



THE CHURCHES  
CONSERVATION TRUST

# ST LAWRENCE'S CHURCH

Snarford, Lincolnshire



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# ST LAWRENCE'S CHURCH

*by Charles Kightly (Church Tourism Consultant to the Diocese of Lincoln 1988–91 and Secretary of Lincolnshire Old Churches Trust 1989–91, with a continuing interest in church tourism)*



## HISTORY

The little church of St Lawrence now stands almost alone amid open fields. Once, however, it was the hub of a thriving village, and later the companion of a great mansion. Both mansion and mediaeval village have now vanished, but the church and its spectacular collection of monuments remain to tell their story.

### THE VILLAGE AND THE MANSION

The earliest mention of Snarford village occurs in *Domesday Book* (1086), though it certainly existed well before that time. Its name, once spelt 'Snardesforde' or 'Snertesforde', means 'Snortr's ford': 'Snortr' is a Scandinavian name, so presumably the place was founded by one of the Viking settlers who colonised Lincolnshire in the 9th century. His ford was doubtless across the Barlings Eau stream, perhaps at the point where it is now traversed by the A46 road.

In 1086 the village population is given as 16 families. It apparently grew in size during the early Middle Ages, perhaps reaching its zenith in about 1300, when a new vicarage was built. Until they were swept away by levelling operations in 1954–56, quite extensive remains of the settlement were visible as 'lumps and bumps' in the fields to the north and west of the church. It survived the Black Death of 1349, but appears to have gone into decline in early Tudor times, and may already have been virtually deserted when Snarford Hall was begun in about 1606. Now Snarford Hall has vanished in turn, and only the church and Hall Farm occupy the old village site. The parish, however, extends well beyond the old village bounds. In 1851 its population was 82, and it currently has just over 40 adult inhabitants. A Parish Meeting has recently been set up.

*Front cover: Tomb of Sir Thomas St Paul (d.1582) and his wife Faith Grantham (Paul Barker)*

*Left: Wall tablet to Frances Wray and her second husband Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick (Paul Barker)*



Snarford Hall was begun in about 1606 by Sir George St Paul (see below), apparently on the site of an older manor house. Until the 19th century, its foundations could be seen in a field 200 yards (183 metres) south of the church, on the opposite side of the road. During levelling in the 1950s, red bricks, churchwarden pipes and glazed pottery were found there. A 17th-century plan shows that it was a large H-shaped building with a terraced garden. Ground floor rooms included a hall, buttery, kitchen, larder, parlour and chapel, with a great chamber and long gallery on the floor above.

*Above: Exterior from the south-east (Paul Barker)*

*Right: Detail from the tomb of Sir Thomas St Paul and Faith Grantham (Paul Barker)*

### THE CHURCH

The church is dedicated to St Lawrence the Deacon (died AD 258), a Roman martyr said to have been roasted to death on a gridiron. He is thus the patron saint of cooks.

The present building was apparently begun in the later Norman period (12th century), but dates substantially from the early 14th century. In late Elizabethan or Jacobean times, however, the chancel (east end) was reconstructed and enlarged to house the huge St Paul monuments. In 1820 the church was 'taken down in part and rebuilt by parochial rate', at a cost of £200, while in 1856 the chancel was re-roofed and given its present windows. It was perhaps during one of these rebuildings that a splendid late mediaeval wrought iron railing, now displayed in the mediaeval galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum, was removed from the church. Most of these stages in its history have left their mark on the fabric of the church.

## EXTERIOR

The oldest surviving part of the church is the lower portion of the **tower**: as demonstrated by the Norman arches within (see below) this dates from the mid-12th century. The upper stage of the tower, however, is of about 1300, as is the **tower west window**. The **entrance door**, flanked by worn crowned heads, and the two pointed **nave windows** to the right likewise date from the early 14th century, and indeed it is likely that the whole church was rebuilt at this time – which probably saw the zenith of mediaeval Snarford's prosperity.

The two Gothic-style windows of the **chancel south wall**, topped by decorative 'hood moulds' with whorled ends, also appear mediaeval. In fact, they are entirely Victorian, probably inserted when the chancel was given its present pitched roof in 1856. Before that time, as a drawing of 1793 shows, the chancel was a

flat-roofed building with rectangular Elizabethan or Jacobean windows. It was doubtless constructed by the St Paul family, perhaps at the time of Sir Thomas' death in 1582, to serve as a private chapel and to house their massive family tombs. One of the **Elizabethan rectangular windows**, alongside a Victorian Gothic insertion, still survives in the **chancel east wall**, and there are traces of two more in the now blank **north wall**. These must have been blocked when the monuments of Sir George St Paul and the Earl of Warwick were erected within, but a further rectangular window survives in the angle between chancel and north nave wall. The **north nave wall** itself contains two original 14th-century windows, and a blocked mediaeval doorway with a pointed arch.





## INTERIOR

The interior of the little **tower** shows evidence of considerable rebuilding. Its oldest features, indeed the oldest in the church, are the four **rounded Norman arches**, three plain and one, towards the nave, with carved 'billet' decoration. These arches survive from the 12th-century tower, but their exact purpose is mysterious. (Unless the tower originally stood at the centre of a cruciform church, which seems unlikely, they cannot have led anywhere.) The pointed arch, which now gives entrance to the nave, was inserted when St Lawrence's was rebuilt in the early 14th century.

Beneath the tower stands the splendid 15th-century **octagonal font**, one of the finest in Lincolnshire. Several of its facets display 'The Instruments of the Passion' – objects connected with Christ's Crucifixion. These include the cross and two scourges; pincers used for removing nails; the vinegar sponge on its stick; the 'IHS' monogram of Christ, and the haloed head of Christ Himself. Round the base of the bowl are human and demonic heads. Many such fonts were defaced as 'idoltrous images' during the Tudor Reformation, but this one is in good condition: a rather surprising fact, given the Puritan views of the St Paul family. Set into the tower floor are several fragments of **mediaeval tomb slabs**. The one nearest the bell rope bears the words 'daughter of John' in early-16th-century lettering.

On the north wall of the simple **nave** is the coffin plate of George Brownlow Doughty (d.1843), a Victorian squire, and a touching handwritten **war memorial**. Of the 13 Snarford men who served in the First World War (1914–18), including five from one family, two were killed, along with five of the seven serving sons of a former rector. The pointed **chancel arch** is basically mediaeval, but shows signs of alteration when the chancel was converted into a St Paul family chapel. Within it stands **the altar**, a mediaeval altar slab in a modern frame, and all around are the St Paul tombs.

*Monument to Sir George St Paul (d.1613), his wife Frances Wray (d.1634) and their only child Mattathia (d.1597) (Paul Barker)*

## The ST PAUL FAMILY

The St Paul family, also called 'St Pol' and 'Sampoole', originated at Byram near Knottingley in West Yorkshire. They acquired the manor of Snarford in about 1400, when John St Paul married Elizabeth Snarford, heiress of the previous owners. Their real rise to power and influence, however, began with the Tudor Reformation, when they accumulated lands confiscated from Lincolnshire monasteries by Henry VIII. George St Paul (c.1494–1559), in particular, steered an adroit and profitable course through several changes of government. Legal adviser to the Duke of Suffolk (Henry VIII's principal agent in Lincolnshire) and to the City of Lincoln, he also contrived to serve successively as an MP under the Protestant Edward VI and the Catholic Queen Mary. His son, Sir Thomas, occupies the largest of the Snarford tombs.

## The MONUMENTS

The oldest surviving St Paul monument is a modest black floor slab beneath the rectangular window of the chancel. Its brass inscription, now detached and fixed to the wall above, translates: 'Here lies **Joan Tornay**, wife of John Tornay of Caenby, esquire, and daughter of John St. Paul of Snarford esquire. She died on the 9th of April AD 1521. May God have mercy upon her soul, Amen'. Far more spectacular is the great 'six-poster' monument of **Sir Thomas St Paul** (d.1582) and his family. MP for Grimsby and twice Sheriff of Lincolnshire, Thomas was called 'earnest in religion' i.e. a zealous Protestant, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth at Richmond in 1580. He married Faith Grantham, herself the descendant of several important Lincolnshire families, and was closely associated with the most powerful men in the county – including Thomas Tailor (builder of Doddington Hall and Lady Faith's step-father) and Sir Christopher Wray of Glentworth (Queen Elizabeth's Chief Justice and father-in-law of Sir Thomas' son). By the time he died in 1582, he had added wide estates near Grimsby and in the Isle of Axholme to the ancestral St Paul lands around Snarford.

Ablaze with the heraldry of his family connections, Sir Thomas' sumptuous and highly colourful monument, restored by the Pilgrim Trust and a private donor, reflects the Elizabethan preoccupation with ancestry. It is thus rather ironic that one of its Latin inscriptions translates:

*'God is the fount and origin of honour'.*





Effigy of Mattathia St Paul (Paul Barker)

The principal inscription round the tomb reads:

*'Here lies Thomas St. Poll, knight, who died on the 29th of August A.D. 1582, in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and rests in Christ. Reader, you see what I am, you know what I have been. Consider what you yourself must be'.*

The bearded Sir Thomas is shown wearing armour, with a gold chain round his neck. His feet rest on a flower-embroidered cushion, and his head on a helmet bearing the 'elephant and castle' family crest – the St Paul arms, a double-tailed lion rampant in red on a silver ground, appears several times on the monument. Lady Faith wears ruff and open kirtle, with a 'French hood' headdress and a medallion hanging from her waist. They lie as if on an elaborate six-poster Elizabethan bed, and round the canopy above kneel their eight children, only four of whom survived infancy. The largest of

the girls apparently represents Faith, who married Sir Edward Tyrwhit but herself died in childbirth, and above her, on a pedestal of his own, kneels the son and heir, later Sir George St Paul, baronet.

#### SIR GEORGE ST PAUL

Sir George (d.1613) was the last, richest and most influential of the St Pauls. His towering alabaster monument against the chancel north wall differs considerably in character from that of Sir Thomas, substituting elaborate Jacobean symbolism for a brash display of ancestry. It is also a far more accomplished work, bearing a striking resemblance to the monument of Sir George's father-in-law, Sir Christopher Wray, at Glentworth nine miles (14.5 km) to the north-west. Doubtless both were produced by the same workshop, perhaps located in Nottinghamshire. It has been much restored and repainted, the decoration cleverly camouflaging the iron girder which supports its crowning pediment.



Effigies of Sir George St Paul and Frances Wray (Paul Barker)

Sir George, in Jacobean armour and 'cloak-bag' breeches, lies stiffly propped on his elbow, in an attitude irreverently nicknamed 'the toothache posture'. His wife Frances, in the same posture, wears the dark gown, wide ruff and frizzed hairstyle made fashionable by James I's Queen, Anne of Denmark. Both are set against a backdrop embossed with coffins, gravediggers' tools, funeral torches and other emblems of death. More symbolism surrounds the tiny effigy of their only child Mattathia, in its separate alcove below: she is flanked by the rose of eternity and the lily of purity, and by two mourning cherubs with the extinguished torches of mortality.

Sir George's epitaph records only the main events of his life – his descent, his marriage, the death of his child, and his foundation of Snarford Hall – but much is known about him from other sources. Twice MP for Lincolnshire, county sheriff in Armada year, and a leading magistrate, he was knighted by James I in 1607,

and in 1611 became one of the first Lincolnshire gentlemen to purchase the new title of hereditary baronet. He also managed to acquire a part-share in the royal monopoly of the sale of wines and 'usquebaugh' (whiskey) in Ireland, which doubtless brought in a good income.

More personal details are provided by a long sermon preached at his funeral by his friend John Chadwich, Vicar of Snarford and honorary chaplain to James I. (There is a printed copy in Lincoln Cathedral Library.) 'For person and natural Endowments very complete', Sir George was a staunch Puritan, who even worried about the propriety of kneeling on a cushion during his long private prayers. His religion permeated his entire life, making him a kind master to his servants, an indulgent landlord who never sued for overdue rents, and a friend to the poor and to learning. His legacies included gifts to two Cambridge colleges, to Market Rasen School, to a preacher at Welton, and to 30 'poor old men' from the Snarford area, who received cash and a



free gown annually. Incorruptible and indefatigable as a magistrate, 'never refusing any pains or endeavour', he was by the standards of the day just and impartial. 'Neither was he void of compassion in the execution of Justice. No, not when he dealt with Papists, or hard-hearted Atheists'. 'Such a friend as he was', concluded Chadwich, 'I fear I shall never find till my soul rest with his'.

His marriage to Frances Wray (see below) was apparently unexciting but happy, 'free from inhuman austerity on the one side, and void of idle complimenting indulgence on the other'. But his faith must have been sorely tried by the death of their only child **Mattathia St Paul**: her burial place is beneath an alcove in the south chancel wall, its brass plate engraved with a flowery Latin epitaph by John Chadwich. After 12 years of childlessness, this records, Frances at last became pregnant while taking the healing waters of Bath in Somerset. The baby girl was born and

christened at Louth, but was apparently never strong. For, while returning to Bath, presumably for her own health, she died at Coventry in September 1597, at the age of one year and ten months. She was brought back to Snarford for burial, 'and since then her mother has never been free from mourning and weeping for a single day'.

It is therefore not surprising that there were originally two effigies of Mattathia in the church. The one in brass on her own alcove tomb has long since disappeared, though its 'indent' remains, but the effigy on her parents' monument is still to be seen.

Worn out by public service, he had recently served on a foreign embassy, Sir George himself died on 28 October 1613, just a week after his 51st birthday. He left his estates to two male relations, but bequeathed an income of £1700 a year to his widow Frances. She thus became, by Jacobean standards, a very wealthy woman indeed.

### 'A RICH WIDOW OF LINCOLNSHIRE' – FRANCES WRAY AND THE EARL OF WARWICK

The most unusual and perhaps the best of the Snarford monuments is the wall tablet commemorating **Frances Wray** and her second husband **Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick** (d.1619). Probably designed by the famous sculptor Epiphanius Evesham, it depicts the heads and shoulders of the couple in low relief, framed as if in a Jacobean miniature painting. Above is their coat of arms, flanked by the white wyvern crest of the Rich family and the golden ostrich of the Wrays. Beneath is a highly complimentary epitaph to Warwick, in English verse.

Described by a contemporary as 'a person of shining conversation and eminent bounty', Frances Wray (c. 1568–1634) was clearly a remarkable woman, worthy of her three appearances on Lincolnshire monuments. She was born the second daughter of Queen Elizabeth's Chief Justice, Sir Christopher Wray of Glentworth, and is depicted on his tomb there as a kneeling girl. At the age of 15 she married Sir George St Paul, on whose Snarford monument she appears again, and after 30 years of marriage found herself a wealthy widow. Three years later, in 1616, she married the still wealthier Robert Lord Rich, becoming Countess of Warwick when he bought that Earldom for the immense sum of £10,000 in 1617.

Apart from his wealth, there seems to have been little to recommend Robert Rich: he was neither a sympathetic character nor a lucky husband. His first wife was Penelope Devereux, sister of Queen Elizabeth's beloved Earl of Essex and herself a famous beauty. As a very young girl, she had fallen in love with the poet Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote her some 108 poems (including *Astrophel and Stella*) and even more songs. But their engagement was broken off, and she was forced by her guardians to marry Robert Rich, who ill-treated her: she retaliated by seeking consolation with Lord Mountjoy, who fathered at least five of her 12 children. At last Rich divorced her in 1605, and began looking about for a wealthy second wife.

'After much wooing and several attempts... he at last lighted on the Lady Sampoll (St Paul), a rich widow of Lincolnshire'. But he was destined to disappointment, and after nine months of marriage he was reported 'near crazed... to see himself so overreached by his wife, who hath so conveyed (managed) her estate that he is little or nothing the better by her'. In other words, Frances had been too clever for him, and after attempting to console himself by buying the earldom, he died a disappointed man in 1619. He was buried with his ancestors at Felstead in Essex, but Countess Frances lived on at Snarford until 1634, dying full of good works at the age of 66. Perhaps surprisingly, she chose to be buried beside her second husband. With her passed away the last of the Snarford St Pauls.

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