

A Medieval Wooden Coffin Lid from Guestwick

by Steven J. Ashley and Andrew Rogerson

While surveying St. Peter's church, Guestwick in July 1983 the authors noted a wooden coffin lid inverted and re-used to form part of the lintel of the doorway connecting the eleventh-century tower to the fourteenth-century north aisle. This doorway, which is cut through the rubble blocking of the arch originally connecting the tower to the eleventh-century nave, is framed within a pointed arch to the west, i.e. to the aisle, while to the east its flat top consists of two slabs of oak, the eastern of which is plain and the western decorated in low relief.

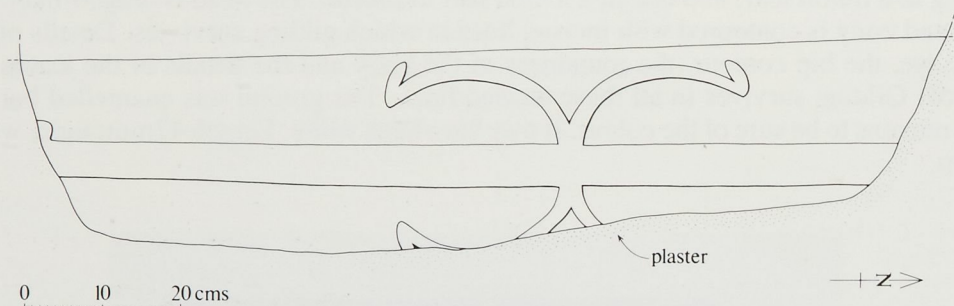


Fig. 1
The wooden coffin lid.

This slab is min. 1.21m long, min. 50mm thick, and the width, if the decoration is symmetrically placed, tapers from 0.33m at the north to 0.25m to the south. The relief decoration, somewhat eroded, stands a maximum of 6mm proud from the otherwise level surface. At the narrow end, part of a motif, perhaps a step but more likely floral (c.f. Butler 1957, 91, fig 1, No. 4) is visible at the base of a broad central ridge. Towards the middle curved decoration springs from either side of the ridge.

Although the head is not visible, it is clear that this slab is a wooden copy of a type of coffin lid common in limestone and produced by the Barnack school of carving in the 12th and 13th centuries (Butler 1964). The ribbon or 'double omega' motif in the centre is an ornament 'peculiar to the Barnack tradition' (Butler 1964, 121-2), and the form of the Guestwick example (best paralalled in Butler 1957, 93, fig 2, No. 4) suggests a date in the first quarter of the 13th century. It is reasonable to assume that either the popularity in earlier medieval Norfolk of limestone coffins and lids was not always matched by their availability, or that the cost of such an import was too great for this particular Guestwick inhabitant, who nevertheless appreciated East Midland fashion.

The above-ground survival of what may have been a common object is remarkable, and is perhaps explained by the discovery of the lid during the great rebuilding of the church in the fourteenth century. Perhaps also at this time, a probably twelfth-century limestone coffin lid was placed at the west end of the nave. This slab is flat-topped with a cross at the head formed by four circles (cf. Butler 1964, 115, fig. 1F), a tapering central ridge and a triple-stepped base. We are grateful to Lawrence Butler for his advice in the production of this note.

Butler, L.A.S., 1957 'Medieval Gravestones of Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough', *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.* 50, 89-100

Butler, L.A.S., 1964 'Minor medieval monumental sculpture in the East Midlands', *Archaeol. J.* 121, 111-153

A mirror-case from Bradwell

by Sue Margeson

A hinged copper alloy mirror-case has recently been found at Bradwell by Mr. J.G. Howell and brought to Norwich Castle Museum for recording. A mirror-case of similar form has just been published in the *Antiquaries Journal*, with a distribution list of 20 others found in England and Scotland (Bayley *et al* 1984). The Bradwell example is an important addition to the corpus as it is virtually complete.

Description

The mirror consists of a pair of identical shallow circular cases of cast copper alloy, hinged on one side (by means of a rivet passing through the projecting loops, now

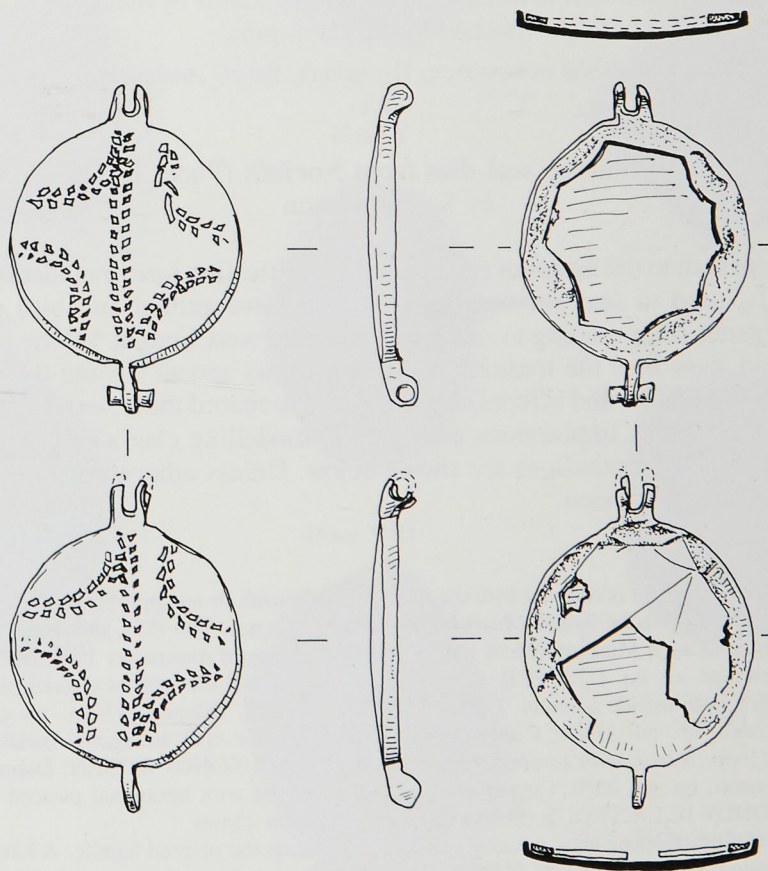


Fig. 2
A mirror-case from Bradwell.