The Role of Ecclesiastical Stairs, Galleries and Upper Spaces in Medieval 'Bad Behaviour'[1]

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This article draws on my thesis on the practical functions of medieval stairs, galleries and upper spaces in church buildings from the eleventh to mid-sixteenth centuries.[2] My research has considered the uses to which the higher levels of church buildings were put during the Middle Ages. Foremost among these was the use of galleries for musical and dramatic performance, and of upper rooms for ancillary functions such as dovecotes. However, the nature of the source-material is such that unusual and exceptional events are surprisingly well-documented. Many instances involve a measure of 'bad behaviour', and it is these which I wish to consider here.

Attributions of good or bad behaviour by the author often depend on context and outcome. The examples discussed here fit into the broad categories of unintended function, unauthorised access and unfortunate mishap. The sources, to be found mainly in medieval chronicles and miracle stories, relate mostly to high-status cathedrals and monastic (rather than parish) church buildings. Some chroniclers put special emphasis on miracle stories, especially those relating to local cults, while others recorded contemporary events of an unusual or bizarre nature with some incredulity. Humour is present in many of these sources, and one should to bear in mind that many stories were probably intended to entertain as much as instruct. If ecclesiastical upper spaces represent a very obscure aspect of medieval architecture, finding documented instances of bad behaviour in them is even more difficult. For this reason, secondary literature is not readily forthcoming.[3] Many of the manuscript sources on which this article draws were edited and published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the medieval dramatic texts edited by William Tydeman in 2001 are a further invaluable resource which would be rewarding for further study.[4]

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[1]   This article was first presented as a paper at the Colloquium on *Bad Behaviour in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* organised by the Centre of Medieval and Early Modern Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury*,* 3rd December 2009.

[2]   Toby Huitson, 'Hidden Spaces, Obscure Purposes: The Medieval Ecclesiastical Staircase, Gallery and Upper Chamber in East Kent' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2008).

[3]   See the comments of Bligh Bond and Camm towards the end of this article.

[4]   William Tydeman (ed.), *The Medieval European Stage 500–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

The first type of 'bad behaviour' I wish to consider here concerns instances where upper spaces were commandeered for purposes which one can be fairly sure they were never intended to have but are nonetheless documented as having happened in them. To start near Canterbury, one example concerns a French pirate raid on Dover Priory in the 1290s. According to a chronicle written at Bury St Edmunds in the late fourteenth century, when the pirates attacked the church, the monks, except a certain Thomas, 'fearing for their lives, all ran together to higher hiding-places (*ad latibula superius)* in the church'.[5] Of the buildings that originally comprised Dover Priory, the church has now completely disappeared, although the gatehouse, built around the time of this incident, survives (Fig.1).

FIGURE 1: THE GATEHOUSE AT DOVER PRIORY, KENT; C.1300

While it is no longer possible, therefore, to reconstruct exactly the monks' strategy, it is reasonable to assume that they sought refuge in a triforium gallery or clerestory wall-passage similar in form to those in the choir of Canterbury Cathedral (Fig. 2). The incident is

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[5]   'Vita Thome de la Hale' (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 240, f. 798) in *The Library of Dover Priory: a History of the Priory of St. Mary the Virgin and St. Martin of the New Work*, ed. and trans by C.R. Haines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 161.

important because it is one of several sources which suggest that, contrary to the opinions of some scholars, refuge in ecclesiastical buildings was generally improvised rather than intended.
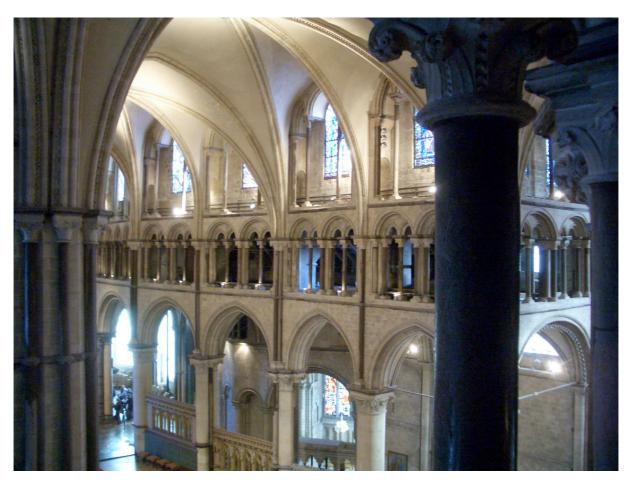

FIGURE 2: THE LATE TWELFTH CENTURY TRIFORIUM GALLERY (CENTRE) AND CLERESTORY WALL-PASSAGE (TOP) IN THE CHOIR OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

At Durham Cathedral in 1165, a gallery was also used for the purpose of refuge, but this time by a thief. The incident is recorded in Reginald of Coldingham's *Libellus de admirandis Beati Cuthberti virtutibus,* (The Little Book of Admiration for the Virtues of St. Cuthbert — Durham's patron saint). According to the miracle story, the fact that several groups of people were visiting the cathedral enabled a thief to gain unauthorised admittance, as each group assumed that he belonged to one of the others. Improvising an unlikely hiding-place under a large pile of prayer-mats, he managed to get himself locked in the church at the end of the day. During the night he climbed up to the great pulpitum loft, from where he stole a valuable gospel-book. He then hid himself for a second time, 'climbing higher by spiral staircase to the arches of the church above the roof-tiles, secured with beams of wood', probably the nave

triforium gallery.[6] By this stage, however, the church servants had realised that a thief was at large and so, at first light, they began a top-to-bottom search of the building:

> [s]oon Aurora appeared with rays of sun, awakening the church servants who were searching for him, and never once deviating from their path, the former was then brought out from where he had hid himself. Then everything became known […][7]

The discovery of the robber is ascribed to the direct intervention of St. Cuthbert, which surely explains why this comical story of confusion and attempted robbery was documented for posterity. It suggests that any incident, no matter how small, or embarrassing for the community, could be turned around and used to bolster the cult of a saint, enhancing its prestige, dependability and power.

Eadmer's famous twelfth-century description of Canterbury Cathedral also mentions an attempted theft from an upper space, probably a chapel on the north transept bridge gallery, but this time the offender was of higher rank:

> Not long before the death of Archbishop Radulf [1121], a certain Teutonic knight named Lambert, who came into England under the patronage of the new queen (Adelais), visited Canterbury, and remained there for some time, residing with the brethren. He became fond of frequenting the place where the relics of the archbishops were deposited, to pray there, to celebrate daily mass there, and was wont to ask all manner of questions, as to who this or that one had been, and what might be the name of one who rested in this or that coffin. At length he conceived a vehement desire to obtain the body of St Bregwyn, and take it to his own country […] when his own death put a stop to the matter.[8]

The gallery at Canterbury has long since disappeared, although there is a surviving parallel at Winchester Cathedral (Fig. 3 on following page). In this instance, the respect shown by a secular, foreign knight to the community's historic Anglo-Saxon relics would normally be regarded as exemplary behaviour. However, the allowing of special access backfired on the Canterbury monks when his interest turned to an obsession which almost deprived the community of one of its relics. To avoid a similar situation repeating itself, the monks decided to rebury the relics near an altar at ground level where they would be less at risk. Arnold Klukas has interpreted references to relics in upper chapels at Canterbury as an

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[6]   Reginald of Coldingham, *Libellus de admirandis B. Cuthberti virtutibus*, ed. by J. Raine, Publications of the Surtees Society. 1 ([n.p]: [n. pub], 1835), ch. 82, p. 175 (author's translation). In church architecture, the triforium is the space above the nave arcade but below the clerestory and extending over the vaults or ceilings of the side-aisles. The term can also be applied to any second-floor gallery opening onto a higher nave by means of arcades or colonnades.

[7]   Ibid.

[8]   Eadmer, 'Vita Sancti Bregwini' (Anglia Sacra t. ii. p.188) abridged in *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral*, ed. and trans. by R. Willis (London: Longman, 1845), §25, pp. 18–19.

indication of their marginal status at this time, but the fact that they were considered valuable enough to protect surely suggests the exact opposite.[9]

FIGURE 3: THE ROMANESQUE GALLERY ACROSS THE SOUTH TRANSEPT IN WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL

Thieves (such as that at Durham) were by no means the only people to use ecclesiastical galleries for ad-hoc sleeping. The *Life of Simon the Hermit* contains a reference to a young scholar at Trier in Germany called Wigericus, who:

> […] having drunk too much wine on a certain day, chose to hide himself, as he was accustomed, to rest in a secret place; he climbed up to the highest parts of the church, and there he stretched out to sleep amongst the columns.[10]

The explanation given by the chronicler (and that generally accepted at face value by modern historians) is that he was simply sleeping off bouts of drunkenness. However, an alternative explanation is suggested by Barbara Harvey's observation that younger monks were sometimes allowed a light meal after High Mass. At Peterborough Cathedral in the early

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[9]   A. W. Klukas, '*Altaria Superiora*: The Function and Significance of the Tribune-Chapel in the Anglo-Norman Romanesque' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 336–37; 344.
[10]   Eberwinus abbas S. Martini Trevienis, *Vita Symeonis eremitae de monte Sinae* […], Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores, ed. by G. H. Pertz and others, 32 vols (Hanover, 1826–1913), quoted in Klukas, *op. cit.*, p. 70 (author's translation).

sixteenth century, it was claimed that if the novices were denied this morning snack, they overate at lunch and then fell asleep during the afternoon when they were supposed to be studying.[11] Therefore, this may not be the example of bad behaviour which it first appears to be. One could draw a parallel with the elderly Canterbury monk Alfwin in around 1100: whilst in a gallery, he had a vision of angels ascending a spiral staircase to reverence St. Wilfrid's relics. This happened when he was semi-alert, somewhere between sleep and waking.[12] Presumably, then, tiredness and sleep in upper spaces was not just a problem affecting novices!

However, novices might sometimes behave better than their superiors did. Thomas Eccleston's *De Adventu Fratrem Minorem in Anglia* (On the Arrival of the Friars Minor in England) tells the story of two Franciscan friars lost in a storm in 1224. Passing by Abingdon Abbey's grange near Oxford, the travellers sought shelter from their fellow-monks but met a frosty reception and were turned away by the prior. However, a novice monk took pity on them and allowed them to sleep in a hay-loft. That night, he had a dream in which Christ sat in judgement on his superiors who were first disowned by Benedict and then hanged by Christ for failing to welcome a stranger as they would Christ Himself. As a result of his dream, the novice decided to join the friars.[13] Here, the novice's action (an act of disobedience which would normally be regarded as bad behaviour) was interpreted by the writer as good because it implied disaffection with the inflexibility and hypocrisy of conventional Benedictines.

Acts of aggression, as one might expect, do not feature prominently in accounts of everyday church life. However, there is a handful of notorious examples of such behaviour in ecclesiastical upper spaces. These demonstrate a combination of unauthorised access with unintended function. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records one of the most notorious incidents, which took place at Glastonbury Abbey. According to the Peterborough version of the *Chronicle,* a dispute in 1083 between the French abbot and the English monks of Glastonbury concerning the abbey's management escalated into open conflict in the chapter house. The monks then barricaded themselves inside the church:

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[11] Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100–1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 157, citing *Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1517–1531*, ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson, 3 vols (*Lincoln Record Society* 33, 35, 37), III, p. 82.

[12] Eadmer, 'Breviloquium Vitae Sancti Wilfridi' in *Historians of the church of York and its archbishops*, ed. by James Raine, Rolls Series 71, 3 vols (London, Longman, 1879), I, pp. 236–37; abridged and trans. by Willis in Willis, *The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral*, §21, pp. 16–17.

[13] See Julie Kerr, *Monastic Hospitality: The Benedictines in England, c. 1070–1200* (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2007), pp. 197–98.

> […] but a pitiful thing happened there that day, in that the French men broke into the choir and pelted the altar where the monks were; and some of the knights went up to the upper floor and shot arrows downwards towards the sanctuary, so that many arrows stuck in the rood which stood above the altar.[14]

Some scholars interpret 'the upper floor' as a timber gallery at the west end of the nave or perhaps an upper chamber above a side-aisle.[15] However, a more likely interpretation is that the knights had gained access to a tribune or triforium gallery at the east end of the building. According to Florence of Worcester's account, the monks defended themselves vigorously using stools and candlesticks, with the result that eighteen men-at arms suffered injuries and three were fatally wounded.[16] The incident recalls another example of unwelcome intrusion by soldiers into a church, one which resulted in the assassination of Charles the Good in Bruges in 1127 while he was praying at an altar close to a gallery connecting the church to the royal palace. This incident surely deserves to be equally as well known as the assassination of Becket later in the twelfth century.[17] Ecclesiastics would doubtless have been outraged by such events, in which sacred space was invaded and defiled.

Acts of aggression in ecclesiastical settings were sometimes instigated by defenders rather than attackers, especially in medieval Ireland. For instance, in 1228 the monks of Monasteranenough, Ireland, took to the church roofs in order to repel Stephen of Lexington,[18] and in 1498 Abbot Troy's attempt to visit a daughter-house of Mellifont Abbey met with similar results, when the provosts, commendatories and other armed men sought a place of vantage behind the church and belfry parapet; from here they loosed a hail of javelins, stones and arrows down on the Abbot.[19] At first sight, such hostile activity seems very uncharacteristic of monks. However, ecclesiastical independence from unwelcome outside interference (whether from secular or ecclesiastic authorities) was often jealously guarded, and these incidents suggest that when infringement was a very real concern, a religious community might resort to using force to defend it if necessary.

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[14] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud 636), ed. and trans. by M. Swanson, (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 214–15.

[15] Swanson in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* p. 215, n. 13, citing Harold M. Taylor and Joan Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1965-78), III, pp. 1017–19.

[16] Florence of Worcester, *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, ed. by B. Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Bentley, Wilson, & Fley, 1848–9); and trans. by J. Stevenson, The Church Historians of England, 8 vols (London: Seeley, 1853-68), II, p. 17.

[17] Norman Housley, 'Crisis in Flanders, 1127–28: The Murder of Charles the Good', in *History Today* 36 No. 10 (Oct. 1986), pp. 10–16.

[18] Roger A Stalley, *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland*: *an Account of the History, Art and Architecture of the White Monks in Ireland from 1142–1540* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[19] Fr. Colmcille O.C.S.O., *The Story of Mellifont* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1958), p. 157, cited in Stalley*, The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland,* pp. 144–45.

Another aspect of bad behaviour in upper spaces is that of accident and mishap. Children and youths often feature heavily in accounts of medieval misbehaviour. According to an anonymous chronicle written at Ramsey Abbey in Cambridgeshire around the year 1000, four teenage novices looking for entertainment one afternoon decided to ring one of the abbey bells very hard, so hard, in fact, that it cracked and made a strange noise. The boys, threatened with a severe beating, burst into tears and were forgiven by the kindly abbot, much to the annoyance of the other monks.[20] Large bells, which were usually presented by noble patrons and high-ranking ecclesiastic dignitaries, were extremely expensive artefacts which belonged to the community. As a result, it was the monks who were accusing the *abbot* of bad behaviour by being too merciful towards the youths, an interesting paradox. Nevertheless, the chronicler includes the incident as a cautionary tale for his readers.

One of the most interesting and complex examples of 'bad behaviour' in an ecclesiastical upper space appears in a collection of medieval miracle stories relating to John of Beverley, the Anglo-Saxon saint associated with Beverley minster, Yorkshire. One day around 1220, large crowds had gathered one day on the occasion of the performance of a Resurrection play outside the church, making viewing of the play very difficult:

> […] And so some small boys who had entered the church happened by chance to find half-open a certain door from which steps led up to the upper parts of the walls. The little boys ran lightly to it and climbed step by step to the vaulting of the church above the walls, intending, as I suppose, to see more easily, through the high windows of the turrets or through any holes there might be in the glass of the windows […] But just then the sextons discovered what the boys were doing; and presumably afraid lest the boys, in their eagerness to see the actors performing the said show, should carelessly make holes in the glazed windows or somehow damage them, they ran after the boys; and forced them to return by boxing their ears hard. Now one of the boys […] afraid of falling into [his] pursuer's hands, retreated upwards until, climbing very rapidly, he reached the great cross which at that time was placed at the end of the altar of the blessed Martin. And standing there looking down, he put his foot carelessly on a block of stone which, loosened and falling from the wall, crashed on to the stone pavement and despite its hardness was smashed into fragments. The boy, losing his foothold and shocked by the terrible crash, fell to the ground [and lay there motionless].[21]

The crowd and the boy's parents believed him to be dead, but he recovered 'so completely unharmed that no injury was to be seen anywhere on his body.' 'And so', the writer concludes, citing many biblical analogies, 'it was brought about that those who, because of the crowds of people, could not be present at the representation outside the church,

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[20] *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS B. 333) ed. by W. D. Macray, Rolls Series 83 (London: [n. pub.], 1886), pp. 112–14.

[21] Raine, *Historians of the church of York and its archbishops*, pp. 328-30; also trans. by Tydeman in Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage 500–1500*, p. 181.

were able to see a miraculous token of the Resurrection inside the nave'.[22] This is a particularly interesting case of bad behaviour because one might assume that it was the boys who had misbehaved by gaining access to an unauthorised space. However, one could equally argue that it was the sextons' heavy-handed response to a very minor situation which was directly responsible for precipitating the events which followed.

The third category of bad behaviour in ecclesiastical upper spaces concerns some of the most daring displays of bravery recorded. One unexpected way in which church towers functioned in this period (and indeed beyond) was to provide places for tightrope and trapeze acts. An example appears in the *Chronicles of Froissart* on the entry of Queen Isabel into Paris in June 1389. When the queen's retinue arrived at Notre Dame in the early evening, they found:

> […] plays and pastimes greatly to their pleasure. Among all other there was a master came out of Genes: (*sic*) he had tied a cord on the highest house on the bridge of Saint Michael over all the houses, and the other end was tied on the highest tower in Our Lady's church […] because it was late this said master with two brenning [i.e. burning] candles in his hands issued out of a little stage that he had made on the height of Our Lady's tower, and singing he went upon the cord all along the great street, so that all who saw him had marvel how it might be […] he was such a tumbler that his lightness was greatly praised.[23]

A similar tightrope act which had taken place at Durham Cathedral some 150 years earlier concluded rather less successfully. The event is recorded indirectly in a list of objections to the election of Prior Thomas Melsanby to the bishopric of Durham around 1237, one of which was the perhaps rather harsh accusation that:

> Likewise, […] he should be excluded as a murderer; because a certain performer in his churchyard going along a string made taut from tower to tower, with the goodwill of the said Prior, the same fell down and was killed; which Prior […] should expressly have prevented such thing from taking place.[24]

Presumably the act was intended to entertain the monks; we can only speculate whether this was a chance accident in a regular event or in a special, one-off performance destined never to be repeated. Had the tightrope walker at Durham completed his act successfully, the incident would, presumably, have been applauded as good behaviour; the fact that it ended in a fatal accident meant that it was seen retrospectively as very bad.

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[22]   Ibid.
[23]   *The Chronicles of Froissart,* ed. by G. C. Macaulay, trans. by J. Bourchier (London, Macmillan, 1899), p. 385.
[24]   *Durham Cathedral Muniments*, (Loc.VI:20), Publications of the Surtees Society, 9 ([n.p]: [n. pub.], 1839), App., p. lxxiii (author's translation).

As well as acts of tightrope walking, experiments in human-powered flight also made use of towers, and several examples from the early medieval period are recorded. The earliest of these took place around 875 in Cordoba, when a certain scholar by the name of Firnas covered himself with feathers to attempt flight from an unspecified high-level location, only to hurt his back.[25] Similarly in 1003 or 1008, the Iranian scholar al-Jahuri jumped from the roof of a mosque while attempting to fly, with fatal consequences. However, one of the most famous attempts was undertaken in the early eleventh century by Eilmer, a monk of Malmesbury Abbey. According to the twelfth-century writer William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* [The Deeds of the English Kings]:

> [B]y the standards of those days Aethelmaer [Eilmer] was a good scholar, advanced in years by now, though in his first youth he had taken a terrible risk: by some art, I know not what, he had fixed wings to his hands and feet, hoping to fly like Daedalus, whose fable he took to be true. Catching the breeze from the top of a tower, he flew for the space of a stade and more; but what with the violence of the wind and the eddies, and at the same time his consciousness of the temerity of his attempt, he faltered and fell, and ever thereafter he was an invalid and his legs were crippled. He himself used to give as a reason for his fall that he forgot to fit a tail on his hinder parts.[26]

The date of the flight (an event unique to this source) is not stated, although, according to historian of science and technology Lynn White who has researched the subject, it probably took place around 1000-1010.[27] While Eilmer's flight is traditionally associated with a launch from the top of one of the abbey's towers, William does not record any specific details about the precise location of the event. His tone is far from condemnatory and is probably best described as one of faint incredulity tinged with mild amusement.

Most of these examples of bad behaviour relate to greater abbeys and cathedrals. However, upper spaces in parish churches, such as rood lofts, were by no means exempt from misdemeanour.[28] Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, a Protestant commentary on the religious persecutions of the sixteenth century,[29] cites one Kentish case-study in detail, and his account is worth quoting here at length:

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[25] *Ibid.,* pp. 63–64.

[26] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. A. Mynors and others, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998), I, pp. 413, 415.

[27] Lynn White Jr., 'Eilmer of Malmesbury, an Eleventh-Century Aviator', in *Medieval Religion and Technology* (Los Angeles, 1978), ch. 4. pp. 59–74

[28] The rood screen is a feature of later fifteenth and early sixteenth century church architecture. It is a screen separating the chancel from the nave, and thus the clergy from the laity during a celebration of the Mass. It is so-called because it was surmounted by the Rood, or Cross, on which was a representation of the crucified Christ. The loft above could be used as a gallery for reading, singing or playing small organs. Often, the staircase is the only evidence for the former presence of a roodscreen.

[29] Also known as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

> In the sayd Q. Maries daies, I may not omyt the tragedye of one John Drayner of Smarden, in the Coūty of Kent Esquire […] This sayde Drayner afterward, beinge chosen Iustice, to shewe him selfe diligente therin, in seking the trouble of his neighbours, made on the roode loft, ix. great holes, that he might looke about the church in Masse tyme. In whych place alway at the sacring therof, he would stand to se who loked not nor held vp their handes thereto, which persons so not doinge, he would trouble and punish very sore […] Wherby he purchased a name ther, & is called to this day Iustice nine holes.[30]

Depending on one's perspective, his action could be interpreted as questionable, even if well-intentioned. However, the story does not end here:

> […] It so fell out, that since this was published, the sayde Drayner came to the Printers house, with other associate, demaunding: Is Foxe here? to whome aunswere was geuen, that maister Foxe was not within. Is the Printer within (quoth Drayner?) It was aunswered, yea: Wherevpon being required to come vp into his house, was asked what his will was. Mary, sayth he, you haue printed me false in your booke: Why sayth the Printer is not your name M. Drayner, otherwise called Iustice nine holes? It is false sayth he: I made but v. with a great Augure, and the Parson made the rest. It was answered: I haue not read that a Iustice shoulde make him a place in the Roode loft to see if the people held vppe theyr handes. He sayd where as you alleadge, that I did it to see who adored þe sacrament, or who not, it is vntrue: for I set as litle by it, as the best of you all. In deede sayth the Printer, so we vnderstand now, for you being at a supper in Cheapside among certaine honest company, and there burdened with the matter, sayd then, that you did it rather to looke vpon fayre wenches, then otherwise. He being in a great rage, sware to the purpose, saying: Can a man speake nothing, but you must haue vnderstāding therof? But sayth he, did I any man any hurt?[31]

The incident is cast as a mockery of Drayner's supposed morally upright character, as well as of broader Catholic practices, Foxe's main motivation. One wonders if the really bad behaviour was shown by the printer for his outrageous accusation, or if the angry reaction which it provoked suggests that there may well have been some substance to the allegations.

The final example, to bring the discussion full circle, is another instance of behaviour in a rood loft which was assumed to be bad, not by contemporaries but by modern commentators. In their book *Roodscreens and Roodlofts* of 1909, Bligh Bond and Camm express their outrage at finding documentary evidence for the installation of a pew for the 'maidens' in an early sixteenth-century Bristol rood loft:

> It certainly comes as a shock to find evidence of the invasion of the roodloft itself by pews […] that a place set apart for uses so sacred could thus be employed seems to point to a great degeneracy of custom and a loss of the older ideals of reverence in the worship of the period […][32]

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[30] John Foxe. *Acts and Monuments* […], (1563 edition), [online] (hriOnline, Sheffield, 2004). <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/index.html>, [consulted 28 Dec 2009], Part V iii, p. 1746.
[31] Ibid. (1583 edition), Book XII, p. 2112.
[32] Frederick Bligh Bond and Dom Bede Camm, *Roodscreens and Roodlofts* in 2 vols (London, 1909), I, p. 99.

Such emotive language assumes a *de facto* segregation of sacred and secular, which tells us little about medieval practice but much about Bligh Bond and Camm's late Victorian and Edwardian ethos which expected roles of class, gender and social status to occupy sharply polarised physical and cognitive domains. Astonishing as their comments may seem today, they also alert us to the fact that what scholars identify today as 'bad behaviour' may not necessarily have been viewed in the same way in the medieval period and vice versa.

What, then, can one make of these examples of 'bad behaviour'? First, they suggest that definitions of good or bad behaviour in the medieval period depended on context and were often socially constructed. Good behaviour could turn into bad (seen at its clearest in the Canterbury relic chapel incident) and much depended on the eventual outcome. At Beverley Minster, the boys showed good behaviour by wanting to see the Resurrection play but bad behaviour by climbing the staircase. The sextons arguably showed good behaviour by following them, but bad behaviour by their heavy-handed response and, arguably, by leaving the door open in the first place. The boys who escaped and climbed higher demonstrated further bad behaviour and were punished by the accident in which one fell from a great height. Ultimately, however, the fact that he recovered and all was well makes the whole story a positive one, much like the foiled robbery attempt at Durham Cathedral fifty years previously, because it shows the saints at work and therefore ultimately has to be good.

The behaviour of the monks in Ireland who defend themselves on the parapets would have been seen in official circles as very bad, yet amongst the community it was presumably seen as good because they were defending their rights from intruders. The behaviour of the Oxfordshire novice when he allowed the friars to sleep in the hay loft, in defiance of his superiors was in the first instance bad, the more so when he defected to the new Order, yet in his dream it was the officials who were condemned by Christ for their bad behaviour. Even though this is not normal behaviour for monks, the chronicler implicitly sees the attack against their French superiors by the candlestick-wielding monks of Glastonbury as good but that of the men-at-arms who shot arrows from the gallery as bad. John Drayner's questionable behaviour in a sixteenth-century rood loft was initially well-intentioned (according to him) but is 'unmasked' by Foxe as bad behaviour, in the light of the allegation of checking on liturgical posture during services to spy on unsuspecting women below. These examples raise interesting questions about the inclusion of such material by chroniclers which might not normally feature prominently in scholarly discussions.

One of the wider themes of conference at which the article was presented as a paper was the role of text and its limits in history. Given that none of the examples in this paper would be possible to recover from material evidence alone, the text emerges as absolutely critical. However, chroniclers often recorded events which were noteworthy or exceptional rather than typical and everyday, giving a disproportionate weight to acts of misbehaviour. The examples which have illustrated this article are exceptionally rare instances and it is dangerous to extrapolate general principles from them. More research is needed into what went on at ground-floor level in ecclesiastical buildings to see if upper spaces were more or less likely to be venues for of misbehaviour or misadventure. Within the building, such spaces were generally less visible and more secluded, whereas anything taking place outside on a roof was more likely to be visible to a public audience. This may explain why an event here which resulted in a fatal accident seems to have been especially condemned. Finally, the scenarios above demonstrate that medievalists in general need to expect the unexpected. One suspects that there may well have been many more acts of 'bad behaviour' in ecclesiastical upper spaces at which we can hardly begin to guess.

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Acknowledgments