

Stone carvings of Chronicles of Narnia characters to appear on Yorkshire church

ITS stories of Aslan, the White Witch, and a magical wardrobe have captivated youngsters ever since they were first published in the 1950s.

Tuesday, 23rd June 2020, 6:00 am



Carver Kibby Schaefer works on a plaster model of Aslan, a character from the children's book series The Chronicles of Narnia

CS Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia rank among the top children's literature of all time and many growing up in the 1980s will have nostalgic memories of Sunday afternoon BBC dramatisations.

The blockbuster Disney & 20th 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 stories.

Now one of Beverley's oldest churches, St Mary's, is to feature 14 characters from the famous tales – including Aslan, the lion – in new stone carvings on the outside walls, replacing those that have been weathered away over the centuries.

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Carver Kibby Schaefer works with plaster models of characters from the children's book series The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis, at Wolds Workshop in Full Sutton

Director of development Roland Deller said: "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."

Art and design students from East Riding College were invited to visit the church, which has countless wooden carvings of animals, real and mythical, among its roof bosses.

The church also famously houses a 14th century carved stone rabbit, said to have inspired the White Rabbit illustrations in Alice in Wonderland.



Beverley's Market Cross bandstand in Saturday Market - with St Mary's church in the background

The students learned about the practicalities of stone craftsmanship and were then asked to create their own designs inspired by stories and legends that would still strike a chord today.

Mr Deller said: "We were particularly struck by (student) 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 carvings will include the White Witch, Reepicheep the mouse, Fledge the winged horse and Glenstorm the centaur.

Lewis had a deep Christian faith and 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 – as well as talking beasts.

"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," said St Mary's vicar Becky Lumley.

The Narnia carvings are part of the 2020 Curious Carvings project, the first phase of a ten-year programme to restore the whole church.

They are due to be completed by the autumn and will be displayed at ground level so people can see them before being hoisted into place.

The CS Lewis Company Ltd gave its permission to the project and the tender has been awarded to Matthias Garn, Master Mason & Partner, with designs by Kibby Schaefer.