



FOR RELEASE ON 22 JUNE 2020

## **The Chronicles of Narnia to be celebrated in stone on major Yorkshire parish church**

St Mary's Church in Beverley has announced that new stone carvings on the exterior of the building will feature fourteen characters from the ever-popular children's books, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by CS Lewis.

The stories of Aslan, the White Witch, talking beasts and magical lands have captured the hearts and imaginations of story-lovers for generations, since their first publication in the 1950s. The books have consistently ranked among the top children's literature of all time, and many children of the 80s have nostalgic memories of the Sunday afternoon BBC dramatisations, with their evocative theme music. The blockbuster Disney & 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox films of the early 2000s introduced the world of Narnia to a new generation, and in 2018 Netflix bought the rights to all seven Narnia stories. While the world awaits this next version, St Mary's hopes that their own carvings will take a special place in the tableaux of Narnia interpretations.

"The precedent of animal and character carvings in churches stretches right back to medieval times," explains St Mary's Heritage Learning Officer, Dr Jennie England. "Amongst our roof bosses we already have countless wooden carvings of animals, real and mythical, and the misericord carvings under the seats in the Chancel feature an elephant and a pelican. And of course there's our famous Pilgrim Hare!"

"For centuries there were carvings in these spaces on the outside walls," explains Roland Deller, Director of Development, "but over time they have weathered away completely. We don't have any pictorial evidence to show us what was there, so have no way of reconstructing the original carvings. And so we decided to commission something new, to reflect more recent times."

Foundation course students from East Riding College studying for a BTEC Art and Design Diploma were invited to visit the church. They studied the historic carvings around the building, learned about the practicalities of stone craftsmanship, and were then asked, as an assessed part of their course, to create their own designs inspired by stories and legends that would resonate with people today.



“The students were so enthused by the project,” says Roland Deller, “and their designs were wonderful. We were particularly struck by Mel Watkins’ drawing of Mr Tumnus the faun, and it got us thinking that we could commission a whole series of Narnia carvings inspired by this design.”

As well as Mr Tumnus, the other characters featured in the new carvings will include the White Witch, Reepicheep the mouse, Fledge the winged horse, Glenstorm the centaur, and of course Aslan the lion. The CS Lewis Company Ltd granted permission for the carvings to be based on these characters, and the highly competitive tender for carrying out of the work was won by Matthias Garn Master Mason & Partner, with the designs by Kibby Schaefer. Matthias, Kibby and their team have worked on ecclesiastical buildings across the UK to acclaim, and their workshop is now based just outside York. Matthias is also an advocate for the system of apprenticeship, training and employing the next generation of stonemasons and carvers, and he took time to visit the college students and talk to them about his craft.

It was the image of the faun Mr Tumnus – half man and half goat – standing with his parcels under the iconic lamppost, which was also CS Lewis’ own starting point for writing the books. He dreamt up this scene when he was a teenager and it stuck with him for almost thirty years before he expanded it into the stories now loved round the world.

“For many children at the moment, facing lockdown, it would be wonderful to find a magical world where they make friends and have adventures, and so the story has much resonance for today,” says St Mary’s vicar Becky Lumley. “Indeed, it was taking three evacuees from London into his own home during the war that inspired CS Lewis to write *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* – which of course starts with Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy being evacuated to Professor Kirk’s house in the countryside, where they find the famous wardrobe... Our children today are in a very different kind of lockdown from that of the Second World War but they too need to imagine new possibilities and hope.”

“These books are not just for children, they contain incredible truth which help many Christians today reflect on our own understanding of God and faith,” she adds. CS Lewis is widely recognised as one of the great theologians of the twentieth century, writing particularly about reconciling faith with pain and suffering in the world, after his own experience of losing his mother at a young age and later losing his wife to cancer. In 2013, on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, Lewis was honoured with a memorial in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, with the inscription of his words: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.”

As well as a deep Christian faith, Lewis had a vivid imagination, and it is this which has endeared the books to generations of children. Narnia is peppered with mythological creatures – fauns, centaurs, dryads, naiads – and of course talking beasts. Lewis had been fascinated by anthropomorphic animals since he was a child, when he and his brother created imaginary worlds inhabited and run by animals. He also loved Icelandic sagas and Norse mythology, which he called Northernness.

“This intersection of sacred and secular, of Christian story and mythological world, is exactly what we also find in the wooden Tudor carvings on our church ceiling,” says Roland Deller. “The 600 roof bosses there are a way of storytelling without words, created in a world which had a high level of illiteracy. They show everything from Biblical characters to bawdy daily life, as well as bizarre mythical creatures like the mantichore and the basilisk.

“The Narnia carvings are part of our 2020 Curious Carvings project, which is the first phase of a ten-year programme to restore the whole church. The north nave clerestory had the most badly eroded and crumbling stonework, so we started in this part of the building. Some of the window tracery was so badly damaged that the windows were in danger of falling in! Thanks to a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant we are able to preserve this part of the building for future generations, and have built a major project interpreting the little-known carvings on the inside of this part of the church. So it feels very appropriate to be adding our Narnia carvings to the external wall of the same section of the building. The carvings are due to be completed by the autumn, and will be displayed at ground level to give people the chance to view them close up, before they are hoisted into their new positions.”

The roof bosses chronicle the life, times, stories, hopes and dreams of Beverley’s Tudor residents, and are unique in design. Some have a clear connection to Biblical stories, others seek to offer moral guidance, and many contain medieval symbolism which might be obscure today but would have been immediately evocative to viewers at the time. St Mary’s is home to one of the largest collections of these carvings in a UK parish church, yet many people have never heard of bosses – and given the height of the ceiling they are hard to see in detail. So the church has hired Dr Jennie England, a medieval historian, and put together an impressive board from the town, to develop resources and build awareness of this remarkable piece of heritage. Through initiatives such as Boss of the Week on Instagram, educational activities for children, and technological innovations, St Mary’s hope to inspire appreciation and curiosity for the bosses at St Mary’s Church – their artistry, meanings, and capacity to teach us about the past and ourselves.

Founded 900 years ago, and built over the following four centuries, St Mary’s possesses some of the finest architecture of any parish church in England. The great nineteenth-century church restorer Sir Tatton Sykes exclaimed, “Lovely St Mary’s, unequalled in England and almost without rival on the continent of Europe!” as he contemplated the west front, framed by two pepper-pot turrets – a style later adopted at the royal buildings of St George’s Chapel Windsor Castle and King’s College Cambridge. The treasured local landmark also features the fifteenth-century Ceiling of Kings, the fourteenth-century Pilgrim Hare (said to inspire the White Rabbit illustrations in another popular children’s book, *Alice in Wonderland*), a stunning star-encrusted ceiling, a magnificent west window by AWN Pugin, and hidden Priests’ Rooms containing artefacts from the town’s rich history. Those interested in finding out more about the church’s history and restoration project – including their regular heritage newsletters and video podcasts – can visit: [stmarysbeverley.org/heritage](http://stmarysbeverley.org/heritage).

**ENDS**

Images based on The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis © copyright CS Lewis Pte Ltd.  
Narnia ® is a registered trademark of CS Lewis Pte Ltd.  
[www.narnia.com](http://www.narnia.com)  
[www.facebook.com/TheChroniclesofNarnia](https://www.facebook.com/TheChroniclesofNarnia)

## **Contact**

For further information please contact:  
Roland Deller  
Director of Development, St Mary's Church Beverley  
T. 07941 952 059 | E. [roland.deller@stmarysbeverley.org](mailto:roland.deller@stmarysbeverley.org)

Follow @StMarysBeverley on Twitter

## **About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future.  
[www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk).

Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund.