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## THE MEDIEVAL MISERICORDS OF KENT'S PARISH CHURCHES

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Misericords are carved wooden brackets supporting small shelf-like seats, wide enough to perch on, beneath the hinged seats of the stalls in the chancel; usually made from a single block of oak. Most date from the mid thirteenth to the late fifteenth centuries. In the medieval church the chancel, the holiest part of the church, was screened off from the nave by the rood screen segregating the clergy from the secular world. As result the choir stalls and their misericords were not visible to the congregation. Whilst wall paintings or the stained glass windows in the nave are there for all to see, to convey a religious message and to inform the illiterate or act as a warning, the subjects on misericords in contrast are often profane, appearing to be there to entertain, amuse and perhaps point a salutary finger at the priesthood.

Church services in the medieval period were frequent and long. Eight times a day the priests, monks or canons filed into the church to sing the daily offices; each also had to recite his own private mass daily.

The daily offices of the church were laid out – Matins, Laud, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. Each office varied in length with three or four psalms, canticles or hymns being sung or recited at the end of the service. There were also readings and lessons. The monks were required to sing these daily offices in the church standing up. Prayers were said with the arms raised. Older monks must have found this tiring so, as a concession, they were allowed a staff or crutch to lean on to take the weight off their feet during the long hours they spent standing. In the tenth century seat-less standing desks were introduced. The strict rules were gradually relaxed so by the eleventh century the monks were permitted to kneel for prayers but sitting was still discouraged. Hinged benches were introduced to the stalls during the twelfth century allowing the monks to sit, but only during the reading of the epistle, the Gradual at Mass and the response to the vespers. A small shelf was fitted beneath the hinged seat as an act of kindness or mercy, hence 'misericord'. This allowed the monks to perch, whilst still giving the illusion of standing.

The bracket supporting the shelf, although unseen, was usually decorated. Initially misericords were fitted only to the seats of the upper rows, used by the elderly and infirm monks, but eventually every stall had a decorated misericord.

The earliest mention of misericords comes from a monastery at Hirsau in Germany in the early twelfth century with the abbey at Cluny in France recording their introduction in 1121. There is a possibility that they may also have been in use in England by then. There is a tantalising reference by the monk Gervaise, when writing about the great fire in Canterbury Cathedral that he had witnessed as a young man in 1174. He recalls that the decorated wooden stalls were lost to the flames, although it is not known if they had misericords. By 1220 the choir had been rebuilt to receive Becket into his new shrine. It would seem likely that the new stalls had misericords.

After the Fourth Lateran Council in Rome in 1215 the litany was altered making the mass more mystical and complex requiring extra priests officiating at the celebration of the mass within the chancel. More seating was required. Part of this process was the extension of the chancel in the Early English style and the installation of the rood screen. In most parish churches stone sedilia were added to provide seating for the priest, deacon and sub-deacon. During this century archbishops began to found colleges to train priests; followed in the fourteen century by the endowment of Chantry Chapels. The priests serving the chantries were organised into small colleges of secular canons. As well as reciting the mass in the Chantry Chapel they also assisted the parish priest in services at the main altar. This signalled the insertion of wooden stalls in the chancel.

Singing of the ritual of the mass was a very important part of Benedictine worship; they would sing the liturgy unaccompanied, in unison with a single line of melody. This determined the positions taken by the monks in the chancel as they stood in a semi-circle facing the altar to sing the daily offices. When stalls were introduced this formation followed naturally. The stalls were set along the north and south walls of the chancel, facing each other, at right angles to the altar. The stalls then continue at right-angles, set against the rood screen, facing the altar. These are called 'return stalls' usually occupied by the senior members of the community or by important visitors.

At the time of the Reformation beautiful works of architecture, masonry and carpentry were destroyed. We cannot know how many misericords were lost at this time; some being burned to provide heat to melt the lead from the roofs. Other misericords were dispersed from the great ecclesiastical buildings out into various small parish churches. Generous patrons had the opportunity to purchase misericords to beautify their own churches. Most parish churches by this time would already have seating provided for the priest in the form of ornate sedilia so the misericords

would not have had a specific function. They could be used by dignitaries when annual visitations were made to the church by their patrons.

After the Dissolution the new form of service only required one priest per parish church with novices to assist as servers. The focus within the church changed with more emphasis on the pulpit and the spoken word and less on the altar with its visual impact. In 1561 it was ordered that the upper part of the rood screen should be removed. This was quickly followed eight years later with the complete removal of rood screens and many return stalls were lost. Once the rood screens were removed and the chancel re-ordered, stalls were redundant. Laird (1986) suggests only 10 per cent may have survived. The Council of Trent, meeting in 1563 forbade the depiction of secular subjects in churches. This constrained the themes used by the carvers.

More dreadful destruction occurred in churches during the Civil War (1645) and later Puritan zealots (1649-1658). Stained glass windows were smashed, sculptures defaced and wall paintings lime-washed over. Misericords probably had a better survival rate because they were not so visible and were either overlooked or not considered to be so important. Highly visible ones were not so lucky. Three of the misericords at Throwley were defaced. In 1682 the medieval return stalls were removed from Canterbury Cathedral by Roger Davis, a London carpenter and joiner. He designed ten return stalls in the style of Grinling Gibbons. They had plain hinged seats. In 1704 the rest of the thirteenth-century stalls were removed and replaced, according to Canon Ingram Hill with 'Tasteless ornate wainscoting'. These stalls were in turn removed by Gilbert Scott in 1874 when he restored the choir stalls although the Dean and Chapter refused to let him remove the ten Renaissance return stalls. The Scott designs were based on those in New College, Oxford. There are sixty-six nineteenth-century misericords in the Cathedral.

#### KENT'S SURVIVING MEDIEVAL MISERICORDS

Seventeen churches in Kent have medieval misericords, as listed in **Table 1**.<sup>1</sup> A total of 120 survive, ranging from one at *St Mary Magdalene, Cobham*, to eighteen at *All Saints, Maidstone*.<sup>2</sup> There may be more as yet unrecorded. Over 3,400 misericords are listed for England, Scotland and Wales (Laird 1986). In the cathedrals and larger churches there may be between forty to eighty misericords. King's College Chapel, Cambridge, has one hundred and eighteen.

The foundation of medieval colleges linked to Kentish parish churches can be proposed as a possible date for installation of stalls into the chancel to accommodate the canons. The earliest seems to be *All Saints, Ulcombe*, where a College of Priests was founded between 1213-15 by Archbishop Stephen Langton as result of a petition from Ralph St Leger. The priests

TABLE 1. CHURCHES IN KENT WITH MEDIEVAL MISERICORDS

Location	Dedication	No	Dating	Notable features/depictions
Aldington	<i>St Martin</i>	6	c.1475	Foliage designs except one based on stone carved vaulting. Supporters: gateways.
Ashford	<i>St Mary the Virgin</i>	16	c.1475	College founded 1475. Range of foliage designs. Acorns/pigs in Autumnal scene. Vines. Pelican in Piety.
Cliffe at Hoo	<i>St Helen</i>	2	early C14th	Grotesque faces. Rounded, bulbous foliage style.
Cobham	<i>St Mary Magdalene</i>	1	C14th	College founded 1362; chancel rebuilt with 18 stalls.
Faversham	<i>St Mary of Charity</i>	11	late C15th	Eleven probably derived from Abbey. Angels. Human figures – jester, wodehouse, friendly-faced man. ‘Janus’-style triple face. Camel. Chained ape. Fox holding plump goose. Lion. Griffin. Wolf under sheep clothing. Grapes.
Harbledown	<i>St Nicholas</i>	1	late C13th	Chantry chapel founded 1371, stalls possibly earlier. Simple carved corbel.
Herne	<i>St Martin</i>	6	c.1510-30	Supporters with cross of St Andrew. Angels. Birds (heron?), bat.
Lenham	<i>St Mary</i>	14	C15th	Installed by monks of St Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury. Based on stone carved capitals.
Maidstone	<i>All Saints</i>	18	early C15th	College founded in 1395. Courtney family arms. Faces with headgear. Sunflowers.
(Maidstone)	<i>(St Michael)</i>	(2)	(?)	
Minster in Thanet	<i>St Mary</i>	18	c.1410	Pilgrim’s head. Arms of local families. Double-headed eagle. Good examples of hennins. Head of Christ depicted? Earliest angels in Kentish church. Cook with ladle. Old woman with distaff. Six expressive faces. Domneva’s hart. Lion supporters. Angel playing cithern. Wyverns. Three sirens.
Sandwich	<i>St Clement</i>	1	C15th	Originally 14.
Throwley	<i>St Michael and All Angels</i>	4	c.1520	Link to woodcuts/pattern book; nude boy chased by winged dragon/ naked man running behind exotic quadruped ridden by ape.

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Location	Dedication	No	Dating	Notable features/depictions
Ulcombe	<i>All Saints</i>	5	C13th	College of Priests founded 1213-15. Rare examples of amphibaena and manticore.
Westwell	<i>St Mary</i>	4	C14th	Undecorated examples.
Wingham	<i>St Mary the Virgin</i>	9	late C13th	College founded 1282. Early C14th female fashion. Foliate head. Donkey/ass/mule heads. Oak leaves with acorns. Grapes.
Woodchurch	<i>All Saints</i>	2	late C15th	Lozenge-shaped stylised foliage suggesting a late 16th-century date.

were 'to serve God and the Blessed Virgin Mary 'in perpetue'. Ralph elected five priests 'to live a communal life, wear white surplices and black copes in the manner of canons, to own no property'. The chancel was altered to accommodate the canons and it would appear that the five misericords still occupying the chancel were added then although it must be remembered that chancels were frequently re-ordered and it is possible that stalls have been renewed. However, they still retain their original wooden peg pivots. On the north wall of the Sanctuary is a charcoal sketch of five heads, possibly the five priests.

*Wingham* College was founded in 1282 by Archbishop Peckham for a master and six canons. Nine misericords of late thirteenth/early fourteenth century survive with five modern additions.

The chancel of *Cobham* was rebuilt in 1362 to accommodate a chantry college for a master and four chaplains. Its founder was John de Cobham. The college prospered and more were priests appointed. Eighteen stalls were inserted but now only one medieval misericord remains. In 1882 when the church was re-ordered stalls were repaired with fixed seats.

In 1371 Thomas Neve, Master of Eastbridge, Canterbury founded a chantry chapel in *St Nicholas Harbledown* and appointed a chaplain. One misericord remains as a return stall. The prayer desks and nave benches are also very old and Gardiner (1950) suggests they may be thirteenth-century when the chancel was rebuilt and so the misericord may be of this earlier date.

The college at *All Saints, Maidstone* was founded in 1395 by William de Courtney, Archbishop of Canterbury. There was to be a master and twenty four chaplains. Of the twenty-eight stalls, all originally enclosed under canopies, eighteen have survived. Four of these misericords have shields displaying the arms of the Courtney family, the archbishop and three of his five brothers (Fig. 6c).

The church of *St Mary the Virgin, Ashford* was rebuilt as a collegiate church in 1475 by Sir John Fogge to accommodate the priests at his



Fig. 1a Aldington, St Martin [S1]: supporters showing a crenulated two-storey gatehouse.



Fig. 1b Minster, St Mary [S5]: angels, as supporters, holding the 'John Curteys' scrolls; anonymous bearded man.



Fig. 1c Minster, St Mary [N5]: Woman wearing hennin which is hiding the devil; lion mask supporters.



Fig. 1d Minster, St Mary [N1]: the fox and goose; the old woman with distaff, cat and dog; simpleton head ?

college. It appears that although the college was built it was never formally issued with a licence from the king, as was required. By then chantries were being suppressed but sixteen misericords were installed and still remain.

Misericords could be installed into parish churches to provide suitable seating for visiting dignitaries. The monks of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury installed fourteen misericords into *St Mary Lenham* during the fourteenth century. These have the appearance of simple village carpentry but their age is testified by the beautiful and varied handmade iron hinges still complete with handmade nails. They are all of similar design of a moulded capital.

In the fourteenth century the Hundred Court was held every third Monday in the church of *St Clement, Sandwich*. The annual Mayor Making also took place here. Stalls were probably installed then to accommodate the mayor and jurors. Of the fourteen stalls just one misericord remains.

*St Martin, Aldington* is a parish church with a fine fourteenth-century sedilia; misericords survive as six return stalls out of an original twenty stalls. The choir stalls were introduced into the church about the time in the late fifteenth century when Archbishop Moreton was a frequent visitor to his comfortable manor house at Aldington suggesting the archbishop was attending mass in the parish church. The deeply moulded, scalloped six-sided misericords support this date. Of the six return stalls, five are decorated with conventional foliage but the sixth [S1],<sup>3</sup> presumably a reference to the archbishop has an unusual scene of rib vaulting resting on three deeply moulded corbels suggesting a link with cathedral architecture. The supporters<sup>4</sup> each show a crenulated two storey gatehouse between two round towers with lancet windows and pointed arches, a quatrefoil above the gate. The gatehouse on the left supporter has a closed gate but in that on the right the portcullis is raised (Fig. 1a). Do these gatehouses represent a mind closed to the word of God, opened by hearing the scriptures? Or simply the entrance into Christchurch Cathedral and the Archbishop's palace?

In Kent at the time of the Dissolution St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury and Holy Saviour Abbey Faversham were carefully dismantled and valuable stone, lead, glass and tiles sold off. Eleven of the sixteen misericords in *St Mary of Charity, Faversham*, were most likely brought into the parish church from the abbey. With the dispersal of misericords *All Saints, Woodchurch* and *St Michael and All Angels, Throwley*, appear to have received these generous gifts in the sixteenth century for the use of visiting dignitaries.

The Victorians collected and refurbished stalls scattered around the church and restored them to the choir as at *Throwley* and *St Martin, Herne*. At the latter a new set of six misericords were carved to complement the six medieval stalls. Similarly new misericords were added at *Faversham*, and *St Mary the Virgin, Wingham*. Over time many misericords have been lost through woodworm, dry rot and general neglect.



Two Kentish churches provide us with a more direct clue as to the benefactor. At *St Mary the Virgin, Minster in Thanet* one of the misericords [S5] has angels, clothed in feathers as supporters.<sup>4</sup> Above each angel is a scroll with the words 'Johanes' in the left and 'Curteys' to the right. John Curteys was the parish priest from 1401 to 1419. There are eighteen beautifully carved stalls with fine desk fronts, decorated arm rests and bench ends, all dating to the stewardship of John Curteys. The central corbel portrays the head of a bearded man, wearing a round cap. The man represented is probably not John Curteys as the clergy had to be clean shaven (Fig. 1b).

At *Herne*, there is a monumental brass in the Lady Chapel recording that Andrew Benstede, vicar from 1511 to 1532, had restored the choir. 'This choir was unsightly, now it is seemly. I am the Andrew who adorned it'. He seems to have been commemorated in the misericords where two seats [S1, S4] have the cross of St Andrew on a shield held by an angel or as supporters (Fig. 6a). Seat [S6] shows another Angel reading from a scroll as the central theme with saltires in the supporters. The angel is perhaps reciting the good works of the vicar on his arrival in heaven.

Heraldry can pinpoint a family connection as at *Minster*, and *All Saints, Maidstone*, and so propose a date. At *Minster*, the arms of the Manston family of Manston Court [N9, N7], St Nicholas de Wade [N6] and the Blaxland [N4] families are all represented on the fifteenth-century misericords. William Manston (c.1375-1440) fought at Agincourt and later became Sheriff of Kent. His brother Nicholas de Wade is also represented, his family mausoleum is behind the stalls in the chapel. At *All Saints, Maidstone*, the arms of the de Courtney family are represented on four early fifteenth-century misericords [S10, 9, 7, 3]. They represent William de Courtney, Archbishop of Canterbury (1381-96), and three of his brothers, Thomas, Edward and Philip. When the college was founded the original church, dedicated to St Mary was demolished and the new church rededicated to All Saints. The last rector of St Mary's, Guido de Mono (1395), is represented by his shield [N1]. There is also a shield displaying the arms of Canterbury [N8]. At *Sandwich*, there is just one fifteenth-century misericord remaining out of the original fourteen depicting unidentified arms.

Without positive dating or use of heraldry, dating can be suggested by the study of developments in the design of the ledge beneath the seat. The earliest thirteenth to early fourteenth century examples were very simple semi-oval flat seats as at *Harbledown, Ulcombe, and Wingham*. The flat ledge became dished and the edge rounded making the seat more comfortable. These three are probably the earliest in Kent. None have supporters.

At *St Helen, Cliffe at Hoo*, the central slender corbel ends in a grotesque face contained within a roundel (Fig. 4a) Shallow moulding appears

ending at each side with stylised foliage roundels close to the upper edge. These roundels gradually evolved into supporters. This British fashion rarely occurs on continental misericords. Initially the supporters on either side of the central carved corbel were simple leaves as at *Cliffe* or trefoils representing the Trinity. From the late fourteenth century the central corbel became more highly decorated and the supporters also increased in size. They became works of art spiralling down in an artistic flourish becoming an integral part of the design in their own right. Heads, animals and birds feature as at *Minster in Thanet*, where the supporters have plump fowls sitting on nests awaiting the cook's call from the central corbel [S4]. At *Ashford*, acorns adorn the supporters tempting the hungry pigs in the centre [N8].

At this time the ledge became thicker and heavier so the depth and number of mouldings on the seat edge increased although the front edge was still straight. By the Decorated period in the early fifteenth century, not only was the seat still deeply moulded but the shape also changed with a faceted or scalloped edge. At *Maidstone*, the misericords are semi-octagons, at *Minster in Thanet*, they have increased to five facets (semi-decagons). In the late fifteenth century this number increases again to six facets (semi-dodecagons) with a point in the centre front as in *Ashford*, *Woodchurch* and *Aldington*.

Changes over time of decorative foliage, armour, clothing, shoes and even hairstyles can also suggest a general date. The head-dresses worn by women can be used to suggest an approximate date. Whereas at *Wingham*, the early fourteenth-century woman is wearing a plain wimple with a pleated front [N3] (Fig. 4b) there are several very good examples of the hennin at *Minster in Thanet* [N5, N10]. This head-dress was popular in the early fifteenth century (Fig. 1c).

#### THEMES

The themes shown in misericords give us an insight into the imagination and the often lively sense of fun of the medieval wood carver. A wide range of subjects is covered all suggesting the preoccupations of the time. The images each have a meaning, sometimes moral, sometimes spiritual. It is uncertain who made the final selection of theme. The patron would want his commission to demonstrate his status, wealth and piety. The carver had more freedom to be creative, displaying his skill and imagination.

Nationally, although almost half of the carvings are of foliage another popular theme is animals, central to a quarter of all misericords. Both everyday and fearsome imaginary creatures appear. Other themes are from the bible or scenes of every-day life at home, at work or at leisure but the scenes are more often profane than religious. Medieval romance and love are often shown from a satirical stance. Jesters are shown as



A



B



C



D

Fig. 2a Ashford, St Mary the Virgin [N8]: pigs and acorns. Fig. 2b Minster, St Mary [S4]: the elderly, bearded cook stirring a small pot set on a trivet. Fig. 2c Ashford, St Mary the Virgin [S8]: pelican with three fledgelings. Fig. 2d Maidstone, All Saints [N6]: the cook with flesh hook and a small ladle.

pantomime figures. Tales from mythology, folk stories, legends, moral allegories, cautionary tales, fables, proverbs and puns all appear. Portrait heads on supporters are often very expressive, some possibly taken from life.

Many designs are unique but others re-appear in various forms. It is likely that the carver worked from existing Norman stone carvings or drawings from chronicles, illuminated manuscripts or design books. Favourite topics were taken from the small roundels in the margins of manuscripts. These designs often taken from the *Bestiary*, a compendium of creatures based on the second-century AD *Physiologus*.<sup>5</sup> By the late fifteenth century religious books, such as *The Book of Hours*, were being printed and published in Germany and France, with woodcut illustrations in the margins. Two misericords at *Throwley*, [S1, S2] can be linked directly to margin illustrations of woodcuts in a book published by Theilmann Kerver in Paris between 1470 and 1520. These illustrations re-occur in a coloured drawing in an English pattern book of c.1520-30 (now in the Bodleian Library).

One woodcut shows three naked, tonsured men, possibly monks, being chased by a dragon, which has a second face emerging from its chest, both mouths belching flames, suggesting the flames of hell and damnation awaiting sinful man. The *Throwley* misericord [S1] is an amended copy of this design, carved in reverse having just one nude boy running away from the beast, his arm raised, shielding his face from the flames that already engulf his feet (Fig. 5d). His body is contorted in fear. The winged creature, wings aloft, has clawed feet with a scaly body. Its head has been sliced away but a second large head emerges from its chest.

A second illustration in the pattern book shows a feathered naked man, perhaps a wodehouse, yielding a stick in one hand and holding on to the tail of an exotic quadruped with the other. The animal prancing along in a lively fashion has cloven feet, a long tail and a mane of hair around its neck. Its face is dragon-like. Astride the animal sits an ape on a saddle in the form of a sack. At *Throwley* [S2] is a similar scene (Fig. 5b).<sup>6</sup> The rider being an ape, unfortunately defaced but still riding on a sack. The quadruped is a powerful thick-set beast with a rodent-like head, a thick mane, short legs and is cloven hoofed. The feathered naked runner is also damaged but enough remains to suggest a muscular male figure running behind the animal. His arm is raised suggesting he is wielding a stick. Unfortunately the other arm and the creature's tail are both missing. The ape could symbolise carnal passions and the man in the nude, following close to the horse's tail could indicate sinful behaviour. Grossinger (1997) suggests that this is a very accurate copy of the Kerver print. She points out that even the plant with a developed seed pod is included in the background.

The patron or chapter would possibly propose designs appropriate to

their church such as the supposed heron at *Herne*, as well as commissioning new designs. Each collection is unique, perhaps commenting on local issues, political allegiances or the family of the patron. Often the subject was secular and satirical. A popular theme was the battle between the sexes, rarely was any tenderness or courtship shown.

The priesthood is often represented as a cunning fox leading his flock, shown as geese, astray. Reynard the fox, easily interpreted by the medieval man as the priest, or more probably a friar, is eventually hanged by pigs.

A recurring theme is the temptation of the devil who is ever present in various guises. At *Minster in Thanet* the devil Tutivillus is lodged between the horns of a hennin worn by the fashionably dressed lady leading her thoughts astray [N5] (Fig. 1c).

### Biblical

Sacred themes, so common in the nave on paintings, glass and statuary to educate the congregation, are comparatively rare in misericords – probably it was considered inappropriate to place one's bottom on a sacred scene. There are three examples of a possible religious subject in Kent – at *Minster in Thanet*, there is a misericord [S1] of a head of a man with long hair and a beard. It is a compassionate face, believed to be the head of Christ who is usually shown with a full beard. Also it does not follow the medieval convention of showing the head with a halo. The bearded heads in the supporters are suggested as the two thieves crucified with Christ. However, the thieves are usually shown with heads turned towards Christ as a symbol of repentance but these two have turned their faces away from the Christ figure. Could they be instead friars who have turned their back on truth? Yet they look too villainous to be men of God. A second similar head (S7) looking sideways could represent Christ or possibly St George. There was a gilded image of St George at the Minster at this period. The dragon supporters confirm ever present evil, overcome by Christ. Another possible religious reference is at *Faversham* where a Janus head [N7] might be a reference to the Trinity.

There are no representations of lives of the saints in Kent. Surprisingly nowhere in Kent is a misericord portraying the murder of Thomas Beckett.<sup>7</sup>

### Angels

Angels, usually half-length, feature frequently on misericords. They might be shown feathered, their wings outspread or in flowing robes. Their hair being braided often wearing a coronet. They may be holding a scroll, a book, a shield or playing a musical instrument. The shield may be blank or displaying the arms of a local family. All of these feature in the misericords at *Minster, Faversham and Herne*.

The earliest angels are at *Minster*, where seven early fifteenth-century angels can be seen. An angel [N3], her hair appearing as a halo, holds an uncharged shield. On another misericord [N6] the image is reversed with a central uncharged shield bearing the arms of the St Nicholas (at Wade) family. Demi-angels act as supporters each also holding a blank shield. The third demi-angel [S8], wearing a long sleeved mantle with cuffs, fastened at the neck and a belt at the waist is playing a cithern, favoured by angels although sometimes they played viols or lyres. The supporters each have a lion mask with a pig's snout inferring boldness and ignorance of the beasts until with the aid of their large ears they are able to hear the gospel through music. On another misericord (S5), the supporters are feather-clad demi-angels, scrolls encircling them. The left-hand scroll is inscribed 'Johanes' the right-hand 'Curteys'. This referring to John Curteys (Rector 1401-1419) who commissioned and probably paid for the choir stalls complete with misericords and is thus commemorated (Fig. 1b). Finally, a feather clad angel [S2] holds a scroll inscribed with *I.H.C.*, Greek for *Jesus*.

At *Faversham*, two misericords depict the same angel [N8, S8]. In both a demi-winged angel with a very round face and flowing wavy hair held in a narrow ribbon, wears a collared robe with long sleeves clutching the top portion of a shield.

At *Herne*, there are three angels. All are full length, wearing a long sleeved robe fastened at the neck. Their flowing hair is held back by a coronet and they have very large solid looking outspread wings. Wings appear to be a speciality at Herne because three birds (either herons or ducks) and a charming bat also have wings constructed in a very similar way. The first angel [S4] holds a plain shield whilst the supporters show the cross of St Andrew in a shield. The second [S6] is reading from a scroll though it is not possible to read the script on the cover. The supporters again have the cross of St Andrew suggesting that the cross is a tribute to Andrew Benstede, the vicar and also proposing a date about 1532 for the installation of the misericords. A third misericord [S1] showing the head and shoulders of a winged angel holding a large cross of St Andrew also seems connected to this generous vicar (Fig. 6a).

At *Throwley* a defaced angel [S3] is traditionally dressed in a round-necked robe; hair framing the face and wings raised behind. The angel appears to be holding a shield (missing). The supporters continue the religious theme with lambs suggesting Christ, the Lamb of God, the Agnes Dei.

#### Everyday life/Domestic Scenes

It is not surprising that the pattern of rural life features prominently. Scenes of agricultural labour are copied from the calendars of twelfth-



Fig. 3a Faversham, St Mary of Charity [N3]: the jester with bagpipe. Fig. 3b Faversham, St Mary of Charity [N7]: the janus heads – a reference to the Trinity?; or a pagan figure able to see past, present and future? Fig. 3c Faversham, St Mary of Charity [N6]: the chained ape. Fig. 3d Faversham, St Mary of Charity [S6]: the wodehouse and griffin battle.

century Psalters that set out the year's occupations as the Labours of the Month. The autumnal scenes in the Calendars usually included the fattening of pigs in the woods as shown in *Ashford* [N8]. The misericord at Ashford is beautifully carved with the three pigs feeding hungrily on acorns beneath the oak tree (Fig. 2a). An old woman sitting comfortably with her pets at *Minster* [N1] might represent Winter (Fig. 1d). These are rare examples of scenes from Labours of the Month in Kent churches.

Human figures are sometimes manipulated to fit the misericord, as at *Faversham*, where both the wodehouse [N1] and the jester [N3] (Fig. 3a) both appear to be kneeling with a foot stretched out behind them. Some heads are surely taken from people known to the carver, perhaps the friendly man on another Faversham misericord.

The domestic occupations featured can be the churning of butter, chopping logs or fanning the fire. Kitchens were a rich source for the carver. At *Minster* where an elderly, bearded cook is stirring a small pot set on a trivet [S4]. He wears a long-sleeved full-skirted cassock suggesting he is the Abbey cook (Fig. 2b). His sensible round-toed shoes protect his feet. He raises his hand as though he is shouting orders. Behind him is a flat paddle used to remove bread from the oven and a basting ladle. The supporters show plump fowls sitting on nests, either supplying him with eggs or are they anxiously eyeing the pot?

At *Maidstone* a younger rotund cook [N6] is more fashionably dressed, wearing a cowl and a tight fitting jerkin has some very fine large round buttons and nicely scalloped cuffs (Fig. 2d). He is waving aloft his flesh hook and a small ladle. These are the only two cooks recorded by Remnant in his catalogue (Remnant 1969).

## Females

We cannot tell who chose the subject carved on misericords but many seem to reflect a generally misogynous priesthood. The attitude of the medieval church to women as portrayed on misericords is very revealing hinting at the moral dilemmas of the clergy. The battle of the sexes is a popular theme with women shown as aggressive, husband-beating creatures. Rarely is a pretty woman shown. Perhaps a rare exception being the gentle motherly face at *Wingham* [N3] (Fig. 4b). Women are denounced by the priests as monsters who disturb the tranquillity of the home. Women are deceitful gossipers, argumentative, lustful and abusive, pre-disposed to sinfulness. The devil was said to lurk under fashionable clothing, the hennin being the worst. At *Minster* [N5] a frowning woman wearing an extremely large hennin has Tutivillus sitting comfortably tempting her thoughts to stray from her devotions (Fig. 1c).<sup>8</sup> He had the specific task of listening to gossips, idle talk and slanderous comments within a church. He also recorded mistakes made by the priest who might mumble through mass or make mistakes in



the litany. All these misdemeanours were noted down and stored in a sack until the Dreadful Day of Judgement. The supporters continue the theme by showing a lion mask with his tongue stuck out, suggesting the tongue of slander is a likely outcome. A second misericord at *Minster* [N10] shows three bird sirens all wearing hennins. The two siren supporters also have a serpent coiled around their bodies. The serpent is associated with the Garden of Eden tempting Eve into sin so we have the double warning against gossip and temptation to slander. Female tenderness is rarely shown so it is refreshing to see the old woman at *Minster* [N1] with a distaff in her hand, her cat and dog on either side of her as she takes her ease (Fig. 1d). Is there a slight sting in the tail, though, as the cat is a symbol of sloth, one of the seven deadly sins. In one of the supporters a fox is running off with a goose. Is this critical of her inattention, failing in her domestic duty to safeguard her flock of geese? Many women are shown with distaff in their hand although images of sheep and the wool trade, on which medieval England depended, are surprisingly rare.

### Fashion

The evolution of medieval fashions, particularly of headwear, is a popular study. The style of armour, especially helmet types, can suggest an approximate date; unfortunately there are no such depictions on Kentish misericords. The curly-haired, bearded man wears a round cap on a misericord at *Minster* [S5]. This cap, worn by pilgrims, was probably fashionable at the time the misericord was carved c. 1410 (Fig. 1b). Similar early fifteenth-century headgear is seen at *Maidstone*. An impressive head [S1] wears a round cap. His strong, handsome face framed by a splendid beard and hair. In another, a boy [N5] is wearing a simple round cap, once again with curly hair escaping from it.

By the end of the fifteenth century the style has changed as at *Faversham* [N2]. A chubby faced but clean shaven man's head is shown wearing a late fifteenth-century Tudor-style cap with curly hair emerging from it. Rather specialist headwear is worn by the jester [N3] at *Faversham*. His cap has a pretty scalloped edge with his wavy hair escaping beneath it. His body appears to be in a crouching recumbent position with a leg appearing awkwardly to his right side. He is playing a bagpipe (Fig. 3a). His right hand holds a five-hole chanter. The bag, held beneath the left arm, is feathered ending with a tail. This is a visual joke beloved by medieval craftsmen. It is rare for jesters to play bagpipes.<sup>9</sup>

### Heads, Portraits, Grotesques and Foliate masks

Various heads are portrayed on misericords at *Cliffe* (2), *Faversham* (2), *Maidstone* (2) and *Minster in Thanet* (4 + 3 supporters). Some heads are

quite realistic, possibly taken from local figures. At Faversham a round-faced man with a kind expression could be someone we could meet along West Street today. The two men at *Maidstone* [N3, S1] and the six *Minster* faces [S1 (+ 2 supporters), S5, S6, S7] are more stylistic and could all have been taken from a book of designs. They are all deeply carved, four are heavily bearded, the medieval sign of virility and honour.

In Design A, appearing at *Maidstone* and *Minster*, the head, wearing a round brimmed hat, has thick wavy hair continuing down to a full beard. The features are strong with deep-set open eyes, a narrow nose with wide nostrils and a sensual mouth. Both faces suggest a kind nature.

Design B has short curly hair and the beard trimmed into a *pard*, the fashion worn by Henry IV (1399-1413, shown on his tomb in Canterbury Cathedral). The face has a furrowed heavy brow, eyes drilled to make them appear more piercing, a narrow nose, a moustache and a forked beard. This more compassionate face can be seen at *Maidstone* and twice at *Minster*, one turning to the side. It has been proposed that this is the face of Christ although it does not follow the medieval convention of showing the head of Christ with a halo.

The heads in the supporters of one of the misericords at *Minster* [S1] have thick, heavy set faces with high cheek bones, deep set open eyes and pronounced nose. They have short curly hair and a short beard. They look vicious and threatening and it is suggested they might represent the thieves crucified beside Christ or miscreant friars.

A fifth face at *Minster* (N1), as a supporter, is less well portrayed. The large mouth dominates; it is wide open with the tongue showing. The figure appears to be wearing some form of head covering with a semi-circular badge in the front and a bobble on top (Fig. 1d). His hair is brushed neatly back. Perhaps he is the village simpleton who should be guarding the geese shown in the opposite supporter being taken by a fox?

The sixth face at *Minster* (S3) has variously been described as a foliate head, or a 'Green Man'. The face is younger, possibly female and looking down instead of straight ahead as in the previous heads. The brow is still deeply furrowed, the mouth is smaller and there is no sign of a beard instead it is surrounded by foliage. Over the head is a large leaf held in place by a thin straight pin that has three beads placed equidistantly. Foliage comes from the mouth. An alternative suggestion has been made that this represents a young woman wearing a scold's bridle. The iron bit of the bridle emerging from her mouth.

A foliate head can also be seen at *Wingham* [N4] where a cheerful face with a fringe of hair grins confidently out at us from surrounding oak leaves. Leaves flow from his mouth. He displays splendid set of teeth and his tongue is mocking us (Fig. 4d).

An interesting image at Faversham has a bearded triple-faced man

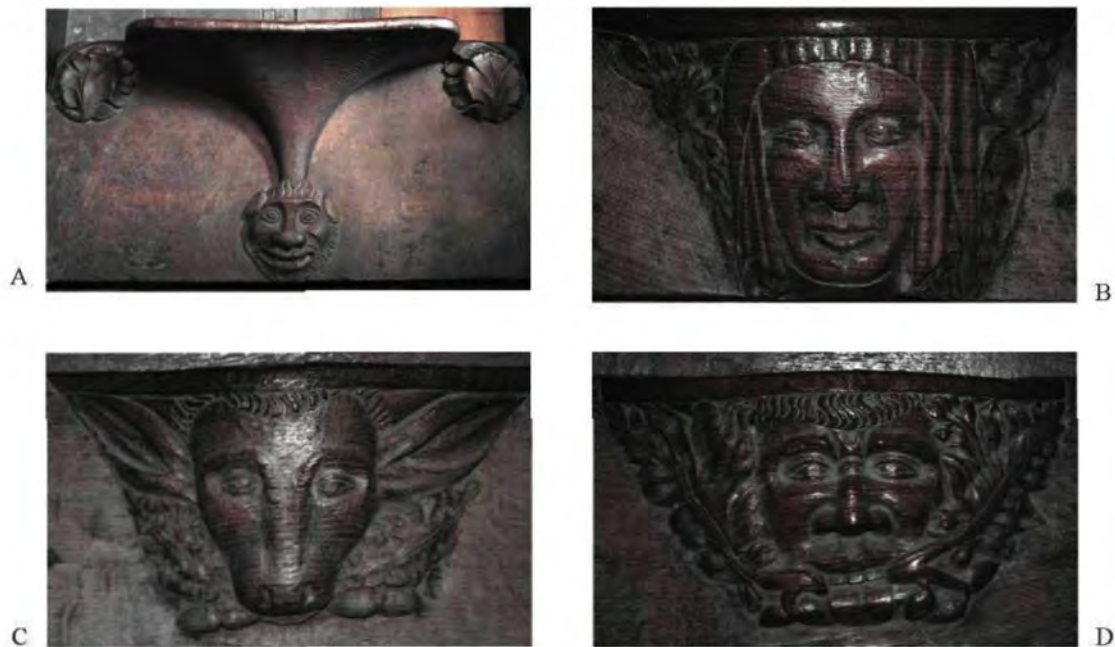


Fig. 4a Cliffe, St Helen [N1]: the grotesque face. Fig. 4b Wingham, St Mary [N3]: woman wearing a plain wimple with pleated front. Fig. 4c Wingham, St Mary [N1]: the mule's ears reach up to the seat. Fig. 4d Wingham, St Mary [N4]: the grinning foliate head.

wearing a round brimmed hat [N7] (Fig. 3b). He has four eyes, three noses and three mouths. This suggests a pagan Janus figure able to see the past, the present and the future, adopted by the Julian Calendar for the month of January. Alternatively it could be suggested it represents the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The triple face is unusual, the only other example given by Remnant is at Cartmel Priory, Lancashire.

The grotesque faces at *Cliffe at Hoo* each have a cheerful round grinning face with deep set open eyes under a pronounced brow, a fleshy bulbous nose; the tongue is out. The head is bearded with short straight hair standing on end from which project pointed upright ear (Fig. 4a).

#### Birds and Beasts: Real and Imaginary.

Animals were a rich source of imagery for the medieval craftsman. Mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and invertebrates all appear in some form or other throughout the record. Designs were taken from the Bestiary, illustrations in chronicles, illuminated manuscripts or books. Carvings of exotic animals like elephants or camels might not be anatomically correct. The royal sport of hunting is represented by stags, boars, foxes, dogs, and horses. To make the carving fit the available space some of the animals are stylised although many others are carved very realistically.

An *ape*, crestfallen and chained holding a flask of urine upside-down is depicted at *Faversham* [N6] (Fig. 3c). The chained ape represents humanity tied to animal passions. The flask is a satire on quack doctors who were said to be as untrustworthy as monkeys and held in low esteem by medieval man.

A headless figure is seen at *Throwley* [S2]. It is presumed to be an ape, riding a quadruped (Fig. 5b). In the Bestiary it is proposed that man was made a little lower than the angels. Beneath him is the ape. He was cowardly, lecherous and ugly. Apes are often shown playing pipes and flutes, thereby disrupting worship in the church. The animal reputedly came from Egypt – a place of sin until rescued by Christ.

*Bats* are associated with the works of darkness. They have committed the sin of presumption by venturing out into a sphere for which they were not designed.<sup>10</sup> At *Herne* [S2] a startled bat swoops out of the misericord attempting a forced landing, back legs braced, claws extended with wings in frantic action. The veining on the wings is carefully observed (Fig. 6b).

The *camel*, when it kneels down to receive its load, symbolises Christ's humility in taking on the sins of the world. Therefore, on most misericords it is seen kneeling. The camel at *Faversham* [S1] has a large hairy hump and is shown lying down. The carver would be aware that a hairy hump was the defining feature so might place one on the back of another creature, bearing no resemblance to the camel. The *Faversham*

face is more like that of a monkey suggesting the carver had never seen a living camel but was working from an illustration.

*Dolphins* are marine mammals and usually shown as a single large animal cresting the waves. They were welcomed by sailors as a good omen becoming a symbol of Salvation or as a symbol of eternity curved into a circle with tails in their mouths. Traditionally dolphins could sing and loved music. At *Minster in Thanet* [N4], they appear as supporters, tails in mouth.

The creatures, presumably *donkeys, asses or mules*, carved onto two misericords at *Wingham*, have long ears reaching out to the edge of the seat (Fig. 4c), for the *Wingham* misericords do not have supporters. They are not the alert, erect ears of a horse but of an altogether more docile, almost sleepy animal. Asses ears were worn by fools and jesters and feature in Mystery plays. Although similar they are not carved by the same hand – one being much crisper with well-defined features. The mane of one [N1] stands bushy and erect, the nose straight and slender, looking almost human. The other [S8] has a shorter, curly mane with a flatter equine nose. Both are munching on acorns.

The power of the *eagle* is shown as he soars directly towards the sun. As the eagle grows older he flies even higher until his feathers scorch and the heat burns the membrane of his eyes. He plunges into a fountain to restore strength to his wings and clarity to his eyes. This makes a parallel with Baptism as a new beginning into the spiritual life. The eagle is the emblem of St John and his gospel which is why the eagle often appears on lecterns and fonts. The Bestiary suggests the eagle can see fish swimming below and will dive down to catch them, just as Christ came down to earth to capture the souls of men. In the double-headed form the eagle represents the Holy Spirit through power and victory. At *Minster in Thanet* the Blaxland family crest [N4] has this double form. The birds have bald heads with ferocious beaks, feathered legs, strong powerful feet with sharp talons and the characteristic wedge-shaped tail.

*Foxes* are frequently portrayed on misericords, often running off with a goose. In the Bestiary he symbolises the Devil, lying in wait for unsuspecting prey. He is said to lie on his back pretending to be dead until some creature, out of curiosity, approaches too close and is caught. In folk tales there were many stories about Reynard the Fox. He always 'got away with murder'. He might be shown as a cowled friar preaching to gullible women portrayed as geese. The preaching friars often attracted larger congregations than the parish churches causing friction.

*Geese* do not feature very often on misericords. They have no mention in the bible although the Bestiary suggests they are watchful, having saved Rome by their alarm calls. Wild geese fly in 'V' formation high across the sky symbolising those who live a holy ordered life. Geese rarely are portrayed alone but often being carried off by a fox, this being

the outcome of those who listen to unworthy friars. They do occur twice in Kent, each time the unfortunate victims of a fox. The *Faversham* fox [S2] is in the act of running off holding the plump goose firmly by the neck. Beneath his feet two other geese are trampled, presumably also dead. At *Minster* [N1] a similar scene is shown in a supporter.

A rather unrealistic horned *hart* with collar and chain is shown at *Minster* [N8], panting as it attempts to leap some obstacle. Generally a white hart, symbolising Christ, is recognised as the badge of Richard II. At *Minster*, however, it has a rather special meaning. It is reference to the pet hart of Domneva, widowed Queen of Mercia, a Kentish princess, great grand-daughter of King Ethelberht. Legend tells how in c.699 her two brothers were killed at the court of their cousin, Egberht of Kent, in Eastry. Domneva, instead of claiming 'blood-money' asked for land in Thanet to found a nunnery. It was proposed by King Egberht that all of the land that was encompassed by her hind in one day should decide the area. The amazing creature encompassed ten thousand acres. This depiction is unique to *Minster*.

According to the *Bestiary*, the *heron* symbolises the ideal person whose soul rejoices in eternal life. As the heron flies so high it is a symbol of the souls of the chosen to enter the kingdom of God. A heron also builds his nest at the top of trees but feeds in water suggesting a person taking nourishment from the present but with their heads in the clouds. They fly above the storms to the peace of heaven where they look upon the face of God. Herons have a crest on their head, a long beak, a long neck and long slender legs. The heron shown on the medieval misericord at *Herne* [S5] hardly fits this description, it is more duck-like. The carver was no ornithologist. It is more likely a play on the name of the parish. The bird is alighting on water; its wings braced giving a feeling of motion. The supporters are of interest. According to Laird (1986) they show the earliest ornamental leg-bands yet recorded. Herons were captured, leg rings fitted before the unharmed heron was released back into the wild. He suggests the earliest recorded recovery date for such a ring is 1710 yet the misericord pre-dates this by two hundred years. In the sixteenth century the royal swans were ringed but it is unclear why herons would be thus marked.

*Lambs* appear at *Throwley* [S3] supporting an angel. They suggest the *Agnus Dei*, Christ as the Lamb of God.

The *lion* is given a whole range of characteristics in the *Bestiary*, both good and bad. The lion was watchful as he slept with eyes open, being on guard even whilst asleep. He guarded against the devil that tempted man into sin. Should the dreadful day of Judgement arrive, the lion would be the first to make us aware of its dawning. Medieval tombs depicting a knight are often shown with feet resting on a watchful lion, also the symbol of nobility and valour. It was thought that lionesses gave birth through their mouths to dead cubs that were only resuscitated after three days by the

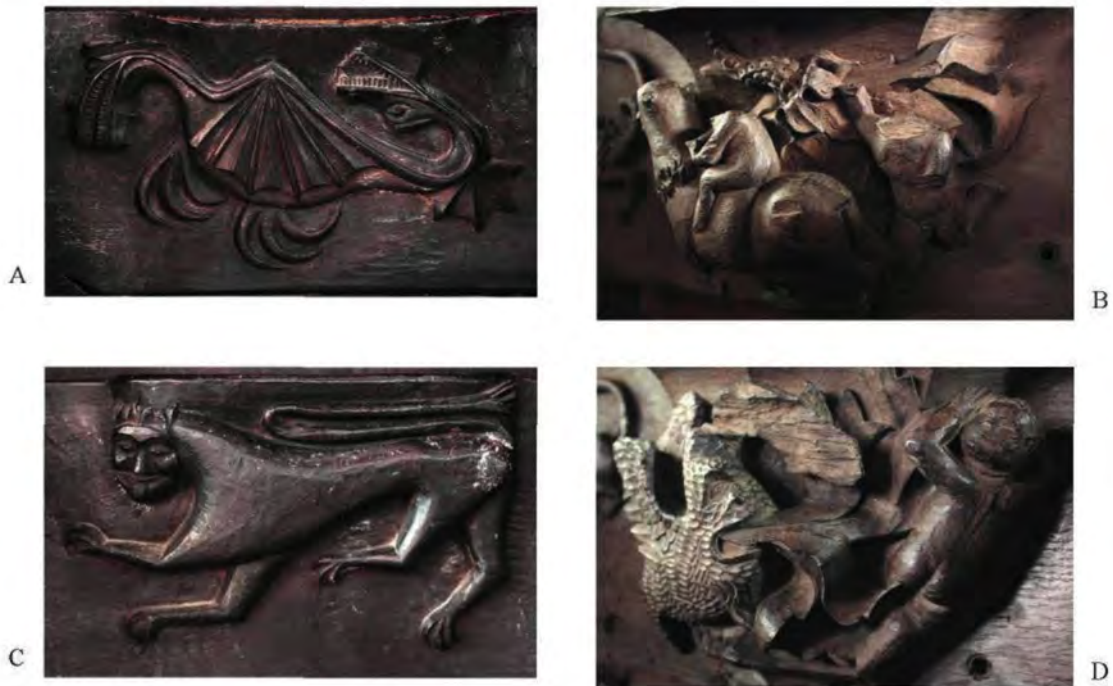


Fig. 5a Ulcombe, All Saints [S4]: the two headed amphisbaena. Fig. 5b Throwley, St Michael and All Angels [S2]: ape, quadruped and naked male. Fig. 5c Ulcombe, All Saints [S5]: the mantichora man-eater. Fig. 5d Throwley, St Michael and All Angels [S1]: nude boy running from dragon, shielding his face from the flames.

licking and roaring of their parents. This appears to be a reference to God who resurrected Christ after three days. One bad attribute is when the lion is shown as a mask with his tongue out suggesting the voice of slander. This symbol occurs at *Minster* [N5] where both lion supporters, alert with pricked ears confirm slanderous thoughts of the central figure of a woman wearing a hennin. Conversely, also at *Minster* an angel playing a cithern [S8] is attempting to channel thoughts of the listeners back to god. The two lion supporters with splendid manes, eyes wide open and very large ears are listening but their tongues are not out so perhaps the music is having the desired effect. They must have previously sinned for their noses are spotted with sin.

Almost identical lion masks supporters are on another misericord at *Minster* [S6] but this time their tongues are definitely extended as they listen to the central figure of a man. He could be suggested as a friar preaching to the gullible congregation. The slanderous theme continues at *Maidstone* where three lions grace a misericord, in the centre and both supporters being lion's heads with protruding tongues [N10]. Lions occur on heraldry, as at *Faversham* where a lion appears in two similar misericords at the top of a shield held by an angel [N8, S8]. The lion with a raised right paw faces out as he follows a ram. A pair of lions with splendid manes support a misericord [S1] at *Throwley*.

The *pelican* in piety is a very popular image in the medieval church. The pelican is a loving parent but the young birds become rebellious and strike their parents in the face. The parents, in a moment of exasperation, strike back and are provoked into killing their own young. Afterwards the female, full of remorse, brings back to life the fledglings with blood from her own breast. The pelican, often with no resemblance to the actual bird, is usually shown standing over her nest of chicks, plucking her breast to allow her blood to restore them. The pelican in piety symbolises man's redemption through the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ paying for our sins so we can live again. Pelicans appear on more misericords than any other identifiable bird in spite of rarely being shown naturalistically. At *Ashford* [S8], the pelican is shown pecking at her breast with her three fledglings in the nest watching intently (Fig. 2c). On either side other pelicans watch from their nest of carefully constructed twigs.

Medieval craftsmen appeared to enjoy carving *pigs*. They are always shown very realistically if in unusual guises. Sometimes the scene is quite naturalistic with the sow suckling her young. The most popular scene is taken from manuscript drawings in the Calendars of Labours of the Month. In October pigs are seen feeding in oak woodland on the acorns prior to being slaughtered in the following month. At *Ashford* one misericord [N8] has a beautifully carved three-dimensional oak tree with three charming piglets feeding on acorns at its base (Fig. 2a).

The *wolf* was a cunning hunter. He always approached his prey upwind



and should he tread on and snap a twig he would bite the offending foot as punishment. A wolf in sheep's clothing symbolises the devil prowling around the church trying to capture souls. The wolf at *Faversham* [S7] is not only licking his foot but he is also disguised under sheep's clothing.

### Moral Allegories and Mythological Animals from the Bestiary

Moral allegories occur frequently in wall paintings but rarely appear on misericords. The Doom paintings of The Dance of Death, Three Living and Three Dead, would have been vividly portrayed over the chancel arch in the nave. St Peter would be weighing the souls of the dead whilst the Satan, with his list, would be eagerly gathering in his own flock.

The allegorical themes on misericords with their mythological animals are often taken from the medieval Bestiary. The beast represents a characteristic such as sin, foolishness or greed. Mythical beasts appear – the griffin, wyvern and dragon, Satan in the form of Tutivillus.

The *amphisbaena* is a mythological serpent or lizard with two heads, one at either end of its body. Only one head slept at a time. Each neck is equal in length. It can run in either direction. Its eyes shine like lamps; it has no fear of cold. The *amphisbaena* is sometimes shown with wings and two scaly feet, somewhat like chicken's feet. It is an example of deceit shown by people leading a double life. This rare symbolic creature appears twice at *Ulcombe* [S4, S5]. The fierce, two headed creature has multiple teeth, large eyes, equal length necks, wings and two claw-like feet (Fig. 5a). From one head a tongue protrudes.

The *manticore* is a man-eating lion or tiger. This other rare symbol also occurs at *Ulcombe* [S5]. It is a legendary composite creature from the Bestiary similar to the Egyptian sphinx. The body is that of a red lion, the tail has poisonous spines that it can shoot as a scorpion to kill or paralyse its victim. It can leap great distances, run very fast with its strong muscular legs and is always ready to pounce on man, whose flesh it eats, leaving no bones, clothes or possessions behind. It sometimes has wings. It has the voice of a siren that can seduce individuals from the path of virtue. There are many interpretations of the form of the *manticore* but can be identified by its human face (Fig. 5c).

The *dragon* is the largest winged, four footed serpent, breathing out fire. Christianity used the dragon to represent Satan in the fight between good and evil. Three saints of the Christian church fought and overcame the dragon – St Michael, St George and St Margaret. At *Throwley*, a winged dragon with a second head on its breast chases a naked boy [S1].

The *griffin* is a hybrid monster with an eagle head and wings with a lion's body and hindquarters. It was strong enough to carry off an ox, to attack horses and tear a man to pieces. A large griffin is shown attacking a wodehouse at *Faversham* [S6], its clawed paw clutching at the top of

the oval shield behind which the wodehouse is sheltering whilst thrusting his spear into the griffin's feathered breast (Fig. 3d). They did have the redeeming feature that they guarded the Tree of Life. The griffin could also be used as a symbol of Christ as he had the strength and nobility of a lion combined with the vision and ability to soar like an eagle.

*Wyverns* are fierce two-legged creatures, similar to the four-legged dragons. A pair spiral down as supporters [S2] at *Throwley*. They can also be seen in the form of roundels acting as supporters to two misericords at *Minster in Thanet*. Two different creatures are carved. In the first [S7] their tails are in their mouths. The head, in profile, is alert with ears pricked, eyes open. The scales are beautifully carved with the wings flat against their sides. The creatures are submissive to the central figure is proposed as being Christ who overcomes evil. In the second [S2] the heads face out boldly. The heads are very similar to the lion masks on other misericords at *Minster* with large pronounced ears, nostrils spotted by sin, faces framed by a fringe of hair. Their bodies appear to be feathered rather than covered in reptilian scales and their long curling tails tuck round their bodies. They are biting their shoulders.

The *siren* had an evil, deadly reputation. It is a composite with the head and breasts of a woman and the wings and body of a vulture. They lulled sailors to sleep with their singing only to tear them limb from limb and eat them. The siren or harpy later evolves into a mermaid. The three sirens at *St Mary, Minster in Thanet* [N10] are all wearing hennins and have serpents coiled about their bodies. They are a dire warning about slanderous gossip and temptation to sin.

The *wodehouse* (*wodewose* or *wodeman*) is the wild man of the forest, not to be confused with the Green Man. He is hairy apart from his face, hands and feet, he is sometimes dressed in skins. He frequently appears on misericords wielding a club or branch and fighting a dragon or lion. He symbolises great strength or passion but can be unpredictable, uncultured or unintelligible. He is innocent of wickedness. He could be likened to the Scandinavian god Thor, the mighty blacksmith with his hammer. The great strength of the wodewose can be used to guard the house and protect the family. At *Faversham* [S6] he fights a griffin. A naked man with a long beard protected behind a large convex shield that is decorated with bands radiating out from a large central boss. He wields a short spear that he is thrusting into the breast of the griffin. There is a second wodehouse at *Faversham* [N1] unfortunately with its nose damaged, kneeling with a foot stretched out behind him, holding a bough. His hair frames a strong face and he appears to be feathered rather than hairy.

## Foliage

Two-thirds of Kentish misericords are decorated with foliage, above the



Fig. 6a Herne, St Martin [S6]: the angel with the cross of St Andrew. Fig. 6b Herne, St Martin [S2]: the bat.  
 Fig. 6c Maidstone, All Saints [S10]: shield with arms of William de Courtney, Archbishop of Canterbury  
 (1381-96). Fig. 6d Ashford, St Mary [N5]: vine with cluster of grapes; vine leaves as supporters.

national average. Out of c.120 misericords recorded in the county, 72 have foliage. A study of the way foliage is depicted is a useful aid to dating.

The earliest foliage was stylised and conventional, based on stone carvings. It became more recognisable as the thirteenth century progressed with oak leaves and acorns, marguerites and roses carved in a very naturalistic style. By the fourteenth century foliage had become very rounded and bulbous with compound ogee curves in the decorated style as at *Cliffe*. Later in the fourteenth century the detailing on leaves had become more precise with veins depicted (Fig. 4a).

This naturalistic foliage went out of fashion in the fifteenth century and instead it became stylised again with lozenge-shaped or square foliage, with or without stalks. This is the most common depiction of foliage in Kent where most of the plants are unidentifiable and unspecific. At *Maidstone* (early fifteenth-century) nine out of twenty misericords have some foliage, mostly stylised but one with identifiable oak leaves [N7] and there are also two splendid sun-flowers [S4, S6]. At *Aldington* (c.1475) five of the six fifteenth-century misericords are of deeply undercut conventional foliage with foliate supporters. Similarly fifteen of the sixteen fifteenth-century misericords at *Ashford* display a variety of foliage. The misericords at *Woodchurch* have foliage with lozenge shaped stylised foliage very similar to those at *Ashford* (Fig. 6d), suggesting a fifteenth-century date. Foliage does not feature as a central theme at *Minster in Thanet* (c.1410) but five supporters have foliage, in two cases stylised roses.

Unsurprisingly, the most easily identifiable foliage in Kent is the oak leaf with acorns. It appears seven times at *Wingham* (early 14th) (Fig. 4c), at *Maidstone* and at *Ashford* where three beautifully carved pigs are feasting on acorns [N8] (Fig. 2a). Even the supporters have clusters of acorns to tempt the hungry pigs. The second recognisable plant is the vine with its accompanying clusters of grapes, for vines were tended on Kentish manors in the early medieval period although the deterioration of the weather later brought this to an end. *Ashford* and *Wingham* both have fat clusters of grapes. An attempt has been made at *Ashford* to identify the genus of plants although they are very stylised. It is proposed that the sycamore, juniper, cyprus and acanthus are represented as well as the oak and vine. Small rosettes appear as supporters at *Faversham*, *Herne* and *Minster*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is interesting to note that some new sets of misericords were commissioned in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *St Dunstan, Frinsted*, has a fine set of nineteenth-century stalls with misericords in the choir and a set of undecorated stalls, with fixed seats in the North Chapel

carved from local trees felled as result of the 1987 storm. There are two modern misericords in *St Michael and All Angels, Hartlip*. *St Nicholas, Southfleet*, suffered bomb damage in the Second World War and has modern furnishings including modern misericords.

In the twenty-first century we are bombarded with man-made images wherever we go. How different in the medieval period where the only place to experience these would be within the confines of the church. With many wall paintings now being revealed we can begin to appreciate the vivid work of the master craftsmen. Behind the medieval rood screen was a different space, perhaps we might liken it to a Gentleman's Club for it was a private place for the priests. Here would be a sense of community, of gossip and masculine humour. We find the meanings and images difficult to understand although they would be clear to the celebrants. They represent the humanity of the priesthood. Today much of the colour and mysticism has gone from our churches but this one link with the past remains for us to appreciate and enjoy in the shape of the misericords. We can admire the skill and be thankful for their survival.

*Editor's note: four misericords were removed from Holy Cross Church, Canterbury, when the City Council took over the church as their Guildhall in 1978. The seats now reside in the upper chapel of the Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury. The next volume of Archaeologia Cantiana will include an analysis of these remarkable examples.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This compares with 8 parish churches in Sussex and only 2 in Surrey according to G.L. Remnant.

<sup>2</sup> Three return stalls at *All Saint's Church, Maidstone* were moved and now stand at the back of the nave, sadly in a poor condition.

<sup>3</sup> The misericords are referred to using the numbering used by G.L. Remnant in *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (1969) starting at the east end, first on the north side and then on the south.

<sup>4</sup> This term was taken from heraldry means the decoration supporting the central carved theme.

<sup>5</sup> The *Physiologus* is a second-century Greek compilation of beasts, birds and amphibians. The chapters are divided into two sections. The first is descriptive of the creature; the second proposes a moral or allegorical interpretation of it. These creatures, all part of God's creation represent the land, the sea or air, symbolising Christ, the devil or man's quest for the attainment of eternal peace. By the medieval period encyclopaedic Bestiaries were produced.

<sup>6</sup> In the Bodleian Library version the animal has become a donkey and the ape is playing the drum and pipe, followed by a fox playing the bagpipes. The only other places these two images appear are in Beverley Minster, Yorkshire and the Cathedral, Bristol. There is no known connection between Throwley and these places.

<sup>7</sup> The only one recorded is at Fornham in Suffolk.

<sup>8</sup> The significance of this portrayal is also examined in the chapter by K. Jones on 'Witchcraft and Magic in Kent 1396-1543', in S. Sweetinburgh (ed.), *Later Medieval Kent, 1220-1540*, p. 205 (and plate 12).

<sup>9</sup> The only other recorded example is at St George's Chapel, Windsor. Bagpipes were said to arouse the passions and often occur in bawdy or sensual scenes. Secular music and boisterous dancing were not encouraged by the church. The musicians are generally pigs or foxes.

<sup>10</sup> Bats occur as a single subject on seven of the misericords recorded by Remnant (1969).