

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Flowers in Stone

by I. M. Roper
1913, Vol. 36, 334-335

© The Society and the Author(s)

FLOWERS IN STONE.

By IDA M. ROPER, F.L.S.

IN a paper published in the earlier part of this volume the subject of "Flowers in Stone as applied to Church Architecture in Bristol" was dealt with, and some examples were given that are to be found in St. Mary Redcliffe Church. In order, however, to do justice to the many elaborate carvings to be seen in that splendid edifice, it may be worth while to enlarge somewhat more on the flowers that inspired the carvers of the different periods during which the church was being built.

The flowers may not seem to vary much, but it is the workmanship that produces the effects. The earliest examples are found in the inner north porch and on the exterior of the tower, and are of the best type of Decorative ornamentation. When about A.D. 1349 the ravages of the Black Death amongst all classes caused a marked change in architecture elsewhere, it is fortunate that here the decoration of the new roofs put on during the following half-century shows but little falling-off from the best execution of floral work, although conventional takes the place of the purely naturalistic.

In the raised choir roof the bosses are boldly handled, and appear to be much undercut as in the best period of the art, while on the eastward part of the nave, which followed immediately in building, actual flowers were sparingly introduced; but the foliage of holly, bay, thistle and dandelion can be recognised amongst the countless bosses, together with the familiar vine, ivy and oak arranged in many patterns. There is an artificial and overcrowded arrangement to be noticed, but this massing together in a

small space seems redeemed by representing good models. At this period occurs the only example of "diaper work" noticed in Bristol, although so much used in contemporary decoration, being placed on the buttress of the tower, and made up of the four-petal flower that afterwards was so common for cornices.

In the north aisles of the church amongst the bosses to be seen in the dim light are examples of the white bryony, not spread out as in the Cathedral, and several of horse chestnut leaves. This tree was common in Italy, and the design may have been brought thence in the early part of the fifteenth century, when these portions were being rebuilt. ¹

At the same period, however, the English rose was not neglected by the carvers, as there are two bosses at least composed of these flowers arranged on an entwined branch, as well as another made into a wreath of roses. After about A.D. 1425 the use of floral motives seems to have been given up, and human faces and geometrical forms took their place.

I take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to a work on a kindred subject: *Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral*, by E. K. Prideaux and G. R. Holt Shafto. I expressed appreciation of it during my lecture, and find that in writing the fair copy for the printer I unconsciously used several expressions which were similar to what I had read in Miss Prideaux's work.

¹ *Proceedings of the Clifton Antiquarian Club*, vol. vii. p. 60.