

# Reviews

*Edited by John Wand and Thomas J. Fitzgerald*

## *Men, Myths and Monsters (Second Edition)*

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*Review by John Wand*

This small book brings to light and to life the medieval carvings of the chancel ceiling of All Saints Church, Gazeley, Suffolk. Unusually for the county, the carvings were missed by iconoclasts on their visits to the church in 1643 and 1644. Even more unusually the carvings barely merit a mention in the second edition of *Buildings of England* and the Historic England listing, although they are in the company of some 15th century stained glass which has also escaped much attention from either iconoclasts or architects.

This book therefore provides a much needed photographic guide to these carvings, which are dated to around 1520. After an introduction to the main features of interest in the church, there follows a description of how the carvings were 'found' and photographed by the

author, using a camera mounted on a tripod and fitted with a telephoto lens, with the author lying on the chancel floor beneath the camera. Following a brief overview of the carvings, the main body of the book consists of seventy full page colour photographs of individual carvings each accompanied by a brief description. Whilst the images have been digitally enhanced, they still show the carvings complete with cobwebs in some cases, having missed the attentions of the cleaners as well!

The range of subjects is impressive, covering the spiritual, mythical and natural world of the artists and the medieval congregation. The photographs are grouped by subject; from the spiritual world come a number of angels playing a range of musical instruments, an *agnus dei* and a carving of St Giles. The natural world provides a number of representations of lions and deer plus, more unusually, a hedgehog and a dragonfly. These wild animals are followed by plants and a range of birds including a peacock and a swan. Domestic animals also feature, including cats and dogs. There are numerous mythical

subjects, particularly dragons, green men and wodewoses (wild men), and, most unusually, a sciapod (a man with a single giant foot). From the human world comes several heads, possibly taken from life and, perhaps the most well-known carving, that of a man baring his buttocks. There is also one coat of arms amongst the carvings, which has been identified as those of the Stafford family which suggests the possible patron of the work.

The second edition benefits from inputs from a number of academics, who help to relate the Gazeley carvings to medieval bestiaries and culture, and there is a brief bibliography. Not all the carvings are illustrated, and the reason for the choice of photographs is not given. For more scholarly readers a complete list of the subjects, where they can be identified, would have provided food for thought, as might a diagram showing the position of each carving, in case it might be possible to discern an overarching rationale for their placement. Nevertheless, the book provides a splendid guide to the carvings and an incentive to visit All Saints – armed with a pair of binoculars!