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FIG. 1. A Marken House with gable decoration  
(from a photograph by the writer).

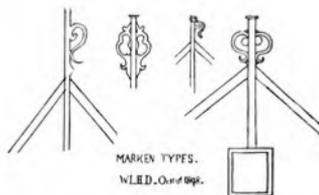


FIG. 2. Gable decorations on Marken houses.

6 February, 1905.

A. C. HADDON, Sc.D., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

The Reverend W. G. SEARLE, M.A., of Queens' College, read a paper on

### THE COINS OF THE BRITONS.

Professor RIDGEWAY criticised the conclusions advanced by Mr Searle.

W. L. H. DUCKWORTH, M.D., of Jesus College, read a paper on

### GABLE DECORATIONS IN MARKEN ISLAND.

Marken Island is so well-known that it is perhaps unnecessary to explain that it is situated in the Zuyder Zee, about two miles from the mainland, and opposite the Dutch village of Monnikendam. The island is frequently visited during the summer months, by tourists from Amsterdam; and to judge from the annoyance exhibited by the fisher-inhabitants at the sight of a camera, one concludes that their picturesque dress has too often attracted the attention of itinerant photographers.

It may perhaps be well to mention that Virchow saw in the inhabitants of Marken, as well as in those of Urk and Shokland (two other islets in the Zuyder Zee), the purest modern representatives of the Batavians described by Tacitus. At one time too, it was suggested that these Batavians are slightly modified and direct descendants of the race to which the Neanderthal-skeleton has given a name. But in view of the recent work of Schwalbe, this theory must needs be abandoned.

The object of the present note is not, however, to discuss the physical characters of the Marken Islanders, for it deals with certain features of their dwellings.

A marked characteristic of the houses of Marken Island is the almost universal occurrence of decorative emblems, at the gable ends (Plate XI, fig. 1). The appearance of some of those decorations is shewn in the illustrations (Plate XI, fig. 2, and

fig. 5, no. 2) and it will be noticed that in each case there is a central pole or staff, with laterally-symmetrical wood-carvings. The pole is fixed, and is rendered secure against the gales which must be severely felt in Marken, by attachment to the window-frame. The following notes refer to the significance of the decorative emblems, and of the wood-carvings at the sides of the central staff.

I. The subject of gable decorations has already an extensive literature, to which some references are given at the end of this note. It may here suffice to say that one of the most usual objects with which gables have in times been adorned, by the early inhabitants of Europe, is the head of a horse. It might be either the actual head of the animal, though sometimes the skull was substituted, and in still more recent times carved wooden representatives of the head took the place of the real object.

The reasons for thus decorating the gable seem to have been various. Thus it is alleged that the emblems may have served simply to protect from decay the ends of the poles which crossed each other to form the gable. Again, it is suggested that the superstitious awe and reverence with which the horse was regarded, led to a belief in magical powers invested in that portion of its anatomy, so that the object in view, in placing the head on the gable, was protection from evil influences, or else satisfaction of the claims of powerful deities whom the sacrifice of a horse might propitiate; or yet again, as Mr Speth has suggested, the head might represent the corpse of an animal which had been sacrificed on the foundation stone of the house.

Though most frequent among the Teutonic inhabitants of Northern Europe, the custom was not confined to these; indeed, as Mr Thomas and others have shewn, similar customs are of world-wide distribution<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Folk-Lore Journal*, Vol. XI. 1900. Thomas quotes Petersen's work, and shews several examples of the gradual modification and tendency to conventionalisation of a motive when successively copied. Some of the Russian examples are of interest (especially those from Nijni-Novgorod) in connection with the present note.



FIG. 3. Old Saxon farm-house in Holstein, with gable decorations of the horse-head type (from a photograph by the writer).



FIG. 4. Old Saxon farm-house in Holstein, with gable decorations of the staff type (from a photograph by the writer).

Previously to my visit to Marken, I had been engaged upon observations on the gables of Holstein (Plate XII, figs. 3 and 4), and in perusing Dr Lenz' useful memoir, I noticed the tendency to preserve even in very conventionalised horse-heads in Holstein, the ears of the animal. So much so, that when I saw the curious little prominences of the Marken emblems, I recognised this feature at once, and it became clear that while the ears are thus represented, the discs or prominences (fig. 2) were originally the heads, and in the outer curved portion of the tracery the arching neck has been retained. These emblems are thus the degenerate remains of two horse-heads which originally faced each other.

To complete the demonstration, I have arranged my drawings of the Marken decorations in series with those published by Dr Lenz. The diagram (fig. 5, p. 244) needs but little explanation, but it is necessary to add that the series is an evolutionary one, and that evolution is represented as progressing in two directions, *i.e.* along both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the sheet. Thus below each type in the uppermost horizontal line, are arranged in column, the several modifications to which it has given rise. Lastly, it should be noted that the heads may either face each other, or they may be turned in opposite directions. Special significance of a superstitious nature was, it is asserted, attached to each of these modes.

Such then is the interpretation of the Marken gable decorations, in which a process of evolution may be seen at work, and ever (in this case at least) acting in the direction of simplification.

II. If my explanation of the origin and nature of the gable decorations of Marken Island be accepted, and I see no reason to dispute the conclusion arrived at, it appears to me to follow that the Marken islanders are probably allied in race to their Teutonic neighbours who at so early a period in European history are known to have habitually employed the horse-head as a decoration or trophy<sup>1</sup>. In other words

<sup>1</sup> Andree (*Braunschweiger Volkskunde*) specially mentions the distribution of the horse-head emblem through the migrations of the Saxon race.

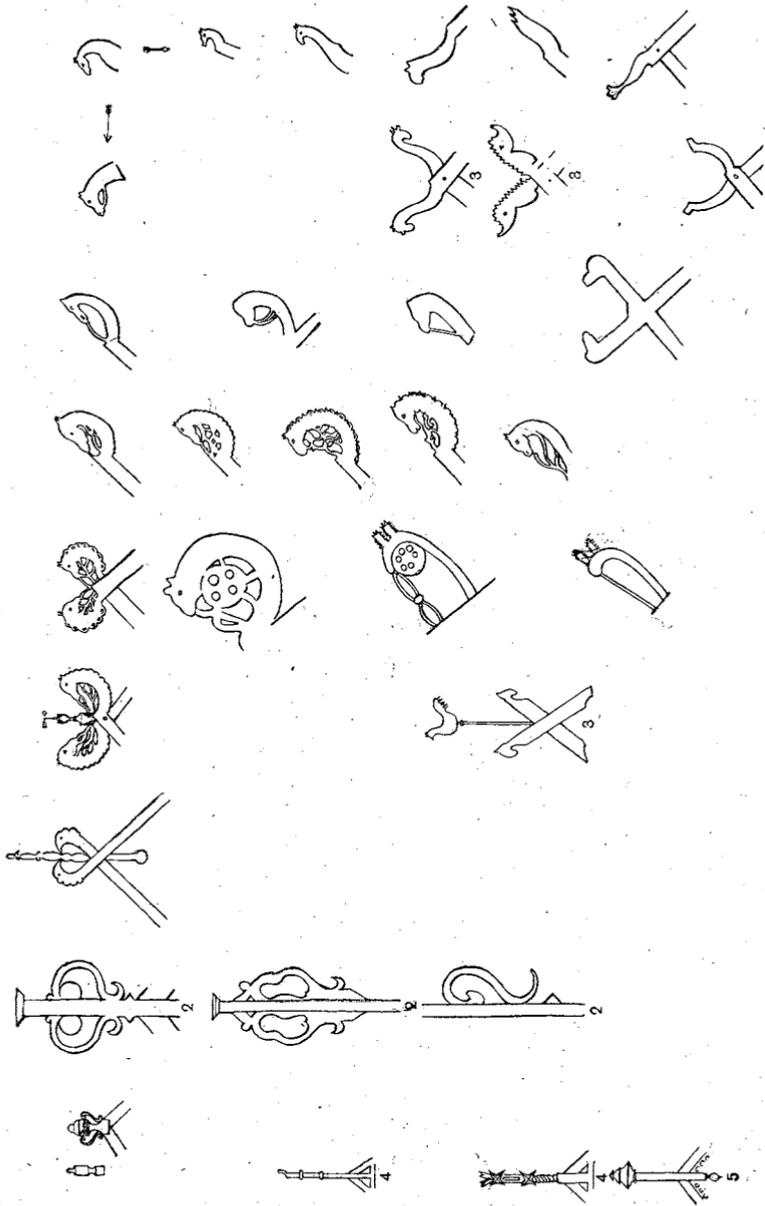


FIG. 5. Series of Marken gable decorations (indicated by the numeral 2), shewing derivation from conventional representation of a horse's head. The other forms occurred for the most part on German farmhouses.

the Marken islanders are not absolutely autochthonous, and my observation tends to indicate that if Marken and the adjacent islands were resorted to as a refuge by a tribe or clan fleeing before victorious Saxon immigrants, the latter were in that case attacking and displacing men of their own race.

There appears to me no reason for associating the Marken islanders with any of the Slavonic peoples, in spite of the fact that the horse is held in honour among these.

Lastly the occurrence in a fisher-population of representations of the horse's head seems also worthy of notice. The Marken islanders thus appear as a section of the great Saxon stock, which has adapted itself to this particular mode of life.

III. My personal contributions to the subject of the distribution of the horse's head or other emblems as gable decorations are but scanty. In default of further information I venture to add the following remarks, based upon observations made in the course of several railway journeys and a motor tour on the Continent. Some of the observed forms are represented herewith (fig. 6, p. 246). The distribution of gable decorations is not continuous, for while frequent throughout Holland, they are rare in Germany between Düsseldorf and Cassel; only new buildings, such as the new station at Lippstadt, present this feature, which I but rarely saw between Cassel and Jena in Saxe-Weimar. Along the Rhine, they become rare when Germany is entered, and this applies specially to the country south of Cologne, as also to that between Stuttgart and Lindau in Bavaria. The decorations occur in Hungary, but I have not identified the horse's head with certainty in that country. The houses of Southern Europe (including Turkey and Greece) do not lend themselves to this form of decoration.

In northern France decorations are also rare, save in La Manche near Cherbourg, where it is noteworthy that the predominant figure is that of a dove with half-extended wings, reminding one of the ancient Mycenaean figures of that bird. As regards the character of the decorations in other regions, those of Holland seem to be related to the Marken types, and

are therefore probably referable to a similar origin. An emblematical wheat-sheaf occurs in one case (fig. 6, no. 10), and thus accords with the records provided by Baring-Gould (*Strange Survivals*). In Franconia, at Oggerheim, a sort of urn-shaped decoration was seen.

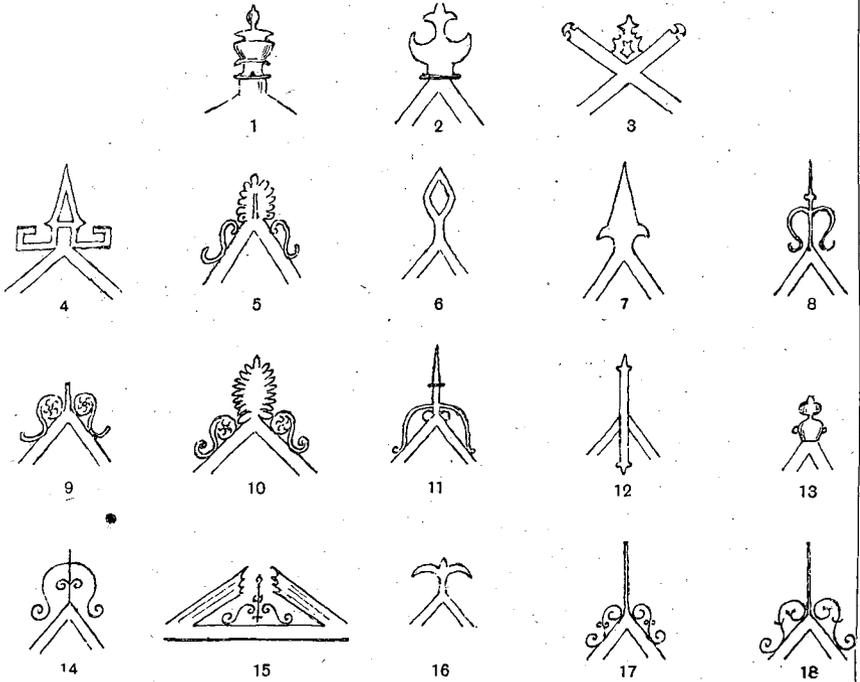


FIG. 6. Gable decorations noticed by the writer in Holland and elsewhere.

- (1) Lippstadt (modern). (2) and (3) New houses at Oggerheim in Franconia. (4—8 incl. Amsterdam. (9, 10) Voorthuizen. (11, 12, 13) Hilversum. (14, 15) The Hague (16) Ipswich. (17, 18) Utrecht.

In Russia the horse's head is frequently seen on gable-ends. A good example was shewn in Paris where at the Exhibition in 1900, a Russian cottage was erected. This cottage was decorated with rather conventional renderings of the horse's head both at the gable ends and also on the folding doors at the side of the building. Mrs McKenny Hughes possesses other records from Russia.

IV. Finally as to the occurrence of such decorations in our own country. Mr Thomas mentions the horse's head in Sussex. My own experience is again limited. In Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire I know of no example. In Cheshire the gable-ends of farmhouses are very commonly occupied by chimney stacks (as in Westphalia). The absence of Saxon emblems in Cheshire is the less surprising for in that district, Saxon influence was subordinate to that of the Scandinavian immigrants. In Aberdeenshire, and in Kent, I have been equally disappointed in my search for these survivals, but I believe that if a systematic enquiry in East Anglia could be undertaken, some such records would almost certainly be discovered, and I should be greatly obliged for any communications on this interesting subject.

#### LITERATURE.

1. Grimm. *Deutsche Mythologie* (esp. the horse's head in German mythology).
2. N. W. Thomas. *Folk-Lore Journal*, Vol. xi. p. 322.
3. Petersen. *Die Pferde-Köpfe an den Bauern-häusern*. Cf. Thomas, *op. cit.*
4. Baring-Gould. *Strange Survivals*.
5. Lawrence. *The magic of the horse-shoe*.
6. Lenz. *Die altsächsischen Bauern-häuser der Umgegend Lübecks*.
7. Andree. *Braunschweiger Volkskunde*.
8. Meitzen. *Das deutsche Haus*.

Mr A. BULL, of Cottenham, exhibited a bird's-eye sketch of Crowland Manor, Cottenham, made by Dr Stukeley in 1731; and pointed out the changes in the locality since it was drawn.

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Monday, 20 February, 1905.

A. C. HADDON, Sc.D., F.R.S., President, in the Chair.

The PRESIDENT gave a lecture on string-tricks and figures from many parts of the world.

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