

## Mysterious Carving Bares All!

Members of the Milborne Port History & Heritage Group were recently shown this carving, found secured to the wall of a shed attached to the Old Church House building: 14-17 High Street, opposite the Gunville turning.

Obvious curiosity was piqued because of the age of the building – late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Could the carving date to this period?

The underlying timber is pale in colour with the front being painted at least twice - yellow and blue. The carving measures 46cm x 10cm x 25mm, and it looks as though it was probably fixed by two modern screws, centrally top and bottom, although originally by hand-forged nails, the head of one of which still remains.

The carving depicts a very masculine looking individual (look at that jawline!) with large clumsy hands and a voluptuous chest region. This type of carving commonly was called a Caryatid (female) or an Atlas or Atlantid or Telamon (male).



Caryatids are sculptured female figures made from stone, wood or terracotta, and have been used in various ways as supports in classical architecture as far back as Greek times; some of their uses are as shelf or mantel supports, table legs, fireplace columns and church fonts.

Our carving has been shown to two antiques experts, whose opinion is that it probably dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century but is depicting the fashion from the Tudor or Stuart period, with the revelation that women of the Elizabethan period would often wear daring dresses to emphasise their wealth (however, may have



been misinterpreted from the French 'décolletage'). Even Elizabeth I has been recognised as joining in, as this report below suggests:

*Queen Elizabeth I was also known to wear low-cut dresses, even during formal meetings with officials like her French Ambassador Michel De Castlenau, who provides scholars with exceptionally reliable written sources on Elizabeth I. For example, when he first met Elizabeth I during a bureaucratic meeting, he describes the front of her dress as follows:*

*'She kept the front of her dress open, and one could see the whole of her bosom, and passing low, and often she would open the front of this robe with her hands as if she was too hot.'*<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, we have no idea whether our carving was a shed doodle from a bored but keen whittling Victorian, or if it even originated from Milborne Port, but at least it has survived to intrigue us.

Hugh Vincent

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.thehistoricalfictioncompany.com/post/why-did-tudor-women-wear-bare-breasted-dresses?srsId=AfmBOoqmZvqErO8CvGWXZT3pfjYuXKNhu8C6B2OhuZysW97r\\_F3gVtFg](https://www.thehistoricalfictioncompany.com/post/why-did-tudor-women-wear-bare-breasted-dresses?srsId=AfmBOoqmZvqErO8CvGWXZT3pfjYuXKNhu8C6B2OhuZysW97r_F3gVtFg)