

rief

owe in line ig award

IBURY: The Marlowe will compete with two of mnes in London for a prize this weekend. p against are's Globe and Wells. The Marlowe is in n UK Theatre's Reneo Award for Best ion of Touring Theatre. rizes to be given on the tude Best New Play and otion of Diversity

al winners will be UK Theatre, and ed at a ceremony in historic Guildhall on

ws comes just days after owe announced it had ne millionth ticket.

es visit

IBURY: Former nal players in the 1 National Football ere on hand to wow it a street club. Ghent, a former or the Philadelphia isited a street party 'All Saints Church to a free cheerleading all camp at Canterbury

urch's Street Klub is a nday school of games, bible lessons on street hich supports families and adults on tes and runs fortnightly ut the year. re details on the camp, rom October 29 to 31, v.AFDLimited.com.



MYSTERY FIGURES: The 'corbels' of Canterbury seem to be purely decorative, and therefore removable, in which case they strictly are brackets

City's rude carvings present brain teaser for historians

THOSE familiar with Canterbury's streets cannot fail to have noticed the striking large breasted female figures which appear to support the

overhanging windows or first floor jetties of several of our buildings. These examples can be seen in Burgate Street, St Peter's Street, Palace Street and

the cathedral precincts. Others, performing a similar function, take the form of men, animals or grotesque combinations of these. Every aspect of these figures is shrouded in mystery - why they are there, how old they are, how many there are in other towns and how they relate to other similar grotesque figures? What

Way We Were



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Historical and
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Society

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evil spirits or disease - the black death or plague perhaps? Are there links with the figureheads of ships? Is there a brewing link (brewing in Ipswich and the local Kent hop trade)? Or with the Protestants fleeing mainland Europe in the 16th and 17th century?

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Every aspect of these figures is shrouded in mystery - why they are there, how old they are, how many there are in other towns and how they relate to other similar grotesque figures? What to call them is in itself a problem.

Although often referred to as corbels, this to architectural historians is a misnomer, as they don't play any role in holding up the building above them.

They seem to be purely decorative, and therefore removable, in which case they strictly are brackets rather than corbels.

Building

Some have been removed and lost (this seems the case with one lost in the last refurbishment of the former Boots building).

Others are reported to have moved from building to building (those in All Saints Lane from Lady Wootton's house in St Augustine's, and those in Whitehorse Lane from the old Fleur de Lis Hotel which stood in the High Street).

The fact that they can be moved around makes them particularly difficult to date.

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Unlike green men (heads encased with foliage), gargoyles, and the more vulgar Irish female version (Sheela na gig), the Canterbury figures lack a specific name and have apparently not yet benefited from academic study or produced any journal literature.

So what do we know? We have found very few large breasted versions in other English towns.

There are a fine pair (there must be a better way of phrasing this) at Hales Place in Tenterden, one at Wye in Kent, several at an Ipswich brewery site, one on a manor house at Brightling in Sussex, and a London example now in the V & A Museum (Sir Paul Pindar's House).

Further afield, one can be seen on the town hall in Lubeck, Germany. Some have cloven hoofs in place of feet, some have distorted grimaces, or enlarged ears, or enlarged, staring eyes, or are bound at their feet or round the body.

Beyond this, all is guesswork. Were they erected to ward off

evil spirits or disease - the black death or plague perhaps?

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Eroticism

Or, more imaginatively, links to the eroticism in carvings on some Hindu temples, or general warnings against carnal lust, or forerunners of the red light in red light districts?

The list is endless, but for now we simply do not know.

Two things are certain. First, Canterbury has an extraordinary number of these architectural devices that are otherwise rare.

Second, reliance on Internet searches is unlikely to assist this study - Googling large-breasted women produces astronomic numbers of hits but very few contributions from architectural historians!



Find more of David Lewis' tales at
canterburytimes.co.uk/hostalgia



GROTESQUES: Rude figures carved in the woodwork on buildings may be there to ward off evil