

# GREEN MEN

## A talk given by Dr Bostwick on 12/11/05

Early references to Green Men in 1575.

1638 *"These men be called green because they be covered in boughs"*

1566 A painting by Breughel shows a Green Man in a troop of actors.

1939 Lady Raglan invented the name "green man" and thought these figures were pagan survivals into the Middle Ages. She linked the green men with the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection.

Examples given of green men:

York Minster: roof bosses and choir stalls

Norwich Cathedral: cloisters.

Southwell Minster Chapter House and elsewhere

Halifax )

Lincoln ) Misericords

St. Albans )

In margins of manuscripts

Tongues sticking out are a feature of some green men eg Nantwich: demon pulling a green man's tongue out.

*"Against whom do you sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood?"* Isaiah ch 57 v 4.

*"Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou loveth evil rather more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou loveth all-devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue"* Psalm.52 w 2-4.

*"The tongue no man can tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"* James 3 (all)

*"His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud; under his tongue is mischief and vanity"* Psalm. 10 v 7.

Women are often shown with their mouths covered i.e. gagged.

*"Be not rash with thy mouth... suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin".* Ecclesiastes ch 5 v 2

Also: *"the mouth is a floodgate of all misfortune"*. York Guildhall: a green man with a double tongue

The leaves can have different forms and meanings

1. A spewing mask: leaves coming from the mouth.
2. Garlanding: leaves around the head.
3. Dissolving: Skin turning into leaves and in some examples faces are made of leaves eg. 138 A.D. Baalbek and C13 Baumberg, Germany.

Villard de Honnecourt's sketch book, produced in the C13, gives examples of foliate heads,

with leaves sprouting like hair and beards. He calls them "leafheads". The garlanded heads are from Roman models; there is also a link with Jesus' crown of thorns.

The one in our Chapter House still has a trace of colour.

In St. Denis, there is an effigy of Silvanus garlanded with oak leaves.

The leaves stand for what is inside a man. eg. Melbourne: index finger sprouting leaves. Hexham: one from the mouth, one from the nostrils. Sutton Benger in Wilts: has birds in the leaves. Hartswell in Lincs. Marburg in Germany: — green thoughts ?

Leaves coming from the mouth is a Christian, not a pagan, symbolism.

Manchester: a lion )

Beverley: a boar )

Ripon: a monkey ) animals with leaves coming

Cawston: a stag ) out of their mouths

Worcester: a beaver )

Conisbrough: a man defends the font from a dragon (= evil) on the other side a bishop defends it from sin

Leaves stand for what is inside a man, "*Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, that defileth a man*" Matthew ch 15 v11

Sometimes shown as breath. e.g. Lincoln gatehouse. i.e. they stand for sin.

Naked figures represent the soul.

Green represents naivety and innocence.