

Project Gargoyle Newsletter

February 2017

*Project
Gargoyle*



Welcome to the latest Project Gargoyle newsletter

During the final four months of last year I steadily worked through the backlog of photographers' 'shoots' which I'd allow to build up for about three years. My main aim was to check everything over and prepare a 'summary sheet' prior to the images and associated documentation being passed to Leicestershire County Council for adding to the Historic Environment Record.

Frankly some of this was almost tedious, especially as there were photos of over seventy churches. But what kept it interesting was the wealth of wonderful carvings. I can confirm that gruesome gargoyles are greatly outnumbered by monstrous corbels. And the sheer quantity of stunning fifteenth century roof bosses still amazes me. But, along the way, some unexpected surprises have popped up, and it's these I want to share with you in this newsletter.

Just to add a little extra variety, some of these are 'off topic' – in that they are not medieval. When this project started back in 2009 the members of the Project Gargoyle committee were well aware that the volunteer photographers could not be expected to distinguish between medieval Gothic carvings and the nineteenth century Gothic Revival ones. Hence the advice given on training days: 'If it's got eyes then shoot it.' That said, photographers are not fools and, furthermore, when I'm allocating churches to be recorded then I've steered folk away from churches known to be have been built or totally rebuilt in the Victorian era.

Nevertheless while checking over the shoots I have become aware of the diversity of styles adopted by different Victorian stonemasons. The heyday for church restoration was the

1860s and 1870s and, necessarily, a great many craftsmen were employed. Geoffrey Brandwood, in his comprehensive survey of the restoration of Leicestershire and Rutland churches, *Bringing Them to Their Knees*, provides evidence for there being at least ten churches in the two counties being restored at any one time during these two decades.

Although my intention is to leave the detailed study of Gothic Revival carvings to someone who has relevant expertise, in this newsletter I have drawn attention to carvings from when the Gothic Revival was just getting underway in the 1830s and 1840s.

But this wasn't the first Gothic Revival – during the 1630s there had been a briefer flurry of church restoration. And Leicestershire has a rare example of a font carved at this time. More details in the following pages.

The main focus of Project Gargoyle is, of course, the thousands of carvings from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. There are carvings older than this but they are covered by two separate academic projects, one looking at the Anglo-Saxon carvings (and hopefully Leicestershire will be the next county to be published) the other focused on Romanesque carvings. Which is not to say that the volunteer photographer's have ignored carvings from these eras, just that there are no plans to 'analyse' these sculptures as part of Project Gargoyle.

My thanks to everyone who has played a part in making Project Gargoyle a success – without you all I would not have the challenge of sorting shoots from seventy churches!

Bob Trubshaw, Wymeswold, January 2017

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Front cover illustration taken at Goadby Marwood by David Jarram.

LARC Project progress

In the previous Project Gargoyle newsletter, published last July, I described how Project Gargoyle was set up to photograph and record Leicestershire and Rutland's medieval carvings, up to and including adding these images and data to the Historic Environment Record. The 'enhancement' of the basic data, and making the images and information available via the Internet was always a separate phase. And in July that 'phase' became a project in its own right, and with its own name: LARC Project, a contraction of Leicestershire and Rutland Carvings Project.

Initial funding has allowed a 'beta version' of a database to be created by Catherine Wells of Ischus Engineering in Worksop (www.ischus.co.uk). During 2017 this will be given some serious testing as one or more of the Project committee make a start on formally describing each carving. It's still early days so I will save the details until the next newsletter when, hopefully, I can confirm that all is working well!

We have an offer of funding to complete the database development although at the present time there isn't a clear timescale for when those funds will be available. All being well things will become clearer in the course of 2017. I am cautiously confident that this funding will be confirmed without undue delay so am reluctant to spend time trying to source funding elsewhere. However if you happen to know someone who wishes to contribute a few thousand pounds then I'm happy to hear from you!

For information, the estimated cost of the next phase of database development is £10,000, although further expenditure is envisaged to promote and develop the LARC Project.



The LARC Project now has its own logo. Over the next few years 'Project Gargoyle' will retire into the background and 'LARC Project' will come to the fore.



Medieval sculptures in wood and stone. An angel supported on a corbel at Ashby Folville. Photograph by David Jarram.



The cover shot

Photograph by David Jarram.

Head shots of gorgeous men – and, more often, women – are more often associated with the covers of newsstand fashion magazines than obscure newsletters about medieval sculpture. But the handsome chap on the cover of this edition is well worthy of equal adoration.

Why? Because he's got 'the lot'. He's been 'glammed up'! Look again – the brown and gold colours are not the natural colour of the stone. If it were a fashion shoot they would be hair dye and rather glittery make up. But

this 'make over' was done long before fashion shoots were ever a thing. You're looking at what is most probably medieval paint.

'Is that it? Just a few smudges?' I hear you all sigh. 'Bob, for goodness sake show us a carving with lots of surviving paint on it.'

Well, I'm sorry, but this is as good as it gets, at least for stone carvings. Indeed, so far as I am aware, it is the *only* medieval stone carving in Leicestershire or Rutland with surviving paint. But not the only painted



The wooden roof bosses and associated timbers in the nave at Ashby Folville also retain their original paint. There is a broad spectrum of colours, indicating just how resplendent these carvings were in medieval times. Photograph by David Jarram.

medieval carving: as the photos accompanying this section readily reveal, there are also wooden roof bosses with 'original' paint.

This stone carving is inside Goadby Marwood church. It is also interesting in that it is one of the few medieval figurative carvings inside a chancel. I suspect this is less because medieval chancels did not have carvings but more because by the time chancels were restored in the nineteenth century (quite often a decade or more after the nave) they were in such a bad shape structurally that it was easier to take them down and rebuild them. The budget may have been enough for new corbels – angels holding shields were the cliché – but not for springers in the arcades. Indeed hardly any chancels were rebuilt with arcades.

While nineteenth century architects often retained medieval carvings, the fashion of the times was to remove wall plaster and any associated paint from church interiors. This was in complete contrast to medieval



This roof boss at Stoke Golding was photographed in 1989. The yellow colour is the pigmented gesso which acts as an 'undercoat' for gilding. Very appropriate for a sunburst face! However by 2010 this had been stripped off and this roof boss is now varnished brown wood. More typically, since the 1950s Leicestershire's roof bosses have been carefully re-gilded and restored.

practices and led to a great many churches now having rubble-construction walls visible, despite the original builders expecting such work to be concealed behind plaster and whitewash.

The reason why so few wooden or stone medieval carvings still have any 'original' paint is because the Victorian restorers made extensive use of stiff wire brushes to remove plaster and paint. Quite why the Goadby Marwood carving escaped this fate is unknown. Perhaps he was hidden behind an item of furniture or something hanging down the wall?

Whatever the reason, we now have a reliable clue about how other carvings in a great many churches might have looked until about 150 years ago.

While this one carving is of special interest, every carving potentially has a story to tell. The aim of the LARC Project is to identify such 'narratives' and make them available to everyone via the Internet.



Kegworth's corbels

The nave roof at Kegworth is decorated with a wonderful set of wooden figures. One of them is an especially splendid depiction of a bagpipe player (with a chanter and single drone), while others are playing the shawm, recorder, trumpet, harp and vielle (the precursor to the modern violin). A companion figure shown holding a book is plausibly a singer. Unlike many comparable wooden figures in nave roofs, these do not have wings so depict 'mortal musicians' not angelic ones.

The chancel is decorated with an exceptional set of stone corbels with deeply-incised heads and upper torsos of winged angels. These are of interest partly because of the quality of the carving but also because most chancels in Leicestershire's churches were rebuilt in the nineteenth century and any original corbels lost.

Above: Bagpipe and vielle players accompanying someone who is probably the singer.

Below: One of the angels in the chancel.

Photographs by David Jarram.





Photograph by David Morley.

Leicestershire's oldest roof boss?

Nave roofs were raised and rebuilt in the fifteenth century when clerestory windows became the fashion, allowing much more light into the interior. The roof timbers of one such church in Leicestershire, Claybrooke Parva, has been dendrodated ('tree ring dating'), revealing that the trees were felled between 1425 and 1450 – a generation or two before the Battle of Bosworth.

But usually it is difficult to put an exact date on the carvings. Not so at Wymondham where the sole surviving roof boss depicts a woman wearing a 'square headdress' (more correctly a 'gable headdress'). These were in fashion from about 1380 until around 1410. Plenty of examples of such headgear can be found on exterior stone carvings, revealing that there was considerable restoration going on in these decades.

However this wooden one seems unique in this area. One the face of things Wymondham raised the nave roof a couple of decades earlier than most other villages. This is indeed plausible as there is plenty of evidence that Wymondham was especially wealthy around this time.

Or was the person who carved it a bit of a 'traditionalist'? Did he rather like carving this style of headdress even though his wife kept reminding him it was now twenty years since it had been in fashion? Without dendrodating we can only speculate...



Muston's Laudian font

A few years ago, while still living in Wiltshire, I took advantage of a guided tour around the parish church led by Dr Martin Palmer. The main theme was to look for evidence of medieval pilgrims visiting Avebury. But Martin noticed part of an oak bell-frame standing on the floor of the tower, inscribed with the date 1636 and what are presumably the initials of the three churchwardens at the time (see photograph above). Interestingly the parish chest was replaced two years before, with the date prominently inscribed in the same style of lettering.

Dr Palmer said something to the effect of 'Oh, yes, that would be right. It was when William Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury and there was a countrywide spree of church restoration.' All news to me and I thought little more of it until I was working through the photographs of Muston church taken by Neil Fortey for Project Gargoyle. (As an aside, the locals don't enunciate the 't' in Muston – local pronunciation is 'Musson'.)

When I got to the shots of the font I mentally stumbled. Here was a seemingly perfectly normal – though rather well-done – Perpendicular style font. So it should have been carved between the late fourteenth century and the middle sixteenth century.

But – and it's the sort of 'but' which made me stop in my tracks – there was a small army of



*Muston font. 'New' in 1641.
Photograph by Neil Fortey.*

faces and heads with arms. There were far too many for this to be a typical piece of 'Perp' masonry as, by this time, things were a little more restrained than in the previous century or so. And, they looked very little like medieval Gothic carvings. Instead they reminded me of faces on seventeenth century wooden furniture.

Pevsner came to the rescue. Almost. In the second edition his co-editor had added the comment that John Nichols (in his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, published in numerous volumes during the latter years of the eighteenth century and the first years of the next century) had noted that the font was 'new in 1641'. A dim recollection of Dr Palmer's remark about the Avebury bell frame came to mind.

A quick Google enlightened me to the life of William Laud. Born in 1573, in 1633 King Charles I him appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He held this post until being arrested in 1640; he was executed in January 1645. These days we do not execute Archbishops, no matter how controversial their opinions might be. But in the seventeenth century things were different. And much more controversial.

In a nutshell, the Reformation was still underway. Laud was very much a traditionalist within the movement. He sought to establish a liturgy which met with popular approval. He may have had plenty of enemies among senior clergy and politicians, but the laity seemingly approved. Throughout the country parishioners decided that it was time to refurbish the church, or at least its furnishings. One has to suspect that Laud had re-activated interest in church worship after a long period when trying to get funds for repairs had proved difficult. Hence the new parish chest at Avebury in 1634 and the new bell frame two years later. And it was likely to be the underlying reason why Muston had got a new font by 1641.

Sadly Laud's approach was a brief interlude and the prevailing Calvinistic and Puritanical

doctrines took hold again from the 1640s onwards.

But was the Muston font really new in 1641? Or had it been 'merely' been restored and the faces added? I only have a passing awareness of seventeenth century carving. I needed to make contact with someone who had the relevant expertise. So I emailed Anna Giangliordano, the art historian who is on the committees for both Project Gargoyle and LARC Project and asked for her help. She promptly came back to me drawing my attention to a chapter in Professor Graham Parry's book *Glory, Laud and Honour* in which he discusses how Laud's emphasis was on the liturgy associated with baptism – thereby making fonts something of an 'in thing' in the 1630s. But mostly Parry was writing about wooden covers for fonts, not the fonts themselves. I emailed him. He generously replied as follows:

Many thanks for sending me the photograph of the font at Muston. It is a most surprising confection. None of the carving looks medieval to me. The flattened faces under the bowl look very like the squashed Mannerist faces one finds in early to mid-17th century prints, as decorative motifs of a grotesque kind. But it is the faces in the middle of the quatrefoils that are most peculiar. I assume they are faces, for that is what they appear to be when I zoom in to the photograph. They seem a most unlikely and inappropriate decoration for a font, for they do not seem to have any symbolic significance. I notice the faces seem to have moustaches. I don't recall moustaches having much place in medieval faces one sees in churches, but they do frequently occur in early 17th century faces. The quatrefoils themselves do not seem to be of a conventional 14th or 15th century character, but have extra loops in them. I assume the four figures at the base of the font could be the four evangelists – but again, they don't have a medieval feel about them. So maybe John Nichols was right, and the font was installed in

1641 or so. [...] The carving is very crisp, which could suggest a date after the Reformation.

The altar cover looks like a typical Jacobean/Caroline cover of a simple kind.

You may have found something quite rare: a genuine Laudian font. Rare, because usually a parish church held on to its old font, even if damaged, because everyone in the parish had been baptised in that font, so it came to symbolise the continuity of Christian worship in that place. It was central to the idea of the Christian community of the town or village. The decoration of this font, however, is not exactly Christian – in the traditional sense. [...]

I think there is a strong case for this being a late 1630s piece, carved by someone who was not accustomed to the conventions of font design, and who just applied some modern decorative carving, as if it were a piece of woodwork for the local manor house.

So, Leicestershire is home to a rare 'Gothic Revival' font – three hundred years before the Gothic Revival was invented!

Grateful thanks to Professor Parry and Anna Giangiordano for their assistance.

Photographs of Scalford's gargoyles by David Jarram.

Scalford's 'Laudian gargoyles'

Which begs the obvious question: how many more carvings from the 1630s are there in Leicestershire? A definitive answer must await considerably more investigation. But there is at least one other church with such carvings: Scalford (pronounced locally as 'Scorfuld'), about twelve miles south-west of Muston.

Pevsner informs his readers that the tower at Scalford was rebuilt in 1639. Which means that the gargoyles are probably from this time – although there is just a slim possibility they were reused from the older tower. Again they seem to be a little too 'crisp' to be medieval.

But are they really rare examples of 'Laudian gargoyles'? Much as it seems likely, further research is needed for confirmation.



Scalford's temporarily concealed Green Man: a cautionary example?

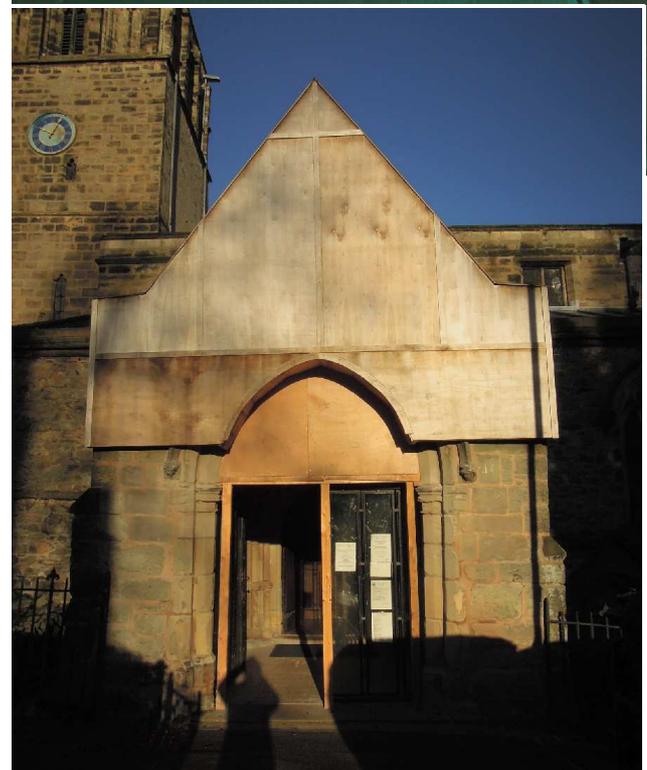
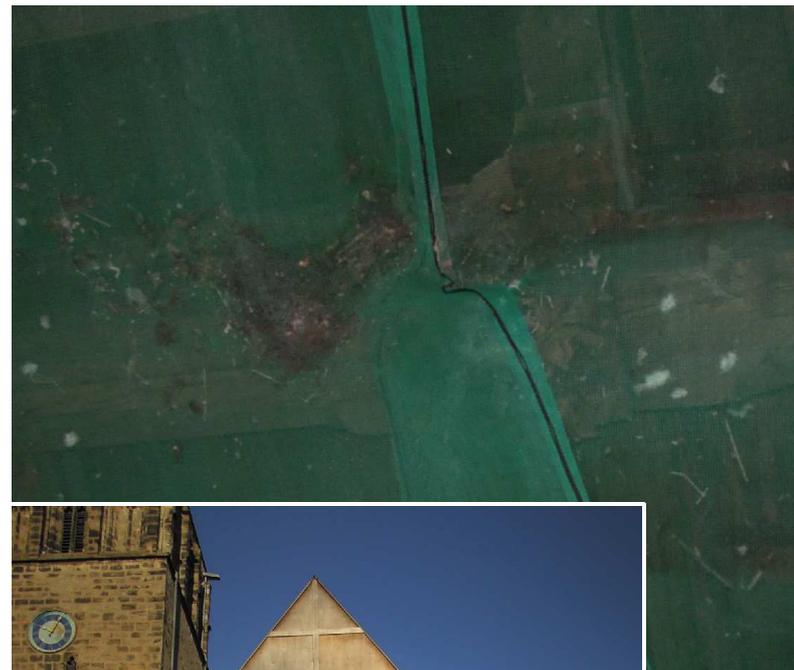
The two photographs on the right were taken in July 1994 and December 2016. I was standing in the same place each time – the south porch of Scalford church, looking up at the roof (although the upper photograph was taken using a longer focal length lens).

The green netting has clearly been installed to prevent birds nesting in the porch and causing damage to what is probably a fifteenth century roof, which also has a simple foliate roof boss. The need to preserve the carvings perforce takes precedence over making them easily visible to visitors.

But how 'temporary' are such measures? A few days before visiting Scalford last December I stopped at Whitwick church. The south porch there is apparently suffering from structural problems. But the timber facade, while clearly only a short-term 'fix', looks like it might be in place for some time. Presumably the cost of repairs cannot be easily met from local funds or grants.

At the same time as relevant grant-giving organisations are suffering from reduced funding while having increased requests for assistance so too demographic changes make church-going – or even financial support for the local church – an increasingly minority activity. Sadly there are likely to be an increasing number of churches with 'temporary fixes'. Some of these will have an impact on the accessibility or preservation of medieval carvings.

Leicestershire County Council has always recognised that Project Gargoyle will provide a record of carvings in case of unforeseen damage. But that really is a worst case scenario. One of the main medium-term objectives of the LARC Project is to raise awareness among local communities of the importance of the medieval carvings in their



midst. This is surely the best way to ensure the long-term survival – and accessibility – of this wealth of sculpture which has for so long been overlooked.



Norton's 'halfway house' hood stops

The Gothic Revival came into fashion in the late 1830s, just as Queen Victoria came to the throne, and took a couple of decades to really get underway. So most Gothic Revival carvings can be dated to the 1860s and 1870s. But there are some earlier ones too.

The earliest Gothic Revival churches in Leicestershire include Appleby Magna, Anstey, Countesthorpe, Shackerstone and Wymeswold. Understandably they are often hybrids of the new fashion and old way of doing things.

Another example is the restoration of Norton juxta Twycross in about 1841. In his comprehensive study of the nineteenth century restoration of Leicestershire and Rutland churches, *Bringing Them to Their Knees*, Geoffrey Brandwood refers to Norton as 'an extremely interesting scheme, being a halfway house between traditional ways of doing things and the new ecclesiological approach.'

This 'betwixt and between' approach is clearly revealed by the hood stops either side of the windows which mostly depict a mixture of naturalist animals and stylised human heads. No hint here of the ubiquitous kings and queens who would soon take over the hoodstops in droves.

Photographs by Iain Loveridge.



Shackerstone's mid-1840s carvings

Just four miles to the east of Norton juxta Twycross is the village of Shackerstone. Most of the church was rebuilt in 1845–6. On the south side of the nave are wonderfully carved 'gargoyles', although they are purely decorative and not functional. They are more human and less monstrous than is typical for medieval gargoyles.

Of special note is the figure with two smaller figures, one at each shoulder. This is plausibly inspired by a medieval gargoyle of similar configuration.

Inside, the chancel arch is decorated with two well-sculpted heads. In many respects they are good examples of the generic kings and queens typical of the 1860s onwards, but these also have elaborately-carved crowns which have been gilded.

*Photographs by
Iain Loveridge.*



Changes at the top

Liz Blood left Leicestershire County Council in October 2016. She had been Project Co-ordinator for Project Gargoyle since soon after its inception in 2009. She provided considerable practical assistance and was a much-needed 'ally', providing prompt and reliable assistance even though the main part of her work was concerned with the War Memorials project. My most grateful thanks to her for all her help.

By agreement with the rest of the Project Gargoyle committee Bob Trubshaw is now co-ordinating all aspects of the project. This role will steadily 'fade out' as the LARC Project increasingly come to the fore.

Where needs recording?

No less than 115 churches have been recorded for the project and several dozen more are allocated to volunteer photographers. In Leicestershire there are plenty of churches with just a few medieval carvings, although I think most of the ones with lots of carvings have been done or are allocated. The exceptions include Croxton Kerrial, Houghton on the Hill and Lubenham. I've been told Whetstone has some interesting carvings in the nave, but I've not been able to establish if they're Victorian or medieval.

In contrast to Leicestershire on a handful of churches in Rutland have been recorded or allocated. Bob Trubshaw is hoping to recruit more volunteer photographers from Rutland or adjoining parts of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire or Northamptonshire who can focus on the wealth of medieval sculpture in England's smallest county.

Volunteer 'art historians'

One of the key aspects of the LARC Project database (currently being developed) is creating accurate descriptions of every carving photographed by the Project Gargoyle volunteers. A rather long 'tick list' has been prepared which allows the person doing the describing to select relevant options. No prior experience of 'art history' or medieval carvings is required as training will be provided. The cataloguing can be done anywhere the user has a computer – at home or elsewhere.

If you would like to know more – without making any commitment to take part – then contact Bob Trubshaw. Some help with development work may be needed in 2017, but the real input may not start until next year.

Web site changes

The old Project Gargoyle web page on leics.gov.uk have not been updated for several years (because the passwords needed to make the changes were lost). Leicestershire County Council plans to 'retire' the current web site during 2017 so this page (www.leics.gov.uk/gargoyle) will eventually go offline. But please do not rely on this site for up-to-date information.

Current information is at **www.hoap.co.uk/gargoyle**

This is now the main web page for Project Gargoyle.

When the LARC Project web site is launched then all the Project Gargoyle information will be included in that site. But that is not expected to happen until next year at the earliest.

Credits

Big thanks to all volunteers whose photographs have been used in this newsletter. Uncredited photographs are by Bob Trubshaw.

This newsletter has drawn attention to some of the more unusual carvings for this newsletter. Nevertheless I hope it provides some indication that there is much more to these carvings than just a collection of 'mug shots'.

Project Gargoyle annual training day

Those who have been with the Project since its inception will be well aware of the annual training days for new recruits.

This year's event will take place on **Saturday 13th May** at the usual venue, Tilton on the Hill church. This will be the seventh time that the churchwarden and the publicans at the Rose and Crown have welcomed and looked after us.

The day starts at 10.00 a.m. prompt with a talk about medieval carvings. This is open to anyone (and free) and lasts about an hour. It's quite OK to come to this part and then tootle off!

The rest of the morning is devoted to helping photographers understand the requirements of photographing and otherwise recording medieval carvings for the Project. In the afternoon there is a workshop to put these skills into practice. Note that photographers should attend the whole day – the afternoon workshop will only make sense if you've been to the morning sessions!

No need to book if you only intend to come for the first hour but please let Bob Trubshaw know in advance if you are planning on staying for the full day. Email bobtrubs@indigogroup.co.uk or phone 01509 881342.



One side of the capital at Tilton which depicts the tale of the fox and geese. Photograph by David Morley.



The Project Gargoyle training day in 2013. Photograph by Liz Blood.



The Fool. One of a number of remarkable carvings at Syston.

Photograph by Steve Harris.

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Talks and workshops

Bob Trubshaw gives various talks about medieval carvings and 'Gargoyle Hunting Workshops'. If you know of a group or event who would like to book such an event then contact Bob.



More information about Project Gargyle

is online at

www.hoap.co.uk/gargoyle

Please note that the old web site at www.leics.gov.uk/gargoyle is now out of date and is expected to go offline sometime this year.