



3.

Coffin lid

Date: 13th century

A HISTORY OF ST ANDREW'S IN 100 OBJECTS

In the churchyard are a number of 13th century stone coffin lids, amongst the oldest of the objects we will be looking at. They are each decorated with a Christian symbol: the floriated cross ('floriated' meaning 'decorated with flowers', resurrection life springing out of the dark place of death). The coffins would, of course, have been buried: stone memorials in churchyards were not common before the 18th century. It seems that the coffins were dug up during the Reformation. The 18th century antiquary William Cole visited Chesterton and found several of these coffin lids used as capstones in the churchyard wall. He commented: 'It is shocking to think how far these depredations [the stripping of parish churches] were carried, for not content with what they could find above ground, they dug open vaults and graves in search for imaginary treasure, tossed the bones out of stone coffins and made use of them for hog troughs, while the tops went to the covering of some old wall, of which many a one about this city doth yet bear testimony'. Perhaps chastened by this, the lids were later moved and laid in the churchyard in the area north of the church.