in successive epidemics.<sup>98</sup> On the south aisle screen, concern about the disease is expressed in an image of St Roche (Fig. 3.21 left), another plague saint, who is depicted with his tunic pulled aside to reveal a plague sore on his thigh. In a panel to the south of this image is a painting of St Margaret standing triumphant on the dragon which had swallowed her (Fig. 3.21 right), but which she had overcome with the sign of the cross. St Margaret was petitioned especially by women in childbirth. Also on the south aisle screen is an image of St Apollonia (Fig. 3.22) who is depicted with the pincers with which she had her teeth pulled as a form of torture. Unsurprisingly, Apollonia was invoked for protection against toothache.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The church is now dedicated to St Mary although its medieval dedication has not been discovered. Orme, N., *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Devon and Cornwall*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996, p.170.

<sup>98</sup> Hoskins, W., *Devon*, London: Collins, 1954, p.61.

<sup>99</sup> The lives of many of these saints are recorded in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, a copy of which is likely to have been held in every parish church in Devon. See above p.125 n. 38. Voragine, Jacobus de, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, translated by William Granger Ryan, Vols. 1&2, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1993.



The screen at Holne was, according to Eddie Sinclair, painted by at least two different artists, the paintings on the chancel doors and the south side being, for the most part, noticeably finer than those on the north side.<sup>100</sup> This might suggest that the screen may have been decorated over a period of time, as and when funds became available, or simply that the donors of the painted panels on the chancel doors and south side could afford to employ a more experienced painter. That the screen at Holne was the object of considerable parochial investment is, however, evident, for in addition to its painted saints, it is richly decorated with carved running vine ornament overlaid with gold and silver leaf and applied with crimson and green glazes along the length of its cornice. Indeed, there was some concern, during its restoration, that the gold would look too bright once cleaned and that this would lead to a misunderstanding that new gilding was being laid down.<sup>101</sup>

For the people of the parish of Holne the screen was their devotion made manifest. It brought the Company of Heaven to the community of the parish and provided a focus for their piety.<sup>102</sup> But although parochial investment may have been largely directed towards images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and saints, images which shone with the beauty of holiness and whose intercession would confer protection from peril and spiritual benefit, images of sin also featured in the visual landscape of the church. William Langland suggests a possible justification for this in *Piers Plowman*: 'Don't we recognize goodness by contrasting it with vice? How could you tell if an object was white, if everything

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<sup>100</sup> Eddie Sinclair. Information board on screen restoration in Holne Church.

<sup>101</sup> Eddie Sinclair. Information board on screen restoration in Holne Church.

<sup>102</sup> Duffy, E., 'Late Medieval Religion' in *Gothic. Art for England 1400–1547*, exhibition catalogue edited by Richard Marks and Paul Williamson, London: V & A Publications, 2003, pp.66–67.

was black? And how could you know a virtuous man unless there were some who were evil?'<sup>103</sup>

The sins of man were nowhere more evident than in the broken body of Christ which hung on the Rood. They were also revealed in the images of saints who were depicted with the instruments of their torture and martyrdom. But this was historical sin; the parish church in Devon was concerned with its ongoing threat and, along with Judgement scenes, pictorial programmes were devised to remind parishioners of this threat.

Many depictions of sin were found in wall paintings, a medium which did not require either great technical skill or costly materials and yet could be adapted to fit whatever space was available.<sup>104</sup> In Devon, very few medieval wall paintings survive, as many churches were subject to extensive Victorian restoration when walls were stripped of their plaster to reveal the natural stone.<sup>105</sup> A fragment at Branscombe (Fig. 3.23) portrays a finely dressed man and woman in close embrace being pierced through by a skeletal figure carrying a lance. This painting is said to represent the sin of lust and is thought to be part of a larger scheme of the Seven Deadly Sins. In Cornwall, a Tree of the Seven Deadly Sins survives in fragmentary form at Poundstock.

Representations of Original Sin were also found in the Diocese of Exeter. At St Neot, a window glazed with stories from Genesis includes that of the Fall (Fig.

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<sup>103</sup> Langland, 2000, p.109.

<sup>104</sup> Devotional figures of saints are also found frequently in this medium. These paintings might use expensive pigments and have associated donor figures, inscriptions, or heraldic devices.

<sup>105</sup> A fine image of Christ surrounded by instruments of the Passion does, however, survive in the north chancel chapel at Ashton church, near Exeter.

3.24).<sup>106</sup> This window, notes Joanna Mattingly, is 'closely linked to the subjects of the first day's performance of the Ordinalia, a three day miracle play cycle written in Cornish for performance in West Cornwall'.<sup>107</sup> Images depicting the Fall are, unusually, painted on the dado of a roodscreen, at Bradninch in Devon. Figures of Adam and Eve are depicted in panels which show the Temptation of Eve (Fig. 3.25) and the Expulsion from Eden (Fig. 3.26). Also shown is the murder of Abel by Cain, emphasising the suffering and death introduced into the world by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. These images of sin occur just to the south of images of the Annunciation and Visitation and highlight the virtues of the figures of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, mother of St John the Baptist, in these panels.

The parish church in late medieval Devon, then, was intended to act as a vehicle through which sinful man, who had brought illness, suffering and death into the world through his disobedience, might seek forgiveness, healing and, ultimately, reunion with God.<sup>108</sup> Clergy and parishioners supported parish worship with images of Christ, the Virgin and saints, who would protect them in this world and whose intercession might be sought for their redemption in the next. Images of sin were introduced as a necessary contrast to the holy figures in order that parishioners might recognise the difference between good and evil and be reminded of the consequences of each. Although a measure of community pride and a reference to the social stratification of the parish might be detected in its fabric, furnishings and decoration, the overwhelming motivation for investment in the parish church in the late medieval period

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<sup>106</sup> The iconography of this window will be discussed further in the section on foliate heads in Chapter Four.

<sup>107</sup> Mattingly, 2000, p.16.

<sup>108</sup> Duffy, 2006, p.293–4.

appears to have been a desire for salvation of the soul, and it is in this context that many figural roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon may best be analysed.



Fig. 3.1  
Seven Sacraments window, stained glass, Doddiscombsleigh north aisle,  
c.1480.



Fig. 3.2

Figure of Christ from Seven Sacraments window,  
stained glass, Cadbury chancel, c.1480.





Fig. 3.3  
Figure of Christ from Cadbury with Seven Sacraments window from  
Doddiscombsleigh.





Fig. 3.4  
Robert Tubb, vicar of St Neot 1508–1544,  
stained glass, St Neot south aisle, early 16<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 3.5  
Ralph Harys, glass-painter, and his wife,  
stained glass, St Neot north aisle, early 16<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 3.6  
The wives of the western part of the parish,  
stained glass, St Neot north aisle, 1528.





Fig. 3.7  
The 'sisters',  
stained glass, St Neot north aisle, 1529.





Fig. 3.8

Detail of the St Neot window donated by the young men of the parish, stained glass, St Neot north aisle, 1530.





Fig. 3.9  
Figure of Christ showing his wounds from a Judgement scene,  
stained glass, Bere Ferrers chancel, 14<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 3.10  
Fragment from a Judgement window,  
stained glass, Bere Ferrers chancel, 14<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 3.11  
Fragment from a Judgement window,  
stained glass, Bere Ferrers chancel, 14<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 3.12  
Fragment from a Judgement window,  
stained glass, Bere Ferrers chancel, 14<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 3.13  
Outer south aisle of Cullompton church,  
built for cloth merchant John Lane, c. 1526.





Fig. 3.14  
Outer south chantry chapel of Tiverton church,  
built for wool merchant John Greneway, c. 1517.



Fig. 3.15  
Assumption of the Virgin, sculpted panel (much restored), Beer stone,  
Tiverton south porch, c.1517.





Fig. 3.16  
Outer south aisle of Tavistock church,  
built for Constance Coffyn, c.1445.



Fig. 3.17  
Morebath church.





Fig. 3.18  
Painted wood screen, Holne nave, c.1480–1500.



Fig. 3.19  
The Coronation of the Virgin, wood screen painting,  
Holne nave, c.1480–1500.





Fig. 3.20  
St Sidwell, St Anthony and St Sebastian,  
rood screen painting,  
Holne north aisle, c.1480–1500.





Fig. 3.21  
St Roche and St Margaret,  
rood screen painting,  
Holne south aisle, c.1480–1500.



Fig. 3.22  
St Apollonia,  
rood screen painting,  
Holne south aisle,  
c.1480–1500.



Fig. 3.23  
Lust, Seven Deadly Sins wall painting,  
Branscombe nave north wall, c.1450.





Fig. 3.24  
The Fall, stained glass,  
St Neot south aisle, east window, late 15<sup>th</sup>/early 16<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 3.25  
The Temptation of Eve,  
rood screen painting, Bradninch nave,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 3.26  
The Expulsion,  
rood screen painting, Bradninch nave,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C.

## **Chapter Four** **Iconography**

Chapter One outlined the limitations of a traditional art historical approach to a study of roof bosses which focuses on style and iconography, but which fails to consider other aspects such as their reception. Accurate description and evidence-based interpretation of the carvings are, however, essential to an understanding of the social and religious function of roof bosses, the subject of Chapter Five. This chapter will, therefore, describe specific motifs carved on roof bosses in the churches of Devon, note their frequency, and offer interpretations based on an examination of these motifs in other media or forms, including manuscript illustrations, wall and rood screen paintings, stained glass, other carvings in stone, wood and alabaster, textiles, and graffiti, and their association with the spoken and written word in the form of biblical text, sermons, prayers and confessional dialogue, and poems, plays and other popular literature.<sup>1</sup> It will also note links between particular carvings and specific areas of the church building.

Understanding motifs is, however, not without its problems. While some were widely used in the medieval church and are well documented, for example, the pelican in her piety, others are frustratingly elusive, for example, the three hares. In the medieval period, as now, motifs could be interpreted in a number of different ways, and so, with loss of context and the passage of 500 years or more, interpretation today is made even more difficult. Several motifs, including the foliate head, have well-developed post-medieval mythologies which confuse the issue further.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not clearly not possible within the bounds of this thesis to offer a comprehensive review of all the different forms in which a motif may be found; what is offered here is a representative sample.

The interpretations which follow, therefore, are just that, interpretations based on a fragmentary knowledge of period, place, people, and pictorial conventions, and not statements of fixed meaning. While the medicinal nature of religion in the Diocese of Exeter during the late medieval period must be borne in mind, and may be the defining factor in the employment of many motifs, it must also be acknowledged that, in a few cases, the choice of motif may not have been made at the instigation of clergy or laity, but may have rested entirely with its carver.<sup>2</sup>

The figural bosses of the churches of Devon are classified here into ten main categories, which are further subdivided, with the number in brackets indicating the number of parishes in which each motif survives. Maps of the distribution of specific motifs which survive in seven or more parishes are included in the Introduction to the Gazetteer. In most cases, however, while certain patterns may be noted, the fragmentary survival of bosses means that it is not possible to make any definitive statement regarding their distribution. Nevertheless, the maps do perhaps show, in some cases, that neighbouring parishes may have influenced each other in their choice of carvings. Where a motif is extant in fewer than seven churches, these are identified below in the section on the description of the motif. The categories, in order of frequency, are:

i) **Human heads** including foliate heads (47); heads with tongues extended (30); crowned heads other than saints (16 male, 3 female); four heads meeting at their chins or at their crowns (10); heads engaged in idle talk (9); pope's heads, bishop's heads, a figure of a bishop, mitres and papal crowns (7); and

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<sup>2</sup> However, the carver, as a Christian, was aware that his work would be viewed not only by his fellow Christians but by God himself, and also within the context of other imagery within the church.

female heads with horned headdresses (at least 2 and probably more). Four individual bosses are also considered here: a boss in the south chancel chapel at Meavy, of a human head with a mouse's head in one ear and its tail in the other; a female head with headdress and two dogs in the north aisle at Ugborough; a boss of a head with open mouth and small figure alongside in the nave at Wembworthy; and a tricephalic boss in the nave at Braunton.

**ii) Beasts and birds** including the three hares (16); the pelican (13); lion (12); unidentified birds (11); dragon (10); double-headed eagle (7); deer (7); sow and farrow (4); owl (3); goat (3); unicorn (3); mermaid (2); antelope (2); eagle (2); elephant (1); camel (1); griffin (1); lynx (1); four horses (1); Biblical locust (1).

**iii) Heraldic devices** including shields which may have been painted with identifying devices, now missing (18); shields which are carved with devices (other than Bouchier, Courtenay, Arms of the Bishops of Exeter or Stafford) (13); the Bouchier knot (11); the Arms or Badge of Courtenay, Earls of Devon (7); Arms of the Bishops of Exeter (at least 2, possibly more); and the Stafford knot (2).

**iv) The life of Christ** including symbols of the Passion (13); the wounds of Christ (8: 4 with all five wounds, and 4 with the wounded heart only); the Holy Name of Jesus: IHC or IHS (7); figures of Christ (5); and the Agnus Dei (4).

**v) Angels** including those holding shields (9); those holding scrolls (3); accompanying the Virgin (2); and single figures of angels (1 and possibly another).

**vi) The Virgin Mary** including figures of the Virgin (5, possibly 6); a lily in a pot (1); a crowned M (1); and MR for Maria Regina (1).

**vii) Saints** including the symbols of the four evangelists (3); St John (2); St John the Baptist (2); St Catherine (2, with possible Catherine wheels in another

1); St Anne (1); St Christopher (1); St Eligius (1); and the four Doctors of the Church: Saints Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome (1).

viii) **Devils** (4), with the possibility of another 1.

ix) **Initials and merchants marks** (6); **inscriptions** (1); **miscellaneous objects**, including the sun, moon and stars (5); wheel and tools (1); books (1).

x) **Full or demi-figures of men and women, other than Christ, the Virgin or saints** including wrestlers (1), the Man in the Moon (1) (another is carved with face only); and a female figure with a distaff, fox and geese (1).

### **i) Human heads**

Heads, in various guises, form the largest category of figural motifs carved on roof bosses in parish churches in Devon. For many carvings, however, specific associations are unclear and their significance uncertain, and, for this reason, the distribution of all bosses carved with heads has not been mapped in the gazetteer.

#### **Foliate heads**

The most frequently occurring single figural motif in Devon is that of the foliate head (Figs. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4), which is usually male in appearance, and has branches and leaves sprouting from one or more of its orifices. Usually this is from the mouth, although in some examples leaves may emerge from eyes, ears, or nose or any combination of these. The motif occurs, at least once, on roof bosses in 47 of those churches which are documented in the gazetteer, and on wall plates in six: Huntshaw, Milton Abbot (Fig. 4.5), Sidbury, Stoodleigh, Sutcombe (Fig. 4.6) and North Bovey.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> North Bovey is the only church having a foliate head image on a boss and wall plate, although the small carvings now on the wall plate may have been brought from elsewhere – see Chapter Six.

C.J.P. Cave also reported 'head bosses...with mouth foliage' at the Church of St Lawrence in Exeter which was destroyed by bombing on 4th May 1942.<sup>4</sup> The type of leaf varies and is often difficult to identify, although maple, oak, hawthorn, buttercup, mugwort, wormwood, ivy, vine and hop have all been identified in English examples. Very often the face has a distinctively furrowed brow as in examples from Ashburton (Fig. 4.7) and North Bovey (Fig. 4.8). Occasionally foliage sprouts from the ears only and the tongue is extended, as in Bampton (Fig. 4.9). The heads are also crowned in two cases, at Braunton (Fig. 4.10) and Spreyton (Fig. 4.11).<sup>5</sup>

In addition to appearing on roof bosses and wall plates, the image is carved in wood on screens, as at Combe Martin, pulpits and bench ends, and in stone on fonts, capitals, as at Frithelstock (Fig. 4.12) and Woodbury (Fig. 4.13), and on tombs, as on the monument of Sir William Hankford, at Monkleigh, d. 1423 (Fig. 4.14). Foliate head bosses are found in the chancel, chancel chapel, nave, transepts, aisles and porches, so it would seem that the motif was not restricted to any particular area of the church and was relevant to patrons, clergy and parishioners.<sup>6</sup> The heads have long been noted in Devon and elsewhere, and it

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<sup>4</sup> C.J.P. Cave, Card index for the church of St Lawrence (*sic*), Exeter, Society of Antiquaries Library MS 943/8.

<sup>5</sup> The Bampton head may also be wearing some form of coronet, although it is not clearly carved as a crown. The Braunton head is slightly leonine. Not considered here are heads which are surrounded by leaves but where foliage does not sprout from the orifices. After the main figure is carved, the background of many bosses is filled with trailing foliage. This may be to provide a textured background for the main image, or may have deeper significance, but to differentiate would be extremely difficult. There do not appear to be any faces composed of leaves on late medieval bosses in Devon.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Hayman states that foliate heads, which he refers to as Green men (see below), 'are not randomly dispersed on roofs. Roofs were carefully constructed so that Green men often appear on the margins of the main subject matter'. However, Hayman also asserts that: 'There is less discernible structure to the placing of green men in parish church roofs than the larger churches' (but see this thesis Chapter Six for a discussion of the position of foliate head roof bosses at South Tawton church). Hayman discusses Devon Green Man roof bosses and reproduces images of those from Spreyton, South Tawton and Sampford Courtenay. Hayman, R., *The Green Man*, Oxford: Shire Publications, 2010, pp. 26, 30, 31, 51.

is interesting to consider, briefly, their historiography, before exploring their use and associations in the church in Devon in the late medieval period.

In *Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral* published in 1910, Prideaux and Shafto record their thoughts on what they term foliate masks. Describing an early fourteenth-century roof boss on the south side of the Presbytery, so occurring in the most hallowed part of the cathedral, they state:

It is a good example of the entirely grotesque and repellent type of expression; the foliage, sprouting from mouth and ears and forming a wreath round the mask, takes the place of hair and beard. It is often stated that this arrangement is intended to be symbolic of the creative energy of the Deity, especially where, as in many cases, the foliage-stalks issue from the eyes and ears as well as from the mouth; but this is hardly credible in view of the fact that there are so many instances in which the foliage-hair is thus arranged in connection with a grotesque and distorted visage without a trace of any attempt at portrayal of divinity in its treatment.<sup>7</sup>

Prideaux and Shafto assert that: 'Whatever significance may have been imported into this device by medieval workers, its form is merely derived from the foliate masks of classic times'. Prideaux and Shafto are of the opinion that their audience would be 'charmed with these medieval grotesques'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1939, in an article in *Folklore*, Lady Raglan draws attention to the foliate heads found in medieval church architecture and gives them a title which was to influence the course of further studies. Raglan recalls that:

It is now about eight years since my attention was first drawn by the Revd. J. Griffith... himself a folklorist, to a curious carving. It is a man's face, with oak leaves growing from the mouth and ears, and completely circling the head. Mr Griffith suggested that it was intended to symbolise

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<sup>7</sup> Prideaux, E. K., and Holt Shafto, G.R., *Bosses & Corbels of Exeter Cathedral: An Illustrated Study in Decorative & Symbolic Design*. Exeter: Commin; London: Chatto & Windus, 1910, p.55.

<sup>8</sup> Prideaux and Shafto, 1910, pp.66–67.

the spirit of inspiration, but it seemed to me certain that it was a man and not a spirit, and moreover that it was a “Green Man”.<sup>9</sup>

Raglan continues:

This figure, I am convinced, is neither a figment of the imagination nor a symbol, but is taken from real life, and the question is whether there was any figure from which it could have been taken. The answer, I think, is that there is only one of sufficient importance, the figure variously known as the Green Man, Jack-in-the-Green, Robin Hood, the King of May, and the Garland, who is the central figure in the Mayday celebrations throughout Northern and Central Europe.<sup>10</sup>

In his general survey of bosses published in 1948, C.J.P. Cave concurs:

Many of these figures recall the Jack-in-the-Green which was a familiar figure on May Day in England fifty years ago...Jack-in-the-Green was no doubt a survival of pre-Christian tree worship which had filtered down through the Middle Ages even into the nineteenth century. There can be little doubt that in the Middle Ages such survivals of an ancient cult must have been still more numerous. Tree worship was intimately connected with fertility rites, and Jack-in-the-Green and the rites of the May King are generally held to be so connected. It seems therefore that it is quite a possible suggestion that the sprouting faces may have been intended for fertility figures or charms of some sort by their carvers...Sometimes a king is shown with mouth foliage....if the above theory is at all correct, these may represent the King-of-the-May.<sup>11</sup>

Cave notes that ‘Quite independently Lady Raglan came to the same conclusion as to the origin of what she calls “the Green Man”’.<sup>12</sup>

Kathleen Basford’s *The Green Man*, published in 1978, attempts to trace the history and development of the image taking in a wide variety of leafy heads from many periods and cultures. These include Romanesque beast heads which disgorge foliage and also many heads which do not disgorge foliage but appear as faces composed of leaves, as in Villard de Honnecourt’s *Tête de*

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<sup>9</sup> Raglan, Lady, ‘The “Green Man” in Church Architecture’, in *Folklore*, 50, 1939, p.45–57, on p.45.

<sup>10</sup> Raglan, 1939, p.50.

<sup>11</sup> Cave, C.J.P., *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches: An Aspect of Gothic Sculpture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p.67.

<sup>12</sup> Cave, 1948, p.68.



*Feuilles*, c. 1235. Basford remarks on the ambivalence of the image which can be 'at once both beautiful and sinister'.<sup>13</sup>

Basford recognises that:

Devon is one of the best of all the English counties for studying variations on the Green Man theme. There are at least seventeen Green Men in Exeter Cathedral, but it is in the country churches that some of the strangest mutants appear. The craftsmen who carved these heads in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries improvised very freely on the theme, drawing on all the resources of the iconography, not only the frown, the baleful glare, the unfocused eyes but also the tongue sticking out and the fierce teeth (these features, occasionally attributes of leaf demons, but seldom if ever seen in the foliate heads of the thirteenth century, became common again in the later Middle Ages).....The making of the Green Man was almost a folk art in these parts, and to observe many variations is like hearing an old folk song sung, not in unison, but by different singers, one after the other, each adding a new verse as he makes it up on the spot.<sup>14</sup>

Basford is wary of drawing conclusions as to the significance of the foliate head but notes that:

It is obvious that these Green Men do not all have precisely the same meaning. Some are demons; some probably represent lost souls or sinners. (The leaves coming from the eyes, ears and mouth may sometimes allude to sins committed by these sensory organs – particularly the tongue).<sup>15</sup>

In his *Liminal Images* published in 2005, Alex Woodcock devotes a chapter to a discussion of 'Foliage Disgorgers and Foliate Creatures'. Like Basford, he explores a wide range of images which combine animals or humans with foliage. Discussing foliate heads of the Romanesque, Woodcock notes that these are more likely to be beast heads than human heads, disgorging interlaced or scrolling foliage.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Basford, K., *The Green Man*, Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1978, p.19.

<sup>14</sup> Basford, 1978, pp.19–20.

<sup>15</sup> Basford, 1978, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Woodcock, A., *Liminal Images. Aspects of Medieval Architectural Sculpture in the South Of England from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Centuries*, BAR British Series 386, Oxford: John and Erica Hedges Ltd, 2005, p.52.

Woodcock states that:

...whereas the typically abstract, dispassionately gazing Romanesque heads appear distinctly other than human, perhaps hinting at the invariability of the afterlife, the later medieval examples foreground the physicality of death... [and are] powerfully evocative of resurrection and immortality...<sup>17</sup>

For Woodcock:

...wherever the Green Man appears we must be aware of the presence of an inexplicable other, whether this is the otherness of dying to this world to be reborn in another, of the familiar yet mysterious force that animates all life, or of other uncharted realms. The image is itself liminal, evocative of processes unknown and unknowable, located at the outermost edges of experience.<sup>18</sup>

While Prideaux and Shafto draw a veil over the significance of the foliate head, they do at least consider how it may have appeared to its audience, although their assertion that the audience may have been 'charmed' by the image has little to recommend it. Raglan and Cave were undoubtedly labouring under Frazerian influence, and their conclusions have long since been called into question.<sup>19</sup> Judge notes, in 1991, that Raglan's Green Man is 'a case study in the "invention of tradition"'.<sup>20</sup> However, the myth has proved remarkably resilient and has been oft repeated. Basford and Woodcock do allow for a Christian interpretation of the foliate head but, as their studies consider a broad range of images over an extended time frame, they leave open questions as to its significance.

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<sup>17</sup> Woodcock, 2005, p.61.

<sup>18</sup> Woodcock, 2005, p.61.

<sup>19</sup> J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, a monumental work published in its third edition in twelve volumes (1906–1915), postulated that religions are rooted in ancient fertility cults centred on a dying and reborn god of vegetation.

<sup>20</sup> Judge, R., 'The Green Man Revisited' in Hutchings, J., and Wood, J., (eds.), *Colour and Appearance in Folklore*, London: The Folklore Society, 1991, pp. 51–55, on p.51.

This thesis is concerned with the foliate head in the late medieval parish church in Devon. The influence of Exeter Cathedral is probably significant here as it has long been recognised as having an unusually high concentration of images of foliate heads.<sup>21</sup> Among the earliest examples on a boss is that at the west end of the Lady Chapel (Fig. 4.15), and this will be examined in its context for any insights that may be offered on the use of the image elsewhere in the cathedral and in other churches in Devon.

The boss in the Lady Chapel is carved in stone and was repainted under G. Gilbert Scott in the late nineteenth century and restored again in 1968.<sup>22</sup> It portrays a head, male in appearance, with furrowed brow. The mouth twists and gapes with an abundance of foliage emerging from between the teeth and wrapping around the head. This foliage is misrepresented by its modern paintwork, as it can be identified as *artemisia* or wormwood, which has large feathery leaves rather than the long stems and small leaves with which it is now painted. Before discussing the iconography of the boss, its context will be established.

The Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral was roofed in 1304 and it is therefore likely that the vaulting and bosses were constructed and carved during the last decade of the thirteenth century or very early in the fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Planned during the rule of Bishop Bronescombe, whose episcopacy lasted from 1258 to 1280, the main building phase took place during the episcopate of his

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<sup>21</sup> On the Exeter Cathedral Keystones and Carvings website, a search for 'Green Man' locates 25 examples. Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>. Accessed 16.12.10.

<sup>22</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>. Accessed 15.11.09.

<sup>23</sup> Jansen, V., 'The Design and Building Sequence of the Eastern Arm of Exeter Cathedral, c.1270–1310: A Qualified Study' in Kelly, F., (ed.), *Medieval Art and Architecture at Exeter Cathedral*, Leeds: The British Archaeological Association, 1991, p.44; earlier examples of foliate heads occur on misericords from the choir-stalls dated to the mid-thirteenth century.

successor, Peter Quinel (r. 1280–1291), and after Quinel's death, during the rule of Thomas Bitton (r.1291–1307). Quinel had served as a Canon under Bronescombe and may well have helped to plan the chapel.

There are 23 full roof bosses in the Lady Chapel, nine of which are purely foliate with most of these concentrated across the central section of the roof. At the east end, nearest to the altar, there are figural bosses carved with images of St John the Evangelist; the head of Christ with nimbus; two winged dragons and two maned creatures, now painted green, but which may be lions and intended to represent the fight between good and evil; the winged lion of St Mark; the winged ox of St. Luke; and the angel of St Matthew.

Towards the west end figural bosses reappear, those closer to the centre of the chapel being two goats eating ivy leaves, and a bull with a cow and suckling calf. These images and the other animal images in the chapel may be derived from medieval bestiaries. Although the bestiaries were an account of the natural world, their main purpose, according to Richard Barber, was:

the edification and instruction of sinful man. The Creator had made animals, birds and fishes, and had given them their natures or habits, so that the sinner could see the world of mankind reflected in the kingdom of nature and learn the way to redemption by the examples of different creatures. Each creature is therefore a kind of moral entity, bearing a message for the human reader.<sup>24</sup>

The goats on the Lady Chapel boss may be mountain goats, *caper*, which, on account of their keen eyesight could recognise hunters from a distance and could therefore signify Christ since he 'saw through the wiles of those who betrayed Him'.<sup>25</sup> The boss of the cow and calf may be explained in a quotation

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<sup>24</sup> Barber, R., *Bestiary. Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library Oxford MS Bodley 764*, London: The Folio Society, 1992, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> Barber, 1992, p. 55.

from *Piers Plowman* which asserts that 'the calf stands for the purity of life in those who administer God's laws. Just as a cow nourishes the calf with mother's milk until it is fully grown, so love and integrity sustain the righteous'.<sup>26</sup> However, interpretation of creatures which derive from the bestiary is often problematic, since the bestiary can often give several explanations of their symbolism, which are in some cases positive and in others negative.

The single boss at the extreme west end is less ambiguous. Four birds perch on what appears to be the body of a fox (Fig. 4.16). The Aberdeen Bestiary gives the following account of the fox:

The word *vulpis*, fox, is, so to say, *volupis*. For it is fleet-footed and never runs in a straight line but twists and turns. It is a clever, crafty animal. When it is hungry and can find nothing to eat, it rolls itself in red earth so that it seems to be stained with blood, lies on the ground and holds its breath, so that it seems scarcely alive. When birds see that it is not breathing, that it is flecked with blood and that its tongue is sticking out of its mouth, they think that it is dead and descend to perch on it. Thus it seizes them and devours them. The Devil is of a similar nature. For to all who live by the flesh he represents himself as dead until he has them in his gullet and punishes them. But to spiritual men, living in the faith, he is truly dead and reduced to nothing. Those who wish to do the Devil's work will die, as the apostle says: 'For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' (Romans, 8:13) And David says: 'They shall go into the lower parts of the earth: they shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes'. (Psalms, 63:9–10).<sup>27</sup>

Between the bull, cow and calf boss, and that of the fox, five bosses run from the north side of the chapel to the south side. Those on the south side are two bearded human heads wearing distinctive headdresses, one a knobbed hat and the other a headband, which may identify them as a Jew (Fig. 4.17) and a Saracen (Fig. 4.18). In a thirteenth-century stained glass panel from Laon Cathedral, which illustrates the story of Theophilus, the Jewish magus wears a

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<sup>26</sup> Langland, W., *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, edited by A. V. C. Schmidt, Oxford World's Classics paperback edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.182.

<sup>27</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/16r.hti> Accessed 15.11.09.

similar knobbed hat as he watches Theophilus making his pact with the Devil.<sup>28</sup> Saracens are clearly identified in fourteenth-century manuscript illustrations by the *tortil* or turban which they wear.<sup>29</sup> Although neither head has the heavy facial features often associated with depictions of Jews and Saracens, and their colouring is modern so cannot offer any additional evidence, both heads have fierce expressions which might mark them as enemies of the Faith.

As Ruth Melinkoff notes:

From a medieval Christian viewpoint, all enemies of the Faith – pagans, saracens, Jews, and others – were closely allied with the world of hell; they did the devil's work on earth, but, ultimately condemned, they were sent to a terrifying hell to be tortured by demons who were reflections of themselves.<sup>30</sup>

During the main building phase of the Lady Chapel, Bishop Quinel had issued his statutes, which contained harsh rules on the treatment of Jews in the Diocese of Exeter. Three years after the statutes had been written, in 1290, Edward I ordered the expulsion of all Jews from England.

The central boss in this section, so positioned directly between the foliate head and possible Jew's head, is of four heads, two female and two male, with two of the heads wearing coronets. The heads are surrounded by a vine and grapes, indicative of the Eucharist. The boss on the north side at the west end, adjacent to the boss of the foliate head, is a carving of four large fish devouring four smaller fish. These may be aspidochelone, a variety of whale, which emit a sweet breath to lure smaller fish into their mouths before swallowing them,

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<sup>28</sup> Strickland, D., *Saracens, Demons, and Jews. Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, illustration on p.123.

<sup>29</sup> Strickland, 2003, pp.181–182.

<sup>30</sup> Melinkoff, R., 'Demonic Winged Headgear', *Viator* 16, 1985, pp.367–81, on p. 375.

bigger fish being wise enough to avoid this fate (Fig. 4.19). The smaller fish represent those whose faith is not firm and who yield to the temptations of the Devil. The action depicted on this boss resonates with depictions of Judgement scenes in which sinners are swallowed by the gaping mouth of Hell. The juxtaposition of the aspidochelone boss and the bursting forth of greenery from the foliate head boss is thus interesting, focusing as both do on opposing actions of the mouth – while one admits, the other emits.

The open mouth is an aspect of the foliate head that has received little attention. However, it is an aspect which may be the key to understanding the image. In Matthew, Chapter 15, verses 18–20, Christ says:

the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man. For from the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man.<sup>31</sup>

In Luke, Chapter 6, verse 45, Christ says:

A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.<sup>32</sup>

This link between mouth and the heart is interesting, there being a roof boss in the Exchequer Arch at Lincoln Cathedral carved with a heart out of which leaves emerge.

The key role played by the mouth in the themes of sin and salvation may be seen in a miniature from the Archbishop of Salzburg's Missal of 1481 (Fig. 4.20), which has been described as having 'virtually all the relevant images of

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew, Chap. 15, v. 18–20, in *Bible, Douay Rheims Edition*, Duarte: Catholic Treasures, 2006, p.1280.

<sup>32</sup> Luke, Chap. 6, v.45, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1358.

the Fall and Redemption...piled into a single picture'.<sup>33</sup> At the centre of the miniature is a tree upon which are illustrated images of the crucified Christ and the round wafers of the host which represent his body. Also depicted on the tree are the forbidden fruit and a skull. Adam lies asleep at the foot of the tree but, below the skull, Eve takes the forbidden fruit from the serpent and offers it to mankind, thus delivering death. At the same time, the Virgin Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, holds out a host to the faithful thereby offering the hope of salvation through the body of her son. The orifice through which sin was introduced thus becomes that through which redemption might be gained, but this might only be achieved if the sinner is truly penitent.

The tree, like the mouth, has a dual role, and this is related in the legend of the Holy Rood in the apocryphal fourth- or fifth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus*, quoted by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*.<sup>34</sup> The story, albeit in a slightly different version, occurs again in a late fourteenth-century three-day play cycle, probably from Glasney, Cornwall, known as the *Ordinalia*. Both legends relate how Adam, approaching death, sends his youngest son, Seth, to Paradise for the Oil of Mercy which has been promised to him at the end of the world. Seth sees a barren tree at the top of which is the Christ child, who will be Saviour of the world and is the Oil of Mercy. In the version in the *Golden Legend*, Seth receives a branch from the tree under which the original sin was committed. After burying his father, he plants this over Adam's grave.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Murdoch, B., *Adam's Grace: Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature*, Woodbridge: DS Brewer, 2000, p.4.

<sup>34</sup> Ryan, W.G., (trans.), Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, Vol. I, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.277.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan, Vol 1, 1993, p.277.



In the version in the *Ordinalia*, Seth is told to take three seeds of the apple eaten by his father Adam, and to place them, when he dies, between his tongue and his teeth.<sup>36</sup> This latter version is shown in late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century stained glass in the church at St Neot in Cornwall (Fig. 4.21). Both stories relate that the wood which grows up from the branches or seeds eventually becomes the cross upon which Christ is crucified. Thus the tree which is central to the story of the Fall becomes the tree upon which mankind is redeemed.

Brian Murdoch notes that:

The motif of the tree growing from Adam's mouth is well-developed iconographically, and Adam's skull is linked with the place of the Crucifixion, Golgotha. Adam's skull is frequently placed at the foot of the Cross in art, and the blood from Christ's feet sometimes flows into the mouth of the skull as a Eucharistic symbol.<sup>37</sup>

Although Adam's soul is initially dragged to Hell, Christ descends between his crucifixion and resurrection leading the lost souls out of Hell, usually depicted as a gaping maw, again reinforcing the importance of the mouth in the Christian story.

The mouth and the tree are thus sites closely linked with both sin and salvation and both feature in medieval wall paintings. A late fourteenth-century wall painting in Crostwright church in Norfolk shows a tree of sins emerging from the mouth of Hell (Fig. 4.22). There appear to be two figures to left and right of the trunk who may be Adam and Eve.<sup>38</sup> Another painting from North Cove in Suffolk

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<sup>36</sup> Halliday, F.E. (trans. and ed.), *The Legend of the Rood*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1955, p.64.

<sup>37</sup> Murdoch, B. 'Legends of the Holy Rood in Cornish Drama', *Studia Celtica Japonica*, 1997, Vol.9, pp. 19–34, on p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Miriam Gill notes that the tree of sins is found in at least nineteen extant medieval wall paintings in England. Gill, M.C., *Late Medieval Wall Painting in England: Content and Context*

shows the Harrowing of Hell with Christ leading souls out of the Hell mouth.<sup>39</sup> Similar paintings almost certainly appeared in the parish churches of Devon, although very few wall paintings remain in the county, having been washed over during the Reformation and then subsequently lost when plaster was stripped from walls during nineteenth-century restorations. A tree of sins wall painting, in poor condition, does, however, survive in Poundstock, Cornwall.

Wall paintings were large scale and the motifs used reflected this. Narratives with figures several metres high were common, as in the painting of the tree of sins at Crostwright. However, where space was restricted, as on a roof boss, motifs had to be adapted accordingly and the imagery abbreviated. Here a human head might be used rather than a full figure and branches and leaves rather than a complete tree.<sup>40</sup>

The sculpted or carved head was extraordinarily powerful in the late medieval period since it was believed by many theologians to be the core of individual identity and the seat of the soul, which, after death, would leave the body through the mouth. It also housed most of the sensory organs and, from the beginning of the thirteenth century, 'treatises with schemas mapping the sins to the senses became common'.<sup>41</sup>

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(c.1350–c.1530), unpublished Ph.D thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2002, appendix, pp.517–521.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.paintedchurch.org/norcove3.htm>. Accessed 17.11.09.

<sup>40</sup> Even so it would be wrong to assume that the foliate head could be interpreted solely in terms of the Adam/Seth story, or as a condensation of the Tree of Sins, since this accords the image a fixed meaning, when its very 'indeterminacy of meaning' may have been central to its function – discussed in the next chapter. The phrase 'indeterminacy of meaning' is used in Carruthers, M., *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 336.

<sup>41</sup> Woolgar, C.M., *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006, p.11.

The senses were usually listed as five: vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch but often, a sixth, speech, was included, sometimes combined with taste as 'the mouth'. In a fifteenth century discussion of chastity, it was noted that it was important to:

Keep thy sight from lecherous sights and thine ears from lecherous hearing and thy mouth from lecherous speech and thy nose from dishonest smelling and thy limbs, hands and mouth and other members from lecherous touching. These are thy five wits and gates through which the fiend entereth into the heart.<sup>42</sup>

As Kathleen Basford suggests, it is entirely possible, then, that the leaves which burst forth from eyes, ears, nose or mouth of foliate heads, may allude to sins committed through these orifices.

To return to the image of the foliate head in the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral, the mouth can be seen to exude the herb *artemisia* or wormwood. The taste of this particularly bitter herb may account for the furrowed brow and twisted mouth but the herb itself was credited with healing powers. In *Piers Plowman*, it is stated that grace acts as a healing herb, and that 'speech is a plant that springs from grace – it is God's minstrel, heaven's proper pastime'.<sup>43</sup>

Given that Bishop Quinel may have helped to plan the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral, and is buried at its east end, it might be expected that its images would reflect his desire for the cure of souls in the diocese. The foliate head in the Lady Chapel appears to be linked to both sin and salvation. In order to attain salvation the body must expurgate sin, considered in the Diocese of Exeter and elsewhere, as a sickness, by bringing it out through the mouth in confession. As William of Auvergne (d.1249) states:

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<sup>42</sup> My modernisation from Woolgar, 2006, p.12.

<sup>43</sup> Langland, 2000, p.128; Langland, 2000, p.90.

the belly of the heart, or conscience, is emptied or relieved from vices or sins, by the agency of the mouth, by speaking or revealing these things to a priest. Therefore just as someone with an upset stomach, straining to expel what is harmful or unsuitable to it, distends his belly and opens his mouth wide to get rid of it, so too someone with an upset to a noble and holy conscience strains and searches the belly of his heart to throw out and expel detestable and filthy vices and sins.<sup>44</sup>

The foliate head in Devon, then, in its human form, may best be interpreted in the context of penitence and the hope of redemption. Chaucer's comments on penitence in *The Parson's Tale* might support such an interpretation:

....Penitence...may be likned unto a tree. The roote of this tree is Contricioun, that hideth hym in the herte of hym that is verray repentaunt, right as the roote of a tree hydeth hym in the erthe. Of the roote of Contricioun spryngeth a stalke that bereth braunches and leues of Confessioun, and fruyt of satisfacioun...Of this roote eek spryngeth a seed of grace, the which seed is mooder of sikernesse, and this seed is egre and hoot. The grace of this seed spryngeth of God thurgh remembrance of the day of doom and on the peynes of helle...The heete of this seed is the love of God and the desiring of the joye perdurable. This heete draweth the herte of a man to God and dooth hym haten his synne...from that tyme that he loveth sadly oure Lord Jhesu Crist, and desireth the lif perdurable, ther nys to him no thyng moore abhomynable...Penaunce is the tree of lyf to hem that it receyven, and he that holdeth hym in verray penitence is blessed, after the sentence of Salomon.<sup>45</sup>

Another interesting use of the foliate head in Exeter Cathedral is that on an early fourteenth-century corbel in the quire (Fig. 4.23). The corbel supports an image of the Virgin carrying the Christ Child, above which are censuring angels. Of this image, Basford states: 'The Virgin treads on the Green Man as she might tread on the head of the old serpent, the tempter himself, lurking in the Tree of Life'.<sup>46</sup> Basford's interpretation accords with Vulgate Psalm 109 with its

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, L., 'William of Auvergne and Confession' in Biller, P. and Minnis, A.J. (eds.) *Handling Sin. Confession in the Middle Ages*, York: York Medieval Press, 1998, p.95.

<sup>45</sup> Chaucer, G., '*The Parson's Tale*' in Benson, L., (ed.) *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.289. *The Parson's Tale* is a 'handbook on penance' and uses material which Chaucer sourced from earlier treatises, see Benson, 1988, p. 956. 'Mooder of sikernesse' may be understood as 'mother of security', 'perdurable' as eternal.

<sup>46</sup> Basford, 1978, p.20.

exhortation to 'make thy enemies thy footstool', taken from the biblical tradition that conquerors would place their feet on the necks of the conquered.<sup>47</sup> The image of the victor and the vanquished was, of course, familiar in the church in the many images of Saints Michael and George standing on the dragons which they had slain. The use of the foliate head on the Exeter quire corbel is replicated in Atherington church where shield-bearing angels stand on corbels carved with the image (Fig. 4.24).

The prevalence of the foliate head at Exeter Cathedral, and its particular usage there, may well have influenced its dissemination throughout Devon, since the Bishop of Exeter, the Dean and Chapter, and Vicars Choral were patrons of churches in many parts of the county. Other motifs carved on bosses in the cathedral, for example the mermaid, sow and piglets and four heads bosses, are repeated across the county, although none to the extent of the foliate head.

In a single example, a full figure carved on a boss in Bridford church (Fig. 4.25) appears to excrete foliage which ties itself in knots around him. The figure is portrayed from the back, a position which Ruth Mellinkoff notes was 'used as denigration, to diminish status or to suggest immoral character'.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to human foliate heads, there are eight churches in Devon in which foliate heads in the roof display non-human characteristics. In the south transept at Atherington, the nave at South Tawton, the south aisles at Burrington and Tawstock and the south porch at Bere Ferrers are foliate beast

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<sup>47</sup> Vulgate psalm 109; Josue, Chap. 10, v. 24, *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, pp. 775 & 273.

<sup>48</sup> Mellinkoff, R., *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, p.213.

heads which have large pointed ears. The south aisle at Ilfracombe has two bosses of dragon heads disgorging foliage. A carved dragon also disgorges foliage on the wall plate at Sampford Courtenay. In the chancel at Bampton, juxtaposed with a human foliate head, is a grotesque or leonine head (Fig. 4.26) with foliage stemming from mouth and ears. A similar design is found in a small piece of fifteenth-century stained glass in Manaton church, near North Bovey (Fig. 4.27). Another leonine example in stained glass, again probably fifteenth-century in date, is located in the north transept at Tawstock. The rarity of the motif in this medium may, however, be a question of survival as glass has always been especially vulnerable during periods of iconoclasm.

### **Heads with tongues extended**

Human heads with their tongues extended are found on medieval roof bosses in at least 30 churches in Devon in a variety of designs (Figs. 4.28, 4.29, 4.30, 4.31). In ten churches, the heads are also foliate, although two churches have both foliate and non-foliate heads displaying this gesture.<sup>49</sup> Bosses with tongues extended appear much more frequently in the nave and aisles than they do in the chancel, where only three cases are recorded in the gazetteer, at Abbotsham, Bampton and Chulmleigh, and there are no examples of this gesture recorded in porch bosses.

Like the foliate head with which it is often associated, the head with its tongue extended has a sinful aspect. Biblical references to the tongue include the Epistle of St James the Apostle, which states that:

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<sup>49</sup> The heads are also foliate in Atherington, Bampton, Braunton, Kings Nympton, Newton St Cyres, North Molton, Rackenford, Rose Ash, South Tawton and Tedburn St Mary churches. The two churches which have both foliate and non-foliate heads with tongues out are Braunton and North Molton.

Even so the tongue is indeed a little member and boasteth great things. Behold how small a fire kindleth a great wood. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is placed among our members, which defileth the whole body, and inflameth the wheel of our nature, being set on fire by hell. For every kind of beasts and of birds, and of serpents, and of the rest, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue no man can tame: a restless evil, full of deadly poison. By it we bless God and the Father; and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.<sup>50</sup>

Proverbs 18:21 asserts that: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue' and Isaiah 57: 4 asks 'Upon whom have you jested? Upon whom have you opened your mouth wide, and put out your tongue? Are not you wicked children, a false seed?'<sup>51</sup>

Following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, pastoral texts became increasingly concerned with sins of the tongue. Guillaume Peyraut's *Summa de vitiis*, written in the 1230s, was hugely influential throughout the later medieval period and devoted 24 chapters to their explication. Peyraut's sins of the tongue included boasting, blasphemy, blunt threats, cursing, flattery, hypocrisy, idle words, insult, loquacity, lying, mocking good people, quarrelling, rumour and sowing discord.<sup>52</sup> For Peyraut, the tongue's propensity for evil is related to its physiology: 'it is moist and slippery and so falls easily'.<sup>53</sup> Peyraut also claims that 'the tongue, unlike the hands and other parts of the body, is naturally enclosed to show its need for confinement, its proclivity for evil'.<sup>54</sup> Edwin Craun cites Etienne's (d. 1261) *Tractatus* in which the tongue is: 'this beast God shut in the palate; he walled it in with teeth; he shut it with the gates of lips; and he

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<sup>50</sup> Epistle of St James the Apostle, Chap. 3, v. 5–10, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1604.

<sup>51</sup> Proverbs, Chap.18, v.21, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.817; Isaiah, Chap. 57, v.4, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p. 954.

<sup>52</sup> Craun, E., *Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.15–16.

<sup>53</sup> Craun, 1997, p.49.

<sup>54</sup> Craun, 1997, p.50.

guarded it with fastening bars of precepts so that it should be well defended and guarded'.<sup>55</sup> A loose tongue, then, was a dangerous beast. A boss at Milton Abbot church has a male head with tongue that is decidedly loose as it is designed to move (Fig. 4.32).

By the fourteenth century, according to Sandy Bardsley, discourse on sins of the tongue had spread from clerical to lay literature and had 'permeated not only poetry and sermons but also the law courts (whether ecclesiastical, royal or local), popular ballads and plays, regulations of manors, boroughs, and guilds, and visual representations'.<sup>56</sup>

In Devon, visual representations of sins of the tongue probably included wall paintings, although these are now lost, illustrations in the margins of manuscripts, stained glass and carving. A fifteenth-century copy of Bishop Quinel's statutes, Exeter Dean and Chapter Archives 3549a, has an illustration in red ink of a head in profile with tongue extended on folio 48. (Fig. 4.33) Stained glass in the north aisle at Bridford church (Fig. 4.34), probably fifteenth-century in date, shows a head, possibly leonine, with tongue extended, which is similar in design to two roof bosses in the nave, although these heads are human in appearance. A small carving on the coving to the rear of the screen at Coldridge shows a female head with a long tongue extended. A corbel which was in the Bishop's Muniment Room at Exeter Cathedral before its destruction by bombing in 1942, was carved with a head with extended tongue and dragons at either side.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Craun, 1997, p.50.

<sup>56</sup> Bardsley, S., *Venomous Tongues. Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, pp.26–27.

<sup>57</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>. Accessed 12.11.10.



One of the most interesting occurrences is also in the cathedral, on a label-stop over a niche in the south side of the west wall of the Lady Chapel. On one side of the niche is the mitred head of a bishop (Fig. 4.35), while on the other, a head with tongue extended appears to challenge the authority of the church (Fig. 4.36). A corresponding niche on the north side of the west wall has label-stops of a huntsman blowing his horn to one side, while on the other side a dog, ignoring the call, sits and scratches its ear.

Ruth Mellinkoff notes that: 'in portrayed religious events, especially those of the lives of Christ and the Virgin, the gesture of sticking out the tongue marked enemies of the faith as depraved'.<sup>58</sup> Mellinkoff states further that: 'sticking out the tongue became a commonplace in the visual arts of northern Europe from the fifteenth century through the sixteenth, especially in portrayals of Christ's Passion'.<sup>59</sup>

The image of a head with tongue extended was, like the foliate head, not just limited to roof bosses but was familiar to parishioners in other, sometimes more accessible, forms, as in the glass at Bridford. In addition to the human heads, lions' heads with tongues extended occur in a further five churches, at Lifton, Meavy (Fig. 4.37), Paignton (Fig. 4.38), Stowford and Wembworthy. Bosses of devils with their tongues out are found at Atherington and Ugborough, while another two devils with tongues extended feature on carvings of women with horned headdresses at East Budleigh and Ugborough.

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<sup>58</sup> Mellinkoff, 1993, p.198.

<sup>59</sup> Mellinkoff, 1993, p.199. Mellinkoff also asserts that 'the gesture of sticking out the tongue has obvious sexual connotations: the tongue imitates the phallus' (Mellinkoff, 1993, p.198), and suggests that many instances of the tongue out gesture are apotropaic. The function of motifs on bosses in Devon is discussed in Chapter Five.

### **Crowned heads (other than Christ, the Virgin and Saints)**

In *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches*, C.J.P. Cave notes that 'there are a great number of king's heads as might be expected'.<sup>60</sup> Cave suggests that 'no doubt such heads must have been meant for that of the king reigning at the time, but it is unlikely that they were in any sense of the word portraits; they were merely the conventional heads of kings'.<sup>61</sup> Crowned heads, of which there are 16 male and 3 female, are found in the chancel, nave, transepts and porch. Figs. 4.39, 4.40, 4.41 and 4.42 show the variation in the carving of these heads.

While in many churches the urge has been to identify crowned heads with historical figures, alternative explanations may be made of the bosses.<sup>62</sup> Turning to the medium of wall painting, it is noteworthy that the sin of pride is often depicted as a crowned figure. An image of the Seven Deadly Sins at Alveley, Shropshire shows a crowned female figure as Pride with dragon-like creatures coming from her lower body probably representing the other six sins. A painting at Raunds in Northamptonshire is very similar. At Hoxne, Suffolk, a male figure bearing a sceptre also represents Pride. This figure is in fragmentary state with the head now missing.<sup>63</sup> It may be that the crowns on two foliate heads, at Braunton and Spreyton, were intended to symbolise the sin of pride as may be the crowned head in the nave at South Tawton, which is juxtaposed with two foliate heads.

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<sup>60</sup> Cave, 1948, p.62.

<sup>61</sup> Cave, 1948, p.62.

<sup>62</sup> In a letter dated March 15, 1937 to C.J.P. Cave, the Reverend H. Beaumont Burnaby of Sampford Courtenay suggests that two crowned head bosses in his church 'represent an Earl and Countess of Devon'. C.J.P. Cave Archive, Society of Antiquaries Library MS 943/6. See also information on North Bovey church in Chapter Six.

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.paintedchurch.org/hoxneds.htm>. Accessed 22.11.09.

In other wall paintings, crowned males appear in images of the Three Living and Three Dead. This subject is Flemish or French in origin and dates to the later thirteenth century.<sup>64</sup> The story, which is based on five poems, *Les Trois Morts et Les Trois Vifs*, relates how three finely dressed kings, while out hunting, encounter three corpses. The corpses' utterances, often painted in speech scrolls above the figures, warn that 'as you are now so once were we, as we are now so shall you be'. The message is that death can strike at any time, and all, no matter what their status in this life, should be prepared. In Devon, Three Living and Three Dead paintings, now lost, are recorded in Barnstaple and Bovey Tracey churches (Fig. 4.43).<sup>65</sup>

Crowned heads, in some instances, may therefore refer to secular authority but with an understanding that this authority is transient and that everlasting power resides with God. This is in harmony with vulgate Psalm 145 which states: 'Put not your trust in princes: in the children of men, in whom there is no salvation'.<sup>66</sup> However, other crowned heads may refer to 'kings...who protect Holy Church and justly govern those beneath them [and who thus] receive a pardon enabling them to pass through Purgatory with ease and become sharers with the patriarchs and prophets in heaven...'<sup>67</sup>

### **Heads engaged in idle talk**

At Atherington (Fig. 4.44) and Christow (Fig. 4.45), bosses are carved with two closely-set heads above which appears the small figure of a demon. The

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.paintedchurch.org/ldintro.htm>. Accessed 22.11.09.

<sup>65</sup> Tristram, E.W., *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, p.137; Anonymous report in *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Vol. VI, 1861, pp. 310–311.

<sup>66</sup> Psalm 145 in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.799.

<sup>67</sup> Langland, 2000, p.75.

demonic figure is Tutivillus, familiar in the late medieval church through penitential, sermonizing and literary texts, plays, wall paintings, corbels, stained glass, bench ends and misericords.<sup>68</sup> Tutivillus records the idle words and whispers of inattentive parishioners on a scroll, which he attempts to stretch out with his teeth.

In the fifteenth-century sermon cycle *Jacob's Well*, probably written in Suffolk, a holy man, who witnesses this, asks the demon what he is doing, to which Tutivillus replies:

I write these tales of the people in this church, to record them before God at the doom for their damnation, and my book is too narrow to write all their tales; they say so many. Therefore I draw it out broader that none of their tales should be unwritten.<sup>69</sup>

In the Christow boss, this action can clearly be seen.

In addition to the bosses at Atherington and Christow, there are bosses which probably allude to idle talk in seven other churches: Buckland in the Moor, Harberton, Iddesleigh, Milton Abbot, South Tawton, Stoodleigh and Ugborough. In these churches, Tutivillus is not present, but the closeness of the heads is suggestive of sinful speech. Phillips suggests that idle talk presented a serious challenge to late medieval ecclesiastical authority, noting that 'complaint about gossip is the most consistent feature of Middle English pastoral literature'.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting that on roof bosses in Devon, gossip or idle talk does not appear to be gendered female in the way that it generally is in parish churches in other

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<sup>68</sup> There are two excellent papers on the history of Tutivillus in literature and art: Margaret Jennings, 'Tutivillus: the literary career of the recording demon', *Studies in Philology*, 74:5, (1977), pp.1–95, and Christa Grössinger, 'Tutivillus' in Block, E., (ed.), *Profane Images in Marginal Arts of the Middle Ages*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, pp.47–62.

<sup>69</sup> My translation from the original as recorded in Phillips, S., *Transforming Talk*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, pp.22–23.

<sup>70</sup> Phillips, 2007, p.13.

parts of England.<sup>71</sup> In 16 documented wall paintings of gossips in England, for example, two of which date from the thirteenth century with the remainder from the fourteenth century, it appears that the characters portrayed are always women.<sup>72</sup> Of six misericords carved with the recording demon, only one, that at Gayton, Northamptonshire, dating to the fifteenth century, incorporates a male figure.<sup>73</sup> Of two examples in stained glass, at Stanford-on-Avon (c.1325–1340) and Old (c.1500), both in Northamptonshire, the former depicts women gossips while the latter includes a man (Fig. 4.46).<sup>74</sup>

The gossiping heads carved on bosses at Atherington, Harberton (Fig. 4.47), Iddesleigh, Milton Abbot (Fig. 4.48), South Tawton and Ugborough appear to be male and female, while bosses at Buckland-in-the-Moor (Fig. 4.49), Christow and Stoodleigh (Fig. 4.50) are carved with two male heads.

The reason for the predominance of males on bosses in Devon which allude to idle talk is uncertain. However, it may be the case that particular sermon texts, now lost, were in use in the county, which like *Jacob's Well*, recognised idle talk as a universal occupation. There is also another possibility which relates to the integration of women in the church in Devon. Katherine L. French has researched the position of women within the medieval church in England and asserts that:

Parishes with women's guilds or activities are found predominantly, but not exclusively, in the southern and western parts of England in both urban and rural communities. That there are more examples in Devon

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<sup>71</sup> Since the story of Tutivillus originated in monastic literature, the demon's first victims were members of the clergy, and therefore male, but when Tutivillus moved into the public domain, it was usually female parishioners with whom he was associated. Grössinger, 2009, pp.49–52.

<sup>72</sup> Gill, 2002, pp.227–235.

<sup>73</sup> The misericords are in Ely Cathedral; Royal Foundation of St Katharine, London; New College, Oxford; Enville, Staffs; Ludlow, Shropshire; Gayton, Northants; Grössinger, 2009, p.54.

<sup>74</sup> Marks, R., *Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 80–81.

and Cornwall than in any other county probably reflects both regional differences and the serendipitous survival of original sources. About 20 per cent of all pre-Reformation churchwardens' accounts come from Devon and Cornwall. The examples of women serving as churchwardens also come from the West Country, suggesting that this area was more open to women's parochial leadership.<sup>75</sup>

The bosses alluding to gossip are all positioned towards the west end of the nave or north aisles of their respective churches, therefore at the furthest point from clerical control. However, bosses in these areas would have been paid for by the laity and so the disturbance caused to other parishioners may have been as relevant as individual inattention to the mass or sermon. Since women in Devon seemed to have been particularly well integrated in the church and are recorded as contributing to its upkeep, it may be that they had some say in the images on the bosses and were keen to see men as well as women depicted in warnings against idle talk.

#### **Four heads**

At least eight churches in Devon have bosses of four heads so arranged that their chins are positioned towards the centre of the boss, of which four examples are shown as Figs. 4.51, 4.52, 4.53 and 4.54. In one church, Broadhempston, a boss carved with two male and two female heads is arranged so that the heads meet at their crowns (Fig. 4.55). Four heads bosses are found in the chancel chapel, nave, aisles and porch. In two churches, Buckland Monachorum and Malborough, the bosses are of granite and are thus not as detailed as those carved in wood elsewhere. Most of the heads wear headdresses of the period, although those at Ashburton have their curly hair uncovered, and the two male heads at Broadhempston are also uncovered. On

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<sup>75</sup> French, K., 'Maiden's Lights and Wives Stores: Women's Parish Guilds in Late Medieval England', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol.29, no.2 (Summer 1998), p. 405.

the four heads boss at Stoodleigh, the heads are uncovered and no hair is carved. On a fine boss of four heads in the south porch at Bovey Tracey (Fig. 4.56), one of the heads wears a crown and another may wear a mitre. The mouths on this boss are open.

There are three similar bosses of four heads at Exeter Cathedral – in the Lady Chapel, where they are surrounded by vine leaves and grapes (Fig.4.57); in the Presbytery, where the heads are surrounded with long, trailing foliage which may be *artemisia*; and in the north tower, chapel of St Paul, where the foliage may again be vine leaves.<sup>76</sup>

Understanding the significance of these bosses is difficult. The bosses may simply represent the community in the church with the foliage on the bosses in the cathedral at Exeter referencing the healing power given to the church by Christ.

### **Horned headdresses**

Bosses in East Budleigh (Fig. 4.58) and Ugborough (Fig. 4.59) churches are carved with female heads adorned with horned headdresses.<sup>77</sup> Between the horns of the headdresses are figures of devils, who are also horned and have their tongues extended. The position of the boss at East Budleigh, on the north purlin of the nave, is interesting as it is visible immediately on entry through the

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<sup>76</sup> Cave notes a boss of four grotesque heads in the treasury at Canterbury, and others of heads chin to chin at Glasgow Cathedral. In Havant there are four heads forehead to forehead, Cave, 1948, p.64.

<sup>77</sup> The horned headdress was fashionable from c.1420–1440 but continued to be used after this date to make a moral point. Grössinger, C., *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords*, London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997, p.158.

south door. That at Ugborough is in the north aisle, although its position may not be original.<sup>78</sup>

The horned headdress came in for particular condemnation in medieval sermons. Women who wore such apparel were likened to wild beasts or devils and:

the soul which has the mastery in a horned woman, as of a butting ox, after reason or conscience or the preacher shall have warned it that those horns are a cause of damnation to others, is spiritually slain and doomed to everlasting death.<sup>79</sup>

G.R. Owst notes that the author of *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* tells of a sermon delivered by a learned bishop in which 'pride and the disguisinge that was amonge women', in particular their 'highe hornes', were punished by 'Noyis flode'.<sup>80</sup>

The *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, a fourteenth-century confessor's manual, which Michael Haren argues is set within the episcopal regime of Bishop Grandisson of Exeter, also condemns these headdresses. In the section 'concerning married women and also widows and other sexually-experienced women', the confessor is instructed to:

proceed briskly...inquiring in the following fashion: first, if they have worn extravagant, vainglorious, outlandish and inordinate apparel on their

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<sup>78</sup> Cherry and Pevsner suggest that the ceiling may have been reset, c. 1800, from parts of a wagon roof. Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (eds.), *The Buildings of England: Devon*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Penguin, 1991, p.879, although Hugh Harrison regards this as being unlikely since:

there are no curved ribs and the straight pieces which could all be purlins are two different sizes, and I have never seen a roof with two different sized purlins. Also the carving of the bosses around the housings for the ribs fit the diagonal ribs, all as the present, with small housings for the small ribs and large for the large ones, so no I don't believe this woodwork ever formed part of a barrel vault, it all looks purpose made. Hugh Harrison, pers. comm., 02.12.10.

<sup>79</sup> Owst, G.R., *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1961, p.403.

<sup>80</sup> Owst, 1961, p.493.



heads, because they go about wearing horns and looking outlandish, which is a category of pride.<sup>81</sup>

Although East Budleigh and Ugborough are the only two churches in Devon where devils actually appear in women's headdresses, there are other churches where carvings may allude to 'outlandish and inordinate apparel' on women's heads, for example in the north chancel chapel at Tavistock (Fig. 4.60) and the north aisle at South Tawton (Fig. 4.61).<sup>82</sup>

At Ugborough, carved on a boss which probably refers to idle talk or backbiting (Fig. 4.62), is a woman wearing a horned headdress in which is perched a bird, now damaged. The bird may be a screech-owl of which the MS Bodley 764 says:

The screech owl is the symbol of all sinners. [It] gets its name from its cry because its mouth speaks what overflows in its heart...It is burdened with feathers to signify an excess of flesh and levity of spirit, always bound by heavy laziness, the same laziness which binds sinners who are inert and idle when it comes to doing good.<sup>83</sup>

A boss in the north aisle of South Tawton church, believed to be unique in Devon, is carved with an owl wearing a horned headdress (Fig. 4.63). This motif is also seen in graffiti recorded by V. Pritchard at the church of St Peter in Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 4.64).<sup>84</sup> An image scratched onto a pillar on the north side of the church shows a woman wearing a headdress with enormous horns. Another image shows an owl wearing a similar headdress,

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<sup>81</sup> Haren, M., 'The Interrogatories for officials, lawyers and secular estates of the *Memoriale presbiterorum*' in Biller and Minnis, 1998, p.157.

<sup>82</sup> A roof boss in the crossing tower at Bishop's Cannings, Wiltshire, is carved with a woman with horned headdress and two devils, one between the horns and the other to the side. Woodcock, 2005, p.104.

<sup>83</sup> Barber, 1992, p.149.

<sup>84</sup> Pritchard, V., *English Medieval Graffiti*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, digitally printed version, 2008, pp.58–59.

particularly appropriate given the fourteenth-century English Dominican John Bromyard's homily on 'the Devil's owls, that have big heads and little sense'.<sup>85</sup>

The horned headdress appears elsewhere on misericords. A fine example is that at Minster-in-Thanel, Kent, where the central motif is of a woman wearing a large horned headdress with a devil perched between the horns.<sup>86</sup> The supporters on this misericord are leonine heads with their tongues extended. Malcolm Jones notes another example of the horned headdress on a misericord in Ludlow where the right-hand supporter is a man carrying a shield to defend himself from the woman's horns.<sup>87</sup> Horned headdresses also feature in wall paintings, notably on the figure of the dishonest ale-wife in the Doom painting at Holy Trinity church, Coventry.

### **A pope's head, bishops' heads, a figure of a bishop, a papal crown and mitres**

At Newton St Cyres, a boss in the nave is carved with a pope's head identifiable by its triple papal crown (Fig. 4.65). Cave states that two bosses in the quire and nave of Exeter Cathedral also portray popes, noting that 'the old form of papal tiara is shown which in Rome gave place to the triple tiara at about this time'.<sup>88</sup> A boss in the north aisle at Cadeleigh may also be intended to represent the papal crown (Fig. 4.66).<sup>89</sup> There are bosses which appear to represent

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<sup>85</sup> Owst, 1961, p.399–400.

<sup>86</sup> Grössinger, 1997, Fig. 126 on p. 89.

<sup>87</sup> Jones notes that the horned headdress was the subject of several satirical poems in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Jones, M., 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art II: Sexist Satire and Popular Punishments', *Folklore*, Vol. 101, No. 1, 1990, pp. 69–87, on p.69.

<sup>88</sup> Cave, 1948, p.61.

<sup>89</sup> The earliest conical form of papal tiara may be seen on two denarii of Sergius III (904–911). However, the tiara developed over time. Egerton Beck states that: 'First the band round the base was richly jewelled, then it took the form of a crown, originally tooth-edged, later with leaf shaped points. A second crown was then added, almost certainly, by Boniface VIII (1294–1303); and a third early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.' Nevertheless, Beck notes that: 'it must not be forgotten that the older forms persisted in works of art after a new one was in vogue; for

bishops' heads in the chancel at Atherington (Fig. 4.67), the north aisle at Landkey (Fig. 4.68) and the nave at Newton St Cyres (Fig. 4.69).

The full figure of a bishop is carved in stone on a boss at the centre of the crossing in Ottery St Mary church (Fig. 4.70). In all probability this represents Bishop Grandisson who rebuilt the church in the 1340s. A similar boss of a bishop, which may also be intended as Grandisson, is found in the nave at Exeter Cathedral. A head, possibly intended as that of a bishop with mitre, is found, as one of a four heads boss, in the south porch at Bovey Tracey. In Stoodleigh there are two bosses, now in the nave, which may be carved with mitres. Presumably these heads and headdresses are intended to recognise the authority of the church, although most would have been commissioned by the laity, possibly as an expression of devotion.

### **Head with mouse**

A boss in the south chancel chapel at Meavy church (Fig. 4.71), which is unique in Devon and possibly elsewhere, is carved with a bearded male head with bulging eyes, a prominent nose and mouth twisted into a grimace. Through the enlarged ears of the figure a mouse runs, with its head appearing in one ear and its tail in the other. Cave suggests that the carving 'symbolis[es] perhaps

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example, both the conical and the fully developed shapes are found in the Sherborne missal, which belongs to the last years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century or the earliest years of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Beck, E., 'The Mitre and Tiara in Heraldry and Ornament (Concluded). II –The Tiara', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.23, No.126 (Sep., 1913), pp.330–332, on pp.330 & 331. The single form of the tiara may be seen in a fresco: *Preaching before Pope Honorius III* (c. 1295–1300), attributed to Giotto, St Francis Upper Church, Assisi, Italy, and on the tomb of Pope Benedict XI (d.1304) in the Church of San Domenico, Perugia. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Braun states that: 'The tiara with three crowns is...the rule upon monuments from the second half of the fourteenth century, even though, as an anachronism, there are isolated instances of the tiara with one crown up into the fifteenth century.' Braun, J., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton, 1912. Accessed online 30.05.11 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14714c.htm>

someone with an empty head'.<sup>90</sup> It is possible, however, to add detail to Cave's interpretation.

The heavy features of the Meavy head can be compared with those of a fool depicted in a historiated initial in the fourteenth-century Psalter of Stephen of Derby, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. G. 185, fol. 43v (Fig. 4.72). Illustrating the text of vulgate Psalm 52 ('The fool said in his heart: There is no God'), the illustration shows a tonsured Augustinian cleric, a triple-tonsured fool seated on the ground and the figure of God the Father looking down from above.<sup>91</sup> Speech scrolls issue from the mouths of the figures, that from God the Father reading 'Behold a fool speaks'. Out of the mouth of the fool come the words 'There is no God', to which the cleric replies 'Surely you lie'.

Malcolm Jones suggests that the carving of the mouse-through-ear may specifically illustrate the idiom "in one ear and out the other", citing lines from a Middle English sermon from BM MS Royal 18 B (c.1415): 'But itt commeth in at the on ere and goyth oute at the othur'.<sup>92</sup> This accords with Chaucer's use of the idiom in *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385) which notes that Troilus took little heed of advice since: 'Oon ere it herde, at tother out it wente'.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Cave, 1948, p.72.

<sup>91</sup> Debra Higgs Strickland suggests that the figure of the fool in the Psalter of Stephen of Derby 'with his thick lips and enlarged bulbous nose represents a Jew. He also wears a close-fitting cap, the rounded type similar to that worn by Jews in other contexts.' Strickland, 2003, p. 139. However, Malcolm Jones asserts that the fool does not wear a cap but, rather, has a triple tonsure. Malcolm Jones, pers. comm.. 24.05.11. The fool's tonsure is discussed by Malcolm Jones in *The Secret Middle Ages*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, paperback edition, 2004, p.104.

<sup>92</sup> Malcolm Jones, pers. comm. 24.05.11. The sermon may be found in Ross, W., *Middle English Sermons, Edited from British Museum MS Royal 18 B. xxiii*, EETS 209, London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1940, p.166.

<sup>93</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book IV, line 434, in Benson, L., (ed.) *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.544.

The Meavy boss may, therefore, represent the foolishness of those who either do not recognize God, or those who hear the word of God but upon whom it makes little impression.

### **Head with dogs**

A boss in the north aisle at Ugborough depicts a female head wearing a headdress from which hang two dogs (Fig. 4.73). The dogs have their heads turned and appear to be licking themselves. This may refer to the bestiary story which states that:

As the dog's tongue, licking a wound, heals it, the wounds of sinners, laid bare in confession, are cleansed by the correction of the priest. As the dog's tongue heals man's internal wounds, the secrets of his heart are often purified by the deeds and discourse of the Church's teachers.<sup>94</sup>

However, dogs could also have a sinful aspect in bestiary stories, returning to eat their own vomit and signifying those who fall into sin again after they have confessed.<sup>95</sup>

The dogs on the boss appear to be lapdogs rather than hunting or working dogs, and these are referenced in sermon of John Bromyard (d.c.1352).

Bromyard relates how the wealthy:

provide for their dogs more readily than for the poor, more abundantly and more delicately too: so that, where the poor are so famished that they would greedily devour bran-bread, dogs are squeamish at the sight of wafer-bread, and spurn what is offered to them, trampling it under their feet. They must be offered the daintiest flesh, the firstling and choicest produce of every dish. If glutted, they refuse it, then, as though they were infirm, there is a wailing over them on the part of those whose bowels yearn with pity for the afflicted...<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/19v.hti>. Accessed 08.10.10.

<sup>95</sup> Barber, 1992, p.77.

<sup>96</sup> Owst, 1961, p.327.

As with so many bosses in Devon, it is difficult to assess quite what the head with dogs boss at Ugborough may be intended to represent. However, since most of the bosses in the north aisle appear to reference sin in some way, it is likely that this boss does the same.

### **Head with worm of conscience**

In the nave at Wembworthy church, a boss is carved with a male head with gaping mouth (Fig. 4.74). Beside the head is a little creature formed of a head and legs. Although this creature has legs rather than a tail, it clearly has no body and may be intended to represent the worm of conscience which gnaws upon the soul when sins are committed. The worm is mentioned in popular theological works and poems in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and, as Marta Powell asserts, 'it is consistently regarded as an agent of severest torture'.<sup>97</sup>

In 1406, Master Richard Alkerton preached in a sermon that, at the Day of Judgement:

curselyngs...shuln be cast down into helle...and ther thei shul [be] bulyd in fyr and brymstone withouten ende. Venemous wormes and naddris shul gnawe here membris withouten seessyng, and the worm of conscience...shal gnawe the soule.<sup>98</sup>

In Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*, the warning concerning the worm of conscience is equally explicit: 'Beware, for no one, whether learned or unlearned, knows

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<sup>97</sup> The worm of conscience appears, for example, in the fourteenth-century poem *The Pricke of Conscience*, the fourteenth-century allegory *Le Pelerinage de l'ame* which was the source of the Middle English *Pylgremage of the Sowle*, and *A Revelation of Purgatory*, written in 1422. Powell, M., 'Last Things First in Chaucer's Physician's Tale', in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 91, pt 1, 1992, pp. 1–16, on pp.6–7.

<sup>98</sup> Owst, 1961, p.522.

whom God will smite, nor how the worm of conscience may terrify on account of wicked life'.<sup>99</sup> Powell notes that:

in both *A Revelation of Purgatory* and *The Pylgremage of the Sowle*, the worm of conscience participates in the climactic weighing of the soul, joining Satan in the left side of the balance to be weighed against the soul's merits in the right.<sup>100</sup>

If the little creature at Wembworthy does represent the worm of conscience, it is not surprising that the head carved on the boss appears truly terrified.

### **Tricephalic boss**

At the west end of the nave roof in Braunton, one boss is carved so that it is tricephalic (Fig. 4.75). As David Williams notes, the most usual tricephalic form in the Middle Ages is a representation of the Trinity, where the head represents the concept of three in one.<sup>101</sup> However, the position of the image at the west end, when the images of the pelican in her piety, the evangelists and an angel appear at the east end, indicates that it is unlikely to represent the Trinity.

Debra Higgs Strickland discusses a misericord at Cartmel Priory (Fig. 4.76) where she identifies a crowned three headed figure as the Antichrist.<sup>102</sup> Peter Chrysologus, a fifth-century bishop of Ravenna sermonized on original sin thus:

O sin, you cruel beast – and a beast not content to vent your fury against the human race from merely one head. We have seen this beast, brethren, devouring with a triple mouth all the highly precious sprouts of

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<sup>99</sup> Marta Powell's translation of lines 278–81 of Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*, in Powell, 1992, p.7.

<sup>100</sup> Powell, 1992, p.8.

<sup>101</sup> Williams, D., *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996, p.132.

<sup>102</sup> Strickland, 2003, pp.213–214. It is noteworthy that this figure also disgorges foliage.

the human family. Yes, brethren, with a mouth that it triple: as sin this beast captures, as death it devours, and as hell it swallows down.<sup>103</sup>

The figure at Braunton wears a headdress which suggests that it may be female. A similar image to that at Braunton is a three-headed figure carved on a clerestory window capital in the south transept in Exeter Cathedral.<sup>104</sup> It seems more likely, given its position, that the tricephalic boss at Braunton refers to sin rather than to salvation.

## **ii) Beasts and Birds:**

Beasts and birds are found in many churches in Devon, particularly carved in wood on roof bosses and bench ends. Many of the creatures probably derive from medieval bestiaries, made familiar to parishioners through sermons, although some may derive from popular literature or simply depict those animals familiar to a rural community. Some beasts and birds are used as heraldic devices.

### **The three hares**

Medieval roof bosses carved with three hares conjoined by three ears, which form a triangle at the centre of the motif, occur in the chancel, nave and aisles in at least 16 churches in Devon.<sup>105</sup> Four of these bosses are shown as Figs. 4.77, 4.78, 4.79, 4.80. In most churches the beasts run in a clockwise direction, although in two churches, Throwleigh and Bridford, their direction is anti-clockwise and in one church with two hares bosses, Chagford, the hares are set

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<sup>103</sup> In Schmidt, G., *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell*, Cranbury and London: Associated University Presses, 1995, p.34. In Dante's *Inferno*, Satan is represented as tricephalic.

<sup>104</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/docs/ViewImage.asp?FileID=1160>. Accessed 27.11.09. Cave photographed a tricephalic boss at Selby Abbey. Cave, 1948, Fig. 200.

<sup>105</sup> It is uncertain whether the creatures are rabbits or hares, although in Germany, where there are early examples, they are usually referred to as hares. Although the creatures are somewhat different in their physiology and habits, they share much of their symbolism.



clockwise in the chancel and anti-clockwise in the south aisle. In Broadclyst church, nine examples of three hares bosses are probably plaster copies of a late medieval boss which was destroyed when the roof of the church was replaced in 1833.<sup>106</sup>

The design is a visual puzzle as each beast has two ears and yet only three are carved. Three hares bosses are found elsewhere in England: in the chapel at Cotehele in Cornwall, in Old Cleeve church in Somerset, in the church at Corfe Mullen in Dorset, and at Selby Abbey, where the three are accompanied by a small fourth hare tucked alongside. There is at least one boss in Wales, in stone, in the Lady Chapel at St Davids Cathedral.

The three hares are also found in tile designs: an example from the nave of Chester Cathedral is now in the collections at the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, and another example, of different design, is set against the altar step in the church at Long Crendon in Buckinghamshire. A single example in medieval glass is now located in a window above the north door in Long Melford church in Suffolk.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Davidson, *East Devon*, p.529.

<sup>107</sup> The three hares motif has a long history with its first recorded example being in a Buddhist cave temple at Mogao in China dating from the Sui Dynasty (581–618 AD). There are at least 17 caves of 492 extant at Mogao where the hares are painted as a central motif on the ceiling in representations of textile canopies, although in one of these, the ears of the creatures form a pin-wheel rather than a triangle. However, the motif is not thought to be Chinese in origin, its possible roots being in the Eastern Iranian world (Guan Youhui, pers. comm., 21.08.04.). The design appears in ceramic and metalwork of this region, and in Egypt/Syria, dating from the 12th to the 14th centuries, and was almost certainly woven in silk. The three hares are also cast in copper on a coin dated 1281/2 from Urmiya, north west Iran. In continental Europe, the hares are found on medieval roof bosses in France, particularly in the Alsace/Vosges region, and on bosses and tiles in Germany. An early example is that on a great bell at Kloster Haina in Germany, dated to 1224. It is possible that the three hares motif travelled from east to west along the Silk Road, woven in silk and/or crafted in metalwork. Its adoption by the Christian church may have arisen from the church's use of eastern silks and metalwork to wrap and house the relics of saints. A silver-gilt reliquary, probably made in southern Russia by relocated

The earliest known occurrence of the three hares in Devon is a decorated initial in a psalter, British Library Additional MS. 21926, which belonged to John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter 1327–1369 (Fig. 4.81). The psalter was probably made in Chichester c. 1270–80, therefore not specifically for Grandisson, but it is annotated in Grandisson's hand, carries his Arms, and is mentioned in his will, where it is bequeathed to Isabella, daughter of Edward III.<sup>108</sup> In the psalter the three hares run within a circle, held by the mouth of a dragon, and decorate the initial T in the introduction to Vulgate Psalm 21 which begins '*Deus, deus meus, respice in me: quare me dereliquisti?*' (O God, my God, look upon me: why hast thou forsaken me?).<sup>109</sup>

Since the design was familiar to the bishop, it is perhaps surprising that bosses bearing the three hares do not appear in Exeter cathedral, where there are other bosses relating to Grandisson in the nave, or in the church of Ottery St Mary, which the bishop rebuilt. There may have been hares bosses at both these sites, however, that are no longer extant. Both the cathedral and church at Ottery St Mary have lost their cloisters and it is known that the three hares motif is found in cloisters, for example on a boss in the early sixteenth-century cloisters of the Collegiate Church of Saint Gengoult in Toul, France, and in the tracery of a window, probably of the same period, in the cloisters of Paderborn Cathedral, Germany.

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eastern Iranian craftsmen for the Golden Horde rulers of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries, displays Islamic iconography, but was used in Trier Cathedral to house part of the skull of St Lazarus in the eighteenth century (Manuel Keene, Curator, Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, pers. comm., 20.07.04.). For information on a silk woven with four hares sharing four ears, see Watt, J. and Wardwell, A., *When Silk was Gold. Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997, p.158–9. See also *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*. Exhibition catalogue edited by Susan Whitfield with Ursula Sims-Williams, London: The British Library, 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Rose-Troup, F., *Bishop Grandisson: Student and Art Lover*, Plymouth: Brendon and Son, 1929, p.17.

<sup>109</sup> Justin Clegg, Curator of Illuminated and Liturgical Manuscripts, British Library, pers.comm, 07.07.04.

The three hares are an iconographic, as well as visual, puzzle since the hare, along with many other bestiary creatures, might be regarded in either a positive or a negative light. However, more often than not, the hare was regarded pejoratively, belonging to 'the lascivious hunt of Venus, the hunt of lust, rather than to the virtuous hunt'.<sup>110</sup>

A Middle English poem, *The Names of the Hare in English*, lists 77 different names or phrases by which the hare might be known, and whose recitation would help the hunter to capture his prey. Many of these are disparaging: the lurker in ditches, the filthy beast, the coward, the traitor, the friendless one, the one who makes you shudder, the covenant-breaker, the animal that all men scorn, the animal that no one dares name.<sup>111</sup>

Ilya Dines notes that the hare and rabbit were latecomers to the bestiary tradition, appearing for the first time at the beginning of the thirteenth century in five bestiaries of the Third Family.<sup>112</sup> In each of these, the chapter relating to the hare reads:

The Hare is called '*lepus*' as it is '*levipes*' or light-footed, that is, it runs quickly, and so in Greek it is called '*lagos*' on account of its speed. It is a swift animal and also timorous. Some affirm that the hare's nature is such that sometimes it is male, and sometimes female. To this animal inconstant people are likened, who being dissolute, as they are neither man nor woman, that is neither faithful nor treacherous nor cold nor hot,

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<sup>110</sup> Rowland, B., *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974, p.91.

<sup>111</sup> Evans, G. and Thomson, D., *The Leaping Hare*, Newton Abbot: Readers Union, 1974, pp.203–205.

<sup>112</sup> Dines, I., 'The Hare and its Alter Ego in the Middle Ages', *Reinardus*, 17, 2004, pp. 73–84 on p.75. Dines' paper convincingly explains why the hare, which carries negative connotations in antiquity and in many bestiaries, is accorded a position of honour in Creation and Naming scenes in medieval manuscript illustration, and carries positive connotations in a bestiary, MS Bodley 764, which is illustrated with an image of four hares sharing four ears. Dines suggests that 'this occurs because the hare has been confused with another animal, *shafan sela*, [the rock hyrax] which is mistranslated as *chyrogrilus* and *lepusculus* in the Septuagint and Jerome's Vulgate, and which takes on a positive symbolism in the Scriptures and in exegetical texts'. Dines, 2004, p.73.

are without doubt those of whom Solomon said: a double-minded man unstable in all his ways.<sup>113</sup>

The notion of the double-minded man is interesting given the doubling of the ears (although only three ears are depicted, each beast has two) and the seemingly endless movement of the hares. In the Bible, the double-minded man is referenced in the Epistle of James 1:6–8:

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, that is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is inconstant in all his ways.<sup>114</sup>

The double-minded man is a man divided between God and the world, a man who has no fixed principles, but ebbs and flows with the tide of popular opinion. He is a man whose faith is not firm and therefore a man who can easily succumb to temptation. Indeed, the Epistle of James goes on to say:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him...But every man is tempted, being drawn away by concupiscence, and allured. Then when concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: But sin, when it is completed begetteth death.<sup>115</sup>

The three hares are clearly associated with temptation in a historiated initial in an early thirteenth-century psalter, British Library Lansdowne 431, probably made in East Anglia (Fig. 4.82).<sup>116</sup> The initial occurs at the beginning of Psalm 52, which takes as its theme the corruption of man before the coming of Christ.<sup>117</sup> The initial, on folio 44, shows the first temptation of Christ, in which he is tempted by the Devil to turn stones into bread. A dragon delivers stones to the Devil in its mouth, while encircled in its tail are three hares.

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<sup>113</sup> Dines, 2004, p.75.

<sup>114</sup> Epistle of St James, Chap.1, v.6-8, *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1601.

<sup>115</sup> Epistle of St James, Chap.1, v. 12, v.14-15, *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1601.

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IIIID=5395>. Accessed 18.12.10.

<sup>117</sup> *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.727.

Although the hares are often said in church guides to represent the Trinity, given their association in manuscripts, it is unlikely that they were interpreted in this way in the medieval period. It is perhaps more likely that they were associated with the three spiritual enemies of man: the temptations of the flesh, the world and the devil, or perhaps, more broadly, lack of firmness in faith.<sup>118</sup>

Wenzel relates how Christ's temptations could be related to the three enemies, a point which may explain the hares' use in Lansdowne 431. He cites the writings of Radulphus Ardens, in the twelfth century:

Our Lord wanted us to fast and to be tempted for the sake of triumph, that is, that he might triumph for us over the flesh, the devil and the world. For the devil had overcome the first man, our forefather, by tempting him in three things: gluttony, cupidity, and vainglory...In these three, beloved brethren, lies all the wickedness of the world, of which John warns us when he says "All that is in the world..." (I John 2:16). Defeated by these three, man became subject to all wickedness, the flesh, the world, and the devil. Therefore, Christ wanted to fast and be tempted, that He might triumph for us over the devil, the flesh and the world together.<sup>119</sup>

Wenzel notes that:

The idea that Adam was tempted by three sins – gluttony, cupidity, and vainglory – and that Christ, in redeeming mankind, had to undergo the same three temptations, was an old one and can easily be traced back to the Fathers.<sup>120</sup>

The position of three hares in some examples in the church might also suggest that the hares carried a negative, rather than positive, connotation. In the fragment of fifteenth-century stained glass at Long Melford (Fig. 4.83), the hares appear to be underfoot, and in the Hôtel de Cluny, Paris, the hares are carved

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<sup>118</sup> Siegfried Wenzel discusses this topos in an article 'The Three Enemies of Man', *Medieval Studies*, Vol., XXIX, 1967, pp. 47–66.

<sup>119</sup> Radulphus Ardens quoted in Wenzel, 1967, p.6.

<sup>120</sup> Wenzel also states: It should be noted that in discussions of the temptations the three enemies were often joined by a fourth "tempter" – God, who "tempts so that He may try and approve of man, and that man himself may recognize what he is and become an example to others". Wenzel, 1967, p.61. This might help to explain occurrences of four hares in some manuscripts and sculpture, although the four hares miniature in MS Bodley 764, relates to a positive interpretation of the hare.

on the fifteenth-century undersill of a window on the north side of the chapel (Fig. 4.84). This position is far more suited to an image representing temptation rather than a representation of the Trinity.

In Devon, especially on Dartmoor, the three hares have, in recent times, been referred to as the 'Tinnners' Rabbits', being said to have some association with medieval tinnners. However, this is a modern myth, and seems to have arisen from a statement made by R.J. King in 1856:

The roof of the Church of Widdecombe in the Dartmoors, said to have been immediately connected with the miners, exhibits many figures which obscurely shadow forth the learning of the Alchemists. Amongst them is a singular combination of three rabbits, each with a single ear, which join in the centre, thus forming a triangle. Allusion is made to this figure in the will of Basil Valentine, where it is called the "Hunt of Venus". Rabbits, it is well known, were a favourite alchemical symbol...It has always been asserted that the tower of Widdecombe in the Dartmoors, which is scarcely surpassed in beauty of proportion by that of any church in Devonshire, was the work of tin miners, who built it as a thank offering for the great quantity of valuable metal they had procured from the moors in Widdecombe.<sup>121</sup>

Although an alchemical illustration featuring the three hares does appear in a book by Basil Valentine, this was post-medieval and the illustration included three dogs running after the hares.<sup>122</sup> But King's association between the church roof, the tinnners, and this obscure alchemical illustration, resulted in later, erroneous, claims, such as that made by Beatrix Cresswell: '...the symbol of the three rabbits joined by their ears...the old Alchemists called the "Hunt of Venus", it is said to be a tinnners mark'.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> King, R.J., *The Forest of Dartmoor and its Borders. A Historical Sketch*, London: John Russell Smith and Plymouth: Roger Lidstone, 1856, p.77.

<sup>122</sup> Valentine, B., *De Macrocosmo, oder von der grossen Heimlichkeit der Welt und ihrer Artzney, dem Menschen zugehörig*, c.1600. Greeves, T., 'The Tinnners' Rabbits – Chasing Hares?' in *Dartmoor Magazine*, Winter, 1991, pp. 4–6, on p.5.

<sup>123</sup> Cresswell, *Moretonhampstead*, Vol. 2, L–W, 1921, p.122.

The iconography of the three hares is undoubtedly problematic, and the reason for the frequency of the design in Devon is unclear, all of which supports the rationale of this thesis that the study should be as wide-ranging as possible since over-reliance on any one aspect, when the evidence is so elusive, risks undermining the entire project.

### **The pelican in her piety**

The pelican in her piety (Figs. 4.85, 4.86, 4.87, 4.88) occurs in 13 of the churches surveyed for this thesis, being found in the chancel, chancel chapel, nave, aisles, tower and porch. A pelican boss can also be seen in the nave at Exeter Cathedral. Of the pelican, the Aberdeen Bestiary relates:

The pelican is a bird of Egypt, living in the wilderness of the River Nile, from which it gets its name. For Egypt is known as *Canopos*.

It is devoted to its young. When it gives birth and the young begin to grow, they strike their parents in the face. But their parents, striking back, kill them. On the third day, however, the mother-bird, with a blow to her flank, opens up her side and lies on her young and lets her blood pour over the bodies of the dead, and so raises them from the dead.

In a mystic sense, the pelican signifies Christ; Egypt, the world. The pelican lives in solitude, as Christ alone condescended to be born of a virgin without intercourse with a man. It is solitary, because it is free from sin, as also is the life of Christ. It kills its young with its beak as preaching the word of God converts the unbelievers. It weeps ceaselessly for its young, as Christ wept with pity when he raised Lazarus. Thus after three days, it revives its young with its blood, as Christ saves us, whom he has redeemed with his own blood.

In a moral sense, we can understand by the pelican not the righteous man, but anyone who distances himself far from carnal desire. By Egypt is meant our life, shrouded in the darkness of ignorance. For *Egyptus* can be translated as 'darkness'. In Egypt, therefore, we make a wilderness (see Joel, 3:19), when we are far from the preoccupations and desires of this world. Thus the righteous man creates solitude for himself in the city, when he keeps himself free from sin, as far as human frailty allows.

The pelican kills its young with its beak because the righteous man considers and rejects his sinful thoughts and deeds.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Aberdeen University MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/35r.hti>. Accessed 19.11.07.

Although the pelican which sheds its blood for its young is more usually described as a female bird, there are different versions of bestiaries, and the earlier *Physiologus*, which record that it is the male bird which offers itself in this way, thus emphasising its gender connection with Christ. Colum Hourihane notes that:

The popularity of the pelican as a symbol with the fathers of the Church may have been due to the many aspects of Christ's life which it incorporated, and which were extended with the passage of time. The pelican was used not only as a symbol of resurrection, but also as a short-hand method of depicting the entire Passion and sacrifice of Christ.<sup>125</sup>

This made it especially suitable for use where space was limited: on misericords, bench ends and roof bosses. The pelican is also found in manuscripts where it can sometimes be identified without its usual attributes of young and nest but simply by its action of pecking at its breast. This may help explain two bosses hitherto unidentified as pelicans – one in the nave at Atherington (Fig. 4.89) and another in the south aisle at Dolton (Fig. 4.90).

Another unusual boss which may also feature the pelican is that in the south aisle at Coldridge, where a bird is carved carrying a round disc in its beak, perhaps intended as the host (Fig. 4.91). Miri Rubin comments on the pelican as 'an image which explored the sacrificial aspect of the Passion and the eucharist', noting that:

An English collection of offices, prayers and hymns of c.1460, which was accompanied by drawings of the *arma christi*, had an image of the pelican feeding its young ones accompanied by the text:

'The pellicane his bloode bothe blede  
Therwith his birdis to fede  
It figureth that god with his blode  
Us fed hanging on the rode'

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<sup>125</sup> Hourihane, C. (ed.), *Virtue and Vice. The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p.122.



and at the foot of the page there is a sketchy drawing of hosts.<sup>126</sup>

The arms of Richard Fox, Bishop of Exeter (r.1487–1492), show the pelican in her piety feeding her young.

## Lion

Like many bestiary creatures, the lion, which is found in the chancel, transept, nave and aisles in at least 12 churches in Devon, can carry positive or negative connotations.<sup>127</sup> Sometimes it is obvious which is intended, for example, in a boss at Burrington where a lion is carved alongside a crowned image of Christ (Fig. 4.92). The lion in this carving has a pronounced tassel at the end of his tail which, in the bestiary, is used to erase his tracks so that hunters cannot follow him to his lair and take him. This relates to Christ:

our Redeemer, the spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of Jesse, the son of David, [who] hid the tracks of His love in heaven, until, sent by the Father, He descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary, and redeemed lost mankind.<sup>128</sup>

However, elsewhere, for example in the nave at Christow (Fig. 4.93), lions may be more likely to be associated with the devil since ‘the devil as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour’.<sup>129</sup> Lion’s heads, sometimes with their tongues extended, are found in five of the 12 churches, with a single boss of a foliate lion’s head being found in Bampton church. Bosses carved with lion’s heads and full-bodied lions are also found in Exeter Cathedral.

A carving of a lion standing on a boar at Ilsington church may allude to the triumph of Christ over the devil, since ‘in the spiritual sense the boar means the

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<sup>126</sup> Rubin, M., *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.310; Oxford Bodleian Douce 1, fol 57., in Rubin, 1991, p.311.

<sup>127</sup> The winged lion, the emblem of St Mark, is considered in the section below on Saints.

<sup>128</sup> Barber, 1992, p.24.

<sup>129</sup> First Epistle of St Peter the Apostle, Chap.5, v. 8, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1613.

devil because of its fierceness and strength' (Fig. 4.94).<sup>130</sup> This boss may, however, have another association, as the badge of Richard III, defeated at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, was a white boar. In the north transept at Chittlehampton, two lions hold a shield, now devoid of any identifying heraldry.

### **Unidentified birds**

Unidentified birds occur in 11 churches documented in the gazetteer, in the nave and aisles. Some peck at grapes, as at Ashburton (Fig. 4.95) and Buckland Filleigh, a design often found carved on the cornice of rood screens, and perhaps alluding to the faithful receiving the Eucharist. Some birds perch on branches, as at Dolton and Langtree (Fig. 4.96), where they may be gathering twigs and are therefore perhaps intended to represent the phoenix, a bird which gathers twigs in its old age to make a funeral pyre, upon which it is then consumed, before a new bird emerges from the ashes. However, this interpretation is far from certain. Other birds have raised wings but there is not enough evidence to identify their type, although some may be eagles.

### **Dragon**

Dragons and wyverns, a two-legged form, are found in at least ten churches in Devon, occurring in the chancel chapel, nave and aisles (Figs. 4.97, 4.98, 4.99, 4.100). Dragons are also frequently found in Exeter Cathedral on corbels, capitals and bosses. By the late medieval period, the dragon was firmly associated with the Devil as in a description of the creature in the Aberdeen Bestiary:

Therefore see to it, O man, that, after you have received the Holy Spirit, that is the spiritual, apprehensible dove, descending and remaining upon you, you are not caught outside eternity, set apart from the Father and

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<sup>130</sup> Barber, 1992, p.87.

the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that the dragon, that is, the Devil, does not kill you. For if you have the Holy Spirit, the dragon cannot come near you. Take heed, therefore, O man, and stay within the catholic faith, live within it, remain steadfast within it, within the one catholic Church. Be as careful as you can that you are not caught outside the doors of that house, that the dragon, the serpent of old, does not seize you and devour you, as Judas was at once devoured by the devil and perished, as soon as he had gone forth from the Lord and his brother apostles.<sup>131</sup>

The dragon was explicitly connected with Satan in Apocalypse 12.9: 'And that great dragon was cast out, the old serpent who is called the devil, and Satan who seduceth the whole world'.<sup>132</sup> This association and its great capacity for swallowing led to its identification with the Hell Mouth.<sup>133</sup> Dragons swallowing or attacking men appear in four churches: Braunton (Fig. 4.101), Chittlehampton (Fig. 4.102), Holcombe Rogus (Fig. 4.103), and Warkleigh (Fig 4.104).

There is a fine boss of a dragon in the north chancel chapel at Ashburton but this appears to be modern. There are two bosses which may represent foliate dragons in the south aisle at Ilfracombe.

### **Double-headed eagle**

The double-headed eagle is found in at least seven churches in Devon, in the chancel, chancel chapel, nave and aisles (Fig. 4.105). CJP Cave notes that:

the double-headed eagle has been supposed to have some relation to Richard Earl of Cornwall, second son of King John, who was elected Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, but this seems a far-fetched idea seeing that there were numerous families in this country who bore the double-headed eagle on their coat of arms. In Papworth's *British Armorial*s there are over a hundred entries under this charge.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/64v.hti>. Accessed 20.10.10.

<sup>132</sup> The Apocalypse of St John the Apostle, Chap. 12, v.9, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1641.

<sup>133</sup> Schmidt, 1995, pp.41–3.

<sup>134</sup> Cave, 1948, p.73.

The significance of the double-headed eagle in Devon is thus unclear, although its use is probably heraldic.<sup>135</sup>

## Deer

Deer occur on bosses in the chancel chapel, transept, aisles and porch of seven churches recorded in the gazetteer. In the north transept at Chittlehampton, a hart is chased by dogs (Fig. 4.106). In the nave and south aisle at North Molton, bosses are carved with winged stags (Fig. 4.107). In Meavy (Fig. 4.108) and South Pool (Fig. 4.109), creatures which are probably deer lie down with heads turned across their backs and tongues out. At Holcombe Rogus, a hart appears to be trampling on a snake, relating to the bestiary story that as soon as they experience symptoms of illness 'they entice snakes out of their holes with the breath of their noses, and overcoming their harmful poison, feed on them and are cured' (Fig. 4.110).<sup>136</sup> 'The nature of deer', according to MS Bodley 764:

is like that of the members of Holy Church who leave this homeland (that is, the world) because they prefer the new pastures of heaven, and support each other on the way; those who are more perfect help their lesser brethren through their example and good works, and support them. If they find a place of sin, they spring over it at once, and if the devil enters their body after they have committed a sin, they hasten to Christ, the spring of truth, and confess, drinking in His commandments, and are renewed, laying aside their old guilt.<sup>137</sup>

In the south porch at Landkey, four harts share one head (Fig. 4.111), a motif that is repeated on a boss in the church at Old Cleeve in Somerset (Fig. 4.112). A stag with fine antlers is carved on a boss in the south aisle at Coldridge (Fig. 4.113). It is interesting to note that John Evans, who built a chantry chapel at Coldridge, was park keeper of the Marquess of Dorset's deer park at Coldridge

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<sup>135</sup> In Exeter Cathedral the double-headed eagle displayed is carved on shields on the Speke chantry chapel at the east end of the north aisle, here intended as the Arms of Speke.

<sup>136</sup> Barber, 1992, p.51.

<sup>137</sup> Barber, 1992, p.52.

in the early sixteenth century. Although the chantry chapel was to the north of the chancel and the boss is positioned in the south aisle and may be earlier, deer were, no doubt, familiar to the local carvers.

### **Sow and farrow**

Bosses of a sow and farrow occur in four churches documented in the gazetteer: in the nave at Braunton (Fig. 4.114), in the south porch at Newton St Cyres (Fig. 4.115), in the nave at Sampford Courtenay (Fig. 4.116), and in the north aisle at Ugborough (Fig. 4.117). The sow and farrow motif is also found in Exeter Cathedral (Fig. 4.118), on two bosses and a corbel.<sup>138</sup>

The sow and farrow boss in the nave at Braunton is especially interesting as it has been the subject of a legend relating to the building of the church since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. In his church guide, Reverend Prebendary T.R. Owen relates the following:

[Saint Brannock] wished to build his church on the hill immediately behind its present site. But each piece of building was miraculously torn down until, in a vision, he received instructions to erect it where he found a white sow and her farrow. There he built it and there today a church still stands. This particular legend is commemorated in one of the bosses in the roof – that over the font.<sup>139</sup>

The legend is mentioned in the Parochial Collections of Dean Jeremiah Milles in the mid-eighteenth century: 'on ye wood work of ye nave are carved a sow with 5 pigs relating to a legend of St Branock (*sic*)'.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html>. The sow and farrow motif can also be found in the church of St Cuthbert, Wells, and in Winchester Cathedral. Broadclyst church in Devon has plaster bosses of the sow and farrow said to be careful copies made from the original oak roof which was removed in 1833.

<sup>139</sup> Owen, T.R., *St. Brannock's Church, Braunton*, 2006 edition, p.9. The position of this boss is discussed further in Chapter Six.

<sup>140</sup> Jeremiah Milles, Dean of Exeter from 1762 to 1784, circulated a questionnaire to parishes with the intention of gathering information for a book on the history of Devon. Although the book

However, Cresswell notes that:

The origin of the legend will be found in Virgil, the poet so deeply revered in medieval times. In the 8<sup>th</sup> book of the *Aeneid*, ll. 42–48, we are told how Ascanius, son of Aeneas, was to found the city of Alba Longa, which preceded Rome, where he saw:

‘A sow beneath the oak to lie along  
All white herself, and white her thirty young’.

On such a site Ascanius had founded a sacred city, and here too was a sacred site; so the symbol was carved on the bosses by the pious builders of the Middle Ages.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the long association of the sow and farrow boss with St Brannock, it is more likely that, in the late medieval period, it would have been understood with reference to a bestiary story which links the beasts with sin. Bestiary material has been shown to have influenced sermons and the 1327 inventory of Exeter Cathedral includes a *Liber bestiarum et alii plures in uno volumine: ‘De tribus naturis...’*<sup>142</sup>

Surviving bestiaries MS Bodley 764 and MS Harley 4751, both dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, have miniatures of sows suckling piglets in a similar configuration to the roof boss carvings (Fig. 4.119).

In MS Bodley 764, the sow is described thus :

The sow (‘*sus*’ in Latin) is so called because it ploughs up (*subigat*) its food; that is, it roots for food in the earth it has disturbed. The pig (*porcus*) is a filthy beast (*sporcus*); it sucks up filth, wallows in mud, and smears itself with slime. Horace calls the sow ‘the lover of mud’. Sows signify sinners, the unclean and heretics: it is prescribed in Jewish law that the flesh of beasts with cloven hooves which do not chew the cud shall not be eaten by the faithful. The Old and New Testaments, the Law

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was never completed, the original returns survive and are now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. For this study, a microfilm of these returns was consulted in the Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>141</sup> Cresswell, *Barnstaple*, 1924, p.93. Malcolm Jones notes that: ‘this is in fact an international folktale motif...especially found in the foundation legends of ‘Celtic’ saints – in the present context, the next nearest example would be the Glastonbury foundation legend’. Malcolm Jones pers. comm. 24.05.11. See Henken, E., *The Welsh Saints: a Study in Patterned Lives*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991, pp. 88 & 159.

<sup>142</sup> Baxter, R., *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998, pp.192-3; Baxter, 1998, p.219.

and the Gospels, support this: because heretics do not chew the cud of spiritual food, they are unclean. Sows are those who neglect their penance and return to that which they once bewailed, as Peter says in his Epistle: 'The dog is turned to its own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire' [II Peter 2:22]. For the dog, when it vomits, casts out and puts forth food which oppresses its breast; but when it returns to the vomit by which it had relieved itself, it burdens itself once again. Thus those who weep for sins they have admitted put forth the iniquity of their hearts, which were sated with the evil that oppressed them inwardly. This they cast out in confession; but after confession, they begin again and take up their old ways. The sow that was washed and returns to her wallowing in the mire is filthier than before; and he who weeps for his admitted sins, but does not desist from them, earns a graver punishment, condemned by his own misdeeds which he could have prevented by repentance; and he descends as if into murky waters because he removes the cleanness of his life by such tears, which are tainted before the eyes of God.<sup>143</sup>

The sow and farrow boss over the font at Braunton, then, is particularly apt, since in baptism original sin is washed away but, thereafter, the temptation to sin is ever present.

## Owl

Owls are carved on bosses in the north aisles of at least two churches in Devon: South Pool and South Tawton, and possibly on a woman's headdress at Ugborough. The South Tawton and Ugborough bosses were discussed earlier in the section on 'Heads'. At South Pool, a boss is carved with four owls' heads with another small head at their centre (Fig. 4.120). This boss, as with the others bearing owls, probably refers to sin, since the owl:

spends its days and nights around burial places, as the sinner delights in sin, which is like the stench of decaying human flesh. For it lives in caves like the sinner who will not emerge from darkness by means of confession but detests the light of truth.<sup>144</sup>

Owls appear frequently on misericords, often mobbed by small birds, symbolizing the condemnation of the sinner by the virtuous. Owls appear on

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<sup>143</sup> Barber, 1992, pp.84–5.

<sup>144</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/50v.hti>. Accessed 10.01.11.

corbels in Exeter Cathedral; however, the owl motif in use in the Oldham chantry chapel at the cathedral is intended as a rebus for Oldham – owl + dom. Bishop Oldham died in 1519.

## **Goat**

Bosses carved with goats are found in three of the churches documented for this thesis: Holcombe Rogus (Fig. 4.121), Illington (Fig. 4.122) and Langtree (Fig 4.123). As discussed earlier, in the section on foliate heads, goats deriving from medieval bestiaries might be viewed positively or negatively, depending on type. A medieval bestiary notes that:

The wild goat grazes higher and higher pasture, searching out the good plants from the harmful ones with sharp eyes, and grazes on these. If it is wounded, it searches out the herb dittany and is cured by touching it. In the same way, good preachers graze in the law of the Lord and delight in good works as in sustenance, always growing in virtue. They distinguish good principles from evil ones with the heart, and ruminate on those they have chosen: they study good and commit to memory the best principles. If they are wounded by sin, they run to Christ, confessing their sins, and are quickly healed. Christ is truly likened to dittany; for just as dittany expels iron from a wound and heals it, so Christ drives out the devil through confession and forgives sin.<sup>145</sup>

However, a he-goat from the same bestiary is described as:

...a stubborn, lascivious animal, always eager to mate, whose eyes are so full of lust that they look sideways...Its nature is so hot that diamonds, against which fire and iron are powerless, dissolve in its blood. For the he-goat, which in Jewish law was offered in atonement for sins, shows us the sinner, who in pouring out his blood (that is, in the tears of penitence) dissolves the hardness of his sins.<sup>146</sup>

It is uncertain which goats are intended in Holcombe Rogus, Illington and Langtree but, almost certainly, some reference to sin and its healing were intended.

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<sup>145</sup> Barber, 1992, p.56.

<sup>146</sup> Barber, 1992, p.83.



## Unicorn

Creatures which may be unicorns appear in the south aisles at Chagford (Fig. 4.124), Coldridge (Fig. 4.125) and Frithelstock (Fig. 4.126). The unicorn in most medieval bestiaries is said to symbolise Christ since it can only be captured when it falls asleep in the lap of a virgin. As Christ descended into the Virgin's womb, was born, captured and condemned, then he is the 'spiritual unicorn'.<sup>147</sup> The single horn of the unicorn signifies that Christ and his Father are one. Rowland notes, however, that some psalters depict the unicorn as symbolizing death.<sup>148</sup>

## Mermaid

Mermaids are only found on bosses in two churches in the gazetteer: in the nave at Stoodleigh (Figs. 4.127,4.128) and in the nave and north aisle at Wembworthy (Figs. 4.129, 4.130). Based on the classical siren who enticed sailors to their doom with her sweet song, the mermaid in the late medieval period was interpreted as a seductress who would lead the soul into sin. The comb and mirror, held by the Stoodleigh mermaids and one at Wembworthy, emphasise an association with vanity and pride, chief among the seven deadly sins. In a medieval sermon, it is the flatterer who is:

to be likened to a merveilous beste of the see that is cleped a mermayde,...that hath the body as a woman, and a taile as a fische; and syngeth so mery that it makith schipmen, that hyreth it and taketh tent therto, falle in slepe and perisse in the see.<sup>149</sup>

A mermaid in the north aisle at Wembworthy is blowing a pipe, probably referring to the siren's flute which, along with her voice and stringed instrument, might lure men to their destruction.

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<sup>147</sup> Barber, 1992, p.37.

<sup>148</sup> Rowland, 1974, p.154.

<sup>149</sup> BL MS Harl. 45, fol 146b, quoted in Owst, 1961, p.201.

Mermaids were also familiar in other media in the churches of the Diocese of Exeter, being recorded in the water beneath the figure of St Christopher in a wall painting, now lost, at Cullompton church.<sup>150</sup> The mermaid is also found on a bench end at Down St Mary, on a misericord, and also on two roof bosses in Exeter Cathedral (one shown as Fig. 4.131), although the mermaids in Exeter do not carry a comb and mirror, instead holding their tails or fish.<sup>151</sup>

### **Antelope**

In the chancel at Widecombe-in-the-Moor (Fig. 4.132), and the south aisle at Coldridge (Fig. 4.133), are carvings which are probably intended for gorged antelopes. Antelopes were known as creatures with keen hearing, which enabled them to elude hunters. When thirsty the creature went to the River Euphrates to drink, caught its long serrated horns in the branches of a shrub and was unable to break free. Its cries attracted hunters who killed the animal.

The moral of this story is related in MS Bodley 764:

So it is with you, O man, who tries to be sober and chaste and to lead a holy life: the two Testaments serve you as two horns, with the help of which you can fell and root out all bodily and spiritual vices. Beware of drunkenness, lest you are entangled in the snares of lust and slain by the devil; for 'wine and women will make men of understanding to fall away' [Ecclesiasticus 19:2].<sup>152</sup>

The gorged antelope is a heraldic device but, since it occurs at both Coldridge and Widecombe-in-the-Moor (where it is also chained) with other bestiary creatures, it is likely that in these churches it was interpreted in accordance with bestiary tradition.

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<sup>150</sup> Pugsley, D., *St Andrew's Church, Cullompton*, Derby: English Life Publications, 1993, p.1.

<sup>151</sup> Pearson, T., 'The Mermaid in the Church' in Block, 2009, p.106.

<sup>152</sup> Barber, 1992, p.34.

## Eagle

There are at least two bosses which are carved with eagles (other than the eagle of St John); that in the south aisle at Holcombe Rogus (Fig. 4.134) grasps a fish in its talons, an image which is familiar in medieval bestiary accounts of the eagle (Fig. 4.135). In MS Bodley 764 it is related that the eagle's eyesight is so sharp that, from a great height, it can see fish swimming in the sea which it dives down to seize. However, when the eagle grows old, its wings become heavy and its eyes cloud over. In order to restore its sight and the strength to its wings, the eagle searches for a fountain and flies towards the sun until its feathers are scorched and the mist burnt from its eyes; then the eagle plunges into the fountain three times and is rejuvenated. The moral of this story is that men 'should seek out the spiritual fountain of the Lord' and lift the eyes of their minds to God so that their 'youth shall be renewed like the eagle's'.<sup>153</sup>

In the nave at Ilsington, an eagle or hawk catches a rabbit or hare, perhaps symbolizing the triumph of the spirit over the flesh (Fig. 4.136). There are several other birds which may be eagles, including another at Ilsington, however, their identification is not certain.

In addition to the eagle at Holcombe Rogus there are several other bestiary creatures in the south aisle, some of which cannot be identified.<sup>154</sup> These bosses are similar in motif and carving to those in a number of churches in Somerset, including Queen Camel, Old Cleeve, Sampford Brett and Wootton Courtenay. The carvings described below, of an elephant, camel, griffin and

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<sup>153</sup> Barber, 1992, p.119; Psalm 102, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.767.

<sup>154</sup> Since many of the surrounding bosses can be identified as particular species from Bestiaries, it is probable that these creatures too derive from that source, although they cannot now be identified.

lynx are, however, believed to be unique on roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon.

## Elephant

The boss of the elephant at Holcombe Rogus is unusual as it does not have a trunk (Fig. 4.137). However, it is almost certainly intended for an elephant as it carries a war tower on its back – a familiar attribute of these beasts in bestiaries. The illustration was based on the belief that: 'The Persians and Indians put wooden towers on his back and fight with arrows as if they were on top of a wall'.<sup>155</sup>

The elephant was a loyal, yet reluctant, mate who, in order to have offspring, went to the east where the female would take the fruit from the *mandragora* tree and entice the male into eating it, thereby awakening his sexual desire.

Thus:

The big elephant and its mate represent Adam and Eve. For when they were in the flesh pleasing to God, before their sin, they did not know how to mate and had no understanding of sin. But when the woman ate the fruit of the tree, that is to say, she gave her man the fruit of the mandrake, the tree of knowledge, then she became pregnant, and for that reason they left Paradise. For as long as they were in Paradise, Adam did not mate with Eve. For it is written: 'Adam knew his wife and she conceived', (Genesis, 4:1) and she gave birth on the waters of guilt.<sup>156</sup>

However, there was an alternative reading for the elephant. Since the beast was believed to have no joints in its legs, if it fell, it was easy prey. Therefore hunters sawed through the trunks of trees against which an elephant rested, with the result that both fell to the ground. Neither a single large elephant,

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<sup>155</sup> Barber, 1992, p.40.

<sup>156</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/10r.hti>  
Accessed 18.12.10.

symbolizing the Law, nor twelve elephants, symbolizing the Prophets, could lift him. Then came a small elephant who succeeded in lifting the fallen elephant where others had failed, and this was held to symbolize Christ, who came to raise up mankind.

Since the elephant boss at Holcombe Rogus is towards the east end of the south aisle, juxtaposes a boss carved with the Arms of the Bluett family, and diagonally opposite a boss of the pelican-in-her-piety, it is likely that it was intended to be interpreted as Christ.

A misericord at Exeter Cathedral is carved with an elephant, although, unusually, it does not carry a tower. An elephant's head is carved on a capital in the Dorset aisle, c.1520, at Ottery St Mary.<sup>157</sup>

### **Camel**

As with most bestiary creatures the camel could be interpreted in several different ways. It was noted for its temperance as it can survive without liquid, for its prudence in storing water for future need, and for lust since: 'the female camel boweth herself and goeth on her knees, when she will be coupled with the male and her talent and desire is strong and fervent in time of love'.<sup>158</sup> However, the camel was perhaps best known for its humility in kneeling submissively to take on heavy loads. MS Bodley 764 states that:

The camel signifies the humility of Christ, who bears all our sins, or the Gentiles converted to the Christian faith. In the gospel it says: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God [Matthew 19:24], meaning that it is easier for Christ to suffer for those who are enamoured of this world than for such

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<sup>157</sup> The Dorset aisle was named in honour of a major benefactor to Ottery St Mary church, Cecily Bonville, Marchioness of Dorset, who married Henry Lord Stafford in 1503. Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.619.

<sup>158</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus quoted in Rowland, 1974, p.49.

men to be converted to Christ, He was willing to assume the part of a camel in taking on Himself the burdens of our weakness which he did out of humility.<sup>159</sup>

The camel in the south aisle at Holcombe Rogus (Fig. 4.138) is probably best interpreted, therefore, in this sense.

### **Griffin**

The griffin is a powerful hybrid with the body of a lion, the king of beasts, and the head and wings of the eagle, the king of birds (Fig. 4.139). Its symbolism is ambiguous: in medieval sculpture it can symbolize the Devil in his attacks on man and, yet, as Rowland notes 'Dante, inspired perhaps by the frequent comparisons of Christ to the lion and the eagle, made the griffin the symbol of Christ'.<sup>160</sup> A boss of a griffin fighting a dragon in the crossing at Exeter Cathedral probably symbolizes Christ (griffin) fighting the Devil (dragon). The griffin boss at Holcombe Rogus may thus carry positive rather than negative connotations; however, this cannot be confirmed.

### **Lynx**

One boss at Holcombe Rogus is carved with a quadruped which appears to be urinating on stones on the ground (Fig. 4.140).<sup>161</sup> This action identifies the creature as a lynx, of which MS Bodley 764 says:

The lynx is so called because it is counted as a kind of wolf (*lupus*). It is a beast marked with spots on its back like those of a pard but it resembles a wolf: its urine is said to harden into a valuable jewel called *ligurius*. The lynxes know that this is valuable, as is proved by the exceptional care with which they cover it with sand: they are naturally jealous, and cannot bear it to fall into the hands of man...This beast typifies envious men who, in the hardness of their hearts, would rather do harm, than good

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<sup>159</sup> Barber, 1992, p.96.

<sup>160</sup> Rowland, 1974, p.87.

<sup>161</sup> Bestiary illustrations of the lynx usually show the creature emitting a stream of urine which turns into a stone. See for example Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 88, Folio 8r at <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beastgallery135.htm#>.

and are intent on wordly desires: even things for which they have no use and which might benefit others they render useless.<sup>162</sup>

The boss is therefore likely to refer to envy, one of the seven deadly sins.

### Four horses

One boss in the nave of Braunton church is carved with horses which have four bodies but share two heads (Fig. 4.141). In medieval bestiaries, it is related that: 'horses get their Latin name 'equi' because when they are harnessed in teams of four, they are equally matched, in equal size, and with equal stride'.<sup>163</sup>

The horse's form, beauty, temperament and colour are discussed, but, unlike most beasts, the horse does not appear to be given a strong moral meaning in bestiaries, although it is noted for its loyalty since, if its master is killed or dies, it feels sorrow and weeps.

However, Rowland notes that:

In medieval times the horse was widely used to represent the sinner or sensual appetite, which must be controlled if man is to find salvation. The unknown writer of "*A Tretyse of Gostly Batayle*" stated that "like as one horse welle-taught hys mastere over many perylls and saveth hym fro perysshing, so the body well-rewled bereth the soule over many perylls off thys wrecched worlde".<sup>164</sup>

The boss with horses may also allude to the second of the seven penitential psalms, vulgate psalm 31, with its verse which warns: 'Do not become like the horse and the mule, who have no understanding. With bit and bridle bind fast their jaws, who come not near unto thee'.<sup>165</sup> This entreaty is repeated in James 3:2–3:

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<sup>162</sup> Barber, 1992, p.38.

<sup>163</sup> Barber, 1992, p.101.

<sup>164</sup> Rowland, 1974, pp.108–109.

<sup>165</sup> Psalm 31, v.9, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p. 709.

For in many things we all offend. If any man offend not in word: the same is a perfect man. He is able also with a bridle to lead about the whole body. For if we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body.<sup>166</sup>

The message here is that if, through the use of a bridle and bit, man can guide horses, he should learn also to bridle his tongue.

An image of four horses in the same configuration as that on the boss at Braunton is found in the Peterborough Psalter, c.1300, where it is placed beneath the feet of a pard, or leopard, a creature which symbolized the sinner, and before a hunter with spear about to kill a wild boar (Fig. 4.142).<sup>167</sup>

### **Biblical locust**

A boss in the south aisle at Coldridge church is carved with a quadruped which has a crowned human head and a long tail ending in three points (Fig. 4.143). The beast is set against a ridged circular ground. Beatrix Cresswell suggests that this beast may be King Nebuchadnezzar, who, in the Old Testament, is humbled by God and lives as a beast of the field for seven years. However, the creature is more likely to be a Biblical locust, described coming out of the smoke-filled bottomless pit in Apocalypse 9: 7-10:

And the shapes of the locusts were like to horses prepared for battle; and on their heads as it were crowns of gold: and their faces as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions: And they had breastplates, as breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle: And they had tails like scorpions, and stings were in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.<sup>168</sup>

Although the beast at Coldridge does not exhibit all the characteristics of the Biblical locust, this may be due to its interpretation by its carver. A misericord at

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<sup>166</sup> Epistle of St James the Apostle, Chap. 3, v.2–3, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1604.

<sup>167</sup> Baltrusaitis, J., *Le Moyen Age Fantastique*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1955, p.139.

<sup>168</sup> Apocalypse of St John the Apostle, Chap. 9, v.7–10, in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1638.



Exeter Cathedral carved with a similarly crowned human-headed quadruped, may also represent a locust.

### **iii) Heraldic Devices:**

There are at least 18 churches in Devon where roof bosses of shields no longer carry identifying marks.<sup>169</sup> These are found in the chancel, nave, transepts, aisles and porch. Presumably these shields were, at one time, painted, or intended to be painted, with a heraldic device, although some may have been painted with symbols of the Passion or the five wounds. Shields carried by angels in the south aisle at Alwington church have, though, been analysed for the presence of medieval polychromy by Elizabeth Cheadle, who noted that there was no evidence that the bosses had originally been painted. However, conservator Eddie Sinclair has pointed out that only tiny samples are taken, and that these can only indicate if medieval polychromy is present on a very small proportion of the surface area. It is, therefore, very difficult to be certain in these matters.<sup>170</sup> Many shields are, however, carved with devices which appear to link the churches with particular families and these are described below.

#### **Bourchier knot**

The most frequently occurring heraldic device on bosses, extant in at least 11 churches in Devon, is that of a reef knot: the badge of the Bourchier family (Fig. 4.144). The chancel of Bampton church houses the tombs of Sir William Bourchier and his wife Thomasine. Sir William is said to have erected the screens and to have built the north aisle of the church in 1450 and a boss of the

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<sup>169</sup> Images of these are included in the gazetteer, although a distribution map is not included.

<sup>170</sup> Eddie Sinclair, pers. comm., 13.09.10.

Bourchier knot is found in the roof of this aisle together with symbols of the Passion.<sup>171</sup>

The Bourchiers were a powerful family, Sir William's brother, Thomas, becoming Archbishop of Canterbury in 1454. Sir William's grandson, John Bourchier, was created 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Bath in 1536 (d. 1539). The 2<sup>nd</sup> earl, also John, is said to have erected the screens at Tawstock church.<sup>172</sup> He married Lady Eleanor Manners, sister of Thomas Manners, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Rutland, sometime before 5<sup>th</sup> May 1524, and their respective badges, the Bourchier knot and the Rutland badge of a peacock, are carved on bosses in the south chancel chapel at Tawstock. Bourchier knots are mainly associated with churches in north Devon, and it will be noted from the map of their distribution in the gazetteer, that the most southerly boss of a Bourchier knot is at Drewsteignton church on the northern edge of Dartmoor.

### **Courtenay arms and badge**

The Courtenays, Earls of Devon, are represented by their arms, of three torteaux (Fig. 4.145), or their badge, a bundle of sticks (Fig. 4.146), in the chancel, nave and aisles of at least seven churches in Devon. The history of the Courtenays in the late medieval period is chequered: Thomas Courtenay, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Devon was attainted and beheaded in 1461 after the Battle of Towton, near York; his younger brother, Henry, was also executed for treason at Salisbury in 1461. A third brother, John, was restored to the earldom in 1470 but killed in the Battle of Tewkesbury a year later. In 1485, Henry VII again

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<sup>171</sup> Francis, T., *The Religious History of the Parish of Bampton, Devon*, Tiverton: Fort Press, 2001, p.1.

<sup>172</sup> Wrey, F. and Wrey, C., *A Guide to Tawstock Church*, 2nd edition, Barnstaple: Pincombe, 1927, p.12. The screens were probably erected, though, before he inherited the title.

restored the earldom, to Edward Courtenay. Edward's son, William, married Katherine, the younger sister of Elizabeth of York, queen of Henry VII. William, however, was attainted in 1504 and not released until the accession of Henry VIII in 1509. The earldom was given by Henry VIII to William in 1511, but William died before his investiture could be completed and was succeeded by his son, Henry. For many years Henry enjoyed the king's favour but, in 1538, he too was accused of treason and was attainted and beheaded.<sup>173</sup> It is perhaps not surprising then that the Courtenay arms and badge do not appear more often in churches in Devon.

The Courtenay arms may, however, in some cases, be connected with Peter Courtenay who was Bishop of Exeter from 1477 until his translation to Winchester in 1486. The Bishop of Exeter was certainly patron at Cheriton Bishop where there are two bosses linked to the Courtenay family – one bearing the Courtenay Arms and the other carved with a bundle of sticks, the badge of the Courtenay family. These bosses are both in the north aisle.

### **Arms of the Bishops of Exeter**

There are many stone bosses at Ottery St Mary painted with the Arms of John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter 1327–1369, who was responsible for transforming the church c. 1340 (Fig. 4.147). The arms of Bishop Grandisson also appear in the cathedral at Exeter.

A boss in the north chancel chapel at Tavistock bears the arms of three shovellers' heads of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter 1420–1455 (Fig. 4.148).

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<sup>173</sup> The history of the Courtenay family is discussed by John Prince in *The Worthies of Devon*, London: Rees and Curtis, Edward Upham and Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1810, pp.249–251.

In Lapford church nave and north aisle are bosses carved with a saltire which may be intended for the Arms of George Neville, Bishop of Exeter 1456–65 (Fig. 4.149).

The Arms of the Bishops of Exeter may have been more widely represented in stained glass in the medieval period, as in a shield with the Arms of Bishop Lacy which survives at East Budleigh church (Fig. 4.150). In Exeter St Martin, a window on the south side of the nave has the Arms of the See of Exeter together with the Arms of Bishop Lacy. Lacy is recorded as having given a window to this church.<sup>174</sup>

### **Stafford knot**

The Stafford knot occurs on roof bosses in at least two churches in Devon: Cadeleigh and Nymet Rowland, both churches in mid-Devon (Fig. 4.151). These bosses may refer to Bishop Stafford (r.1395–1419) or, alternatively, they may reference the marriage in 1503 of Cecily Bonville, Marchioness of Dorset, to Henry, Lord Stafford. The fan-vaulted Dorset aisle at Ottery St Mary bears her name and the Stafford Arms are placed over the entrance to the north porch of the church.

### **Arms or badges carved on shields (other than Bouchier, Courtenay, Stafford and Bishops of Exeter)**

In 16 churches, coats of arms are carved on shields on bosses in the chancel, nave, aisles or porch.<sup>175</sup> In the south porch at Bere Ferrers, the Arms of Ferrers,

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<sup>174</sup> Scott, J.G.M., *St Martin's Church, Exeter, Devon*, 2004, p.3.

<sup>175</sup> Images of these bosses may be found in the gazetteer, although no distribution map is included. In Atherington chancel and Landkey north aisle, a crescent moon with star may refer to the Denzil family, although in neither case does this emblem appear on a shield. In the south

Willoughby de Broke and Cheney are carved on bosses, with some of these arms being repeated inside the church on a bench end and in stained glass. At Berry Pomeroy, the Arms of Pomeroy are sculpted in stone in the porch. At Bulkworthy, the Arms of St Ledger and Butler are found on bosses in the south aisle. The Arms of the Ayshford family appear in the south aisle at Burlescombe, while in the chancel at Cheriton Fitzpaine a shield is carved with the badge of Holand, the Dukes of Exeter. In the south aisle at Holcombe Rogus the Arms of the Bluett family can be seen. In the north aisle at Horwood, are the Arms of Pollard and in the south porch at Marldon, the Arms of Gilbert are sculpted in stone. The Arms of Sir Otho de Grandisson, uncle of Bishop Grandisson, are to be found on bosses in the roof of Ottery St Mary as are the Arms of the bishop's sister, Katharine de Montacute, Countess of Salisbury (the Arms of Bishop Grandisson and those of Courtenay are also in the roof at Ottery St Mary). The Arms of Cornu and De Esse are seen in the chancel and nave at Sutcombe, with De Esse repeated in the south aisle. Several churches have arms which have not been identified: there is a shield with chevrons and possibly two animal heads in the north aisle at Cheriton Bishop, a shield with crossed staples at Chulmleigh, a shield with three lozenges at Cullompton, a shield with the figure of a bull at Harford, a shield with crown and sword (which may be related to a martyred saint) at Newton St Cyres, and shields with a gauntlet and two further devices at Sidbury.

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chancel chapel at Tawstock is carved the peacock badge of the Earls of Rutland, although again not on a shield.

#### **iv) The life of Christ:**

##### **Symbols of the Passion**

Instruments of the Passion are carved on shields on bosses in 13 churches recorded in the gazetteer, sometimes combined with a wounded heart, one of the five wounds. The bosses occur in the nave and aisles. The most frequently occurring symbol is that of a crown of thorns, often carved as a twisted wreath, and with no indication of the thorns which would have been difficult to carve and are unlikely to have been visible from floor level. Also represented are the cross, three nails, the spear and sponge (Fig. 4.152), and scourges (Fig. 4.153). The symbols of the Passion were widely portrayed in other media, notably in a wall painting in the south chancel chapel at Ashton church where a large figure of Christ is surrounded by the instruments of his torture (Fig. 4.154).

##### **Five wounds**

The wounds of Christ, to hands and feet and to the heart, are carved on shields in the aisles of at least eight churches in Devon, although in only four of these do all five wounds occur. A fine boss of the five wounds in the south aisle at Broadhembury retains traces of blue and red colouring, although it is not known whether this is medieval or later (Fig. 4.155). A boss of the five wounds in the porch at Cheriton Fitzpaine is probably modern.<sup>176</sup> In four churches, only the wounded heart appears, surrounded by a crown of thorns, as shown in Fig. 4.156 at Poughill.

Eamon Duffy notes that devotion to the Wounds of Jesus was a popular cult in late medieval England, finding expression in vernacular sermons, verse and

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<sup>176</sup> This boss is not, therefore, included on the map of the five wounds in the gazetteer.

prayers.<sup>177</sup> Duffy cites a prayer which links each of the wounds with particular sins to which they might act as an antidote:

O Blissful Ihesu for the wounde of your lefte hand kepe me from the synne of envy and yeve me grace...to have this verytu of bounte that of all myn even crysten welfare & profit bodily & gostely therof to be as myn owyn. In honour of thys peyne *Pater Noster*.  
Gracious Ihesu for the wounde of your right foot kepe me from the synne of covetyse that I desire no maner thyng that is contrary to your wylle and gyf me grace to have allwey the vertu of freness in dissescioun. In honoure of thys peyne *Pater Noster*.<sup>178</sup>

Duffy suggests that devotion to the five wounds: ‘was specially linked to intercession for the dead and deliverance from Purgatory’ for ‘when Christ came as Judge he would display his Wounds to the elect as pledges of love for them, to sinners as bitter reproach –“they shall look on him whom they have pierced”’.<sup>179</sup> The five wounds were therefore familiar to parishioners in Judgement scenes.

### **The Holy Name of Jesus**

Bosses bearing the sacred monogram – IHC or IHS – (Fig. 4.157) survive in the chancel, nave and aisles of at least seven churches in Devon. The cult of the Holy Name of Jesus flourished in late medieval England. As Susan Wabuda points out:

The Holy Name represented one of the most potent of all the prayers and sacred texts that served as avenues to God’s grace, because it enjoyed the ultimate of intimate associations with Christ...Jesus’s name was intimately connected with salvation, divine protection and mediation. It represented light, it healed, and it was heavenly food. The act of bringing his name before God in prayer was a petition to preserve the body from grievous harm, and a means to speed the soul through its ordeals in purgatory to its ultimate reception into the joys of Paradise. By saying Jesus’s name or repeating it again and again, or even by looking upon

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<sup>177</sup> Duffy, E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p.245.

<sup>178</sup> Duffy, 1992, p. 244.

<sup>179</sup> Duffy, 1992, p.246.

the letters that represented it, his blessing would be conferred upon a suppliant.<sup>180</sup>

It is interesting to note that in four churches the sacred monogram occurs in association with symbols of the Passion and/or the wounds of Christ. In Bampton, there are shields bearing the sacred monogram (IHC and IHS), instruments of the Passion (sponge, spear, nails, crown of thorns and cross), and the five wounds. In Holcombe Rogus, the five wounds and sacred monogram appear on shields in the south aisle. In Cadeleigh and Kings Nympton, a heart surrounded by the crown of thorns and the sacred monogram are found.

### **Figures of Christ**

In only five churches of 121 documented in the gazetteer is a figure of Christ recognisable on roof bosses. In the nave at Burrington, there is a boss of a crowned figure alongside that of a lion which may refer to Christ as the Lion of Judah (see Fig. 4.92). In the nave at Buckland Monachorum, an unusually large rectangular oak carving, which now serves as a boss, portrays Christ crowning his mother as Queen of Heaven (Fig. 4.158). It is unlikely, however, that this carving was ever intended as a boss and it may once have formed part of a reredos.<sup>181</sup>

There is a demi-figure in the chancel at Widecombe probably intended as the crowned Christ with hands raised showing his wounds, although modern and poorly applied paintwork does not indicate wounds or blood (Fig. 4.159). Close

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<sup>180</sup> Wabuda, S., *Preaching During the English Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.154.

<sup>181</sup> Hugh Harrison, pers. comm., 11.05.06.



examination of a photograph of the boss, however, reveals a split running from top to bottom of the boss to the left side of the figure. There also appears to be a split to the top right of the boss. This may indicate a repair or restoration, which possibly includes both arms, but, due to the application of modern paintwork, it is impossible to be sure. The image is, however, similar to that in stained glass at Cadbury, thought to have been the central figure of a Seven Sacraments window.

Four bosses with the figure of Christ are to be found carved in stone in the great collegiate church of Ottery St Mary. Bosses in the Lady Chapel and chancel show the Christ child with the Virgin Mary, while an image of Christ in Majesty is found in the roof of the Lady Chapel (Fig. 4.160), and another of Christ crowning the Virgin as Queen of Heaven is in the chancel. In Plympton St Mary, originally a chapel attached to Plympton Priory, a crucifixion is carved in Roborough stone on the central boss in the south porch (Fig. 4.161).

In the south porch at Thorverton, an unusual stone boss (Fig. 4.162) portrays three central figures, two of whom appear to be God the Father and an angel. Also carved are what appear to be a swaddled child, an ear of corn, and an eye. The boss is stated by Cherry and Pevsner to be a 'weird representation of the Holy Trinity', yet alternatives to this suggestion have also been made.<sup>182</sup> The boss is discussed in a letter to C.J. P. Cave from the Bisschoppelijk Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, dated March 10, 1947. The writer, whose signature is indecipherable, states:

I thought too on the Trinity. But should it be possible that this boss represents the Annunciation or in particular the Conception (*Angelus Domini...nuntiavit Mariae et concepit de Spiritu Sancto...et verbum*

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<sup>182</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.803.

*carum factum est*). This is only a suggestion; I don't know now any other explanation for this boss.<sup>183</sup>

A head, which Cave suggests may be that of Christ, is at the east end of the south chancel chapel at Meavy, but as the head has neither nimbus nor crown, there is no evidence to support this claim. Moreover, the head is probably modern, being much sharper in carving than other bosses in the chapel. A boss in the south porch at Paignton is said to represent the Ascension but it is badly decayed.<sup>184</sup>

That images connected with the life of Christ are seldom found on roof bosses in the parish churches of Devon is not unexpected as these images would have been very strongly represented in other forms and media: the great wooden carving of the Rood which was the central image in every church, stained glass, as at Abbots Bickington (Fig. 4.163), on wall and screen paintings, and in alabaster.<sup>185</sup>

### **Agnus Dei**

A lamb with cross, the Agnus Dei, is carved on bosses in four churches: in the nave at Langtree where the image is also carved on the font; in the south chancel chapel at Coldridge (Fig. 4.164), in the south porch at Sutcombe and in the chancel at Ottery St Mary where it is carried by St John the Baptist. The Agnus Dei symbolised Christ: 'Behold the lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world'.<sup>186</sup> An Agnus Dei boss is positioned in the north

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<sup>183</sup> C.J.P. Cave Archive, Society of Antiquaries Library MS 943/6.

<sup>184</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=383779&mode=adv> Accessed 10.10.10.

<sup>185</sup> At Combe Martin, a figure of Christ is painted on one of the doors of the rood screen. Alabasters from South Huish and Cheriton Bishop are carved with scenes from the Passion of Christ. Allan, J., 'An Angel from Pinhoe and Other Medieval English Alabasters in Devon', *Devon Archaeological Society Proceedings*, No. 59, 2001, p.159–181, on pp.165–8.

<sup>186</sup> John, Chap. 1, v.29 in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1393.

porch at Exeter Cathedral although Henry and Hulbert suggest it may have been reused from elsewhere.<sup>187</sup>

#### **v) Angels:**

Angels are carved on bosses in at least 16 churches in Devon, most commonly holding shields or scrolls. Angels were messengers and, as Burgess notes, 'were intermediaries between the earthly and heavenly realms. They were able to carry the suffrages and prayers of the parish faithful "up", and to bring grace or revelation "down", to the direct benefit of the faithful'.<sup>188</sup>

#### **Angels holding shields**

Angels holding shields are often found on the wall plates of churches in Devon, for example at Northlew (Fig. 4.165), and occur less frequently on bosses. However, fine examples do survive in the chancel, chancel chapel, transept, nave or porch of at least 9 churches, notably two bosses from the medieval roof at Crediton church (Figs. 4.166, 4.167). Shield-bearing angels carved in stone form pendant bosses in the Lane Aisle at Cullompton (Fig. 4.168).

#### **Angels holding scrolls**

Angels holding scrolls are only found in three churches recorded for this thesis: in the porch at Landkey, in the nave at Warkleigh and two fine bosses in the chancel at Cheldon (Fig. 4.169). A figure in the south chancel chapel at South Pool may also be intended as an angel carrying a scroll (Fig. 4.170).

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<sup>187</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/docs/ViewImage.asp?FileID=938>  
Accessed 18.12.10.

<sup>188</sup> Burgess, C. 'Time and Place' in Burgess, C., and Duffy, E. (eds.), *The Parish in Medieval England*. Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium, Volume XIV, Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006, p.26.

## **Angels accompanying the Virgin**

In two churches there are stone bosses in the south porch carved with angels accompanying the Virgin: Brixham (Fig. 4.171) and Sidbury. In Brixham, the carving is similar to that which occurs on an altar frontal made from late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century vestments, now stored in the west tower of the church (Fig. 4.172). In Sidbury, angels carry a female figure to Heaven, probably the Virgin, or perhaps Mary Magdalene (Fig. 4.173).<sup>189</sup>

## **Angel on cloud**

There is a figure of an angel on a cloud at the east end of the nave in Braunton church. This is discussed in a case study of that church in Chapter Six. Two bosses in the north aisle at Widecombe also appear to be winged, and may be intended as angels, but are probably post-medieval.

## **vi) The Virgin Mary:**

### **Figures of the Virgin**

Bosses featuring the Virgin Mary occur in at least five churches of Devon, and possibly a sixth. The church of St Mary, Higher Brixham has a worn stone boss in the south porch, probably that of the Assumption of the Virgin accompanied by angels. Preserved in the church is an altar frontal made from early fifteenth-century vestments which is worked with a similar design.<sup>190</sup> In the south porch at Sidbury, another worn stone boss, which shows a central figure being carried by angels, probably represents the Assumption of the Virgin, although, as is mentioned above, the figure may be intended for Mary Magdalene. The boss in

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<sup>189</sup> An image of Mary Magdalene being carried to Heaven is depicted in the Queen Mary Psalter, fols. 301–2, Davidson, C. (ed.), *Gesture and Drama in Medieval Art*, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series 28, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001, p.166.

<sup>190</sup> See section above on 'Angels accompanying the Virgin'.

the south porch at Thorverton, discussed above in the section on 'Figures of Christ', may represent the Annunciation.

A boss in the nave at Burrington is carved with the Virgin and Child (Fig. 4.174), while a carving, which now serves as a boss in the nave at Buckland Monachorum church, shows the Coronation of the Virgin.<sup>191</sup>

Two bosses at Milton Abbot, in which a baby is cradled in the hand of a larger figure, are said by C.J.P. Cave to be 'unusual examples of Madonna and Child' (Fig. 4.175, 4.176), however, this attribution is uncertain.<sup>192</sup>

### **Lily in a pot**

A pot with a lily (Fig. 4.177), usually shown in scenes of the Annunciation as on the rood screens at Buckland in the Moor (Fig. 4.178), and in stained glass at Bondleigh (Fig. 4.179), is carved on a boss in the south aisle at Coldridge.<sup>193</sup>

John Mirk, an Augustinian priest from Shropshire, refers to this image in the *Festial*, a collection of vernacular sermons written in the 1380s. In Mirk's sermon, a Christian and a Jew were seated either side of a wine pot talking of Mary, mother of Christ. The Christian commented to the Jew that as the green stalk of a lily brings forth a white flower without any help from man and without any impairment of the stalk, so Mary conceived of the Holy Ghost, and brought forth her son. The Jew responded that when he saw a lily spring out of the wine pot he would believe but, until then, not. At once, the fairest lily that ever was

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<sup>191</sup> See section on 'Figures of Christ'.

<sup>192</sup> Cave, 1948, p.200. One of the adult heads, however, appears to be male. Malcolm Jones suggests that the figures might be intended as fools with marottes – cf. bench-ends at St Levan, Cornwall. Malcolm Jones, pers. comm. 24.05.11.

<sup>193</sup> An alabaster from South Huish church shows the Virgin kneeling with a pot of lilies. Allan, J., 'An Angel from Pinhoe and Other Medieval English Alabasters in Devon' in *Devon Archaeological Society Proceedings*, No. 59, 2001, p.159–181, on pp.163–165.

seen sprang from the pot. At this, the Jew fell to his knees saying 'Lady, now I believe that you conceived Jesus Christ, God son of Heaven, of the Holy Ghost, and that you were a virgin before and after'. The Jew converted to Christianity and was a holy man thereafter.<sup>194</sup>

### **Crowned M**

A device of a crowned 'M' carved on a boss in the nave at Bampton (Fig. 4.180) refers to the Virgin as Queen of Heaven while another from the nave at Cotleigh may refer to Maria Regina (Fig. 4.181).<sup>195</sup>

As with images of Christ, the relative paucity of images of the Virgin on roof bosses can be explained by their inclusion in other, usually higher status, media such as stained glass and alabaster. According to Quinel's statutes, every church was required to have a statue of the Virgin as well as an image of its patronal saint. Another image of the Virgin stood alongside the figure of the crucified Christ on the rood beam and there are many paintings on rood screens, as at Hennock (Fig. 4.182). The Virgin was widely depicted in stained glass, as at Broadwoodkelly (Fig. 4.183), and a wall painting of her Assumption survives at Exeter Cathedral (Fig. 4.184). A wall-painting of the Virgin in her role as intercessor for the souls of the departed, was also recorded at Bovey Tracey (Fig. 4.185).

### **vii) Saints:**

#### **The Four Evangelists**

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<sup>194</sup> My modernisation of Erbe, T., (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, Early English Text Society, London, 1905. Unaltered reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer 1997, p.109.

<sup>195</sup> The crowned 'M' is also found in other media. Malcolm Jones notes that: 'From a site in London comes a mould for casting six badges of the crowned letter 'm': it ...seems almost certain that these multiple badges commemorate, and for their wearers beseech the protection of, the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven.' Jones, 2004, p.19.

The four evangelists, in symbolic form as an angel (St Matthew), winged lion (St Mark), winged ox (St Luke) and eagle (St John), are found on bosses in at least three churches in Devon. At the east end of the nave at Braunton, the evangelists carry identifying scrolls which are now gilded (Fig. 4.186). At Burrington, the symbols of the evangelists appear together with scrolls and human figures of the saints in the nave (Fig. 4.187). The evangelists are also carved in stone in the porch at Thorverton (Fig. 4.188). The four evangelists were frequently depicted on screen paintings, for example at Holne, and in stained glass, for example at Doddiscombsleigh. An eagle with scroll, which probably refers to St John the Evangelist, occurs in the nave at Exeter St Martin (Fig. 4.189), and a figure of St John at the crucifixion is found in the south porch at Plympton St Mary.

### **St John the Baptist**

St John the Baptist appears as a full figure carrying the Agnus Dei on a boss in the chancel at Ottery St Mary (Fig. 4.190). A severed head of the Baptist is carved on a boss in the north aisle at Poughill (Fig. 4.191). This image is also replicated on bench ends, such as those at Coldridge (Fig. 4.192) and Weare Giffard (Fig. 4.193).

### **St Catherine**

Bosses at North Bovey (Fig. 4.194) and Widecombe-in-the-Moor (Fig. 4.195), both on Dartmoor, are carved with images of a crowned St Catherine holding the wheel upon which she was tortured.<sup>196</sup> Images of this saint are again more likely to have been represented in paintings on rood screens in Devon, as at

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<sup>196</sup> For a detailed discussion of the boss at North Bovey see Chapter Six.

Hennock, and in stained glass, as at Awliscombe (Fig. 4.196). A bench end at Combe-in-Teignhead is carved with an image of the saint. In the north aisle at Cadeleigh church three bosses are carved with spiked wheels which may allude to St Catherine.

### **St Anne**

St Anne appears on a boss in the chancel at Ottery St Mary, where she is pictured in her traditional role of teaching the Virgin Mary to read (Fig. 4.197).

### **St Christopher**

Burrington church has a nave boss carved with an image of St Christopher carrying the Christ Child (Fig. 4.198). Presumably C.J.P. Cave did not visit Burrington, for he notes that: 'St Christopher appears, as far as my records go, only at Selworthy and in the Norwich cloisters; his absence from roof bosses is remarkable considering how often he appears on wall paintings'.<sup>197</sup> According to Miriam Gill, the image of St Christopher is the most frequently depicted subject in English medieval wall painting.<sup>198</sup> Although there are no extant wall paintings of the saint in Devon, images are recorded at Cullompton and Hatherleigh.<sup>199</sup> St Christopher also appears in stained glass in Devon, for example, at Abbots Bickington, Doddiscombsleigh and Littlehempston (Fig. 4.199). A devotional image of the saint is recorded in Ashburton in the churchwarden's accounts of 1538–9, a guild is mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts for North Petherwin, and a store at Broadhempston.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Cave, 1948, p.46.

<sup>198</sup> Gill, 2002, p.367.

<sup>199</sup> Pugsley, 1993, p.1; Hillyer, N., *An Illustrated Guide and History of Hatherleigh Parish Church*, 1992, p.12.

<sup>200</sup> Whiting R., *The Blind Devotion of the People. Popular Religion and the English Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edition, 1991, pp. 65, 107, 110.



Although Cave claims that the absence of St Christopher from bosses is remarkable, it is perhaps more remarkable that he is imaged in this format at all, given that in his story in the *Golden Legend* he is portrayed as a giant and is therefore much more suited to large scale depiction.<sup>201</sup> Christopher was usually painted as a monumental figure on the north wall of the church opposite the main lay entrance of the south porch and therefore in an area of maximum visibility and accessibility. The saint's power stemmed from the belief that he would 'put away sickness and sores from them that remember his passion and figure' and his image would protect against fatigue and sudden death.<sup>202</sup> An Anglo-Norman inscription in a wall painting of the saint at Wood Eaton in Oxfordshire, reads: '*Ki cest image verra le jur de male mort ne murra*' – 'who sees this image shall not die an ill death this day'.<sup>203</sup>

### **St Eligius (Eloy or Loy(e))**

A boss in the north aisle at Ugborough is said to show St Eligius, also known as St Eloy or Loye, forging a horseshoe (Fig. 4.200).<sup>204</sup> According to his legend, when a boy, Eligius had served as an apprentice to a goldsmith, before eventually becoming master of the mint to the Frankish kings. Consecrated as Bishop of Noyon in seventh century Gaul, Eligius lived a holy life, performing many miracles. One such miracle, and that to which the boss at Ugborough presumably refers, concerns his shoeing of a horse possessed by the devil. The

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<sup>201</sup> Devotional images are found in small scale alabasters, but these at least would enable the parishioner to draw close to the saint. The inventory of St Kerrian's church, Exeter, dated 1417, records: '*Item 1 imago Sancti Cristoforii de alabaster*'. Allan, 2001, p.177.

<sup>202</sup> Unattributed quotation in Marks, R., *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004, p.100.

<sup>203</sup> Marks, 2004, p.100.

<sup>204</sup> Cave, 1948, p.213.

horse was kicking wildly, so Eligius cut off its leg, and shod the hoof, before re-attaching it.<sup>205</sup>

Although the saint is not in Bishop's clothing, as depicted in a rood screen panel that was stolen from the church of St Andrew, Hempstead, Norfolk, and in an alabaster from the church of St Andrew, Freckenham, Suffolk, he was venerated in Devon, with blacksmiths and hay-carriers refusing to work on his feast day.<sup>206</sup> It was reported in the Episcopal Register of Bishop Veysey in 1539 that: 'Some shoemiths be so fondly and superstitiously set to worship St Loyes Day that [they] in that day will not shoe any man's horse'.<sup>207</sup> A devotional image of St Eligius is reported as having been in Chagford church during the 1530s where there was also a guild dedicated to the saint, and an image was also venerated in Morebath.<sup>208</sup>

Richard Marks notes that Eligius

had a special relationship with the poor: "St Loye loved well poor people....The poor people also loved him, that where he went they followed him, and they that would speak with him must ask and enquire of the poor people where he was".<sup>209</sup>

### **The Four Doctors of the Church**

The Four Doctors or Fathers of the Church, Saints Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome, are carved in stone in the roof of the south porch at Thorverton (Figs. 4.201, 4.202, 4.203, 4.204). The Four Doctors were, however,

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<sup>205</sup> Marks, 2004, pp.105–107.

<sup>206</sup> <http://www.norfolkchurches.co.uk/hempstead/hempstead.htm>. Accessed 26.11.09; this alabaster is shown in Marks, 2004, p.110.

<sup>207</sup> In Whiting, 1991, p. 72.

<sup>208</sup> Whiting, 1991, p.107; Duffy, E., *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, p.25.

<sup>209</sup> Ellis, F., (ed.) *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints, as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 vols., London, 1900, in Vol. 3, p.262, quoted in Marks, 2004, p.105.

more usually found painted on the dado of rood screens in Devon, as in the churches at Holne and Widecombe in the Moor.

### **viii) Devils:**

Bosses which feature devils or demons occur in four, or possibly five, churches. At the west end of the north aisle at Atherington, the recording demon Tutivillus perches between two gossiping heads. Nearby is the full figure of a devil with tongue extended (Fig. 4.205). The recording demon Tutivillus also occurs in the nave at Christow church with another devil or demon with two bodies and tongue out nearby. At East Budleigh, in the south aisle, a demon sits between the horns of an elaborate horned headdress. In the north aisle of Ugborough church, a devil occupies the same position, with another devil with tongue out carved on a boss at the east end of this aisle (Fig. 4.206). At the west end of the nave in South Tawton, and visible from the north door, is an image which has been referred to as a sheela na gig.<sup>210</sup> Whether this image satisfies the criteria for such an attribution is debatable and this is discussed further in a case study of South Tawton church in Chapter Six. The carving might simply be intended as a devil.

### **ix) Initials and merchant's marks, inscriptions and miscellaneous objects:**

#### **Initials and merchant's marks**

Initials are carved on bosses in the nave and aisles of four churches: Hittisleigh, Holcombe Rogus, Kings Nympton, and Langtree, although this latter may be post-medieval. The initials I.C. at Hittisleigh, which are carved on two bosses in the north aisle, are said to be those of John Cole, who, it is claimed, was

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<sup>210</sup> Cave, 1948, p.17; Oakley, T., *Lifting the Veil: A New Study of the Sheela-Na-Gigs of Britain and Ireland*, BAR British Series 495, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009, p.175. See Chapter Six for image.

responsible, partly or entirely, for the erection of the aisle between 1417 and 1440.<sup>211</sup> However, this date conflicts with other information which suggests that the north aisle roof may be dated to the early sixteenth century.<sup>212</sup> The merchant's or cloth mark of John Lane is carved in stone on a boss in the Lane Aisle at Cullompton church. Another mark, which may be a merchant's mark, occurs on a boss in the north aisle at Sandford.

### **Inscriptions**

In the south aisle at Coldridge, a unique inscription appears to run across four bosses. The first is carved 'IHC', the second 'hafe', the third 'merce', and the fourth 'anno'. The inscription therefore seems to read 'Jesus have mercy for this year (?)' (Figs. 4.207, 4.208, 4.209, 4.210).<sup>213</sup>

### **Miscellaneous objects:**

#### **Sun, moon and stars**

The sun, moon and stars are found on bosses in five churches. In the chancel at Atherington and the north aisle at Landkey a star and crescent moon may be intended for the heraldic badge of the Denzil family. At Braunton there are bosses of the sun and a star, together with another of the figure of the Man in the Moon (described below). Another Man in the Moon appears in the nave at Wembworthy, although here a face only. At Milton Abbot, the sun, moon and stars are carved together on one boss (Fig. 4.211), perhaps simply a reference to the heavens.

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<sup>211</sup> Cresswell, *Cadbury*, 1919, p.83.

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=445091&mode=adv>. Accessed 14.08.10.

<sup>213</sup> I am grateful to Charles Tracy and Kate Jewell for their help in deciphering this inscription. Charles Tracy, pers. comm., 11.08.10.

## **Wheels**

In the north aisle at Cadeleigh, three spiked wheels may allude to St Catherine. In the nave at Meeth, there is a boss of a wheel with wheelwright's tools (Fig. 4.212).

## **Books**

Bosses carved with open books are found in the nave and north aisle at Lapford. It is likely that these books were painted with script as some stage, although all trace of this is now missing.

## **x) Full or demi-figures of men and women, other than Christ, the Virgin or saints:**

Full or demi-figures of men and women, other than those who are saintly or angelic, are relatively uncommon on roof bosses in parish churches in Devon, occurring in only eight of the churches surveyed. A figure which may represent a preacher in a pulpit occurs in Weare Giffard (Fig. 4.213), while in South Pool there is a figure of a kneeling man (Fig. 4.214). At Wembworthy, there are two bosses carved with two confronted demi-figures whose hands touch (Fig. 4.215). At Bridford, there is a rear view of a full figure which appears to be excreting foliage. At Sampford Courtenay, there is a demi-figure in the north aisle where the difficulties of carving a figure on a small boss result in a shortening of the arms (Fig. 4.216).

## **Wrestlers**

In the south chancel chapel at Tawstock, two males, naked apart from their shoes, appear to be wrestling (Fig. 4.217). Ruth Mellinkoff notes

representations of wrestlers in various states of dress in medieval manuscripts: two folios with clothed wrestlers in the Rutland Psalter; a folio with partly clothed wrestlers and another with nude wrestlers in the Gorleston Psalter; partly clothed wrestlers in the Luttrell Psalter; and in the Walters Hours clothed wrestlers on two folios and nudes on another.<sup>214</sup>

Wrestling also appears with some frequency on misericords. In Bristol Cathedral, two wrestlers, like those at Tawstock, are naked, apart from neck-ropes at which they pull. A third figure stands close by with his hand on the shoulder of one of the contenders.<sup>215</sup>

In Exeter Cathedral, wrestlers are carved on two corbels and on a roof boss in the presbytery (Fig. 4.218).<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, the men in these carvings are clothed in tunics and have bare feet. What is remarkable about the Tawstock boss is that the combatants are naked apart from their shoes. However, it is noteworthy that the tradition of wrestling in Devon included kicking, and a hard shoe was worn, unlike the tradition in Cornwall where the wrestlers relied on their upper bodies only, with no kicking allowed.<sup>217</sup> The position of the wrestlers at Tawstock is also worthy of comment, since the interlocking of their bodies echoes the shape of the Bouchier knot boss in the roof nearby.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Mellinkoff, R., *Averting Demons: the Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes*, Los Angeles: Ruth Mellinkoff Publications, 2004, p.116. Mellinkoff notes other examples of wrestlers in manuscripts and on a lead badge, of fourteenth- or fifteenth-century date, now in the Museum of London.

<sup>215</sup> Grössinger notes other examples of wrestlers in various states of dress at Ely Cathedral, Gloucester Cathedral, Hereford Cathedral, Ludlow, and St Cuthbert, Halsall. Grössinger, 1997, p.172.

<sup>216</sup> Henry and Hulbert, <http://hds.essex.ac.uk/exetercath/index.html> Accessed 29.10.10. Cave notes bosses with wrestlers at Lincoln Cathedral, in the cloisters at Norwich Cathedral, and at Lechlade and St Mary, Beverley. Cave, 1948, p.58.

<sup>217</sup> Porter, J.H., 'The Decline of the Devonshire Wrestling Style' in *The Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts, Report and Transactions*, Volume 121, Barnstaple, 1989, p195–208, on p. 196.

<sup>218</sup> I am indebted to Sam Smiles for this observation. Sam Smiles, pers. comm. 19.10.10.

In John Mirk's *Festial*, the sermon for *Secunda Quadragesime* Sunday (the second Sunday in Lent) concerns scouring and cleansing the conscience of the filth of sin. Mirk relates the scriptural story of Jacob wrestling with the angel from Genesis Chap. 32 and Osee (Hosea), Chap.12. Jacob cheated his brother Esau of his birth-right, but many years later wished to appease him and to receive God's blessing. He wrestled all night with an angel in the form of a man and, despite receiving a crippling injury to his leg, refused to let go until the blessing was received. Mirk preaches that the penitent:

must first be Jacob...for by Jacob is understood a wrestler...for he that will see God in Heaven, he must wrestle on earth with the evil angel, that is, the fiend, and with his own flesh. When he goes to confess himself, and has a horrible sin, the fiend puts such shame in his heart, so, though it be in his mouth, he may not for shame tell it out; then he must wrestle with the fiend, and overcome him, and so tell openly all the circumstances thereof.<sup>219</sup>

Whether the bosses at Tawstock and Exeter reference the story of Jacob is not known, but it seems entirely plausible that they might.

### **The Man in the Moon**

In the nave at Braunton, a boss is carved with the figure of a man carrying brushwood, accompanied by a dog, and set within a crescent moon (Fig. 4.219). The story of the Man in the Moon is mentioned in the late twelfth century by the English writer Alexander of Neckham. Commenting on the moon's shadows, he refers to the belief that they are formed by a peasant who has been banished to the Moon for stealing thorns or brushwood.<sup>220</sup>

The tale is also referenced in *The Testament of Cresseid* by Robert Henryson (c.1425–1506). Henryson, describes the moon, or Lady Cynthia, thus:

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<sup>219</sup> My modernisation of Mirk in Erbe, 1997, p.94.

<sup>220</sup> Baring-Gould, S., *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, London: Rivingtons, 1888, p.196.

Hir gyse was gray and full of spottis blak,  
And on hir breist ane churle paintit full evin  
Beirand ane bunche of thornis on his bak,  
Quhilk for his thift nicht clim na nar the hevin.<sup>221</sup>

Baring-Gould records a German folktale which expressly suggests that the wood carried by the Man in the Moon was cut on a Sunday and that the man was banished as a warning to all Sabbath-breakers.<sup>222</sup> These stories perhaps reference the biblical tale of Numbers 15, 32–36, which tells of a man brought before Moses and Aaron for gathering sticks on the Sabbath who was subsequently stoned to death for his transgression of the Commandment not to work on that day.<sup>223</sup> There are three surviving medieval wall paintings of the Warning to Sabbath Breakers in Cornwall which depict Christ surrounded and wounded by tools used on the Sabbath.<sup>224</sup> The motif also survives in stained glass from St Neot church, now on loan to the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro. The use of the Man in the Moon motif on the roof boss may have been a convenient way of expressing a similar message in a confined space.

A Man in the Moon image, although this time without his dog, is found in a medieval painting on the ceiling of Gyffin church, near Conway, North Wales.<sup>225</sup> The roof of the chancel is divided into compartments with four of these painted with symbols of the Evangelists. According to Baring-Gould, the sun, the moon and two stars are placed at the feet of the angel of St. Matthew, the winged ox of St Luke, the lion of St Mark and the eagle of St John. The painting dates to the fifteenth century.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/testfram.htm>. Accessed 10.01.11.

<sup>222</sup> Baring-Gould, 1888, pp. 191–2.

<sup>223</sup> Baring-Gould, 1888, pp. 191.

<sup>224</sup> At Breage, Poundstock and St Just in Penwith. See [www.paintedchurch.org](http://www.paintedchurch.org).

<sup>225</sup> Baring-Gould, 1888, pp. 197–8.

<sup>226</sup> <http://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/43691/images/ST+BENEDICT%27S+CHURCH%2C+GYFFIN>



An earlier example of the motif, complete with dog, appears on an engraved seal of Walter de Grendon (Fig. 4.220). The seal, which is affixed to a document dated 1336, is inscribed with a legend in Latin: '*Te Waltere docebo cur spinas phebo gero*', which Baring-Gould translates as 'I will teach thee Walter, why I carry thorns in the moon'.<sup>227</sup>

Perhaps the reason why the image of the Man in the Moon did not survive in an ecclesiastical context is that it was held by some to be superstitious. Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, in *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, written about 1449, states that it is 'vntrewe...this opinioun, that a man which stale sumtyme a birthan of thornis was sett in to the moone, there forto abide for euere'.<sup>228</sup> Although the story continued to be referred to – it is mentioned by Shakespeare in both *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – its use in the church may have been deemed unacceptable. In the nave at Wembworthy a boss depicts another version of the Man in the Moon – this time more familiarly carved as a face within a crescent moon (Fig. 4.221). Malcolm Jones notes a late fifteenth-century misericord bearing a similar image in the church at Ripple, Hereford and Worcs.<sup>229</sup>

### **Woman with distaff, fox and geese**

A boss in the nave at Iddesleigh church is carved with a female figure who catches or beats with a distaff a fox chasing four geese (Fig. 4.222). This

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<sup>227</sup> Baring-Gould, 1888, p.198–9. Baring-Gould records the seal's owner as Walter de Grendesse and dates the document to 1335. Jones records the name of the owner as Walter de Grendon and the date of the document (PRO P348) as 1336. Jones, M., *The Secret Middle Ages*, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, paperback edition, 2004, p.181.

<sup>228</sup> Pecock, R., *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, edited by Churchill Babington, London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860, p.155.

<sup>229</sup> Jones, 2004, p.182.

narrative is also carved on early fourteenth-century to early sixteenth-century misericords, sometimes with a cock or ducks instead of geese.<sup>230</sup>

Kenneth Varty, whose study of the fox in medieval art is unrivalled, notes the presence of the distaff-wielding wife in several miniatures in fourteenth-century manuscripts, on a carving of a fourteenth-century capital in Oakham parish church, Rutland, and sculpted on a frieze on the tower of Bloxham St Mary, Oxfordshire.<sup>231</sup> Varty also notes a fifteenth-century stone roof boss in the porch of Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, which is sculpted with a fox with a cock slung over his back chased by a distaff-wielding woman (Fig. 4.223).<sup>232</sup>

Varty also discusses the literary traditions of the fox, including the French *Roman de Renart*, c.1170s–1230s, and Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale of the Cok and the Fox*, c.1390, which features Dame Malkyn wielding her distaff in pursuit of daun Russell, the fox, who has made off with Chantecler, the cock.<sup>233</sup>

The use of this image on the IIsington roof boss and that in Norfolk may refer to the need for the Christian soul to be on guard against the wiles of the devil represented by the fox. It may therefore reference the deadly sin of sloth.

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This chapter has demonstrated that images carved on figural bosses in the parish churches of Devon were not exclusive to that form, and that they

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<sup>230</sup> Variations appear at Ely Cathedral, Boston St Botolph, Whalley St Mary and All Saints, Minster-in-Thanel St Mary, Ripon Cathedral, Norwich Cathedral, Manchester Cathedral and Beverley Minster. In Bovey Tracey church, a misericord is carved with a fox carrying off a goose over its back. A fox is depicted trying to steal a goose from the goodwife's basket on a bench end at Tuttington parish church, Norfolk. Varty, K., *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England. The Iconographic Evidence*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999, pp. 38–50.

<sup>231</sup> Varty, 1999, pp.39–44.

<sup>232</sup> Varty, 1999, pp.48–9.

<sup>233</sup> Varty, 1999, p.27.

operated collaboratively with similar images in different media, a range of other images, and the words of sermons, penitential, and other literature, to influence their audience. The chapter has offered interpretations of the carvings and has noted possible links between certain carvings and the areas in which they are found. Those bosses which appear to reference idle talk, for example, are found exclusively in the nave and aisles towards the west end at the furthest point from clerical control. Bosses that appear to refer to the vanity of women would serve no purpose in the chancel so these too were restricted to the nave and aisles. Bosses referencing holy figures, on the other hand, are mostly found in the chancel, porch, or at the east end of the nave.

However, many bosses seem to be placed arbitrarily. This may, of course, be the result of the fragmentary survival of bosses in parish churches, yet, as Paul Binski notes, with regard to wall paintings, ‘a very common, indeed natural, feature of many post-Romanesque church decorative schemes is not order but seeming randomness’.<sup>234</sup> Binski emphasises the dangers of searching for order where none may have been intended, suggesting that this marginalizes images which ‘do not fit easily into pre-ordained narrative schemes’ and ‘it also risks creating the impression that order is implicitly a feature of higher (although hidden) intelligence, whereas disorder is a feature of “parochial” mediocrity or worse’.<sup>235</sup>

As regards parish churches in Devon, in some cases roof bosses do appear to have been part of a scheme, for example, at Braunton, where there are many

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<sup>234</sup> Binski, P., ‘The English Parish Church and its Art in the Later Middle Ages: A Review of the Problem’, *Studies in Iconography*, Volume 20, 1–25 1999, p.10.

<sup>235</sup> Binski, 1999, pp. 10–11.

figural bosses in the nave and where, it can be argued, they are specifically grouped. Here patronage of the church may have been an important influence and this will be discussed further in Chapter Six. However, in many churches with fewer figural bosses, and/or where they seem to have been randomly placed, the intention may not have been programmatic. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily indicate a lack of coherence as regards roof bosses. Indeed, when the function of roof bosses is considered, as it is in the next chapter, it becomes clear that many figural bosses were deeply relevant to the patrons, clergy and parishioners of medieval Devon.



Fig. 4.1  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Drewsteignton south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.2  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Harberton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.3  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Payhembury, no longer *in situ*, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.4  
Foliate head, roof boss,  
Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.5  
Foliate head, wall plate, Milton Abbot nave, c.1504–1536.



Fig. 4.6  
Foliate head, wall plate, Sutcombe porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.7  
Foliate head with furrowed brow,  
roof boss, Ashburton north chancel chapel,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C (?).



Fig. 4.8  
Foliate head with furrowed brow,  
roof boss, North Bovey chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.9  
Foliate head, roof boss, Bampton chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.10  
Crowned foliate head,  
roof boss, Branton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.11  
Crowned foliate head,  
roof boss, Spreyton chancel, 1451.





Fig. 4.12  
Foliate head, capital, Frithelstock nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.13  
Foliate head, capital, Woodbury nave, early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.14  
Foliate head, carving on tomb of Sir William Hankford, d. 1423,  
Monkleigh south chancel chapel.





Fig. 4.15  
Foliate head, roof boss, Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral, late 13<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.16  
Fox feigning death, with  
perching birds, roof boss,  
Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral,  
late 13<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.17  
Head of Jew (?), roof boss,  
Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral,  
late 13<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.18  
Head of Saracen (?), roof boss,  
Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral,  
late 13<sup>th</sup> C.

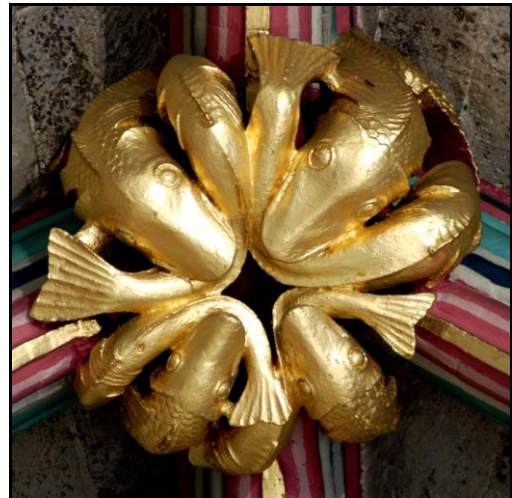


Fig. 4.19  
Aspidochelone swallowing  
smaller fish, roof boss,  
Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral,  
late 13<sup>th</sup> C.

**Figure 4.20 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.20  
*Tree of Death and Life*,  
miniature by Berthold Furtmeyer,  
Archbishop of Salzburg's Missal, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek,  
Munich, 1481.

From Cook, R., *The Tree of Life*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974,  
plate 44.





Fig. 4.21  
Seth places three seeds under the tongue of his father Adam,  
stained glass, east window, south aisle, St Neot, Cornwall,  
late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.22

The tree of sins emerges from the mouth of Hell, wall painting, north wall, Crostwright nave, Norfolk, late 14<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.23  
Foliate head, corbel,  
Exeter Cathedral quire,  
early 14<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.24  
Foliate head, corbel,  
Atherington south transept,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.25  
Figure excreting foliage, roof boss,  
Bridford nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.26  
Leonine foliate head, roof boss,  
Bampton chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

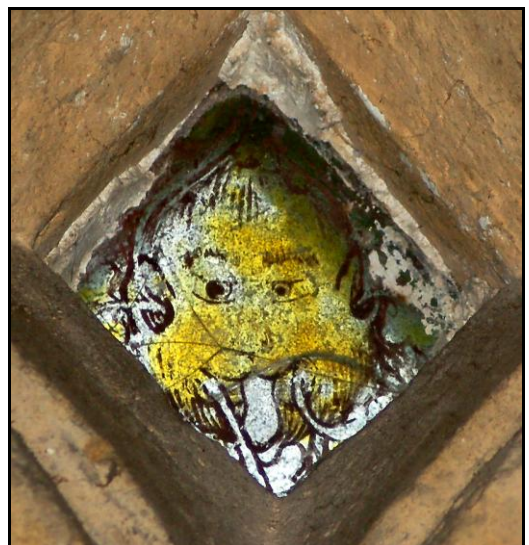


Fig. 4.27  
Leonine foliate head,  
stained glass, north aisle,  
Manaton, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.28  
Head with tongue extended,  
roof boss,  
Branscombe nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.29  
Head with tongue extended,  
roof boss,  
Chulmleigh chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

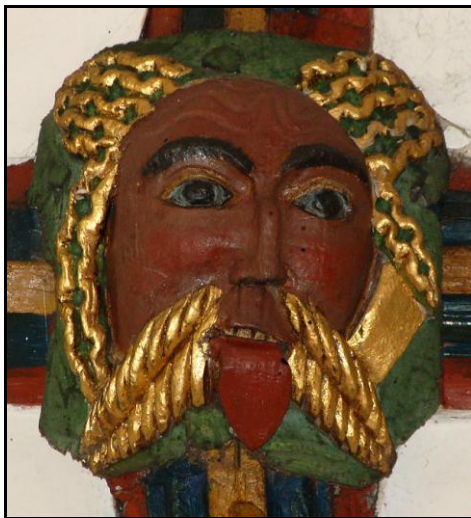


Fig. 4.30  
Head with tongue extended,  
roof boss,  
Harberton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.31  
Head with tongue extended,  
roof boss,  
Upton Hellions nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.32  
Head with moveable tongue,  
roof boss, Milton Abbot nave, c.1504–1536.



Fig. 4.33  
Head with  
tongue extended, red penwork,  
fol. 48, Exeter Dean and  
Chapter MS 3549a,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.34  
Head with tongue extended,  
stained glass,  
Bridford north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.35  
Head of bishop, corbel,  
Lady Chapel,  
Exeter Cathedral,  
restored (?)



Fig. 4.36  
Head with tongue extended,  
corbel, Lady Chapel,  
Exeter Cathedral,  
13<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.37  
Leonine head with tongue extended,  
roof boss, Meavy south chancel chapel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.38  
Leonine head with tongue extended,  
roof boss, Paignton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.39  
Crowned male head, roof boss,  
Sampford Courtenay nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.40  
Crowned female head, roof boss,  
Sampford Courtenay nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

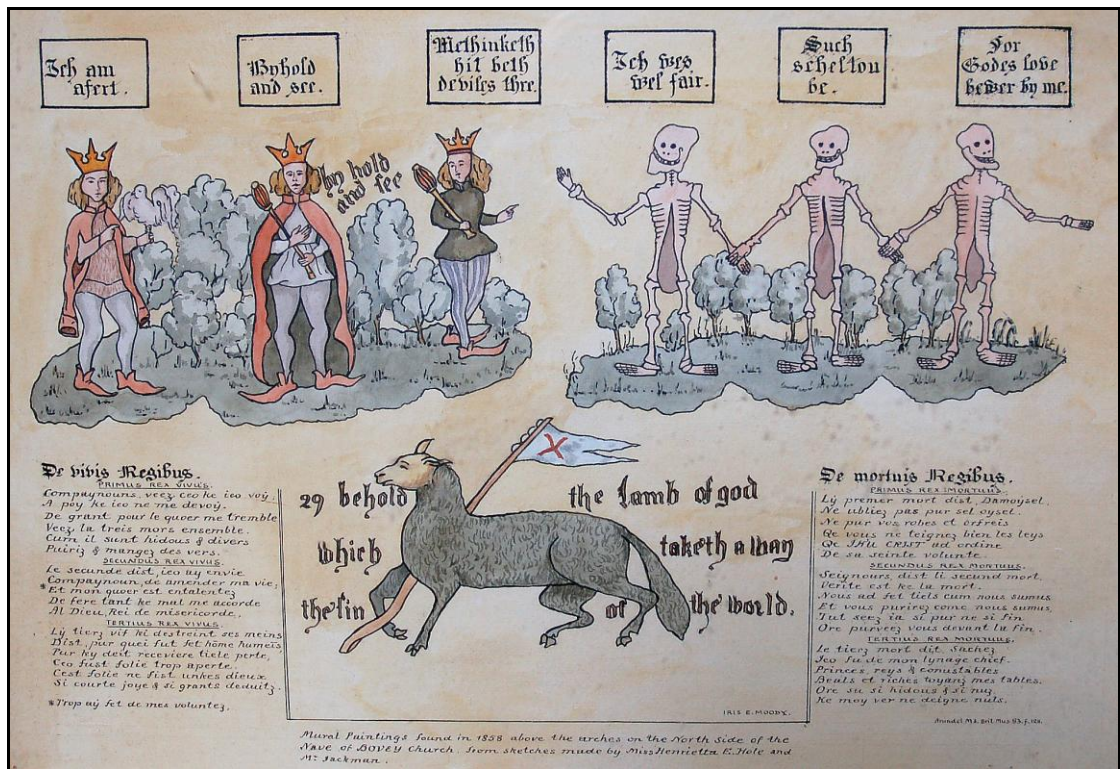




Fig. 4.41  
Crowned male head, roof boss,  
Sidbury north transept, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.42  
Crowned male head, roof boss,  
Tedburn St Mary nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Mural Paintings found in 1858 above the arches on the North Side of the Nave of BOVEY Church. Some sketches made by Miss Henrietta E. Hole and Mr. Jackman.

Fig. 4.43

The Three Living and Three Dead.

Watercolour of medieval wall painting found in 1858 on the north side of the nave at Bovey Tracey, from sketches made by Miss Henrietta E. Hole and Mr Jackman. Framed image in nave at Bovey Tracey.





Fig. 4.44  
Male and female heads engaged in idle talk  
with the recording demon Tutivillus,  
roof boss, Atherington north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.45  
Male heads engaged in idle talk  
with the recording demon Tutivillus,  
roof boss, Christow nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

**Figure 4.46 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.46

Watched by demons, women engage in idle talk.

Stained glass, Stanford-upon-Avon, Northamptonshire, c.1325–1340.

Image by Keith Barley from Phillips, S., *Transforming Talk. The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007, front cover.



Fig. 4.47  
Male and female heads  
engaged in idle talk,  
roof boss, Harberton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.48  
Male and female heads  
engaged in idle talk,  
roof boss, Milton Abbot nave, c.  
1504–1536.



Fig. 4.49  
Male heads  
engaged in idle talk,  
roof boss, Buckland in the Moor nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.50  
Male heads  
engaged in idle talk,  
roof boss, Stoodleigh nave,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.51  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Ashburton north aisle, early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.52  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Chagford south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.53  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Harberton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.54  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Stoodleigh nave,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.55  
Four heads joined at their crowns,  
roof boss, Broadhempston  
north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.56  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Bovey Tracey porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.57  
Four heads, roof boss,  
Lady Chapel, Exeter Cathedral, late 13<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.58  
Female head with horned headdress and devil,  
roof boss, East Budleigh nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.59  
Female head with horned headdress and devil,  
roof boss, Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.60

Female head with elaborate headdress, roof boss,  
Tavistock north chancel chapel, c.1420–1455.



Fig. 4.61

Female head with elaborate headdress, roof boss,  
South Tawton north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.62  
 Female head with horned headdress  
 and bird, probably a screech owl, together with male head.  
 Roof boss,  
 Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.63  
 Owl wearing horned headdress,  
 roof boss,  
 South Tawton north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

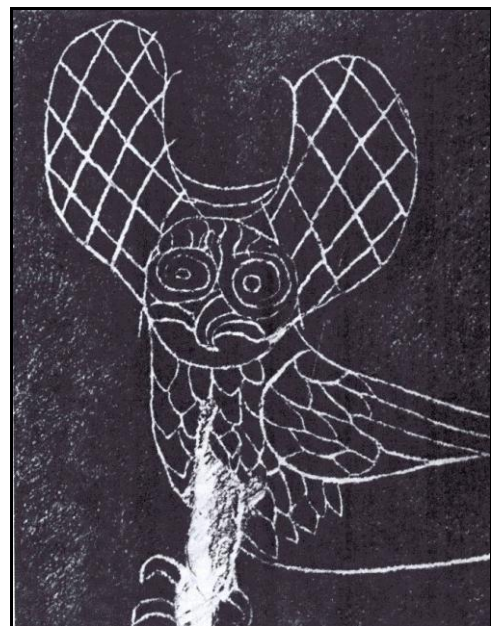


Fig. 4.64  
 Owl wearing horned headdress,  
 graffiti, Stetchworth,  
 Cambridgeshire, 15<sup>th</sup> C (?).  
 From Pritchard, V.,  
*English Medieval Graffiti*,  
 Cambridge and New York:  
 Cambridge University Press,  
 2008, p.59.  
 Reproduced with permission of  
 Cambridge University Press.





Fig. 4.65  
Pope's head with triple crown, roof boss,  
Newton St Cyres nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.66  
Papal crown (?) Roof boss,  
Cadeleigh north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.67  
Bishop's head and mitres,  
roof boss, Atherington chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.68  
Bishop's head,  
roof boss, Landkey north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.69  
Bishop's head,  
roof boss, Newton St Cyres nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.70  
Figure of bishop (Grandisson?),  
roof boss, Ottery St Mary crossing,  
c.1340.





Fig. 4.71  
Head with mouse in ears, roof boss,  
Meavy south chancel chapel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

**Figure 4.72 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.72  
Fool disputing with an Augustinian.  
Psalter of Stephen of Derby, England, 14<sup>th</sup> C.  
Bodleian Library MS Rawl. G. 185, fol.43v (detail).

From Strickland, D., *Saracens, Demons and Jews, Making Monsters in Medieval Art*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003, p.139.





Fig. 4.73  
Female head with headdress and dogs,  
roof boss, Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.74  
Head with gaping mouth and worm of conscience (?), roof boss,  
Wembworthy nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.75  
Tricephalic roof boss,  
Braunton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.76  
Antichrist, misericord,  
Cartmel Priory, Cumbria,  
mid-15<sup>th</sup> C.  
Image © Michael Tisdall.



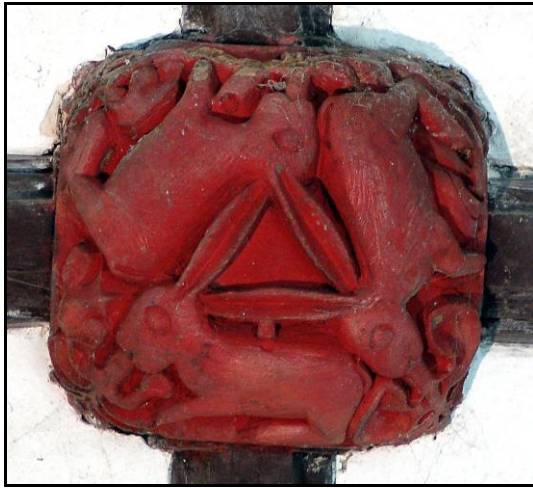


Fig. 4.77  
Three hares,  
roof boss, Bridford nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.78  
Three hares,  
roof boss, Paignton nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.79  
Three hares,  
roof boss, South Tawton  
south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.80  
Three hares,  
roof boss, Tavistock  
north chancel chapel,  
c.1420-1455.

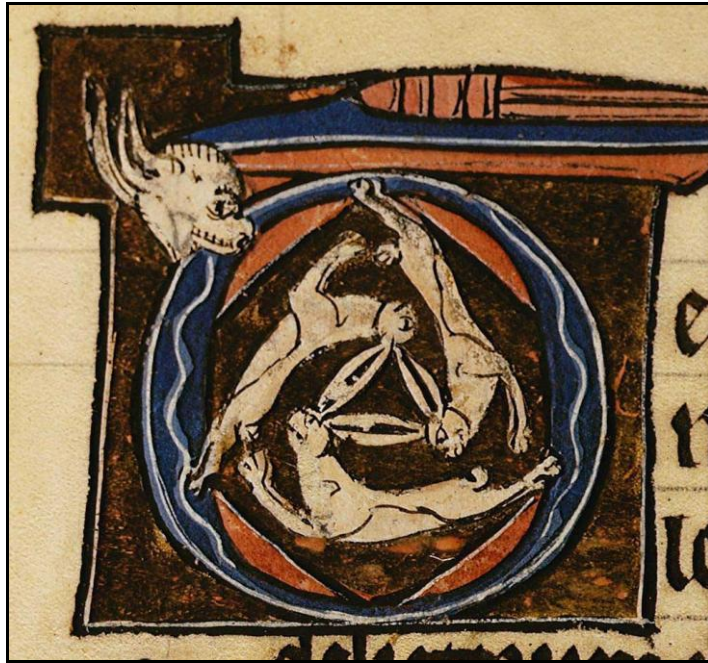


Fig.4.81  
 Three hares in decorated initial T, vulgate psalm 21,  
 Grandisson psalter,  
 British Library Additional MS. 21926,  
 c.1270–80.  
 Image © British Library Board Add. 21926.



Fig. 4.82  
 Three hares in historiated initial, vulgate psalm 52,  
 psalter, British Library Lansdowne 431,  
 early 13<sup>th</sup> C.  
 Image © British Library Board Lans. 431.





Fig. 4.83  
Three hares, stained glass fragment now above north door,  
Long Melford church, Suffolk, 15<sup>th</sup> C.  
Image © Chris Chapman.



Fig. 4.84  
Three hares, undersill, chapel,  
Hôtel de Cluny, Paris,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.  
Image © Chris Chapman.



Fig. 4.85  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Braunton nave, c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.86  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Burrington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.87  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Warkleigh nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.88  
Pelican in her piety, roof boss,  
Widecombe nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.89  
Pelican, roof boss,  
Atherington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.90  
Pelican, roof boss,  
Dolton south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.91  
Pelican carrying host (?), roof boss,  
Coldridge south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.92  
Lion of the tribe of Judah, roof boss,  
Burrington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.93  
Lion, roof boss, Christow nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.94  
Lion over boar, roof boss,  
Ilsington crossing, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.95  
Bird pecking at grapes, roof boss,  
Ashburton south chancel chapel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.96  
Bird on branch, roof boss,  
Langtree nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.97  
Dragon, roof boss, Alwington nave,  
c. 1401–1426.



Fig. 4.98  
Dragon, roof boss, Atherington nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.99  
Wyverns, roof boss, Braunton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.100  
Wyverns, roof boss, Holcombe Rogus  
south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.101  
Dragon attacking man,  
roof boss, Branton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.102  
Dragon attacking man,  
roof boss, Chittlehampton  
north transept,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.103  
Dragon attacking man,  
roof boss, Holcombe Rogus  
south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.104  
Dragon attacking man,  
roof boss, Warkleigh nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



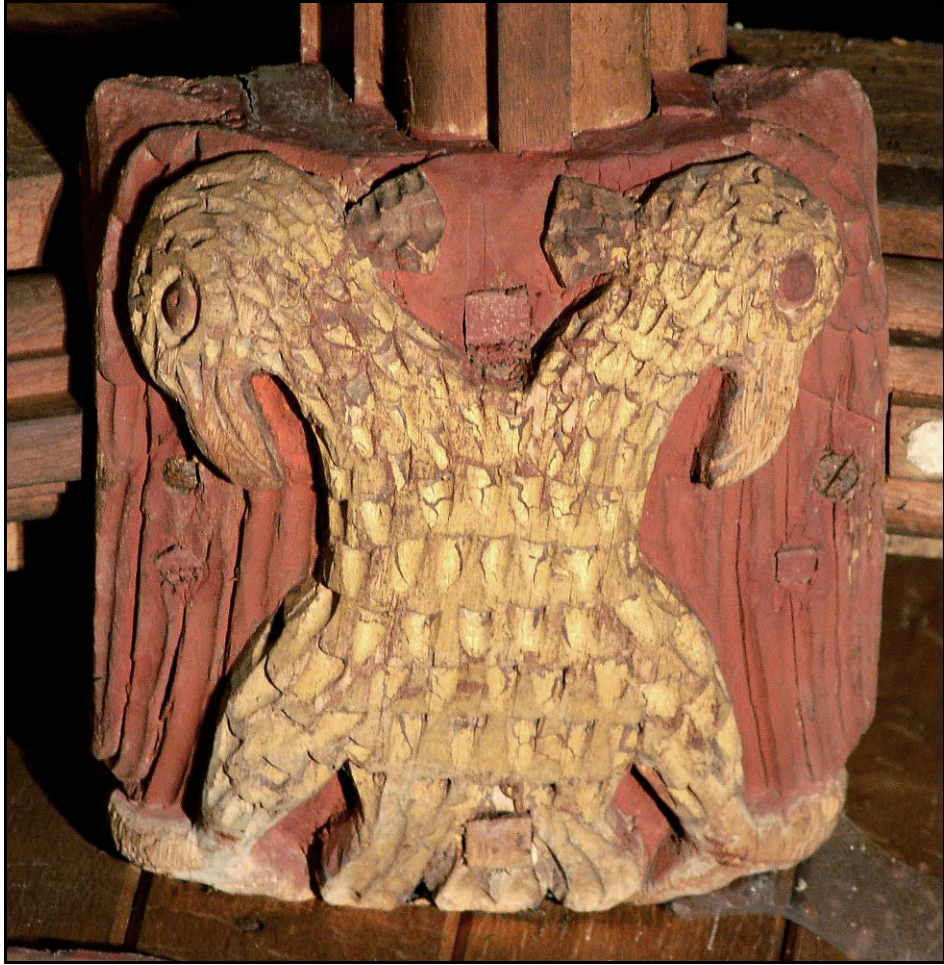


Fig. 4.105  
Double-headed eagle,  
roof boss, Clawton nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.106  
Dogs chasing stag,  
roof boss, Chittlehampton  
north transept, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.107  
Winged stag,  
roof boss, North Molton nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.108  
Deer, roof boss,  
Meavy south chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.109  
Deer, roof boss,  
South Pool south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.110  
Deer trampling on snake (?),  
Holcombe Rogus south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

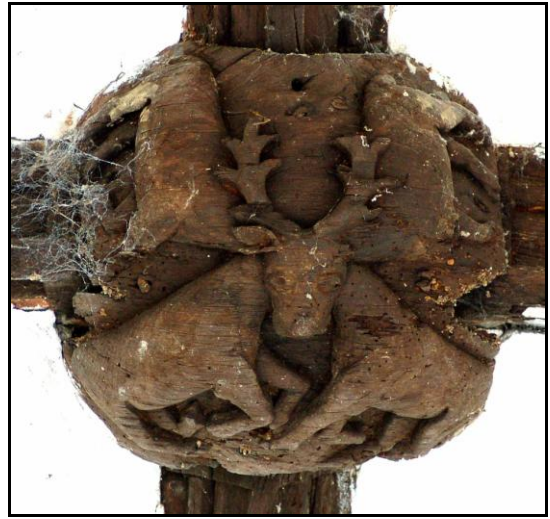


Fig. 4.111  
Four harts share one head, roof boss,  
Landkey south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.112  
Four harts share one head,  
roof boss,  
Old Cleeve nave, Somerset,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.113  
Stag, roof boss,  
Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.114  
Sow and farrow, roof boss,  
Braunton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.115  
Sow and farrow, roof boss,  
Newton St Cyres south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.116  
Sow and farrow, roof boss,  
Sampford Courtenay nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.117  
Sow and farrow, roof boss,  
Ugborough north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.118  
Sow and farrow, roof boss,  
Exeter Cathedral north choir aisle,  
c.1303–1310.

**Figure 4.119 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.119  
Sow, miniature, MS Bodley 764, c.1220–1250.

From Barber, R., *Bestiary*, London: Folio Society, 1992, p.84.





Fig. 4.120  
Heads of four owls with another head at centre,  
roof boss, South Pool north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.121  
Goat eating dittany (?),  
roof boss, Holcombe Rogus  
south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.122  
Goat, roof boss,  
Ilsington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.123  
Goat, roof boss,  
Langtree nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.124  
Unicorn (?), roof boss,  
Chagford south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.125  
Unicorn, roof boss,  
Coldridge south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.126  
Unicorn, roof boss,  
Frithelstock south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.127  
Mermaid with comb and mirror,  
roof boss, Stoodleigh nave,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.128  
Mermaid with comb and mirror,  
roof boss, Stoodleigh nave,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.129  
Mermaid with comb and mirror,  
roof boss, Wembworthy nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.130  
Mermaid with pipe,  
roof boss, Wembworthy north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.131  
Mermaid holding her tail,  
roof boss, Exeter Cathedral presbytery,  
c.1286–1302.



Fig. 4.132  
Gorged and chained antelope,  
roof boss, Widecombe chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.133  
Gorged antelope,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.134  
Eagle with fish, roof boss,  
Holcombe Rogus south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

Figure 4.135 has been removed  
due to Copyright restrictions.

Fig. 4.135  
Eagle with fish,  
miniature, MS Bodley 764, 1220–1250.

From Barber, R., *Bestiary*,  
London: Folio Society, 1992, p.118.



Fig. 4.136  
Eagle and rabbit/hare, roof boss,  
Ilington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.137  
Elephant, roof boss, Holcombe Rogus south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.138  
Camel, roof boss, Holcombe Rogus south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.139  
Griffin, roof boss, Holcombe Rogus south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.140  
Lynx, roof boss, Holcombe Rogus south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.141  
Horses, roof boss, Braunton nave, c.1388–1413.

**Figure 4.142 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.142  
Horses beneath the feet of a leopard, marginal illumination,  
Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 9961–62, Peterborough Psalter, f.48v,  
c.1300.

From Baltrušaitis, J., *Le Moyen Age Fantastique*, Paris:Armand Colin, 1955,  
p.139.





Fig. 4.143  
Biblical locust (?), roof boss, Coldridge south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.144  
Bouchier knot, roof boss, Morebath north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.145  
Arms of Courtenay, Earls of Devon,  
roof boss, Sampford Courtenay nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.146  
Bundle of sticks, badge of Courtenay, roof boss,  
Dolton south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.147  
Arms of Bishop Grandisson,  
roof boss, Ottery St Mary crossing,  
c.1340.



Fig. 4.148  
Arms of Bishop Lacy, roof boss,  
Tavistock north chancel chapel,  
1420–1455.



Fig. 4.149  
Arms of Bishop Neville (?),  
roof boss, Lapford nave, 1458–65.



Fig. 4.150  
Arms of Bishop Lacy,  
stained glass,  
East Budleigh north aisle,  
1420–1455.





Fig. 4.151  
Stafford knot, roof boss, Nymet Rowland north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.152  
Sponge, spear and crown of thorns:  
symbols of the Passion,  
roof boss, Meeth nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.153  
Scourges: symbols of the Passion,  
roof boss, Nymet Rowland north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.154  
Christ with symbols of the Passion,  
wall painting, Ashton north chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.155  
Five wounds,  
roof boss, Broadhembury south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.156  
Wounded heart with crown of thorns,  
roof boss, Poughill north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.157  
IHC,  
roof boss, Cadeleigh north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.158  
Christ crowning the Virgin as Queen of Heaven,  
carving now used as roof boss,  
Buckland Monachorum nave,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.

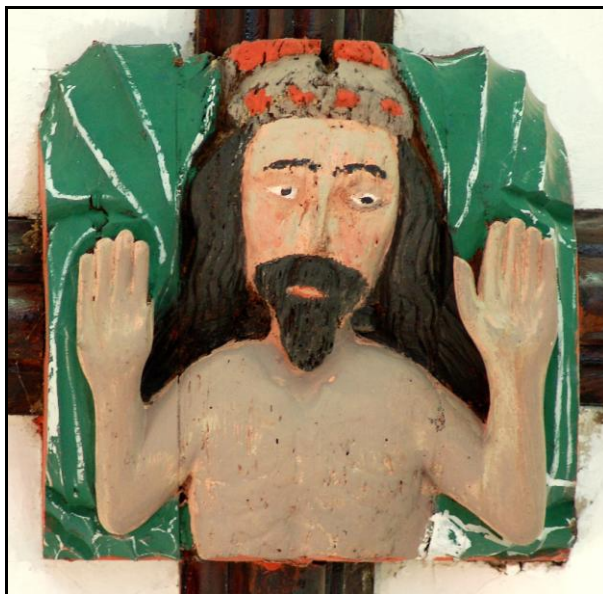


Fig. 4.159  
Christ showing his wounds (?),  
roof boss, Widecombe chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.160  
Christ in Majesty, roof boss,  
Ottery St Mary Lady Chapel,  
c.1340.

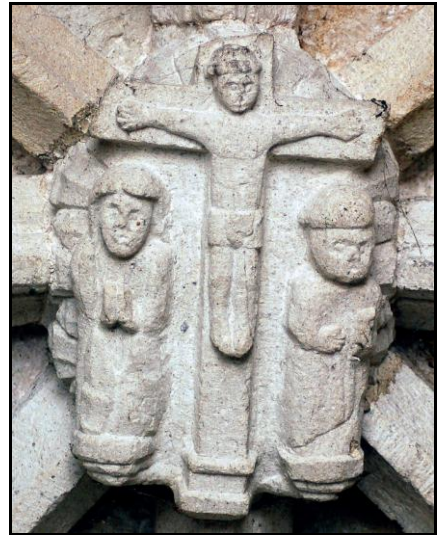


Fig. 4.161  
Crucifixion, roof boss,  
Plympton St Mary south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.162  
The Trinity or the Annunciation ?,  
roof boss, Plympton St Mary south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

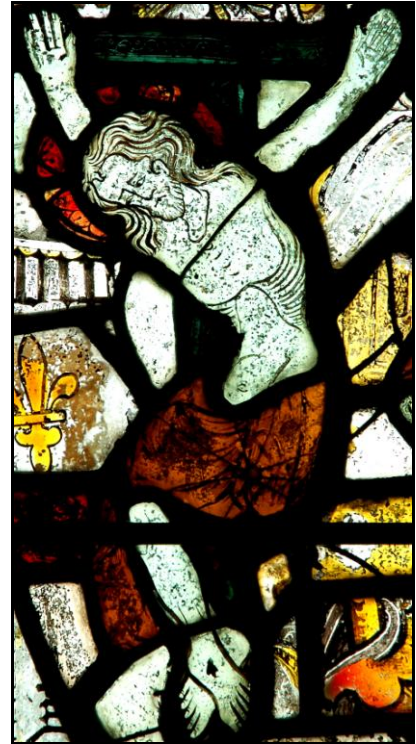


Fig. 4.163  
Crucifixion,  
stained glass,  
Abbots Bickington,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.164  
Agnus Dei,  
roof boss, Coldridge south chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.165  
Shield-bearing angel,  
carving fixed to wall plate,  
Northlew south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.166  
Shield-bearing angel,  
roof boss, Crediton, no longer *in situ*,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.167  
Shield-bearing angel,  
roof boss, Crediton, no longer *in situ*,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.168  
Shield-bearing angels,  
roof boss, Cullompton, Lane aisle,  
c. 1526.



Fig. 4.169  
Angel holding scroll,  
roof boss, Cheldon chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.170  
Angel holding scroll (?),  
roof boss, South Pool south chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.171  
Angels accompany the Virgin,  
roof boss, Brixham south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.172  
Angels accompany the Virgin,  
cope/altar frontal, Brixham St Mary,  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.173  
Angels carry the Virgin Mary to heaven (?),  
roof boss, Sidbury south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.174  
Virgin and Child,  
roof boss, Burrington nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.175  
Virgin and Child (?),  
roof boss, Milton Abbot nave,  
c.1504–1536.



Fig. 4.176  
Virgin and Child (?),  
roof boss, Milton Abbot nave,  
c.1504–1536.



Fig. 4.177  
Lily in pot,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.178  
Lily in pot, Annunciation,  
wood screen painting,  
Buckland in the Moor,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.179  
Lily with Virgin, Annunciation,  
stained glass, Bondleigh,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.180  
Crowned 'M',  
roof boss, Bampton nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.181  
M.R., Maria Regina (?),  
roof boss, Cotleigh nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

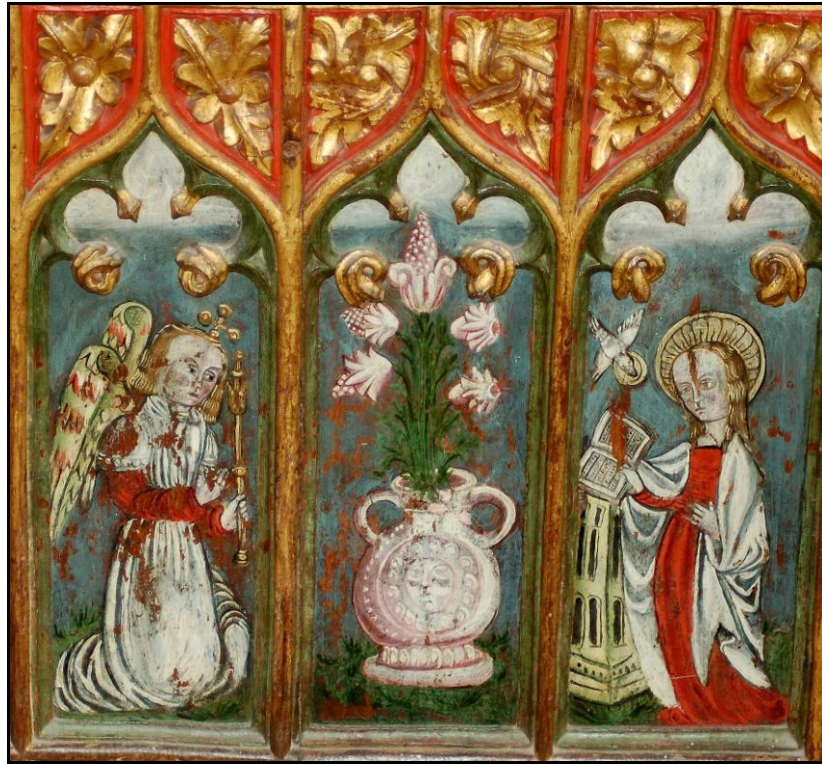


Fig. 4.182  
Annunciation,  
wood screen painting, Hennock,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C.

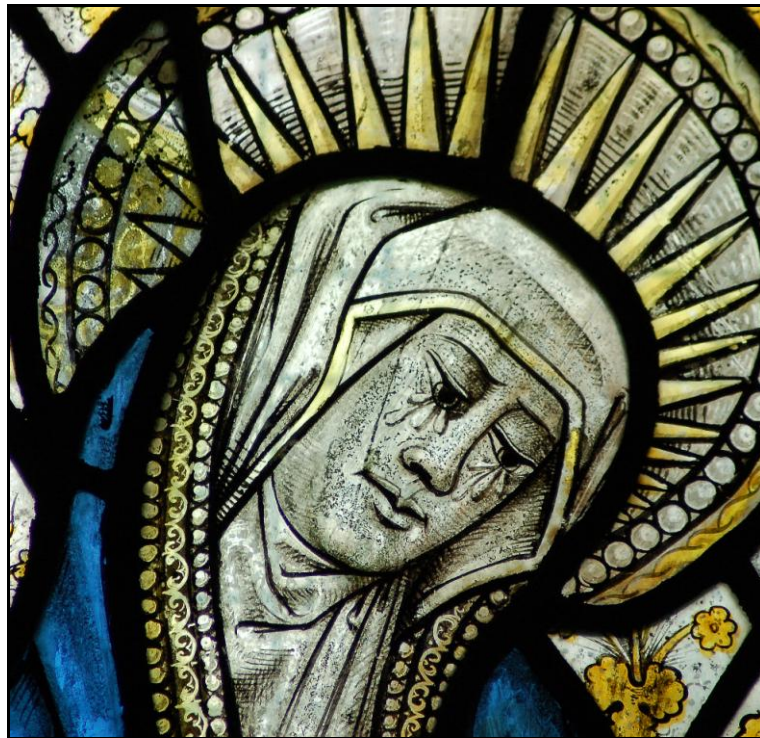


Fig. 4.183  
Virgin from a Crucifixion scene, stained glass, detail,  
Broadwoodkelly, c.1523.





Fig. 4.184  
Assumption of the Virgin, wall painting,  
Exeter Cathedral, early 16<sup>th</sup> C.

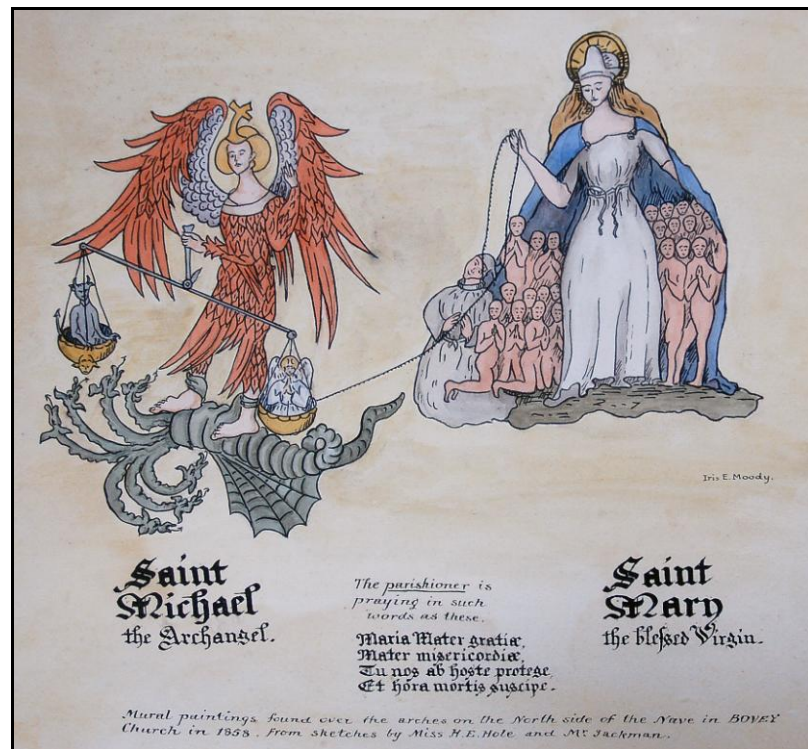


Fig. 4.185  
Weighing of Souls with the Virgin interceding.  
Medieval wall painting found in 1858 on the north side of the nave at  
Bovey Tracey, from sketches made by Miss Henrietta E. Hole and Mr.  
Jackman.  
Framed watercolour in nave at Bovey Tracey.





Fig. 4.186  
St Matthew with scroll,  
roof boss, Braunton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.187  
St Mark with lion and scroll,  
roof boss, Burrington nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.188  
Winged ox of St Luke with scroll,  
roof boss, Thorverton south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

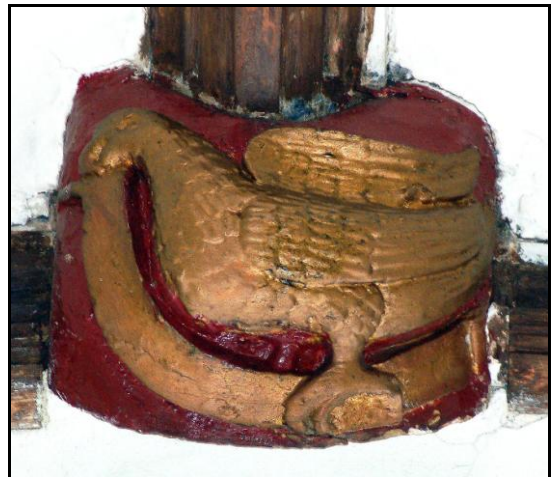


Fig. 4.189  
Eagle of St John (?) with scroll,  
roof boss,  
Exeter St Martin nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.190  
St John the Baptist with the Agnus Dei,  
roof boss, Ottery St Mary chancel,  
c.1340.



Fig. 4.191  
Severed head of John the Baptist,  
roof boss,  
Poughill north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.192  
Severed head of John the Baptist,  
bench end, detail,  
Coldridge south aisle, 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.193  
Severed head of John the Baptist,  
bench end, detail,  
Weare Giffard nave, 16<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.194  
St Catherine with wheel,  
roof boss,  
North Bovey chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.

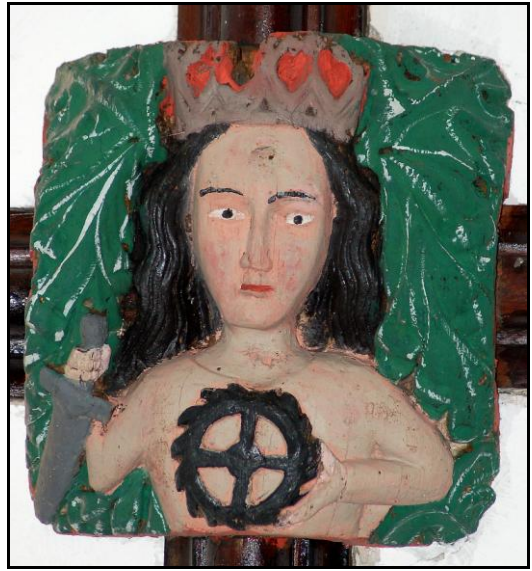


Fig. 4.195  
St Catherine with wheel and sword,  
roof boss,  
Widecombe chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.196  
St Catherine with wheel,  
stained glass,  
Awliscombe north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.197  
St Anne teaching the Virgin to read,  
roof boss,  
Ottery St Mary chancel, c.1340.





Fig. 4.198  
St Christopher carrying the Christ Child,  
roof boss,  
Burrington nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.199  
St Christopher carrying the Christ Child,  
stained glass,  
Abbots Bickington chancel, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.200  
St Eligius (Loye) forging a horseshoe (?),  
roof boss,  
Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.201  
St Ambrose, roof boss,  
Thorverton south porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.202  
St Augustine, roof boss,  
Thorverton south porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.203  
St Gregory, roof boss,  
Thorverton south porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.204  
St Jerome, roof boss,  
Thorverton south porch, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.205  
Devil with tongue extended,  
roof boss, Atherington north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.206  
Devil with tongue extended,  
roof boss, Ugborough north aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.207  
IHC,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.208  
hafe,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.209  
merce,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.210  
anno,  
roof boss, Coldridge south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.211  
Sun, moon and stars,  
roof boss, Milton Abbot nave,  
c.1504–1536.



Fig. 4.212  
Wheel with wheelwright's tools,  
roof boss, Meeth nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.213  
Preacher in pulpit (?),  
roof boss, Weare Giffard south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.214  
Kneeling man,  
roof boss, South Pool south aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.215  
Two demi-figures touching hands,  
roof boss,  
Wembworthy north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.216  
Female demi-figure,  
roof boss,  
Sampford Courtenay north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.217  
Wrestlers,  
roof boss, Tawstock south chancel chapel,  
early 16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 4.218  
Wrestlers,  
roof boss, Exeter Cathedral presbytery,  
c.1286–1302.





Fig. 4.219  
Man in the Moon,  
roof boss, Branton nave,  
c.1388–1413.



Fig. 4.220  
Man in the Moon,  
seal of Walter de Grendon,  
appended to document dated 1336, PRO P348.

Drawing from Baring-Gould, S.,  
*Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*,  
London: Rivingtons, 1888, p.198.



Fig. 4.221  
Man in the Moon,  
roof boss, Wembworthy nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 4.222

Woman catching fox by the neck as it chases geese.  
Roof boss, Iddesleigh nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



**Figure 4.223 has been removed due to to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 4.223

Fox with a cock chased by woman with distaff.

Drawing of 15<sup>th</sup> C. roof boss, south porch, Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk.

E. de la Mare Norris.

From Varty, K., *Reynard, Renart, Reinart and Other Foxes in Medieval England. The Iconographic Evidence.*

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999, p.49.

## Chapter Five

### Seeing Sin and Salvation

The majority of medieval bosses which survive in Devon are from rural rather than urban churches since many urban churches have undergone a significant degree of intervention, and, in some cases, complete destruction as a result of war or redevelopment.<sup>1</sup> The medieval lay viewers of most of the bosses recorded for this thesis would, therefore, have been country people who, for the most part, worked in agriculture, cloth making or the tin industry (or often in combinations of these), and who lived in relatively small, and often isolated, settlements. Herbert Kessler notes that: 'In most cases, medieval "users" encountered art over long periods and in stable conditions', and this is likely to have been the case in rural Devon.<sup>2</sup>

Literacy was the exception in the county at this time, particularly in rural areas, and there are no accounts which give any indication of the significance of figural bosses to their medieval audience.<sup>3</sup> Given the fragmentary nature of the material evidence and the lack of documentary evidence, any theory of the bosses' significance can only ever be speculative. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the difficulties, this chapter will propose a particular function for figural bosses, through reference to medieval clerical texts, in addition to the decorative function they shared with foliate bosses. As a prelude to this, the

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<sup>1</sup> In Exeter, for example, of 22 parish churches recorded in the late Middle Ages, only seven survive with any medieval fabric and all have been restored to a greater or lesser extent. Orme records 22 churches; Cherry and Pevsner however, suggest that there were 'about 15 medieval churches within the city walls'. Orme, N. (ed.), *Unity and Variety. A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, Exeter Studies in History No. 29, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1991, p.66; Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (eds.), *The Buildings of England: Devon*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Penguin, 1991, p.387.

<sup>2</sup> Kessler, H., 'On the State of Medieval Art History', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Jun., 1988), pp. 166-187, on page 178.

<sup>3</sup> Although it would be wrong to assume that people were equally illiterate – some could not read at all, some could not read well, while others might manage the vernacular but could not understand Latin texts.

chapter will explore theories of vision and attitudes to images in the late medieval period since both are likely to have influenced the development and use of figural roof bosses.

## **Vision**

In the medieval church, vision was not thought of simply in corporeal terms, it also had a spiritual dimension.<sup>4</sup> These two dimensions – corporeal and spiritual – were held in constant tension, for while spiritual vision might ascend to God, bodily vision would inevitably fall back to earthly pleasures, as it had done in the Garden of Eden.<sup>5</sup> Man's spiritual vision was thus compromised by his inability to control his corporeal vision and his other bodily senses. According to Bernard of Clairvaux: 'It is sin alone which dulls and confuses the vision; nothing else seems to stand between the eye and light, between God and man'.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, the interior of the church roof may be considered as having stood between God and man, a point raised by Reverend J.L. Fulford in a paper on 'Open Roofs' read at the quarterly meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society in July 1844.<sup>7</sup> Fulford notes that the roof is: 'that part of our sacred buildings which within confines our sight, without conducts the eye and thought to heaven'.<sup>8</sup> Although Fulford expresses this idea in the nineteenth century, it may be that, even in the medieval period, the church roof was regarded as a

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine also discusses intellectual vision but this, as Hahn points out, 'is not vision in the normal sense of the word but concerns divine knowledge'. Hahn, C., 'Vision' in Rudolph, C., (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Art*. Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Blackwell Reference Online. <[http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/book?id=g9781405102865\\_9781405102865](http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/book?id=g9781405102865_9781405102865)> Accessed 14.02.11.

<sup>5</sup> Biernoff, S., *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p.46.

<sup>6</sup> Biernoff 2002, p.36.

<sup>7</sup> Fulford, Rev. J.L., 'Open Roofs' in *The Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Volume II, Exeter, 1847, pp. 41–51.

<sup>8</sup> Fulford, 1847, p.41.

particularly apt space in which to display images which emphasised the limited vision of sinful man.

The task of the church, as Christ had instructed Paul, was to:

open [the] eyes [of the people], that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a lot among the saints, by the faith that is in me.<sup>9</sup>

If the church was to open the eyes of the people in a spiritual sense then it would employ corporeal vision in its mission, and a scientific understanding of corporeal vision would, in turn, enhance an understanding of spiritual truths.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, in the late medieval period, many theologians were actively engaged in the study of optics.

Regarding corporeal vision, there existed two main theories: the theories of extramission and intromission. The extramission theory of Augustine, based on Platonic theory, suggested that there was a fire within the body which gathered behind the eyes and was projected in the form of a ray that touched the object on which it focused. A representation of the object then returned to the eye and, bonding to the soul, was retained in the memory. The intromission theory, based on Aristotelian thought and favoured by Thomas Aquinas, suggested that the object itself emitted 'species' or rays which were received by the sensitive organ of sight.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Acts, Chap. 26, v.18 in *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1474.

<sup>10</sup> Lindberg, D.C. (ed.), *John Peckham and the Science of Optics. Perspectiva communis*, edited with an introduction, English translation, and critical notes, Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970, p.19.

<sup>11</sup> Camille, M., *Gothic Art*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1996, p.22.

John Peckham (c.1235–1292), a Franciscan, taught at the Universities of Paris and Oxford and became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1279. His *Perspectiva* (later *Communis*) became a standard text on medieval optics, drawing together the work of scholars from ancient Greece and from the Islamic and Christian worlds. It was, according to David Lindberg, ‘by far the most popular of all medieval treatises on optics...because of its broad scope and introductory character’, its influence extending to artists and engineers from the late Middle Ages through to the Renaissance.<sup>12</sup>

Probably written between 1269 and 1279, before he became Archbishop, the *Perspectiva* favoured the intromissionist explanation of sight.<sup>13</sup> Although Peckham accepted that visual rays from the eye existed (as objects they too emitted species) he argued that they were ‘neither necessary nor sufficient as an explanation for sight’.<sup>14</sup> Peckham noted, however, that vision was not completed in the eye itself, for:

no visible object is recognized without a distinction of the visible intentions or without a comparison or relation to the universals of known things previously abstracted from sensible things; and this cannot occur without reasoning.<sup>15</sup>

Vision therefore required processing in the brain where the internal senses were located.

The manner in which the brain was believed to process information received through the eye is illustrated in a diagram of c. 1330 in Cambridge University Library Ms Gg 1.1 (Fig. 5.1). The diagram, according to Mary Carruthers, shows the human cognitive process as expounded in the late medieval tradition of

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<sup>12</sup> Lindberg, 1970, p.29.

<sup>13</sup> Lindberg, 1970, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> Lindberg, 1970, p.35.

<sup>15</sup> Lindberg, 1970, p.137.



Thomas Aquinas, which itself derived from Aristotle via Avicenna.<sup>16</sup> Above the head is a label bearing the motto (here translated): 'anterior part of the brain, middle part, posterior part'.<sup>17</sup>

The eyes are linked by 'channels' (*nervi*) to five 'cells', or ventricles, in which various aspects of brain function take place. Carruthers points out that three of these ventricles, in the anterior and middle parts, operate simultaneously rather than sequentially.<sup>18</sup> In these, labelled *sensus communis*, *ymaginatio vel formalis* and *estimativa*, the visible species are apprehended, retained and judged.<sup>19</sup> The *cogitativa*, the ventricle drawn just above the ear, works with the *imagines* or mental creations produced by the first three to present 'materials of understanding', through which ideas and thoughts are constructed.<sup>20</sup> Mental images are finally stored in the remaining ventricle, the *vis memorativa*, which is located at the back of the head.

In between the *cogitativa* and *vis memorativa* is drawn the *vermis* – the worm – of the cerebellum. In the text into which this drawing is incorporated, the dynamic element of brain function developed by Islamic writer Qusta ibn Luqa (864–923) is mentioned. Gert-Jan Lokhorst notes that:

In a treatise called *On the difference between spirit and soul*, Qusta ibn Luqa (864–923) combined Nemesius' ventricular localization doctrine with Galen's account of a worm-like part of the brain that controls the flow of animal spirit between the middle and posterior ventricles. He wrote that people who want to remember look upwards because this raises the worm-like particle, opens the passage, and enables the retrieval of memories from the posterior ventricle. People who want to think, on the other hand, look down because this lowers the particle, closes the passage, and protects the spirit in the middle ventricle from being

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<sup>16</sup> Carruthers, M., *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.67.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke E. and Dewhurst, K., *An Illustrated History of Brain Function*, Oxford: Sandford Publications, 1972, p.29.

<sup>18</sup> Carruthers, 2008, p.67.

<sup>19</sup> Camille, 1996, p.23.

<sup>20</sup> Carruthers, 2008, p.68.

disturbed by memories stored in the posterior ventricle. Qusta's treatise was very influential in thirteenth-century scholastic Europe.<sup>21</sup>

The viewing posture for roof bosses, with head tipped back, might therefore be associated with recall of memories.

Michael Camille suggests a fundamental shift from the extramission model of vision to the intromission model in the late medieval period.<sup>22</sup> Discussing the influence that theories of vision and comprehension may have had on image-making in the medieval period, he states:

The intromission model of vision, coupled with this receptive notion of comprehension [as shown in Fig. 5.1], changed not only the way that artists thought they saw, but the images that they made and the ways that people looked at them. For this system gave the object as well as the viewer a dynamic role in perception.<sup>23</sup>

This dynamic role is evident in a statement on images from the fifteenth-century tract *Dives and Pauper*:

they been ordeynd to steryn manys mende [man's mind] to thynkyn of Cristys incarnacioun and of his passioun and of holye seyntys lyvys. Also they been ordeynyd to steryn mannys affecioun and his herte to devocioun, for often man is more steryd be [stirred by] syghte than be heryng or redyngge. Also they been ordeynyd to been a tokene and a book to the lewyd peple, that they moun [may] redyn in ymagerye and peynture that clerks redyn in boke.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Lokhorst, Gert-Jan, "Descartes and the Pineal Gland", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/pineal-gland/>>. I am grateful to Professor Mary Carruthers for a reference to an earlier version of this paper. Mary Carruthers, pers. comm., 25.04.08.

<sup>22</sup> Camille, M., 'Before the Gaze. The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing' in Nelson, R.S. (ed.), *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance. Seeing as Others Saw*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 197–223, on p.204.

<sup>23</sup> Camille, 1996, p.23.

<sup>24</sup> Marks, 2004, pp.16–17 quoting from Barnum, P.H. (ed.), *Dives and Pauper*, Vol. 1, pt. 1, E.E.T.S. original series, 275, 1976, p.82. The idea that images might act as books for the uneducated is famously expressed by Pope Gregory I in a letter written to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, c. 600: 'What writing does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to, those who do not know letters read it', quoted in Duggan, L.G., 'Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate?''', *Word and Image*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1989, pp. 227–51, on p.227. Duggan notes the influence of Gregory's statement on twentieth-century scholars of medieval art many of whom believed, in the words of Emile Mâle, that 'the

Thus, in the intromissionist explanation of sight prevalent in the later Middle Ages, the affective power of images was emphasised. Images were valued primarily not as works of art but for their power to move their viewers and to focus their minds and senses.<sup>25</sup> This power was, no doubt, enhanced by the changing light (natural or wax) in which images were viewed, and by the 'searching mode of seeing demanded by pre-modern levels of interior illumination'.<sup>26</sup> As Camille notes: 'the intromission model took the emphasis away from vision and onto the power of images themselves, whose eyes, as in cult statues, could stare back'.<sup>27</sup> As the parishioner gazed upwards, then, his eyes might meet those carved on the bosses which studded the roof of the parish church, a reminder, should he need it, that he was under constant watch.

## **Posture**

A posture with face turned upwards had a recognised spiritual dimension. The Aberdeen Bestiary, written and illuminated in England around 1200, offers the following commentary on the nature of man:

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simple, the ignorant, all who were named 'sancta plebs Dei', learned through their eyes almost all they knew of their faith'. Duggan, 1989, p.241; Mâle, 1972, pvii. Yet, as Avril Henry points out:

The surprisingly persistent notion that the medieval arts were designed to instruct the unlettered is based on a misconception. Little medieval art is merely instructive. Our modern response to medieval typology is sufficient evidence that pictures in this mode only 'instruct' if you already know what they mean. They then act as reminders of the known truth...If you stare at a depiction of two self-consciously naked people picking fruit you are likely to mistake them for apple-gathering nature-worshippers if you do not already know (as most people do today) that this is Adam and Eve, whose temptation and fall prefigures Christ's resistance to temptation.

Henry, A., ed. *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition*, Aldershot: Scolar, 1987; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987, pp.17–18.

<sup>25</sup> Miles, M.R., *Image as Insight. Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, p.9.

<sup>26</sup> Kinney, D., 'The Apse Mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere', in Sears and Thomas, 2002, p.21.

<sup>27</sup> Camille, 2000, p.207.

The Greek word for man is *antropos* [*anthropos*], because he looks upwards, raised up from the ground to contemplate his creator. This is what the poet Ovid means, when he says: 'And though other animals are prone and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him look at heaven and raise his countenance to the stars.' (Metamorphoses, 1, 84–6). Standing erect, he looks at the heavens in search of God; he does not turn towards the ground, like the beasts who have been fashioned by nature and obedience to their appetite to bend their heads.<sup>28</sup>

The notion that man raised his countenance in search of God is reflected in the medieval practice of prayer. Nine manuscript copies survive of a medieval treatise on bodily prayer: *De penitentia et partibus eius*, attributed by Richard Trexler to the Parisian intellectual Peter the Chanter (d.1197).<sup>29</sup> Although none of the copies, which date from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, has its origin in England or France, it is reasonable to suggest that the practice of prayer was not dissimilar throughout the western Catholic world.

The treatise, intended as a manual for practical use, considers prayer as part of penance, defining it 'actively, as the individual's capturing (*captatio*) of the benevolence of God'.<sup>30</sup> Peter notes particularly that prayer must be done with contrition of the heart as well as the sound of the mouth in order to be effective. His study is thus devoted to prayers spoken aloud.<sup>31</sup>

Peter finds six postures of prayer in the Bible and derives a seventh from the writings of Gregory the Great. Of these seven, four involve standing (the first, second, third and sixth modes), one involves kneeling (the fourth mode), while the remaining two (the fifth and seventh modes) involve prostration. Trexler

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<sup>28</sup> Aberdeen University Library MS 24 <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/81v.hti> Accessed 19.1.09.

<sup>29</sup> Trexler, R.C., *The Christian at Prayer. An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d.1197)*, Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, Volume 44, 1987.

<sup>30</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.76; Trexler, 1987, p.28.

<sup>31</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.30.

notes that all nine manuscripts detail that prayerful activity should begin by having supplicants: “turn [their] face[s] toward Jerusalem”, that is, east or toward the altar of sacrifice. “Turning toward Jerusalem” is’, asserts Trexler, ‘a metaphor for doing penance’.<sup>32</sup>

Peter’s treatise is of unusual interest in that he calls for illustrations of his modes of prayer and in the first three of these modes, for both clergy and laity, several illustrations reveal the head tipped back so that the eyes look upwards (Figs. 5.2 and 5.3). As regards the first mode, Trexler states that:

Peter’s verbal description of mode 1 does not state how the head should be positioned...but in the textual justifications for mode 1 that followed the description of the mode, Peter the Chanter cited Martin of Tours as having his eyes as well as hands and arms turned towards heaven.<sup>33</sup>

Peter suggests that his modes of prayer should be varied to prevent loss of interest. He notes however that some prayer postures are avoided by his clerks who do not wish to be seen by the faithful in a position of submission. Trexler states that: ‘The “humble and reverent postures” to which clerks objected notably included the first two standing postures’, and he explains that:

The objection to cruciforming one’s arms must have stemmed from the fact that in judicial practice if not theory, crucifixion might still be visited upon the lowest criminals, while to raise one’s hands over one’s head in public was the sign of surrender.<sup>34</sup>

Peter condemns those who would avoid such postures stressing that public prayer should show humility before God.<sup>35</sup> When practised, Peter’s prayer

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<sup>32</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.38.

<sup>33</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.111.

<sup>34</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.48.

<sup>35</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.48.



modes 1 and 2, and possibly mode 3, would have brought roof bosses into direct view.

Mary Carruthers suggests that the church building might be seen as an 'engine of prayer'. She states:

A church building itself has, as it were, moving parts. It works as an engine of prayer, not simply as its edifice. In Cistercian churches, this cognitive engine primarily moves in patterns of shadow and light, and in other subtle variations of form which demand intense effort to see. In the churches of other orders, the modes of the way are marked as well by complex programs of sculpture and painted glass.<sup>36</sup>

Although Carruthers specifically discusses monastic architecture here, the metaphor of an 'engine of prayer' might apply equally to the medieval parish church building: an engine of prayer designed to lead parishioners from the darkness of sin to the light of salvation, and where intense effort to recognise one's sin was required if there was to be any hope of salvation.

If figural roof bosses were seen during periods of prayer and recollection, what function might they have fulfilled in addition to their decorative function? The remainder of this chapter will attempt to draw out the ways in which the bosses may have operated in the 'engine of prayer' that was the medieval parish church. In order to achieve this, the chapter will consider what was perhaps the defining moment in the practice of western Christianity in the late Middle Ages: the issuing of the reforming decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

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<sup>36</sup> Carruthers, M., *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, paperback edition, 2000, pp.263–264.

## **Penance**

The most influential of these decrees concerned penance and was contained in canon 21, *Omnis utriusque sexus*. This commanded that:

All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time. Otherwise they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death.<sup>37</sup>

With the threat of such severe penalties in a society in which both religious and social life revolved around the church, it was paramount that the decree should be followed absolutely. However, to do this required a degree of instruction for both penitent and priest. The penitent needed to know what, how and when to confess, and the confessor needed to have the skills to examine the penitent, to determine the degree of sin, and to impose the appropriate penances in order to heal his parishioners' spiritual sickness.

As a consequence of *Omnis utriusque sexus*, there was a significant rise in both Latin and vernacular literature relating to the examination of sin. These works were in the form of penitential manuals intended for priests and narratives which made use of confessional discourse. Pantin notes that:

the correct use of the sacrament of penance is a theme which dominates or underlies most of the religious literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from the constitutions of the bishops down to the

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<sup>37</sup> Shinnars, J. and Dohar, W.J. (eds.), *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998, pp.169–170.

unexpected places as certain passages in Langland, Chaucer and Gower.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, especially *The Parson's Tale*, and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, as well as Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* and the anonymous *Pricke of Conscience* all contain, to a greater or lesser degree, what have been referred to as 'confessionally organized moments'.<sup>39</sup> Each of these works emphasises the need for self-knowledge to draw the soul from sin and all highlight the development of an interiority based on the confessional.<sup>40</sup>

Concealing sin was always a temptation and, as a consequence, the literature was extremely detailed in its examination of the penitent's deeds and also his thoughts. David Aers comments that:

*The Parson's Tale* stresses that contrition demands that a person search out (and show sorrow for) not only sinful actions but 'alle his synnes that he hath doon in delit of his thought'; it encourages careful self-scrutiny concerning the nature of the inward 'consentynges' given in such movements of individual consciousness. The teacher carefully emphasises that attention to external actions, to 'outward' deeds is not remotely adequate. He warns that self-scrutiny, confession and repentance must address the most intimate movements of thought, contrition leading to a 'wonder sorweful and angwissous' response.<sup>41</sup>

Nor was this process to be an occasional activity. Aers notes that: 'The focus on the individual's inner life, affections and thoughts needs to be a continual

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<sup>38</sup> Pantin, W.A., *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955, p.192. The sacrament of penance, through these works and others, continued to exert influence throughout the whole of the late medieval period.

<sup>39</sup> Raskolnikov, M., 'Confessional Literature, Vernacular Psychology, and the History of the Self in Middle English', *Literature Compass* 2, 2005, ME 128, 1–20, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00128.x., p.7.

<sup>40</sup> Little, K., *Confession and Resistance. Defining the Self in Late Medieval England*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Aers, D., 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the "History of the Subject"', in Aers, D. (ed.), *Culture and History. Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992, pp.177–202, on p.185.

process integrated in the individual's very self-identity: "contricioun moste be continueel"<sup>42</sup>.

In Devon, Bishop Quinel's chapter on penance in his statutes of 1287 provided his clergy with firm guidelines for the rooting out of sin. Quinel notes particularly that:

because anyone who is in grave sin, cannot forgive those of others while he is oppressed by his own, the priests should recall themselves back to their conscience so that they first correct their own sins and then censure those of others. And so the priest should care like a wise doctor and being perfect he should first wipe out his own sins and then wipe away and heal those of others.<sup>43</sup>

It was thus essential that the priest confessed his own sins and Quinel stipulates arrangements for this:

And so that [the priest] might be able to do this more freely and easily, we have decided with the approval of the present synod that the local archdeacons who have fuller knowledge of the priests' wisdom and behaviour, should choose one or two confessors from each deanery whom they know to be particularly suited by their knowledge and merits, who in our place can hear the confessions of rural deans, rectors, vicars and parish priests, while we retain our full authority in our role as penitentiary, and to whose judgement recourse may be had in doubtful or more serious cases except perhaps when a crisis occurs that cannot be sorted out without consulting us.<sup>44</sup>

After the clergy, Quinel turns his attention to requirements for the laity decreeing that priests:

should warn their parishioners and by frequent preaching induce each of them three times a year, namely at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost or at least at the beginning of Lent...to make full confession of his or her sins to his or her own priest.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aers, 1992, p.185.

<sup>43</sup> Barlow, F. (transcription), '16 April 1287 Synodal Statutes of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel for the Diocese of Exeter' and '*Summula* of Bishop Peter Quinel or Quivel of Exeter' in Powicke, F.M., and Cheney, C.R., (eds.) *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church II*, A.D. 1205–1313, 2 Vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, Part II 1265–1313, pp. 982–1077, on p.991, trans. C. White.

<sup>44</sup> Barlow, 1964, pp. 991–992, trans. C. White.

<sup>45</sup> Barlow, 1964, pp. 992, trans. C. White.

The statutes thus recommend confession three times a year rather than once a year as decreed by Lateran IV.

In the prologue of the *summula* appended to his statutes and intended as a practical handbook, Quinel again emphasises the importance of penance:

From what has been said it is clear that the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the physician, and the sinner offends this Trinity through sin. For sin is death and penance is the medicine that, through its three parts, namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction, appeases the wrath of the Trinity which the sinner offends by sinning.<sup>46</sup>

Quinel also explains his motive for the inclusion of the *summula*:

Therefore, I Peter, priest of Exeter, reflecting on these things in my heart and sympathizing with the shortcomings of secular priests hearing confessions – whose ignorance, sad to say, I have all too often experienced – assign the present brief summary to them which they should know for their benefit and that of those going to confession.<sup>47</sup>

The *summula* begins with a lengthy examination of the ten commandments, since ‘the multitude of sins can be boiled down to the transgression of these’ and ‘both penitents and confessors are obliged to know them’.<sup>48</sup>

Following this is a discussion of the seven deadly sins expounded as they are likely to be met in the confessional. Interestingly the metaphor of a tree is used here, a device which was used frequently in medieval wall paintings of the sins:

Since the tree of vices with its loaded branches is no more clearly revealed than when its very roots are uncovered, I think it fitting to call to mind its roots. There are seven deadly roots of sin, which are to be explained frequently to people.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.171.

<sup>47</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.171.

<sup>48</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.172.

<sup>49</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.174.



The first root to be explained is pride ‘from which every wicked offspring of the vices takes its origin’.<sup>50</sup> Pride has seven different types, namely, disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contempt for one’s neighbour, arrogance, impudence and self-exaltation. The following excerpt reveals the very many ways in which the penitent might be tempted into the greatest of all sins, that for which Lucifer fell, and is noteworthy for its inclusion of those of noble birth and ecclesiastical status as well as farmers and artisans:

Now pride has many sources. For instance, a person’s natural gifts; in other words, when a man is proud of his natural endowments – so that because of his physical build, he is strong; or because of the accident of birth, he is wellborn; or because of the way he looks, he is considered handsome; or because of a fluent tongue, or even because he has a nice voice, he is deemed eloquent – as are certain lawyers and even laymen who argue before secular judges. Nobility is also a source of pride, if one is born of a great family; children, too, lead to pride, if one has many of them, or they are comely, or are good sons or daughters. Pride also finds a source in temporal possessions, as when a man takes pride in having great wealth or rich clothes, houses, lands, a large income, or many vassals or servants, or fine horses, or when he outranks others in his temporal possessions. Pride also has a source in gratuitous reward, that is to say those things that come from grace. For instance, when a man is proud because he is wise or even because he is a good scholar [*clericus*] or a legal advocate, or a good artisan or farmer; or he takes pride in his virtue, because he believes himself to be good and despises sinners; or he is proud because he has gained men’s favour or has a good reputation or ecclesiastical dignity or status. One should prescribe a variety of penances to correspond to all these many varieties of pride.<sup>51</sup>

After pride, the second root is sloth ‘which is a kind of apathy of body and a melancholy of the spirit and mind’.<sup>52</sup> Sloth ‘also engenders a weariness of life, which makes this second root extremely deadly’ as from sloth ‘murmurings against God rise up’.<sup>53</sup> The *summula* notes here that ‘a priest should work hard to teach remedies against it – namely, images of eternal rewards, and the recollection of death (not only earthly death but spiritual death) and of eternal

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<sup>50</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.174.

<sup>51</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.175.

<sup>52</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.175.

<sup>53</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.176.

suffering'. The suggestion that images should be used here is particularly interesting, although it is not specified whether these images should be mental images stimulated by the words of the priest or images carved or painted in the church building – perhaps both were intended.

The *summula* continues with a discussion of the remaining five deadly sins – envy, wrath, covetousness or avarice, gluttony and lechery – and instructs the confessor that:

each of these roots and the things that arise from them (and more if he knows them) should be reviewed with the penitent just as has been said. And so he should be confessed of all those sins into which he has fallen.<sup>54</sup>

The circumstances of sin are then scrutinised, for:

Just as it is proper for a person to undress completely to show his bodily wounds to a doctor or a surgeon, since confession is the healing of injuries done to the soul it is proper for someone to reveal all his inner wounds to his spiritual doctor – in other words, all those circumstances and everything which could aggravate the sin in any way. The circumstances can be noted in this mnemonic [versum]: Who, what, where, by whose aid, why, how and when.<sup>55</sup>

Further:

We should consider our deeds doing this in respect to each part of the body and each of our senses, seeing whether we have sinned through our feet, our hands, our eyes, our ears, and so on with every other part of the body. For so it is written: “The just man is first accuser of himself; his friend cometh and shall search him” [Prov. 18:17]. Thus, if a penitent omits any of these things, by a careful examination the priest ought to make good the omissions.<sup>56</sup>

Significantly perhaps, given the many bosses which appear with extended tongues, the *summula* also states that a penitent ought to recall his words,

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<sup>54</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.178.

<sup>55</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.178.

<sup>56</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.181.

because: 'the tongue is the font of all sin, just as the blessed James and also Solomon says: the soul lives or dies by the tongue [James 3:6; Prov. 18:21]'.<sup>57</sup> The major part of Quinel's *summula*, a reissue of the *summula* of Walter de Cantilupe, is thus devoted to the detailed methods by which the priest should teach the penitent to examine his conscience and to confess his sins. The remainder of the work is composed of a series of instructions to the priest detailing when a penitent must be sent to a bishop or the pope for confession and absolution, how to determine appropriate penances, and special penances for the sick and dying. In the final chapter of the *summula* the priest is instructed to teach the articles of faith, the *Credo*, the *Paternoster* and the *Ave* to penitents and a reminder is given regarding the frequency of confession.

Quinel's words were supported in the Diocese of Exeter by other writings on pastoral care, there being a wide dissemination of this type of material in both Latin and the vernacular in the late medieval period. In his will dated September 9<sup>th</sup> 1457, Master John Moretone, Rector of Ilfracombe, 'desired that his books, *Aurea Legenda* and *Pupilla Oculi*, might be chained within the chancel of the parish church and remain there for ever'.<sup>58</sup> The *Pupilla Oculi*, written c. 1385, by John de Burgo, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, and based on the *Oculus Sacerdotis* of William of Pagula, is structured on the seven sacraments. The section on penance includes instructions on the hearing of confessions, interrogations and penances as well as what the priest should do in doubtful cases.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Shinnars and Dohar, 1998, p.181.

<sup>58</sup> Nesbitt, F., *Ilfracombe Parish Church*, Ilfracombe: Twiss Brothers, 1906, p.74.

<sup>59</sup> Pantin, 1955, p.213.

Texts, however, were restricted in their accessibility – most parishioners in rural Devon would have been excluded from using them directly by their illiteracy. In these circumstances, the words of the priests in delivering the penitential message were immensely important. Speech, however, is ephemeral, and although preaching took place in the parish church and the priest instructed his parishioners on confession, contrition needed to be continual.<sup>60</sup> Images, which could be made accessible and enduring, might therefore support the penitential process in ways that words, both written and spoken, could not.

### **The power of images**

In the mid-fifteenth century, Bishop Reginald Pecock recognised the power of images over words in stirring the memories of both literate and illiterate:

The eyesight showeth and bringeth into the imagination and into the mind within the head of a man much matter and long matter sooner, and with less labour and travail and pain, than the hearing of the ear doth. And if this now said is true of a man who can read stories in books –that he shall much sooner and in shorter time and with less labour and pain in his brain come to the remembrance of a long story by sight, than either by hearing other men's reading, or by hearing his own reading – much more is this true of all those persons who cannot read in books; namely, since they shall not find men so ready to read a dozen leaves of a book to them as they shall find ready the painted walls of a church, or a stained cloth, or images spread abroad in diverse places of the church.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Quite how often preaching took place is the subject of some debate. The presence of many medieval pulpits in Devon does not necessarily indicate frequent preaching (they may have been used for reading the bead roll) although H. Leith Spencer suggests that, by the late medieval period, 'a Sunday sermon in the parish church was coming to be expected' Spencer, H.L., *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.64.

<sup>61</sup> Pecock, R. *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, edited by Churchill Babington, London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860, pp. 212–213, repunctuated and quoted in Aston, M., *Lollards and Reformers. Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, London: Hambledon Press, 1984, p.184. Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester from 1450, was a controversial figure, who was convicted of doctrinal error in 1457. Pecock's books were publicly burned, and he is believed to have ended his days in exile in Thorney Abbey, Cambridgeshire, although the date of his death is not known. Aston, 1984, p.207.

Images 'spread abroad in diverse places of the church' could be used by anyone and at any time.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Pecock recognised that images were necessary to 'pluck... [man] upward and for to hold him upward in good thoughts'. Indeed, images were sanctioned by Christ who had given the church the 'seeable rememorative signs' of the sacraments through which God's grace would be imparted to his people.<sup>63</sup>

The sacraments, it has been noted, were also pictured in stained glass, thereby reinforcing their importance as channels of grace after their liturgical performance had ended. In the seven sacraments window in the church at Doddiscombsleigh the penance panel provides interesting details of the act of confession (Fig. 5.4). The priest, his head covered with a cowl, sits looking at a book, presumably a penitential manual, which rests on the desk at which the bare-headed male penitent kneels. The penitent's hands are raised and slightly apart although possibly about to be clasped in prayer. The priest lays his right hand on the penitent's head in a gesture of absolution.

On the floor behind the priest, resting against his seat, are two clasped books, suggesting that the priest had other manuals that he might refer to if any particularly difficult sins came to light during the confession. Waiting penitents stand in prayer in the background, emphasising that prayer was a key part of the penitential process, although their apparent closeness to the kneeling figure may be more to do with portraying the scene in a limited space than a true representation of the confessional process.

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<sup>62</sup> The exceptions being during Lent when devotional images were veiled. Although the lay parishioners were not generally admitted to the chancel, they might still view the images there through the upper part of the rood screen.

<sup>63</sup> Pecock, 1860, quoted in Aston, 1984, p.183.



It is not possible to determine from this panel exactly where confession took place in the church, although Nichols suggests a position either just in front of the roodscreen in the nave or just behind the roodscreen in the chancel.<sup>64</sup> Quinel's statement that 'women should make confession in public and without a veil, not so they can be heard but so they can be seen' suggests a position in the nave which was open and where it would be possible for other penitents to queue without hearing the confession.<sup>65</sup>

The panel illustrates the section on penance in Quinel's statutes which states:

Let them [priests] pay careful attention to the nature and contrition of those making confession; let them listen to what they are saying and support them in a spirit of gentleness; they should not provoke them by a word or a look but should solicitously encourage them to make a full confession. They should not let their eyes wander but keep them fixed on the ground, not looking directly at the face of the one who is making confession, except to judge the person's contrition of heart and shame, which is the most important part of penitence, which will be able to be understood better from the facial expression than from the words themselves.<sup>66</sup>

The emphasis on facial expression as an indicator of true contrition is of particular interest, given the sorrowful appearance of many of the faces carved on roof bosses (Figs. 5.5 and 5.6).<sup>67</sup>

Vision and the control of vision played a significant part in the confessional process and this control extended to access to imagery in the church building. During Lent, when parishioners were expected to confess, many images in the

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<sup>64</sup> Nichols, A.E., 'The Etiquette of Pre-Reformation Confession in East Anglia', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 17, No.2, Summer 1986, pp145–163, on p.155.

<sup>65</sup> Barlow, 1964, p. 992, trans. C. White.

<sup>66</sup> Barlow, 1964, p.992, trans. C. White.

<sup>67</sup> It is interesting to note here Leonardo da Vinci's comment on this subject: 'Men who have strongly marked horizontal lines on their foreheads are full of sorrow, whether secret or admitted'. Leonardo da Vinci, quoted in Baxandall, M., *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.59.

church relating to salvation were veiled, as was the sanctuary, and so the emphasis on sin, in visual as well as verbal terms, intensified.

Discussing control of vision in the parish church through the mechanism of both the rood screen and Lenten veil, Eamon Duffy suggests that:

we need to grasp that both [rood] screen and veil were manifestations of a complex and dynamic understanding of the role of both distance and proximity, concealment and exposure within the experience of the liturgy. Both screen and veil were barriers marking boundaries between the people's part of the church and the holy of holies, the sacred space within which the miracle of transubstantiation was effected, or, in the case of the veil, between different types of time, festive and penitential. The veil was there precisely to function as a temporary ritual deprivation of the sight of the sacring. Its symbolic effectiveness derived from the fact that it obscured for a time something which was normally accessible; in the process it heightened the value of the spectacle it temporarily concealed.<sup>68</sup>

That the clergy controlled many of the pathways to salvation and to God is evident. The laity were excluded from parts of the church and from certain elements of ritual which were presented in language that they might not hear or understand. However, there was one way in which all might communicate with God – prayer – and it will be remembered that it was during periods of prayer that the bosses may have been seen.

Mary Carruther's description of the church building as an 'engine of prayer' occurs in the context of her work on medieval memory.<sup>69</sup> Discussing a mental image made up especially for effective thinking, Carruthers notes that:

A cognitive image is designedly functional (though its author may have some epistemological aspirations for it as well). In monastic rhetoric such an image can have effects that are both pedagogical and ethical, but those effects occur within the alert mind and colouring emotion of a viewer/listener. The image is used by its fashioner and, if it finds artistic

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<sup>68</sup> Duffy, E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–1580*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p.111.

<sup>69</sup> Carruthers, 2000, p.263.

form, by its audience as a cognitive tool. The first question one should ask of such an image is not “What does it mean?” but “What is it good for?”<sup>70</sup>

The answer to this question as regards figural roof bosses can only ever be conjectural, but given the emphasis on confession in the late medieval church in Devon, it might be suggested that it is in this context, and more broadly in the context of a desire for salvation of the soul, that figural bosses may best be understood. Viewing roof bosses necessitated a position with the head tipped back, a position that might be associated both with recall of memories and prayer, and it is possible that many figural bosses may have been used as mnemonic devices and as aids to prayer in a process of self examination for sin. This is not to imply that they were used just to recall events in the penitent’s past for they may also have acted to remind him that temptation to sin was an ongoing threat, thus actively helping him to modify his future behaviour.

Carruthers notes that certain features were standard in medieval memory advice. ‘In particular’ she notes ‘treating the memory as though it were an area divided linearly into columns within a grid seems distinctly medieval’.<sup>71</sup> The arrangement of ribs and purlins in the wagon roofs of churches in Devon conforms directly to this rectangular grid pattern which is also found on the picture pages of medieval manuscripts.<sup>72</sup> Carruthers cautions however that:

all memory advice is clear that one should not rely on ready-made images, one should learn to fashion one’s own, for only this exercise will concentrate the mind enough to ensure a safe investigation of one’s memory. A true memory-image is a mental creation, and it has the elaboration and flexibility, the ability to store and sort large amounts of information, that no pictured diagram can possibly approach.

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<sup>70</sup> Carruthers, 2000, p.118.

<sup>71</sup> Carruthers, 2008, p.162.

<sup>72</sup> Carruthers, 2008, pp. 324–327.

There is a built-in indeterminacy of meaning, and even of relationship of parts, to medieval diagrams, for they follow the logic of recollection-which is associative and determined by individual habit – and not the logic of mathematics.<sup>73</sup>

In use as mnemonic devices, therefore, bosses would have been understood in terms of associations rather than in terms of fixed meanings. Using a boss as a starting point, each penitent might create his own memory-images by recalling his own failings and visualising himself as a particular kind of sinner.

The use of bosses as mnemonic devices finds echoes in Gregory Roper's discussion of what he terms the 'psychological event' of late medieval confession: the construction of the penitent as a particular kind of self.<sup>74</sup> In an illuminating essay on Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, Roper discusses how

On the theological level, penance takes a sinful soul removed from God and, by the complex process of examination of Conscience, Confession, and Satisfaction, restores the Imago Dei, the true reflection of God in the human soul. On the psychological level, penance takes a broken, divided self and, by inducing shame and contrition and getting the sinner to speak about past events, restores to the self a wholeness, a completion, by giving the penitent in effect a new self.<sup>75</sup>

Roper notes that it is through the use of lists, originating in penitential handbooks but delivered through sermons or in the process of confession, that the sinner is encouraged to remember all the sins he has committed since he last confessed. The lists, suggests Roper, can do no more than offer general descriptions of sin. What is needed for confession is recognition of, and contrition for, actual sins committed and so the sinner must personalise the lists

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<sup>73</sup> Carruthers, 2008, pp. 335–336.

<sup>74</sup> Roper, G., 'Dropping the Personae and Reforming the Self: The Parson's Tale and the End of *The Canterbury Tales*' in Raybin, D. and Holley, L.T., *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson's Tale*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000, pp. 151–175, on pp.153–154.

<sup>75</sup> Roper, 2000, pp.155–156.

so that he can recognise his sin both as his own but also as an instance of typical, universal sin.<sup>76</sup>

'The penitential handbook's lists of sins' writes Roper:

are sample portraits that penitents are asked to match up against their own experiences. As the sinners' memories are jogged by particular sins, they in a sense "try on" those sins. And in trying them on, the penitents specify the general definitions or descriptions in the handbook with their own experiences, and can then describe their lives in sin.<sup>77</sup>

Roper's use of the term 'sample portraits' is interesting, given that so many roof bosses are of human heads. It may be that these bosses were also used as 'sample portraits', helping the sinner to define his own sin with greater accuracy so that it could be fully confessed.

The idea of 'sample portraits' finds echoes in the use of the *speculum* in medieval literature. Susan K. Hagen notes that:

From the time of St Augustine and well into the Renaissance, a writer could use the word *speculum* in the title of a work to indicate that the text contained Christian exemplars to which readers could compare themselves – as though studying the lines of their personal images in a mirror – thereby discovering the truth of both what they are and what they should be.<sup>78</sup>

Hagen cites Hugh of St Victor commenting on a work of St Augustine that:

'it is rightly called a mirror; for we can see in it as in a mirror in what state we are, whether beautiful or deformed, just or unjust'.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Roper, 2000, p.158.

<sup>77</sup> Roper, 2000, p.157.

<sup>78</sup> Hagen, S., *Allegorical Remembrance. A Study of the Pilgrimage of the Life of Man as a Medieval Treatise on Seeing and Remembering*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990, p.109.

<sup>79</sup> Hagen, 1990, p.109.



However, mirrors might deceive. Hagen notes that in John Lydgate's Middle English version of Guillaume de Deguileville's fourteenth-century poem *Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, the pilgrim gazes into both the Mirror of Adulation and the Mirror of Conscience. In the Mirror of Adulation, the image of the ageing pilgrim is reflected back as a young man with a full head of hair. The pilgrim does not like this mirror however, and tries the Mirror of Conscience, which reflects back his true image: 'a tonsured, somewhat wearied, and sinful older man'.<sup>80</sup> Hagiography, the character who has introduced the pilgrim to both mirrors, explains that the Mirror of Conscience:

schewith (by trewe expeyence,  
With-out Eccho or fflaterye,  
Or eny other losengerye,)  
Vn-to a man, what ymage  
He bereth aboute, or what visage,  
The portrature, ryght as it is,  
And in what thyng he dothe amys,  
And how he schal the bette entende,  
Alle his ffylthes to amende.<sup>81</sup>

### **Prayer**

Turning to the bosses as an aid to prayer, it is useful to consider Virginia Reinburg's definition which states that prayer is:

a discourse, spoken or silent, expressed in the first person (singular or plural), which establishes a relationship with a person or persons believed to have supernatural power. For late medieval devotees these persons were God, the Virgin Mary and saints...All prayers speak about the self, the supernatural persons being prayed to, and the human community of which the praying self is part.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Hagen, 1990, p.110.

<sup>81</sup> Lydgate, J. *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, lines 22510–18, quoted in Hagen, 1990, p.110.

<sup>82</sup> Reinburg's response to Bossy, J., 'Christian Life in the Later Middle Ages: Prayers', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, Vol. 1, 1991, pp.137–48. Reinburg's comments are on pp.148–150; this definition is on p.149.

Duffy notes that the essentials of Christian prayer are ‘praise and self-surrender to God, confession of sins, intercession for one’s own needs and those of one’s “even-christians”, and for the building of community in charity’.<sup>83</sup> Both Reinburg and Duffy agree that while prayer speaks of the relationship between the self and God, it also considers the community of which the pray-er is part. If used as aids to prayer, then, it might be expected that the bosses would also reference the community and this does appear to be the case in the many carvings of heads which decorate the church roof. Several bosses are carved with four heads meeting at their chins, possibly representing the wider community of the church. In Fig. 5.7 from the south porch at Bovey Tracey church, the figures include heads wearing a male headdress, a female headdress, possibly a mitre, and a crown. In Fig. 5.8 from Chagford, the heads are not so lavishly arrayed. It is noteworthy that, in some cases, four heads bosses are carved with mouths open, possibly in praise or prayer. Other bosses appear to relate to sins which would disturb social unity, especially sins of the tongue which in small isolated communities with a predominantly oral culture could prove particularly damaging. A boss from the north aisle of Ugborough church, for example, shows male and female heads with twisted mouths engaged in what is presumably sinful conversation or backbiting. The presence of the bird in the woman’s headdress, probably a screech owl, which in medieval bestiaries is associated with the wailing of sinners in hell, supports such an interpretation (Fig. 5.9).

These bosses seemingly portray both unity and disunity within the parish community. Regarding the sacrament of penance, it was important to pray for

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<sup>83</sup> Duffy, 1992, p.119.

peace within the community prior to confession, as the priest could not absolve anyone who remained in a state of hostility with his neighbours and forgiveness had to be demonstrated in acts of charity.<sup>84</sup>

Perhaps the prayer which best exemplifies the three key aspects identified by Reinburg and Duffy, that is devotion to God, and a concern for both the self and for one's community, is a prayer which both clergy and laity were required to know by heart: the *Pater Noster*.<sup>85</sup>

In *De Penitentia*, Peter the Chanter states that the *Pater Noster* is the perfect prayer which 'contains everything necessary for salvation', and he lists it as the first of seven prayers after which should come 'all other prayers which are used by the Catholic church throughout the world'.<sup>86</sup>

John Mirk's sermon collection, the *Festial* (c.1380s) notes that it is much more 'spedfull [useful] and meritabull [meritorious]' to say the *Pater Noster* in English rather than in Latin for, when spoken in English, the parishioner knows and understands well what he is saying and by his understanding he will have 'lykyng and devocyon forto say hit'.<sup>87</sup> The *Pater Noster* was, then, an essential component of late medieval religious life. It was a prayer which recalled past actions, was prescribed as penance for sins, and a prayer which looked to the future with its plea regarding temptation.

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<sup>84</sup> Bossy, J., 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, Vol. 25, 1975, pp.21–38, on p.25.

<sup>85</sup> Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...Amen. Translation in Shinnars, J. (ed.), *Medieval Popular Religion 1000–1500*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997, p.4. The other prayer which all were expected to know was the *Ave*.

<sup>86</sup> Trexler, 1987, p.35; Trexler, 1987, p.45.

<sup>87</sup> Erbe, T., (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, Early English Text Society, London, 1905. Unaltered reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer 1997, p.282.

In a sermon from the *Festial*, John Mirk presents the seven petitions of the *Pater Noster* as the ‘vii prayers...that puttyth away the vii dedly synnys, and getyth grace of God forto haue all that man nedyth forto haue necessary, bothe to the lyfe and to the soule’.<sup>88</sup> M.D. Anderson cites two sermons from British Museum Royal 18 B xxiii which also make an association between the prayer and the sins. Anderson states that:

in the more elaborate of these the preacher explains that each of the Deadly Sins is a particular hindrance in praying one of the clauses of the Lord’s Prayer. The proud, who do not consider other men as brothers, cannot call God ‘Our Father’; the envious do not wish his kingdom to come and those who are wrathful against their fellows do not obey his will. The slothful neglect those religious exercises which are our spiritual ‘daily bread’...<sup>89</sup>

If the *Pater Noster* was to be effective, therefore, and was to be heard by God, the impediment caused by the sins needed to be recognised.<sup>90</sup>

While the *Pater Noster* itself does not seem to be directly represented on roof bosses, allusion is certainly made to several of the Deadly Sins. These include the first two sins examined in Bishop Quinel’s *summula*: pride, which is referenced in bosses of horned headdresses (Fig. 5.10), and, perhaps, those of crowned heads, and sloth, referenced in bosses of heads engaged in idle talk, a form of spiritual malaise (Fig. 5.11). Other bosses are also carved with motifs which might relate to the sins; for example, the sin of envy might be detected in bosses which suggest backbiting (see Fig. 5.9).<sup>91</sup> Visual representations of the Seven Deadly Sins in roof bosses, as with representations in wall paintings and other media, may therefore have served as aids to the praying of the *Pater*

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<sup>88</sup> Erbe, 1997, pp.282.

<sup>89</sup> Anderson, M.D., *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1963, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> John Chap. 9, v.31 contends that: ‘God doth not hear sinners: but if a man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth’. *Douay Rheims Bible*, 2006, p.1412.

<sup>91</sup> See Mirk’s *Festial*. Erbe, 1997, p.284.

*Noster*, as well as other prayers, since they brought into focus the spiritual corruption which might impede the effective communication of the prayer and against which the seven petitions of the prayer could be presented.<sup>92</sup>

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Looking at roof bosses, then, it can be imagined how they might have been used as mnemonic devices and aids to prayer.<sup>93</sup> The invocation carved across four bosses in the south aisle at Coldridge church, 'IHC hafe merce anno', supports this usage. In the case of heraldic bosses, this can also be imagined. As Pamela Graves notes, symbols which reminded parishioners of particular families or individuals were a 'powerful technology for salvation', since:

in the late middle ages it was believed that it was enough for a person to be thought of, however cursorily or unintentionally during the mass, for the remembrance to contribute towards the account of that person's salvation.<sup>94</sup>

This chapter has offered an understanding of many roof bosses in the light of the penitential process. Lee Patterson notes that:

Of all the ways in which the church affected the lives of medieval Christians, certainly the most ubiquitous and probably the most profound was through its administration of the sacrament of penance...in succeeding centuries more and more of the religious life of medieval

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<sup>92</sup> Gill, M., 'Preaching and Image: Sermons and Wall Paintings in Later Medieval England' in Muessig, C. (ed.), *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2002, pp. 155–180, on p.175.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Marks notes the use of a strategically positioned roof boss in the Beauchamp Chapel attached to St Mary's church, Warwick:

The ostensible theme of the Chapel is Beauchamp's personal salvation. The imagery of the interior fuses the earthly and heavenly worlds...The central focus of the ensemble is Beauchamp's effigy. It depicts him in his armour as '*miles Christi*', placed with his feet to the east in anticipation of his resurrection and attainment of salvation on the day of judgement, painted behind him on the upper part of the Chapel west wall...The effigy gazes up, with hands open in gesture of either adoration or silent prayer, at the figure of the Queen of Heaven carved on the easternmost roof boss.

Marks, R., "Entumbed right princly": The Beauchamp Chapel at Warwick' in Barron, C., and Burgess, C., (eds.), *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England*. Harlaxton Medieval Studies Volume XX, Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010, pp.163–184, on pp. 166–167.

<sup>94</sup> Graves, C. P., *The Form and Fabric of Belief. An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk and Devon*. Oxford: John and Erica Hedges and Archaeopress, 2000, p.143.



people came to be concentrated upon and articulated in terms of penance and the confessional.<sup>95</sup>

It was in the interests of both clergy and laity to effect the penitential process as thoroughly as possible, given the fragility of life during the late medieval period. It is not surprising that both groups turned to images, which were accessible and readily assimilated, to provide a focus for recall and prayer. In using images, including those on bosses, to recall sins committed in the past, to pray for forgiveness and for deliverance from temptation in the future, both clergy and laity were preparing themselves for the inevitable and awful Day of Judgement.

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<sup>95</sup> Patterson, L., *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p. 374.

**Figure 5.1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 5.1  
Diagram of the brain, Cambridge University Library MS. Gg 1.1, fol 490v,  
c. 1330.

From Carruthers, M., *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in  
Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
2008, front cover.

**Figure 5.2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.**

Fig. 5.2

Illustration of Peter the Chanter's prayer mode 1, Venetian State Archives, S. Maria della Misericordia in Valverde, b.1, unpaginated, 13<sup>th</sup> C.

From Trexler, R.C., *The Christian at Prayer. An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d.1197)*,  
Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies,  
Volume 44, 1987, p.134.

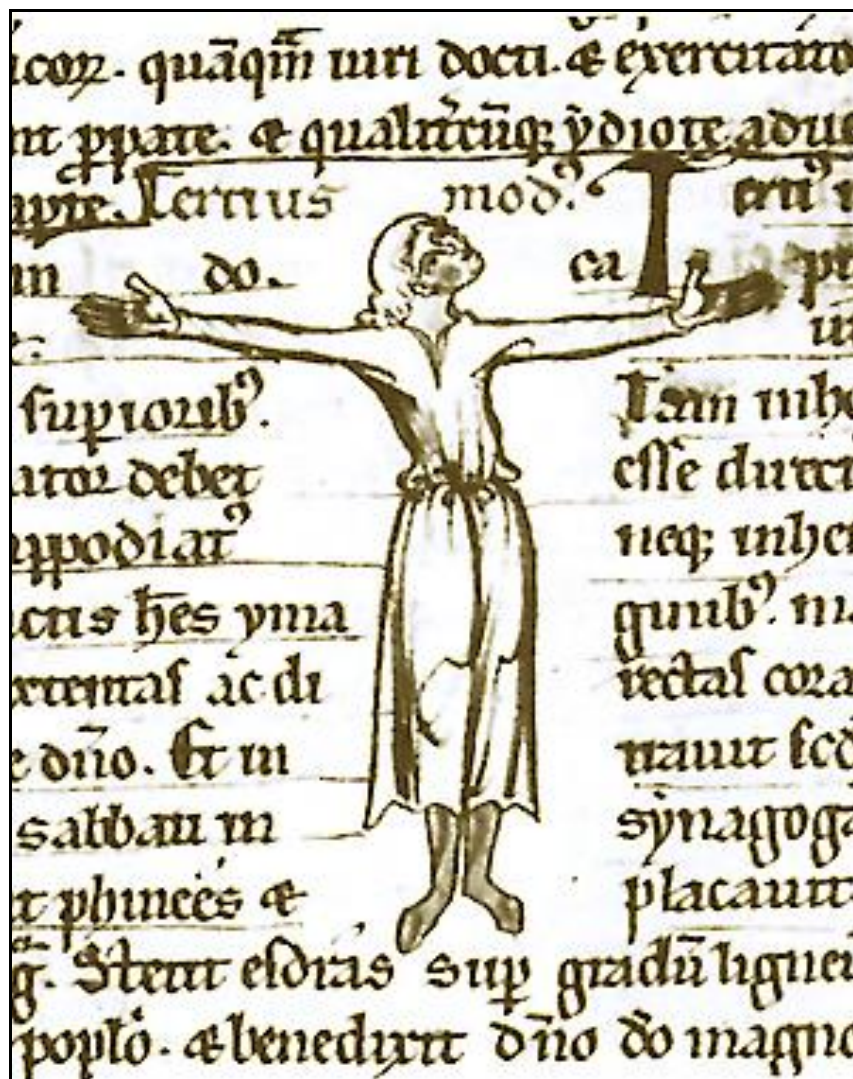


Fig. 5.3

Illustration of Peter the Chanter's prayer mode 2,  
B.L. Additional MS.19767, 1227–1246.

From Trexler, R.C., *The Christian at Prayer. An Illustrated Prayer Manual attributed to Peter the Chanter (d.1197)*,  
Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies,  
Volume 44, 1987, p.143.

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Fig. 5.4  
Penitencia.  
Detail of Seven Sacraments window,  
stained glass, north aisle, Doddiscombsleigh church,  
c.1480.





Fig. 5.5  
Foliate head with furrowed brow,  
roof boss, North Bovey chancel,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 5.6  
Crowned head with furrowed brow,  
roof boss, Ashburton north chancel chapel,  
15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 5.7  
Four heads,  
roof boss, Bovey Tracey south porch,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 5.8  
Four heads,  
roof boss, Chagford south aisle.  
15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 5.9  
Heads engaged in sinful conversation,  
roof boss, Ugborough north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 5.10  
The Deadly Sin of pride.  
Roof boss, East Budleigh nave,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 5.11  
The Deadly Sin of sloth.  
Roof boss, Atherington north aisle,  
15<sup>th</sup> C.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Carving and Community**

C.J.P. Cave's greatest achievement, as regards roof bosses, may be measured in the breadth of his photographic recording and documentation of these carvings in churches and cathedrals across Britain. Cave presented his work in the form of a survey, considering bosses as objects of Gothic sculpture, and focusing on their style and iconography. This thesis is more limited geographically, in recording and documenting the majority of roof bosses in parish churches in a single county, Devon, yet its analysis cuts deeper than Cave's as it seeks to examine the interactions between the carvings and the community who commissioned, created, and used them.<sup>1</sup> This study is therefore markedly different from Cave's in its concern with the people of the parish as well as the carvings.

The concluding chapter of this thesis focuses on the people and carvings in six churches, all of which are uncommonly rich in surviving medieval and post-medieval evidence. The six churches, from across the county, vary in size and the wealth of their respective parishes, span the date range considered, and include those with ecclesiastical patrons and those where patrons were lay. The case studies follow the structure of the thesis in considering materiality and method at Stoodleigh, with links between the carvings and the dedication of the church also considered here; the influence of ecclesiastical authority at Braunton; the motivation of patrons, clergy and parishioners at Spreyton; recognition and interpretation of motifs at North Bovey; and the iconography, collaboration between motifs, and function of bosses at South Tawton. Finally,

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<sup>1</sup> Cave does, briefly, discuss carvers but this is largely in relation to the style of bosses.

changes wrought by the Reformation are considered with regard to bosses at Harford church.<sup>2</sup> It is hoped that the cumulative evidence from each case study will confirm that this thesis, in adopting methodologies which consider the community as well as the carving, makes a significant contribution to the study of roof bosses, and enhances understanding of the late medieval parish church and its people in Devon and beyond.

It is important initially, however, to assess progress made by the thesis in the recording of bosses since this is the foundation upon which the entire study rests.

### **Recording late medieval figural roof bosses in Devon**

C.J.P. Cave noted a total of 42 churches in Devon in which there were medieval roof bosses, though not all of these have, or had, figural bosses. This study records a further 79 churches in which figural roof bosses are found and revisits the 42 churches recorded by Cave. Since Cave's study was country-wide, and his focus largely on the great churches, and on style and iconography, his recording of information, especially for parish churches, was necessarily brief. The gazetteer augments Cave's study significantly, particularly in its detailed information on the dedication of the church, patrons, outline of the church building, and its roofs. It includes a photograph of each of the figural bosses, which Cave was unable to do in his published works, and it documents the position of bosses. The gazetteer also includes maps of the distribution of bosses and information on their measurements.

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<sup>2</sup> For images of most of the bosses discussed in this chapter, see Gazetteer.

### **Materiality and method at Stoodleigh**

Stoodleigh is a small rural parish in mid-Devon not far from its border with Somerset. Stoodleigh church has been dedicated to St Margaret since at least 1373.<sup>3</sup> In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the advowson of the church was held by the Fitzpaine family. The heiress of John Fitzpaine, Margaret, married John Austell, who presented to the rectory in 1448 and 1454, but by 1460–1 the advowson was in the hands of John Kelleghe, before passing sometime before 1487 into the hands of Humphrey Calwodleghe.<sup>4</sup> The church building consists of a chancel, nave, south aisle, west tower and south porch. However, much of its present appearance is due to a Victorian restoration carried out in 1879–80, according to the designs of architect Henry Woodyer, for Thomas Carew Daniel, then patron of the church.<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary to determine the extent of the material changes made by Woodyer since this is likely to have an impact on any assessment of roof bosses in the church. Fortunately, a description of the church before restoration survives in the notes of James Davidson. Davidson recorded, on 27 July 1843, that:

The village church consists of a nave about 36 feet long by 16 wide – chancel about 13 by 12, an aisle to the south about 48 by 12, an embattled tower at the western end containing 3 bells and a porch covering the south door...The nave opens to the aisle by 3 low arches on columns formed by alternate shafts and mouldings their capitals ornamented with foliage. The chancel is open to the aisle by a low arch the soffit of which is carved in trefoiled panels...The ceilings are coved and ribbed the intersections ornamented with rude faces, foliage and devices.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Orme, N., *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Devon and Cornwall*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996, p.206.

<sup>4</sup> Cresswell, *Tiverton*, 1920, p.180.

<sup>5</sup> Cherry, B., and Pevsner, N. (eds), *The Buildings of England: Devon*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Penguin, 1991, p.767.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson, *North Devon*, p.217.

In a newspaper report dated 5 July 1880, marking the re-consecration of the church, the extent of Woodyer's restoration is revealed:

A new chancel, thirty feet in length, with chancel-aisle and porch, has been added...The old roof has been restored throughout, the arch timber-work being left open to view with plaster between the rafters...The arcade between the nave and south aisle has been taken down, cleaned, restored, and rebuilt upon new foundations....The quaint old bosses in the roof of the nave have been cleaned throughout, and the old carved wall plate has been re-decorated...In removing the plaster from the north wall two old doorways, which formerly led to the rood-loft, with their stairs were met with. These have been cleaned and the walling recessed back, leaving the stone arch and jambs exposed...The alterations have been carried out from the designs of Mr H. Woodyer, Grafham House, Guildford, under the supervision of Mr Redfern, as clerk of the works, by Mr Wood, builder, ...Mr Stenson, of Tiverton, has done the Bath stone work, and the chancel stalls and screens have been executed by Mr Luscombe, of St. Sidwell's, Exeter.<sup>7</sup>

The wagon roof of Woodyer's new chancel is decorated with modern bosses, including symbols of the Passion, the Arms of the Diocese of Exeter and the Province of Canterbury and a monogram of St Margaret. The major part of the nave roof is, however, original and is decorated with carved roof bosses and wall plates. Altogether, 33 bosses cover the junctions of moulded ribs and purlins, being fixed on north, crown and south purlins at every third rib (Fig. 6.1). It is uncertain whether Woodyer coloured or re-coloured the bosses, which appear to have been painted *in situ* as there are traces of their red decoration on ribs and purlins. Certainly the bosses bore colouring in July 1938, when C.J.P. Cave records that they are 'coloured red and white'.<sup>8</sup>

The bosses are rounded with shallow carving and are similar in style to those in the nave at Braunton. The nave roof at Stoodleigh also shares with Braunton the unusual feature of having ribs and purlins on which the moulding splays to

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<sup>7</sup> Unattributed newspaper cutting, Sheet A3, Stoodleigh Parish File, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>8</sup> C.J.P. Cave, Card Index, Society of Antiquaries Library MS 943/8.



form a flat base for the bosses, rather than the more usual arrangement in Devon where bosses are shaped to fit over ribs and purlins. Given their similarity in style to those at Braunton and the shaping of the ribs and purlins, it might reasonably be suggested that the major part of the nave roof and most of the nave bosses at Stoodleigh date from the late fourteenth century or early fifteenth century.

Some of the 33 bosses, however, may be copies carved during Woodyer's restoration, since he converted the existing chancel into an additional bay for the nave, rebuilding part of the north wall and the roof, as well as the arcade between the nave and south aisle. Examination of the timbers suggests that the first ten ribs from Woodyer's chancel arch westwards appear to date from this period, with this extension requiring nine extra bosses. While Woodyer may have reused the old chancel bosses, photographic analysis suggests that it is more likely that he had copies made of the existing nave bosses and that he used most of these (seven of nine) in the new roof section.

The new nave bosses, most of which are carved with foliage and a star pattern, are marked by their sharpness and an increased depth in their carving. It appears, though, that three figural bosses may also have been copied: a head beneath stylised foliage, two wyverns and a mermaid. The mermaid boss is particularly interesting since the Victorian carver has neither carved her with hair nor with detailing in the comb which she carries. The comb in this boss appears as a plain block.

In addition to the new bosses, Woodyer also required further lengths of carved wall plate and three sections on the north side of the nave and six sections on the south side are modern copies of the old wall plate.<sup>9</sup>

In the nave roof it is noteworthy that, on ten of the eleven ribs on which bosses are fixed, including the new ribs, the design of the boss on the north side echoes that of the corresponding boss on the south side. This repetition also occurs with some motifs along the length of the roof. Although this arrangement may be Woodyer's, the old bosses at the west end of the nave, which Woodyer had no reason to disturb, display this feature. With one exception, all bosses which feature human heads are fixed on the crown purlin.

C.J.P. Cave notes that the bosses at Stoodleigh 'are peculiar and very crude and are unlike any I have come across elsewhere'.<sup>10</sup> Of the bosses of mermaids, he notes: 'their design is hopeless; they look like a child's attempt at portraying a mermaid'; of the wyverns, Cave states: 'the design is extremely crude', and of the bosses with heads, he asserts that they are 'almost as childlike in their execution'.<sup>11</sup> Cave goes on to state that: 'it looks as though some local and inexperienced man has tried his hand at these carvings and had not made a success of it'.<sup>12</sup>

An interesting point may be made here about levels of parochial investment in roof bosses. In many churches, roodscreens appear to have been the focus of

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<sup>9</sup> Harrison, H., *Report: St Margaret's, Stoodleigh. Appraisal of Henry Woodyer's Restoration 1879–80*. January 2010, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Cave, C.J.P., *Roof Bosses in Medieval Churches: An Aspect of Gothic Sculpture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p.211.

<sup>11</sup> The wyvern bosses are sometimes referred to as birds by Cave (Cave, 1948, p.15) and in the same work as dragons (Cave, 1948, p.20). It seems certain however, that they are wyverns, a type of two legged dragon.

<sup>12</sup> Cave, 1948, p.20.

late medieval investment by the laity. In Burrington church, for example, the level of technical accomplishment in the carving of the roodscreen is very high, whereas that of the roof bosses is moderate. However, the bosses probably pre-date the roodscreen by a significant numbers of years and must have been part of the general rebuilding of the church in the fifteenth century, whereas the roodscreen, which probably dates to the early sixteenth century was, no doubt, commissioned at a time when parochial finances had had a chance to recover. In other churches though, such as Ugborough, while the screen is noted as being 'impressive', the bosses in the north aisle are also 'excellent'.<sup>13</sup>

It seems then, that the quality of the carving of bosses may simply have reflected the finances available in the parish at the time. Where funds were available, specialist carvers were probably employed, some of whom may have come from outside the area. In other small, isolated, rural churches, like Stoodleigh, where funding was more limited, local men who were not especially skilled in carving probably carved the bosses. Nevertheless, as is pointed out in Chapter Two, the fact that some bosses were not technically accomplished does not mean that they were any less important in terms of their function. It may be that the simple outlines on the Stoodleigh bosses, and their almost cartoon-like quality, elicited a response from their audience which more elaborate carving would have failed to do.

Of the figural motifs on the bosses at Stoodleigh, the two most frequently occurring are those of the wyverns and mermaids, both of which, during the late medieval period, carried strongly negative connotations.<sup>14</sup> Other bosses in the nave at Stoodleigh also appear to refer to sinful behaviour. The bosses of the

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<sup>13</sup> Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p. 879.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Four.

paired heads probably reference jangling or idle talk in church, and the heads which appear beneath stylised prickly foliage perhaps refer to the snares of the Devil which trap the unwary.

Bosses with an eight-pointed star pattern may carry a more positive connotation. The number eight is significant in the Bible – Christ mentions eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount and Christ’s Resurrection took place on the eighth day of the Passion. The octagonal shape of many medieval fonts symbolises the death of the old spirit and the promise, through baptism, of a new life in the resurrected Christ.<sup>15</sup> The stars may therefore point to salvation which might be gained through the ministry of the church, referenced by the bosses carved with bishops’ mitres and, ultimately, through the sacrifice of Christ, referenced by the carving of the cross and crown of thorns.

The roof bosses at Stoodleigh, then, allude to the dangers of falling into sin but also to the promise of redemption, and the motif of the foliate head which is carved repeatedly on the wall plates is consistent with this interpretation. From the mouth of each head streams a stylised vine and grapes which may allude to the salvific effect of the Eucharist (Fig. 6.2).

Of particular interest at Stoodleigh is a possible link between the bosses and the patronal saint, Margaret, whose statue would have been placed on the north side of the altar in the chancel, with a statue of the Virgin Mary on the south.

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<sup>15</sup> For a numerological understanding of octagonal baptisteries and fonts, see Nichols, A., *Seeable Signs. The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments 1350–1544*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994, pp.69–71, and Dölger, F., ‘Zur Symbolik des altchristlichen Taufhauses. Das Oktogon und die Symbolik der Achtzahl’, *Antike und Christentum*, IV, 1934, pp.153–187. I am grateful to Dr Aleksandra Jones for these references.

The dedication of the church to St Margaret is unusual, there being only three known churches thus dedicated in Devon between 1066 and 1600.<sup>16</sup>

The legend of St Margaret was related in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. In this work, Margaret is portrayed as a beautiful and virtuous noblewoman who endures torture and being swallowed by a dragon – the devil – in defence of her Christian faith. With the sign of the cross the devil is vanquished, although Margaret is finally beheaded, thus receiving the crown of martyrdom.

Of Margaret, De Voragine says:

The name Margaret is also the name of a precious jewel called margarita, pearl, which is shining white, small and powerful. So Saint Margaret was shining white by her virginity, small by humility, and powerful in the performance of miracles. The power of the pearl is said to work against effusion of blood and against the passions of the heart, and to effect the strengthening of the spirit. Thus blessed Margaret had power over the effusion of her blood by her constancy, since she was most constant in her martyrdom. She had power over the heart's passions, i.e., in conquering the demon's temptations, since she overcame the devil. She strengthened the spirit by her doctrine, since her doctrine strengthened the spirits of many and converted them to the faith of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

A contemporary description of an image of Margaret is given in a sermon:

Herfor Margret ys paynted over coruen [painted or carved] wher scho ys with a dragon undyr her fete [dragon under her feet] and a cros yn her hond, schowyng how by vertu of ye cros scho gate ye victory of ye fynde [fiend].<sup>18</sup>

Fig. 6.3 shows an image of St Margaret painted on the dado of the rood screen at Holne.

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<sup>16</sup> Of 339 traced – 70% of the whole. Orme, 1996, p.30.

<sup>17</sup> Ryan, W.G., (trans.), Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, Vol. I, Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.368.

<sup>18</sup> Erbe, T., (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: a Collection of Homilies*, Early English Text Society, London, 1905. Unaltered reprint, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer 1997, p.201. I am indebted to Malcolm Jones for the gloss of 'paynted over coruen'. Malcolm Jones pers. comm. 24.05.11.



The wyverns at Stoodleigh were therefore particularly apt as symbols of temptation given the presence of an image of St. Margaret standing on a dragon. The images of the mermaids were appropriate too, given the dedication of the church. As creatures of the water and temptresses, they could be contrasted with the saintly figure, Margaret, the pearl, who was 'shining white by her virginity ...yet...powerful in the performance of miracles'.<sup>19</sup>

Close analysis of the materiality and method of the carvings at Stoodleigh church reveals evidence of post-medieval restoration which must be taken into account when considering the church's roof bosses. Examination of the style of the bosses offers possible evidence for dating, suggests that the carvers were probably local, but that they were aware of the configuration of roof timbers and bosses elsewhere. As the medieval dedication of the church is recorded, it is possible to speculate that some of the bosses were commissioned by the people of the parish to highlight the virtues of their patronal saint, Margaret, whose statue adorned the chancel, and whose image may also have appeared in stained glass and painted on the rood screen. While C.J.P. Cave asserted that the bosses at Stoodleigh are 'peculiar and very crude' and 'almost childlike in their execution' and clearly regarded the carvings as being unsuccessful, an approach which considers other aspects of the carvings, besides their quality, confirms that the bosses at Stoodleigh are far from 'hopeless', but, should instead be recognised as a rich resource for our understanding of the people of a small isolated rural parish church in late medieval Devon.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ryan, 1993, p.368.

<sup>20</sup> Cave, 1948, p.211; Cave, 1948, p.20.

### **Ecclesiastical authority at Braunton**

In some churches, it seems almost certain that ecclesiastical patrons influenced the choice of roof bosses in the public spaces of the church. This appears to be the case at Braunton church in north Devon, whose patrons were the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral. Braunton, the *Brannocminster* of a ninth-century charter, takes its name from a Celtic missionary, St Brannock, who is reputed to have established a church here, perhaps a coenobitic community, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> In 1478, William of Worcester stated that Brannock's body lay in Braunton church: '*Sanctus Barnocus heremita iacet apud Braunton*' where it is still believed to be, probably beneath the high altar.<sup>22</sup> In 1327, a silver container with a bone of the saint was recorded as being the gift of Deacon Bartholomy and was kept in a small painted chest in Exeter Cathedral.<sup>23</sup> The *Ordinale* of Bishop Grandisson (r.1327–1369) states that the saint's feast day was celebrated in the cathedral on 7 January.<sup>24</sup> St Brannock was clearly venerated in the Diocese of Exeter and the church which housed his shrine, and to which pilgrims would journey, reflected this veneration in its size and decoration.

Of particular interest for this study is the wagon roof of the nave at Braunton studded with 36 bosses (Fig. 6.4), all of which are coloured or gilded to some degree, with 20 of these being figural. The boss-bearing ribs and purlins are decoratively carved with stylised foliate spikes emanating from beneath the bosses (Fig. 6.5), a feature which does not appear to be replicated elsewhere in Devon, and which marks the high level of craftsmanship afforded to this place of

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<sup>21</sup> Orme, 1996, p.136; Owen, T.R., *St. Brannock's Church, Braunton*, 2006 edition, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> Harvey, J.H., *William of Worcester, Itineraries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p.114.

<sup>23</sup> 'Inventory of valuable objects at Exeter Cathedral in 1327' in Pearce, S. and Bounia, A. (eds.), *The Collector's Voice: Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting, Volume 1, Ancient Voices*, Ashgate Publishing, 2001, pp.223–225, on p.225.

<sup>24</sup> Cresswell, *Barnstaple*, p.88.

pilgrimage. If these spikes were gilded or coloured, the effect from the floor would be that of a foliate cross with the boss at its centre. Most of the bosses are circular and carved in shallow relief, four bosses of heads at the west end being the only ones which do not conform to this pattern. These, however, may be later in date, although their iconography is consistent with the late medieval period.

Conservation work, carried out after a major fire in 2003, revealed that the existing colour was twentieth-century in origin with no apparent trace of an earlier scheme, although extensive investigation was not undertaken.<sup>25</sup> Tree-ring analysis of oak timbers in 2003–4 confirmed that timbers in the nave roof date from the end of the fourteenth century or beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Most of the bosses probably date from the same period.

The bosses at the east end of the nave are carved with religious motifs – an angel representing St Matthew; an angel in a cloud; an eagle representing St. John; the pelican-in-her-piety; the winged lion of St Mark and the winged ox of St Luke. Those in the central section of the nave, closest to the position of the font and most visible on entry through the south door, which is situated towards the west end of the church, are more worldly: the Man in the Moon; a dragon swallowing a man; two wyverns with necks entwined; horses with two heads and four bodies; and a sow and farrow. The figural bosses at the extreme west are all of human heads: a male head with curled hair and wearing a hat; a bearded head; a head with furrowed brow; a bearded and crowned foliate head

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<sup>25</sup> Cheadle, E., and Hassall, C., *St. Brannock's Church, Braunton, Devon. Report Following Conservation and Restoration of Twelve Fire Damaged Roof Bosses in the Nave*, January 2005, unpaginated.

<sup>26</sup> Tyers, I., *Tree Ring Analysis of Oak Timbers from St Brannock Church, Braunton, Devon*. English Heritage Centre for Archaeology Report 81/2004, p.5.

with tongue extended; a large head with mouth slightly open revealing teeth; three heads sharing four eyes and another head with tongue extended.

Although the nave was the preserve of the laity, the commissioning and placement of bosses there may have been influenced by the church's patrons, the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, whose interest was, no doubt, heightened by the presence of the shrine of Saint Brannock and the church's value as a site of pilgrimage. The bosses in the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral, which were described in Chapter Four, and pre-date those at Braunton by around one hundred years, are similar in iconography and placement, with symbols of the Evangelists and a head of Christ at the east end, and most of the bosses of bestiary creatures and human heads towards the west end.<sup>27</sup>

The bosses in the nave at Braunton do not, therefore, appear to be randomly placed, but rather define three distinct areas. Those at the east end, nearest the chancel and the shrine of St Brannock, are carved with religious images (the pelican-in-her-piety, an angel, the four evangelists) which reference the sacrifice of Christ and the church through which salvation might be gained. The carvings towards the central section, between the north and south doors towards the west end of the church, and over the font (the Man in the Moon, a dragon swallowing a man, wyverns, horses, a sow and farrow), seem to relate to the ever-present danger of sin and the punishment for those who cannot resist temptation.<sup>28</sup> The carvings at the extreme west feature human heads, wherein are located most of the sensory organs through which sin may enter.

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<sup>27</sup> See description of the Lady Chapel bosses in Chapter Four.

<sup>28</sup> At Braunton, the situation of the sow and farrow boss above the font is particularly apt since the waters of baptism would wash away original sin. The sow and farrow boss at Braunton may also have some association with the bench immediately behind the font. Churchwardens'

On entry to the church, then, through north, south or west doors, the parishioner, on looking up, is faced with images of sin and the consequences of that sin. The path to salvation, however, is clearly marked at the east end of the nave, with bosses that remind the worshipper of the ministrations of the church and the Passion of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

A study of the roof and bosses in the nave at Braunton suggests that the people of the parish considered their nave roof to be a significant space and that they may have sought the advice of, or been otherwise influenced by, the church's patrons, the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, in its decoration. However, while a programmatic scheme exists in the nave, in the south chancel chapel there is only one figural boss, of a head, out of a total of 45 bosses, all others being foliate. Understanding the significance of this boss is extremely difficult. As the medieval chancel roof is lost, our understanding of the overall role of bosses in Braunton is undoubtedly compromised. Nonetheless, the evidence from Braunton suggests that, in some cases at least, patrons and parishioners collaborated in the decoration of the public space of the church.

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accounts from the early seventeenth century refer to this bench as the 'churching pew' (Graves, C., *The Form and Fabric of Belief. An Archaeology of the Lay Experience of Religion in Medieval Norfolk and Devon*. Oxford: John and Erica Hedges and Archaeopress, 2000, p.137). 'Churching' was the process through which a woman who had given birth was 'cleansed' before being admitted back into the community of the church. Since childbirth involved the spilling of blood, a woman was considered unclean and, after the birth, was expected to remain isolated for a period of seven days for a male child and 14 days for a female child. A further period of purification followed, 33 days in the event of a male child and 42 days in the event of a female child (Graves, 2000, p.137.). At the end of this time, the woman attended a 'churching' ceremony which involved being met at the church door by the priest and being led to the churching pew, where she was set apart from other parishioners. Only after this ceremony and her confession was a woman permitted to partake of the Eucharist once more. The sow and farrow boss, with its association with birth and that which is unclean, is therefore well suited to a position above the churching pew.

<sup>29</sup> In an assessment of the role of bosses in the Angel Choir at Lincoln Cathedral, T.A Heslop makes a similar statement: 'the visitor entering the building...can take the road of strife and temptation to the west or the road to union with Christ and his church to the east'. Heslop, T., 'The Iconography of the Angel Choir at Lincoln Cathedral' in Fernie, E., and Crossley, P. (eds.), *Medieval Architecture and its Intellectual Context*, London: Hambledon Press, 1990, pp. 151–158, on p.155.



### **Motivation at Spreyton**

As has been noted, there are, in most cases, problems in identifying the donors of bosses which makes difficult any assessment of motivation or choice of motif. However, in some churches additional evidence is available in the church roof which adds to our understanding of both motivation and choice of motif. This evidence is particularly rich at Spreyton, a parish in the middle of the county of Devon. The chancel roof of the small church at Spreyton (Fig. 6.6) is decorated with nine bosses, three of which are probably modern, carved with the Greek letters alpha, chi-rho and omega, and four of which are foliate. Two medieval figural bosses are carved with three hares and a bearded, crowned foliate head.

Remarkably the ribs and purlins of the chancel roof are carved with an inscription in Latin (Figs. 6.7, 6.8), which records the following, here translated:

Henry le Maygne, Priest, Vicar of this Church, caused me to be built in the year of our Lord 1451 Robert of Rouen of Becdenne, Prior of Cowyk and Richard Talbot, Armiger, Lord of Spreyton, gave of their goods for my building. Pray for their souls. This Henry was born in the land of Normandy, and himself wrote all these words with his own hand.

The inscription continues:

Sweet friend of God, ever young, fair as a star on high,  
Be thou mindful of me, when the hour of death draweth nigh,  
Mother of Jesus, revive all those who from the heart send prayer;  
Spotless thyself, renew the minds fast bound by sinful snare.<sup>30</sup>

This house shall be called the house of prayer; in it everyone that asks receives, he that seeks finds, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Witness, O Christ, that this has not been written  
That praise to himself be given, but that his soul be remembered in heaven.

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<sup>30</sup> The couplet *Dulcis amica dei, rosa vernans, stella decora, Tu memor esto mei dum mortis venerit ora* appears in a fifteenth-century lyric on the Coronation of the Virgin, BL ADD MS 20059, Brown, C.(ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939, p. 69.

St Nicholas, pray for us; St Edward Martyr, intercede for us.  
For aye let the sinful deed a foolish act be decreed.  
When for an apple alone the whole of mankind is undone.  
God was born of a Virgin meek, but if any the manner should seek,  
It is not for me to say how, but that God can do all things, I know.<sup>31</sup>

Whether this inscription was carved *in situ* is not known although the practicalities of so doing may suggest otherwise. However, in an article published in 1929, the Reverend E.V. Freeman offers the following on the inscription and le Maygne:

It must suffice to say that, written partly in Scripture phrase, partly in Leonine devout verse, [the inscription] combines a spirit of devotion with a charm of expression which we may regard as reflecting the mind of the good Vicar who composed it, a scholarly cleric of a very practical turn. We may picture him up there on the scaffolding among the timbers of the new chancel, that is to be the glory of his church. He toils there day after day with his materials, laboriously inscribing his thoughtful lines for us who come after to read. He records that his own part in the work is not done for admiration but for remembrance (*“non corpus ut laudetur, sed spiritus ut memoretur”*), and we feel that his humility is sincere. For myself, I incline to think that in his piety he went further and executed not only the inscription but also the bosses, for, to my eye, they are rudely done, and with the awkward touch of the amateur. However that may be, it is certain that Henry le Maygne left behind him something more than a

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<sup>31</sup> A transcription and translation of the Spreyton inscription is displayed in the north aisle of the church. As transcribed, the original Latin reads:

*Henricus le Maygne, Presbyter, Vicarius istius Ecclesiae, me fecit fieri anno domini CCCCLI. Robertus de Rouen de Becdenne, Prior de Cowyk, et Ricardus Talbot, Armiger, Dominus de Spreyton, dederunt de bonis suis ad me faciendum. Orate pro animabus eorum. Normanniae terra Henricus hic natus fuit, et ipse scripsit haec omnia manu sua propria.*

*Dulcis amica Dei, vernans, ut stella decora  
Tu memor esto mei, mortis dum venerit hora;  
Jesu parens, refove gentes, quae corde precantur;  
Labe carens, renova mentes, quae sorde ligantur.  
Haec domus orationis vocabitur: in ea omnis qui petit accepit, qui quaerit invenit, et pulsanti  
aperietur.  
Testis sis, Christe, quod haec non scriptitat iste  
Corpus ut laudetur, sed spiritus ut memoretur.  
Ora pro nobis, Sancte Nicholae; Sancte Martyr Edwarde, intercede pro nobis.  
Stultum sit peccatum perpetuo reputatum;  
Pro solo pomo perditur omnis homo;  
Virgo Deum peperit, sed si quis quomodo quaerit,  
Non est nosse meum, sed scio posse Deum.*

footprint, something almost amounting to a portrait of himself outlined upon the timbers of the chancel that he loved.<sup>32</sup>

The purpose of le Maygne's inscription seems clear enough – to record those who funded the building of the church, to recognise sin, to ask for intercession from the Virgin and saints at the Day of Judgment and to offer prayers for the souls of the benefactors and all those 'who from the heart send prayer'. The choice of the two figural bosses, of the three hares and foliate head, both of which move in the realms of sin and salvation, therefore seems entirely apt. However, le Maygne may have had an additional reason for choosing these particular designs, the key to which may be found in the inscription.

The first section of the inscription records the names of the three people whose roles were key in the rebuilding of the church. Of these three, two were natives of Normandy, le Maygne himself and the Prior of Cowick, Robert of Rouen of Becdenne. The Prior and Convent of Cowick were patrons of Spreyton church until the year 1451, the year that the inscription was carved and the bosses probably positioned.

Cowick Priory, situated just to the west of Exeter and dedicated to St Andrew, whose image is carved on the stem of the font at Spreyton (Fig. 6.9), was a dependency of the Benedictine Abbey of Bec in Normandy, and its monks between the mid-thirteenth century and 1451 were all French.<sup>33</sup> The priors of Cowick were in a difficult position since their allegiance to the abbey of Bec sometimes brought them into conflict with the Bishops of Exeter. The main

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<sup>32</sup> Freeman, E., 'Footprints of Medieval Life in a Mid-Devon District', *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural and Archaeological Society*, Vol IV, Part II, Third Series, 1929, pp.97–109, on p.108.

<sup>33</sup> Yeo, Geoffrey, *The Monks of Cowick*, 1987, booklet sold in aid of the St Thomas Church Restoration Appeal, p.4.

problem that an 'alien' priory faced though, was not with the bishop, but with the king. Wars between England and France in the late thirteenth century brought considerable financial difficulties for the priory, as the king ordered the seizure of all property which belonged to foreign monks, in order to prevent funds being sent to the enemy, and then demanded payment for its return. This process continued throughout the late medieval period as the wars raged on. By the time Robert of Rouen was instituted as prior in April 1447, the financial position of the priory was precarious. Four years later, in May 1451, King Henry VI announced his decision to suppress Cowick Priory on the alleged grounds that it was an alien priory without a convent of monks. On 22 November that year, Robert of Rouen announced his resignation as prior and by the summer of 1452, the monks had returned to Bec and the priory buildings had been abandoned.<sup>34</sup>

Sometime before his resignation, but perhaps after the order to suppress the priory was issued, Robert of Rouen 'gave of his goods' for the rebuilding of Spreyton church. Since Henry le Maygne, the Vicar of Spreyton, was also a native of Normandy, he, almost certainly, had some connection with the Abbey of Bec and the Priory at Cowick. Cresswell suggests that he was a monk.<sup>35</sup>

Given this association and the suppression of the priory in the year that the chancel roof at Spreyton was constructed, it might be that the roof bosses there recalled those at the priory, of which there are now no trace. Since le Maygne sought to record, in his inscription, the links between Spreyton and Cowick Priory, his use of motifs which had also been employed in the priory, and which

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<sup>34</sup> Yeo, 1987, pp.17–21.

<sup>35</sup> Cresswell, *Cadbury*, 1919, p.160.

may have echoed those at the Abbey of Bec, would not be unexpected. Bosses of three hares (Fig. 6.10) and a foliate head (Fig. 6.11), juxtaposed in the same manner as those at Spreyton, are to be found in the chapter house of the Benedictine Abbey church at Wissembourg, now the church of Saints Peter and Paul, in Alsace, France, dated to c.1300.<sup>36</sup>

However, it is not possible to be certain that the bosses at Spreyton pre-date those in the neighbouring parish churches of Sampford Courtenay and South Tawton, both of which have three hares and foliate head bosses which are juxtaposed.<sup>37</sup> The style of the three hares and foliate head bosses in the nave at Sampford Courtenay, though not so much those in the chancel, certainly bear distinct similarities to the bosses at Spreyton.

That le Maygne's inscription contains prayers to the Virgin and to Saints Nicholas and Edward the Martyr, asking for intercession, lends further support to the contention of this thesis that some figural bosses were used as mnemonic devices and aids to prayer.

It is interesting to note that there is only one other figural boss in the whole of the church at Spreyton, of three hares, on the crown purlin towards the east end of the nave. This boss is smaller than those in the chancel and is almost certainly carved by a different hand. This boss, like those in the chancel, is clearly seen and its motif probably derives from the larger chancel boss. The inclusion of this boss may, therefore, have been made on the recommendation

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<sup>36</sup> It is not known whether the Abbey of Bec, largely destroyed in the French Revolution, ever contained bosses of a foliate head or three hares.

<sup>37</sup> The juxtaposition of three hares and foliate head bosses can also be found in North Bovey, Throwleigh and Widecombe-in-the-Moor.



of Henry le Maygne. All other bosses in the nave and north aisle at Spreyton are foliate.

C.J.P. Cave noted that Henry le Maygne wrote 'a long inscription on the rafters in the chancel' at Spreyton, although Cave does not appear to have recorded the content of the inscription, nor to have linked it to the bosses.<sup>38</sup> However, close study confirms that the bosses and the inscription mark a significant moment of transition in the lives of the patron, clergy and parishioners at Spreyton. The rebuilding of the small church coincided with the loss of its time-honoured patron and, for Henry le Maygne, the loss of a community of monks with whom he shared a common bond.<sup>39</sup> Le Maygne continued to serve the parish until 1458, but his inscription and the three hares and foliate head bosses commemorate the transition of 1451, while referencing the greater transition which was to come. The bosses in the chancel at Spreyton suggest that, in some cases, the choice of particular motifs may have been deeply personal.<sup>40</sup>

### **Interpretation at North Bovey**

The necessity for accurate description of bosses, as a pre-condition for interpretation, is a factor which was stressed in Chapter Four. Without this attention to detail, it is easy to misinterpret bosses and thereby to misunderstand their role in the medieval church. The problems of misinterpretation can be demonstrated in the case of the figural bosses of the

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<sup>38</sup> Cave, 1948, p.211.

<sup>39</sup> After the suppression of Cowick Priory, the patronage of Spreyton church was at first granted to Eton College, before being granted by Edward IV to Tavistock Abbey in 1464. Cresswell, *Cadbury*, p.158.

<sup>40</sup> Inscriptions are recorded elsewhere in the roofs of churches in Devon and Cornwall. An inscription at Harford church in Devon is discussed later in this chapter. In Cornwall, at Grade church, the wall plate in the chancel was inscribed '*Dominus Johannes Roly me fecit AD 1486*', while an inscription in the nave read '*Thomas Erysy me fieri fecit AD 1487*'. Rogers, J., 'Notice of the Cradle Roof of Grade Church in Cornwall, AD 1486-7' in *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Volume VI, Exeter: William Pollard, 1852, pp. 147–150, on p.149.

chancel in North Bovey church. Of 12 extant bosses, all of which are covered with a thick layer of ill-applied modern paint in blue, red and gold, five are figural: a foliate head, three hares, two crowned female figures whose heads, shoulders and arms are shown and a crowned male head. In 1889 Charles Worthy identified the crowned figures as Edward I and his two queens, Eleanor of Castile and Marguerite of France.<sup>41</sup> This information is repeated in the listing details for the church and in a church guide.<sup>42</sup>

If this identification is correct, it would suggest that the bosses may date from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, which would be a much earlier date for wooden bosses than is usual in parish churches in Devon. It appears, though, that Worthy did not study the bosses very carefully before making his identification, since a close examination reveals that one of the female crowned figures carries a spiked wheel and the other has her hands held across her breasts. These bosses and that of the crowned male may, therefore, be figures from the legend of St Catherine related in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, perhaps the most widely read book after the Bible during the late Middle Ages and almost certainly known to the clergy in whose domain the bosses were placed.

The legend relates how the beautiful eighteen year old virgin daughter of King Costus was summoned with others by the Emperor Maxentius to offer sacrifice to idols. Catherine refused and, unable to break her Christian faith, Maxentius imprisoned her without food and ordered the construction of spiked wheels to

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<sup>41</sup> Worthy, C., *Devonshire Parishes*, Vol.II, Exeter and London: William Pollard and George Redway, 1889, p.177.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=85167&mode=adv>. Accessed 12.12.10). Sherley-Price, L., *North Bovey. A Short History and Guide*, no date.

tear her to pieces. Maxentius's empress, who had been converted to Christianity by Catherine, berated the emperor for his cruelty and, when she too refused to offer sacrifice to the idols, was condemned to be beheaded, having first had her breasts cut off. Catherine did not die on the spiked wheels, which were destroyed, along with four thousand pagans, by an angel of the Lord. Her eventual death, from beheading, conferred the martyr's crown which Catherine had also predicted for the empress.

If the crowned female bosses in the chancel at North Bovey represent St Catherine and the empress, the crowned male may refer to the passage in the legend where the empress, led away to her martyrdom, begs Catherine to pray for her. Catherine answers 'Fear not, O queen beloved of God,... for today you will gain an eternal kingdom in place of a transitory one, and an immortal spouse for a mortal.'<sup>43</sup>

As with many of the bosses in Devon, however, there are alternatives to this interpretation. The boss of the female with hands across her breasts may represent St Agatha, another virgin martyr who was tortured by having her breasts cut off. Images of St Agatha are painted on rood screens in Heavitree, Ugborough, and in nearby Widecombe-in-the-Moor. The crowned male may not be identifiable as an individual but may, more broadly, represent the transience of earthly status and riches, or, indeed, pride. <sup>44</sup>

Interpreting the crowned female bosses as martyred saints rather than as Queens of England changes the emphasis of the chancel roof at North Bovey

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<sup>43</sup> Ryan, 1993, p. 338.

<sup>44</sup> However, Cresswell notes that in the years 1462–1479, the patrons of the church were Edward IV and two named proctors for the king. It is possible, therefore, that the boss of the crowned male references Edward. Cresswell, *Moretonhampstead*, Vol. 1 A–K, 1921, p.60.

entirely. From being a space where the focus of the imagery of the roof is on the temporal, it becomes a space which focuses on the hope of the eternal, through those who have died in the defence of their faith.

Other woodwork in the chancel is also potentially problematic. On the wall plate are 30 small carved images decorated in the same paintwork as the bosses. Many of these small carvings are foliate but, among the figural, there are two foliate heads (Figs. 6.12, 6.13), shields with lions, a shield with three harps, a shield with double-headed eagle and another with two birds and a hart lying down with head raised (Fig. 6.14). Cresswell attempted to identify these images, noting that the three harps 'are the arms of Harpesfield, and these with the "lions combatant" were carved on the old font at Dunsford'.<sup>45</sup>

These old carvings, though, have been applied to a modern timber wall plate. They may, of course, have been reused from an old wall plate in the chancel, but Beatrix Cresswell notes that, during the incumbency of the Reverend William Henry Thornton who was Rector of the church from 1866 until 1916, a considerable amount of restoration work was carried out at his expense. The Rector recorded in his *Reminiscences*: 'I myself have blended into the church at North Bovey all sorts of spoils, from all sorts of churches, and in so doing have provided much interesting occupation, and a long series of puzzles for the future antiquarian'.<sup>46</sup>

If Thornton was responsible for the application of the carved images to the wall plate, their provenance might be questioned. However, in a reference of 1874 to

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<sup>45</sup> Cresswell, *Moretonhampstead*, Vol. 1 A–K, 1921, p.57.

<sup>46</sup> Thornton, W.H., *Reminiscences of an Old Westcountry Clergyman*, Second Series, p.19, quoted in Cresswell, *Moretonhampstead*, Vol. 1 A–K, 1921, p.55.

the chancel roof at Widecombe-in-the-Moor, some six miles distant, James Hine notes:

It is to be regretted that, in the restoration of this chancel during a former incumbency, the original wall plates, which were of much interest and had on them figures of heads, the white hart of Richard II, and a griffin, were destroyed and ordinary stained deal plates substituted for them.<sup>47</sup>

Although Hine states that the wall plates from Widecombe were destroyed, it may be that the small carvings were kept and redeployed by Thornton, since their description at Widecombe largely accords with the carvings now in the chancel at North Bovey.

The post-medieval history of medieval woodcarving in the chancel at North Bovey highlights the need for caution in contemporary analysis. Throughout this study, it has been necessary to re-evaluate constantly both material and documentary evidence since, over the years, many false trails have been laid. Every church is a palimpsest, as clearly demonstrated at North Bovey, and it is therefore necessary to consider the evidence with great care before offering any interpretation of carving or community.

### **Iconography, collaboration between motifs, and function at South Tawton**

Of all the parish churches in Devon, South Tawton is probably the richest in terms of a combination of the material evidence of its bosses, their historiography, written accounts of pre-Reformation imagery of the church, and the documentary evidence of the nineteenth-century restoration of the church's roof.<sup>48</sup> The examination of this church in relation to the iconography and

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<sup>47</sup> Widecombe-in-the-Moor Parish File, WSL Exeter, Sheet A36. Notes on Widecombe, from a paper by James Hine, read at the Plymouth Athenaeum, Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> 1874, reprinted from the *Torquay Directory*.

<sup>48</sup> Even so, dating of the bosses has to be treated with some caution.

function of its bosses, and the possible collaboration between motifs, will therefore be correspondingly detailed.

The church at South Tawton (Fig. 6.15), a neighbouring parish of Spreyton, is large and mostly of local granite although the piers are of East Devon Beer stone, a creamy fine-textured limestone which allows much greater detail in carving than the coarse granite. Beer stone was usually conveyed by water as far as possible – its use many miles inland suggests that South Tawton church had wealthy benefactors whose income probably derived from farming and from the wool and tin trades.<sup>49</sup> The presence in the parish of many large late medieval houses, subsequently altered, further attests to this wealth. Dominated by an embattled tower at the west end, the bulk of the church building is Perpendicular in style, probably dating to the fifteenth century, when re-building, possibly in several phases, took place. The church has aisles to north and south, with north and south chancel chapels.

The wagon roof of the main body of the church runs uninterrupted from west to east as South Tawton, like the majority of Devon churches, has no chancel arch (Fig. 6.16). Every fourth rib in the nave is hollow-chamfered and enriched with small four-leaf motifs. Carved angels, many playing musical instruments, are fixed at the base of these ribs. There is a carved foliate wall plate and carved bosses, both foliate and figural, cover the intersections of the roof timbers. Of 36 bosses in the nave roof, nine are figural, seven of these being on the crown purlin with one each on north and south purlins.

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<sup>49</sup> Hoskins, W., *Devon*, London: Collins, 1954, p.260.



The roofs over the north and south aisles are slightly pitched, with hollow-chamfered timbers, again enriched with small four-leaf motifs. There are also several small figural motifs carved into the timbers however, including, in the north aisle, two birds, one of which is a pelican-in-her-piety and another which may be a pelican without her brood. In the south aisle, these small carvings include a head surrounded by foliage; a lion's head with tongue extended; two foliate heads, one with tongue extended; and the head of an angel.

Both north and south aisles have carved bosses on the centre beam and half bosses on each side against the wall plate. In the north aisle, five full bosses and two half bosses on the nave side are figural. In the south aisle, four full bosses and four half bosses on the nave side are figural. The full bosses are roughly square, half bosses being rectangular, and are shaped to fit around the ribs and purlins. All the bosses appear to have been dark stained with no trace of colour apparent in photographs.

The roofs have clearly undergone restoration, and it is necessary to gauge the extent of this if any meaningful discussion is to be made regarding the bosses. Fortunately, a detailed specification for the restoration of 1881 by William Dart of Crediton survives.<sup>50</sup> This identifies work to be carried out in the church, excluding the chancel, the roof of which appears to have been completely renewed in the nineteenth century. Regarding the roof, Dart states that:

The roof timbers of nave and aisles to be carefully examined, and all decayed wood cut out and made good in the best manner with new material...This work to be executed with great care so as to avoid injury to the general framework. All defective bosses to be replaced with new and any missing portions of the carving on wall plate of the nave. No. 24 carved angels of the cost of 30/- each, exclusive of the wood to be provided and fixed at bottom of moulded ribs of nave roof. All the carved

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<sup>50</sup> DRO, South Tawton Parish 2915 A-1, PW23.

work to be executed by a thoroughly experienced professional carver approved by the Architects [Messrs. Hayward and Son of Exeter]. The plastered ceiling of nave roof is not to be removed, but made good where it has been broken into.<sup>51</sup>

While the angels at the base of the moulded ribs of the nave were new work, Dart's intention seems to have been to preserve as much of the existing roof as possible. His statement 'all defective bosses to be replaced with new' is interesting, but visual examination would suggest that, of the figural bosses, only one appears to be an obvious replacement – the grotesque head in the south chancel chapel (Fig. 6.17). Dart was clearly keen to avoid any unnecessary disturbance, and the expense of carving new bosses, when so much other work needed to be done, must have been a consideration.

Although, in his specification, Dart had stated that the plastered ceiling of the nave should not be removed, once work had commenced it was found to be unsafe and so was taken down and the roof left unceiled. The lack of a ceiling and the dark staining of the roof timbers have ensured that it is now sometimes difficult to see detail in the bosses without the use of artificial light. Whether or not the roof was originally ceiled, the green oak roofs of the fifteenth century would have appeared much lighter and, even if left unpainted, or perhaps limewashed, detail in the bosses would have been more clearly seen.

The figural bosses of South Tawton are, without doubt, very fine. Some 33 years before Hayward's and Dart's restoration, they were recognised by the antiquarian James Davidson who visited the church on 22 June 1848. Detailing the architectural features of the building, he recorded that: 'the ceilings are coved and ribbed with wood and at the intersections of the ribs are handsomely

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<sup>51</sup> DRO, South Tawton Parish 2915 A-1, PW23, pp.8-9.

carved bosses of heads and foliage'.<sup>52</sup> In an article on the churchwardens' accounts of South Tawton, published in 1907, Ethel Lega-Weekes published the earliest known photographs of 12 of the medieval figural bosses.<sup>53</sup> Her discussion of their iconography is, however, brief and highly speculative and does not help to determine their function. C.J.P. Cave visited South Tawton in 1936 to photograph and make notes on the bosses. In his published work of 1948 he states that South Tawton has 'some very good wooden bosses, including some remarkable foliate heads with foliage from the nose as well as from the mouth'.<sup>54</sup>

While the carvings have long been recognised as being 'handsomely carved' and 'very good', they have stimulated little interest in their combination of motifs and in their use by a medieval audience. Now isolated in a dark roof space and stripped of nearly all their medieval decorative and religious context, it is perhaps difficult to imagine the part the bosses once played in the church at South Tawton. However, some attempt at a reconstruction of the pre-Reformation appearance of the church, and the religious sensibilities of its people, can be made through an examination of its churchwardens' accounts, which date back to 1524, and through later accounts of the building which record features no longer extant.

The churchwardens' accounts, transcribed by Ethel Lega-Weekes in the early part of the twentieth century with some translation by Mr Salisbury of the Record Office, London, are remarkable as they document the changes in

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<sup>52</sup> Davidson, *South Devon*, p.69.

<sup>53</sup> Lega - Weekes E., 'The Churchwardens' Accounts of South Tawton, Part II', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art*, Vol. 39, 1907, pp. 302–336.

<sup>54</sup> Cave, 1948, p.212.

imagery, liturgy and legislation, and the parishioners' response to these changes, through the turbulent period of the Reformation. There is an unfortunate break between 1540 and possibly 1553–4, when the account is undated but inferentially that of the year of the accession of Mary Tudor. The brief Marian period is of exceptional interest as it paints a vivid picture of the parishioners' attempts to restore what had been hidden, damaged or destroyed during the reign of Edward VI.

In the defective account of Hugh Battishill, probably of 1553–4, are recorded payments for 'buldyng of the awter', for 'a manell booke and a masse booke bowghte', 'a pixe bowght' and 'a hangynge for the pixe'.<sup>55</sup> The following year 33s 4d is paid for 'the latyn crosse' ( a cross made of a brass-like alloy) with smaller amounts paid for 'halowyng [blessing] of ye corporas clothe...frankencnce... v pounds of wax...[and] making of the candels'.<sup>56</sup> Dominating the pre-Reformation church of South Tawton, certainly as far as the laity was concerned, must have been its rood and screen. Most of the roods of English churches were removed following the Royal Injunctions of 1538 and 1548 and this must have included that at South Tawton as, in the same year (1554–5) that the 'latyn crosse' is purchased, the same amount is paid for the carving of a new rood (item paid for keruinge of the Roode xxxij <sup>s</sup> iij <sup>d</sup>).<sup>57</sup> The rood and screen were, no doubt, striking in their colour and effect but no material evidence of either survives, the greater part of the medieval screen

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<sup>55</sup> CWA, South Tawton, transcription of fol. 97, 1553–4 (?) by Ethel Lega-Weekes in Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>56</sup> CWA, South Tawton, transcription of fol. 98, 1554–5, by Ethel Lega-Weekes in Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>57</sup> CWA, South Tawton, transcription of fol. 98, 1554–5, by Ethel Lega-Weekes in Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

being removed in 1826, with the bottom panels either destroyed or removed in the restoration of 1881.<sup>58</sup>

A narrow winding stairway from the chancel gave access to the roodloft. The steps of this stairway are much worn indicating that the rood loft was well used, perhaps for the playing of music, but also for placing wax lights before the rood and the attendant figures of the Virgin and St John the Evangelist. Frequent payments are made in the accounts for wax and for making candles.

In addition to the images of St Andrew and St Peter mentioned in Chapter Two, the church at South Tawton probably had other images which were associated with Stores: stocks of money raised through feasts or 'ales', and through legacies. Stores mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts at South Tawton include that of the patronal saint Andrew; the Store of the Illustrious Names of Jhesu and the Blessed Mary, Virgin; the Store of St Catherine and the Store of St George. These Stores may have been associated with altars, that of St Andrew with the high altar as would befit a patronal saint, and those of Saints Catherine and George with altars possibly positioned against the rood screen in the aisles.<sup>59</sup> The 'North Altar', referred to in an item of 1532, may have stood in the north chancel chapel and was possibly dedicated to 'The Illustrious Name of Jhesu and the Blessed Mary Virgin'.<sup>60</sup> Discussing the Store of St Catherine at South Tawton, Lega-Weekes suggests that devotion to the saint would also have taken place in the north aisle, noting, among other examples, that at Membury the chapel of St Catherine was in the north aisle and that at Plympton

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<sup>58</sup> Burton, Rev. C. *An Account of the Parish Church of St Andrew, South Tawton and the Chapel of St Mary South Zeal*, Fifth edition, Gloucester: The British Publishing Company Ltd, 1966, p.10.

<sup>59</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p.319.

<sup>60</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p.319.

St Mary, in 1462, the north aisle was described as the “Gilda St Katherine”.<sup>61</sup> It follows that if an image of, and possibly altar to, St Catherine was located in the north aisle then the south aisle probably housed an altar to St George.

The accounts also contain a very interesting reference to the roof: in 1557–8 there is recorded a payment of 8d ‘for taking downe of the pycters on the Rowffe of the chourche’.<sup>62</sup> This may have referred to the roof over all of the chancel or perhaps part of the chancel which may have been painted with images of saints, as in the medieval painted ceilings at Gyffin Church, Conwy, North Wales and St Helen’s Church in Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

It seems that at least some of the parishioners of South Tawton found the changes of the Reformation period hard to bear. The churchwardens’ accounts reveal the reluctance of the wardens to comply with the Injunctions of Elizabeth 1 of 1559–60 to remove the roodloft. The accounts of 1562–3 record a payment for the ‘excommunicatt’ of iiij men because the Rode loft was not taking down’.<sup>63</sup> Coming so soon after the failed Prayer Book Rebellion of 1549, which began in Devon at nearby Sampford Courtenay and resulted in many deaths, the excommunication of the four men clearly had the desired effect, for later in the accounts for the same period is an item ‘payed for the takeyng down of ye Rode Bordes’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, September 8, 1926. Newspaper cutting in South Tawton Parish file, sheets A34–5, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>62</sup> Lega-Weekes, 1907, p. 329.

<sup>63</sup> CWA, South Tawton, transcription of fol. 109, 1562–3, by Ethel Lega-Weekes in Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>64</sup> CWA, South Tawton, transcription of fol. 109 b, 1562–3, by Ethel Lega-Weekes in Devon and Cornwall Record Society Library, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.



The pre-Reformation church of South Tawton was image rich and the focus of great devotional piety. In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was recorded that in a north aisle window, there still remained a figure of St Christopher with two persons kneeling and the legend 'S. Xtopher ora pro nobis'.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the devotional images, the parishioners would have been reminded visually, as well as through the admonitions of the priest, of their fallen state and of the judgement that was to come. This was of the utmost importance, since:

the preacher who always talks of the piety and pity of God, and of the sweetness of the Lord Jesus to sinners, pleases them hugely and right gladly do they listen to him...But assuredly when the preacher dwells too much on the divine mercy, and says nought of punishment, he makes the people presume too greatly on the mercy of God, and thus to lie and perish in their sins.<sup>66</sup>

No trace of wall painting survives at South Tawton, although it might be expected that this medium would have been used to portray sin. However, with the exception of the chancel, the medieval roof bosses of South Tawton do survive and, with reference to the decorative scheme recorded above, it is possible to suggest why specific motifs were carved and situated in various parts of the roof and how they were used by their audience.

It is noteworthy that the crown purlin of the nave at South Tawton carries the greatest number of figural bosses – seven in all. Three of these are variations of human foliate heads, while one appears to have foliage emanating from the top of the head; there is also a crowned head which may refer to the sin of pride, male and female heads set close together towards the west end which may

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<sup>65</sup> Milles, *Parochial Collections South Tawton*, microfilm in Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>66</sup> MS. Caius Coll. Camb. 334, fol. 177 et seq., in Owst, G.R., *Preaching in Medieval England*, New York: Russell and Russell, 1965, p.335.

refer to idle talk, and the head of a beast with foliage spilling from its ears. These bosses would have aligned with the great rood with its figure of the suffering Christ.

The affective power of this figure is evident in a Passion lyric from a fifteenth-century manuscript. As Susan Hagen explains:

In the poem, Christ asks that man “beholde and see” the pain he suffered for humanity’s sake and that man love him above all else. A man, representing humankind, responds that he hears Christ’s word and with his help will turn from sin forever.

*(Querela divina)*  
O man unkynde  
hafe in mynde  
my paynes smert.  
Beholde and see  
That is for the  
Percyd my hert.

*(Responsio humana)*  
O lord right dere  
Thi wordes I here  
With hert ful sore;  
Therefore fro synne  
I hope to blynne  
And grefe no more.<sup>67</sup>

R.W. Scribner cites a sixteenth-century prayer which he states could easily cater for pre-Reformation belief. The prayer ends with words spoken by Christ:

O mortal man, behold my wounds; was there ever found such pain to equal mine. You are the cause of my suffering, I suffer this because of your sins; what do you do through my wounds! I am dying here for your sake alone – you should mark that well and full; turn away from your wicked opinion, time and tide will soon expire.<sup>68</sup>

Both of these prayers are unequivocal in their declaration that Christ’s suffering is caused by mankind’s sin, and in their inference that man should turn from his

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<sup>67</sup> Hagen, S., *Allegorical Remembrance. A Study of the Pilgrimage of the Life of Man as a Medieval Treatise on Seeing and Remembering*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990, pp.51–52.

<sup>68</sup> Scribner, R.W., ‘Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception’ in *Journal of Religious History*, Vol XV, 1989, pp 467–469.

sin. A drawing which accompanies the fifteenth-century lyric shows a penitent in prayer gazing up at the wounded figure of Christ (Fig. 6.18). It is not difficult to imagine penitents at South Tawton gazing up at the figure of Christ on the rood and using the bosses to recall their own part in his suffering as they waited in turn to confess.

The position of the figural bosses in the north and south aisles also suggests some interesting possibilities. Durandus, in his *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of around 1286, states that:

In church, men and women sit apart: which according to Bede, we have received from the custom of the ancients...the men remain on the Southern, the women on the Northern side: to signify that the saints who be most advanced in holiness should stand against the greater temptations of this world; and they who be less advanced, against the less: or that the bolder and the stronger sex should take their place in the position fittest for action: because the Apostle saith, God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.

In a footnote to this by the Reverend John Mason Neale and the Reverend Benjamin Webb, written in 1843, it is stated that: 'This is the practice in some parts of England even to this day: more especially in Somersetshire'.<sup>69</sup>

Lega-Weekes notes a Devon connection with this practice:

An interesting article on South Tawton and its neighbourhood, which appeared in...1862...contains the following remarks on the parish of Belstone: "This church...has but one entrance, a porch at the north-west corner, the inner door only two feet wide. A custom which seems to have been a rule in the primitive church was reported to us as still surviving

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<sup>69</sup> Durandus, William *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments: A Translation of the First Book of the Rationale Divinorum Officiorum with an Introductory Essay, Notes and Illustrations by the Rev. John Mason Neale and the Rev. Benjamin Webb*, Leeds: T.W Green, London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington; Cambridge: T. Stevenson, 1843, pp.36–37. Margaret Aston suggests that the laity were also separated according to status, the space nearest the chancel, being the preferred location. Aston, M., 'Segregation in Church', in Sheils, W. and Wood, D., *Women in the Church. Studies in Church History*, Vol. 27, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, pp. 237–294, on p. 239. Nicholas Orme asserts that the parish church in Cornwall in the later Middle Ages 'was a mirror of society, with the clergy in the holiest part, the patron or other gentry in privileged places, and the congregation almost certainly arranged in social order'. Orme, 2007, p.103.

here in all its rigour. When the parishioners repair to their church for the celebration of divine service, the sexes immediately separate, the males going to the south, and the females to the north...<sup>70</sup>

In a newspaper article of 1926, Lega-Weekes was reported as observing that she:

must leave it to others to reconcile the proposition that the north was the women's side, with the fact that the north door of the church was sometimes alluded to as 'the Devil's door!' – through which the evil spirits were to make exit on the baptism of a child. There had once been a north doorway at South Tawton church, but it was stopped up in 1881.<sup>71</sup>

The bosses in the north aisle do seem to have a feminine slant, with three of five full bosses (those featuring elaborate female headdresses) probably relating to female vanity and pride and one featuring a woman probably engaged in idle talk with a man. Only one full boss is of a single male head and this is situated towards the east end of the aisle.

The only figural boss situated on the south purlin of the nave roof, whose detail can only be seen fully from the west end of the north aisle, has been referred to as a sheela na gig.<sup>72</sup> These figures are usually defined by their overt display of female genitalia and an examination of the squatting figure at South Tawton reveals no such display. The figure does, however, have its arms, hands and legs positioned in such a way as to focus attention on its pubic area and, on close examination of a photograph of the boss, a discreet opening is visible although this is not seen from the ground (Fig. 6.19). The figure has a malevolent expression, with a face that does not appear fully human, and

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<sup>70</sup> Article by Thomas Hughes, *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1862, quoted in Lega-Weekes, 1907, p.318.

<sup>71</sup> *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, September 8, 1926. Newspaper cutting in South Tawton Parish file, sheets A34–5, Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter.

<sup>72</sup> Murray, M.A., 'A Sheila-Na-Gig Figure at South Tawton' in *Man*, Vol. 36, October 1936, p.184; Cave, 1948, p.17; Oakley, T., *Lifting the Veil: A New Study of the Sheila-Na-Gigs of Britain and Ireland*, BAR British Series 495, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009, p.175.

although there are four fingers on each hand, there is no thumb depicted. On each foot of the figure there are only three toes and in this respect, and in its splayed legs and demonic expression, the figure resembles that of the devil in the north aisle at Atherington. Since the figure faces the north door – the devil’s door – then it may be that the function of this particular boss was apotropaic.

The full bosses in the south aisle are a grotesque face, which is probably Victorian, two foliate heads and the three hares. The foliate head bosses, of masculine appearance, share the same basic form but are carved in a very different manner. One is of a flesh-covered face spewing abundant foliage. In the other the head is skull-like and the foliage is dry and tangled, although there are berries present. The difference in these heads is marked and, although it may signify some nuance of the design which is now lost, these bosses, and others of the foliate head in the church, might simply reflect the carver’s desire to explore the design as widely as possible. The three hares boss, which is among the easiest to see in the south aisle, being well lit and in a lower roof than that of the nave, may be connected with overcoming the three temptations: the world, the flesh and the devil, as outlined in Chapter Four.

The accomplished carving of the bosses at South Tawton would suggest, as do the Beer stone piers, that the church was the focus of considerable investment and that William Dart was following tradition when he specified, in 1881, that the new carved work was to be carried out by ‘a thoroughly experienced professional carver’.

The South Tawton bosses are invaluable to this study as the survival of many figural bosses in the nave and aisles, together with accounts of pre-Reformation

and Marian imagery, allow a considered assessment to be made of their possible function. South Tawton church may have been unusually rich in its medieval imagery, but elements of its decoration must have been shared and similarly used in every church in Devon.

### **Changes at Harford**

Harford is a relatively small isolated parish situated on the southern edge of Dartmoor. Its small granite church, dedicated to St George before the Reformation was, in 1859, recorded by William Cotton as being in a dilapidated condition with 'the nave dark, and green mould struggling everywhere against sickly whitewash'.<sup>73</sup> Despite the 'high dingy deal pews and damp pavement' and the 'terrible dirt, even on the altar', the church was not without merit, however, for Cotton noted that 'the redeeming points are the roofs'.<sup>74</sup> These he described as having 'every rib carried into a twining stem or leaf'.<sup>75</sup>

Cotton also noted an inscription on the wall plate on the north side of the chancel: IHS HELPE VS AMEN. WALTER HELE P'SON 1539. IHS SALVS. This wall plate, unfortunately, is no longer extant, it being found to be so badly damaged by death watch beetle that it was removed in 1968.<sup>76</sup> Parson Hele's inscription suggests that he contributed towards the cost of the chancel roof at Harford, perhaps with the Hylle family, who were lay patrons in the late medieval period.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Orme, 1996, p. 167; Cotton, W., 'On the Churches of Cornwood, Harford, and Ermington', in *Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society*, Vol. VI, 1852, pp. 289–307, on p.305–6.

<sup>74</sup> Cotton, 1852, pp.305–6.

<sup>75</sup> Cotton, 1852, p.306.

<sup>76</sup> Howell, R.A., *Guide to Harford Church*, 1992, p.2.

<sup>77</sup> Cresswell, *Plympton*, 1922, p.121; since the names Hele and Hylle are not dissimilar, it may be that these are variations of the same name.



The inscription, invoking the Holy Name of Jesus, is echoed in six medieval bosses carved with the letters IHS in the chancel, nave and south aisle (Fig. 6.20). These bosses are well carved, fitting closely around ribs and purlins and with the foliage surrounding the central motif echoing that on the roof timbers. The bosses are unusual in that they are found in three distinct areas of the church, bosses carved with IHS more usually being confined to one area, though this may be a question of survival. They are also unusual in their concentration, the largest number elsewhere in Devon being three repeated on the same rib in both Cadeleigh north aisle and Kings Nympton south aisle.

Although this thesis declared at the outset that it would not consider floral or foliate bosses due to their number and the difficulty of identification, at Harford church there are three bosses, positioned on the centre purlin of the chancel roof, which can, very probably, be identified as Tudor roses (Fig. 6.21), and which are of significance in documenting changes introduced by the Reformation.<sup>78</sup> Susan Wabuda notes that:

Like the red-and-white rose with which it is often paired, the symbol IHS became one of the badges of the Tudors. The sacredness of Jesus's own Name was appropriated to bolster the power and prestige of the dynasty.<sup>79</sup>

The bosses in the chancel at Harford, then, speak of the divine right of Henry VIII in a time of change, for they were probably erected five years after the Act of Supremacy (1534), in which Henry VIII was declared supreme head of the Church of England, and a year after the Royal Injunctions of 1538 which ordered the removal of any image which might be considered idolatrous.

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<sup>78</sup> The position of foliate/floriate bosses is noted in the gazetteer, however.

<sup>79</sup> Wabuda, S., *Preaching During the English Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.157.

As Wabuda points out:

...the Holy Monogram incorporated an advantageous measure of abstraction, which meant that it could be used to fill the void that resulted when medieval images of the saints were dispatched in the first wave of iconoclasm under Henry and Edward. The iconography of the IHS became a bridge between old and new, the special symbol that characterized the moderate Protestantism of the English Church.<sup>80</sup>

Whatever the religious leanings of Walter Hele and the patrons of Harford church, the IHS motif was versatile enough to accommodate a range of opinion, and it is interesting that it is used in Hele's inscription with both the vernacular and the traditional language of the church, Latin, again bridging the old and new. Walter Hele's concern for his salvation, and for that of his parishioners, is evident in the inscription carved on the wall plate. Also evident, though, is the expression of this concern in a manner which would not bring the parson into conflict with secular authority.

Another figural boss at Harford may also refer to King Henry, that of the fleur-de-lys with scroll, on a shield in the south aisle. Although the fleur-de-lys had long been associated with the Virgin Mary, it also had a tradition of royal usage and this may be its association in Harford. The only other medieval figural boss is of a bull on a shield, presumably the badge of an unidentified donor.<sup>81</sup>

Harford also has many bosses which appear to be post-medieval replacements, although their date is uncertain. Two are of particular interest as they appear to be carved with an early form of papal crown.<sup>82</sup> Since all the medieval figural bosses appear to have been carved by the same hand, and the decoration on ribs and purlins is consistent throughout, it might be suggested that the chancel,

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<sup>80</sup> Wabuda, 2002, p.175.

<sup>81</sup> Possibly a member of the Buller family, although this attribution is uncertain.

<sup>82</sup> For this identification, see n.89 on pp. 203–204 of this thesis.

nave and south aisle roofs at Harford were all constructed c.1539. If this is the case, it is highly unlikely that the modern papal crown bosses are copies of bosses from that date since the break with Rome had, by then, occurred. If the papal crown bosses are not copies of original medieval bosses, this begs the question, why was this particular design chosen for this church and by whom?

A study of the bosses at Harford is instructive as it reveals that, early in the Henrician Reformation, changes regarding the use of images in the church were filtering through to even the smallest, and most isolated, rural communities. It also reveals the resourcefulness of Walter Hele, the parson, in incorporating motifs which would satisfy both traditionalists and the new order. Harford, however, also highlights the problems of post-medieval intervention and the need for great care in any interpretation of its bosses.

The case studies outlined in this chapter show very clearly that no church can be considered typical as regards its roof bosses. Each was subject to a range of influences, but from the late fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century, many bosses, whether they were part of a programme or not, appear to be associated with the salvation of the soul. It must be recognised, however, that the evidence regarding roof bosses in even the best recorded parish church in Devon remains fragmentary, and that, in the words of medievalist Christopher Brooke, 'the acreage of our ignorance enormously exceeds, and will always exceed, the area of possible knowledge'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Brooke Christopher, *Medieval Church and Society*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971, p.51.

## **Conclusion**

The loss of medieval material from the parish church in Devon is, as elsewhere in Britain, significant. Almost all the statuary has vanished, and no complete Judgement scene, ubiquitous in the medieval church, survives in painting or in glass anywhere in the county. Although paintings survive on the dados of 41 rood screens in Devon, extant wall paintings in the county are extremely rare.<sup>84</sup> The survival rate for figural roof bosses in Devon is, however, by comparison with other forms and media, remarkable: of 409 parishes recorded in the county in 1535, figural roof bosses survive in around 30%.<sup>85</sup>

A key element of this study was the establishment of a photographic corpus of these bosses. This has allowed comparison to be made with other images in the county and those further afield. It is now possible to recognise motifs in Devon which appear elsewhere in Britain but have never before been recorded in the county. A good example is the owl with horned headdress carved on a boss in the nave at South Tawton, and known in graffiti in Stetchworth, Cambridgeshire. Another is the boss carved with the Man in the Moon in the nave at Braunton, also found on a ceiling painting at Gyffin, north Wales. Although these motifs are now rare, the geographical distance between the bosses in Devon, and other examples in England and Wales, indicates that motifs in Devon were part of a common currency of design in the late medieval period.

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<sup>84</sup> Williams, M. *Medieval English Roodscreens, with special reference to Devon*. PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2008, online.

<http://eric.exeter.ac.uk/exeter/bitstream/10036/89276/1/WilliamsM.pdf>

Rood screen paintings are not all *in situ*. The screen at Harberton, for example, has painted panels added in a restoration of 1870, with some of the original panels displayed in the north aisle. Cherry and Pevsner, 1991, p.469.

<sup>85</sup> Late medieval figural roof bosses are extant in at least 121 churches.

The corpus of bosses established by C.J.P. Cave in the first half of the twentieth century was extraordinary, given the circumstances under which he was working. His recordings were made in an age when equipment was not as technically advanced as it has since become, and development of photographic plates was an expensive specialist operation. Cave's reproduced images are all in monochrome. This study has benefitted enormously from the advent of digital photography, which has expedited the process of recording, and enabled a researcher with no specialist training to reproduce images in colour which reveal a high level of detail.

However, while the survival of medieval figural bosses in parish churches in Devon may be comparatively good, and recording methods have improved markedly, contemporary documentary evidence relating to the bosses is woefully lacking. Although there is evidence of named carvers for some work in the church (see Chapter Two), the names of the carvers of figural bosses do not appear to be mentioned in churchwardens' accounts for Devon which, for the most part, survive for the period after which many bosses were carved.<sup>86</sup> Neither is there documentary evidence relating to how the bosses were viewed and used and the thesis has been necessarily speculative in its approach to these aspects. Nonetheless, the thesis has at least brought these facets of the study of roof bosses into the light, even if it has been unable to provide definitive answers to the many questions that can be asked.

As Cave acknowledged, much work remains to be done. This thesis is limited in scope, with a word limit which has prevented detailed analysis of motifs, and of

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<sup>86</sup> Churchwardens' accounts consulted for this study were, however, restricted to those which have been transcribed, published, or referenced in other works. Nonetheless, little information survives for the fifteenth century.

all the churches documented in the gazetteer. While it serves as an introduction, therefore, it cannot be claimed that it is, in any way, exhaustive. Even so, in its recording of bosses, it does, at least, provide material which is available for future research.

Although there have been advantages in the restricted geographical focus of this study, particularly in terms of being able to interpret bosses within the framework of a single diocese, there have been disadvantages too. Future research might consider bosses in Cornwall, also part of the Diocese of Exeter in the late medieval period, and bosses in Somerset, both counties noted by Cave as having an abundance of wooden bosses. Comparing bosses in two different dioceses would, potentially, be useful in assessing the role of diocesan authorities in the deployment of specific motifs. The study might also be extended further to include bosses in parish churches throughout Britain and, indeed, in churches across continental Europe.

This thesis has made its contribution through detailed recording of roof bosses in the churches of Devon, and through its analysis which considers the interactions between the community and their carvings. It has shown that late medieval roof bosses, in even the humblest and most remote rural church, are worthy of study, since they are a testament to the hopes and fears of patrons, clergy and parishioners in pre-Reformation Devon. In these, often technically unaccomplished, carvings can be seen an expression of the deepest concerns of those who may not appear in any written record and, yet, who laboured to decorate their church in a manner which would bring them closer to God.





Fig. 6.1  
Stoodleigh nave roof showing 30 of 33 roof bosses.



Fig. 6.2  
Foliate head wall plate, Stoodleigh nave, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> C.

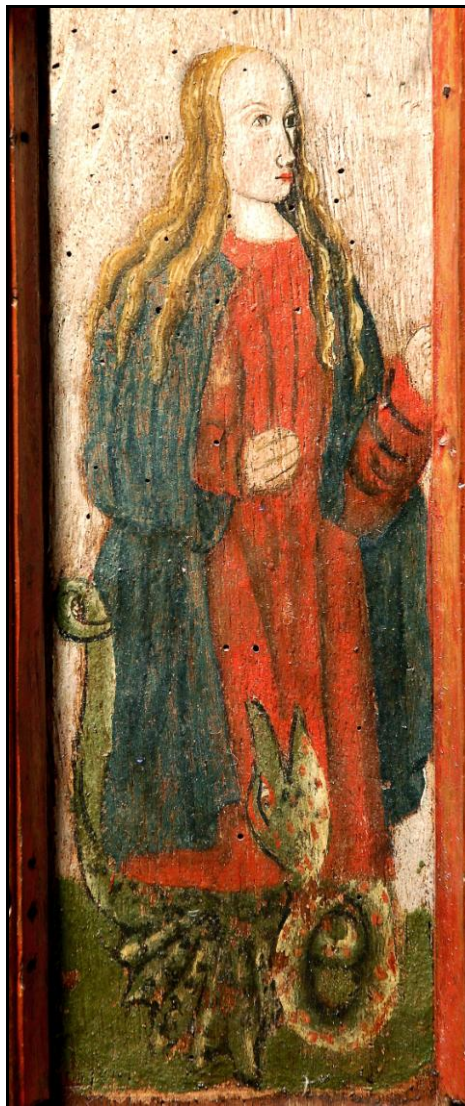


Fig. 6.3  
St Margaret standing on dragon,  
painting on rood screen,  
Holne south aisle, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 6.4  
Braunton nave roof, c.1388–1413.



Fig. 6.5  
Foliate spikes on ribs and purlins, Braunton nave roof, c.1388–1413.



Fig. 6.6  
Spreyton chancel and nave roofs, 1451.





Fig. 6.7

Inscription on ribs and purlins, Spreyton chancel, 1451.



Fig. 6.8

Inscription on ribs and purlins: Henricus le Maygne, Spreyton chancel, 1451.



Fig. 6.9

Stem of font carved with image of St Andrew, to whom Cowick Priory was dedicated. Also shown is St Catherine with wheel and another unidentified saint. Spreyton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.





Fig. 6.10  
Three hares, roof boss, Wissembourg,  
Alsace, France, c.1300.  
Image © Chris Chapman



Fig. 6.11  
Foliate head, roof boss, Wissembourg,  
Alsace, France, c.1300.  
Image © Chris Chapman





Fig. 6.12  
15<sup>th</sup> C. foliate head carving applied to modern wall plate,  
North Bovey chancel.



Fig. 6.13  
15<sup>th</sup> C. foliate head carving applied to modern wall plate,  
North Bovey chancel.



Fig. 6.14  
15<sup>th</sup> C. carving of hart applied to modern wall plate,  
North Bovey chancel.





Fig. 6.15  
South Tawton church in its village setting.



Fig. 6.16  
South Tawton nave and chancel roofs.





Fig. 6.17  
Grotesque head, South Tawton south chancel chapel,  
19<sup>th</sup> C.



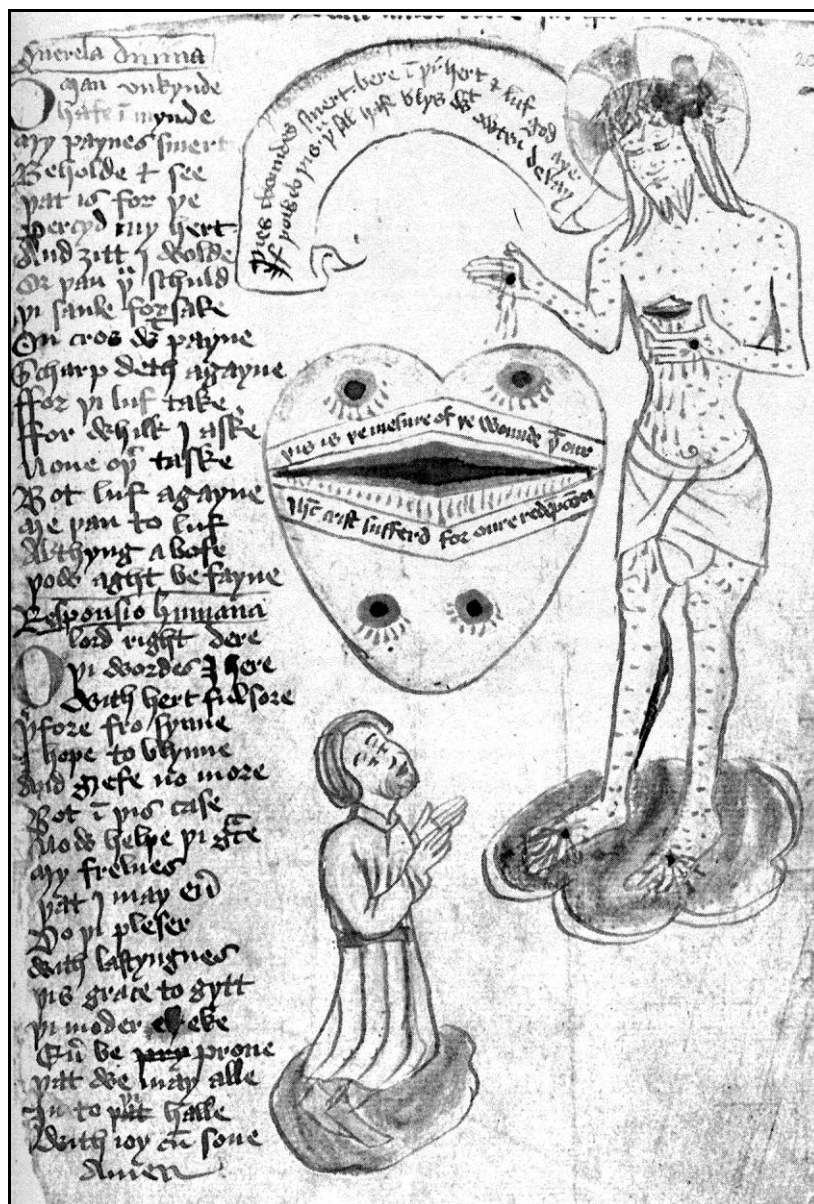


Fig. 6.18  
 "O Man Unkynde", manuscript illustration,  
 British Library, MS. Add.37049, fol.20,  
 15<sup>th</sup> C.

From Hagen, S., *Allegorical Remembrance. A Study of the Life of Man as a Medieval Treatise on Seeing and Remembering*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990, figure 23.

© British Library Board Add. 37049.



Fig. 6.19  
Sheela na gig (?).  
Roof boss, South Tawton nave, 15<sup>th</sup> C.



Fig. 6.20  
IHC, roof boss, Harford south aisle, 1539.





Fig. 6.21  
Tudor rose, roof boss, Harford chancel, 1539.

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