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**A Late Saxon Sculptural Fragment from All Saints' Church,  
Somerford Keynes**

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decorated a screen such as the one of which fragments have been recovered from the riverside at London, though the figures on that screen were on a rather larger scale.<sup>12</sup> What is undeniable is that the Little Shurdington relief is one of the best pieces of sculpture yet recovered from the Cotswold region: the body modelling is, in fact, only equalled by the fragmentary relief figure of Mercury from the Bath Gate, Cirencester.<sup>13</sup>

### Notes

1. We are most grateful to Mr. and Mrs. King for informing us of this relief and for giving us access to it.
2. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), *Ancient and Historical Monuments in the County of Gloucester. 1. Iron Age and Romano-British Monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds* (London, 1976), pp. 60–1.
3. M. Henig, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani, Great Britain. I fasc. 7 Roman Sculpture from the Cotswold Region* (British Academy, Oxford, 1993), p. 10, no. 20, pl. 8.
4. E. Simon, *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae II* (1984), p. 543, no. 340, pl. 407. See also W.L. MacDonald and J.A. Pinto, *Hadrian's Villa and its Legacy* (New Haven and London, 1995), p. 191, illus. 238.
5. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Art in Roman Britain* (London, 1962), p. 131, no. 16, pl. 19.
6. J. Boardman, *Greek Sculpture: The Classical Period* (London, 1985), p. 205 and illus. 184–5 on p. 209.
7. See J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 72–4. Illus. 74 on p. 74 represents a Hellenistic ruler in a similar 'Polycleitan' stance.
8. M. Henig, *A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites* (BAR British Series 8, Oxford, 1978), p. 245, nos. 466 (Caerleon) and 467 (Edinburgh). See also idem, 'The "Alexander" Gem from Caerleon', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 28 (1979), pp. 317–18. Details of the Southwark intaglio (Museum of London) have not yet been published.
9. Sculpture from the Stanwick site is mentioned in *Britannia* 22 (1991), pp. 252–3. Full details of the sculpture by T.F.C. Blagg and M. Henig will be published in the final report on the excavation.
10. J.M.C. Toynbee, 'Greek Myth in Roman Stone', *Latomus* 36 (1977), pp. 343–412.
11. B. Cunliffe and P. Davenport, *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath 1. The Site* (Oxford University Committee for Archaeol. Monograph 7, 1985); P.H. Mitard, *Le sanctuaire Gallo-Romain in Genainville* (Guiry-en-Vexin, 1993).
12. T.F.C. Blagg in T. Dyson (ed.), *The Roman Riverside Wall and Monumental Arch in London* (London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc. Special Paper 4, 1980), pp. 157–69.
13. M. Henig, *Roman Sculpture from the Cotswold Region*, p. 24, no. 69, pl. 20.

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## A LATE SAXON SCULPTURAL FRAGMENT FROM ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, SOMERFORD KEYNES

### Introduction

The doorway on the north side of the nave in All Saints' church at Somerford Keynes provides the best known evidence for an Anglo-Saxon church on this site. Its re-opening, following removal of medieval and Victorian infilling, was a celebrated local event on 22 April 1968 and was largely the inspiration of the then rector and local historian, Geoffrey Gibbon (Gibbon 1969).

Less well known is a smaller sculptural fragment of later Saxon date preserved in the church since at least 1893 when its presence was recorded by county antiquarians (Romilly Allen 1893,

65). For many years before the restoration of 1968 it was set within the recess of the infilled Saxon doorway. More recently (in 1985) and whilst displayed unprotected on a window sill in the nave, the fragment was accidentally broken into two parts across its weakest point. Thereafter the need for improved care and protection was recognised, and the subsequent conservation and re-display of the fragment has provided an opportunity for fresh study and the publication of this brief note.

### *The fragment and its significance*

An illustration of the fragment made in 1893 was used by Reginald Smith in his study of the sculpture from Bibury (Smith 1913–14, fig. 5). Thereafter the fragment was referred to many times, but usually with little further analysis (Dobson 1933, 168; Kendrick 1949, 103; Talbot Rice 1952, 128–9; Mackay 1963, 80; Taylor and Taylor 1965, 557).

The fragment measures 560 × 300 mm in height and varies in thickness from 90 to 103 mm. It is carved on both front and back, whilst the side and top have been chiselled to a smooth finish. The detail of the carving is clear.

The stone takes the form of two opposed beasts, their mouths touching and holding a round ball between them (Fig. 1). One head is reduced to a snout and mouth, but the other retains mouth, eyes and strong curving neck. Unusually the stone is carved actually to the shape of the creatures and pierced completely below the mouths. The mouths of both creatures have curling tips to the upper and lower lips, and the junction between jaws and face is outlined by a lapet. There are no teeth, so the mouths could be beaks. The top of the head of the more complete creature is damaged, but the line of the neck curves up abruptly immediately below the damaged area indicating that the creature probably bore a crest or comb. The eyes are emphasised by fans of bold, lobed eyelashes. The neck, outlined by a plain simple moulding, is covered by plant tendrils, 'buds' set in nests of leaves or sprouting from lobed tendrils, a spiral, and two claw-like tendril terminals.

The Somerford Keynes stone is carved in the *Ringerike* style, so called after the geological name for sandstone beds in the Oslo region of Norway which were a source of some finely ornamented slabs (Graham-Campbell and Kidd 1980, 168). The style was at its most influential in southern England during the reign of Cnut (1016–35). A date for the piece in the first half of the 11th century would, therefore, be most likely.

The two Somerford Keynes beasts belong to a tradition which is best shown, both engraved and in the round, on a ship's gilded bronze weather vane from Heggen in Norway, and on a magnificent grave marker from St. Paul's churchyard in London (Graham-Campbell and Kidd 1980, figs. 9, 99, 101). Reginald Smith (1913–14) offered a more local parallel when he observed the similarities between the Somerford Keynes beasts and those on a gravestone from Bibury (now preserved in the British Museum with a replica in Bibury church). The Bibury stone (Smith 1913–14, fig. 4) was part of a group of *Ringerike* stones found just outside St. Mary's church. Somerford Keynes is only c. 10 miles (16 km) from Bibury, a proximity which, allied to the similarities in style, makes it possible that the carvings from both sites were from the same workshop.

As to function, there have been various interpretations. One writer (Anon. 1983, 49) suggested that the fragment was from the headstone of a grave and drew a comparison with a similar representation 'of the same intensely Scandinavian character' on the grave marker from St. Paul's mentioned above. Mackay (1963) suggested that the piece was part of a tympanum, an error which may indicate that he only saw one side. It has also been suggested that it could be part of an ornate chair. Fragments of several stone chairs, as well as two complete 'frith stools',

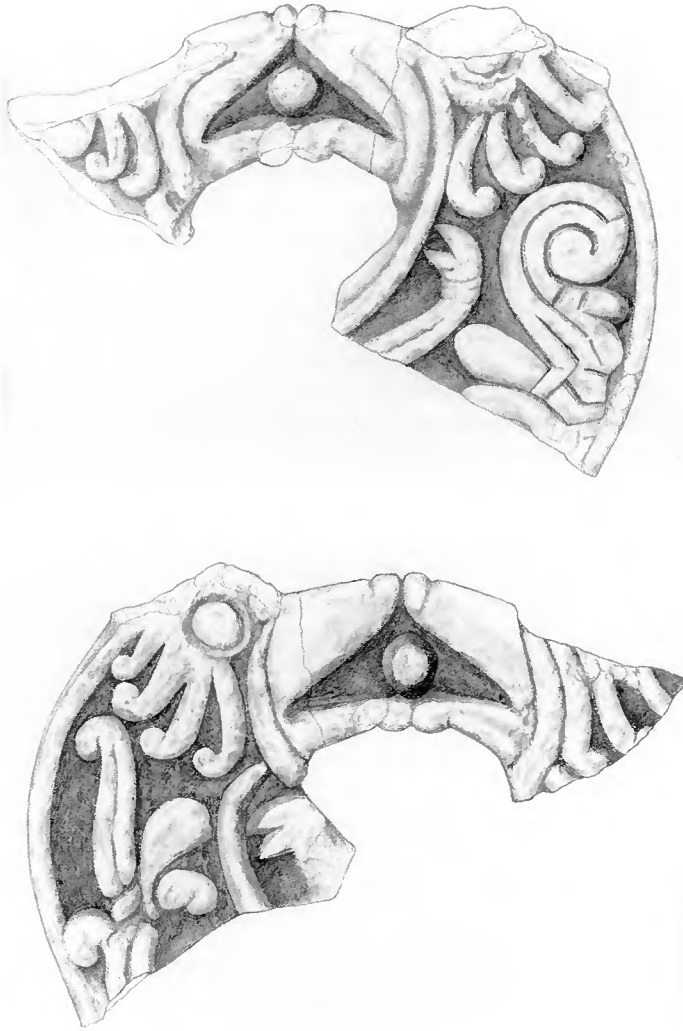


Fig. 1. Late Saxon sculptural fragment from All Saints' church, Somerford Keynes, dating from the first half of the 11th century A.D. (illustration Richard Bryant, copyright Cotswold District Council). Scale 1:6.

survive in the north of England, but they belong to an earlier date (Cramp 1984, 9–10; Lang 1991, 20).

The closest parallels are, however, provided by a group of *Ringerike* decorated headstones and grave slabs from All Hallows' and St. Paul's churches in the city of London, Rochester cathedral (Kent) and Great Canfield (Essex) (Tweddle, Biddle and Kjolbye-Biddle 1995, 165–7, 209–10, 223–9). While none of these stones is carved to an animal shape, three of the gravestones are decorated on both faces and one may be pierced. It is likely, therefore, that the 1893 suggestion was right and that the Somerford Keynes fragment is part of a head or foot stone, possibly associated with a recumbent slab.

*Conservation and display*

A specialist stone conservator, Michael Eastham of Ardington near Wantage (Oxon.) was commissioned by Somerford Keynes parochial church council in 1995 to repair and restore the broken fragments and to mount the restored piece securely on the east wall of the tower within the nave of the church. The fragments were cleaned and attached to the wall with non-intrusive and painted cramp fixings of stainless steel rods, the whole protected with a vertical damp-proof membrane using a lead sheet. At the same time, two further fragments already in the church, and a piece of voussoir and a small stone head, were also conserved and redisplayed.

*Acknowledgements*

Somerford Keynes parochial church council identified the need for conservation of the broken fragments in 1991 and, on the advice of the Gloucester diocesan advisory committee and the Corinium Museum in Cirencester, obtained grants from St. Andrew's Conservation Trust and from the Pilgrim Trust through the Council for the Care of Churches. Thanks are due to Mrs. B. Wooster and Andrew Argyrakis respectively for facilitating funding and to Jonathan MacKechnie-Jarvis at Church House, Gloucester, for much useful advice. Additional funding came from the parochial church council's own reserves.

Ella Bampffield and Pamela Davis, respectively churchwarden and secretary to the parochial church council, followed the conservation initiative through with remarkable persistence over a six-year period, and their diligence is acknowledged with appreciation. The Revd. Graham Martin proved a constant ally. Cotswold district council through its museums and arts service funded Richard Bryant's illustration of the fragment, and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments provided its usual good offices at the National Monuments Record Centre in Swindon.

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