St Mary, Sledmere, Yorkshire, East Riding

Feature Sets (2)

• Interior Features

Description

Sledmere is a village about seven miles NW of Driffield. The church consists of a sandstone ashlar building of a chancel with a N vestry, an aisled nave, a W tower and a S porch. The church interior has delicate screens of wood and metal, and pink stone. The present nave and chancel were built in 1893-8 and replace an 18thc church, which itself had replaced the medieval structure, enlarged in the 14thc. A range of plans and early views are displayed in the church, but no structure of our period has survived. As Pevsner and Neave (1995), 692, say, in the late 19thc 'the church was rebuilt on the lines of the medieval building which were discovered on the demolition of the Georgian nave and chancel'. Remains of Romanesque sculpture consist of a series of corbels in the chamber above organ and a fragment reset into the tower arch.

History

The Domesday Survey records that in 1066 'Slidemare' was held by Thorfin of Ravensworth and Gospatric son of Arnketil. In 1086 it was held by Gospatric and Nigel Fossard, being Count Robert of Mortain tenant-in-chief. The chapel at Sledmere was dependent on Kirby Grindalythe, a possession of Kirkham priory: in the 1160s Richard Wyvill granted the chapel to the canons of Kirkham priory and claimed them all his rights to the advowson of the chapel.

Features

Interior Features

Interior Decoration

Miscellaneous

Corbels reset in chamber above organ
The room in which the corbels are located is reached by a Victorian spiral stair and is filled by the organ except for a narrow passage on its W wall that leads directly onto the top of the rood screen. Consequently, it is only possible to see a total of ten or eleven corbels on the W, N and E walls, but none of them is adequately visible due to the steepness of the angle. There may be more on the E wall but hidden by parts of the organ.

**Corbels on E wall**

On the E wall, three or four corbels could be seen from a normal angle, but it was not possible to light them adequately:

E1: corbel featuring two men's heads looking in opposite directions. The heads are flat and worn; it is possible that they are both grinning. Below both heads there is a tiny body with short tunic and legs, or another motif not quite legible in these conditions;

E2: corbel with two heads looking diagonally out; these large heads have small bodies and legs, an unusual feature. Again, the parts below the heads are unresolved, because unusual;

E3: this very worn corbel depicts an animal head; there are pointed ears and perhaps the tongue is hanging out of the mouth;

E4: corbel of undefined shape.

**Corbels on W wall**

These corbels could only be seen from a steep angle below:

W1: a mask with its tongue hanging out;

W2: a bearded man's head looking solemnly forwards; the piece is finely carved but broken at the top R corner;

W3: possibly set upside down and depicting a man's head looking sideways;

W4: a mask with open mouth;

W5: this corbel is on the angle as the wall turns over the doorway to the stairs. It perhaps depicts a seated figure, holding a crosier on the R.

**Corbels on NW wall over entrance**

W6: a man's head, not so well carved as W2;

W7: a man's head with wide-open mouth and the tongue hanging out.

**Fragment**

The piece is reset in the R jamb of the tower arch, on the nave side of the screen that closes off the base of the tower. The reset fragment was perhaps part of an impost or stringcourse. It features two patterns, one consisting of a row of diamonds edged with a rounded moulding, and another which seems to be a row of chip-carved irregular triangles.

**Dimensions**

| Height (approximately) | 0.18m |
The reset fragment in the tower arch can be possibly compared with the impost of the chancel arch at North Dalton, which is carved on both upright and chamfer. Also, the piece may be a fragment of a stringcourse.

The two heads on corbel E1 seem to have broad grins, so their long watching is over and they see their Redeemer coming. Below the heads one would expect small bodies and legs, but this is not certain, as one head on corbel E1 appears to have a wide upper lip across the full width of the corbel, with part at least of a row of even teeth. The carving below may represent tiny human heads, probably symbolising people resurrecting out the big mouth (Death?). This mouth can be compared with that on the bronze door-pull at Novgorod, which has several heads in it, or at Adel, which has only one. The corbel E1 can be also compared with the corbel CN8 at Kirkburn. The corbel E2 has the two human heads looking in opposite directions: this is a common motif, but below both heads there is the suggestion of a pair of legs which are placed like the forelegs of a sitting cat, which there might be the haunch of the animal too. On the left, the chest has a star roundel. Probably his is to show the two watchers being transformed at the Second Coming and receiving their new resurrection bodies, as Christ-like lions. This can be compared with the Christ-centaur at Dijon (Wood (2009), 226-7). Another comparison can be established with the corbels at Kilham. It should be noted that one possible context for these corbels is the Second Coming (Wood (2003), 14-25): that event is preceded by patient watching and followed by Judgment, with Heaven for those who have been faithful.

Bibliography


The church from SW
Sledmere Old Church, N side, before 1897-8. Thelwell Collection (2/9), Bridlington Local Studies Library.
Sledmere church, S side, 1758. Thelwell Collection (7/53), Bridlington Local Studies Library.

**Location**

**Site Location**

Sledmere
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