

BOOK REVIEW

Men, Myths and Monsters: the Unique Mediaeval Roof Carvings of All Saints Church, Gazeley. By Simon Johnson. 86pp., plates. Newmarket: Lazarus Publications N.F.P., 2022. ISBN 978 1 3999 1394 2. Price £8 pb.

This well-produced not-for-profit paperback would represent good value for money for the high quality of Johnson's photographs alone. These feature a representative range of the low-relief carvings in the cusped lozenges of the late medieval chancel roof at Gazeley All Saints church. As the author observes, the carvings can be difficult to discern at ground level, so the close detail of his images is most valuable.

The accompanying text of this second edition of Johnson's popular study of the iconography of these roof carvings is accessible and insightful, informed by reference to scholarship in the field. The carvings represent the sacred and the profane: angels and saints, alongside animals, birds, people, foliage and beasts. This imagery is set into the wider context of medieval art and culture, including illuminated bestiaries and the apparently common visual juxtaposition of good and evil. Such 'play of opposites' has been observed elsewhere by Claire Daunton, as in the alternating hammerbeam and tie-beam nave angel roofs at Outwell and Fincham in Norfolk and the north aisle hammerbeam roof at Mildenhall.

In East Anglia, embellished panelling is often associated with single-framed canted or 'wagon' roofs, as at Gazeley, although not exclusively so; exceptions include the arch-braced nave roof canopy of honour embellished with sacred monograms at Metfield. In the region, such panelling appears to have been more prevalent over chancels and chapels with altars or at the east end of the nave in dialogue with the rood.

The patronage and date of the Gazeley roof are briefly pondered in the book. A carved Stafford coat of arms might suggest a *terminus post quem* of the late fourteenth century for the roof, although sponsorship by the local landowners cannot be assumed. The style of clothing depicted in some of the panels suggests a later date of *c.*1520 for the carvings. If this is the case, the roof structure would have been somewhat anachronistic in East Anglia, where boarded canted or scissor-braced roofs commonly date to the fourteenth century. The spectacular chancel roof at nearby Bury St Edmunds St Mary is a pertinent example. The cusped lozenges and bosses of the late medieval roof evidently combined angelic motifs with a range of carved animals, birds (including the Lancastrian chained swan) and heads, from the mitred to the grotesque. This scheme was likely augmented during the mid- to late fifteenth-century expansion of the chancel. The key to understanding the Gazeley roof may rest with its sophisticated neighbour.

SARAH CASSELL

