

## An Exhibition on the Medieval Carvings on the hammer beams of St Margaret's Church, Ipswich



1

Although the Trade Marks of the three major donors for the roof are carved in the clerestory window spandrels only the mark of the Halle family (a posser with crossed tongs) is found in the roof carvings both on the beams and also on the external stone structure of the clerestory.

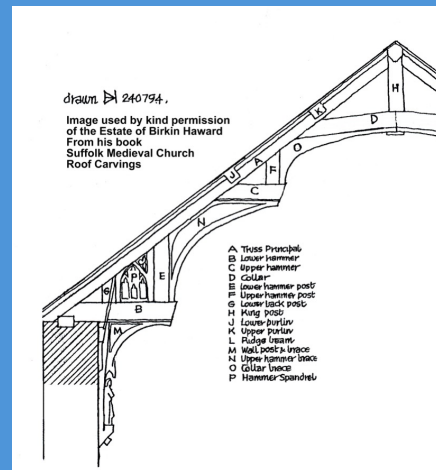


2

We know that about 25% of all double hammer beam roofs in England are found in Suffolk. However, no marks identifying the craftsmen involved have been discovered. The oak used is likely to have been imported from elsewhere as not enough would have been available locally. It is also probable that it would have been air dried (rather than green) to enable the fine carving which we see today.

### How does the structure work?

Short beams, the hammers, are supported by curved braces from the walls and hammer posts rise from the end of the beam to support the rafter structure of the roof and the second layer of hammer beams. The weight of the roof is therefore directed down through the posts and beams to the wall plate and thus to the wall which is very thick.



3

The carvings and mouldings are coloured in

- red (red vermillion),
- green (synthetic malachite [copper carbonate]) and
- mid brown (ochre [iron oxide]).

Interestingly small amounts of smalt, a blue pigment found in Europe from roughly the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, were found.

It is thought that the original colouring scheme may have been enhanced at a later date. Certainly, the colouring would have been striking to see. Thankfully no-one has since cleaned the paint off to “improve” the roof or remove the distraction from the later late 17<sup>th</sup> century panels.



4

Crossed keys – a symbol of St Peter, a founder of the church in Rome, who was given the keys of heaven. At this time churches in England were still part of the Roman Catholic church led by the Pope. The Church of England had yet to be established by Henry VIII.



5



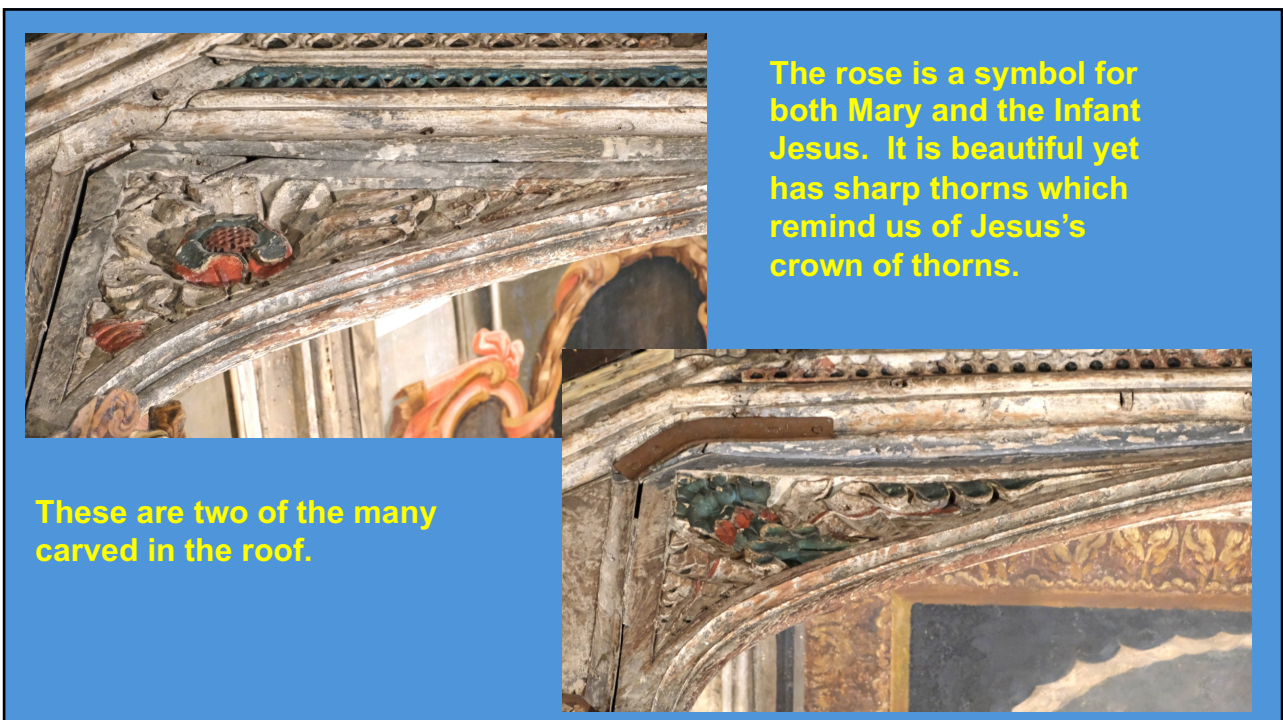
Green Men are often found on religious buildings: The Green Man is also a popular name for pubs! The Green Man is an example of how images from the Old Religion were brought into Christian churches and is one of the most ancient, pagan symbols to be found.

Pre-Christian pagan traditions and superstitions, were still influential in the early Middle Ages. We have two Green Men in the roof space.

6



7



8

A dragon, carved in the roof.  
The church is dedicated to St Margaret of Antioch. Legend suggests that Satan, disguised as a dragon, swallowed her. However, his stomach rejected her, opened and let her out unharmed.



9

A saltire.  
No one nowadays is sure why this appears. There was a medieval belief that The Apostles Creed was written at Pentecost by the apostles gathered around the table. The line *I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord* was attributed to St Andrew – his emblem is of course the saltire cross. Is this a way of indicating Jesus without an image?

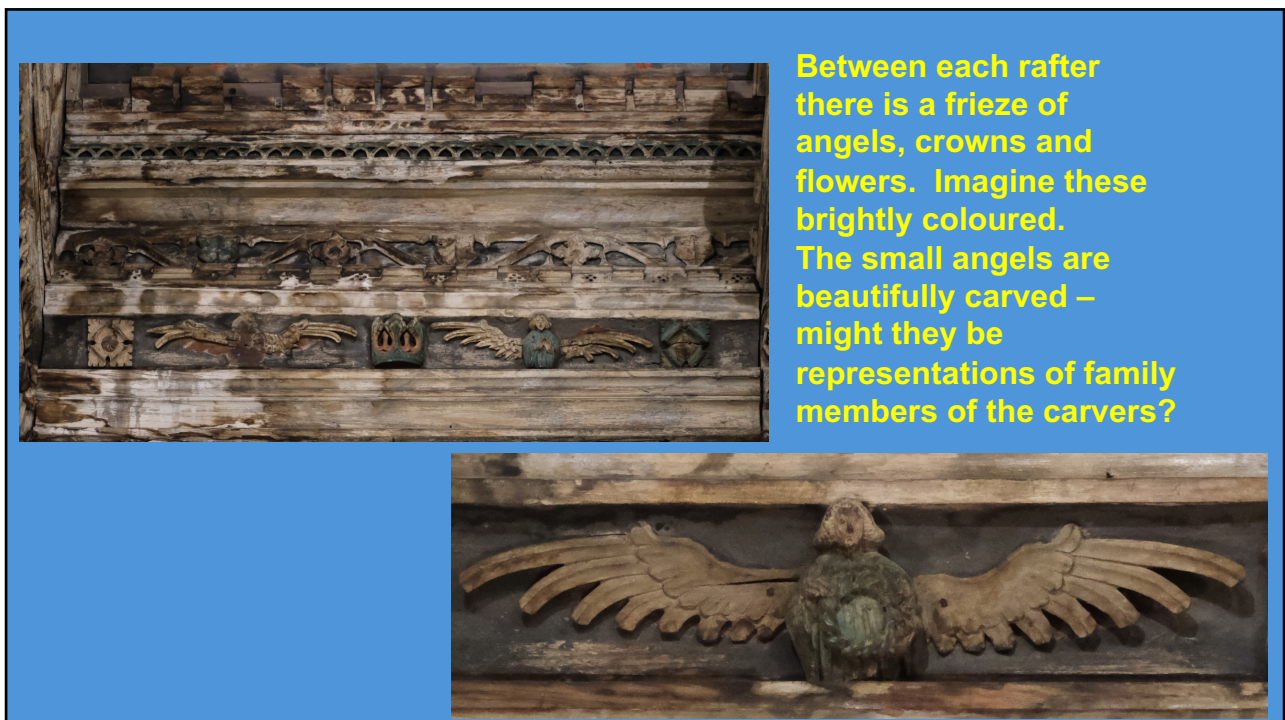


It is also known that a cross, including the saltire form, was placed at the four corners of a church at its dedication. Could this have been carved as part of the dedication of the new roof?

10



11



12