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THE WODEWOSE IN EAST ANGLIAN CHURCH DECORATION.

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The word "Wodewose" is not one which is in use every day or in every mouth, and perhaps someone may ask, "What is a Wodewose?" Wodewose (otherwise Woodwose, Wodewese, and Woodwyse) means a Wild-man or Mad-man. It must be noted that the first component of the word has no relation to Wood (*silva*), and the word does not denote a Wild-man-of-the-woods. Wode is Early English for Wild or Mad, and Wose signifies a Being. They are derived from the A.S. Wod (wild; conf. *Du.* Woede; *Ger.* Wuth) and a substantival form of the verb Wosan (to be). In the old ballad of "Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight" occurs the line "Wodwose that woned in the knarrez," *i.e.*, "Wild-man that dwelt in the rocks." Here, clearly, there is no reference to a silvan savage. No doubt, as civilization progressed, the wild-men found themselves more secure from observation and molestation in the depths of the woods, and the last survivors enjoyed shelter in the uncleared and unreclaimed forests long after their fellows had disappeared from the opened country. Thus associated with the woods, they would become popularly known as Wild-men-of-the-woods. But the primary meaning of Wodewose is, as noted above, simply a Wild- or Mad-man.

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I am indebted to the Rev. H. A. Harris, Rector of Thorndon, for reference to the following passage in Harl. MS. No. 5900: "They are called woudmen or wildmen, thou' in thes day we on the signe call them Greenmen, covered with grene boues, and are used as signes by the stillers of strong watters . . . a fit emblem for those that use intosticating lickers which berefts them of their sennes." The tavern sign of the Green Man and Still is not uncommon even now.

The word is found in occasional use certainly down to the middle of the sixteenth century (*e.g.*, "Some roamed like woodwoses"—Sir T. Wilson's "Art of Rhetoric," 1554), but perhaps it was then dropping out of vogue.

The first point that engages the attention in relation to the wodewose in art is his early association with church architecture and decoration and other objects ecclesiastical. This is especially observable in East Anglia. Carved figures of wodewoses are found upon the exterior of churches, upon fonts, and, I am informed, upon misericords. A highly interesting architectural example is furnished by the fine old church of S. Margaret's, Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk. At three of the four angles of the nave (the tower engages with the fourth angle on the north-west) are buttresses culminating in graded pinnacles. The south-east and south-west pinnacles are each surmounted by a boldly carved life-size figure in Caen stone of a wodewose armed with a club. The north-east pinnacle has unfortunately lost the wodewose.

At S. Mary's Church, Mendlesham, Suffolk, are two fine porches. The angles of the exterior of the north porch bear sculptures of two crowned lions and two wodewoses clad in skins and armed with clubs. The figures are in a very good state of preser-

vation. At S. John Baptist's Church, Saxmundham, Suffolk, is an early octagonal font, c. 1400 A.D. At four angles of the octagonal shaft are alternately a lion sejant affronté and a wodewose. These are clad in skins, and one carries a club erect on the shoulder, and the other a club depressed at his side. At S. Bartholomew's Church, Orford, Suffolk, is a font which so closely, if not identically, resembles that at Saxmundham, as to suggest a strong probability that the two fonts were made by the same maker; and exhaustive enquiry would doubtless bring many other examples to light.

Passing from the church itself to other matters ecclesiastical, we find that in an inventory of the estate of Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham *temp.* Edward III., there is mention of a bed with "VIII. tapecia lanea, cum wodwysse in armis ejusdem intextis," and another bed "broudatum cum signis de wodewese et arboribus." It is, perhaps, useless to speculate how the wodewose first came thus into artistic use in religious life. Possibly he was regarded with superstitious awe as a potential bringer of good luck, and therefore a power to be propitiated.

A noteworthy feature is the frequent association of the wodewose with the lion, and I am not prepared with any satisfactory theory to account for this, beyond a bare suggestion that the joinder of the noble human savage with the king of savage beasts would be in natural harmony.

Arrived in the next century we find the wodewose used decoratively in secular art. In the Minutes of the Goldsmiths' Company of London, under the date 1468, it is recorded that the Wardens of the Company (who made periodical visits to the provinces for the purpose of regulating and controlling the manufacture of silver plate by local craftsmen) journeyed to Cogges-

hall, Essex, and there inspected a dozen silver spoons "with woodwoses," which had been improperly marked with the "Liberd's Heed" (Leopard's Head). In 1486 a will was proved at York in which the testatrix bequeathed "sex cochlearia argenti cum wodwysshes deauratis." And in 1498 the will of Agnes Hildyard was proved, in which she bequeathed "sex cochlearia optima arg. cum wodwoshes."

In 1900 there was sold at Messrs. Christie's rooms by order of the executors of a deceased gentleman of East Anglia, a fifteenth-century spoon, surmounted with a wodewose (described in the catalogue as "a chased figure of a man in skin raiment holding a club"), and marked with a Liberd's Heed. It passed into the possession of the late Mr. A. Bateman, and was again sold at Messrs. Christie's by his executors in 1903. The figure of a wodewose is well shown upon this spoon, a good illustration of which is given in Mr. C. J. Jackson's "History of English Plate." Unfortunately, however, that writer appears to have supposed that it was an Apostle spoon, and he has described it as such. This spoon is in every particular identical with the description of the Coggeshall spoons, and, having regard to this and to the additional fact that it came from an East Anglian source into public notice in 1900, there is very strong probability that it is one of the dozen mentioned in 1468. It is now the property of a well-known collector.

The wodewose (modified into "Wodehouse," probably in phonetic sympathy with a modified pronunciation) gave its name to an ancient East Anglian family, Barons Wodehouse and Earls of Kimberley, the supporters of whose shield of arms are two wodewoses. A branch of this family bears a wodewose as a crest. In the county of Essex the name in its old form of "Woodiwiss" is found. Descendants of Sir Abraham Woodiwiss are living in Derbyshire.

The interesting question now presents itself, Whence came the wodewose thús into East Anglia, and what is its meaning? Messieurs Prior and Gardner in "Mediæval Figure-Sculpture in England," devote some pages to Font-Sculpture in East Anglian Churches and, so far as the wodewose is concerned, they remark, "Angel corbels support the angle-shafts of the bowl, and the stems very often have base-figures—usually a lion at each corner, or sometimes a standing 'Apostle' with the figure called a 'Wodehouse' (viz., a wild man with a club) alternately." They further say, "The remarkable font-making of the Fifteenth Century is that of the East Anglian district, and we assign it to the Norwich craft. Since stone fit for sculpture is not to be got from the ground within fifty miles, Norwich had to depend on the sea carriage of it, and the [*Eastern part of the] Eastern Counties, when they used stone, had recourse to that city as the depot and distributing centre. . . . At Norwich itself the building of its many churches produced masons engaged from century to century in the working up of imported stone, and, as in London, such conditions developed a shop-trade in articles of stone furniture. The Fifteenth Century building of Norfolk churches used this trade centre for both the material and the masons, and, on completion of the fabrics, fonts must have come, too, from the same city-craft. But easy carriage by water alone would allow the conveyance of such bulky pieces, and, accordingly, the figure-carved fonts of Norfolk and Suffolk are to be found in churches either immediately on the seaboard, or within easy reach from one or other of the estuaries and waterways which penetrate East Anglia. One can say, in a general way, that all that

*These words are not in the original which I am quoting here.—
H.D.E.

are now found are either within seven or eight miles of Norwich itself, or within that distance of a landing at which boats from the capital city could deliver."

I think we may accept the above as fairly indicating the provenance of the figure-carved fonts of Norfolk and Suffolk in general, but it does not carry us any further on our way in quest of the source of the wodewose. I am inclined to suggest (but by no means to insist) that it was an importation from abroad—probably from the Low Countries—intercourse and traffic between which and the ports of East Anglia were upon a considerable scale.

Here I must revert to the story of the Wardens of the Goldsmiths' Company and the wodewose spoons, which is recounted at some length in the Company's Minutes. The Wardens found the spoons in the possession of one John Fabian, of Coggeshall, and they seized them on suspicion that they were below the standard of purity of silver, and therefore had improperly been marked with the Leopard's Head. Upon assay, the excess of alloy was proved. Fabian then alleged that the spoons had been made by Deryk Knyff. Knyff admitted the fact, but he stated that he had bought the metal from Thomas Coundrey, though he himself had added the finials. In result, the Wardens condemned both Knyff and Coundrey and imposed a fine, and they further ordered that the spoons should be destroyed and that the defendants should supply to Fabian a dozen similar spoons of full standard purity. The point of this for my argument is that the wodewoses were put on to the spoons by Deryk Knyff, whose name evidently indicates that he was a Fleming, one of the many thousands of Flemish artists and craftsmen who settled in the Eastern Counties during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, and enriched them with their skill in metal work, textiles, etc. Moreover, the

wodewose as a terminal to English spoons is wholly unknown prior to 1468. This seems to afford a clue to the source of the wodewose. Possibly, wodewose-bearing fonts, in a completed state, and therefore less bulky and more portable, were shipped direct to Yarmouth and Ipswich in competition with the Norwich trade. That trade had been seriously impaired by the ravages of the Black Death in East Anglia, and, perhaps, no places suffered more than Norwich, then one of the chief cities of England, and Yarmouth, then a port of such magnitude as to be able to furnish a contingent to Edward III.'s expedition against Calais double in strength to that provided by London itself. The business of Church-building in East Anglia was arrested by the devastation of the plague for a long period of years, and possibly was never again fully revived so as to attain its previous level. Almost as a natural consequence, font-making would be prone to decay with church-building, and it might not improbably come to pass that foreign importations became, in time, a necessity in order to supply a renascent demand.

I hope that the above notes, albeit imperfect, may meet the eyes of many East Anglian antiquaries, and may be sufficiently interesting to attract their consideration, so that further light may be forthcoming upon the subject. I shall gratefully receive any communications (addressed to 7, Roland Gardens, London, S.W.), either generally thereon, or notifying any other examples within their knowledge of the wodewose within or upon local churches.

I acknowledge with thanks the permission of the "Burlington Art Magazine" to incorporate in this paper some notes of mine upon the Wodewose which appeared in last August's issue of that publication.