



LILY CRUCIFIX.
LONG MELFORD.

TWO UNUSUAL SUBJECTS IN ANCIENT GLASS IN LONG MELFORD CHURCH.

BY CHRISTOPHER WOODFORDE.

1. THE LILY CRUCIFIX.

In the window over the door in the north aisle of Long Melford Church there are several small panels of glass, difficult to see without the aid of a ladder or powerful glasses. Most interesting is a panel showing our Lord crucified upon a lily-plant. Upon either side are two small oval panels, a good deal restored, representing the *Annunciation*.

The lily-crucifix panel measures twenty inches by nine and three-quarter inches. The Figure is nailed to the lily, and no cross appears. The hands are nailed to flowers; of which there are six. The right foot is placed over the left, a single nail piercing both feet. The face is bearded; the head, which inclines downwards towards the right shoulder, is represented with long hair reaching to the neck, and is nimbed. The drawing of the body is boldly done. Blood drops from the wound in the side. The lily does not grow out of a vase or from the ground, although it may originally have been thus represented. The whole is carried out in stain, and is set upon a fine decorated blue background. The glass, together with the *Annunciation* figures, may be dated as late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.

In *Archæologia*, Vol. LXXIV (1925), under the title "An Alabaster Table of the Annunciation with the Crucifix," Dr. W. L. Hildburgh examined in detail the subject of the "lily-crucifix."* The following are to be found:—

1. Kunstgewerke Museum, Cologne. An English Alabaster. Date c. 1375.
2. Tong Church, Salop. A misericord. Date c. 1410.

*The writer's debt to Dr. Hildburgh's paper in explaining this panel of glass is obvious, but the writer would like to acknowledge Dr. Hildburgh's courtesy in allowing him to quote from it so freely.

3. St. Mary's Church, Nottingham. A panel on the tomb of John de Tannesley (dated 1414).
4. Victoria and Albert Museum. A painted wooden panel.†
5. York Minster. In fifteenth century glass.‡
6. St. Michael's Church, Oxford. In fifteenth century glass.
7. Queen's College Chapel, Oxford. In early sixteenth century glass.§
8. Westwood Church, Wilts. In fifteenth century glass.
9. Church of SS. Peter and Paul, West Wittering, Sussex. On the tomb of William Earnley (died 1545).
10. Kenn Church, Devon. Upon a screen panel.||

It will be seen from this list that the subject seems to be peculiar to this country and occurs chiefly in glass. But its widespread occurrence, and the examples in other "media" suggest that the representation was by no means uncommon.** Sometimes Christ is depicted crucified directly upon the lily, as in the Long Melford example, sometimes the lily grows up between the figure and the Cross, as at Westwood, Wilts. In examples No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 the lily-crucifix is directly associated with the Annunciation, as it apparently is at Long Melford. The significance of this is not altogether plain. One cause for it may be found in the fact that in medieval England March 25th was taken as the date of both the Annunciation and the Crucifixion. This connection may still be traced in the collect for Lady Day: "We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts: that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord."

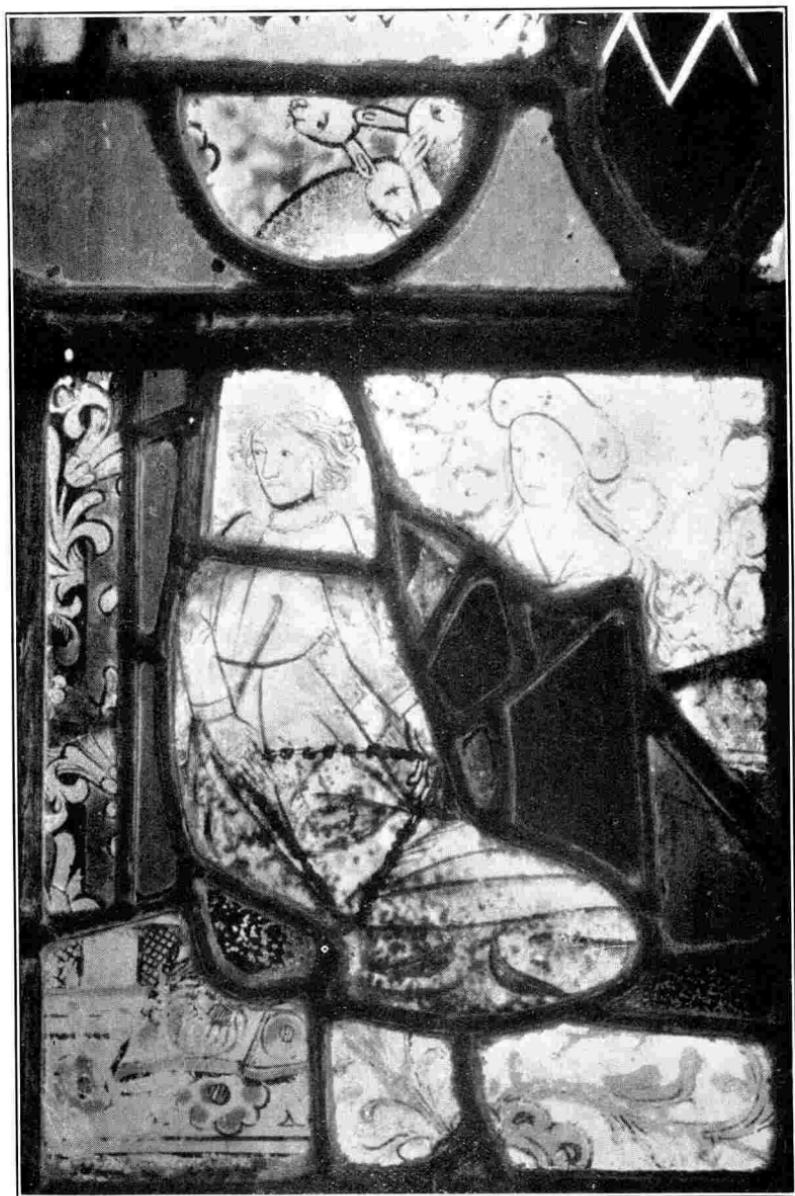
†An East Anglian origin is generally suggested for this panel.

‡Described and illustrated, F. Harrison, *The Painted Glass of York*, p. 88 and plate.

§Described and illustrated by Dr. Hildburgh in *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XII, p. 25, pl. IX.

||Described by Dr. Hildburgh in *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. VII, pp. 72 f.

**It is noteworthy that no example of the subject has been found in the many representations of the Annunciation in illuminated MSS. and embroidery.



ANIMAL SYMBOLOGY.
LONG MELFORD,

Dr. Hildburgh, after a full examination of the meaning of the lily when it is placed between the figures of our Lady and Gabriel and in particular, when it is introduced into pictures of the Crucifixion, arrives at certain conclusions. 1. In the Cologne Alabaster the Crucifix has been set upon the lily of the Annunciation in allusion to the Resurrection: and this is in accordance with the usual meaning, in medieval art, of the Crucifix on the lily. 2. The Crucifix upon the lily of an Annunciation scene may, in some instances, have been intended to serve as a symbol of the Virgin Birth, although its earlier (and very probably original) significance was as a symbol of the Resurrection. 3. Since from an early period the likeness of the crucified Christ was associated with representations of living vegetation, and since many traces of the association persisted through medieval times, and in England, and since in medieval times Christ was often likened to a flower and more especially to a lily, the combination of the Crucifix with a lily-plant was to be expected when a suitable motive for it arose. The Crucifix upon the lily-plant of Annunciation scenes appears to have been fairly common in England in the late fourteenth, the fifteenth, and the early sixteenth centuries, but rare—if occurring at all—in continental art of the period. The reason for this is not clear, but may possibly have been in part dependant upon certain popular stories current in England and perhaps not current on the Continent, or to certain English popular customs (not yet identified) which were not found on the Continent.*

2. "THE TRINITY RABBITS."

This name is locally given to a curious device upon a fragment of glass in the southernmost light of the west window of the north aisle. Three rabbits are so arranged as to have altogether only three ears, while each seems to have two.

I have been able to discover only one other example in England. Mr. G. McN. Rushforth, F.S.A., was able to parallel this Long Melford device with one exactly

*Hildburgh, "An Alabaster Table of the Annunciation, etc.," pp. 231-232.

similar to it carved upon a boss in the roof of South Tawton Church, Devon. There the rabbits are set upon a background of oak-leaves.

Examples would seem to be more numerous abroad. A list has recently been given,[†] namely,

- i. Upon a boss in the church of Carbenay (Haute-Saône).
- ii. In the church of Halberstadt (Germany). Material not stated.
- iii. Upon a seventeenth century carpet (Swiss).
- iv. Upon the handle of a wooden spoon, date 1793 (Swiss).
- v. At Paris there was an old inn sign—"Les trois lapins," which was treated in the same way.

To these examples two others can be added.[‡] One is in stone upon a window frame in Paderborn Cathedral, the other is in the Cloister of the Franciscan nuns at Muotta, in Switzerland, and is carved in wood.[§]

That this device was ever meant to symbolise the Trinity is unlikely, although it is sometimes said to do so. With regard to the examples at Paderborn and Muotta, E. P. Evans says of the first "it was placed there probably as a votive offering by the travelling handicraftsmen of Paderborn as the badge or ensign of their gild": of the second "it was doubtless intended to be an emblem of Trinitarianism." But no evidence is given in support of these statements. Although the fragment at Long Melford affords no certain indication of its purpose it is more than likely that the rabbits formed a device upon a fifteenth-century quarry, and that no religious significance was intended.

[†]Professor Deonna, "Etres monstrueux à organes communs." *Revue Archeologique*, Vol. XXXI (1930), pp. 28 ff.

[‡]Given by E. P. Evans in *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture* (London, 1896), p. 239.

[§]It is interesting to note that three of the nine examples are Swiss.