The Earliest Source for the S-shaped Trumpet—Its Provenance, Material Context, and Relevance

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In 1984 Peter Downey published a famously controversial article in the journal *Early Music*.[1] It contested conventional understanding of the development of the trumpet in the late medieval period. The consensus view, which largely remains, is that the instrument passed through four stages: first the straight trumpet (long and short versions),[2] followed by the S-shaped instrument and (probably in quick succession) the trumpet with a folded wrap. Then followed a variance of one or both latter versions: a single, moveable, telescopic slide was fitted at the mouthpiece yard, to form what modern writers have called "the renaissance (or medieval) slide trumpet." This instrument provided the prototype for the trombone, which existed with most of its necessary features by about 1470. The "slide trumpet" also revealed for the first time the fundamental and revolutionary principle that a mechanical device allowing the sounding length of a brass instrument to be adjusted by its player during performance, facilitated access to a much wider range of notes and expressive possibilities than is available on an instrument of fixed length.[3] The fixed-length trumpet continued to exist, but the version with a slide portended a new idiom and a much wider scope of deployment in both sacred and secular music.

Downey disputed that there ever was a slide trumpet and argued that all grounds for its existence could be countered by opposing iconographical, musical, and documentary evidence. Several authorities marshalled arguments against this hypothesis, and after a lengthy and much-quoted exchange in *Early Music*, the consensus prevailed.[4]

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[1] Peter Downey, "The Slide Trumpet: Fact or Fiction," *Early Music* 12 (1984): 26–33.

[2] A version of the shorter form of the straight instrument was known as the clarion or clarin. Only a few English inventories show payments being made separately to clarioners and trumpeters. Both instruments were associated with declamation, but the clarion may have had a better utility for this purpose, especially in fields of conflict. Versions of clarin/clarion occur in other languages with more specific meanings: see, for example, B. Kenyon de Pascual, "Clarines and Trompetas: Some Further Observations," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 7 (1995): 100–06.

[3] This takes account of evidence that some Roman brass instruments appear to have been fitted with a finger-hole.

[4] Herbert W. Myers, "Slide Trumpet Madness or Fiction," *Early Music* 17 (1989): 383–89. Ross W. Duffin, "The Trompette des Menestrels in the 15th-century Alta Capella," *Early Music* 17 (1989: 397–404). Keith Polk, "The Trombone, the Slide Trumpet and the Ensemble Tradition of the Early Renaissance," *Early Music* 17 (1989): 389–97. Patrick Tröster, "More about Renaissance Slide Trumpets: Fact or Fiction." *Early Music* 32 (2004): 252–70. Edmund

DOI: 10.2153/0120240011001

Downey's paper had questionable features, but brass instrument scholarship, and the musical world more generally, owes him a debt of gratitude for provoking one of the more important and conspicuous debates about the history of brass instruments.[5]

My purpose in this paper is not to re-open that debate, even though some comments at its conclusion may suggest the contrary. Primarily, I have a more modest objective: to consider the time when the S-shaped instrument emerged and to encourage greater interest in this version of the late medieval trumpet. Downey claimed that it originated in France in the early fifteenth century, a view that appears to have been shared. This was certainly mistaken. An English iconographical source of 1379 shows what is clearly an S-shaped trumpet. It has been cited by other writers but has often been wrongly or ambiguously dated, and to my knowledge it has never received close scrutiny for musical purposes.[6] My focus in this article is therefore threefold: to explain why the source can be dated so precisely, to suggest how consideration of the material purpose

Figure 1: Worcester Cathedral Misericord S19: a joust with two musical supporters.

A. Bowles, "Blowing a Trumpet," *Early Music* 18 (1990): 350–51.

[5] An excellent general overview of the development of the trumpet in the period is given in Keith Polk, "Trumpets, Shawms, and the Early Slide Trumpet ca. 1350–1470," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 30 (2018): 1–17.

[6] It is dated wrongly in several sources published before 2000. Francis Galpin (*Old English Instruments of Music*, 1910), who was usually reliable, dated it variously as "late fourteenth century," "1394," and "1397." This may be the source of a legacy of errors perpetuated by, for example, Anthony Baines, *Brass Instruments: their History and Development* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 94; Tom L. Naylor, *The Trumpet and Trombone in Graphic Arts 1500–1800* (Nashville: The Brass Press, 1979), 193; and the first edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), s.v. "Trumpet," but corrected in the second edition. Part of the problem seems to have been caused by a simple transcriptional error in which "1379" was presented as "1397."

of the source might cast light on popular understanding of the instrument at the time it was created, and in conclusion to offer some thoughts on how the S-shaped trumpet might benefit from attention in its own right, rather than being regarded as merely a brief stage in the trumpet's history.

The S-shaped trumpet marked an important development in the history of brass instruments. It is assumed to have been made possible by advances in medieval metal technology that enabled metal tubing to be bent without adversely impacting its internal bore profile. This may be true, but properly it should be seen as the rediscovery of a technique that seems to have been lost since Roman times.[7] The primary advantage provided by the S-shaped design was its ergonomic shape, which may have stimulated more enterprising ways of playing as well as more interesting repertoires and musical utilities. It has been suggested that the instrument was invented partly or even primarily to allow trumpeters to play when riding a horse. That a trumpet of this type could be used for that purpose is beyond doubt, but there is scope to wonder whether such a facility was in demand when a short-form trumpet (clarin) could have been thus used anyway.

Worcester misericord S19

The "S"-shaped trumpet is shown in a wood carving on a misericord at Worcester Cathedral (Figure 1), which, in the medieval period, was one of nine Benedictine cathedral priories in England.[8] It is one of forty-two misericords fitted in the north (N) and south (S) choir stalls. The one showing the trumpet has been assigned the identifier S19.[9] A misericord is a shallow, hinged shelf, fitted in church choir stalls approximating to seat level. In modern times they are usually part of more elaborate Victorian stalls; in the medieval period the arrangements would have been much starker. They were introduced at a time when monks stood rather than knelt for prayer.[10] The daily offices, which started at dawn with matins and ended at night with compline,

[7] See Peter Holmes, *Horns and Trumpets of the European Iron Age: The Horn and Trumpet in Ancient Europe and the Middle East. Book 1* (London: ABCo Design, 2022). For a brief overview of medieval developments in metal manufacture, see also Bowles, "Blowing a Trumpet."

[8] See Joan Greatrex, *The English Benedictine Cathedral Priories: Rule and Practice, c.1279–c.1420* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The words "priory," "abbey," and "monastery" each refer to a place that houses a religious community. However, "cathedral priory" has a more specific meaning and refers to a monastic order attached to a cathedral in the Province of Canterbury. There were just nine English cathedral priories.

[9] There are many catalogues of misericords but no unified reference system. In this article I use the system adopted by Worcester Cathedral in its short publication *The Misericords in Worcester Cathedral* (Worcester: Reef Publishing, n.d.), but it should not be taken as a standard reference.

[10] For the manner of worship in the period, see Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021).

routinely occupied up to nine hours of a day. As well as the ordinary and proper prayers of the day and other offices in the cycle of devotions, there was a requirement for each of the 150 psalms to be read aloud each week. Monks leaned against misericords to ease their exhaustion (the literal meaning of "misericord" is "pity for the heart"); those of advanced years would have found them especially welcome. They survive in churches (and some museums) in Britain and other European countries. When folded and unoccupied they reveal their woodcarvings, most frequently in oak, and showing a bewilderingly various range of topics.

S19 shows a joust in which two mounted knights in full armor are supported by two musical squires: a drummer (a pair of nakers at his waist) and the trumpeter. All but four of the present Worcester misericords are original and were installed in 1379; S19 is undoubtedly one of the original installations.[11] Some in the Worcester set, like others found in British and European churches, show labors of the months (sowing, harvesting, felling of trees, and so on) and a large group show biblical scenes; others have depictions of leisure activities, as well as mythical topics and grotesques. S19 can be regarded as falling into the category of leisure or entertainment. As I explain below, the tournament was a popular topic for representation in misericords and in illustrated books.

Dating S19

Few misericords can be dated precisely, but it is possible to attribute an exact date to S19 for reasons that are exceptional. They center on the activities of John de Lyndesey (Lyndsey), an obedientiary (a monk with designated duties)[12] of the Benedictine order. He was ordained in 1350 and quickly gained respect and even celebrity: by 1372 he was appointed sacrist of the priory.[13] As such he was responsible for the maintenance of the abbey buildings and the land that encircled it. He was ambitious to restore

[11] Four are nineteenth-century replacements. The originals were installed in the choir stalls under the tower in 1379, moved to a different position in 1551 and returned to their present position in 1556. They were moved again in the early nineteenth century and restored yet again to the choir in 1865. For an overview of the three-dimensional art at the cathedral, with (given the date of publication) remarkably good photographic images, see Elijah Aldis, *Carvings and Sculptures of Worcester Cathedral* (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1873). A Victorian copy of S19 (without the two musicians) was installed at Gloucester Cathedral in 1887.

[12] The word "obedientiary" is used frequently in literature about medieval religious communities but is otherwise descending to obsolescence. It appears to have had two meanings in the fourteenth century. Firstly, to mean a member of a religious community who was designated to a specific office by a senior member of that community such as an abbot, and secondly (and rarely) it was used more liberally to mean a member of a religious community: one who obeyed the rules of that community.

[13] Lyndsey was proposed as dean of Worcester three times, but not appointed. The position of sacrist, itself an important post, may have been awarded as compensation.

parts that had fallen into disrepair, for even in 1372 it was more than 350 years old. It is important to stress that the restoration of places of worship in the late medieval period was considerably more than a practical chore: it was regarded as a profound act of devotion because it signified spiritual renewal.

Lyndsey started his work in the precincts: in the graveyard where monks were buried. Early in his endeavors he encountered an obstruction in the soil which transpired to be a hoard of gold coins. We might speculate that he interpreted this as divine intervention: not only was the Almighty approving of the work—he was also providing it with a subvention. The gold was sold to a local goldsmith who provided funds sufficient to pay for extensive renovations. He went on to supervise the rebuilding of the bell tower, the vaultings of the nave, the choir stalls and much more. The completion of each stage was recorded in the Liber Albus of the abbey.[14] It states that all work on the choir stalls including their installation was completed in 1379. However, a further independent source verifies this date and that the story about the gold coins is not apocryphal.

It appears that Lyndsey and the prior incumbent at the time the gold was found had not followed the legal requirement to inform the king of the finding. Consequently, in 1391/2 "a writ of distraint" was issued to both men on account of the gold pieces

Figure 2: Sherborne Abbey, Dorset, England. Misericord showing a male grimacing face.

[14] The *Liber Albus* (White Book) of Worcester survives in the Worcester Cathedral Library and accumulatively records much of its history. My secondary source for this information is Joan Greatrex, *Biographical Register of the English Cathedral Priories of the Province of Canterbury c.1066–1540* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) (henceforth cited as *BRECP*).

they had found "about seventeen years earlier." That the money had been spent on the fabric of the abbey appears to have been beyond dispute, but the two monks were required to pay £50, a ruinous amount, into the royal exchequer in recompense. A sad story but one that provides this part of the provenance with the highest form of documentary primary source: a legal record.[15]

Matters of context: Worcester and its Benedictines

Worcester is in the west midlands of England, near the Welsh border. Like other priories of the Benedictine order the monks adhered to the *Rule* of St. Benedict.[16] Written in about 540 C.E., it laid out the orders for Christian monasticism: in seventy-three short "chapters" it provided spiritual and temporal guidance for monastic communities. There are chapters dealing with the ascetic life, the daily devotions, the appointment and training of novices, but also day-to-day practicalities such as the administration of tools needed for the necessary crafts, the organization of the cellar and kitchens, and the treatment of travelers and guests, each of whom should be welcomed as if "it were Christ" himself.[17] The frequent presence of visitors is but one of the reasons why religious communities such as that at Worcester were not isolated from external influence, and were not themselves devoid of influence. Each was a constituent of a

Figure 3: Detail of the left supporter in Worcester misericord S19 (nakers player).

[15] *BRECP*, 841.

[16] Carolinne White (transl. and ed.), *The Rule of St Benedict* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

[17] Ibid., 78.

network of religious houses that helped shape the geography of the country. Worcester priory was progressive. For example, it was one of the main supporters and patrons of the nascent university at Oxford, with which it developed strong connections. Many of its monks were sent there as students. Among the regular visitors in the Middle Ages was the royal entourage, for which Worcester was a convenient stopping point on the route to Wales, whose rebellious population was a cause for concern for much of the later Middle Ages. The social and cultural connectiveness of Benedictine settlements, and especially Worcester priory, is important for what follows, because while this article deals with what can be made of one of the smallest decorative items in an otherwise massive religious edifice, the cultural context is of crucial importance.

Figure 4: Bristol Cathedral. Misericord showing a parody of a joust.

Figure 5: St.-Catharina church, Antwerp. Parody of a joust (1531–48).

Misericords as material culture: who made them and how should they be read?

Misericords have traditionally been regarded as a humble form of sculpture and studied primarily for their craftsmanship. More recently this approach has been supplemented by a scholarship directed at a deeper understanding of why the subjects they contain, with their vast scope, were regarded as appropriate for ecclesiastical settings: did they have a purpose beyond their most obvious utility, and was there a meaning that they were intended to convey? Biblical scenes, grotesques, mythological and actual creatures coalesce with scenes of ordinary life in its various states and phases: there are depictions of men pulling faces with outstretched tongues (Figure 2), images of homely domesticity and even scenes of outrageous lasciviousness—some are shocking. Small sculptures of grotesques and similar subjects abound in the extremities of cathedrals, but the choir stalls in which misericords were always situated were proximate to the altar where priests and monks assembled for worship and prayer. Why and how did they find their way into the most sacred space of churches? It is as if those who commissioned and made them felt no burden of restraint. Even in the twelfth century, questions were being asked:

> What mean those ridiculous monstrosities in the courts of cloisters; those filthy apes those fierce lions, those centaurs, those half-men, those spotted tigers, those fighting soldiers and horn blowing hunters… (Letter to the Abbott of St. Thierry from St Bernard of Clairvaux [1125].)[18]

Misericords were not conspicuously displayed; indeed, for much of the time they were hidden. This could weaken the idea that significant meaning was intended, but a different interpretation suggests the opposite: their obscurity contributes to and helps explain their meaning. The images may indeed be obscure to the human eye, but not to an omnipotent and all-seeing god. A credible argument can be offered which suggests that misericords were placed at the site where prayers and supplications were made on behalf of the laity precisely because they represented the human condition in its bewildering entirety: from the profound to the trivial, from virtue to debauchery, from the sacred to the profane.[19] Indeed, some felt that the sentiment extended beyond humanity to all God's creations: the Prior de Coinsi found it necessary to censure the clergy for allowing "wild cats and lions" to stand equal to the saints.[20]

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[18] Quoted in Paul Hardwick, *English Misericords: The Margins of Meaning* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 6. Hardwick's work provides an excellent example of more modern research into misericords and their meaning.

[19] Ibid., *passim*.

[20] Julia de Wolf Addison, *Arts and Crafts in the Middle Ages; a Description of Medieval Workmanship* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1908), 271.

Figure 6: Marginal illustration from the "Queen Mary Psalter" (early fourteenth century) Lbl. MS 2 B VII.f.176r.

If the idea that misericords symbolize the entirety of the human condition at the epicenter of prayer has credibility, it is likely that S19 was meant to be read as a narrative, comprehensible to all, irrespective of social station. But this idea works only if the narrative content was sufficiently clear and familiar: to the monks themselves and the laity (from which monks were drawn), whose sense of mortality and engagement with devotion was heightened following the Black Death plague of 1348/9.[21] Most of the laity may have been poor and often illiterate, but they were not universally stupid, neither were they humorless or oblivious to parody, faculties that would have been essential in this instance, because the narrative of S19 was undoubtedly more obvious in the fourteenth century than it is to modern eyes. Satires and incongruities are a common feature of medieval iconography, and tournaments and jousts were especially favored for such treatment. It follows that the modern quip that misericords were "jokes hidden under seats"[22] may well apply, but it is worth remembering that a joke works only if the audience gets it.

Our attention in S19 should be drawn to neither the jousting knights nor the trumpeter, but to the drummer (Figure 3) who, open-mouthed and unfooted, is seized by the imminent and comic realization that a horse and its armored rider is about to descend on him.

Jousting and other tournaments, sports of choice for the nobility, were viewed by many with a measure of skepticism and even ridicule. Most known misericords that take the joust or tournament as its topic are satirical parodies; the same largely applies

[21] About sixty records of Worcester monks of the period survive. They show that most recruitment came from the town itself (several of the priors were local men) and from the surrounding farmlands and woodlands.

[22] The term "jokes hidden under seats" is a widely quoted phrase in literature on misericords; see, for example, Addison, *Arts and Crafts*, 271.

Figure 7: Worcester Cathedral misericord S23: A huntsman with his horn.

to their representations in illuminated manuscripts.[23] For example, a misericord installed by about 1332 at Bristol Cathedral, a little more than sixty miles distant from Worcester, shows two jousting figures: not knights in armor but broom-waving peasants, one mounted on a pig, the other on a large bird—perhaps a turkey (Figure 4). Others show monks mounted on hobby horses of the type made as children's toys (Figure 5).

This should influence the way we understand the trumpeter in S19. He is not a principal; the main story is elsewhere. If the instrument had been unfamiliar, it would have been a distraction. From this we might conclude that the instrument was indeed known in the region of Worcester and probably in Britain more widely somewhat earlier, and perhaps significantly earlier than 1379. This idea gains additional credibility from documentary sources that show that trumpet and nakers combinations were popular in England from much earlier in the fourteenth century.[24]

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[23] This generalization is based on scrutiny of the catalogued themes listed in *The Index of Medieval Art at Princeton University* (https://theindex.princeton.edu/ accessed 11 November 2024). See also Malcolm Haydn Jones, "The Misericords of Beverley Minster: a Corpus of Folk-loric Imagery and its Cultural Milieu…" (PhD Thesis, The Council for National Academic Awards/Polytechnic of the South West, 1991).

[24] See Richard Rastall with Andrew Taylor, *Minstrels and Minstrelsy in Late Medieval England*

Figure 8: Detail from the "Bible of Richard II," Lbl MS1 E IX f.151r.

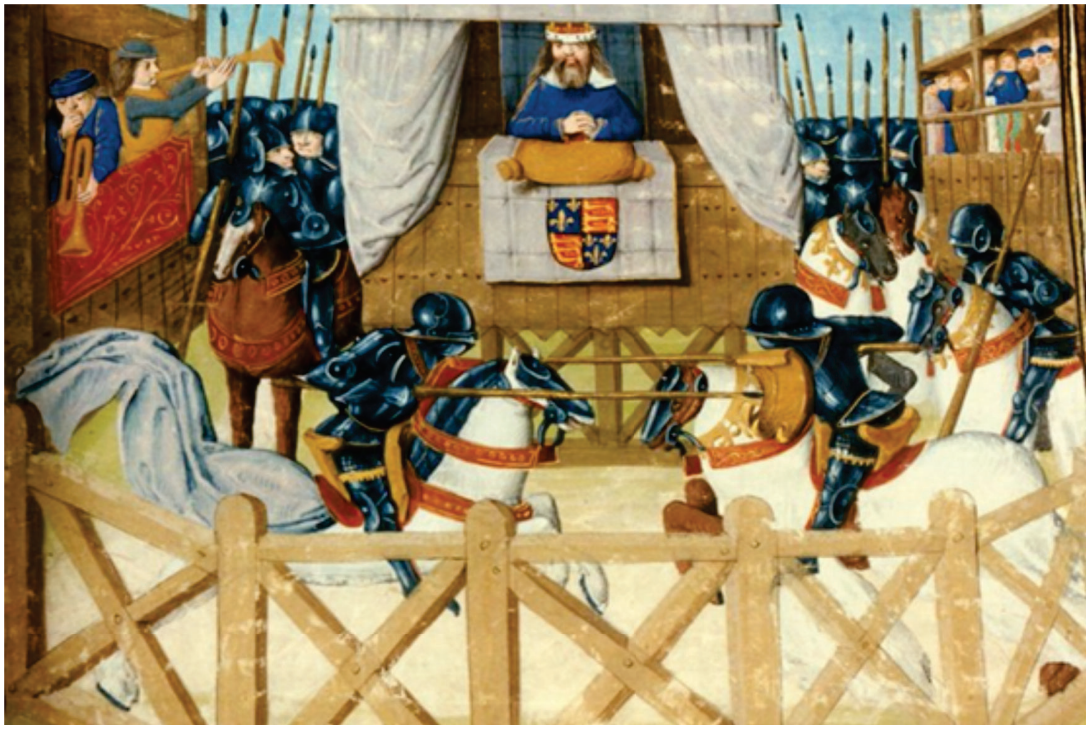

Figure 9: Detail from the "St. Alban's Chronicle." Lambeth Palace Library MS 6. f.233

How original was S19: could it have been a copy?

Other questions about the originality of the S19 scene remain to be addressed. Could it be a copy of an image that originated elsewhere? Many medieval images were copies or variants of existing sources, and the corpus of misericords shows many topics to be formulaic. A further possibility is that S19 was commissioned from elsewhere, even from a foreign workshop. The latter idea can be set aside because the Worcester set conforms to a design format that is exclusive to English misericords: a centerpiece with supporters on both of its sides—thus the two jousting knights (the centerpiece, with a squire on each side (the supporters).[25] However, other questions frustratingly persist: who did the commissioning and to what brief? Were wood craftsmen or monks given free license, and if so, from what experience could their inspiration have been drawn for S19?

There were three stages in the production of misericords: commissioning, designing, and carving. Two, or even all three of these stages might have been the work of the same

(London: Boydell and Brewer, 2023), passim.

[25] G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xx. It may be noted that supporters seem to be peculiar to Britain. The author knew of "no examples among European misericords."

person. Surviving documentation is absent, but the Worcester set is assumed to have been commissioned by the obedientiaries.[26] Another assumption is that carvers always worked to an extant or invented design which was settled before the commencement of carving. As is the case elsewhere, the forty-two misericords at Worcester show no attempt to fit into an overall thematic scheme; designers appear to have had free license. The biblical scenes in the Worcester set (all depictions of Old Testament stories) are based on wall paintings that once covered the internal walls of the twelfth-century chapter house.[27] The sources for the other designs are open to speculation; the favored idea is that they were copied from marginal illustrations in illuminated books of hours and prayer books.[28] There is no known iconographical source of an S-shaped trumpet on which S19 could have been based, but an approximation of the basic topic is found in an illuminated book known as the *Queen Mary Psalter*, which originated in London or East Anglia between 1310 and 1320. It shows a dual scene with a tambourine player on one side and a (straight) trumpet being blown on the other. Each of the characters including the mounts are represented as apes (Figure 6).[29]

As is usually the case, the identity of the Worcester carvers is unknown, but they probably worked permanently at the abbey, which had an established reputation for its craft work. The skills may have been found among the monks themselves[30]; one of the Worcester obedientiaries, a man named Mason, has been proven to have been, literally, a stone mason.[31] Furthermore, wood carving skills were not exclusive to carpenters; those who worked with other materials such as leather, alabaster and even stone and metals may also have had the necessary skills.[32] Worcester monks were recruited almost entirely from the town and its surrounding farms and woodlands where craft skills would have been common, and it has been noticed that misericords in other Worcestershire

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[26] M. J. Anderson (freestanding chapter in ibid.). John Perry, in a work devoted primarily to metalwork, makes the interesting point that "it was within the great Benedictine monasteries that the artistic crafts were fostered and exercised in the first millennium." John Tavenor Perry, *Dinanderie: A History and Description of Medieval Art Work in Copper, Brass and Bronze* (London: G. Allen and Sons, 1910), 87.

[27] See Mrs. Trenchard Cox [*sic*], "The Twelfth-Century Design Sources of the Worcester Cathedral Misericords," *Archeologica* (1959): 165–71.

[28] M. J. Anderson, chapter in *A Catalogue of Misericords.*

[29] London, British Library, MS 2 B VII.f.176r. The provenance mentioned above is that established by the British Library. The name attached to the psalter is misleading; it is given because in the sixteenth century it was the property of Queen Mary. The original owner was Isabella of France, the consort of Edward II. It was probably made for her.

[30] Of all British misericords of the period none have been linked to a particular carver. It has been suggested that those in some of the royal chapels were made by the King's master carpenter, but there is no evidence linking any carver to a specific misericord.

[31] *BRECP*, 826–27.

[32] John Blair and Nigel Ramsey (eds.), *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), 401.

churches have more than a passing resemblance to the Worcester abbey set. The *Rule* of St. Benedict refers to crafts in two of its seventy-three rules: *Rule 32*, which deals with the monastery's tools and property and *Rule 57*, which concerns the monastery's craftsmen and the need for humility, even among the most skilful of them—suggesting that some of them were richly endowed with such skills.

S19, like the other Worcester misericords, demonstrates assiduous attention to detail. Interestingly, it is not the only one to show an innovative brass instrument. S23 (also one of the original 1379 set) has an image of what is catalogued as "a huntsman with his horn" (Figure 7): the horn is a circular instrument apparently in two parts joined within a pommel—a very early source, perhaps the earliest for a medieval, circular brass instrument. Two supporters are present, both in the form of double-headed eagles.[33] The hunt and the huntsman are frequently encountered pastoral topics in misericords because they were such a common feature of ordinary life. Here too there is no known source from which a copy might have been made. This raises the possibility that the design is based on local observation, and this might also explain why the detail of the instrument is so exact.

Later English images of S-shaped trumpets.

There are at least two other English iconographic sources showing the S-shaped trumpet, both later than S19, but probably earlier than the most quoted French sources. One is an image in an illuminated bible, known as the "Bible of Richard II"; it shows a trumpet amidst a group of other musicians who are clustered around King David—the illustration accompanies Psalm 80 (Figure 8).[34] Galpin, presumably because of its association with Richard II who died in 1400, assumed it to be late fourteenth century, but the British Library, on the basis of subsequent research, believes it to be a decade or so later. The second source is found in a copy of the "St. Alban's Chronicle" in the possession of Lambeth Palace Library (Figure 9). Again, there is a connection with Richard II: he is seen in full-face, observing a tournament of knights while two musicians, a trumpeter and most probably a shawm player, perform in a balcony to his right. This has been dated late fourteenth century by Lambeth Palace Library.[35]

Relevance and Hypotheses

The two things this paper establishes beyond reasonable doubt are that S19 was made in England and that it was created no later than 1379—almost certainly during that year. Less certain is the date when the S-shaped trumpet became widely known in England and elsewhere in Europe, but it strains credibility to believe that the instru-

[33] The double-headed eagle was not at this time as strongly linked with countries of the Holy Roman Empire as it was to become.

[34] London, British Library, Royal MS 1 E IX f151r.

[35] London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS6 f.233.

ment was completely new in the late 1370s. It is worth stressing that no claim is made that this form of the instrument had English origins, but of course, it is possible and there are grounds for believing that the instrument was made locally.[36] While this information clarifies some detail, it does not impact dramatically on the overall story of the late medieval trumpet, but it might prompt curiosity about the status of the S-shaped instrument in that story. By this I mean that this form of the instrument might be considered a distinctive species rather than a mere a stage in the development of the trumpet. Put somewhat differently, and to emphasize a point made above, the change from the straight trumpet to the more ergonomic design is unlikely to have had a neutral effect on players and the way they played. This idea is accompanied by an obvious and apparently insurmountable problem—sources that could endow it with total credibility are almost entirely absent. There are no written musical sources because repertoire was memorized and transmitted aurally, and documentary sources are insufficiently explicit about the way trumpets were played; but it should not follow that the most searching questions should be avoided, or that reasonable hypotheses must not be explored.

Keith Polk, in one of several contributions to our understanding of trumpet idioms in the Middle Ages, has described the extent to which trumpet and shawm bands functioned in Germany in the fifteenth century, and shown them to have been sophisticated ensembles with distinctive idioms.[37] Could analogous groups have existed earlier? Could the new ergonomic species of the instrument have prompted equally distinctive idioms in the fourteenth century? The S-shaped instrument was known in a town at the western edge of England in the 1370s. Is it reasonable to draw from this that it was probably a familiar sight in many other places where a musical life flourished?

Fourteenth-century minstrels were not isolated. The best of them were part of vibrant international networks, trumpeters especially so because the diplomatic and emissarial functions and royal errands with which they were charged granted special license to travel unhindered. There were also assemblies that had a major influence on internationalism among minstrels. Rob Wegman has drawn attention to what may be the most important: the minstrel schools.[38] Wegman suggests that minstrel schools were held in Europe between 1313 and 1447. They were congregations of minstrels who met annually or, in an age punctuated by geopolitical conflict, at greater intervals. The meetings were usually held in Lent when court and other duties were subdued or suspended. They took place in various European countries (including England) and

[36] A subsequent paper may offer further information on the possibility that the S-shaped instrument was manufactured in Worcester and that it might have had English origins.

[37] Keith Polk, *German Instrumental Music of the Late Middle Ages: Players, Patrons and Performance Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[38] Rob Wegman, "The Minstrel School in the Late Middle Ages," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 14 (2002): 11–30. See also, Andrew Wathey, "The Peace of 1360–69 and Anglo-French Musical Relations," *Early Music History* 9 (1989): 129–74.

were hosted by cities (presumably by guilds or confraternities) rather than noble houses. They should be understood as resembling modern trade conventions in which ideas, practices, developments to instruments, and repertoires were shared.[39] English court records show that court minstrels were funded to attend these events (for example, in 1377 two pipers and a nakerer were given "9.00s to go to the schools overseas"),[40] but the records are unlikely to reveal the full scale of engagement of English performers. Richard Rastall has estimated that as many as sixty-eight English minstrels may have received such subventions,[41] and at least three of the schools were held in England.

While sources about the schools convey little about what and how instrumentalists performed, other sources show that in the middle of the fourteenth century there were important and rapid changes to the "songs" performed by minstrels.[42] The most revealing witness of this is given in the Limburg Chronicle, the work of Tilemann Elhen von Wolfhagen, a notary and clerk in the German town of Limburg. Wolfhagen described changes to songs around 1360, and went on:

> Things changed also with the regard to trumpet and shawm playing and music progressed [lit., ascended] and had never been as good as it has now started to become. For he who was known, five or six years ago, as a good shawm player throughout the whole country [the Rhineland, perhaps the Holy Roman Empire as a whole], is not worth a fly now.[43]

Trumpet playing in England in the fourteenth century

By the fifteenth century a distinction was made in French-language texts between the military trumpet (*trompette de guerre*) and the "minstrel trumpet" (*trompette des ménestrels*):[44] terms that may have signified different instruments as well as musical deployments. A common assumption has been that this distinction supports the possibility that by this time slide trumpets were in use, but this too is an interpretation that has been contested.

English sources that reveal information about the employment of trumpeters are numerous,[45] but there are no documentary references that can be confidently linked

[39] A list of Minstrel Schools assembled by Keith Polk is appended to Wegman's article (ibid.).

[40] Rastall, *Minstrels and Minstrelsy*, 67.

[41] Ibid. Rastall also mentions the attendance of English minstrels as early as 1288/9: earlier than the period Wegman attributes to them.

[42] It is likely that "songs" refers to more than the performance of vocal music and suggests secular music more generally.

[43] Quoted in Wegman, "The Minstrel School," 15.

[44] The earliest sources that make this distinction are from the Burgundian court.

[45] The basis for documentary information on minstrels in this period is given in a variety of works by Richard Rastall, much of it consolidated in *Minstrels and Minstrelsy*. Also, two books

specifically to the S-shaped instrument. Some generalizations can be made from payment lists, livery records, and other documents. The most obvious features revealed by such sources are that trumpet players were in abundance and that the best of them were well-paid, well-traveled, and not isolated from European trends. They were employed by the royal household and by noble households elsewhere in England, Scotland, and Wales, and on important occasions, such as coronations, several were gathered to work alongside each other; for example, at Whitsuntide in 1306, for the knighting of Edward of Caernarvon, nineteen trumpeters were in attendance. Some towns and cities also employed trumpeters.[46] There was a hierarchy determined as much by the status of the employers as the employed: some trumpeters, especially those of the royal household, enjoyed high regard, others were journeymen.[47] Some were despatched as part of military campaigns, but there does not appear to have been an obvious routine discrimination between military and other trumpeters. The instruments they played seem to have been made in England or Scotland. There are records of money being spent for that purpose and goldsmiths appear to have been part of that trade even in the fourteenth century.[48] One of the key roles of trumpeters was enacted simply by their presence in a noble entourage: they were symbols of status; but this feature, and their deployment on military campaigns, along with their classification as components of "loud" rather than "still" ensembles, should not limit our understanding of what trumpeters did and how they did it.

Peter Downey and Edward Tarr both suggested that medieval trumpeters used only the first four notes in the harmonic series (H1–H4) of whatever was their instrument's nominal pitch.[49] This seems unlikely. While the fundamental is theoretically present on

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by Constance Bullock-Davies, *A Register of Royal and Baronial Domestic Minstrels 1272–1327* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), and *Menestrellorum Multitudo* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978).

[46] See Richard Rastall, "Civic Minstrels in Late Medieval England: New Light on Duties and Careers," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 52 (2021): 183–218.

[47] Information is scarce but it is worth noting that not all trumpeters were recipients of the same fees. For example, Earl Warren's trumpeters in 1306 were rewarded with 9 pence a day, while payments to the Welsh trumpeters Yvan and Ithel a year later received just 2 pence a day. Rastall, *Minstrels and Minstrelsy*, 19.

[48] There is evidence of silver trumpets being commissioned by the royal household in the fourteenth century, presumably for special occasions. In the 1380s the Goldsmiths owned two silver trumpets (Rastall, *Minstrels and Minstrelsy*, 247). See also Maurice Byrne, "Instruments for the Goldsmiths' Company," *Galpin Society Journal* 19 (1966): 71–83, which deals with the involvement of the goldsmiths in instrument making in the sixteentth century. Court records also refer to reimbursements for trumpets or parts of trumpets made of latten, a yellow alloy closely resembling brass. Some instruments were made of copper.

[49] Downey, "The Slide Trumpet." Tarr, in his article on the trumpet in *New Grove I*, references Grocheio's *Ars Musicae* (ca. 1300) for this, but I can find no such reference. Grocheio mentions trumpets just twice and on neither occasion infers such limitations. It is possible that Tarr drew

all brass instruments, it can hardly be regarded as part of their routine tessitura. So, if H1 is ignored, it follows that, by this measure, the careers of medieval trumpeters were determined by their efficiency in playing just three notes. Downey also suggested that one of the principal roles of trumpeters was to play drones. This is possible, but is it likely? It is difficult to read the available sources without concluding that trumpeters led more interesting and complex professional lives, but detecting clear evidence about the totality of what and how trumpeters played involves speculation. The difficulty is exacerbated in English sources of this period by the fluctuating meanings of key parts of the vocabulary associated with music making. Most troublesome are the words "minstrel" and "minstrelsy," both of which appear to have had a looser meaning in England than in the French equivalent. The original meaning of "minstrel" was a court servant or functionary, but by the early thirteenth century it had evolved to mean one who was associated with courtly entertainment. This included musicians and singers, but also jugglers, waferers (those who made wafers), jesters, and others. It may also have included heralds, who, despite modern uses of that word, were not themselves trumpeters even though they were often accompanied by a trumpeter: they were court messengers, and executors of declamatory announcements who also had responsibility for the organization of ceremonies and entertainments.[50] All who were engaged for entertainments are often routinely listed in payment records under "minstrels," so musicians are there, but so is, for example, John de Coton, who made "his minstrelsy with snakes (*cum serpentibus*) before the King," and a group of nude dwarfs who were similarly rewarded for their "minstrelsy."[51]

Notwithstanding such challenges, it is possible to discern general features about how the lives of trumpeters were led in fourteenth-century England. Many, unsurprisingly, were members of dynasties in which the skills of fathers were passed to sons. On the other hand some attached to the royal court may have had more formal training from childhood.[52] A letter from the Prince of Wales (later Edward II) in 1306 instructed his Keeper of the Wardrobe, "we bid you to buy in London, for our little trumpeters, a pair of trumpets which are good and strong for packing; and pair of little nakers for Franseskyn our nakerer."[53] These refer to five "boy minstrels," each less than thirteen years old, who are mentioned in court records and may also have been retained as child

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the inference from the theoretical sections of Grocheio's text.

[50] Trumpeters would have been in attendance for some heraldic duties, but heralds were not themselves trumpeters. I am grateful to the College of Heralds for clarifying this point. For the history of heraldry, see Anthony Richard Wagner, *Heralds and Heraldry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

[51] Bullock-Davies, *Menestrellorum Multitudo*, 66–67.

[52] Ibid., 10. For trumpets in medieval processions more generally, see Edmund Bowles, "Musical Instruments in Civic Processions during the Middle Ages," *Acta Musicologica* 33 (1961): 157–61.

[53] Bullock-Davies, *Menestrellorum Multitudo*, 149.

choristers or grooms, but in adulthood became court minstrels.[54] There were others who were singled out as exceptional because of their service and, by implication, their quality. One was the trumpeter John Scot who spent his entire life in the service of the king (Edward II and III), much of it as part of a group of two trumpeters and two nakerers. When he retired, he was "granted for life and without rendering anything to the king, 8 acres of land and a meadow in the town of Pontefract in Yorkshire."[55] There are instances where the scale of payments and the spaces in which trumpeters performed imply that their role was not confined to the issue of declamatory fanfares. For example, there are payments in 1302 to the trumpeter John Carlisle for his minstrelsy in the presence of the two young princes, and to the trumpeter William Corbet who, with another unnamed trumpeter of the Earl of Arundel, entertained the king in his private rooms. What, one wonders, was played and heard in such places?

There is some evidence, sometimes circumstantial, that trumpets were heard in English ecclesiastical settings from the thirteenth century, for example shawms and trumpets played in a service that preceded the knighting of the future Edward II at Pentecost in 1306.[56] Edmund Bowles has offered convincing evidence for their use in ecclesiastical settings elsewhere in Europe from the early fifteenth century and this may be relevant to the events at the Council of Constance which is discussed briefly below.[57] Whether trumpets performed in the liturgy itself is a more open question, but Andrew Kirkman has suggested that such was possible at the chapel of the Court of Savoy in the fifteenth century.[58]

It is difficult to determine when and where the S-shaped instrument first appeared. Keith Polk suggests that it emerged ca.1370 and lasted only until about 1390, "though this profile [of the instrument] did continue to appear from time to time in the fifteenth century."[59] I estimate it to have emerged slightly earlier—in the 1350s perhaps—lasting until some point in the sixteenth century, if one can rely on iconographical evidence alone.[60] The nominal pitch of trumpets in England in the fourteenth century is difficult to estimate. However, estimates have been made during close examination of

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[54] Rastall (*Minstrels and Minstrelsy*, 54) names five boy minstrels who appeared in the 1306 Pentecost celebrations.

[55] Ibid., 150.

[56] Richard Rastall, "Minstrelsy, Church, and Clergy in Medieval England," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 97 (1970–71): 83–98.

[57] Edmund A Bowles, "Were Musical Instruments used in the Liturgical Service during the Middle Ages?" *Galpin Society Journal* 10 (1957): 40–56.

[58] Andrew Kirkman, "The Polyphonic Mass in the Fifteenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth Century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 684.

[59] Polk, *German Instrumental Music*, 6.

[60] There is plenty of evidence from later English sources, including a memorial plaque to Matthew Godwin on an internal wall of Exeter Cathedral. It is dated 1587.

the fourteenth century "Billingsgate trumpet," so called because it was discovered in a construction site in the Billingsgate district of the City of London in 1984.[61] Four parts of a trumpet were found, but there is doubt about whether these parts formed a single instrument, or where those parts were made.

The Council of Constance

This topic is appended in the interest of completeness and because it could be relevant to the argument made about the status of the S-shaped instrument. It is also a matter of special interest for the early history of the trombone. It concerns the performance of the trumpeters who accompanied the English delegation at the Council of Constance in 1414/15. The Council was assembled to resolve a papal schism, but it has also been identified as an event that marked a turning point in international cultural exchange.[62] The English delegation was led by Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, the King's most favored and cleverest diplomat. English documents that describe the preparation leading to the despatch of the delegation are scarce: many are believed to have been lost in a fire in the seventeenth century.[63] What we know of the event itself is substantially based on the chronicle of an eyewitness, Ulrich von Richental, a local man, and the son of a senior town official at Constance. The source needs some context: it appears not to have been written until at least a decade after the event and is now lost. It survives in copies made by others, none of which was made less than two decades after Richental's original. Concordance between the copies is sufficient to suggest their reliability, particularly in respect of the matter at hand. According to the Richental chronicle, the English delegation included a group of seven musicians, presumably English, who played shawms and trumpets (*Prusuner*). They performed in various spaces to great effect, including at a mass marking the uniquely English feast of St. Thomas Becket of Canterbury. Richental described their performance thus: "die prusoner prusenettend überainander mit dry stymmen, als man sunst gewonlich singet" ("the trumpets played together in three parts in the way that one normally sings"). This

[61] On the Billingsgate trumpet, see Jeremy Montagu, *The 14th century Billingsgate Trumpet, Museum of London*. https://jeremymontagu.co.uk/The%20Billingsgate%20Trumpet.pdf (accessed 28 August 2023), which contains references to other sources that have analyzed this find. Also, Sabine K. Klaus and John Schofield, "The Billingsgate Trumpet Re-examined and Re-assessed," *Galpin Society Journal* 71 (2018): 95–108. A later trumpet (probably late sixteenth century) was found on the shore at Romney, Kent in the mid-nineteenth century and became the property of the brewer Henry Bean Mackeson, but it is now lost. It is briefly discussed by Louis Bacon and Sabine Klaus in *Historic Brass Today 1* (2022), HistoricBrassToday 2022-v02-i01-Spring-7398.pdf (accessed 11 September 2023).

[62] See, for example, Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music 1380-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter 3.

[63] See C. M. D. Crowder, "Correspondence between England and the Council of Constance 1414–18," in *Studies in Church History* 1 (1964): 184–206.

source was first brought to the attention of brass instrument scholarship by Anthony Baines, who believed it led to the "almost inevitable conclusion" that these were slide trumpets.[64] This may be true, but only if a favorable interpretation is conferred on this one, short phrase, which at face value must be regarded as ambiguous. There is nothing else in the chronicle that supports such an interpretation. It could be explained as a comment on the quality of the playing or on some other feature that is now lost to modern understanding. Does it inevitably follow that the slide trumpet had already been invented, and that its players were already equipped with the skills needed to make such a favorable impression? Is an alternative possible: that this short text could be understood as a statement on the idiom of an instrument that had already been known in England, and probably elsewhere, for at least half a century? One thing seems certain: the performance that accompanied the English delegation was special. At an event when so much music-making was heard and seen, it was to just this one performance that Richental gave more than passing attention.

Conclusions

The S-shaped trumpet probably emerged early in the second half of the fourteenth century. The 1379 Worcester misericord is its earliest known source. Its ergonomic shape was important and may have stimulated new ways of playing. Trumpeters and other minstrels were not isolated in the late medieval period, especially those of the royal household: there were international duties and events that promoted the sharing of the ideas and developments, and they impacted on the working lives of minstrels, including trumpeters. There were also major centers of cultural production, such as the court of Burgundy, which cast an influence across Europe.

The division between *haut* and *bas* groupings (or what was termed "loud" and "still" in England) prevailed throughout the medieval period. This division was determined by practicalities, especially the natural timbre and dynamic balance of instruments, which consequently defined the spaces in which such instruments were appropriately deployed. Such considerations may or may not have conferred exclusive roles for trumpets, but they form a basis for understanding how consorts were understood in the period and the part trumpeters played in them. While we have less information about what they played, it is certain that loud ensembles existed throughout Europe and, critically, they developed idiomatic repertoires.

Klaus and Schofield summarized the role of the medieval trumpet very clearly: "From the twelfth century onward, the trumpet assumed two main functions in

[64] Baines, *Brass Instruments*, 100. Baines' source was M. Schuler, "Die Musik in Konstanz während des Konzils. 1414–1418," *Acta Musicologica* 38 (1966): 150–68. The event has also been discussed in the context of the history of the trombone by Trevor Herbert, *The Trombone* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2006), 59-60, and Stewart Carter, *The Trombone in the Renaissance: A History in Pictures and Documents* (Hillsdale NY: Pendragon Press, 2012), 76–77.

Europe: it was a signalling instrument in times of war and a representative symbol in times of peace; between these two functions stood its use in tournaments."[65] This is probably broadly correct, but because it was intended as a summary it may have missed an important part of the story: that the idiom was not static throughout the later medieval period.

Thanks to Keith Polk for reading this and making several helpful suggestions. To Howard Weiner for information regarding the Council of Constance. Also: Worcester Cathedral Library and its librarian Dr. David Morrison, Rebecca Phillips, archivist of Gloucester Cathedral, the manuscripts departments of the British Library and Lambeth Palace Library, the Societies of Antiquaries of London, the Open University, The Royal College of Music, Cardiff University, and the London Library.

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[65] Klaus and Schofield, "The Billingsgate Trumpet," 106.