

William's Noah's Ark



Let me tell you about my son. His name is William. He is a little over a year old. William is a very special little boy, as he came to us later in our life. My husband and I had been together over 8 years before we became blessed with his arrival. We had been granted lands by our King in the year 1350 and we were very concerned about who might inherit them. My mind has been put to rest over this matter, as anybody can see how good William is. Why it has been weeks since he has chased any chickens or sheep, besides I think it was the neighbor's boy.

The Noah's Ark I have built is designed to be played with by my son. The roof and front will lift off to allow for easier access to the inside. The pieces are all smooth and painted with a non toxic paint, so they can be crewed on. Because very few toys have survived the riggers of childhood and time, I have had to create the ark from pictures in several illuminated manuscripts. I have also found a number of pictures of children's toy boats and animals, so I feel it is a reasonable supposition that an ark might have been built.

The Bible gives us a rough guideline for the design of the ark. *"And God said to Noah,...Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the*

ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second and third decks....And you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female." (Genesis 11—20) Assuming a cubit is a unit of measurement, then the width of the ark should be 1/6 of it's length. My ark is scaled at about 1/5. I felt that adding a third story would make the ark top heavy, apparently medieval people felt the same way, as I only found a single illumination of a three story ark. My ark has multiple doors along its sides, so the animals can get fresh air.

Due to the limited number of surviving toys from the early Middle Ages I have made some assumptions. To begin with children love to play with animals. (A large number of horse toys have survived from the Middle Ages.) By the 1300's the church had a fairly strong hold on the population and play was thought of as frivolous. But play which revolved around a religious subject might have been acceptable, hence the choice of an ark to illustrate Noah's story. Illuminated Manuscripts contain numerous of pictures of Noah's Ark. From these pictures I concluded that an ark built by a loving parent of the 1300's would have reflected the art and architecture of that time period. It would have two stories with curved arch doorways, typical of Gothic Architecture. Once the first animal (polar bear) was cut out I knew the arches would need to be wide enough for two animal to stand next to each other and tall enough not to bump their heads, except the giraffe.

I have chosen animals which are native to Europe or animals which are in Bestiaries. These animals would need to be able to see over the edge of the boat, as also indicated by a number of illustrations. The ark is scaled so the polar bear can put his nose to the wind, over the side.



I discovered that many times the Bestiaries have illustrations of animals in fantastic colors, not generally found in nature (for example I found several green horses.) This is the reason I have not painted all of my animals brown. I found it interesting that the animals in the Aberdeen Bestiary have diapering on them in the same style as Gothic Illuminations. My animals are also diapered. I have painted the pairs of animals the same color, even when the male and female of the species look different, for an example look at the green lions.

Unfortunately my ark will not float, it is too heavy. I have tried to mimic the curved front shape of the hull, complete with the painted details of planking and nails.



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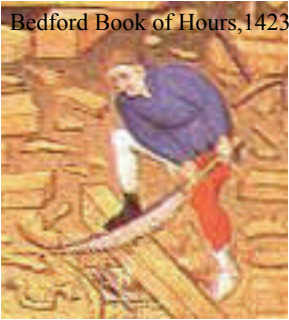
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Tools and Woodworking

I cannot believe the Castle Carpenter is still complaining about William helping him in his shop. Why it has been a month since William knocked over the bucket of pitch onto his tools. It has taken me far longer to get the pitch cleaned out of William's hair, then it could have taken him to attach a few new ax handles.

Bedford Book of Hours, 1423



I have run into a problem documenting tools from the 1250's until the 1400's. I cannot find any pictures. I can easily find pictures of Roman or Viking tools and tools from the 1400's, but very few pictures in between. I have included pictures from the Roman time period and a few pictures from the Bedford Book of Hours made in 1423. I am operating under the assumption that if a tool serves a simple function and would have been easy to use, then the technology to manufacture it would not have been lost.



Chichester Excavations 2nd-3rd century AD

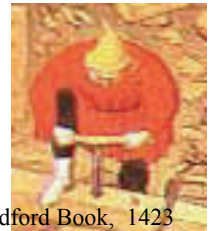
The first tool I used was a saw to cut the lumber. A Medieval Saw would have had a fairly short blade that was curved upward, with a wooden handle. "Before the making of steel became somewhat scientific with the invention of the Catalan furnace in the fourteenth century all hand saws were pull saws." (Bealer, pg.83)

This is different from a modern saw which will cut on the push and pull of a stroke.



Chichester Excavations 3rd-4th cent. AD

The next tool I used was a drill. A Medieval drill would have had an auger bit with a horizontal handle used to twist the bit into the wood. I imagine that a lot of elbow grease was needed to drill a significant number of holes. The advantage of an auger drill is it will allow the full weight of the human body to be placed on it and it is muscle driven.



Bedford Book, 1423

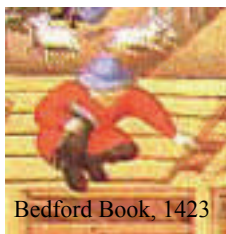
I have also used a hammer, although a wooden mallet would probably been just as effective. The hammer was used to pound the pegs into the holes to hold the puppet theater together. I have used the modern equivalent of these period tools, with the exception of sandpaper.

The puppet theater and ark have been assembled using maple pegs, glue and saw dust. (The saw dust

will expand when it mixes with the glue creating a tighter bond.) I have recently found

out that a pegged joint in the Middle Ages was made with a round hole and a square peg that was pounded into place. I am assuming that the peg must be a wood which is stronger than the base material, otherwise it would create a weak joint. Maple is stronger than pine. I have

not used any nails or screws in the puppet theater or the ark's construction. (As it turns out square headed nails are period and would have created a much quicker project.)



Bedford Book, 1423



Roman hammer/Axe 100-300AD.

A Ball



I do not understand why Cook insists that I send William to the kitchen with a ball, but she does. Perhaps it is because a ball is one of the easiest ways to keep a small child happy and out from under foot. You can roll the ball across the floor and have the child chase it or throw it across a room if you need just a bit more time to get something done. This appears to be of unending interest to a toddler. There is a lot of evidence that Gothic children played with balls. Manuscripts include directions for games or show illuminations of children playing a game.



Again due to the fleeting nature of toys, I have been unable to find a specific extant example of a ball. I have made a number of balls out of the following materials: felting, linen and wool scrap cloth. Each of the balls has a different weight and feel to it. William has experimented with the toys and he seems to favor the brightly colored felt balls. He seems to really enjoy dumping out the bag full of balls and watching them roll every which way, so far he has shown no interest in putting them away (fortunately my Ladies maid dotes on William and she can pick them up.)

The felt ball was made from wool. I started with a loosely wound ball of clean carded wool roving. I gently poured warm water over it, before adding a little soap. Next I rolled and tossed the ball between my hands for about 10-15 minutes. Every once in awhile I dipped the ball into cold and hot water to shock the fibers, causing them to tighten up. I stopped rolling the ball when it got to the size and density that felt correct.



The balls made from fabric scraps are just as easy to construct. I cut strips of fabric about an inch and a half wide and rolled them into the proper shape. Next I ran a couple of stitches through the center of the ball and on the final layer of fabric. I am hoping that this will prevent William from unrolling the ball. I expect that the ball made from wool scraps will last longer than the ball made from linen scraps, because it will be less likely to ravel or fray. I have chosen a dark color of fabric to hide dirt. Later experiments have found that dark colored balls are easier to loose.

1. Orme, pg. 150

2. Virgin and Child 1300-1350, French Little and Husband, pg. 97.

3. Virgin and Child ca. 1250-60 (Paris) Little and Husband, pg. 110

Cote-hardie

As William's proud mother I must say I do not understand this new fade of the cote-hardie. It just does not make any sense to me to stitch a tailored garment for a growing boy. But as the local land-owner I cannot have my son thought of as a peasant child with ill-fitting and baggy clothing.

The first half of the 1300's saw the popularity of the cote-hardie. It is a garment that can best be described as "fitted through the waist where it buttoned; flaring to a full skirt that was open at the front and usually, knee length. The sleeves, apparently the major distinguishing feature, ended at the elbow in front while in back hung down as a short tongue or longer flap..." (Tortora and Eubank pg. 93) I have found a number of illustrations and statuary which support this description. There appears to be a regional difference in hanging sleeves. I have chosen not to put hanging sleeves on a baby for practical means.

I tried to make William's cote-hardie with extra generous seams, so it could grow with him. This did not turn out to be a successful experiment, as the curved pieces must be clipped to lay flat. It is still my hope that the ease built into the garment, will allow him to wear it more than one time.

I have made the cote-hardie out of navy blue linen, as it goes well with Williams blue eyes. The buttons are also made out of linen. (I took a wonderful class at Pennsic this past summer.) To save time I used a sewing machine for William's clothing, but I hand stitched all of the clothes for the puppet. Note how stylish the puppet looks in his cote-hardie.

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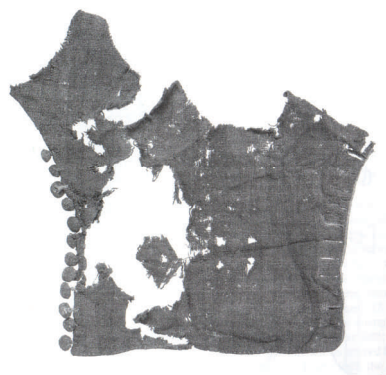
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6.



5.



1. Sculpture of man with a large buckle at the waist., c.1360 (Egan and Pritchard)
2. Wooden figure of Walter de Helyon showing buttons on front of tunic and sleeves, from Much Marcle, c. 1360. (Egan and Pritchard)
3. Illuminated Manuscript from the Morgan Library, c. 1350
4. Jehan de Grise, Romance of Alexander c. 1338-44 (Gill)
5. Lutterel Psalter, England c. 1335-40 (Deuchler)
6. Cloth buttons and corresponding holes on a sleeve from a deposit dating to the second quarter of the 14th century. (Egan and Pritchard)

Puppets and Puppet Theater



The Romance of Alexander (Bodley 264)Folio 54v

As William has grown older it has become more challenging to entertain such a bright mind. To that end we have hired a man to perform puppet shows for his delight. So far the stories are about knights riding off to war, as requested by my Lord Husband, I would prefer more gentle stories.

There are large gaps in the timeline of the development of Drama. For example we have a number of Greek and Roman plays, yet very few of the Liturgical Drama's of the 1300's have survived . What is known about drama in the 1350's is that it had out grown the confines of the church and moved outside. This growth outside of the church is paralleling the growth of towns and guilds. "As groups other than the Church gained in prominence, it was probably inevitable that they should come to participate in and eventually to dominate theatrical productions." (Brocket, p. 94) In 1375 records have survived from several cycle plays (the York cycle of 48 plays, the 24 plays from Chester and the 32 Wakefield plays.) It is evident from reading the plays that a director and a stage manager were present and that the works were produced outdoors. These plays required large casts, which were frequently recruited locally. "The chanting that had been typical in liturgical drama was abandoned in the vernacular plays in favor of a delivery resembling everyday speech...Most characters are stereotyped with few clear-cut actions and emotions." (Brocket, p.101) At this same time Interludes were being performed. They were small plays presented between other activities, for example a small play might be performed between the courses of a banquet. I think that from these various roots puppet theaters began to flourish.

Again not much is known about early puppet theater, as there are no surviving scripts. The only evidence, which has been found, is the small marginalia illumination (see above picture.) It is thought to be the earliest reference to Punch and Judy (although her name was "Joan.") If scholars have correctly identified this small illustration, than the beginnings of Punch and Judy theater can be moved back an other 100 years.

I am very familiar with the workings of a theatrical mind (as this is my mundane profession) to that end I have made the theater from scrap lumber and painted it a bright color. All of the materials are from supplies found in my home, with nothing specifically purchased for this part of my pentathlon entry. I feel that this is the way an itinerant director would have worked. The colors and characters are all designed to catch and hold a child's attention.