



A 19th century engraving of the interior of St Mary's, Bottesford, looking westwards from the high altar.

## Historic Framework

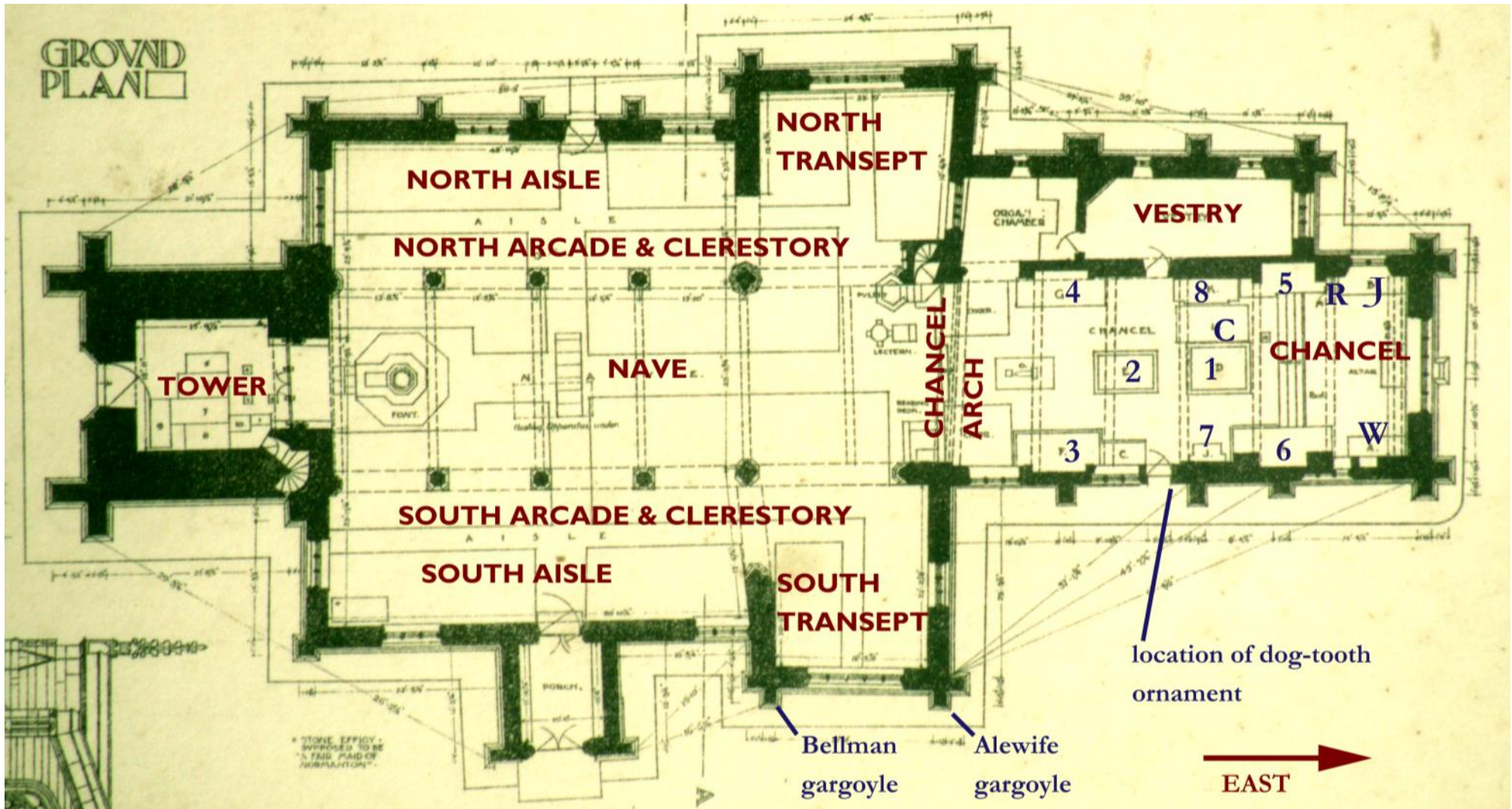
Looking around this beautiful church there is, perhaps, a tendency to think it so well-proportioned and matched that it must all have been planned and built at the same time. This impression, though natural, is quite misleading; the church was built in several stages. In 1795, John Nichols described St Mary's, giving details which include a list of the stained glass in the clerestory which was subsequently removed during 19th Century 'restoration', but saying nothing about carvings other than the tombs in the chancel. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner published a typically concise description, stating in broad terms when different parts were built, but hardly mentions the imagery apart from the chancel monuments. The description in the Listed Building record [[www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk](http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk)] provides a summary of the chronology, but again gives only the most sparing of attention to the carvings. There are descriptions in church guidebooks by M.P. Dare and E.A. Shipman, but neither say much about the medieval imagery. This is an important matter when we seek to put the medieval work into a time sequence: we will say how we see the history of the building.

In pre-Reformation times the interior of St Mary's, like other English churches, would have been richly coloured, its sculpture vividly so, its walls brightly painted with religious scenes, images and patterns. There was a rood screen and loft with statues of the Crucifixion, St Mary and St John. There were three chantries and a Lady Chapel. Radical change took place during the Reformation and Civil War, c.1538-1660. The rood loft and devotional images were removed, the chantries dissolved, and the internal arrangements underwent major changes. Painted plaster was stripped and the interior became plain and sober. The bare stonework interior seen today resulted from further 19th Century removal of even the plain plaster. The Medieval carvings that remain represent merely a part of what was a colourful scheme whose subtlety and complexity we can only speculate about. They are survivors.



*In the north aisle, we encounter this macabre figure, beautifully carved in what may be Purbeck stone, in contrast to the pale pinkish grey stone of the arches themselves. The dragon's claws, scales and two heads, tormenting the liar, are very detailed.*

**Plan of St Mary's** - taken from the drawing displayed in the south aisle, which has the words: National Silver Medal Drawings: Cecil A.L. Sutton from "The Building News" April 3, 1908.



**Key to the Tombs and effigies:**  
 R - effigy of Sir Robert de Roos  
 W - tomb of Sir William de Roos  
 J - tomb of Sir John de Roos

C - Henry de Coddington brass

1 - tomb, 1st Earl of Rutland  
 2 - tomb, 2nd Earl of Rutland  
 3 - tomb, 3rd Earl of Rutland  
 4 - tomb, 4th Earl of Rutland

5 - tomb, 5th Earl of Rutland  
 6 - tomb, 6th Earl of Rutland  
 7 - tomb, 7th Earl of Rutland  
 8 - tomb, 8th Earl of Rutland

The changes went further. The resplendent alabaster and marble tombs of eight successive earls and their ladies of the Manners family, together with Medieval effigy and tombs of members of the de Roos family, dominate the chancel. The effect is that of a spectacularly theatrical mausoleum, and it is this that most visitors come to see.

St Mary's has a deceptively simple plan. The nave is flanked by north and south aisles, the tower at its western end. Chancel, north chancel aisle, transepts and south porch complete an overall cruciform layout. However, there have been several stages of building and modification.

The chancel, of local Liassic ironstone, contains remnants of Early English architecture. In its southern wall there is part of a respond with 'dog-tooth' decoration and a capital, together with a fragmentary trace of a probable gothic arch. These have been interpreted as part of a southern aisle, though it is also possible that they may be remains of an external doorway. An Early English piscina is seen in the SE corner of the chancel. Ironstone masonry, probably also of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, is seen in the north transept and a small patch in the wall of the north chancel aisle. The northern chancel wall retains two Early English arches which once gave access to a north chancel aisle.

The chancel has been considerably modified, windows inserted, a clerestory added and its northern aisle remodelled as a late Perpendicular vestry. In the southern wall are three square-topped Perpendicular windows, and above them a clerestory with close-spaced, square-framed Tudor windows. Some of the windows were blanked out when the huge tomb of the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl was emplaced early in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The chancel has a Perpendicular eastern window, and its northern wall has a Decorated window at its eastern end, with a small 'Tudor' window above it. The chancel aisle was replaced by the present two-story vestry, with its small arched and square-topped windows. The vestry served as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century village school, long before it acquiring its

*Window in the south aisle, east of the porch; the right-hand side abuts against the stonework of the reconstructed south transept.*



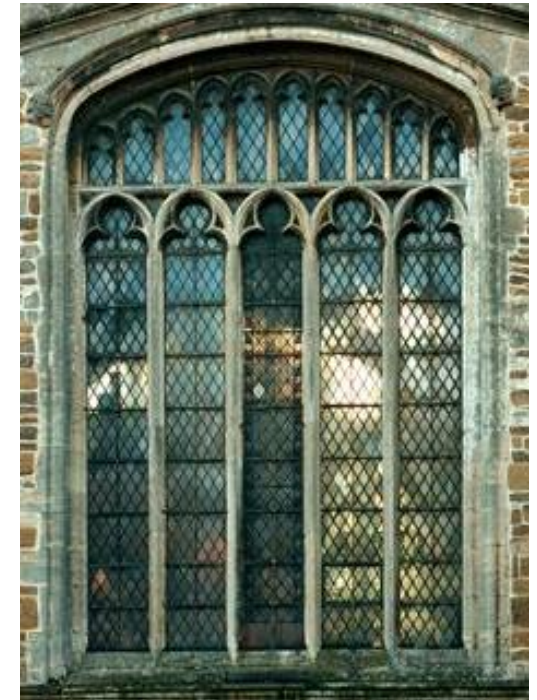
modern role as the benefice office. Old rooflines seen in the eastern wall of the nave record the steeply pitched chancel and nave roofs that were replaced by the present gently pitched roofs hidden by the parapets.

Other parts of the church are faced in Middle Jurassic oolitic-limestone ashlar, though cruder masonry is seen for instance internally where walls would be dimly lit and hidden by plaster and paint. The windows in the south aisle display curvilinear Decorated gothic tracery of the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The porch is also of this age, with small Decorated windows in its upper level indicating that there was once a 1<sup>st</sup> floor room (a parvise): the Perpendicular external doorway is too high to accommodate the floor of this chamber, which may have been removed before the doorway was inserted.

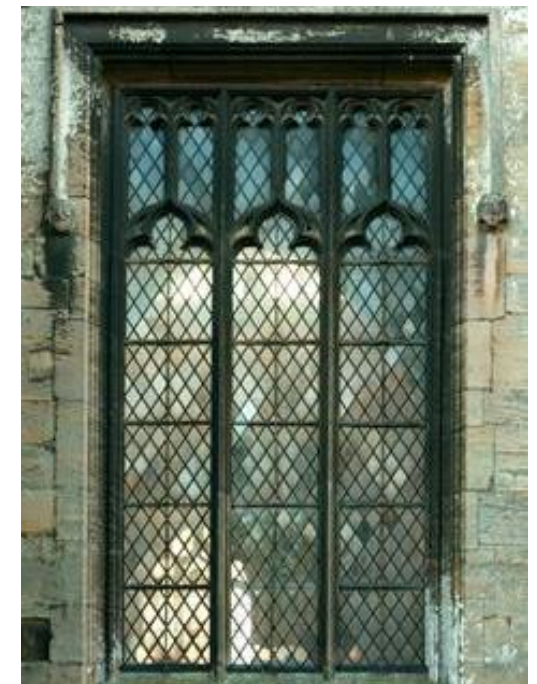
The south transept was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style which is also seen in the clerestory above the nave. Inside you can see the junction between older walling contiguous with the south aisle and the new walling of the transept. The gable of the transept has a Perpendicular window flanked by statue niches (both empty) and gargoyles, above which is an ornate parapet and pinnacles. Windows in the north nave aisle belong to the Perpendicular, including two with square-topped shapes. The window inserted in the north transept is also Perpendicular.

The six-stage tower and recessed spire were built after the aisles, also in the Perpendicular style. At the top of the tower is a battlemented parapet with kiosks at the corners. Younger than the tower is the Perpendicular clerestory over the nave, which abuts against the tower. Here, rows of windows, eleven on either side, are accompanied by ornate parapets and pinnacles, together with the rows of carved figures pictured in later pages.

A late Medieval flourish is the decoration of the nave, in that the arcades are embellished with carvings of mythical beasts, together with heraldic shields and the figures of a king and a lady (or priest). These appear to date from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as discussed later, but it is doubtful if other major changes took place at this time. Later still, during or after the Reformation, were the building of the vestry, addition of the chancel clerestory and



*The north transept window, Perpendicular style, but the carved faces at the label-stops may be later.*



*The western window of the north aisle, late-Perpendicular style, with contemporary carvings of faces at the label-stops.*

construction of crypts under the sanctuary and vestry.

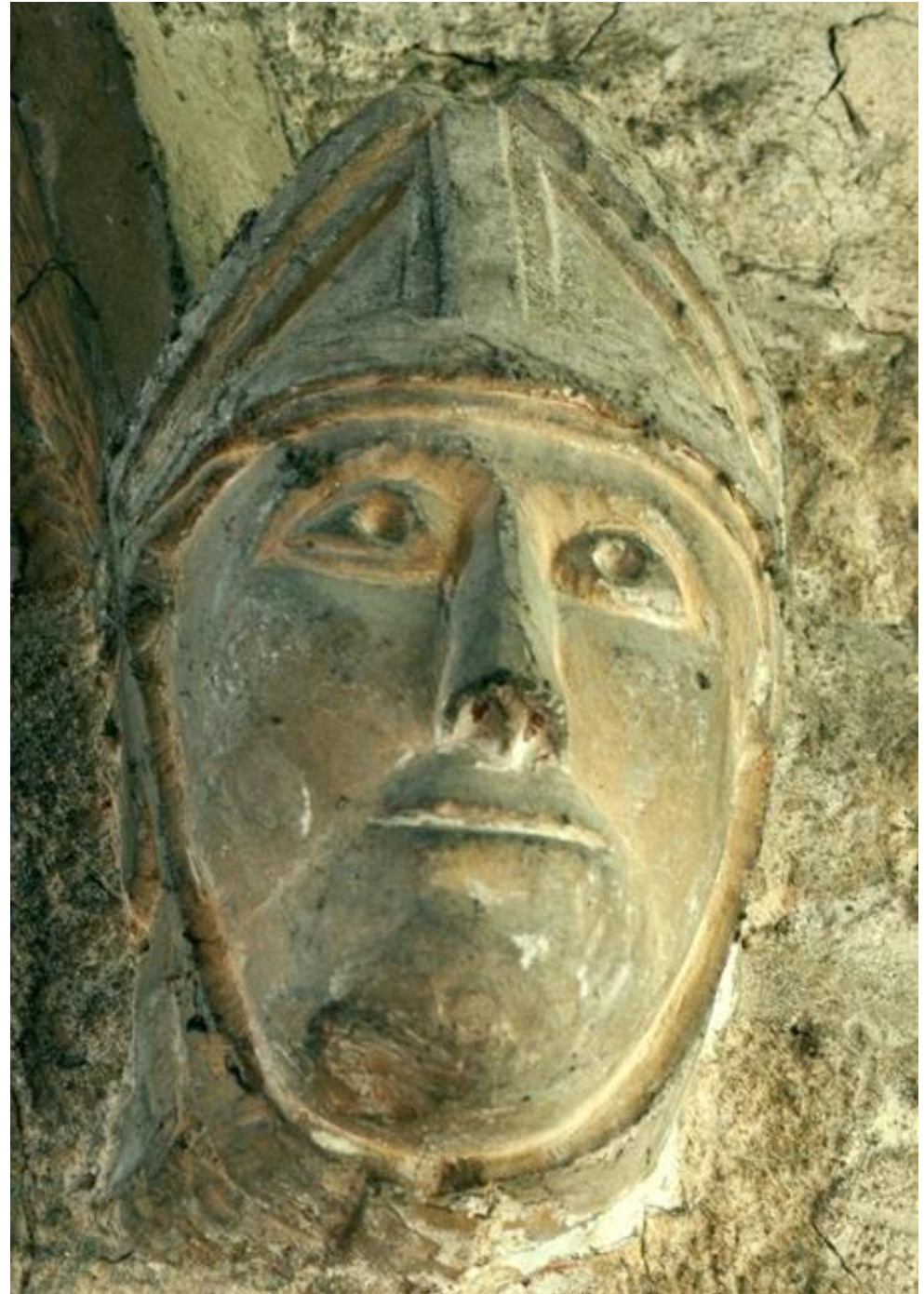
Based on this discussion, the history of the church that we propose is as follows:

**Late 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> Century** – an Early-English gothic church was erected. There may have been an Anglo-Saxon church at Bottesford and conceivably a Norman building: a priest is recorded in the Domesday Book (1086). However, the first recorded rector of Bottesford, installed in 1209, was Nicholas d’Albini, son of Baron William d’Albini III. In 1247, the lordship of Belvoir passed to the de Roos (‘de Ros’ or ‘Ross’) family when Sir Robert de Roos, whose effigy and Heartstone can be seen in St Mary’s, married the heiress Isabel d’Albini. The de Roos already held large estates in Holderness and the Vale of Pickering that had come to them through the marriage of Peter de Ros to Adeline, the sister of Walter d’Espece (died 1153), builder of Helmsley Castle, Rievaulx Abbey, Kirkham Priory and Warden Abbey. Nevertheless, Belvoir must have been a valuable addition.

**Early 14<sup>th</sup> Century** – construction, using limestone ashlar, of the south aisle in the Decorated style. This was a time of prosperity and population increase in England. It may be that the Barons de Roos, or the local community, wished to re-fashion their parish church to accommodate a growing congregation and, perhaps, as a matter of pride and prestige.

**Late 14<sup>th</sup> Century to early 15<sup>th</sup> Century** – a period during which there was further enlargement, with construction of the north aisle and then the building of the tower and spire. This may have been intended to complete earlier work interrupted by the famines, Black Death and later plagues that beset the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a time of widespread church building, out of piety and the need for penitence, and to reflect the sense of renewal and deliverance from what had been a truly awful series of events. Prosperity

*Early 14th Century carvings in the south aisle: a bishop's face on the transverse arch at the end of the aisle.*





based on the wool trade had returned to many parts of England, prompting the widespread building or expansion of churches, including as it seems St Mary's.

**Mid-15<sup>th</sup> Century to Early 16<sup>th</sup> Century** – The middle part of the 15th Century saw further enlargement and embellishment of St Mary's, with construction of the clerestory over the nave and reconstruction of the south transept. This may have been an optimistic time in Bottesford. The market cross is attributed to this period, suggesting moves to develop the village's commercial potential, and the work on the church can be seen as also expressing a mood of confidence. The Barons de Roos were prominent Lancastrian supporters. For instance, John the 7<sup>th</sup> Baron had fought at Agincourt (1415). However, their 'reign' ended abruptly, if temporarily, in 1461 when Thomas the 9<sup>th</sup> Baron was attainted by Edward IV, who went on to reward William Lord Hastings for his loyalty with extensive lands and castles including Belvoir. Hastings neglected the castle and used it as a source of materials for new building work in his preferred castle at Ashby de la Zouch. It seems likely therefore that Edward IV's reign saw a decline in Bottesford's fortunes, with little work taking place on the church at this time.

The carvings of fantastical beasts seen in the nave arcade are probably part of the mid-15th Century work, but the accompanying shields bearing the arms of the de Roos and the arms and effigy of Bishop Marshall of Llandaff may have been added later. John Marshall died in 1495. His will states that he was a native of Bottesford and that he bequeathed funds to establish a chantry at St Mary's. The Marshall shield is probably a late 15th Century addition perhaps related to a chantry in the south transept where the Lady Chapel is today.

The date of the Roos shield seems more problematical. The lack of quartering of the de Roos arms with those of the baroness's family may indicate that it commemorates a bachelor lord rather than Baron Thomas, whose wife was a member of the powerful Tiptoft and Charlton families. During the first year of Henry VII's reign (1485-86), Baron Thomas's exiled son, Edmund de Roos,

*At the first springer of the south aisle arcade, a face in ecstasy, eyes uplifted.*

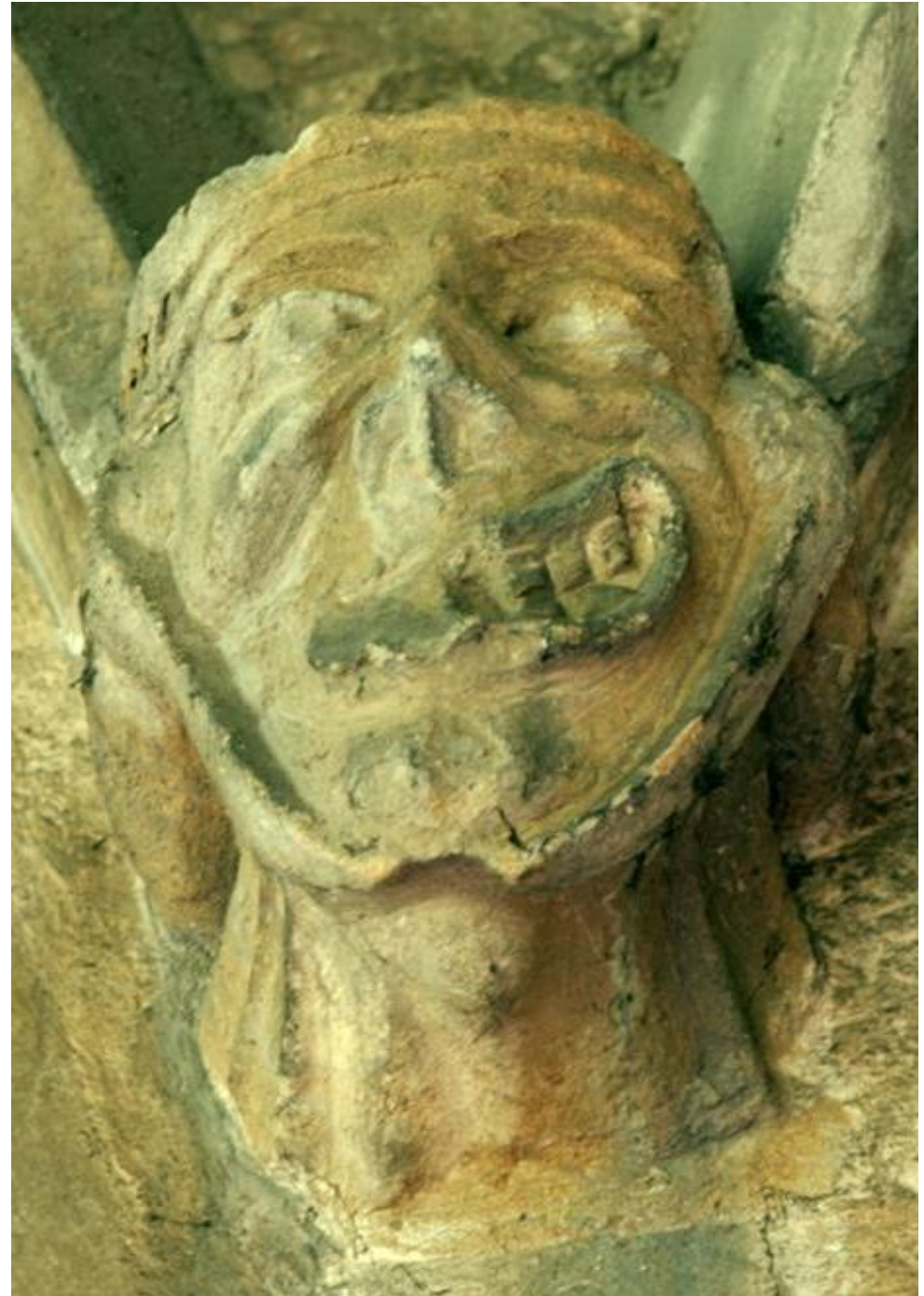
petitioned successfully for the return of his family's estates and titles, but Edmunds years as the 10th Baron did not run smoothly. In 1492 an extraordinary Act of Parliament, reported by Nichols, stated that Edmund was "not of sufficient discretion to guide himself and his livelihood", and deprived him of the right to manage his affairs, placing his brother-in-law Sir Thomas Lovell in charge. It is tempting to speculate that the de Roos shield was erected by Edmund during the few years when his authority was undisputed, 1485 to 1492. Edmund's sister, Eleanor de Roos, had married Sir Robert Manners, Sheriff of Northumberland, and their son, Sir George Manners, would eventually inherit the title Baron Roos in 1508. Thus, an alternative explanation for the shield may be that it was erected by Sir George Manners to mark his taking the title of 11th Baron Roos.

**16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries** – Construction of the chancel clerestory and vestry. These changes arose out of the Reformation, with the adoption of St Mary's as a mausoleum by the Earls of Belvoir.

**18<sup>th</sup> Century** – little change except that the roofs reached their present form. E.A. Shipman stated that nave roof was not completed until 1740. It is plain, almost crude when compared with those in many other parish churches. Only in the transepts is there a greater degree of refinement, including a rose boss in the centre of the south transept roof.

**Late 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century** – St Mary's had become rather dilapidated by the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Restoration of the tombs was undertaken by curate William Mounsey in the 1780s, and they have been further repaired since. In 1847, under the leadership of Canon Frederick Norman, bench pews were installed by Messrs Broadbent & Hawley of Leicester. The choir loft was removed and an organ added by 1859. The tower was renovated by Sir Gilbert Scott who, in the 1860s, corrected a dangerous tilt that had developed. New stained-glass memorial windows were installed towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but there was also removal of medieval stained glass from the clerestory, a

*At the third springer the south aisle arcade, a distorted face.*

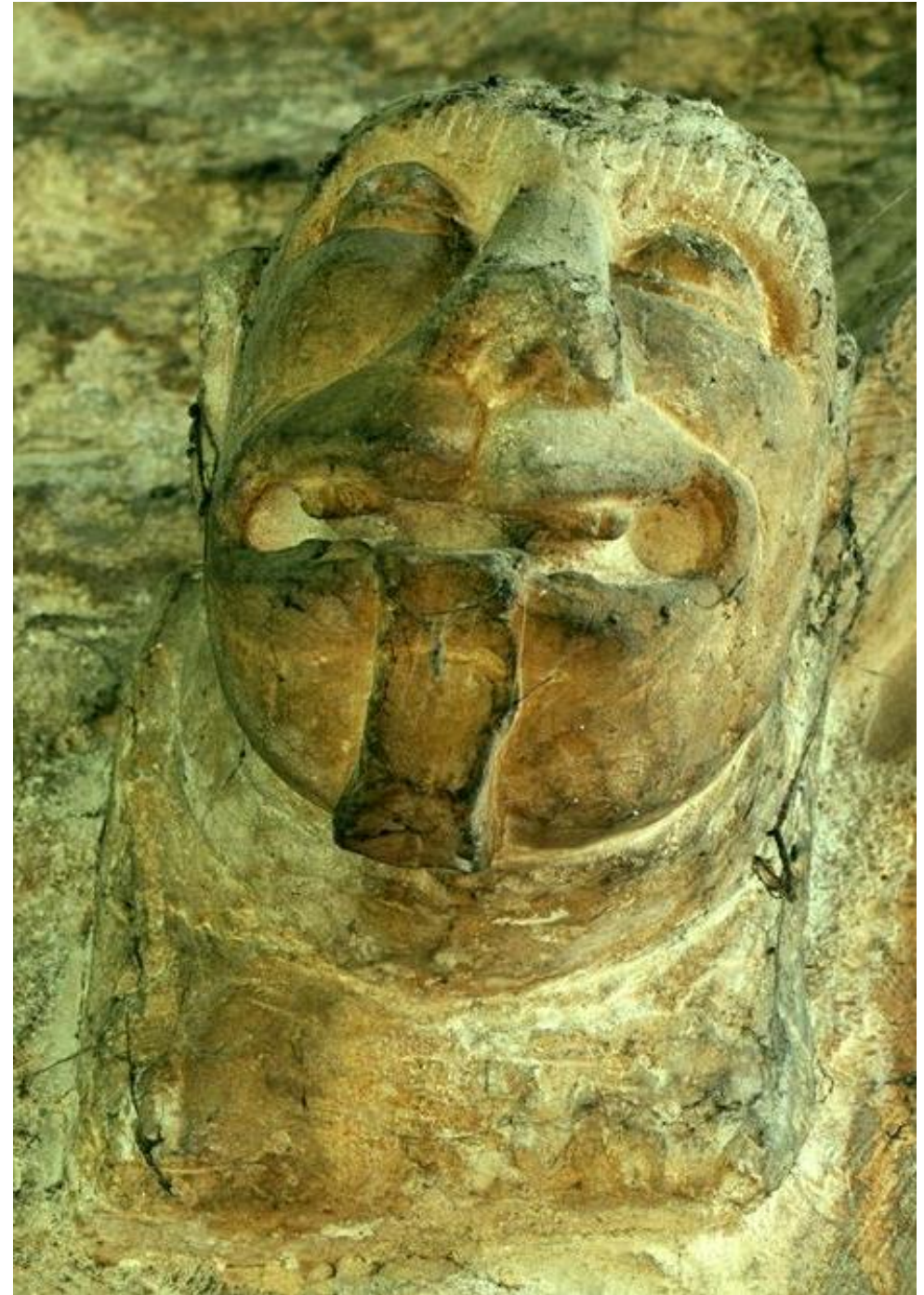


fraction of which was recovered and placed in the westernmost window of the chancel clerestory where it is seen today.

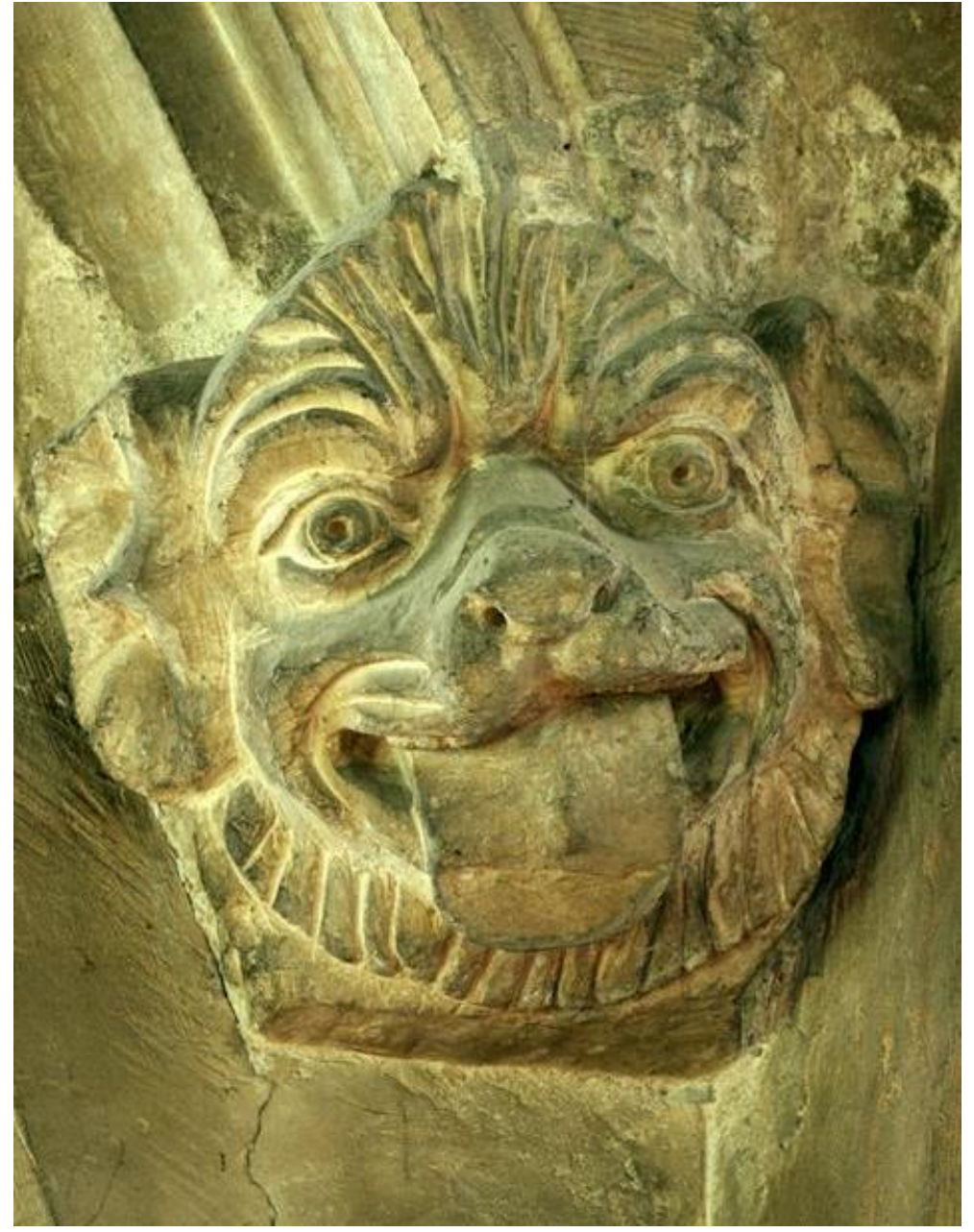
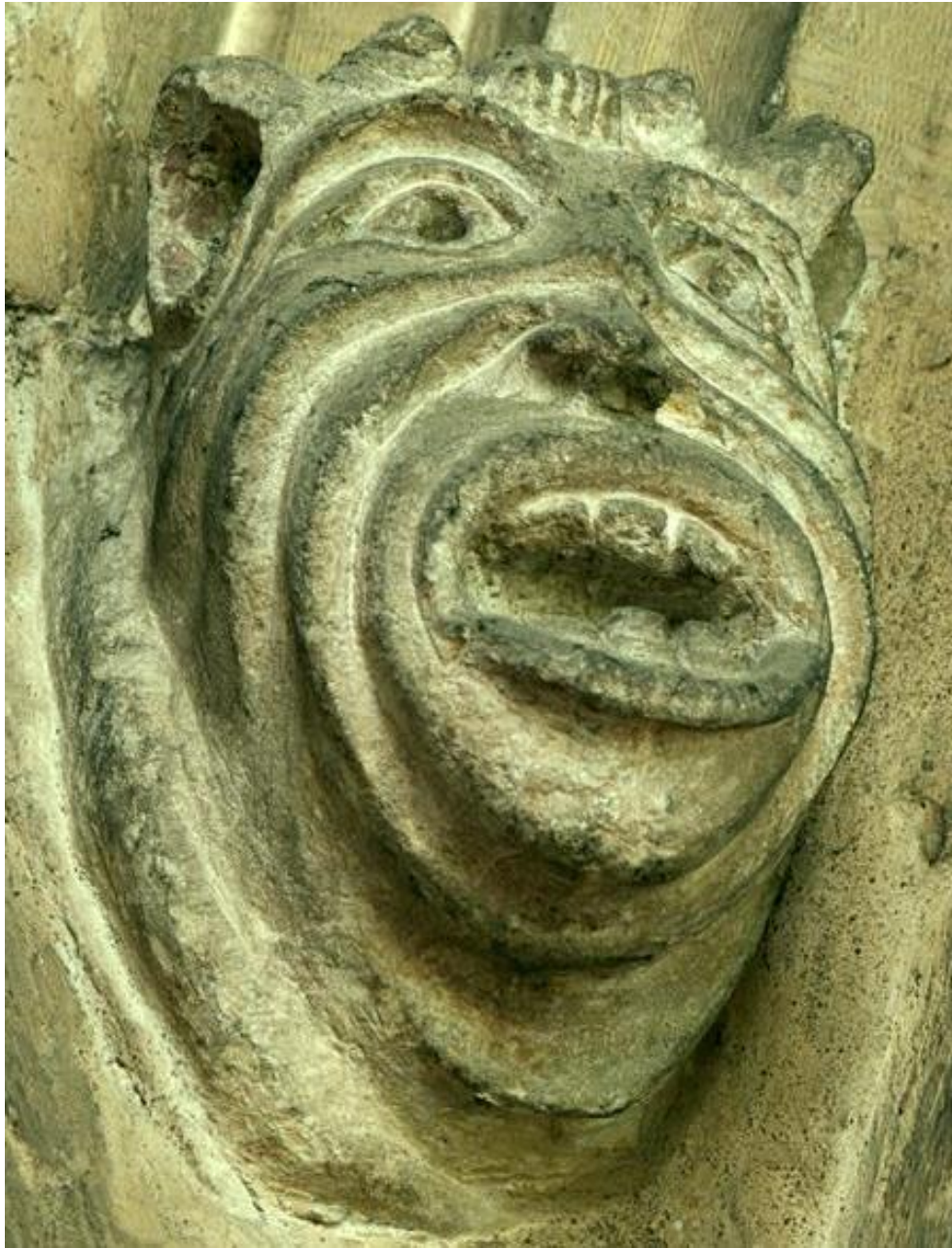
Remains of the medieval Doom painting were assessed in 1967 by Eve Baker and Douglas Betts during restoration of the roof: their report being reproduced by E.A. Shipman in 1995. Though in poor condition, it is perhaps fortunate to have been spared during the removal of plaster during the 19th Century restoration.

We tentatively conclude that the Medieval carvings on the south aisle may belong to the first half of the 14th Century. Carvings on the north aisle are probably late 14th Century, those on the tower early 15th Century, those on the clerestory and south transept probably mid-15th Century, and those on the nave arcades mid to late 15th or even early 16th Century. Together these are a display of Late-Medieval art, to which we can add the Doom, the remains of medieval stained glass and also the Coddington and Freeman brasses in the chancel floor. They are what is left to us of the decorative richness of the pre-Reformation St. Mary's.

The tombs in the chancel are in marked contrast. They are essentially commemorative rather than devotional, realistic rather than allegorical, not essential to the liturgical purposes of the church. Nevertheless, they are sumptuous, exquisite and fascinating, marking the turbulent politics of the 16th and 17th Centuries. The Victorian stained glass marks the great period of church restoration of the 19th Century.



*On the transverse arch of the south transept, a grimacing man wearing a collar and bridle.*



*Also in the north aisle, on the transverse arch at its eastern end are these faces, one plump with perhaps stumpy horns, the other perhaps a lion, sticking out its tongue.*