



11.

The Doom

Date: late 15th century

A HISTORY OF ST ANDREW'S IN 100 OBJECTS

One of our greatest treasures is the doom painting on the chancel arch. These scenes were exceedingly common in the middle ages but not many have survived, and fewer with such detail as ours. It was painted around the giant rood (or cross) that was the focal point in every parish church before the Reformation (after which not one survived in England—but the 'shadow' of the top of ours remains). In the top panel—now limewashed—was Christ in majesty (visible still in the early 19th century); beneath him are the saved and the damned. A faded St Peter welcomes the just into the celestial city on our left, whilst on our right a red flat-footed devil tugs one unfortunate soul towards his destiny, whilst below a yellow devil is transporting his victim piggy-back. There are no favours to the powers-that-be here: kings, popes and monks are amongst the condemned. The serious—indeed grim—message is tempered, though, by a good deal of humour in the devilish depictions, whilst the modest, non-presumptuous demeanours of those who are saved is touching. There is not a hint of either sadism or triumphalism here.

During the 16th century Reformation this whole scene was painted over and the old Catholic image-based faith was superseded by an emphasis on the word. Beneath the figure of Mary (kneeling to the left of the rood) is a fragment of the Protestant decoration, probably the ten commandments. The Tudor rose on the bottom left and the Stuart thistle on the right were part of a later scheme that also included the royal coat of arms of James II (1685-88).