

Background Notes on the Parwich Tympanum and our Anglo-Saxon Heritage

What is a Tympanum?

“The vertical recessed face of a pediment, often adorned with sculpture. 1685” Oxford English Dictionary

The Tympanum Project

The ancient carved stone or tympanum situated above the west door on the outside of the tower at St Peter’s Church Parwich, has been deteriorating over the last hundred years. This deterioration is due to exposure to rain and sun; the resultant cycles of dampness and drying causing the surface of the stone to break down. Parwich Parochial Church Council were investigating moving it inside the Church, but in 2006 English Heritage advised that attempting to move it involved an unacceptably high risk of major damage to the stone. In order to preserve a record of the carving before it deteriorates further the current project was initiated to have a replica of the stone made. This project, together with the collection of the following information, has been undertaken by Parwich Parochial Church Council, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and by Parwich & District Local History Society.

The Origins of Christianity in the Peak District

Christianity is likely to have first come to this area under the Romans, perhaps sometime in the third century, though it was not until 313AD that the Emperor Constantine made it the imperial religion of Roman Britain. What we know about Christianity in Roman Britain is patchy, and, although it was an ‘official’ religion, Michael Austin in his history of the Church in Derbyshire suggests *“the Romano-British Church was far from strong or widespread”*. We have no unambiguous surviving evidence of Christianity in the Peak District dating from the fourth century, though some believe that St Mary the Virgin in Wirksworth dates from this period. It is argued that the name of the brook, the Ecclesbourne, using element ‘*eccles*’ derived from the Latin ‘*ecclesia*’ (this is also the root of the modern Gaelic word ‘*eaglais*’ meaning church), indicates a very early church somewhere in the area, and that St Mary’s unusual circular churchyard indicates this is a Romano-British ecclesiastical site. It has been also speculated that the early carved coffin lid, the Wirksworth Stone, in St Mary’s, generally thought to be Saxon (c.700 to 800AD), could rather be late Roman.

Following the withdrawal of the Legions and the subsequent breakdown of Roman Britain in the early fifth century, the incoming pagan culture of the Anglo-Saxons will have become dominant amongst the Pecsæte (the People of the Peak) in this area. How much Anglo-Saxon culture represented an invasion of Germanic peoples, and how much it represented the adoption of the culture of Northern Germany by Britons under an incoming ruling elite is not fully known. This may have varied from place to place. Certainly their culture and religion became dominant, and their farming practices were to develop into a pattern of farming that was to continue in our area for the next millennium.

Locally the earliest evidence of any return to Christianity is the late seventh century grave goods decorated with both pagan and Christian symbols, which were found at Wigger Low, south of Bradbourne. By this time the Pecsæte were part of the kingdom of Mercia, and the historical

accounts indicate that missionaries from both Celtic Lindisfarne and Roman Catholic Canterbury were active in Mercia in the second half of the seventh century.

Christianity was recorded in the non-Roman parts of Britain from the early third century. It had reached western Britain by sea routes for North Africa and Egypt, and was inspired by the asceticism of the early Desert Fathers. This Celtic strand of Christianity came to Anglo-Saxon Northumbria from Iona at the invitation of King Oswald, following his victory at the battle of Heavenfield in 633AD. A Celtic monastery was founded on the island of Lindisfarne, within sight of St Oswald's capital Bamburgh. In 653AD the son of the pagan King Penda of Mercia married the Christian daughter of the then King of Northumbria, and obtained permission from his father to send for priests from Lindisfarne. Four priests came, one of which, the Irishman Diuna, was, after the death of Penda, consecrated the first bishop of the Middle Angles and Mercia in 656AD, with his see based at Repton. An early biography of St David of Wales, who died in 601AD, states he had founded a Celtic monastery at Repton, and, though we have no independent confirmation of this, it could explain Diuna's decision to base his ministry here.

Christianity quickly became the dominant religion of the area, and local tradition has it that Betti, one of the four Celtic missionaries from Northumbria, who disappears from the historical record, founded the church of St Mary the Virgin in Wirksworth. (In contrast to the idea of an earlier fourth century foundation, this offers an alternative explanation of the apparently Celtic influenced shape of the churchyard and the Eccles place names, which also relates to church sites in the Scottish and Irish tradition. Further it gives a possible identity for the skeleton buried in front of the altar under the Wirksworth Stone.)

The Roman Catholic Church entered Britain with St. Augustine's mission to Canterbury in 597AD. Initially it was slow to take hold north of the Thames, but Celtic Christianity in Anglo-Saxon Britain was absorbed into the Roman Church in the decades that followed the Synod of Whitby in 664AD. However, some Celtic influences continued locally. It is suggested that the dedication of Ashbourne Church to the Northumbrian King, St Oswald, is the result of the Lindisfarne mission. Also Celtic influences can be seen in the design of the various Saxon carved crosses found in the Peak District, the nearest being in the church yard at All Saints in Bradbourne, thought to date from around 800AD.

The Romano-British Church would have been primarily an urban phenomenon, but Celtic Christianity grew out of a largely non-urban society, and the Roman Catholic Church of Anglo-Saxon England sought to evangelize the countryside as well. One way of doing this was through minster churches established on royal land covering the areas around them. To quote Turbutt, "*The minster churches and their communities thus became the spearhead of missionary effort throughout the country under the leadership of the local bishop, whose cathedra was at the 'head minster'. At this early period everything depended on the zeal of the bishop whose primary duty, according to Bede, was that of preaching*". In addition to Repton, there were such churches at Ashbourne, Bakewell, Chesterfield, Derby, Hope and Wirksworth.

In 679AD the enormous Bishopric of Mercia was divided up, with a new see based at Lichfield covering the modern counties of Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire as well as parts of Warwickshire and Shropshire. Derbyshire continued to be part of the diocese of Lichfield up to the creation of the diocese of Derby in 1928. The origins of Derbyshire as a political entity grew out of the pagan Danish Vikings' incursions of the ninth century; the area under Danish control became known as the Danelaw, of which Derbyshire became a later subdivision. By 866AD York was a Danish city and the monastery at Repton was sacked in the winter of 873/4AD, with the other local minster churches probably also suffering a similar fate. However the baptism of the

Danish king, Guthrum, as one of the terms of the treaty of Wedmore (Chippenham) following his defeat by King Alfred of Wessex (Alfred the Great) in 878, resulted in the conversion of the Danelaw to (or back to) Christianity.

We do not know when Christianity first came to Parwich, though the Romans were active in our immediate area, and the current layout of the village originates in the Saxon period. The name 'Parwich' is thought to derive from both a Celtic and a Saxon element, suggesting that there was some continuity here between the Britons and the incoming Anglo-Saxons. The '-wich' or '-wick' element is thought to derive from the Saxon or Old English for 'a dairy farm'. It appears that in the sixth and seventh centuries our area was settled by extended family groups on scattered farmsteads. Some of these grew into villages, like Parwich, with an open field system that still influences many field boundaries (e.g. The Wings, Sitterlow, the Flats, Fouffinside and Hilltop), and a nuclear village with a number of house plots and small greens that still follow the pre-Norman layout. Other of these scattered farmsteads have remained as single farms, such as Hanson Grange, several miles west of the village towards Dovedale, which became a monastic grange in the later Norman period.

Parwich enters the historical records in the tenth century and the manor, as part of a larger estate, was managed from Wirksworth. It was seized by the Danish King Cnut (1016 to 1035) on the death of his father-in-law who had large landholdings in the Midlands. Parwich continued as royal land after the Norman Conquest, held locally by Coln, who was a native of Anglo-Saxon or Danish extraction. Subsequently the supreme lordship of the manor passed to the Norman de Ferrers family, however even in the thirteenth century it continued to be farmed by native (pre-conquest) families, who were also immediately overseen by the descendants of other middle ranking pre-conquest families such as the de Alsops and the de Knivetons. (Subsequent descendants of a number of these pre-Conquest families are still found in the area.) The Norman invasion did bring English religious practises closer in line to those of the Continent, and marked a surge in church building and monastic expansion across the country. However, the early Norman kings were keen to assert their authority in opposition to the Pope, as illustrated by Henry II's conflict with St Thomas à Becket and the latter's martyrdom in 1170.

Although the high clerical offices were quickly filled by Normans, the minor clergy would continue to have been drawn from the ranks of native (pre-conquest) families. Culturally, change would have been slow in the village, though by the mid-thirteenth century the de Knivetons and their ilk would have been fluent in French and well versed in Norman customs. Also by this stage the known tenants in Parwich had largely Norman French Christian names, though a few pre-conquest names survived. It would take a further century or so for the descendants of the Norman families, such as the Beresfords (of Beresford and Fenny Bentley) to spread from their castles and larger manor houses into the farms and villages and mix with the native stock.

St Peter's Church Parwich

There is some evidence that St Peter's churchyard makes up most of a large enclosure, though all that can be seen now is a broad bank or causeway running parallel to the lower section of Creamery Lane, behind Nether Green Farm, and the height difference between Church View and Church Cottage's gardens and the churchyard. This possibly could have been a pre-Christian ritual enclosure, situated next to the brook that is thought to have given Parwich its name: '*par-*' possibly being derived from a Celtic name for the brook. This gives rise to speculation that a church was built here in response to its pre-Christian use. Alternatively, the South Peak Archaeological Survey suggest that the present church and churchyard may have largely obliterated two concentric ring banks, indicating the presence of a Celtic church, dating from the late seventh or the eighth century (or even from the late Roman period?).

Some archaeologists have suggested these embankments may be later Norman fortifications. This would mean that these fortifications had become a church within a relatively few years. Also the continuity of land holding in Parwich, with an Anglo-Saxon tenant in chief both pre- and post-Conquest would seem to make fortifications here unnecessary. There is no mention of any church here in the Domesday Survey (1086), but there are known to be omissions of churches elsewhere. The oldest Christian artefact we have in Parwich is likely to be the Tympanum, so dating it may be crucial to establishing the origins of the site as a place of Christian worship.

We do know that the old church here, demolished in 1872, was largely Norman in style, consistent with it being built in the twelfth century, much like those surviving at Kniveton and Alsop en le Dale. There seems to have been an explosion of church building in our area in the century or so following 1066. However this does not completely exclude the possibility that the Norman Parwich Church replaced an earlier Saxon church. Countering this though, unlike the known Saxon church at Bradbourne, which was an independent mother church gaining its own associated chapels in the twelfth century, Parwich Church enters the historical record as a subordinate chapelry to a more important mother church.

This limestone building would have seemed very dramatic in a village where most if not all the other buildings would have been timber framed with a thatched roof. It is not until the sixteenth century that stone built houses started to appear locally. The last of the timber buildings will have disappeared or been clad in stone by the end of the eighteenth century. Thatch continued to be used as a roofing material into the eighteenth century, though again this will have disappeared by the early 1800s.

The Norman church here was a chapelry of St Oswald's in Ashbourne. There would have been a priest in the village, but, as said above, it is likely that these early chaplains were of native stock, with limited education, who also farmed alongside their parishioners. Cox in his nineteenth century survey of Derbyshire Churches states, "*The first definite mention that we have found of the chapel of Parwich occurs in the Endowment Charter of the Vicarage of Ashbourne, made in 1240, wherein it is stipulated that the vicar is to supply a fit chaplain for Parwich*", though more information may still remain to be discovered in the archives of Lincoln Cathedral, as the Dean of Lincoln held the gift of the living of Ashbourne.

The earliest named chaplains occur either as witnesses or tenants in property deeds. (The following information is drawn from the 'Kniveton Leiger', a remarkable survival of the thirteenth century deeds of the de Kniveton family, who held land in Parwich as well as in a number of other manors.) In around 1210 Ralph clerk of Parwich (also referred to as Ralph the clerk son of Gamell de Parwich) is identified; he has several brothers, William, Wude and Henry active in the parish. As well as being from Parwich, it is likely he is from a long established local family, his father's Christian name occurring pre-conquest and also being found amongst the early de Alsops. However, there is some ambiguity about his status, as 'clerk' can indicate either a priest or just someone who is literate. There is also a reference to a Nicholas son of Henry clerk of Parwich (c.1240-50), though again this could just mean Nicholas' father was able to read and write. By the mid thirteenth century a John (c.1250) and a Gerbert (c.1260) are unambiguously identified as chaplains of Parwich, with Gerbert at least renting both a house plot and plough land in the parish.

The current Victorian church in Parwich preserves a number of features from its Norman predecessor. This new church opened in 1873, presumably to mixed emotions amongst the parishioners, some feeling regrets at the loss of their familiar ancient place of worship. One Joseph Thompson (1883-1909), though not living in the village himself, was from a local family and left us the following notes: *In my boyhood there was a small but interesting Norman church, but the parsons have 'Restored' this off the face of the earth. First of all, the heavy pillars and*

round arches which supported the roof, dividing the Nave from the Aisle were pulled down and a meaningless round plaster arch of no ornamentation was substituted. But that was not enough. In later days a reforming parson came. The church had an unusually long chancel for the size of the building. This was not placed in the exact middle of the eastern wall but rather to one side; it therefore prevented the parson from seeing all the congregation when he read from the communion table, moreover he had to lift his voice to be heard. So the decree went forth; a faculty was obtained, and the dear old church was pulled down and a brand new one built. Where now is the low, ivy covered square tower, through which one entered and saw the sexton toll the bell? Where now is the sculptured sword, thought to be crusaders? Where is the pulpit for the Parson with the desk under it for the clerk? Where the choir with its diverse instruments of music in the gallery? Where the square pews that belonged to the several farms, and gave a special and personal interest to the occupants? All gone! All swept away to satisfy the ritualistic fancies of a sacerdotal parson. Thus is England being spoiled of its glory. Inside the church are comfortless benches, a Sanctum and Altar foresooth and externally it is a spick and span new building which might just as well be a Methodist Chapel. **But that is not all. Our fathers long indulged in a little paganism including nature worship. Amongst the ornaments of the church was an entablature covered with animals symbolic of phallic worship. This evidently had been taken down at a later period and been obscured by whitewash and plaster. On pulling down the church it has been built into the porch of the new church as the tympanum of the arch above the main door.** (Presumably he means the west door in the tower.) I used to see two oak chests in the chancel and wondered what they contained. It is said the candles for lighting the church were stored there because the mice played havoc with them when they were stored in the cupboards on the wall. I used to see one, bolder than the rest from my perch in the gallery. It used to run out of its hole and take a nibble from the candlestick placed in its holder ready for lighting. This it did repeatedly and these attacks left visible marks on the candle. But it must have satisfied the hunger of the poor thing that looked as small and famished as any church mouse must do! I often wonder what became of the old sundial that so long dominated the porch door of the old church, around which a circle of expectant worshippers, men and boys, used always to be standing waiting for the service to begin?

There used to be a little odd-looking square old man, by the name of Isaac Saint (died 1864), who had a chronic weakness for always being Church warden, an honourable office in that day and he generally had his desire satisfied. Being then in power he decided that certain 'Improvements' be made at once. First the pews in the gallery were cleared away followed by the clearing of the Norman arches and one circular plaster arch was substituted for them. A Vestry meeting was called to discuss the improvements. Some said it would not be safe and would put the church in danger. Nothing daunted the little man who declared it would be such an easy thing 'To turn-er arch' that he could do it himself! – So the thing was done and the great wide, hideous flat arch took the place of the two beautiful Norman arches with their corbels and zig-zag chiselling, in keeping with the architecture that the most iconoclastic dissenter would never have wished to be swept away. Then the Font stood inside the chancel. The stove stood in the middle of the Church. Women clattered up the aisle in their pattens and men used to cover their faces reverently with their hats during their private devotions before the service. There was no merit then in turning to the east, though a low curtsy towards that point was dropped by several women. In the square pews each knelt with his back to others, unaware of the bad orthodoxy of such practice. Nor did I often hear the sermon discussed, for, like Tension's hero "they thought 'a said what 'a ought to 'a said and then they coomed away".

As Thompson points out, various features from the old Norman church of St. Peter have been used in the current building, including the Tympanum.

Known History of the Parwich Tympanum

Dr David Jefferson for English Heritage has identified the gritstone making up the Tympanum as Ashover Grit of the same sandstone type outcropping on Stanton Moor. This Stanton Moor stone has been used by man since Neolithic times, and is still quarried today. It is possible that the stone for the Tympanum was brought the six miles or so from Stanton Moor. However, Dr Jefferson goes on to say: *“the same sandstone horizon outcrops a very short distance to the south of Parwich Church and extends to the south for about one kilometre before turning north west and extending towards Alsop en le Dale on both sides of the Bletch Brook. Should the quality of this stone be similar to that on Stanton Moor, this would suggest that the stone for the carving could be of extremely local origin.”* This local ‘outcrop’ appears from geological maps to run in a narrow strip along the side of the Brook and Pits Lane to Priest’s Rood, after which it turns up the Bletch for about one and a half miles.

Unfortunately, although the carving is early, it does not enter the surviving historical record until the nineteenth century. It is hard for us now to imagine the religious life of our rural ancestors, before the Crown, at the Reformation, and then Parliament, following the Civil War, began to interfere in public worship and the decoration of churches. “The Voices of Morebath”, drawing on its remarkably complete parish records, describes a Devon parish church in the early sixteenth century run by the priest and his parishioners largely without reference to the outside world, focusing on devotion to the Virgin Mary and their saints, maintained by fund raising by the various village ‘stores’ or groups. Their concerns were more about organising the village festivals or wakes, and raising enough to keep the candles alight before the rood cross and the various statues than issues of doctrine. The early church in Parwich must have been much like this, a separate world of the priest, the lord of the manor and the villagers, changing only according to variations in individuals’ commitment and devotion, and in the wealth of the parish over the five hundred years or so between the Conquest and the English Reformation, though unfortunately our parish records are considerably less complete than those of Morebath. The puritan purges of the Commonwealth in the mid seventeenth century will have cleared the old church of its main decorations. Parishioners must have felt much as Joseph Thompson did two hundred years later, when their statues were smashed, any wall paintings whitewashed over, the ancient font ejected and the rood loft demolished. (It is interesting to note that the gallery Thompson mourned was made with timber salvaged from the earlier rood loft.)

The earliest published reference we have to the Parwich Tympanum is in Cox’s survey of Derbyshire Churches of 1877; *“But the most interesting discovery was in connection with the tympanum, or semi-circular stone, that filled up the upper half of the north doorway. This had been so coated with plaster and whitewash that it presented a plain surface, but upon being cleansed, was found to be covered with rudely incised grotesque figures ...”*. We also have an article by the antiquarian Llewellynn Jewitt on the stone, published in Derbyshire Archaeological Journal of 1880/81 which reports, *“the tympanum formed the head of the south doorway of the Parish Church of Parwich When that interesting old church was taken down for re-building and enlarging in 1872, this tympanum was carefully taken down, and has been re-built in the new erection.”* Despite the confusion as to where this stone was (there was no north doorway), the plaster and whitewash, presumably dating from the Commonwealth, may have helped to protect the carving.

The Derby architect Henry Stevens incorporated the Tympanum into his Norman influenced new building in its present exterior location over the west door. Comparing the stone as it is today with a drawing of 1872 (published by Llewellynn Jewitt in 1880/81), it seems that both the left and right sides were trimmed, before it was replaced in the new building.

At some point relatively soon after the construction of the new church (before the Edwardian photograph shown), there appears to have been movement in the Tympanum's new housing; the right hand side of the stone lintel, which supports it, cracked completely through, and a metal peg, still there, was inserted to prevent further damage. This crack also continues up through the Tympanum itself, running through the body of the carved wolf. Dr Jefferson noted that the stone of the Tympanum to the right of this crack has weathered differently to the remainder of the carving. He suggests this could indicate that damage to this portion of the stone had occurred after the 1872 drawing, and that it was repaired by a piece of new stone being inserted.

When installed in its present position the carving on the Tympanum was in a remarkable state of preservation; however, this new location has made it vulnerable to weathering. In the late 1980s, the Northampton firm of stone conservators, Harrison Hill Ltd, surveyed the deteriorating condition of the stone. They found the carved surface was flaking because of salt crystallisation within the surface of the stone due to repeated cycles of drying and wetting by exposure to the elements. At this time the decision was made to treat the stone in situ by spraying a stone 'strengthenener' and adding some protective 'pointing', but this may have only served to trap moisture in the stone causing further flaking of the surface. Also the flakes have become larger, because the coating of 'strengthenener' has had the effect of binding the surface layer of the stone into a single sheet.

The original purpose/role of the tympanum

In the Saxon and Norman periods very few people were able to read; indeed it was not uncommon for the poorer rural clergy to have little or even no literacy. It is hard for the modern reader, with almost unlimited access to books and to information in general through the internet, to picture the intellectual world as it was before Caxton's introduction of the printing press in the late fifteenth century. Books were a very expensive rarity: as late as the sixth century, St. Columba precipitated a battle over a copy of a Psalter, which prompted his self imposed exile in Scotland, which resulted in the foundation of Iona, and in turn the foundation of Lindisfarne. Consequently wall paintings, stained glass windows and carvings were essential aids to Christian teaching for most people, providing what became known as the *Biblia Pauperum* or the *Poor Man's Bible*: 'sermons from stones' and 'good from everything'. Some of these early images are direct representations, as in most of the carvings on the Wirksworth Stone, and in the early Kniveton Crucifix.

Other carvings like the Parwich Tympanum have animals or figures that are symbols or visual metaphors telling a story. The ideas they represent becoming more potent through the need to interpret them, and also take on the other associations of the symbols used. At times such images even incorporated older pagan symbols such as the Scandinavian Tree of Life, sometimes found in church wall paintings, or the widespread image of Christ as a lamb, drawing on the early Judaic use of animal sacrifice. These images, including the carved stones, would have become objects of veneration in themselves having an almost magical power in the eyes of our Saxon forebears, adding to the spiritual quality of the churches that housed them.

Interpreting the symbols

Thompson's description of the Tympanum as "*a little paganism including nature worship*" and "*animals symbolic of phallic worship*" perhaps sells our forbears short. These symbols, though drawing on pre-Christian imagery and aimed at the non-literate, have multiple associations and explore surprisingly complex ideas and beliefs.

In Llewellynn Jewitt's nineteenth century article we have the following interpretation of the symbols, though we would now want to distance ourselves from the potentially anti-Semitic

aspects of the carving and his interpretation:

First we have the Lamb bearing the Vixellum Crucis, or banner of the cross, and on his head is the sacred Dove, symbolising the Holy Ghost, and illustrating Jesus Christ “the Lamb of God” (St. John i. 29) with the “the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him” (St. Matthew iii. 16, 17).

Next in the centre, we have the Hart, which symbolizes the Christian Convert, the true believer; “as the Hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God.” (Psalm xlii. 1).

The Lamb and the Hart are ... both trampling upon the Serpents – emblematic of the wicked one – who are darting forth their poisonous tongues.

Above but turned away from the Hart, is the Swine, which symbolizes “the Gentile or Heathen, who have no knowledge of God before their eyes,” but revel in all uncleanness; ...

... in front is a Wolf, with its mouth open and sharp-set teeth, its long claws, and its tail expanded into a trifolium. “The Wolf symbolises the persecuting spirit of the Jews;” “both Jews and Gentiles were like ravening wolves let loose against the faithful.” ... The Wolf ... is biting or devouring one of the “foils” of the trefoil, or shamrock – the emblem of the Trinity.

Foden and Robinson in their ‘History of Parwich Church’ draw on later interpretations of the symbols that differ slightly to Jewitt’s quoted above. They say: “*The stone is covered with rudely carved figures unfolding the story of Redemption. On one side is a lamb bearing a circular-headed cross symbolising Christ as the Lamb of God; above the head of the lamb is a dove, typifying the Holy Spirit. The central figure is a hart, representing the Christian convert or true believer, and under the feet of the hart and the lamb are two serpents with protruding tongues symbolic of the Evil One. Above is the swine into which the Unclean Spirit entered in one of Jesus’ miracles, and the remaining figure is a wolf, with tail expanded into a trifolium or shamrock. The latter is the emblem of the Trinity, and the wolf is represented devouring one of the leaves, symbolising the Denial of the Divinity of Christ.*”

Because of the naive nature of the carving it is difficult to accurately date it, but a number of authors have suggested that it is from an earlier pre-conquest church here, because of the representation of Christ as the Agnus Dei or the ‘Lamb and Flag’. It is argued that the Agnus Dei is likely to be early, because this was prohibited by the Council of Constantinople in 692AD that decreed Christ should be represented as a person. However, this decree focused on the lamb slain on the cross (see below), and the Agnus Dei came into popularity later in the medieval period, being also found on a number of other unambiguously twelfth century carvings, when perhaps this decree was a more distant memory. The use of the lamb also brings to mind the Biblical idea of the ‘Good Shepherd’ and would be particularly meaningful to a farming community. The form of the *Vixellum Crucis* or ‘banner of the cross’ here is circular, rather than the more usual banner or flag shape. Jewitt identifies this as particularly Saxon, and it may be have grown out of the ‘cruciform nimbus’ or halo with a cross superimposed on it, used to distinguish Christ from other figures in illuminated manuscripts, such as those dating to the time of the Venerable Bede in eighth century Northumbria.

The interpretation of the Dove as the Holy Spirit is straight forward: “*the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him*” (St Matthew iii. 16-17). However, it can further be associated with the Creation, “*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*” (Genesis i. 2), and it occurs in the story of the Flood, “*And the dove came in to him ... ; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew the waters were abated from off the earth*” (Genesis viii. 11).

Some commentators have interpreted the deer, not as a hart, but a stag, the rather strange leaf shaped ears being alternatively seen as stylised antlers. It may also be relevant that the Hart and the Stag feature quite heavily in Celtic (particularly Irish and Scottish) mythology, often mysterious creatures associated with beauty and the *'other world'* or the *'land of faery'*. Possibly also relevant is the much later use of the Stag to represent Christ, amongst the Angles and Saxons that remained on the European mainland, in what was to become northern Germany.

The two serpents on the Tympanum have generally been linked with the Devil, as seen in the Temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It may be relevant that there are two serpents represented here and not one, as in the fragment of a carving of this scene in Wirksworth Church (see below). The two serpents on the Parwich stone are possibly reminiscent of the more abstract Celtic snake carvings, and their relationship to the lamb and hart here also brings to mind God's cursing of the Serpent in Genesis, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" Genesis iii 15.

Also the wolf and the swine (both of which were found wild in Britain until the seventeenth century) are interesting, as one wonders if these reflect a Scandinavian influence, rather than a purely Biblical or Judaic origin. Both occur in Scandinavian mythology. This would, perhaps, put the carving into the period of the Danish occupation, therefore sometime after 880AD. The relating of the solitary swine or pig to Christ's casting out the demons into the *'herd of many swine'* (St Luke viii 30-33), although perhaps an important association, does not seem to offer a full explanation of this symbol, as a significant aspect of the Biblical story is that there were many demons (his name was *'Legion'*) and many Gaderene swine. It is perhaps the Old Testament *'unclean'* status of the swine here that is most important; as Jewitt says "*in Lincoln Cathedral there is a boss on which is the figure of a monk scourging a Pig, symbolic of destroying the lusts of the flesh*". Also there is the New Testament idea of the pig symbolising the inability to grasp higher truths; "*Give not that which is Holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you*" (St Matthew vii. 6). The pig also figures in both Celtic and Scandinavian mythology. The Irish have early tales of the deliciousness of pork and the first domestic pigs, and the Scandinavians focus more on the ferociousness and danger of the wild boar. However it also came with the Anglo-Saxons from what is now northern Germany, where the wild boar had pre-Christian religious significance. It is found as a decoration on early Anglo-Saxon helmets and grave goods in England, and later in church decoration in northern Germany and in the crest of the early kings of Saxony, suggesting its significance to Anglo-Saxon culture predated their arrival in Britain. This is one of the virtues of using such symbols, in that a single image can have many and varied links and associations.

The Wolf, also with its head turned away from Christ, represents those actively persecuting Christianity. "*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues*" (St Matthew x. 16-17). The wolf is found in early Irish church carvings. Here it is represented as attacking its own three leafed tail; St Patrick in his conversion of the Irish is credited as using the shamrock to explain the apparently paradoxical nature of the Trinity or God being three persons in one (the Father, Son and Holy Ghost). This would seem to support an earlier Celtic origin, though the Wolf also features in the Scandinavian traditions.

The symbols found on the Tympanum show additional influences to those of the Bible and the Roman Catholic Church of mainland Europe, and draw on more than just what the pagan Anglo-Saxons would have brought with them from what is now northern Germany. There is a strong Celtic influence on the symbols perhaps suggesting the earlier Saxon period, but then also there

are possible Scandinavian influences suggesting a later Danelaw date, further the Lamb and Flag continued in popularity well into the Norman period. It is worth noting that the symbols also focus on the idea of conversion to Christianity and persecution by non-Christians. Does this indicate the stone dates to a period when not everyone would be Christian or when paganism was a fairly recent memory? This would seem to place the carving in the earlier Saxon period (c.700), or following the conversion of the Danish Vikings (c.900), but it might also be explained by an ongoing obsession with heresy in the medieval period and by the growing popularity of the Crusades in the twelfth century giving rise to an antagonism to non-Christians. In consequence it is worth looking further at the other churches and other carvings in our area.

Other Saxon and Norman carved stone in the area

When you begin to look there is a surprising amount of early stone carving in our area. We have already mentioned the Wirksworth Stone, thought to be Saxon. This coffin lid, though mainly directly illustrating biblical stories, is also relevant here because of its use of the symbol of a lamb on a cross to represent Christ Crucified. Cockerton gives us the following account: "*Crucifixion. A lamb slain on an equal-armed Grecian type cross, with the four symbols of the evangelists holding books in the angles. This symbol of the Lamb slain upon a cross (not the lively Agnus Dei of later times) was banned by Canon LXXXI of the Quinisext or Trullan Council of Constantinople of AD 692 which decreed 'that the figure in human form of the Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world, Christ our God, be henceforth exhibited in images, instead of the ancient lamb, so that all may understand by means of it the depth of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his Passion and salutary Death, and his Redemption which was wrought for the whole world.'*" St Mary the Virgin in Wirksworth is well worth visiting for this carving and for a number of other early carved stones, including the Bonsall 'T'Owd Man', set into the church walls in the nineteenth century. T'Owd Man or 'the Old Man' is a lead mining term for the miners of past times. It is generally assumed that these carvings are Saxon.

Turbutt in his 'History of Derbyshire' divides Saxon carving in our area into two groups: the first, including such as the Wirksworth Stone and the Bradbourne Cross, involves a higher standard of carving, which he dates following the conversion of Anglo-Saxon Mercia in the late seventh and eighth centuries; the second group involves cruder carving and involves the inclusion of Scandinavian motifs, which he dates to the resurgence of Christianity following the conversion of pagan Danes in the late ninth and tenth centuries. One wonders whether the Parwich Tympanum and the examples below might fit into this latter group.

Early church carvings will generally have been created by itinerant professional stone carvers or masons, but could also have been made by local amateurs, which is more likely to be the case with the cruder carvings. Two other local churches have stone carvings with significant similarities to the Parwich Tympanum: St. Bartholomew's in Hognaston and St. Mary's in Tissington. Both these villages also are not recorded as having churches in the Domesday Survey, and their present church buildings appear to be of twelfth century Norman origin, though both have been extensively remodelled in the intervening millennium.

At Hognaston, also previously a chapelry of Ashbourne, St Bartholomew's has, in addition to a Norman font, a tympanum remarkably similar to the one here in Parwich. Many of its symbols are the same and they are configured much as those on the Parwich Tympanum: a lamb and flag (Agnus Dei), though with two doves or birds over it (Why the extra bird? Although not an English tradition, like the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is sometimes represented by a dove.); a swine; a wolf; and purportedly a fox, though this is now much deteriorated. The main difference to the Parwich stone is the replacement of the central hart, with a human figure holding a book in one

hand and a bishop's crosier or staff in the other. This places either an individual bishop or saint or a more generic figure representing the Church in the centre, rather than the True Believer there on the Parwich stone. However, there is such a large overlap in the symbols used, that one cannot help but speculate as to whether they were carved by the same person, or that one is a partial copy of the other. Though both are naively carved, the one in Hognaston is perhaps the cruder, suggesting that they were not done by the same hand, but not excluding the possibility that it is a partial copy of the one in Parwich. In Hognaston there is a tradition, though perhaps the result of relatively recent speculation, that their stone was carved by an early village blacksmith.

St Mary's in Tissington, previously a chapelry of Bradbourne, has a fine carved tympanum with a chequer board pattern, but it is the font that has a series of carvings again very similar to those on the Parwich Tympanum. These carvings are around the side of the font, and, though much worn, have some overlap with the animals in Parwich: there are a lamb and flag (Agnus Dei); a beast, that could be a wolf devouring its own trefoil or threefold tail (though it has also been interpreted as a lion representing either St Mark or Jesus Christ); and a bird, possibly a dove representing the Holy Spirit (though it looks much more like an eagle, perhaps the Eagle of St John). The two remaining symbols are not found on the Parwich stone: a beast with a man's head sticking out of its mouth, this could be the whale swallowing Jonah (though it could also be a copy of a medieval representation of a crocodile); and two human figures, reminiscent of those on the tympanum at Tissington

Some Conclusions about the Parwich Tympanum

It is perhaps frustrating that we know so little of the history of the Parwich Tympanum. Even the experts are cautious in dating the carving, as can be seen in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings' recent article which says it "*stylistically dates from 700-1100AD*" a range of 400 years, though this does place it in the Saxon period. The evidence for a pre-conquest church in Parwich is very tentative, and its existence at present is only a speculation. That three apparently Norman churches, Hognaston, Parwich and Tissington, have similar carving strengthens the argument for a twelfth century date to these carvings, as it is less likely that all three incorporate pre-conquest carving brought from different buildings, or that all three are on the sites of earlier churches missed by the Domesday Survey.

The previous argument for a pre-conquest date of the Parwich Tympanum relies heavily on the 692 prohibition of representing Christ as a Lamb, but it is likely that this refers to the images of a lamb slain on the cross, rather than the later Agnus Dei or Lamb and Flag. However, Turbutt's description of cruder carving with Scandinavian motifs, appearing after the conversion of the Danelaw in the late ninth century, might be seen to apply to the Hognaston, Parwich and Tissington carvings, which would seem to take us back towards a pre-conquest date.

However these three villages would have been inhabited by native (Anglo-Saxon and Danish) families with the local tenants in chief also coming from pre-conquest families. Further as chapelries, their priests, with only limited stipends, are likely to have been drawn from native stock, and supplementing their meagre standard of living by farming. So although these churches date from the early Norman period, they will have been set very much in a Saxon context, and our three sets of carvings could be Norman in date, though pre-Norman in style.

The possible relationship between the Parwich Tympanum, the Hognaston Tympanum and the Tissington Font requires further investigation. It is tempting to picture an itinerant stone carver moving from village to village, or to imagine people inspired by a visit to a neighbouring church attempting to replicate the carvings they saw in their own church, but we may never come up with a definitive conclusion on whether they were made by one or several artists.

Finally it is well worth quoting Austin's comments on the Saxon and Norman craftsmen in Derbyshire, who created such as the Parwich Tympanum: *"The men who carved this stonework for these churches would have been taught their faith within their walls. It is likely that their priests were too ill-educated to teach them much, and would have scarce understood the words of the liturgy they used, but they told the Bible stories and the craftsmen rendered them in stone. As the craftsmen and their families stood in church they would in turn have been taught by the stone Annunciation and the carved Crucifixion. These men are dead and long forgotten. Their work remains to remind us of our unity with them of the communion of all the Derbyshire saints."*

Making and installing the replica

In 2005 a 3D laser scan of the Tympanum was undertaken by Conservation Technologies (the National Museums Liverpool). Using a laser scanner on the stone in situ they produced an exact 3D computer image or model of the carving. This will preserve an exact record of the carving as it is now, and it could be used to create a near approximation of how the carving was when first made.

This 3D computer image/model can then be used to create a replica stone. Initially consideration was given to making a replica of the Tympanum to replace the original in the exposed exterior position so that the original could be moved to a more protected position inside the Church. However the damaged state of the original with its unstable flaking surface, in addition to the potential difficulties of extracting it, led English Heritage to the firm conclusion that any attempt to move it involved an unacceptable level of risk. In terms of the original they recommended that some remedial work to the tower would reduce water penetration to the stone, but that allowing the continued weathering of the carving is the lesser of two evils.

In consequence, it was decided that the replica should be placed inside the Church in a position easily seen by visitors. This has the double benefit of having a permanent record of the carving, despite the inevitable on-going deterioration of the original, and means that it will be accessible to visitors without any risk of touching it causing further damage. There was some debate as to whether an exact replica or an enhancement was appropriate. It was decided that an exact replica of the stone as it is now (i.e. at the time of the 2005 scan) would be made: as the conservation agencies and the Diocese looked more favourably on an exact replica being installed in the church; as an 'old looking' replica would be more in keeping than a crisp 'new looking' enhanced reproduction; and as the enhanced replica would be considerably more expensive.

In June 2006 both English Heritage and the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings gave their formal support for the decision not to move the original, and in December 2007 the final 'faculty' (a sort of ecclesiastical planning permission) was issued by the Diocese of Derby for the installation of the replica tympanum on the north wall of the tower inside the church, and for free standing information boards to be placed nearby. Parwich Parochial Church Council successfully applied for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to help with the cost of making and installing the replica and of producing the information boards explaining the history of the Tympanum, interpreting its significance and outlining this project.

Using the virtual Tympanum from the previous laser scan Conservation Technologies of Liverpool have subcontracted a company to produce an exact replica in Ashford Grit, quarried on Stanton Moor. This replica was installed on the north wall of the tower using stainless steel mounting in June 2008. The information and some of the images contained in these notes was also used to create the display material printed on the free standing boards designed and manufactured by Caliba of Nottingham.

The replica will be officially dedicated along with the new stained glass window depicting the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary on Sunday 6th July 2008 by the Bishop of Repton.

Compiled by Peter Trehitt on behalf of
Parwich Parochial Church Council
and Parwich & District Local History Society

St. Peter's Day (29th June) 2008



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Copies of these notes can be downloaded in full and or as a printer friendly version (without images) from Parwich Church's web pages at <http://www.ashbournechurches.org/Parwich.htm>

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<http://www.jeffersonconsulting.co.uk/>
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- **Parwich & District Local History Society:**
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