Misericord
Place of origin: Somerset (Made)
Date: 1500-1525 (Made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown (maker)
Materials and Techniques: Carved oak
Credit Line: Given by Mrs E. Davies
Museum number: W.6-1948
Gallery location: In Storage

Descriptive line
of carved oak, English, 1400-1500, from Blagdon church, Somerset

Physical description
Misericord with carving in the centre depicting a swineherd with a basket feeding two swine, with foliage supporters.

Dimensions
Height: 26.7 cm, Width: 48.3 cm, Depth: 11 cm

Museum number
W.6-1948

Object history note
One of eight misericords removed from Blagdon church, Somerset about 1820. They are a mixture of figurative and purely decorative foliage carvings. The shape of the seats and the carving style compares very closely with the misericords at Worle church a few miles away. The treatment of vine leaves and grapes in both sets, and the use of cloaked human heads (see W.4-1948) strongly suggests that both sets of sculpture were by the same rustic carver. These misericords are examples of country craftsmanship at its best enlivened by naivety of inspiration and robustness of character. Since the subjects at Blagdon include feeding the swine, and Adam and Eve at their biblical occupations, it is quite possible that there was a Labours cycle here.

As it happens, the stalls at Worle can be dated precisely to the early years of the sixteenth century. One misericord there bears the letter P and the monogram R.S.P., the P probably standing for prior, and R.S. for Richard Spring, prior of Woodspring and vicar of Worle, 1499-1516. It is useful thus to be able to date the Museum’s carvings, despite the appearance on the vine foliage misericord (W.5-1948) of the ‘trefoil’ leaf which first appeared at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Here is a good example of a country craftsman being stylistically behind the times and a possible instance of the tendency to historicism in the fifteenth century.

Notes from R.P. 47/2619
11 November 1947 letter Mrs E Davies to V & A offers as a gift “eight 14th cent. miserere seats originally in Blagdon Church, Somerset”. They were discarded when the church was repaired in the middle of the last century and then acquired by Mrs Davies’ great grandfather, and later in possession of her father, Ernest Baker of Weston-s-mare. She notes the seats were once lent to the V & A.

12 November 1947 Minute paper Thorpe to Edwards explains that the 8 misericords were removed @ 1820 from Blagdon Church, near Bristol. They date from the 15th century with subjects including Adam & Eve and the Prodigal Son. They were lent to the 1930 Medieval Exhibition at the V & A by Mr Ernest Baker F.S.A. (Mrs Davies father). Cat. No. 721 recorded in Baker’s name (N.F. 5875/1925 - contact was Dr F C Eeles - Secretary of the Central Council For the Care of Churches, who once had an office at the Museum).

12 November 1947 letter Edwards to Mrs Davies accepts her generous offer of the misericords, an “interesting” and “important addition to the collections”.

Undated response from Mrs Davies arranges to ship the misericords along with some oak fragments from Blagdon.

20 December 1947 Edwards note to Ashton reports that the misericords were shown in the Medieval Exhibition and date from about mid 15th century “although not of outstanding quality” they are “obviously acceptable as a gift”. He recommends that the carving fragments sent with the misericords be accepted as a courtesy but notes that they are “worthless”.

Undated list of objects submitted on approval for gift
8 misercords mounted on 2 backboards comprising:

Backboard No. 1
Misercord No. 1	13 heads etc. W.4
2Grapes and leaves W.5
3Swinherd and swine W.6
4Floral, leaves etc. W.7

Backboard No. 2
Misercord No. 1	1Grotesque figure W.8
2Adam & Eve W.9
3Leaves & fruit W.10
4Two figures, one seated W.11

30 December 1947 letter Ashton to Mrs Davies acknowledging the misercord gift as "a valuable addition to our collections of medieval woodwork". He also accepts the fragments for inclusion in the reference section.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O100764/misericord-unknown/