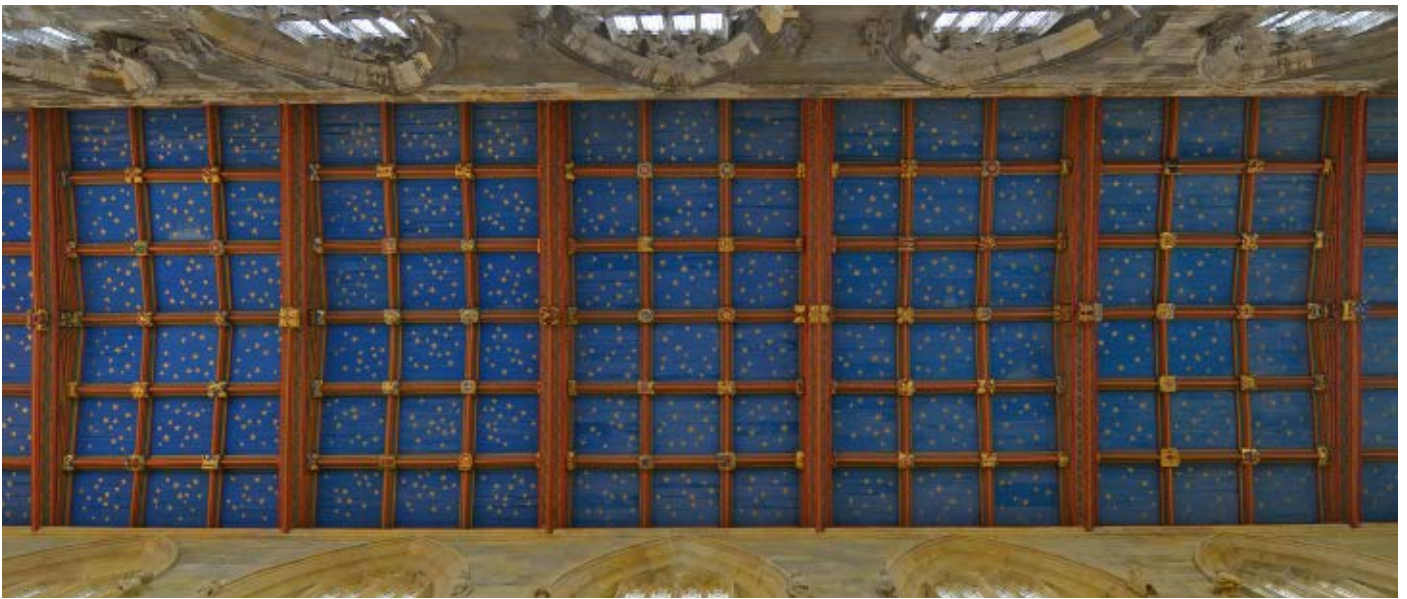


MEDIEVAL LIFE

AS REVEALED IN THE ROOF BOSSES OF ST MARY'S CHURCH, BEVERLEY

St Mary's Church Beverley is one of the largest and finest parish churches in England. It is particularly famous for its medieval and Tudor roof bosses which decorate the ceiling inside the Church, and give us a wonderful insight into life in the medieval period.



This shows the roof in St Mary's. As well as the bosses, the ceiling has been decorated with an image of the night sky.

A roof boss is a wooden carving on the roof of a church at the point where beams or rafters meet. It covered up the joint, and was a chance for the crafts people building the church to carve images of everyday life – what was important to them and images of life in Beverley. Understandably many are of religious themes, but there are also carvings of life in Beverley, for example with scenes of drunkenness, and several show mythical and feared beasts.



Exploring Medieval Life through the Roof Bosses of St Mary's Church Beverley

Using the roof bosses of St Mary's, we can gain an insight into the hopes and fears of people in the medieval period.

In this exercise, you need to search through the selection of images of roof bosses provided and match the number of the boss to the question.

Religion

The medieval people of Beverley were very religious. Life was often short, and they were very concerned about what happened to their soul when they died.

In this exercise, you need to search through the roof bosses and match the number of the boss.

1. Can you find an image of Jesus? He was often portrayed as long haired with a beard and set within a halo with a cross.

Boss Number:

2. Jesus was crucified by the Romans. Can you find a boss that shows the hammer and nails that were used to nail him to the cross?

Boss Number:

3. The life of Jesus was told in the Bible in 'The New Testament'. It contains four accounts of his life, written by St Matthew, St Mark, St Luke and St John. These are known as 'the Four Evangelists'.

The Evangelists are often shown, not as people, but as symbols. Can you find the roof boss for each of the Evangelists.

St Matthew – shown as an Angel

Boss Number:

St Mark – shown as a Lion with wings

Boss Number:

St Luke – shown as a Bull or Ox

Boss Number:

St John – shown as an Eagle

Boss Number:

4. In the Old Testament of the Bible, the first people were Adam and Eve. They lived naked in the Garden of Eden, until Eve was tempted by a snake. Can you find a boss carved to show Adam, Eve and the snake?

Boss Number:

5. People in the medieval period feared demons that would torture them if they were sent to Hell or Purgatory. One of the bosses shows a demon tormenting a human. Can you find it?

Boss Number:

6. There is also an image of a soul that is going up to heaven, carried in a blanket by two angels. Can you find it?

Boss Number:

7. Some of the roof bosses criticize the Church and its teachings. There is roof boss in St Mary's that shows a fox preaching (teaching) to geese. Can you find it?

Boss Number:

The fox was associated with cunning and deceit. Geese were associated with stupidity, easily deceived. What message about the Church do you think the carver of this boss was trying to get across?

Also, notice that the fox already has a goose in a sack on its back. What do you think the fate of these geese will be?

8. Boss number **27** shows two important figures in Beverley's history, a king and a bishop.

The King is Athelstan, who is said to have granted many freedoms to Beverley in the 10th century.

The Bishop is John of Beverley, the Saint who is buried at the Minster.

The figure of the King is much larger than that of the Bishop. Why do you think the carver has done this? (Hint: the carver is making a point about the relationship between the king and the Church)

Animals and Mythical Beasts

There are many images of animals in St Mary's. We can find dogs, horses and even monkeys and bears.

We also find images of beasts that today we would regard as fantasy, but were very real to the people of medieval Beverley. In the late medieval period, Europeans were just beginning to explore the world beyond Europe, and accounts of these journeys and voyages were popular.

They often contained descriptions of fantastic creatures, such as people with one large leg that they use to shade themselves from the sun. These beasts were very real to medieval people and there are several carved on the roof of St Mary's.

1. Can you find,

A dog

Boss Number:

A horse (with no rider)

Boss Number:

A monkey

Boss Number:

The head of a boar or pig

Boss Number:

2. Sometimes we can see the sense of humour of the artist in the carving.
Can you find,

A pig playing a harp

Boss Number:

A boar playing a set of bagpipes

Boss Number:

3. Can you find,

Two dragons, chained together

Boss Number:

A Unicorn

Boss Number:

4. The Manticore was a terrifying mythical beast with the head of a human, body of a lion and tail of poisonous spines. It was said that if a knight speared a Manticore with his lance, the Manticore's poison would go through the lance, instantly killing the knight and his horse.

Can you find three separate Manticores?

Boss Number:

and

and

5. One of the creatures that the explorers claimed to have found was the Blemmyae. These were headless figures whose faces were in their chests. There is a Blemmyae on the roof of St Mary's. Can you find it?

Boss Number:

Everyday Life in Beverley in the Medieval Period

Often the bosses are not religious, but simply show scenes from the everyday life of people in the town.

1. Beverley was the home of the Northern Guild of Minstrels who provided music for the churches and in the town.

Can you find three bosses that show people playing musical instruments?

Boss Number: **and** **and**

2. Much of Beverley's wealth came from the trade in woollens with Europe. There are two roof bosses showing merchants carrying their goods. Can you find them?

One shows a man riding a mule with a large sack of wool across the back of the horse in front of him:

Boss Number:

The other shows a merchant holding his goods in parcels under this arms

Boss Number:

3. There is even a man with toothache.

Boss Number:

4. We can see how the people of Beverley were entertained and passed the time. Can you find the following?

Two wrestlers, tied together by belts

Boss Number:

A Jester

Boss Number:

A Bear chained up for bear baiting

Boss Number:

A Couple who are drunk

Boss Number:

Design your own Boss

As you can see, the roof bosses of St Mary's Church were an opportunity for the people of Beverley to carve images of what mattered to them.

Certainly many of the scenes are religious, and this reflects the importance of religion in a society where many died very young.

But there are also scenes of sport, drunkenness, humour and even the monsters that they feared in their nightmares.

For this exercise, you have been asked in the 21st Century to design a new boss for the ceiling of the Church.

The theme can be anything that is important to you.

1. Draw your boss on the template on the next page.
2. When you have completed your design, provide a short description of your boss in the box below, and a short explanation of why this is important to you.

Design your own Boss template:

