

Information Sheet

Fine and Decorative Arts Series No.2

THE LINCOLN IMP



INTRODUCTION

The Angel Choir of the Cathedral Church of St. Mary in Lincoln is one of the finest examples of the ecclesiastical architecture of thirteenth-century England still standing today. Built in the years between 1256 and 1280 to house the shrine of Bishop Hugh of Avalon, who had

been made a saint by the Pope in 1220, the Angel Choir, or retro-choir as it is technically known, consists of five bays with triforium and clerestory, and north and south aisles.

The Choir takes its name from a series of carved figures of angels which fill the spandrels of the triforium arches. In all there are twenty-eight angels together with representations of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Today the detail of their workmanship, as with the detail of the carved roof-bosses in the aisles and the choir, is difficult to see from ground level in the absence of suitable lighting, but almost certainly all the sculptures would have originally been painted or gilded and shown up more clearly against their background. Although the Angels and the roof-bosses quite rightly attract much attention, there is an enormous wealth of detailed figure sculpture elsewhere both inside and outside the retro-choir, worthy of investigation by the visitor.



The Angel Choir, Lincoln Cathedral from the south-west

One of the best known and most popular figures is the so-called Lincoln Imp, a grotesque figure one foot high at the base of an elaborate leaf corbel which supports the vaulting shafts above the penultimate eastern column on the north side of the choir. In form the Imp is a short, thick-set figure with a shaggy or hairy coat. He sits with his right leg crossed over the left knee, with both hands, which are shown as having three thick fingers, resting on his leg. The face is half-human with stumpy horns and bull's ears projecting from the head. His feet are cloven hooves. The Lincoln Imp depicts a devil.

His situation within a Cathedral has almost inevitably given rise over the years to stories and tales which seek to explain his presence there. Many of them are of comparatively recent origin, and very few of them have any intrinsic interest. One of the more common is as follows:—

“One day, many years ago, the wind being in a playful mood brought two Imps to see Lincoln. The first thing that attracted their attention on drawing near the City, was its magnificent Minster. They were filled with awe and astonishment at so noble a building,

and it caused their hearts to sink within them for a time, but plucking up courage, they flew thither to more closely examine its wonderful carvings and mouldings. After flying around for some hours, one Imp found the south door open and with great trepidation, impishly popped his head inside. Catching sight of the exquisite Angel Choir, he could not resist the temptation of a chat with the angels, so in he hopped, making straight for a pillar. He hopped still higher, but his curiosity cost him dear, for no sooner had he reached the top to rest, than he was in a moment turned to stone. The other Imp, tired of looking for his lost brother, alighted on the back of a witch. He also was immediately turned to stone. The wind still haunts the Minster Close awaiting the return of the Imps."

Grotesque figures of half-human, half-animal form became increasingly popular in the art and architecture of early thirteenth-century England and appear in stone sculpture and wood-carving, manuscript illumination and floor tiles. They were used as a vehicle for caricature and satire, but often simply as decoration without any didactic purpose in mind and serve to demonstrate the extraordinarily versatile imagination of the mediaeval artist. On the north and south sides of the Angel Choir many of the figures in a similar position to the Imp are in fact grotesques, a point often overlooked. They are very varied in form, but some have semi-human attributes. Almost all of them are in a very fine state of preservation, and can be seen to the best advantage with the aid of a pair of binoculars.

The Lincoln Imp does not however stand alone. The thirteenth-century sculptors have also used demons or devils as decorative elements elsewhere in the Angel Choir. Grotesque heads with horns and ears appear on the internal east and south walls within the trefoil and quatrefoil decoration, and on the external east wall. Amongst the relief sculptures decorating the southern entrance devils with cloven hooves and hairy bodies can be seen feeding the Damned into the mouth of Hell. Far above them on top of the buttress to the east of the door another devil often associated with the Imp sits on the back of a female figure, now badly weathered and beyond repair. Today, just as in the Middle Ages, both still serve to remind us, as do their companions, of the Church's constant battle between the forces of Good and Evil.

EXPLOITATION OF THE LINCOLN IMP

The 'mediaeval' legend of the Lincoln Imp was almost certainly revived as a sales gimmick by the Lincoln jeweller and watchmaker James Ward Usher (1845-1921). (See Lincolnshire Museums Information Sheet, Fine and Decorative Arts Series No. 1).

Early guides to the Cathedral from 1808 to 1862 make no mention of the Imp. In Murray's *Handbook to the Cathedrals of England* p.293 (published in 1862) reference is made to 'The grotesque below the second corbel on the north side (counting from the east — it is in the retro-choir) represents an elf with large ears and may perhaps be regarded as illustrating the mediaeval folk lore'.

THE POPULARITY OF THE LINCOLN IMP

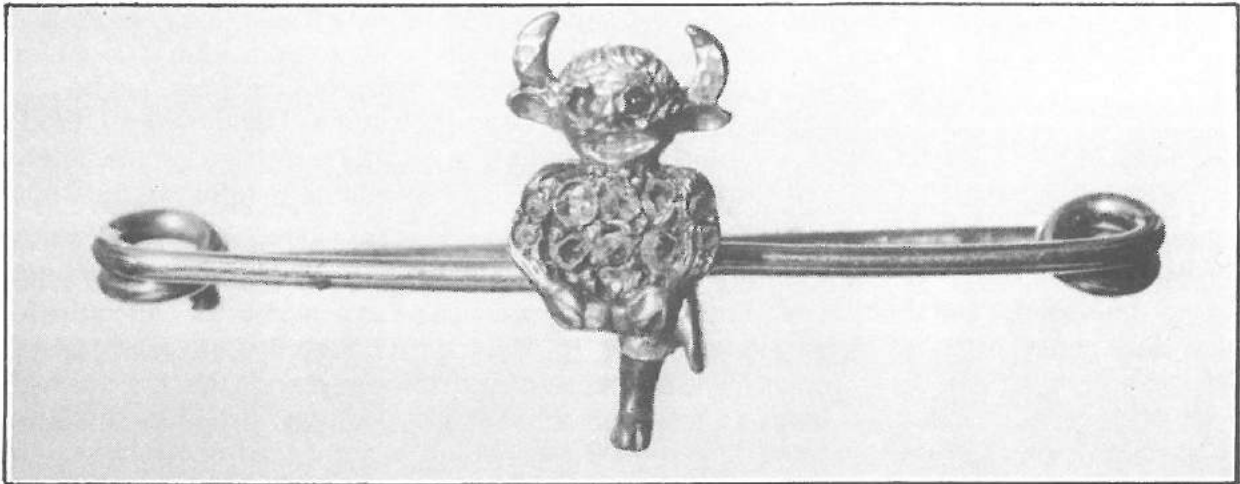
By 1874 the Imp had gathered some popularity and plaster casts were to be seen in a number of shops. These were probably made by the Lincoln firm of G.A. d'Ascanio Savage c. 1895. Mr. E.A. Taylor, who became Usher's shop manager in 1911 records:—

'James Ward Usher an astute business man, had the monopoly of Lincoln Imp jewellery, having registered it and this gave him priority and monopoly for the regulation period of six years. It was a tremendous success and accounted for much business and orders poured in from all over the world. These Imps were made in precious metals and some jewelled, and the writer's first customer, the day he started with the firm, bought eight diamond-set Imp brooches, and gave orders for many more.'

Mr. E.A. Taylor's account of James Ward Usher
(Local Collection, Lincoln Library Service)

It was probably some time around the 1880s or 1890s that James Usher went to the trouble of obtaining a Registered Patent design on the Imp, thus preventing any of his opponents in the

trade from making or selling similar items. The jewellery and souvenirs consisted of brooches (Usher Collection 72/18), cuff links, tie pins, spoons and thimbles. The jewellery was often set with precious stones.



*A Lincoln Imp brooch with rose diamonds, not fully faceted, in a silver setting on a gold mount
Usher Collection 72/18*

A certificate of Registration of Design No. 151149 in the possession of James Usher & Son Ltd., dated 20th June 1890, is a register and design for a Lincoln Imp Spoon. This gave James Ward Usher a copyright of five years.

PATENTS, DESIGNS, AND TRADE MARKS ACT, 1883.

Certificate of Registration of Design.

No. 151149

PATENT OFFICE: DESIGNS BRANCH,
25, SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS,
CHANCERY LANE, LONDON, W.C.,
1890.

This is to certify that the Design, of which annexed is a Copy, was registered this, 20th day of June 1890, in pursuance of the Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks Acts, 1883 to 1888, in respect of the application of such Design to articles comprised in Class One, for which a Copyright of five years is granted.

N.B.—All goods in which registered designs are applied—Classes 1 to 12—should during the period of copyright bear the abbreviation “Rd.” and the number given on registration.
All goods to which registered designs are applied—Classes 13 and 14—should during the period of copyright bear the abbreviation “Regd.”

W B & L (07a) -1820-10000-12-29

*Certificate of Registration of Design dated 20th June, 1890 for a Lincoln Imp spoon
(By courtesy of James Usher & Son Limited, 6 Silver Street, Lincoln)*

The sale of Imp jewellery brought Usher considerable business and fame to the extent that such insufficiently addressed letters as 'To the Silversmith who makes and sells the Lincoln Imp' and another with only a sketch of the Imp and the word 'Lincoln' on the envelope, found their way to his business in the High Street.

FOR YEAR END PRESENTS.

JAMES USHER & SON,
ART JEWELLERS & SILVERSMITHS, HIGH-STREET, LINCOLN.

HAVE UNQUESTIONABLY THE
FINEST, BEST AND CHEAPEST STOCK IN THE CITY
OF CHOICE, yet INEXPENSIVE JEWELLERY & SILVER WARE FOR PRESENTS,
INCREASED VARIETY, AND EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD TASTE.

They would esteem an inspection by all intending
Purchasers of Presents, before making their selection, of their **NEW YEAR SHOW of SILVER WARE.**

FINE GOLD BRACELETS, 16/- to 25/-

FINE GOLD BRACELETS (Gem Set), 30/- to £20

FINE GOLD BROOCHES, from 5/- to 20/-

FINE GOLD NECKLETS, from 15/- to 50/-

FINE GOLD NECKLETS (Pearl Set), from 50/- to £5 5s.

FINE GOLD PENDANTS, from 5/- to 50/-

FINE GOLD MUFF CHAINS and GUARDS, from £2 15s.

FINE GOLD LACE PINS, from 5/-

FINE GOLD LINKS, from 15/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Diamond & Pearl, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Opals & Diamonds, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Turquoise & Pearls 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Rubies and Pearl, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Emerald and Diamonds, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, Olivines and Diamonds, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, in Antique Style, 25/- to 25/-

LADIES' RINGS, 18 Carat Signet, from 25/-

GENTLEMEN'S RINGS, 18 Carat Signet, 30/- to 25/-

SILVER CHATELAINES and **CLASSES.**

SILVER CIGARETTE CASES and **MATCH BOXES.**

SILVER-MOUNTED PURSES and **LETTER CASES.**

HAIR ORNAMENTS and **HAT PINS.**


SILVER-MOUNTED VELVET MATCHES for Chateaux.

OXIDIZED GUN METAL GOODS (Plain and Gem Set).

SILVER FRUIT KNIVES and **GACHOU BOXES.**

SPECIALLY APROPOS FOR PRESENTS ARE JAMES USHER AND SON'S

ROSE BOWLS,
FLOWER VASES and **PROFIT DISHERS,**
NOVEL JARDINIERS and **FERN POTS,**
ARTISTIC LUNCHEON DISHERS,
EGG FRAMES with **12 LOTS**
SILVER SPOONS,
SILVER CALENDARS,
SILVER CARE DISHERS,
SILVER SON-BON USHER,
PLATE. TORTOISE SHELL WARE (Silver-Mounted).



JAMES USHER AND SON'S EVER POPULAR "LINCOLN IMP" SOUVENIR SPOONS & JEWELLERY

(Originally Introduced by them) ARE SHOWN IN GREATLY INCREASED VARIETY.
LATEST ADDITIONS: DIAMOND-SET BROOCHES & CHARMS, BEAUTY AND FASCINATING IN STYLE. **NOW SHOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

JAMES USHER AND SON guarantee all Goods supplied by them to be of **FIRST-CLASS QUALITY,** and whilst possessing the characteristics of Excellence in Taste, to be specially Good Value for money.

JAMES USHER AND SON, HIGH-STREET, LINCOLN.
ESTABLISHED 1837. THEIR 6th CHRISTMAS SHOW.

Trade Announcements.

NEW CENTURY PRESENTS.

JAMES USHER & SON,
ART JEWELLERS & SILVERSMITHS, NEAR THE CORNHILL, LINCOLN.

Request an inspection, which will certainly be well repaid, of their **EXCEEDINGLY BEAUTIFUL STOCK** (acquired both in the City and County of Lincoln) before making selection.

THEY CHALLENGE COMPARISON FOR
GOOD TASTE, CHOICE QUALITY, and STRICTLY MODERATE PRICES.

CHARMING NOVELTIES FROM THE PARIS EXHIBITION.
"LINCOLN IMP" SOUVENIR SPOONS AND JEWELLERY,
for which Messrs. USHER and SON are celebrated, are now to be found in greater variety and selection than ever, forming, on account of their local interest, most appropriate presents.

JAMES USHER & SON were the original introducers, ten years ago, of their now famous
"LINCOLN IMP" SOUVENIR SPOONS & JEWELLERY.
All others are therefore **SIMPLY PIRACERS.**

OTHER SPECIALITIES ARE—
ENGAGEMENT RINGS and GOLD FLEXIBLE BRACELETS } A Splendid Selection from 15/- to £25 each
PEARL-SET NECKLETS & PENDANTS, GOLD COMBS & HAT PINS.
OXIDIZED GUN-METAL JEWELLERY, Plain and Set with Gems. *Now Very Popular.*
TORTOISE SHELL-WARE—SILVER MOUNTED. DAINY CHINA-WARE—SILVER MOUNTED.

WATCHES: An Important Speciality of Messrs. USHER and SON is their
"PEERLESS" LEVER WATCHES in GOLD AND SILVER,
Which have obtained **High Certificates;** every one of which is guaranteed to **perfect accuracy of time, and to last a life time,** and of the excellence of which they have received many **justifying testimonials.**

RICHTLY ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUES OF JEWELLERY AND PLATE, SPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR
PRESENTS, ON APPLICATION TO


JAMES USHER & SON,
ART JEWELLERS & SILVERSMITHS, EXPERTS IN GEMS & ANTIQUE SILVER,
ESTABLISHED 1837. LINCOLN.

NEW YEAR'S PRESENTS.
NEW YEAR'S PRESENTS

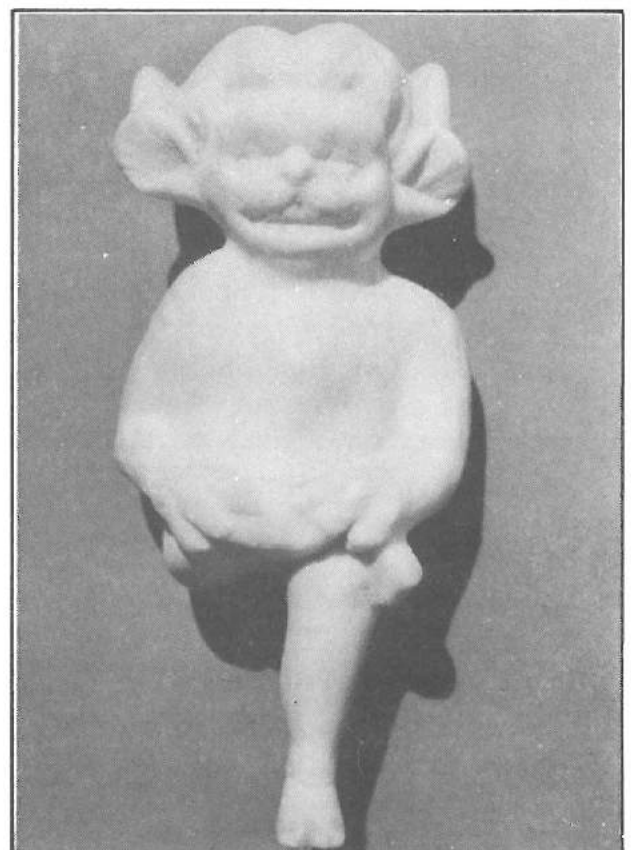
**FIRST CLASS GOODS!
SECOND CLASS PRICES!**

JAMES USHER AND SON,
ART JEWELLERS & SILVERSMITHS,
LINCOLN.

HAVE PLEASURE IN REQUESTING AN INSPECTION OF THEIR
ENTIRELY NEW AND VERY CAREFULLY-SELECTED STOCK OF GOLD JEWELLERY FOR NEW YEAR'S PRESENTS.
NEW AND RICHLI-ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUES,
Containing Hundreds of **SPECIAL NOVELTIES,**
free by post on application.
SPECIALITIES:—
THE "LINCOLN IMP" SOUVENIR SPOONS and JEWELLERY,
JAMES USHER AND SON'S
Original Idea and Introduction.
(All others are imitations).
STERLING SILVER PLATE.
ANTIQUE SILVER, FROM JAMES 1st to Geo. III.
THE LARGEST, THE CHOICEST, AND THE CHEAPEST STOCK OF JEWELLERY AND PLATE IN THE COUNTY;
Possessing Great Advantages in Superiority of Taste.
GOODS SENT FOR SELECTION AND APPROVAL.
JEWELLERY DESIGNED AND MOUNTED TO ORDER.



JAMES USHER AND SON,
GOLDSMITHS, WATCHMAKERS & EXPERTS
IN ANTIQUE SILVER PLATE,
NEAR THE CORNHILL, LINCOLN.



Usher advertisements from the Lincolnshire Echo

A Goss china Imp (Private Collection)

A gold scarf pin incorporating the Imp is reputed to have been presented to Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales, and according to the account he wore it when his horse '*Persimmon*' won the Derby in 1896. The story is also told of Alfred Shuttleworth, the wealthy Lincoln Industrialist who lived at Eastgate House, who when "throwing a party" in the spacious days of the early part of this century made it a custom to give his lady guests a jewelled Imp brooch or some such memento. When the soup was served, the lady guest would remove the cover of her soup dish and there, instead of soup was a jewelled Imp.

Since the early part of this century the Lincoln Imp has appeared in various forms on the handles of brass pokers, toasting forks, table bells, and in Goss china. It still continues to appear on many brass souvenirs today. The quality of these souvenirs has changed markedly over the years from the sumptuous jewellery and the souvenirs which Usher patented. This quality is reflected in the fortune that Usher amassed and his subsequent bequest to the City of Lincoln of his Fine Art Collection and the sum of £59,125.1.4d for the construction of the Usher Gallery. The City of Lincoln owes much to James Ward Usher for his careful selection of this sculptured figure in the Cathedral and its 'mediaeval' legend, as it has greatly promoted the City over the years. The image of the Lincoln Imp is constantly seen throughout the County as it is now the symbol of Lincolnshire County Council.

COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY

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