

## **The Bell Stones – by Alan Nicholls.**

Of all the historic buildings in Alveley the Bell Inn is one of the most well known. This is probably due to a series of thirteen stone carvings which grace the outer wall of the inn and are a focus of attention for any customer, either old or new. Over the years many people have viewed and photographed the stones, from groups of school children to university professors, historians and representatives of the British Museum. Such is the interest that a number of experts have recommended that the stones be removed from the building and replaced with plaster copies. Fortunately for the parish and people of Alveley this request has been refused by the owner. To remove the stones from this building and place them in a museum would be a great loss to the village and the historical society supports the owner on this issue.

A series of thirteen stone carvings are to be found at the Bell Inn, ten of which are located in the outer walls of the building. Over the years a number of building extensions have been added and therefore what was once the outer wall has in some places become the inner wall. Some stones are therefore now inside the building, for example in the lounge and rear office. Three further stones are located in different places. The first and possibly the best preserved is set into the fireplace in the lounge, it was found when former owner Gilbert Wood was digging out foundations for the toilet block extension in the early 1970's. Gilbert's late wife Marjorie had the stone set into the fireplace in remembrance of her husband who died some years earlier. A second stone is presently stored in the outbuilding which was once the stables. I assume this stone was also found when building work was in progress. It is hoped that this stone will also be on show in the near future. The third stone is now situated in the garden wall close to the entrance to the inn. It had always been assumed that this stone was found with the others, as described previously, however, after researching old photographs kindly loaned by the present owner it appears that the stone was originally set into the apex of the kitchen roof. The roof was subsequently altered and the stone was relocated.

### **History of the stone carvings**

All the stones were carved some time between 1140 and 1160 and are attributed to the Herefordshire School of Norman sculpture, which is the name given to the type of sculpture evident in a number of churches that fall mainly within the diocese of Hereford and Worcester.

The quest for information starts at Shobdon church in Herefordshire. It is known that the founder of the priory there, Oliver de Merlimond, steward to Hugh Mortimer of Wigmore castle, went on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in north western Spain to visit the shrine of St. James in the cathedral there. He travelled from England through France and stayed with the canons of Saint Victor in Paris. He must have stayed in Spain for a long time before returning to Shobdon church. He may have taken his master carver with him as on his return his craftsmen went about recreating many of the carvings he had seen at various places of worship through France and Spain including the Puerta de la Platerias, the cathedral at Compostela.

One is led to believe that the Herfordshire school of Norman sculpture was not really a school but a workshop where the craftsmen would have travelled from place to place working where commissions were given. The style of the school has a diversity of sources from Anglo-Saxon, French, Spanish, Viking and even some Italian influence. The long tails and figures entwined are of Anglo-Saxon origin, the long winding dragons and snakes and the dragon heads are of Viking influence, the beak heads being mainly French.

Shobdon church was probably commenced before 1148 and therefore it is likely that all the carvings were done within 20 - 30 years. The school is also represented by work outside Herefordshire at Ruardean in Gloucestershire, Rock and Chaddesley Corbett in Worcestershire and of course south Shropshire. It is notable that the stone carvings are only to be found in churches, Kilpeck, Brinsop, Stretton, Sugwas, Eardisley, Castle Frome, Fownhope etc. with one exception, the Bell Inn at Alveley.

We can assume therefore that at some time after the twelfth century whilst St Mary's church was going through its various stages of rebuilding and reconstruction the stones were taken "as ready building material" and used in the construction of the Bell Inn. There are many other pieces of stone used in the structure of the Bell that are generally accepted to have come from the nearby church. Over the years the stone carvings have succumbed to many layers of whitewash but it is hoped that within the foreseeable future that work will commence to clean them and reveal the intricate carvings which must represent the beauty of the church as it once was some 800 years ago.

Finally we must consider the chapel at Romsley, now long gone, the site having been reclaimed for farming. In the early 1900's when the building was demolished many local people, including farmers, collected the stone and used them to build walls and possibly cottages. Today in Romsley there are several carved stones similar to those at the Bell set into farm walls. Some of them depict signs of the zodiac and all are known to have come from the chapel site. Floor tiles from the site indicate a building there as early as Roman times. Did these ruins provide the stone and carvings which are to be seen at the Bell today?

Obviously a lot more research needs to be done, however, a document recently discovered at St Mary's church seems to show that "St Anne's Chapelry of Romsley" may have been affiliated to the parish church and St Mary's were certainly the landowners of the chapel site.

On the twenty eighth of April 1980 the Bridgnorth Journal published an article on the stones. Essentially it described the carving as being of Viking origin. As it has been shown there is certainly a Scandinavian influence but there is much more to their origin. Radio Shropshire broadcast a programme live from the Bell on the seventh of August 1994 concerning the history of the parish which included a discussion about the carvings between Michael Howell of Radio Shropshire and Mike Stokes of Rowley House museum. An edited version of that discussion is given in the following transcript:-

**Michael.** So let's put this in simple terms, we've got an important guy - we're talking about 800-850 years ago - an important chap whose name I can't pronounce.

**Mike.** Oliver de Merlimond

**Michael.** So your man - as you said - goes off - how did they go in those days? Mike. On horseback.

**Michael.** There were no roads?

**Mike.** Oh there were, in France the Roman roads were still there. It was normal for the day. It would have taken him three or four weeks to get there and the same to get back travelling at 60 or 70 miles a day on horseback, he wouldn't have had many problems. Communication wasn't always as limited as we were taught it was. They used to travel a lot.

**Michael.** Okay. So he gets there, he gets to Santiago de Compostela. Where's that?

**Mike.** It's right on the western tip of Spain. He goes there, he does his praying and then comes home bringing his designs and designer, decides to found a church, and of course wants it in the style he's just seen which is the new 'in' style, Shobdon Church is coming along the same time - they needed sculptures and it looks as though Oliver's sculptors were employed by the priory to decorate that church. They decorated that church and they decorated across Herefordshire, we only have bits that are surviving, we have pictures that we have brought along. There are one or two examples in southern Shropshire, Stottesdon font is one part of the school, Aston Eyre tympanum, the arch over the door, is another piece from the school. Chaddesley Corbet in Worcestershire has a font - it actually has a dragon on rather like the one in the back wall here. The furthest piece in the east is Billesley in Warwickshire, just north of Stratford on Avon, where there's a tympanum which we have a parallel for here in the pub.

**Michael.** Well we'll have a look at that later Mike. Why do people go on pilgrimages?

**Mike.** It was a demonstration of their piety. It was expected. It was rather like the gentlemen of the eighteenth century doing the grand tour, it was something you just did. And after a hundred years of doing it - they would have been doing it from Normandy to the Holy Land before they came to Britain - it was just part of a gentleman's demonstration of status.

**Michael.** I suppose on the bottom line, I can afford to do this, and showing they can.

**Mike.** They were very pious people, they were very rigid and bureaucratic, but they were very pious.

**Michael.** OK so we've got Oliver de Merlimond, he sees this stuff and he says "WOW"

**Mike.** It would have been stunning - it still is in many places - if you go there and see the perfect examples its

overwhelming - there's nothing like it in Britain to the extent you see it on those continental churches.

**Michael.** And he says " this is what we're gonna do" - he's got the guy with the sketches, any chance he'd sketch them himself.

**Mike.** He could have done, but it's more likely he would have a craftsman with him, a sculptor. Unless he'd had training - we don't know that from the story. The story is actually preserved in the records of Morville church.

**Michael.** So they would have drawn up all the sketches - almost a pattern book - they would have come back and said 'this is how we are going to make our new buildings look like.'

**Mike.** Then find the local sculptors and say 'right chaps this is what we want, how are we going to do it?' And of course the local sculptors all come from existing traditions of sculpture, some of which were Anglo-Saxon in origin; the Winchester school, which mirror some of the things we have here; the Anglo Scandinavian sculpture from the northern Midlands, there are elements of that in the school as well. Of course there are elements of continental influence - so it's a real mixture of styles, which with local peoples own training and background, the ideas they were given, and their ability, was such that they could adopt and adapt at will.

**Michael.** Now OK - they come back, they've got the local people in they build the first one at Shobdon, they spread out - they start getting satellite buildings.

**Mike.** Kilpeck is the finest example though, in Herefordshire, - and the photographs show it is stunningly beautiful. If you've never seen a church with decoration on it's amazing, especially when you realise they were probably plastered and painted. Now we see them in bare stone, imagine them painted in bright colours, you couldn't have walked around without seeing that church and it would have been overwhelming.

**Michael.** It would, especially when you think that the basic population lived in a thatched hut with a mud floor.

**Mike.** A small timber framed house maybe if you please, lets go a little bit more upmarket, I think it's a little bit derogatory to call them mud huts. But the Lords home and his castle, which in Kilpeck's case is right next door to the church, which are part of the same complex, would have been very elaborate and they would have been designed to be striking.

**Michael.** Yes but the poor people lived in fairly simple places.

**Mike.** Simple but not shoddy.

**Michael.** I'm just trying to imagine the effect it would have on them.

**Mike.** Oh right - it's a demonstration of wealth, a demonstration of your status, it's the two cars in the drive and no food in the fridge syndrome.

**Michael.** People don't change do they.

**Mike.** No they don't - and lordship is about being seen to be powerful - it's the same as politicians these days, you've got to look as if your powerful - if you want a class act, act as if you've got one. Michael. Acting as though they'd got a class act they built a series of chapels and churches around. OK. And now we have the great mystery Mike, we're not in a twelfth century chapel, we're in a seventeenth century pub, though the carving is still here.

**Mike.** Yes that's right, and the answer must be that there was in the twelfth century a chapel here - and it's quite interesting that if we look at the church across the road - the existing church is largely 13th century albeit with Victorian alterations. There is some late twelfth century work in there and it looks as though that church was built to replace the chapel which we have the remains of here. Probably all of it was used to build the pub and all the walls and buildings around about us. Unfortunately of course we only have a few bits of sculpture showing - it may well be if we dismantle everyone's garden wall and probably some of the sandstone buildings in the village that we'd find a lot more of it - people face it inwards rather than outwards sometimes. The chapel was built about 1150, the school of sculpture only lasted about ten or fifteen years. It's very rapid and very particular to the period.

**Michael.** Now that was quite an elaborate and expensive job and it didn't last very long.

**Mike.** Nope - it may not have been very well built, that might be the reason. Of course what we have to think about is who built it, that's the big question. A colleague of mine, John Hunt of the WEA has been working on the history of the family and the period - and it looks as if the school of sculpture falls just when the family L'Estrange took lordship of Alveley. Hamo L'Estrange is probably the best candidate of course he was at the beginning of the L'Estranges when they were beginning to be powerful, but not as powerful as they were going to be.

**Michael.** Didn't we have L'Estranges at Knockin, the same family?

**Mike.** Yes same family. They owned Ryton XI Towns, Knockin and a whole chunk of Shropshire, divided their estates across the whole county, that's normal, divide and rule by the King, give them bits here and there so they feel powerful but they can't join it together to fight against you, which is a practical way of doing it. So it's Hamo who built the chapel, that's assuming it is a chapel, we can't prove it of course because we don't have a building, we just have the sculpture, and it may be that they used the sculpture in some kind of building we've never seen before.

**Michael.** That's hypothetical.

**Mike.** Well yes, but we archaeologists are always dubious until we have seen it with our own eyes. Anyway if Hamo was the builder he would have built what was appropriate to the day, which would have been a small chapel typical to the lordship status. But when the L'Estrange family really took off and became powerful and wealthy it may well be that they wanted a larger church. Their population may have been expanding. Again as we found in Knockin, they found a town, they develop it, they had to do the same here, even with an existing village which the place name implies there was - something like Althere - the clearing, the village here, that must have been expanded quite dramatically when the Normans arrived. The other question is, if they had a chapel like that did they have a castle or a hall? There's no evidence of that anywhere. Michael. Perhaps we need to go digging. Lets go for a wander around. Here we are, wonderful sandstone, just straight, nice, rectilinear blocks of sandstone.

**Mike.** Just a little flowerbed and you've got half a dozen bits of stone column, all reused by, I presume, Mr. Wood, who found a lot of these in the car park in the 70's and 80's. I imagine he used a lot of those to edge his beds just to make sure they were preserved. Mr. Wood was very very proud of his sculpture, and Mrs. Wood who I met - Mr. Wood had died by the time I came here - Mrs. Wood was also proud, it was really a memorial to her late husband's work and efforts to keep the pub going and keep the sculpture preserved.

**Michael.** So there on the edge of the flower bed we have the parts of what may be a column from the nave of the chapel. Moving on, here what's this, two little archways, two little figures.

**Mike.** Two men with their hands clasped across their chests, they're probably apostles or saints, we've got another one at the back of the pub, covered in limewash that we'll see in a moment. They are paralleled at Brinsop and Rowellston in Herefordshire and they're used as borders around the walls. You seem to get little horizontal bands of different designs to break up the patterning. They're over doorways, over arches, we've only got two little blocks of them but no doubt there are lots more around, and of course what we want is for everyone in the village to look at every bit of stone in their gardens and if you've got anything then bring it along, or tell us, or give us a ring and we can go and see it.

**Michael.** Yes. The purpose of this sort of carving, it wasn't just decorative was it? Because we are talking of an illiterate population, an illiterate congregation, there was an instructional element in it as well wasn't there?

**Mike.** That's right, there usually is yes. They're usually mostly symbols of good against evil, in other words you must be good you mustn't be evil, a fairly simple message. They also tell stories from the bible, we see on the wall paintings of the period a similar type of thing, we see it in manuscript art, which all were used in churches to bring out to people what they should think, how they should think and to pass on some moral advice. A lot of wall paintings, in particular are about avarice and gossiping and that was not considered good form in the Norman period.

**Michael.** So instead of writing in a book 'tips for living' you actually carved it on the walls.

**Mike.** Yes, or you paint it on the walls - that's the other thing this church may have had on the walls that didn't have

the sculpture on, it may have had a lot of painted decoration.

**Michael.** Which of course we'll never see.

**Mike.** I doubt it, unless somebody takes the church down over the road and we can excavate the foundations, you never know what may be underneath.

**Michael.** You might struggle to get permission to do that. How much painting survives? There's some at Heath isn't there?

**Mike.** There's quite a lot around yes, Claverley's the classic example but that's later in date than these are here, not by much, but that shows the kind of continuous scheme of decoration that you can have around a church. And at Claverley of course you have all those mounted knights and mounted angels, whatever they are, charging each other, presumably again good against evil, something of the sort, you should know, you were born there, you should know better than me. Mike. You can see the folded arms better on this one on the right up here, they're actually in this little architectural frieze which would have been running along the outside of the building probably, in the church that is, rather on the outside than on the inside. And over in the corner, it used to be hiding behind a big honeysuckle tree last time I saw it, but thank goodness they've opened it up, a rather interesting spiralling little beast.

**Michael.** Now let me describe him, he's set in the wall above my head, about 12 inches square and he looks a bit like my Doberman in his head, a big wide mouth and a big fierce eye and his tongue sticking out, and teeth. And then his body, comes down to there, comes down to the bottom, and then goes right up the other side and it comes back and turns under itself and through itself and round itself and on. And it's scaly as well. A serpentine beast with almost a dog's head.

**Mike.** Well it's a dragon, I suppose you'd call it really in the general sense. The devil figure, we'll see one by the fireside in a minute as well with St. Michael standing on top of it.

**Michael.** Will we?

**Mike.** Oh yes, scaly body again, but the one thing you didn't mention, and nearly everybody misses is the funny little foot in the front. And for some reason in this period and in this school, nearly all of the animals have three toes, not five.

**Michael.** "Sorry mate ... no, no, no, three's yer basic, any f'ing else's extra mate". (laughter)

**Mike.** That's right. What it really is, that's what you see in Anglo - Saxon art as well, that's part of the old Anglo - Saxon style coming through.

**Michael.** So you've got this blending in ... you've got an Anglo-Saxon sculptor .. I mean .. have they got five toes in Spain?

**Mike.** Nope, same again, it's traditional with the period, it's the easiest way of drawing it in simple sculptural terms. You don't need to embellish it any more than that. In Anglo-Saxon manuscript art there's a superb illustration of King David playing the Lyre. We know that all Anglo - Saxon period lyres had six strings. Have you ever tried drawing six strings equally spaced from each other, It's easier to draw five, and every Anglo-Saxon manuscript you see only ever has five strings, because you draw one down the middle and then two both sides. They were just being simple.

**Michael.** So they never drew what actually existed.

**Mike.** Well they did but not always accurately, they drew it to a scheme that worked.

**Michael.** Amazing. Now I know you were getting quite excited, there's a small sandstone privy or pigsty.

**Mike.** Probably an old sty .... yes when we came before it was rusted up solid and Mrs. Wood got a jemmy out and tried to force it for us - and we were excited because right above the door there's a half-moon shaped chunk of stone,

say about four feet across and two feet from top to bottom, which looked from this side, although it's flat, as though it may have been another tympanum. You're going to say what's that.

**Michael.** No, that's over the door innit mate.

**Mike.** Yeah. that's right, and normally they're decorated with figural scenes like we've got in the building here. We've got at least two parts of two tympanum. I looked at it this morning, it's flat on the inside ... that doesn't mean it's not one, it just means it's a plain one.

**Michael.** Must be a bit of a disappointment for you though.

**Mike.** Well it's always nice to find sculptured things, but now at least we know. I've had a chance to see it, measure it, photograph it, so we have a record of it at long last.

**Michael.** What information do you need to record? Because I know that archaeology is exciting but it's also got a meticulous side.

**Mike.** In my case today, I've been able to measure each stone properly, produce, I hope, a good set of black and white photographs with some fine detail that will be good enough for publication, which we intend to do in the Shropshire Archaeological Society journal, probably in a year or two's time. And that's the basic record, and from that either I or other people can assess what we say about the sculpture, and whether they agree with us or not is, like any other academic work, down to debate.

**Michael.** Yes. I love these academic rows, when your attribution doesn't quite agree with somebody else's and you have these viscious squabbles. Where are we going now Mike?

**Mike.** Well we'll go to the fireplace.

**Michael.** Now this is a nice stone fireplace, like what you would have in your nice bungalow and there's a decorative panel in it. But your decorative panel is a little bit special.

**Mike.** This is a panel that Mr. Wood found back in the 80's, Mrs. Wood had it set in there as part of her memory for him. It shows us a rather splendid character with a pointy Frigian cap without the bell ... Long hair cut in very thick swags, a big bulbous eye with his nose and downturned mouth, not looking particularly happy.

**Michael.** Yes, he's not a happy lad is he.

**Mike.** He's leaning to his right, his arms are wrapped lots of tendrils of foliage, which are twisting around him, we can see the leaves up here that are at the top and behind him, and in front. His left hand is twisted around behind another piece, he's fighting his way through, big hands, he's pulling it apart wrenching his way through. You can see his clothing, thick swathes of woolly trousers and tunic top.

**Michael.** Very baggy pants and big boots.

**Mike.** Yes big boots, but I think his are gone. What's missing from this piece is two things. We have at Billingsley in Warwickshire an exact parallel, it looks as if it's carved from the same pattern, almost like laying on a paper pattern and chipping it out and working from there. Behind him, up above his shoulder should be a huge dragon, chasing him, and that's evil. So he's fighting his way away from evil, through the tendrils and the trials and tribulations of life, and on the far side in front of him and just above is a dove.

**Michael.** Ahh.

**Mike.** Fighting his way to heaven, symbolic all the way through. Michael. Flee evil.

**Mike.** That's it. Fight your way from it and strive for good. We've talked about allegoric reference outside and here's the perfect example of just that. Of course, because we haven't got the dragon, and we haven't got the dove, it might be just possible that this is from something else. But it certainly matches the panel in the little Georgian chapel at Billingsley as it now is. It's the only bit of ancient stone in the building, it's completely gutted. Little seventeenth

century chapel with this wonderful tympanum standing in the corner, and again it just turned up in excavation in the field outside, these things do keep surprising us.

**Michael.** It's sandstone?

**Mike.** Yes it's likely it was quarried locally, it hasn't been examined, there are quarries in the Alveley area after all. It does carve very easily. And if you remember that a lot of these would have been plastered and painted that would have preserved the surface, even on the outside, for quite a long time.

**Michael.** Amazing. That's just in the nice decorative stone fireplace. Let's look over in the rather handsome inglenook.

**Mike.** Not quite so exciting, you may think, just a couple of ledges with some brassware standing on, but they're actually parts of a string course, that's the moulding on a horizontal band through the inside of a church which are there to carry rain water away from the face of the wall and allow it to drip away. And the simple style that we have here, just a simple fillet and the rounded undercut, again probably of the twelfth century, it may be slightly later, but again from an ecclesiastical building. And it's not from the church that's there now as far as we can tell, so maybe again it's from our earlier little chapel.

**Michael.** Absolutely stunning stuff, and we've just scratched the surface of what carving there is in the pub.

**Mike.** We've got some superb ones out in the private rooms in the back, we've even got some out by the loo.

**Michael.** Have we, well let's go to the loo ... Mike and I are off to the loo.

**Mike.** We're by the gent's now. They're very battered this little pair, but two chunks of stone, probably from a corbel table, that's blocks of stone that support the roof line along the top of the wall. I'll show you again some pictures of the Kilpeck ones so you can describe some of those to your listeners. But here we've got one with a little band the outside, rectangular block, and contained inside it a great swirl of interlacing body of another beast., they're all dragons and snakes and serpents these things. They loved interlace in the late Anglo Saxon period. It was a designers delight to be as complicated as you could. And the problem always is to find where it starts. And I think it's here, at this thickening which I think is a jaw, biting onto it's own tail which comes down to here. So we start there, go up to there, goes round, through etc. it goes on forever.

**Michael.** And this interlacing goes on. It's in Welsh love spoons, in Celtic stuff.

**Mike.** This one down here, part of another one but even more bashed, but what's more interesting, you might have noticed as we've walked around so far, except the one in the fire place, all of these stones are set in the outside of the original stone pub. The bit we're in now, the passageway, is obviously a modern extension to the building and so it shows that whoever built this place in the seventeenth century also thought these things were very interesting, which is an intriguing thought when you think of all the Puritanism that was going on in churches. They were covering up stuff like this most of the time in the church itself. Here, whoever built this pub, cared for it and liked it as much as we do.

**Michael.** We're going to the ladies now, oh that's nice, that's quatrefoil that is.

**Mike.** Yes I can show you a parallel for this in one of the sheds outside on a piece that we found in the late eighties which is part of the top of a doorway, now whether this is isn't quite clear as it's had to be cut into, and the plaster which may reveal all sorts of treasures if we could clean it all down.

**Michael.** Wouldn't you like to have a go too.

**Mike.** I would! And it's two quatrefoils interlaced into each other forming a knot, and the nearest parallel we have for that design is on Malmesbury Abbey where there was another school of sculpture based on West Country motifs. It looks as if it's been absorbed across the Severn, another idea coming to the school. It really is a mish mash of everything.

**Michael.** We'll finish with St. Michael. This really is the star attraction isn't it.

**Mike.** It is, set into here in the private rooms, and we're very fortunate to be able to get in to see them. They're a small group of sculpture, one here in the back wall of the main room and a few in the little shed next door, the pantry. This is a broken block of a much bigger block and it's the bottom of a scene from St. Michael. St. Michael is standing here on the serpent, and if you look at him carefully, what you can see, remember our scaly dragon outside, is the body of a serpent curling around under Michael's feet, great big clumpy feet. And the serpent's tail curling up behind him. He's standing, literally, on it. But we've lost the top of Michael's body so we can't see exactly what he's doing, but we can guess. He's going to be driving down with a lance into the back of the beast, and we can just make out a shoulder here, and there's the front hip of the animal, it's feet are disappearing behind the frame of the door, probably the beast's wing. There's St. Michael's wing, you can see the tips of his feathers, him being an angel, and what are probably his arms, raised to drive the lance down, typical piece of allegory, good over evil, literally in this case, over evil. A simple statement, but good is above, so it must win. But it's also a way of showing the military mind at work, that we are fighting for right whenever we fight, and in the case of the Normans of course, they always believed that God was on their side.

**Michael.** That, Mike, is part of a big panel. We've seen string courses, we've seen friezes and corbel blocks, all pieces of decorative structure of the building, this is obviously something bigger, where would that have been?

**Mike.** Probably over the door, I think it's a tympanum. It's unusual in that it's rectangular in its form now, but I think it's been trimmed, it was probably a curved frame originally. There's a hint in the way the tail and the body's all curved as though the shape of the overall block may actually have been intended to show that motif. We've actually got another one hiding in the shed. (Opens door)

**Michael.** Oh my word. We're going now into what must be the pantry. Mike. Treading through everything.

**Michael.** What have we got here?

**Mike.** Sampson and the lion. Now at Stretton Sugwash in Herefordshire there is a perfect example, and there's one at Leominster priory about six inches long. Here we've got another variation on the theme. Another tympanum. Sampson with his long flowing locks and his thick pleated clothing has his right arm raised over the lion's head and the other clenched over the lion's jaw to wrench it backwards.

**Michael.** The top jaw in his right hand.

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**Mike.** His left arm goes under the lower jaw and is wrenching the lower jaw down, so it's pulling them apart, killing the lion. And Sampson kills the lion. Of course there are many images of people killing lions, they're all good against evil, the same symbol. And of course this is an indication that we've got a chapel with more than one door, we've got two tympana, so that's a hint to start with. It helps to build a picture of what it was like, again, one, two, three more serpents, the one down the bottom is upside down, it's like the one in the back wall, that's all we have here, but again in the outside of the stone building.

**Michael.** Mike there's one more bit in the shed over there we've got to look at.

**Mike.** Little child's coffin in the yard, made of sandstone, reused as a drain, very tiny. Michael. How old would that be?

**Mike.** Medieval, broadly speaking 15th century, difficult to date.

**Michael.** A chunk of stone, couple of feet long, 18 inches wide, foot high, and on the front interlaced quatrefoil.

**Mike.** Same as we saw by the ladies, rather smaller, little bits of interlace here, notice they stop where the top surface is because the next stone up would have carried on the design. You can see how some of the tendrils disappear into nothing. If we just lean it upon its edge it's a capital. It's the top stone on the right hand side of the door of this chapel, or a door into this chapel, or the left hand side of the chancel arch. It's one of the two. It's most likely a door because if we look at the back it's a flat surface which is cut to fit into a wall. Had it been the chancel arch you'd have seen the back of the projecting column as well.

**Michael.** That's the best preserved and most elaborate piece of carving we've found isn't it. Mike. It is.



**Michael.** Just kept in the shed.

**Mike.** It's safe in store, important as part of the group of carvings, there must be more pieces of it reused somewhere that are about. It is just possible that the Bell itself is on the site of this old chapel and that's why all the stones have ended up here.