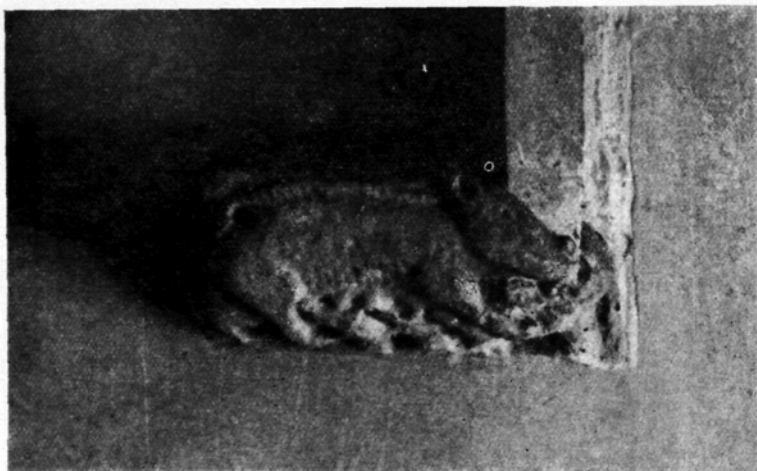




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GOODNESTONE. *Photo : Rev. A. H. Collins.*



WREXHAM. *Photo : W. A. Call.*

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THE SOW AND PIGS; A STUDY IN METAPHOR.

BY GEORGE C. DRUCE, F.S.A.

THE north porch of the church of Goodnestone-next-Wingham, which is now the vestry, was either rebuilt or added when the nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1841. Over the blocked north doorway is a square hood moulding having in the middle a shield on which the name *Wyllyam Bopp* appears, and at each terminal a bit of sculpture. On the left (as a person stands facing the same) is a sow suckling her young pigs (Plate 1) and on the right an ape seated with a chain about its neck fastened to a (?) rock behind, and part of another figure. It is in poor condition. All this was originally over a window in the south aisle and was removed probably in 1841. The name upon the shield is, no doubt, that of William Boys who died in 1507. There is a brass to his memory in the chancel. The date of the window is therefore fairly well fixed, i.e. the end of the fifteenth century.

So far as I know this is the only sculpture of the sow with its litter of pigs in a Kent church; but elsewhere the subject occurs fairly frequently, more particularly in the West Country. It was a favourite subject for bosses, because it could be manipulated to compose into a more or less circular form, and is also met with on misericords. Apart from these positions it is difficult to find, but occurs exceptionally as a terminal to the hood moulding of the east window of Glapthorn church (Northants); upon a cornice on the north side at Toddington (Beds.) and in a similar position at Bloxham (Oxon); in a spandrel of the arcading at the west end of Beverley Minster, where the sow is stretched in a most uncomfortable way to fit the space; and as a corbel in the nave at Wrexham (Denbigh) (Plate 1).

Examples in the form of bosses are to be seen in Exeter Cathedral (twice), and in churches at Braunton, Newton St. Cyres, Spreyton, Ugborough, and Broad Clyst, all in Devon ; in Winchester Cathedral, St. Mary Redcliffe Bristol (Plate 3), where the pigs are very hairy, and in the porches at St. Cuthbert's, Wells, and Hitchin (Herts).

Upon Misericords one of the best scenes of sow and litter is in Chester Cathedral (Plate 2). Elsewhere it is found in Worcester Cathedral, and Winchester Cathedral (Plate 2) where the sow plays on double pipes while feeding her young. At Ribbesford (Worc.) small carvings have been inserted in a modern pulpit, which include the sow and litter and sow playing the bagpipes. On an ivory draughtsman of the thirteenth century in the British Museum the sow and pigs appear, being one of a set of animal pieces. As a foreign example the sow suckling three little pigs is mentioned among animal subjects on a portal (c. 1200) at Remagen on the Rhine.¹

The number of small pigs varies ; as a rule five or less, as space was limited. At Goodnestone, where the carving is not in good condition, there seem to be only two. At Braunton, Wells, Chester and Worcester there are five ; at Winchester, on both boss and misericord three ; at Ugborough four, and the tails of four more are visible ; on the draughtsman two.

The alternative treatment of the sow playing a musical instrument to her little dancing pigs also occurs fairly often, but principally on misericords. Of this phase there are instances in Durham Castle Chapel, Ripon Cathedral, Richmond (from Easby Abbey), Winchester Cathedral, Manchester Cathedral, Beverley Minster, St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and Westminster Abbey. The number of small pigs varies as before, and also the kind of musical instrument. At Durham Castle she plays the bagpipes to three little pigs ; at Ripon and Richmond to two ; at Winchester she plays pipes and on the same misericord a boar plays the fiddle, holding the bow with one foot and making the notes with the

¹ See Plate in *Proceedings of the Verein von Alterthumsfreunden in den Rheinlanden*, Bonn, 1859. If the dating is right, it is earlier than any example known to me in this country.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL.

Photo : F. H. Crossley.



WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL.

Photo : G.C.D.



Photo : C. J. P. Cave.

ST. MARY REDCLIFFE, BRISTOL.



MS. HARL. 4751. BRITISH MUSEUM.

other drawn as a human hand. At Manchester she plays bagpipes to four pigs, and a sty and trough are introduced ; at Beverley also to four with a trough in the foreground ; and as side subjects on the same two misericords the sow is saddled and plays on a harp. In St. George's Chapel, Windsor, there is an excellent rendering of the Sow with harp and three small pigs dancing, and in Henry VII's Chapel a sow plays a pipe alone.

As to the reasons which led the carvers to employ the subject of the Sow and Pigs for church decoration it might be held that they simply represented a well-known domestic feature, namely the sow suckling her young. This view might have some chance of acceptance were it not that the companion subject of the sow playing a musical instrument to her dancing pigs occurs as frequently, and this could not have been copied from nature. We have, therefore, to look elsewhere for the motive. Naturally we turn to illuminated manuscripts, which we know the carvers used so freely, and in particular to the medieval Bestiaries or Books of Beasts. In two of these MSS., I have found illustrations of the sow suckling her young, namely, in MS. Harl. 4751 in the British Museum (Plate 3) and MS. Bodl. 764 at Oxford, which date from the latter part of the twelfth century. These two MSS. have much in common. There are no illustrations of the sow playing music and pigs dancing in any of the Bestiaries so far as I am aware.

The texts relating to the Sow in these two MSS. make no mention of the sow feeding her small pigs, although the miniatures show that phase. In MS. Harl. 4751, there are four small pigs, in the Bodleian MS. five. The text was apparently written first, a space being left for the picture. The painter then did his part and filled in a scene which he knew well. The fact that these were religious MSS. and that the Sow and pigs appeared in them was quite enough for the Church carvers who were in need of decorative details ; and once the subject was appropriated its appearance in one quarter led to its being taken up in others, and so gradually it spread and was used to the end of the fifteenth century, in

which period we find most of the examples. The same good fortune happened to many other animal and bird subjects in the *Bestiaries*.¹

The description of the Sow and its habits and the moral lessons based upon it are dealt with in a very full and picturesque manner, displaying a delightful mingling of a rude kind of etymology, moral teaching, and secular matter. The whole presents a real effort on the part of the moralist. In MS. Harl. 4751, the text, translated from the Latin runs as follows :

Title : Sus.

"The Sow is so named because it roots up (*subigat*) the pastures, that is, it seeks its food by rooting up the ground. Boars (*verres*) are so named because they have great strength (*vires*). The pig (*porcus*), as if named from *spurcus* (filthy), wallows, for it buries itself in filth and mud, and covers itself with mire. Thus in Horace : 'Mud is dear to the sow.'"² Hence, also, we get the terms for filth and bastard persons (*spurcitiam et spurios*). We call pigs' bristles "setae", and "setae" as derived from "Sus"; from these also "sutores" (shoe makers) are named because they sew (*suant*) with hairs,³ that is, they sew together skins of leather. Swine signify sinners and unclean persons or heretics, about which it is laid down in the law : "Because they divide the hoof and do not chew the cud let not their flesh be touched by true believers."⁴ Though these men take upon themselves

¹ The lion breathing on its dead cubs in the cloisters at Canterbury and the butting rams on the South doorway at Barfreston are cases in point.

² "Sirenum voces et Circae pocula nosti ;
Quae si cum sociis stultus cupidusque bibisset,
Sub domina meretrice fuisset et turpis et excors,
Vixisset canis immundus vel amica luto sus."

(*Hor. Epist. ad Lollium*, Lib. I, Ep. 2.)

"You have known the voices of the Sirens and the draughts of Circe ;
But if he had drunk these draughts with his companions like a
foolish and greedy man,
He would have been under the dominion of the harlot, shameful
and without understanding ;
He would have lived like a filthy dog or as a sow that loves the
mire."

³ Real hairs of horse or swine were used for sewing before thread of flax was invented. Isidore was the source of most of the pseudo-etymology of the *Bestiaries*.

⁴ Deut. xiv. 8.

each testament of the law and of the Gospel yet because they do not ruminate upon spiritual food, they are unclean. Again, swine signify penitents who have become slack and still have an eye for those sins which they had wept for, as Peter says in his epistle : " The dog is returned to his vomit and the washed sow to her slough of mud."¹ The dog I say when it vomits the food which was oppressing its stomach is certainly wise, but when it turns again to its vomit from which it was lightened, it is sickened again. Thus those who bewail their crimes, that is to say, the wickedness of their mind, with which they were evilly satiated and which oppressed them inwardly, show wisdom in going to confession ; but if after their confession they return to their sin, they take upon them again (the oppression of mind). The Sow, too, which is washed, if it is bathed in a slough of mud, becomes again more filthy—and he who bewails his sin committed, but nevertheless does not give it up, subjects himself to an almost greater fault in that he despises the very forgiveness itself which he was able to obtain by repentance, and rolls himself as it were in dirty water. Because, while he washes off the filthiness of his life with his tears, before God's eyes he makes the very tears themselves filthy. Again, pigs are the unclean and wanton men in the Gospel : " If thou cast us out, send us into the herd of swine."² Again in the same : " Cast not thy pearls before swine."³ Swine are the unclean spirits in the gospel. " And he sent him into his fields to feed swine."⁴ The pig also similarly signifies the unclean men and sinners about whom it is written in the psalm,⁵ " With thy hid treasure is their belly filled—they are filled with swine's flesh and have left what they have over to their little ones." For this speaks of uncleannesses which are hidden from God, that is, which are known to be forbidden. Swine's flesh belongs to polluted things, which, among other

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 22.

² Matt. viii. 31.

³ Matt. vii. 6. There is a beautiful representation of a man throwing small flowers (*margarites*) instead of pearls (*margaritas*) to swine on a misericord in Dordrecht Cath. c. 1540.

⁴ Luke xv. 15.

⁵ Ps. xvii. 14.

precepts of the old testament, are prescribed as unclean. They have, moreover, passed on the remains of their sins to their children when they cried out : " His blood be on us, and on our children."¹

Again, the Sow (denotes) the sinner of good understanding and living in luxury as in Solomon : " A gold ring in the nostrils of a sow is as a fair woman who is foolish."² Again, the sow signifies foul thoughts of fleshly lusts, from which proceed unproductive works as though boiled away (decocta) as in Isaiah : " They which eat swine's flesh and broth of abominable things is in their vessels,"³ that is, in their hearts.

The Sow thus affords a fine example of the lengths to which the mediæval moralist would go. He ransacked the Bible for quotations which he could fit in. But all the same when the illustrator got to work he, in this case at least, ignored the text altogether and acting, probably, on the simple instruction to make a picture of a sow, drew what was familiar to him, namely the sow with her litter. It is possible that the same man worked on the two MSS. mentioned.

The occurrence of the Sow playing music to her little dancing pigs is more difficult to account for. Possibly it was a mere variant forming a skit on the unmelodious squealing of pigs which was held to resemble the tones of bagpipes, and then was extended to pipes in general and other musical instruments, such as the fiddle and harp.

The sow and litter provided nick-names when casting crude iron in an open mould. This iron consisted of a runner, " the Sow "—from which branched ingots after the manner of a coarse comb and called " pigs " ; and this gave the commercial name to " pig-iron ", which is used at the present time.

I must not omit to acknowledge help given me by Mr. Arthur Hussey, and photographs kindly provided by Rev. A. H. Collins, Mr. C. J. P. Cave, Mr. W. A. Call, and Mr. F. H. Crossley.

¹ Matt. xxvii. 25.

² Prov. xi. 22.

³ Is. lxxv. 4.