

# Foreword

**B**EFORE ANY VISIT TO a historic church, habit leads me to start with Pevsner, whose deadpan description of the roof of St Nicholas, King's Lynn, reads, "The roof has tie-beams on shallow arched braces with traceried spandrels. Above the tie-beams tracery and arched queenposts, also with tracery . . . each alternating truss has angels as hammerbeams." There is little there to indicate that St Nicholas' angel roof is a miracle of English carpentry, one of many such to be found throughout East Anglia where the genre flourished from the late 1390s until the 1530s, at which point the artistically deadening hand of Reformation began to sweep away religious imagery. Amidst the turbulent iconoclasm of the Reformation years, when so much ecclesiastical art and decoration was defaced and destroyed, most angel roofs survived, protected by their inaccessibility. Of the 170 surviving angel roofs in England, roughly 70 per cent can be found in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The same inaccessibility that protected these roofs has also made them hard to appreciate without the aid of binoculars and

the resulting consequence of a stiff neck. This book is of great importance because Michael Rimmer, a keen photographer and connoisseur of angel roofs, has succeeded in documenting virtually every surviving medieval angel roof in East Anglia. Thanks to scaffolding in churches under restoration, I have been privileged enough to get up close to an angel roof a few times. Now thanks to Michael's photographs, that experience is available to many for whom these photographs will be a revelation, showing the complex mix of carpentry, engineering, artistry and faith that make these roofs so thrilling to contemplate.

I have the honour of being Chairman of The Churches Conservation Trust; St Nicholas, King's Lynn, with its angel roof, is among the nearly 350 churches we care for. I believe they all have the power to galvanize communities and inspire and delight individuals. With a generosity to match his talent, Michael has kindly decided to donate his royalties from this book to The Churches Conservation Trust and all lovers of the English parish church should be grateful to him.

**Loyd Grossman**

Chairman of The Churches Conservation Trust