

Notes on Birds
in
Medieval Church Architecture

by
George Claridge Druce

Originally published in

The Antiquary

Journal of the Society of Antiquaries of London

Volume 50, Issues 7, 8 and 10

July, August and October, 1914

About this Text

The article “Notes on Birds in Medieval Church Architecture” by George Claridge Druce (1860-1948), a member of the [Society of Antiquaries of London](#), was published in the Society’s monthly journal, *The Antiquary*, in 1914. Druce wrote extensively on Bestiary subjects; several of his articles are available in the Digital Text library of the [Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages](#) web site.

While the scanned text is readable and searchable, the illustrations are of such low digital quality that no amount of enhancement can make them usable. They are included in this extract in any case.

Source

The article was originally published in three issues of *The Antiquary*:

- Part 1 in Volume 50, Issue 7 (July, 1914 / page 248-253)
- Part 2 in Volume 50, Issue 8 (August, 1914 / page 298-301)
- Part 3 in Volume 50, Issue 10 (October, 1914 / page 381-385)

This edition is an extract of only the Druce article; the full text of the three journal issues is available from the Internet Archive:

- [Part 1](#)
- [Part 2](#)
- [Part 3](#)

This PDF extract is available in the Digital Text library of the [Medieval Bestiary: Animals in the Middle Ages](#) web site.

<https://bestiary.ca/etexts/etext113697.htm>

Copyright

The print edition of this text was published in London in 1914; this extract was produced from the Internet Archive digitized copy in 2024 by David Badke. The original print edition by George Claridge Druce is believed to be in the public domain. The Internet Archive digitized copy and this extract from it are also in the public domain.

Part 1
The Antiquary
Volume 50, Number 7
July, 2014

Source: http://archive.org/details/sim_antiquary-a-magazine-devoted-to-the-study-of-the-past_1914-07_50



FIG. I.

Notes on Birds in Mediæval Church Architecture.

BY GEORGE CLARIDGE DRUCE, F.S.A.

ONE of the problems still awaiting the archaeologist is the identification of the numerous carvings of birds in churches. This is not so difficult in the case of birds which possess distinctive natural features, such as the peacock, swan, and owl, or where there are accessory details, as in the case of the pelican or ostrich; but where birds occur singly and have no special characteristics, it is generally impossible to distinguish them. The mediæval bestiaries

animal, the manuscript illustration was often closely followed, and even in the case of better known animals the carvers seem to have relied on the pictures. There is evidence that accurate treatment of anatomical features was not regarded as of much importance. Details generally were suppressed, as it was impossible to render in stone or wood everything that could be drawn with pen and ink, and so long as the subject was understood, it was hardly necessary.

The eagle is, perhaps, the most important bird that appears in architecture, but when it

stands alone, it cannot always be distinguished from other birds of prey, such as the hawk. It is a fortunate circumstance that the animals and birds upon the twelfth-century doorway at Alne have titles—if it were not so, we could not recognize the eagle there (Fig. 1); it stands with its head turned back, and is probably gazing at the sun. In the illustration in MS. Harl. 3244 (B.M.) of the early thirteenth century, the eagle stands in a similar attitude, gazing at the sun, which is shown in the picture. It holds a scroll bearing the words: "Sum pennatorum rex atque magister eorum." Where there are accompanying features, it may be more easily identified, as upon misericords at Norwich

Eustathius, the *Moralia* of Gregory the Great, from Isidore's *Etymology* (seventh century), the works on *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* and the *De Universo* of Rabanus Maurus (ninth century), and from the *De bestiis et aliis rebus* in the appendix to the writings of Hugo de Sancto Victore of the twelfth century. These commentators had, in turn, borrowed largely from classical authors on natural history, such as Pliny, Solinus, and Elian. Isidore tells us how Christ can be symbolized by animals and birds—i.e., by the lamb for His innocence, the sheep for His patience, the ram for His leadership, the kid for His likeness to sinful flesh, the calf for His sacrifice for us, the lion for His kingship



FIG. 2.

Cathedral, where it has seized a sheep; at New College, Oxford, a hare or rabbit; at Gloucester Cathedral, an animal like a fox; and at Stratford-on-Avon, a bambino; at Whalley two eagles are devouring a pig.

The symbolism of the eagle is of a very comprehensive character. In one manuscript (12, F, XIII., B.M.) of the thirteenth century we are told that, "by the name of eagle at one time Christ is signified, at another the devil, at another the proud heretic, at another contemplative persons who have time for robbery and earthly gain, and at another contemplative and holy persons whose thoughts are of heavenly things." The texts and symbolism of the bestiaries were largely derived from the treatises on the *Hexameron* of Ambrose, Basil, and

and courage, the serpent for His death and His wisdom, the worm for His resurrection, and the eagle for His ascension; and he is careful to explain that the worm is that one which emerged from the ashes of the phoenix, and is not the silkworm. This shows how deeply rooted was the system of symbolic teaching based on animals in the Middle Ages, and which, rendered in pictorial form in the illustrated bestiaries and in architecture, provides such an interesting study.

The eagle is used as a symbol of the Ascension by Honorius in the *Speculum Ecclesie*, of the twelfth century. In his sermon for that feast day he teaches that "as it flies higher than all birds, and casts its glances into the very rays of the sun, so did Christ rise to the highest heavens above all

saints, when the Father exalted Him above all the angels." This is shown in window glass at Lyons Cathedral, but we know of no sculpture here beyond that at Alne, which is not quite definite. There are several other scenes recorded in the bestiaries. The eagle beats its young ones when becoming fledged, and urges them to fly; and it also forces them to gaze at the sun. It has such

the fountain three times, and thereupon its wings and eyesight grow strong again, and it is rejuvenated as before. All these episodes are made use of to teach religious or moral lessons.

Originally, no doubt, there were many of these subjects in ecclesiastical carving, but, owing to loss and decay, they are now hard to find. There is a sculpture on the jamb of



FIG. 3.

keen eyesight that it can see the fish in the sea from a great height, and swoops down and seizes them. These items were derived from Pliny's account of the *Haliæetus*. Another story runs that, when it is old, its wings become heavy and its eyes dim; so it seeks a place where there is a fountain of water, and there it flies up into the rays of the sun and scorches its wings and burns the blindness out of its eyes; then it dives into

the twelfth-century doorway at Ribbesford (Worcestershire) in which an adult bird with curved beak appears with three smaller birds (Fig. 2). Romilly Allen, in his *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 268, explains two of the figures as an eagle grasping a fish in its claws, but a careful inspection convinced us that all four are birds. The subject may perhaps represent the eagle urging its young ones to fly, but there does not appear to

be a nest; it is just as likely to be a hawk seizing a bird, which would be equally suitable for sculpture on an ecclesiastical building. There is an excellent carving of the



FIG. 4.

eagle forcing its young one to gaze at the sun on the north side of Strassburg Cathedral, of late thirteenth-century date (Fig. 3). The parent is holding out the young bird towards the sun, which is represented as a human face in rays. This corresponds with an illustration in MS. Sloane 3544 (B.M.) of about the same date, in which the parent is pulling the young bird out of the nest, intending to banish it, as it has failed to maintain its gaze (Fig. 4). The bestiary tells us that this is not from any lack of love for its offspring, but because it regards it as degenerate and unfit to rear. The coot, however, finds a home for the rejected eaglet, and rears it with its own brood, and a pretty little moral lesson is founded upon this, to the effect that, while the coot takes care of the stranger, and tends it with the same maternal love, and provides it with the same food as her own family, we reject and cast out our own children with harsh cruelty.

The eagle with the fish in its claw is illustrated in several manuscripts, but is scarce in architecture. Allen records one upon a Scotch cross, and the claw alone grasping the fish is carved on the cornice of the screen at Conway. Of the eagle diving into the fountain a rather poor instance appears in late panelling at Forrabury (Cornwall). It

is illustrated in manuscripts at the British Museum, and is a symbol of regeneration by Baptism. In one of them (MS. 12, C, XIX.) the reader is addressed thus: "So also thou, O man, whether Jew or Gentile, who art clothed in an old garment, and who hast the eyes of thy heart darkened with unbelief, seek the spiritual fountain of the Lord, who said: 'Whoever is not born again by water and the Holy Spirit, cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

Another episode recorded by Pliny (*Natural History*, ch. x. 5 [4]), but of which we have as yet found no mediæval account, is the contest between the eagle and dragon. The dragon here stands for a serpent who tries to steal the eggs. There is a spirited carving upon a misericord at Lincoln Minster, the dragon being coiled round the bird. Pliny intimates that it is a drawn battle, both becoming exhausted.

The hawk is met with in sculpture almost as frequently as the eagle, and there was every justification for its use. It occurs either standing alone, striking a bird, or perched upon the hand in a hawking scene. In the calendars attached to mediæval psalters hawking is used to indicate a month, generally May, in conjunction with the two figures of Gemini. In these cases the sportsman is generally on horseback, as upon the twelfth-century lead font at Brookland (Kent), upon



FIG. 5.

the thirteenth-century font at Lostwithiel (Cornwall), and upon a misericord at Ripple (Worcestershire). Abroad a good carving of this class may be seen upon some late

twelfth-century capitals in the vestibule at Loches.

The hawk occurs alone on misericords at

but is sometimes grasping a small bird, which is probably a dove. Occasionally we find a hawking scene, as in MS. Bodl.

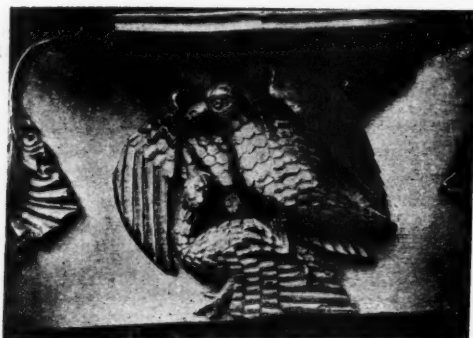


FIG. 6.

Edlesborough (Bucks) (Fig. 5) and Beverley Minster, and upon the cornices at St. Neots; striking a duck or other bird at Chester,

764, where a lady is enjoying the sport assisted by two attendants, who rouse the ducks by beating small drums. There are



FIG. 7.

Norwich Cathedral, and St. Katherine's, Regent's Park (Fig. 6), and grasping a rabbit on a poppy-head at Swavesey (Cambs.). In the bestiary illustrations it is usually alone,

some very good illustrations of this kind in MS. 10, E, IV., where the sportsman is again a lady. In MS. Harl. 4751 (B.M.) a bestiary of the thirteenth century, the sportsman is a

man, and he is assisted in the same way. A hawk is striking a duck, and other ducks are flying or swimming away at an impossible angle (Fig. 7).

The symbolism of the hawk in MS. Harl. 4751 is adopted from Ambrose, Rabanus, and Hugo, the last of whom borrowed from the *Moralia* of Gregory. It is of an interesting character. Rabanus (*De Universo*, Lib. VIII.) comments upon the hawk as one of the unclean birds of the law, and says its actions should not be imitated. "As it becomes tame and gives help in plundering, it is a type of those persons who appear to be gentle and of a quiet nature, but who are really associated with greedy and cruel men." Contrary to what we should expect, the hawk as a bird of prey is a type of the holy man or monk, "one who, so to say, lays violent hold of" the kingdom of God, and the passage in Job xxxix. 26 is introduced to teach that, as the hawk moults its old feathers and gains new plumage, so the man who has adopted the religious life has thrown off his old ways of living, and has put on the new wings of virtue. The hawk's quarters are the cloister, and all the various incidents connected with hawking, such as the bird being let out and coming to the hand to be flown, being held on the left hand and flying to the right, and capturing the dove, are used to teach various lessons of the lofty aims and good deeds of the man of God in his life, both in and out of the monastery. Even the hawk sitting upon its perch, fixed above the ground and supported by the two walls, is the man who, with mind raised above earthly things, holds firmly to the rules of a well-ordered life, the walls being the Active Life and the Contemplative Life, which sustain the uprightness of those who live in religion. The hawk's fetters again mean the humiliation and bondage of the man who, in fear of judgment, represses the impulses of his heart; and the strap or jess, inasmuch as it is made of the hide of a dead animal, signifies the mortifying of the flesh.

There was thus every good reason why such subjects as the eagle and hawk should be used in ecclesiastical buildings, and, once established, they continued right on to the early sixteenth century; but it is probable

that, at this late date, the symbolic idea had become largely worn out, and that the decorative element was the chief factor.

(To be continued.)



Part 2
The Antiquary
Volume 50, Number 8
August, 2014

Source: http://archive.org/details/sim_antiquary-a-magazine-devoted-to-the-study-of-the-past_1914-08_50



Notes on Birds in Mediæval Church Architecture.

BY GEORGE CLARIDGE DRUCE, F.S.A.

(Continued from p. 253.)



THE hoopoe is of a different class, and carvings of it are scarce in churches. The only examples known to us which illustrate its legend are at Carlisle (Fig. 8) and St. George's Chapel, Windsor. It is one of the group of birds which have crests, and which are extremely difficult to identify. The crests are of two kinds—*i.e.*, like the peacock's, which is drawn as an upstanding bunch of ball-headed pins, or as curled feathers some-

what like the crest of the grebe. The latter type may be seen on misericords at Higham Ferrers, New College (Oxford), and Norwich Cathedral, but the birds do not necessarily correspond in other respects. In the besti-

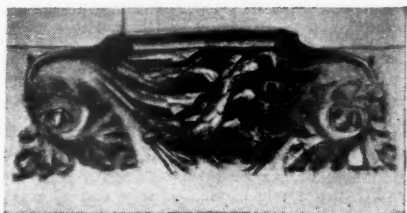


FIG. 8.

aries the hoopoe's crest more often resembles that of the peacock, but in MS. Harl. 3244, and to a lesser degree in MS. Sloane 278 (B.M.) it has a saw-like ridge upon its head and back. Sometimes it has no crest. There is an excellent carving of a crested bird with nest of eggs upon a fifteenth-century bench front at Great Gransden (Hunts) (Fig. 9). The long beak and up-standing ridged crest would indicate the hoopoe, but no nest appears in the existing manuscript illustrations. If it were not for the crest, it might correspond with the "alcion," a bird now identified with the kingfisher, but which in the bestiaries is a sea-bird, as described by Pliny. Perhaps the carver here worked on independent lines. The birds at Windsor have crests.

The hoopoe is described as a very foul bird, always spending its time about graves, and feeding upon human filth; and there is a very curious item to the effect that if anyone smears himself with its blood when falling asleep, he will dream that he is being suffocated by demons. A French version says that demons will carry him off. According to Rabanus, who is quoted, the hoopoe is a type of wicked men who delight in dwelling in the filthiness of their sins. The hoopoe is also said to be a mournful bird, and so to symbolize the sadness of this world, which leads to spiritual death.

The legend is so pretty that it is worth giving in full, the version in MS. 233 at Berne being followed: "It is written in

the law 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' And again: 'Whosoever curseth his father or his mother, let him die the death.' The Natural Philosopher has said: 'There is a bird which is called hoopoe. When the young of these birds see their parents grown old, and unable to fly or see through blindness, then these their children pluck off the very old feathers from their parents, and lick their eyes, and cherish their parents under their wings, until their feathers grow again and their eyes become bright, so that they are made quite young again in body as before, and can see and fly and show their gratitude to their children, because they have fulfilled their duty towards their parents with such love. But their children say to them: Behold, sweetest of parents, as you have brought us up from infancy, and have made us the object of all your labours, so in your old age we are paying you the same services and ministrations.' Then follows the moral: If birds, which have no reasoning power, treat one another in turn like this, how can men, seeing that they are possessed of reason, refuse to render like for like to their own parents!

The scene is shown upon the misericords at Carlisle and Windsor. The young birds are pulling the feathers off their parents, as in the bestiary illustrations. Sometimes one



FIG. 9.

of them is seen licking the old bird's eye; there is a particularly good miniature with this feature in a manuscript at St. John's College, Oxford.

Peacocks occur fairly frequently. The earliest instance known to us is on the

thirteenth-century font at Hodnet (Salop), where it is in profile and crudely drawn (Fig. 10). Upon a misericord at Lincoln Cathedral there is a fine pair in profile with heads crossed, and there are three others at New College, Oxford. At Wells Cathedral



FIG. 10.

and Cartmel the peacock is full-face with tail outspread. The illustrations in the bestiaries are generally arranged to display the tail to the best advantage, the subject affording a good opportunity to the colourist. One of the finest is in MS. 22 in the Westminster Chapter Library.

The peacock has been the subject of symbolism from very early times. Owing to the idea that its flesh was so hard that it was not subject to decay, it was a symbol of immortality, and as such appears freely in Early Christian art. The difficulty of cooking its flesh is referred to in the Latin bestiaries, and an epigram of Martial (in a somewhat mutilated form) is introduced: "You wonder as often as it unfolds its jewelled wings; and can you hand over this creature to a cruel cook, O hard-hearted man?" One manuscript says that its flesh is scarcely to be cooked either upon a hearth, or in the stomach by the heat of the liver, and it is therefore a type of the minds of doctors, which are neither consumed by the flame of avarice nor kindled by the heat of desire. But for the most part the symbolism of the peacock seems to have turned upon its beautiful feathers and its pride. In MS. Harl. 4751, because it was brought to Solomon from distant regions, and has diverse colours in its feathers, it signifies the

Gentiles coming to Christ from distant parts, and shining through His grace with the splendour of many virtues. In this manuscript the peacock is shown full-face with its tail spread out in a circle (Fig. 11). Pliny's account of its vanity and of its spreading out its feathers when praised seems to have inspired some of the bestiary writers, for in MS. Harl. 3244 the heading runs: "De superbia pavonis qui caudam suam orbiculatam laudatus explicat." Another version mentions its wings as glittering like stars, and the brilliancy of its tail, which is used to adorn the heads of Kings and rich men and keep off the sun. It has "a small head and crest of plumes, a voice like a devil's, a wing like an angel's, a foot like a thief's, and a head like a serpent's." A French manuscript (No. 3516 in the Arsenal Library, Paris) says that when the peacock sleeps at night, it wakes up suddenly and cries out, because it believes that it has lost its beauty. This typifies the soul which in the night of this world ought always to fear lest it lose the benefits and grace that God has given it. The peacock, too, has great foresight, "for by the tail we understand foresight, because, inasmuch as it is behind, it signifies that which is to come to pass." Alexander



FIG. 11.

Neckam, too, who died in 1217, has much to say about the peacock and its interpretation in his work, *De Naturis Rerum*. In one bestiary there is a long account of Solomon's ships bringing ivory apes and peacocks from Tarshish, and their significa-

tion. Chaucer refers to the pride of the peacock in the *Reve's Tale*, when he describes the Miller of Trumpington "as any peacock he was proud and gay."

The parrot is another scarce bird in architecture, almost the only instance known to us being upon a misericord of the fourteenth century at Wells Cathedral, where there is a pair perched upon a branch of a tree with leaves and fruit (Fig. 12). It is strange that there are so few, for both artists and carvers must have been familiar with its form. On the misericord at Wells and in the bestiaries they are well drawn, an exception being in MS. Add. 11283 (B.M.), where the parrot resembles any ordinary bird with a ring round its neck. The illustrations usually show one or two perched on branches. The misericords at Wells are among the best in the country, the work being for the most part



FIG. 12.

refined and naturalistic. There are many animals and birds that the carvers would be familiar with, but the fact that there are errors in anatomy points to their having relied in some measure on illuminated manuscripts.

The description of the parrot given in the bestiaries in the main follows the *Polyhistor* of Solinus (chap. lv.), and says that it comes from India alone, and is of a green colour with a purple ring round its neck. "It has a broader tongue than other birds, and is thus able to produce articulate words; so that if you did not see it, you would think it was a man speaking." It utters words of salutation, such as "All hail!" or "Farewell," naturally, but otherwise must be taught. Its beak and head are very hard—the latter so hard that you can strike it with an iron rod when teaching it, for "it takes lessons in speaking like a man." So far we

have found no symbolism in the Latin bestiaries, and they omit an item, which is given by Solinus, to the effect that you can distinguish the aristocratic parrots from those of low degree (*nobiles et plebeios*) by the number of their toes. The parrot of high degree has five toes and the other only three. This feature is made use of in the French bestiary in the Arsenal Library to point a moral. We are told that one of the parrots is "ases plus gentils que li autre—et que li vilain ont III dois a lor pies, et les gentils en ont VI a lor pies." The author has apparently made a mistake, for Solinus says only five. He then describes the parrot's appearance and goes on to say that it has a great dislike to rain, and takes care not to be caught far away from its home in the wood when storms come. "For it has such a nature that rain does it a great deal of harm and spoils its colour very much, and so it is careful, as wise birds are." The parrot is a type of man. One is much better than another. By its habits we understand how to live spiritually and to fear God. The good parrot is the man who lives thus. "He flees from the rains and tempests of hell; he does not play about outside the wood, and is not caught in the storm. But the man who sins, he is the bad parrot. He is caught in the storm, which hurts him very much and ruins and kills him—that is, he is surprised in sin at the end, and dies and is lost, and dwells for ever in the tempests of hell among the devils."

(To be concluded.)

Part 3
The Antiquary
Volume 50, Number 10
October, 2014

Source:
http://archive.org/details/sim_antiquary-a-magazine-devoted-to-the-study-of-the-past_1914-08_50

Notes on Birds in Mediaeval Church Architecture.

BY GEORGE CLARIDGE DRUCE, F.S.A.

(Concluded from p. 301.)

THE ostrich is another interesting bird. Examples that can be identified are very scarce in churches, and they are confined to the scene where the bird has a horseshoe in its beak. This relates to the story of its extraordinary digestive powers, which, strange to say, is but seldom mentioned or illustrated in the bestiaries. The texts usually deal with an entirely different phase, which is fully illustrated; yet there are no carved examples of it at present known to us. The ostrich with the horseshoe appears upon misericords at Trinity



FIG. 13.

Church, Stratford-on-Avon (Fig. 13) and St. George's Chapel, both of fifteenth-century date. In the latter instance another horseshoe lies on the ground, and the ostrich is face to face with a bird of a different kind which has a serpent in its beak.

The ostrich with the horseshoe is, however, illustrated in MS. Sloane 278 and Add. 11283, but there is no reference to the incident in the texts. The fact that it will "eat iron" is, however, mentioned by Neckam and in the French versions of the "Imago Mundi." The story was probably derived from Pliny. There is a good illustration in the series of pictures from the bestiary in Queen Mary's Psalter, where the ostrich has a horseshoe in its beak. Another horseshoe and three nails lie on the ground close by, and a man in front is apparently offering it a third.

The other scene, which occurs regularly in

the Latin bestiaries, and of which it is hard to find examples, is where the ostrich, when the time comes for laying its eggs, gazes steadily at the sky, and waits until the star Virgilia appears, which is in the month of June. Then it lays its eggs in the sand, covers them up, and goes away and forgets all about them. But by the calmness and mildness of the air and the warmth of the sand the eggs are hatched. Then the moralist comes in in an unexpected way, for, instead of teaching a lesson of parental neglect, he says: "If the ostrich recognizes its own time and forgets its young, how much more shouldst thou, O man, recognize the true time, and with eyes uplifted, and forgetful of what is behind thee, press onward firmly unto the prize of the high calling" (Phil. iii. 14); and other appropriate passages of Scripture are quoted. This scene is introduced into the bestiary on the strength of Jeremiah viii. 7, which reads in the Vulgate: "Milvus in cœlo cognovit tempus suum." In MS. Sloane 278 and the Arsenal Library version this passage is quoted, but the word "asida" takes the place of "milvus." "Assida" is the usual title for the ostrich in the bestiaries, and was adopted from the Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew word which means stork, not ostrich. How the word "asida" came to be used for the latter in the bestiaries is not apparent. "The ostrich in the heavens" is nonsense, as it cannot fly. But it is probable that the author, finding that the passage fitted his story, substituted the ostrich for the stork or other bird, and turned the passage round to read, as in the Arsenal MS.: "The ostrich knows its own time in the heavens."

In the Arsenal version the ostrich is a type of the good man who is patient, humble, long-suffering, and pious, which virtues warm his soul and keep it alive in a state of perpetual joy, and when in this state it is nourished by the true sun of justice as the eggs are.

The illustrations nearly all show the ostrich gazing at the star Virgilia, and its eggs lying in a hole in the sand. It usually has cloven feet, but sometimes hooved; the former may be well seen on the carving at Stratford. The manuscripts variously say that its feet are like those of the stag, cow, or camel, and

one version explains that it got its name of *Struthio camelus* from this circumstance.

The bird facing the ostrich at Windsor may be the ibis or heron. Both are seen with serpents in their beaks in the bestiaries; but the ibis is usually bringing serpents' eggs to its young ones in a nest. As it feeds on carrion, a corpse, dead dog, dead fish, rats, or eels, are introduced into the pictures. This seems to be depicted upon a misericord at Lavenham (Suffolk), where a couple of birds of the ibis class symmetrically arranged are biting the ears of a corpse, of which the head and shoulders only are visible (Fig. 14). The bird at Windsor is therefore more likely to be the heron, and there is another reason which favours this in the association of the ostrich with the heron and hawk in Job xxxix. 13



FIG. 14.

(Vulgate): "Penna struthionis similis est pennis herodii et accipitris." Upon this an elaborate symbolic discourse is founded in the "Moralia" of Gregory, and which is repeated in the "De bestiis et aliis rebus" of Hugo. This is to the effect that as the ostrich has wings, but cannot raise itself above the earth, it is a type of hypocrites who simulate the life of the good and have a pretence of a holy way of living; yet they do not possess the reality of pious actions, and, weighted with worldly cares, cannot rise to higher things. The heron and hawk, on the other hand, which use their wings for rapid flight, are a type of the elect of God. In the bestiaries the heron is described as fearing storms and flying above the clouds to avoid them, and so is a type of the souls of the elect, who fear to be involved in the troubles and per-

secutions of this world instigated by the devil, and who, avoiding earthly things, direct their gaze and thoughts to the abodes of heavenly bliss.

There is another bird holding a large serpent on a misericord at Windsor which may also be a heron (Fig. 15). It would appear to be a water bird, as it has webbed feet, but is otherwise more like an eagle than a heron. The carvers were, however, not over-particular about anatomical details. In the bestiaries the herons are as a rule fairly drawn, and do not have webbed feet.

The owl affords a contrast to the ostrich, as carvings are common. They often show only the single figure, the owl having a rat in its beak or claws; but there is another scene in which the owl, having come into the light

from types illustrated in books; the bestiaries had a wide range. There must, however, have been exceptions, as has been pointed out at Wells; there is a carving at Boston of a



FIG. 15.

of day, is mobbed by other birds. The misericords at Norwich Cathedral provide good instances of each (Figs. 16 and 17), and there are other single figures at Edlesborough, Ripon, and Higham Ferrers. There is a charming little sculpture of an owl on a branch in a spandril of the west doorway at Wilden Church (Beds). The scene of the mobbing also occurs at Beverley Minster and St. George's Chapel. Two different types of owls are represented, which seem to be based on the barn-owl and eared or horned owl. The former is the more common, as at Norwich; the latter, with tufts on its head and divided beard, may be seen at Windsor. Both occur upon misericords at Ulm Cathedral, the barn-owl type with a rat, and the eared and bearded owl, as at Windsor. This seems to point to the carvers having worked



FIG. 16.

camel of late fourteenth century date which is quite natural, although the same carver appears to have relied on an illustration when he carved a very quaint crocodile close by.

The owl appears in the bestiaries under three heads—viz., *noctua* or *nicticorax*, the little owl or night-hawk; *ulula*, the screech-

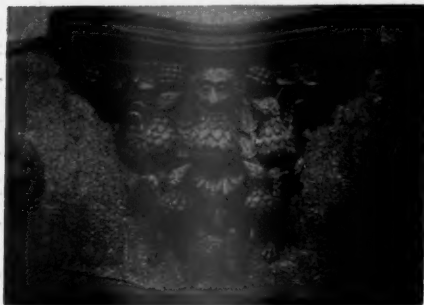


FIG. 17.

owl; and *bubo*, the eared or horned owl. This classification seems to have been derived from Pliny, but the artists did not carry it out in the illustrations, as they are drawn in-

differently, and in some cases do not resemble owls at all. Thus in MS. Harl. 3244 noctua has ears, while in Harl. 4751 bubo has none. It is bubo which is mobbed by other birds,



FIG. 18.

but the scene is only illustrated in a few manuscripts (Fig. 18). It will be seen how the carving at Norwich corresponds with the manuscript, although symmetrically arranged, and the same is the case at Windsor.

Noctua is described as different from and smaller than bubo, Isidore being quoted as an authority. Being a bird of night, it shuns the light, and its sight is dimmed by the brilliance of the rising sun. It is therefore a type of the Jews, who loved spiritual darkness and refused to see the light of salvation which Christ brought to them, but rejected Him and cried: "We will have no King but Cæsar." As it is an unclean bird in Leviticus, it is unlawful to feed upon its flesh, because no one ought to imitate the actions of that creature which loves the deeds of darkness. One version says that noctua, or nicticorax, is a type of those who study the stars at night-time and the courses of the constellations, who explore the mysteries of spirits and believe that they can see to the very heights of heaven; but they cannot see the light which is Christ and faith in Him which is close to them, because they are blind and leaders of the blind.

There are two exceptional illustrations of nicticorax in MS. Bodl. 602, in which the bird is pecking a corpse in the neighbourhood of two large temples. In one of the

illustrations a door and two small towers are falling down. The reference here is to the laying waste of Babylon and "the owl" lingering in the dwellings of it.

Ulula, the screech-owl, is but rarely described and illustrated. Its screeching denotes weeping or groaning, and so is a symbol of sadness; and its cries also denote the shrieking of sinners in hell.

Bubo is the bird of ill-omen. We are told that it is a funereal bird and overcome with sloth, dwelling in tombs and filthy places, and a quotation from Ovid is introduced: "And this foul bird becomes the swift messenger of approaching evil tidings." Bubo is a type of sinners. All its bad points are brought into play to illustrate their ill-doings; its lingering in tombs and holes indicates the sinner who delights in his sins, which is the corruption of human flesh, and who hates to come into the light of the truth. When it is seen by other birds it is greeted with great clamours and is attacked by them. So if the sinner comes into the light of day, he affords a great opportunity for mockery to well-doers, and when he is caught openly in wrong-doing, he has to bear their reproofs. They tear out its feathers and wound it with their beaks, and in like manner are the carnal actions and extravagances of sinners reprov'd by good people.

The last of the "bird" subjects we shall notice is the bat, and this because in the

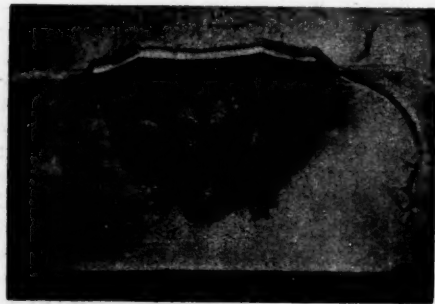


FIG. 19.

bestiaries it is included in the list of birds. There are good instances on misericords at Wells and Edlesborough (Fig. 19), which are well carved, but display serious anatomical

errors; and it is included in the earlier series of carvings of animals from the bestiary on the canopies of the stalls at Poitiers Cathedral.

The illustrations in the manuscripts are not very striking, generally consisting of one or two bats badly drawn as mice with small wings. Occasionally it is shown full-face. The illustration in MS. 22 in the Westminster Chapter Library is a fair sample (Fig. 20). One version says that the bat is an "*avis ignobilis*," and describes it as a flying creature and yet a quadruped, and provided with teeth, "which are not usually found in other birds." It is like a mouse, and emits a sound "not so much like a voice as a squeak." It is viviparous. The manner of its flight is explained, and the formation of its wings as

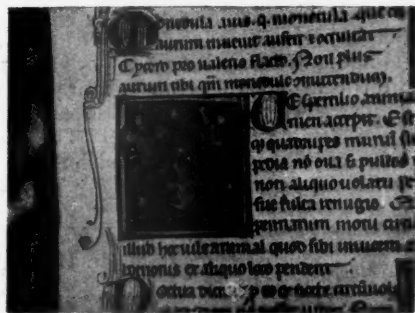


FIG. 20.

"membranes hung to its arms." "And this mean creature has such a nature, that they cling to each other and hang from any spot like a bunch of grapes, and if the one at the top should let go, all of them are scattered, which comes about by a kind of bond of sympathy, which is difficult to find in men of this world." There is more symbolism based on it as an unclean bird of the law, and a curious item is inserted to the effect that, if anyone who has a good head of hair is smeared with its blood, he will become bald; a bit of information which sounds very like Pliny, but which we have not as yet located.

In discussing these carvings of birds the question arises: How far did the carvers have considerations of symbolism present

VOL. X.

in their minds? At the time of the earlier stone sculptures such as we see at Alne, the symbolism was no doubt well understood; but when we come to the carved woodwork of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is very doubtful if it was regarded. The decorative element had no doubt become the chief standpoint. The bestiaries seem to have played the part for animals and birds that the manuscript Psalters and Romances did for other subjects occurring plentifully in architecture. The carvers recognized them as religious books, and whether they consulted the text or not, they saw the pictures, and that, coupled with the fact that such animals and birds had been freely used for decoration in earlier buildings, was probably sufficient.

We have touched upon the difficulties of this branch of archæology. It is an attractive study for those who are energetic enough to roam from village to village with cycle and camera in search of these carvings of animals and birds, part of the charm being the uncertainty of what you will find, or even whether you will find anything at all.

