

## Introduction



*St Mary the Virgin, "The Lady of the Vale"*

Churches and cathedrals display a host of images of faces, realistic and allegorical, in statues, gargoyles and grotesques, tombs and memorials, floor-brasses and stained glass. In addition to Jesus, Saints and biblical scenes, we meet church benefactors and innumerable anonymous carvings, sacred and profane. Men and women mix with angels and figures of evil. This book examines the variety of late-medieval and post-Reformation faces in one parish church in the East Midlands. St Mary the Virgin, Bottesford, is best known for the memorials of the Earls and Countesses of Rutland, but it also contains many other faces. Some are remarkable, all are interesting. Together they reflect the history of this corner of the country as well as the rich skills of the artist-craftsmen who created them.

St Mary's, the "Lady of the Vale", is at the heart of the most northerly parish of Leicestershire, a finger of land wedged between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Its spire, 210 feet high (64 m), is a landmark in the low-lying farmlands of the Vale of Belvoir. Visitors to the church are inevitably drawn to its chancel, packed with monuments of importance both as works of art and as a record of Tudor and Jacobean England. They may also look at the carvings of allegorical beasts at the tops of columns in the nave, but few will have lingered over carvings hiding in the darkness of the aisles and in the height of the clerestory, save perhaps for the carving of the sinner with his tongue and eye being eaten by a two-headed serpent seen in the north aisle.

There is much to look at: a Jacobean pulpit, a Tudor font (another in the Lady Chapel is said to be Anglo-Saxon), a 13th Century piscina, and next to the organ shallow niches where a side altar once stood. There are Victorian stained-glass windows and one window with reclaimed medieval stained-glass. There is the village War Memorial and around the walls of the aisles and chancel numerous memorial plaques and a series of heraldic hatchments.

Outside, gargoyles project from tower and aisle. Approaching the south porch, you can't miss two beautifully realistic gargoyles mounted on the south transept, popularly known as the 'Bellman' (or 'Tollman') and 'Alewife', seeming to welcome us to the market and to the church ale. There are many other carvings on the outside, faces on the aisles and transepts, faces crowded along the frieze round the parapet of the tower, arrays of figures sprouting from the clerestory. A pair of binoculars will help.

St Mary's stands at the centre of a sprawling farming parish, part of the old Danelaw where place names indicate communities of Scandinavians, as well as the Anglo-Saxons. There were originally three or more townships within Bottesford parish. In 1795, John Nichols recorded that there had been a church (more correctly, a chapelry) at Normanton, where the priest from St Mary's once held services three days a week, but which had already disappeared before his time. In 1845, local antiquary, Andrew Esdaile, mentioned other township churches at Bottesford "opposite the Rutland Arms" and also at Easthorpe and 'Wimbishtorpe', and also stated that St Mary's itself is on the site of Beckingthorpe old church. These assertions are hard to prove, in the absence of archaeological records. In any case, it was clearly St Mary's that prospered and achieved the status of a parish church where local people married, christened their children and buried their dead (and paid their tithes).



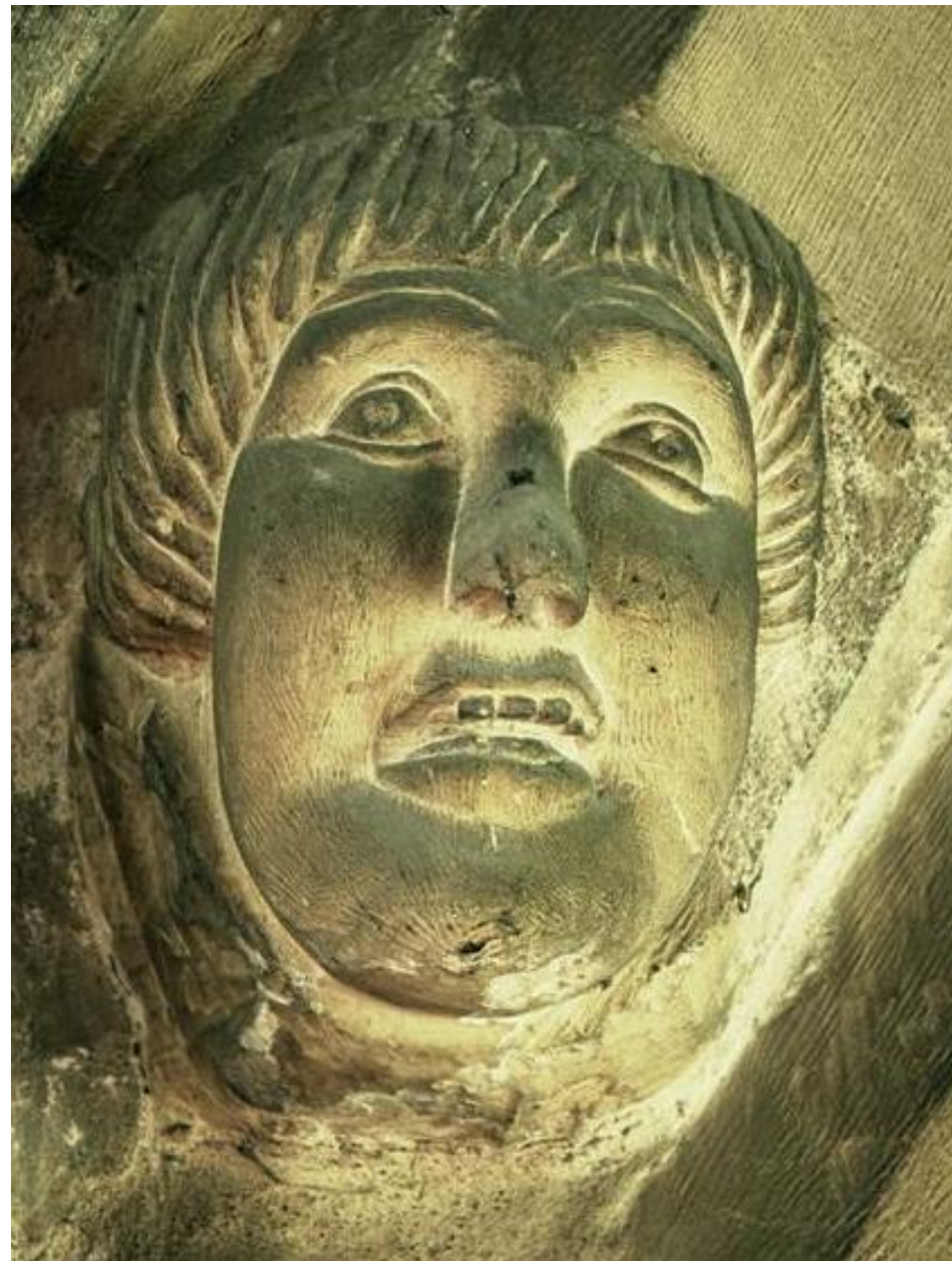
*An 18th century engraving of St Mary's, Bottesford.*

Bottesford was part of the estates of Belvoir. Its church has benefitted from the patronage of the lords of Belvoir from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day. Robert de Todeini was the Norman overlord, and a priest is recorded at Bottesford in the Domesday Book. The first recorded rector, Nicholas d'Albini, installed in 1209, was the youngest son of William d'Albini III of Belvoir, one of the barons who confronted King John at Runnymede in 1215.

Major rebuilding and enlargement of St Mary's commenced in the 14th Century, when Bottesford was the fourth largest settlement in Leicestershire, and continued in the 15th Century. This all took place during the lordship of the Barons de Roos. Their distinctive "Three Water-Bougets" arms are on the southern spandrel of the west door, on the sills of the empty niches on the south transept (now faint, due to centuries of weathering) and flamboyantly above the eastern pier of the north arcade, opposite the effigy of Bishop John Marshall of Llandaff, who was also a member of a prominent Bottesford family. Nichols recounted that the northern side of the nave is "ascribed" to the de Roos, the southern side to the Marshalls. St Mary's has served the needs of its patrons as well as those of parishioners to the present day, while the modest chapelries or chantries in the other townships in the parish struggled and finally expired. The funeral of the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Rutland was held at St Mary's in January, 1999.

In this book we look at the variety of carvings and other decorations in the church, from the truly grotesque to quite extraordinarily lifelike, of people and creatures. We have tried to bring out the way that the treatment of faces, in particular, changed over the centuries from late-Medieval to post-Reformation and then into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Materials have also evolved, from the pinkish grey limestone of the medieval work, through the alabaster and marble of the Tudor and Jacobean, to Victorian and Medieval stained glass. There are remains of a Doom painted on the plaster-covered wall above the chancel arch. There are examples of a medieval floor-brass in the chancel.

We have added a commentary on the history and significance of the carvings, relating them to the development of the building itself and its relationship to the broader historic and cultural setting. Many carvings on parish churches in general are allegorical, with recurrent themes such as the 'green man'. At Bottesford there is a more noticeable emphasis on realism in the faces in the Medieval carvings. They span the period from the early 14th Century to shortly before the Reformation. It can be argued that the effigies on the post-Reformation tombs continue this evolution towards greater realism, portraying the identity and piety of the deceased, rather than the object of his



*A benign angelic face on the transverse arch at the eastern end of the south aisle .*



*The Bellman (or Tollman, the man who tolled the bell on market day) and the Alewife look out from the south transept.*

faith and devotion. The figures on the tombs are remarkably life-like. It's as if we are witnessing stages by which the Renaissance reached the parish, followed by the Baroque of the later, 17th Century tombs, or put more simply, we see the passage from the Medieval world to the modern world.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey. We want to focus as much on the beauty of the images as the history they have to tell. We have been again and again deeply impressed by the skill and artistry of the medieval masons and painters, and of the later sculptors and creators of stained glass, whose work is so abundantly displayed. Most are anonymous, especially where pre-Reformation work is involved, yet there are great artistic and craftsman skills

on display. Today they would be celebrated artists and deservedly honoured. With the later work, the names of the alabaster and marble sculptors are known in many cases, as are those of the creators of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century stained glass windows.

However, it must be emphasised that St Mary's is not a museum or an art gallery. It is a living building where the art is put there for a variety of purposes, but never just because it is beautiful. Most of all, of course, it is a parish church, a place where the community has worshipped for hundreds of years, and long may it continue to do so.

## Acknowledgements

This book is a contribution to the Bottesford Community Heritage Project, and also to the fund-raising of the Friend's of St Mary's. The idea for it came from the photographic recording of figurative carvings at St Mary's as a contribution to Project Gargoyle, the recording of figurative carvings in Leicestershire churches led by Bob Trubshaw on behalf of Leicestershire County Council. Much of Project Gargoyle is carried out by volunteers. It has been a 'learning experience', prompting questions of when and why the carvings were created. Leicestershire has a wealth of such art, often overlooked by historians. Our aim has been to put the outcome of our part of Project Gargoyle to work, reproducing a selection of the images to prompt discussion of what they are and why they are there.

This book follows on from the Bottesford Living History Project (2006 to 2009), which was funded by the former Local Heritage Initiative (Countryside Agency) and managed by the Heritage Lottery Fund (Grant LH-06-086). The outcome of this project was published as "*Not Forgetting: Aspects of Village Life in Bottesford, Easthorpe, Muston and Normanton*", Bottesford Community Heritage Project, 2009.

We are grateful for the support of the Friends of St Mary's, Bottesford, who encouraged preparation of a small exhibition in the church of some of these pictures in 2012. We are grateful to churchwarden John Topps for his help, which included generously allowing access to the otherwise security-protected church roofs one fine day in 2012. We are grateful to Michael Saunders for sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm, and showing us the list of the church windows and their makers, for the information given by Dr. Madelaine Grey of the University of Wales with regard to the association of St Mary's with Bishop Marshall of Llandaff, to Evan McWilliam of the University

*Francis Manners, the 2nd son of Francis, 6th Earl of Rutland, who died in 1620 allegedly of witchcraft.*

of York regarding the age of the font, and to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster

We acknowledge extracting details from the church guidebooks, one published in 1972 by M.P.Dare, and a later one written by the E.A. (Ted) Shipman, c.1990, followed in 1995 by his *Gleanings from St Mary's*. None are in press, though a modern revision of the 1990 guidebook is available at the church. We are grateful to Lionel Wall for sharing his findings and thoughts, to Catherine Pugh for constant support and critical advice, and to Kathy Sparham, John Daybell, Shirley Daybell and Sue Dunsmore for spotting errors and making improvements to the text.

