

This article was downloaded by: [University of Exeter]

On: 14 July 2015, At: 19:25

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



## Archaeological Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raij20>

### Notes on a Sculptured Tympanum at Kingswinford Church, Staffordshire, and Other Early Representations in England of St. Michael the Archangel

Charles E. Keyser M.A., F.S.A.

Published online: 17 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: Charles E. Keyser M.A., F.S.A. (1905) Notes on a Sculptured Tympanum at Kingswinford Church, Staffordshire, and Other Early Representations in England of St. Michael the Archangel, *Archaeological Journal*, 62:1, 137-146, DOI:

[10.1080/00665983.1905.10852993](https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1905.10852993)

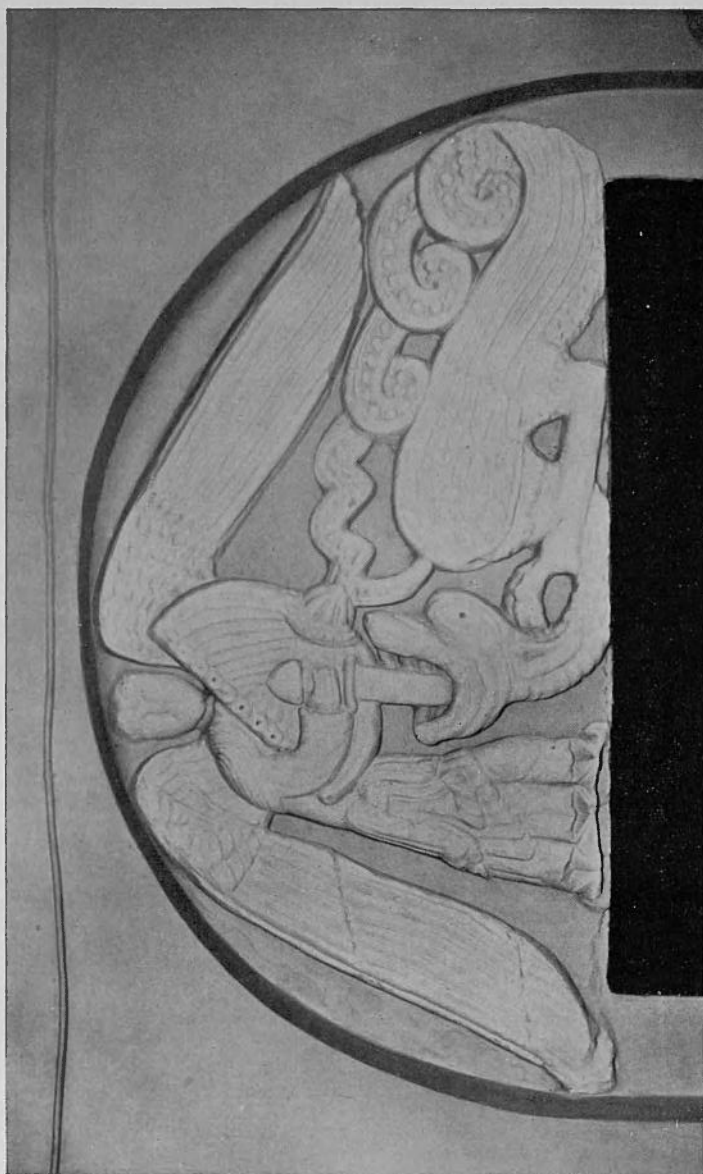
To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.1905.10852993>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

*To face page 137.*



THE TYMPANUM—KINGSWINFORD CHURCH.

NOTES ON A SCULPTURED TYMPANUM AT KINGSWIN-  
FORD CHURCH, STAFFORDSHIRE, AND OTHER EARLY  
REPRESENTATIONS IN ENGLAND OF ST. MICHAEL  
THE ARCHANGEL.

By CHARLES E. KEYSER, M.A., F.S.A.

Kingswinford, or more correctly King's Swinford, is a large and important parish in the south-west corner of the county of Stafford, on the borders of Worcestershire, about three miles from Stourbridge. The church stands just off the high road from that town to Wolverhampton. It is dedicated to St. Mary, and consists of a west tower, etc., but has been so thoroughly reconstructed and renovated that it possesses little now of antiquarian interest. The Court House Inn, and a fine old black and white house with date 1596, both near the Church, remain as relics of the importance of the parish in old times, and the base of the churchyard cross is still *in situ* on the south side of the sacred edifice.

Within the Church, the only noticeable features besides the special subject of this article, are the font with some ornamental carving on the stem and alternate faces of the bowl, and a date 1662 inscribed on it, a very fine old timber chest, with the initials FR, two heads and a spread eagle within the panels, and male and female figures on the divisions, probably of the Jacobean period, and a mural tablet to George and Thomas Corben with date 1637.

The sculptured tympanum now occupies the space over an interior doorway at the west end of the south aisle, facing the staircase to the gallery. It is stated to have been here in 1808 and originally to have occupied the space over the south doorway, as the following paragraph in Shaw's *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* no doubt refers to it; "Over the principal south door through the porch is some curious rude sculpture," Vol. II, p. 231. It has unfortunately been liberally embellished with whitewash, but otherwise is in excellent preservation. It is semi-circular, and of large dimensions, being five feet eight inches in length at

the bottom by two feet ten inches in height at the broadest part. A small portion of the lower side seems to have been shaved off. The sculpture presents us with the familiar subject of the contest between St. Michael and Satan, in the usual representation of an archangel contending with a large winged dragon. It differs slightly from all other examples of this subject, as will shortly be pointed out. It is at the same time one of the most interesting and vigorous carvings illustrating this great traditional event, and it is unfortunate that it only came under the notice of the writer last spring, and just too late to be included in his work on the sculptured Norman tympana and lintels,<sup>1</sup> which had then just been published, and which is otherwise a fairly complete treatise on this special branch of architectural lore.

As we face the tympanum, the figure of St. Michael occupies the space on the left side of the stone. He is stooping forward sideways, but with the head turned round so as to show the full face. He is bareheaded as in all the other early representations of this subject, has curly hair and very large outspread wings, the right behind his back so as to fill up the space on this side, the left extended in front of him, reaching nearly to the other extremity, and almost touching the twisted tail of the dragon writhing beneath. He is very richly vested, and has a sleeve down to the wrist of the right arm, which alone is shown. His left side is concealed by a large umbrella-shaped shield with a boss surrounded by a beaded circle at the centre, and an outer border of flat circular beads or pellets. This is held above the head of the dragon. St. Michael holds in his right hand a sword, which he is pressing into the open jaws of the dragon, about half the blade having been driven home. This is the only instance where the subject is thus portrayed. In all the other examples where St. Michael holds a sword, he is in the act of striking, but has not, as here, actually delivered the stroke. The dragon is very large and fills up the whole of the space beneath the wing and to the right of the saint. It has a large head with oval

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana and Lintels with Figure or Symbolical sculpture, still, or till recently, existing in the Churches of Great Britain*, by Charles E. Keyser, M.A., F.S.A.

eye and small pierced hole to delineate the pupil, long neck, scaly body, feathered wing similar to that of St. Michael, long leg and claw pressed against the back of its neck, and long beaded tail carried in several coils above its back. The head is raised straight up towards the saint, and is receiving the thrust of the sword in the centre of its open jaws, displaying a terrible double row of fangs. The whole composition is spirited, and a good specimen of early sculpture. It is difficult to assign an exact date to this particular example. As is pointed out in the work on sculptured Norman tympana, etc., already referred to, some of the tympana are of the pre-Norman period, but the great majority belong to the twelfth century, many of them being quite late in the Norman period. The subject of St. Michael seems to have been a popular one in early times, and two examples, viz., at St. Bees and Ipswich, are apparently of pre-Norman date, and as the Kingswinford sculpture in some respects corresponds with that at Ipswich, it may also belong to an early period.

The subject of St. Michael is treated in various ways in sculpture and painting up to the end of the twelfth century. We find him represented :

- (1) as an angel or archangel,
- (2) bearing a soul to heaven,
- (3) weighing souls,
- (4) contending with the devil.

(1) Under the first heading we note on the tympanum above the north doorway at Halford Church, Warwickshire,<sup>1</sup> a three-quarter length figure of an angel seated bareheaded, with small outspread wings and hands raised and holding a scroll, on which an inscription was in all probability formerly painted. It would not be safe to assume that this was intended for St. Michael, were it not for the fact that a somewhat similar example exists at Pennington, in Lancashire.<sup>2</sup> This tympanum, no doubt,

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana, etc.*, pp. lxix and 17, Fig. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana, etc.*, pp. lxix and 35, Fig. 137.

*Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiq. and Archaeol. Soc. Trans. New Series*, III, 373.

*Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, Vol. VIII, p. 200.

In this last account a different translation of the inscription is given, but still it can confidently be asserted that the figure of the Archangel is intended for St. Michael.

originally belonged to the Parish Church, but is now inserted over the entrance to a farmhouse at Loppergarth in this parish. It exhibits a half-length figure with large outspread wings and both hands raised in attitude of benediction. The Saint has a cruciform nimbus, a mark of distinction very rarely applied to any one except the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. An inscription in Runic characters round the semicircular portion is said to record the fact of the foundation of the Church by one Gamel in the middle of the twelfth century, and its dedication to St. Michael the archangel. It is a fair presumption that here we have the Patron Saint, distinguished by the cruciform nimbus, instead of a cross on the forehead as in later times, and bestowing his blessing on the Church which had been dedicated in his honour. At Hawksworth Church, Nottinghamshire, on a tympanum now let into the south wall of the tower,<sup>1</sup> in a medallion above the cross, which forms the central figure, is an archangel with outspread wings and hands, which may also be intended for this saint.

(2) The representations of St. Michael as the bearer of souls are much rarer in England during the Norman period. Among the series of early sculptures on the west front of Lincoln Cathedral is one which shows two angels ministering to a prostrate form on the upper part, while on the lower are the lost souls being hurled into the jaws of hell.<sup>2</sup> On a beautifully carved sepulchral monument at Ely Cathedral,<sup>3</sup> is a representation of an angel richly vested holding in a napkin a small nude figure. An invocation above to St. Michael shows that this is intended to portray the archangel carrying up a soul to heaven. On the tympana at Hallaton and Moreton Valence which will shortly be described, St. Michael appears to be specially protecting some human souls, while engaged in the contest with the evil one.

(3) The subject of St. Michael weighing souls does not appear in Great Britain before the late Norman period, nor then, as far as the writer knows, in sculpture. It

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana, etc.*, pp. liii and 19, Fig. 94.

*Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, Vol. IX, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Journ.* XXV, p. 12, Fig. 10.

*Associated Architect. Soc. Reports*, VIII, p. 287, Fig. 10.

<sup>3</sup> J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 272, Fig. 95.



seems to have been often introduced in subjects of the Doom abroad, as, for instance, on the western façade of St. Trophime at Arles, but did not become a popular subject in England till a later period. There is an example in painting within the splay of a window on the north side of the nave of Kempley Church, Gloucestershire.<sup>1</sup> Here the Virgin interceding on the soul's behalf is also introduced, a very early instance of what afterwards became a fairly common representation. In the subject of the Doom painted over the chancel arch at Patcham Church, Sussex,<sup>2</sup> are several angels receiving the souls of the saved. One on the right may be St. Michael weighing the souls, though the balances and this part of the picture have been destroyed. This subject is depicted in the well-known mural painting of the Doom on the west wall of Chaldon Church, Surrey,<sup>3</sup> which belongs to quite the end of the twelfth century.

(4) St. Michael contending with the devil. This is by far the commonest form in which St. Michael is represented in early art, and we find him armed for the contest :

- (a) As at Kingswinford, with a sword.
- (b) With a spear or dart.
- (c) With a cross.

The instances where he is armed with a sword seem to be the earliest representations of this subject, and, besides the one at Kingswinford, which may, as has been stated, be very early, two at least are probably of pre-Norman date. At St. Bees in Cumberland is the lintel of a former doorway,<sup>4</sup> in the centre of which is a large dragon with scaly neck, long twisted tail, and head

<sup>1</sup> *List of Buildings having Mural Decorations*, etc. (South Kensington Museum, 1883) pp. xli and 147.

<sup>2</sup> *List of Buildings*, etc., p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *List of Buildings*, etc., pp. xli and 60.  
N.B. A large number of references to other authorities are given in the List.

<sup>4</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxx and 40, Fig. 138.

*Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiq. and Archaeol. Soc. Trans.*, II, 27.

Rev. W. S. Calverley, *Early Sculptured Crosses*, etc., in the *Diocese of Carlisle*, p. 259.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 274.

*Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, VI, 130.

*British Archaeol. Assoc. Journ.*, VI, New Series, p. 267.

*Victorian History of the County of Cumberland*, I, 275.



with open jaws turned back towards a small figure in the background, with uplifted sword and shield held against the mouth of the dragon. One end of the stone is ornamented with knotted work of early character. Another early example is that on a stone now let into the interior north wall of St. Nicholas' Church, Ipswich.<sup>1</sup> Here we see St. Michael on the left side, vested as at Kingswinford, with small wings spread out above him, sword held behind his back in the right hand ready for the thrust, and kite-shaped shield in the left hand between his body and the dragon, a terrible monster with large head, triple forked tongue and long claws pressed against the shield. It has small wings and is reared up on its tail, which has many coils, in the act of hurling itself upon its saintly opponent. The whole subject is full of animation and an excellent specimen of early sculpture. On the space on the lower part of the stone, below the body of the dragon, is an explanatory inscription in capital letters :

HER SCE  
MIHAEL FEHTIHD  
DANE DRACA.

(Here St. Michael fighteth the dragon.)

A somewhat more elaborate example, but very similar in the treatment of the principal figures, is that on the tympanum over the north doorway of Hoveringham Church, Nottinghamshire.<sup>2</sup> Here again on the left (east) side is St. Michael with outspread wings, richly vested and with nimbus, holding a heater-shaped shield in his left hand, whilst with the right he brandishes the sword behind his back in the act of delivering the stroke or thrust against the dragon, which is advancing against him. This fearful looking creature has a large head with triple forked and barbed tongue, and claws similar to the monster at Ipswich pressed against the shield,

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. xxviii, lxx and 22, Fig. 138.

*British Archaeol. Assoc. Journ.*, I, 146.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 273, Fig. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *List of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxx. and 21, and Fig. 139.

*Associated Architect. Soc. Reports*, X, 24.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 163, Fig. 43.

Kelly's *Postal Directory for Nottinghamshire*.

whilst its winged body terminates in a long tail with many coils filling up the western portion. A smaller dragon intertwined with the larger one appears above with its head just above the shield of the archangel. Behind him is introduced the Agnus Dei with cross supported on the right fore-foot, and at the apex of the tympanum, just above the wing of the saint, the hand of God issuing from a cloud, no doubt intended to typify the divine aid given to the heavenly champion in his contest with the powers of darkness. As adjuncts to the main subject two intertwined serpents and a female dragon or sphinx are introduced on the lintel, and at the lower termination of the outer unrecessed portion of the tympanum, on the east a bishop holding a pastoral staff and giving the benediction, on the west St. Peter holding a large key in the right, and a pastoral staff in the left hand. The carving and treatment is vigorous and of considerable merit.

Within the south transept of Southwell Minster, Nottinghamshire, an irregular shaped tympanum with similar carving has been preserved.<sup>1</sup> Here we find St. Michael nimbed and vested as in the previous examples, with outspread wings, sword grasped in the right hand behind his back, and small circular shield of the Kingswinford type held against the open jaws of the dragon, which, with long and slender winged body and many coiled tail, is advancing against him. Behind him is David killing the lion, in the act of wrenching its jaws apart, a lamb being introduced above. The object of placing these two subjects together no doubt was to demonstrate the strength accorded to those who put their trust in the almighty power of God.

On the lintel, or oblong tympanum, over the south doorway at Harnhill Church, Gloucestershire, is another somewhat similar sculpture.<sup>2</sup> Here St. Michael is, as usual, on the left with short tunic coming just below the knees, and long close-fitting sleeves, sword raised

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxxi and 44, Vig. 142.

Carter, *Ancient Sculpture and Painting*, II, 38.

*Associated Architect. Soc. Reports*, X, 44.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 273.

G. M. Livett, *A Guide to Southwell Minster*, p. 128.

- *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., Fig. 139A.

behind his back in the act of striking, and small oval-shaped shield. The dragon is facing him in a recumbent position, with large head and extended tongue against the shield, one claw raised, one wing shown on the back, and long twisted tail. A cable band is carved below, perhaps to signify the perpetual warfare which is ever being waged between the forces of good and evil. The sculpture is remarkably deep and well preserved, though a plentiful coating of whitewash, green with damp, somewhat mars its effect.

At Long Marton Church, Westmoreland, on the tympanum over the south doorway,<sup>1</sup> is a very singular exemplification of this same subject. On the right hand side is a large dragon with protruding tongue and twisted tail. Above it is a kite-shaped shield with a cross on it, and a pair of wings and sword above, and on the side a quatrefoil, perhaps intended for a double "M" as the initial of Michael. To the left is represented a large animal with the body of a lamb, and long winged neck and head of a bird, which as in the instance at Ault Hucknall, Derbyshire, may be presumed to be meant for the Agnus Dei. There can be little doubt that the contest between St. Michael and Satan is here delineated.

(B) St. Michael armed with a spear instead of a sword is twice represented on the Norman tympana. At Hallaton Church, Leicestershire, the tympanum is preserved in the side wall of the north porch.<sup>2</sup> Here in the centre is a vigorous figure of St. Michael with outspread wings trampling on the prostrate serpent, while with his right hand he grasps a long spear, which he has pressed into its throat. With his left hand he holds a large circular shield similar to that at Kingswinford, and in a fold in his sleeve he holds three small human

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxxii and 28, Fig. 143.

*Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiq. and Archaeol. Soc. Trans.*, V, 174.

Rev. W. Calverley, *Early Sculptured Crosses*, etc., in the Diocese of Carlisle, p. 229.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxxi and 18, and Fig. 141.

Nicholls' *History of Leicestershire*, Vol. II, Pl. CIII, p. 603.

J. H. Hill, *History of Langton*, etc., illustration to face p. 273.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 273.

M. H. Bloxam, *Principles of Gothic Ecclesiastical Architecture*. Eleventh Edition, i, 132.

figures, while three more are rising up behind the dragon, probably intended for souls rescued from the regions of hell.

The other example is at Moreton Valence Church, Gloucestershire, over the north doorway, and is in excellent preservation.<sup>1</sup> Here St. Michael has the nimbus, and outspread wings, flowing robe carried down to his feet, long spear in his right hand pressed into the open jaws of the dragon, and a large circular shield in his left hand. The dragon seems to be endeavouring to escape to a wood, represented by foliage on the right, but has its head turned back towards the archangel, behind whom are several figures, probably intended for rescued souls.

In a medallion on the very fine Norman south doorway at Riccall Church, Yorkshire,<sup>2</sup> we find this subject similarly treated. Here St. Michael has pinned down his opponent with his spear, while he holds a book in his left hand, above which is a tau cross. The dragon has a beaded body. On a sculptured stone dug up in the churchyard at Seaford, Sussex, and now preserved within the church, is another early representation of this subject, described as a "rude but spirited carving."<sup>3</sup> In this example St. Michael is thrusting a dart into the open jaws of the dragon, whose head and neck only are displayed.

(C) St. Michael armed with the Cross, which in each case he is pressing into the mouth of the dragon, is carved within a medallion on the arch of the north porch at Barton-le-Street Church, Yorkshire, and on a sculpture let in over the west doorway of Garton on the Wolds Church in the same county. Within the splay

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxxi and 30, Fig. 140.

Lysons' *Antiquities of Gloucestershire*, Pl. XXXVI.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, pp. 269, 273.

Kelly's *Directory for Gloucestershire*.

<sup>2</sup> *Reliquary*. New Series, II, 101.

*Yorkshire Archaeol. Journ.* XII, 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Sussex Archaeol. Coll.*, VII, 116.

*A list of Norman Tympana*, etc., pp. lxxii and 12, Fig. 40.

Lyson's *Magna Britannia*, *Buckinghamshire*, p. 486.

*Archaeologia*, X, 167.

*Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Archaeol. Journ.*, VI, 77.

*Records of Buckinghamshire*, VIII, 225.

Lipscomb, *Hist. of the County of Buckingham*, Vol. II, p. 146.

Sheehan, *Hist. of Buckinghamshire*, p. 117.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, pp. 273, 285.

*British Archaeol. Assoc. Journ.*, New Series, VI, 242.

of the east window of Copford Church, Essex, was discovered a portion of a painting of this subject similarly treated, forming part of the very early and interesting series brought to light some few years ago.

On the lintel of the well-known south doorway at Dinton Church, Buckinghamshire,<sup>1</sup> is portrayed a fearful looking dragon with large protruding tongue and terrible fangs advancing from the left (west) side towards a small winged figure on the east, who is holding in both hands a small cross, the head towards the open jaws of the dragon—no doubt another exemplification of this subject.

Although it will not be safe to assert that the examples cited are probably all that remain in England during the Norman and earlier period, still it is hoped that the list is a fairly comprehensive one, and demonstrates the variety of the treatment which the artists of these early times applied to the representation of the great archangel, the prince of the heavenly host.

In the work by Mr. J. Romilly Allen on *Early Christian Symbolism*, the opinion is expressed on page 274, that some of the examples, where a figure on foot, but not winged, is fighting with the dragon—for instance that on the lintel of Ault Hucknall Church, Derbyshire—are intended to represent St. Michael,<sup>1</sup> and not St. George; but although it is not possible to speak positively upon this, yet it seems the most reasonable supposition that a clear distinction should be observed between these two subjects, both of which were popular in the twelfth and succeeding centuries, and that that distinction should be emphasised, not by the one being on foot and the other on horseback, but by St. Michael being always portrayed, as one would naturally expect, with wings, as a necessary appendage to the mighty leader of the host of angels, whose special function it is to carry out the commands of their Divine Master with the utmost zeal and celerity.

<sup>1</sup> *A list of Norman Tympana, etc.*, pp. lxxvii and 21, Fig. 145.  
*Assoc. Architect. Soc. Reports*, XII, 162.

J. C. Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, I, 242.  
*Archaeologia*, XLVII, 167.

J. Romilly Allen, *Early Christian Symbolism*, Fig. 137, pp. 274, 366.  
*Gentleman's Magazine*, 1793, Part I, p. 449.  
*British Archaeol. Assoc. Journ.*, New Series, VI, 250, 267.