



# ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH

BUSLINGTHORPE  
LINCOLNSHIRE



THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

LONDON

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION  
TRUST WELCOMES YOU TO  
ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH  
BUSLINGTHORPE, LINCOLNSHIRE

*Many years ago Christians built and set apart this place for prayer. They made their church beautiful with their skill and craftsmanship. Here they have met for worship, for children to be baptised, for couples to be married and for the dead to be brought for burial. If you have time, enjoy the history, the peace and the holiness here. Please use the prayer card and, if you like it, you are welcome to take a folded copy with you.*

*Although services are no longer regularly held here, this church remains consecrated; inspiring, teaching and ministering through its beauty and atmosphere. It is one of more than 325 churches throughout England cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. The Trust was created in 1969 and was, until 1994, known as the Redundant Churches Fund. Its object is to ensure that all these churches are kept in repair and cared for, in the interests of the Church and Nation, for present and future generations.*

*Please help us to care for this church. There is a box for donations or, if you prefer to send a gift, it will be gratefully received at the Trust's headquarters at 89 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH until 30 September 2002. We will be moving to new offices in the autumn of 2002, so please look out for announcements in our churches or visit our website [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk) for details of our new address.*

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## ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH

BUSLINGTHORPE, LINCOLNSHIRE

by CLAUDE BLAIR

Buslingthorpe, which is about three miles (4.8km) south-west of Market Rasen and ten-and-a-half (16.9km) north-east of Lincoln, is first recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, though the entry makes no mention of either a church or a priest there. The place name derives from 'Buselin's hamlet'; he held it c.1115. The mediaeval village, which is unlikely to have been large, was probably deserted in the later Middle Ages, and had certainly disappeared by 1602, when it was stated in a diocesan visitation that 'Bothe church and chauncell are very ruinous in the walls, tymber rooffe & wyndowes, by reason there are no parishioners or very fewe there & of no abylytie'. In the following year it was further reported that there were only ten communicants, and that the rector, Ethelbert Slade, was not only an absentee, but was also 'of meane learninge' and 'meane behaviour'. Today, the position of the village is marked only by the moated site of the old manor house – now containing what E J Willson described in 1812 as 'a genteel modern house of brick' – with the church on a hillock adjacent to it, a cottage which probably dates from the 19th century, a modern bungalow, and a number of mounds in the fields to the south.

Despite the neglect just mentioned, the church was to have almost another four centuries of active life ahead of it. In 1986, however, the Lincoln diocesan authorities decided that it was no longer possible to maintain this, and the church was declared redundant and vested in the Redundant Churches Fund, now The Churches Conservation Trust, in 1987. It is a modest, though well-proportioned, building comprising a stone west tower, and simple aisleless nave and small chancel, of which the last two were rebuilt in 1835, in yellow brick with stone dressings, to the designs of Edward James Willson (1787–1854), already mentioned. This distinguished Lincoln antiquary-architect was responsible for some notable work locally, including the case of the Lincoln Cathedral organ, but is best known nationally for his association with A C Pugin – father



*The church from the north-west*

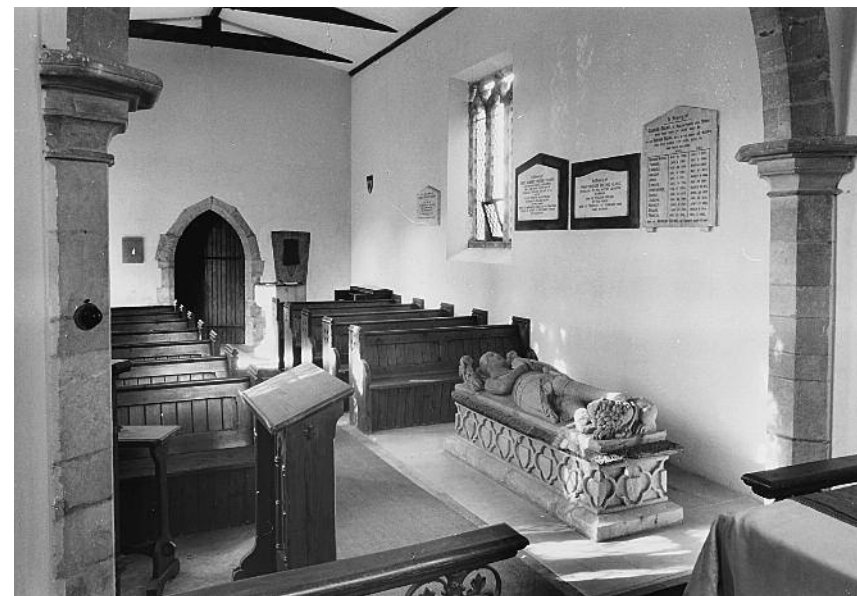
(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

of the more-famous A.W.N. Pugin – in the production of two influential early publications on mediaeval Gothic architecture (*Specimens of Gothic Architecture* (1820–25), and *Examples of Gothic Architecture* (1831–36)), as well as for a number of popular topographical books written in collaboration with John Britton.

Willson's approach to restoration was conservative, and a small sketch made by him in 1812 of the previous church at Buslingthorpe, viewed from the south-east, shows that its successor is in exactly the same style, even to the tracery in the windows, though with a few additions and changes of detail. The earlier building did not have a separate chancel, but otherwise corresponded in shape, and also apparently in size (Willson describes it as 'a very small edifice'). The two south windows, however, flanked the door, which was set centrally instead of to their west, while the tower was lower, and had a gabled roof instead of the present pyramidal one.

The only substantial remaining parts of the mediaeval church, apart from the monuments described later, are the lower section of the tower, which probably dates from the late-13th century like the small lancet window it contains, and the chancel arch and columns, which are of the same date though possibly recut. The font, however, has a late-mediaeval bowl, recut and mounted on a new base in the 19th century, while a few fragments of mediaeval stained glass survive in the east window. Amongst them is a shield with a coat-of-arms that can be identified from Willson's 1812 note as that borne by both the Egmont and Davile families. Also from the old church are the one bell, a rare surviving example of the work of Humphrey Wilkinson of Lincoln dating from 1702, and a beam in the belfry dated 1755.

The special importance of the church lies in the two monuments it contains to 14th-century members of the local knightly family. One is a famous brass set in a tapered Purbeck marble coffin-lid, and the other a life-sized recumbent stone effigy on a tomb-chest of the same material. The former was found buried in the churchyard, apparently in 1807, together with its stone coffin, and was recorded by Willson as still being



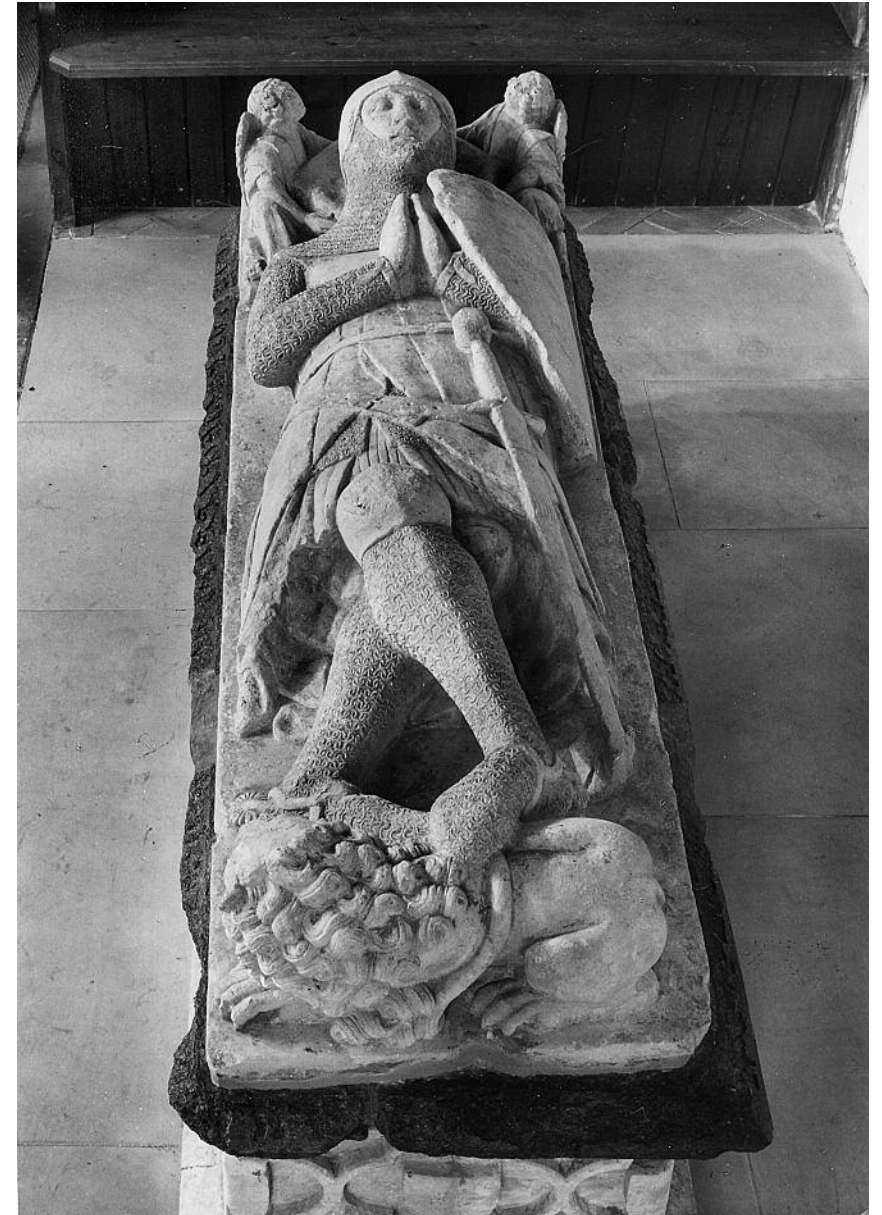
*View of the nave from the chancel*

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

outside in 1812. He probably placed it in its present position during the 1835 rebuilding, when he moved the stone tomb to an unsatisfactory location against the wall near it. The tomb had previously been in the north-east corner – to which it had already ‘been removed from its original position’ – where it ‘was almost hidden by some seats, & the pulpit placed upon it’. In 1988, after conservation (by Harrison, Hill of Little Oakley, Northamptonshire), it was returned to approximately its pre-1835 position.

The effigy and tomb are carved out of oolitic limestone and, as a few traces of colour show, were originally painted, including the coats-of-arms on the shield. The figure depicts an armoured knight with his head resting on two cushions flanked by angels, his hands, which are bare, raised on his chest in prayer, his legs crossed – a posture that has nothing to do with the Crusades – and his feet on a recumbent lion. He is dressed in a sleeveless, long-skirted gown over a mail (modern ‘chain’ mail) shirt (*hauberk*) with close-fitting wrist-length sleeves, a globular helmet (*bacinet*) worn over a separate mail hood – or perhaps merely a tippet – to which it is secured by knotted laces, mail leggings, and quilted thigh-defences, to which are attached globular plate knee-pieces decorated with shields. The edge of the padded garment worn under his hauberk is visible just above the knees, and he is girded with a cruciform sword, has a shield over his left upper arm, and spurs with large rowels on his feet.

The tomb-chest is panelled with blank shields within quatrefoils, all in low relief. Set between it and the slab on which the effigy rests is an additional slab of Purbeck marble – apparently an unique feature – with a chamfered edge bearing the indents of the individually-inlaid brass Lombardic capital letters of an inscription. None of the letters survives and, despite the recent conservation work the inscription is only partly legible, though it can be expanded a little from a record made by Willson in 1812. It reads, with his additions printed in square brackets, [+ICY . GYS] T . SIRE . IOHAN . DE . BVSSSEL[YNGTHOR]P . DE . EG... HAN...[LERE] (*Here lies Sir John de Busselyngthorp of Eg...han...knight (chevalier)*). There can be no doubt that this refers to the only recorded member of the family with that name to hold the manor, the Sir John de Buslingthorpe who was born in about 1277 and died between 1340 and 1344. The monument can therefore be dated within this last bracket, or slightly earlier, since it was not uncommon in the Middle Ages for



The effigy of Sir John de Buslingthorpe (c.1340–44)

(CHRISTOPHER DALTON)





The brass of Sir Richard de Buslingthorpe, probably made c.1325–40

people to set up their own memorials. The effigy has stylistic affinities with others in the area, and is therefore likely to have been produced in a local workshop, probably in Lincoln, an important cathedral city where many masons and carvers were then working.

The recent conservation of the monument has led to the interesting discovery of a number of early graffiti scratched on Sir John's shield. They include representations of a ewer, a shield with an unidentified coat-of-arms, and several helms surmounted by crests, one of which is a bearded head wearing a brimmed mediaeval helmet of the kind known as a kettle-hat. The helms are of 14th-century type, and it seems likely, therefore, that the graffiti are workshop doodlings that were covered up when the shield was eventually painted.

The brass is one of the most famous in existence, and since the middle of the 19th century has been illustrated in countless works on church monuments. It again represents an armoured knight, but only from the waist upwards, his head supported on two cushions, and his hands raised on his chest in prayer with a heart clasped between them; he wears neither shield nor sword, but below him is an indent for a missing shield, presumably purely heraldic. His armour is similar to Sir John de Buslingthorpe's, the only differences being that the mail hood is apparently made in one with the hauberk and the bacinet is worn underneath it, his hands are protected by fingered gauntlets covered with overlapping scales, and blank rectangular *ailettes* appear behind his shoulders. These last were ornamental appendages, used mainly for the display of heraldry, and normally worn attached to the points of the shoulders facing outwards. The fact that they are represented here frontally behind the shoulders must be because of difficulty in depicting them in their correct position on an engraved figure viewed directly from the front. Running round the edge of the Purbeck coffin-lid into which the figure is set are the indents for the separate brass Lombardic letters – all of which are missing – of a French inscription similar to that round the stone effigy. It reads +ISSY . GYT . SIRE . [R]YCHARD . LE . FIZ . SIRE . IOHN . DE . BOSELYNGTHORP . [D]EL . ALME . DE KY . DE[V]S . EYT . MERCY (*Here lies Sir Richard the son of Sir John de Boselyngthorp, on whose soul may God have mercy*).

Until comparatively recently, the brass was dated to the 1280s. This dating was based partly on comparison with a group of military brasses – for example, at Acton, Suffolk and Stoke D'Abernon, Surrey – which

are now known to be much later than was once believed, but probably mostly on a general impression that the figure looks early. The genealogy of the de Buslingthorpes, however, includes only one Richard whose father was named John: the son of the Sir John commemorated by the stone effigy, who was born in about 1306 and died between 1361 and 1369. It is improbable that the figure could be as late as the latter period, and the evidence of other brasses suggests that it dates, in fact, from c.1325–40 – that is within Sir Richard's lifetime – and was made somewhere in the north-east of England, probably York or Lincoln. Despite the later dating it still remains one of the earliest surviving brasses in the country. It should be mentioned, incidentally, that the fact that Sir Richard holds a heart does not mean that the brass covered a heart-burial, since it was accompanied by a full-sized coffin when found in the churchyard in 1807.

One other mediaeval monument remains in the church, an incised stone slab reused as the lintel of the west window. Dating from the late-13th century, it depicts a priest in mass vestments holding a chalice, and is bordered by an inscription in Lombardic capitals. Because of its present use, it is only partly visible (it is also almost certainly incomplete), and no coherent reading of the inscription is possible.

Finally, mention must be made of the unusual 19th-century monument on the north wall to Mr and Mrs Charles Odling and their 12 children, all remarkable for their longevity in an age of high infant mortality and shorter lifespans than the present one.

## SOURCES

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Detail of effigy of Sir John de Buslingthorpe (CHRISTOPHER DALTON)

Front cover: Exterior from the south-west (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

Back cover: Interior looking east (CHRISTOPHER DALTON).

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