

The Legend of Quaykham Church

Prince-Bishop ordered his masons to build
A new church for Saint Mary the Virgin,
The very best builders within their gild
Who, with hammer and chisel and whin-gin,
Would sharp raise walls as true as a plumb-line
On the King's Meadow, an isle in the Tyne.

By the first day's sunset the footings were laid
And two courses of stone set into place;
A keel brought them to the camp where they stayed,
Sleeping soundly that night, covered with grace.
But, next day, when to the isle the boat steered
They found all their good work had disappeared.

They stood dumbfounded, aghast and confused:
Who could possibly have cleared the whole site?
It looked like the land had never been used,
The whole work of a day undone by night.
Where had it all gone? No one knew, until
Shocking news came from Quaykham on the hill.

That morning the innocent village awoke
To find fresh footings where none were before,
With stacks of dressed stone and beams of best oak:
Surely the work of angels, or devils, or
Fairy folk. Then someone said, "You know,
There's a church being built on the King's Meadow."

Every stone and truss was carted back down
And the builders undid what was undone.
Masons grumbled, their foreman wore a frown,
Especially at the setting of the sun.
A priest spoke up, "We must conquer our fears:
I require watchmen, two stout volunteers."

A couple of men settled for the night
As dismal shadows gathered dark and deep.
They drank strong ale by the warm campfire's light
And, despite their resolve, they fell asleep.
Both were awakened by the new dawn's chill
To find all was gone, once more, up the hill.

The good folk of Quaykham again returned
All the stones and beams back down to the isle.
Yet, what the cause was had still not been learned;
The priest thought it must be his sacred trial.
Angels? Devils? Or some troublesome elf?
He decided he would keep watch himself.

When a day's work was done for the third time
And builders retired to their camp once more,
The prelate remained to frustrate the crime,
With bible and club to even the score.
Moon reached its zenith in star-littered skies
When a fantastic scene assailed his eyes.

Over foundations, by newly laid stones,
Around oak beams and the idle whin-gins
Shaking scaffolding like fragile old bones,
A cunning Green Man dancing widdershins.
As he cavorted and led his wild chase,
A smile! A scowl! Then anger twisted his face.

Quaking, the priest stepped out from the shadows,
Confronting the Green Man, who sneered with disdain.
Angered, the prelate delivered two blows
With his club, splitting the Green Man in twain.
Quite what had happened was beyond his ken,
For he found himself facing two Green Men.

He brandished before him the sacred Good Book
And unto the highest angels he spoke.
Out from the clear sky a lightning bolt struck
And the two Green Men became wreathed in smoke.
When the smoke cleared from the vicinity
There weren't two Green Men, but a trinity.

One with a wicked smile! One with a scowl!
And one with anger gnarling its features.
Defeated, the priest pulled forward his cowl,
Then surrendered to the whim of those creatures.
As they danced widdershins around him there
The blocks and beams spiralled into the air.

Next morning Quykham woke to find once more
Footings for a new church they had not planned,
And at the centre, its progenitor,
The priest, bewildered, making one demand,
"The spirit moves in a mysterious way,
So, where the church now stands, there let it stay."

In Quykham, for Mary, a church did grow
And for long generations it has stood,
Overlooking the Tyne flowing below,
Serving the good and the not so good.
On its north wall to mark how it began
Are ranged the three faces of the Green Men.

This re-telling folklore is attributed to authorship of Dave Alton