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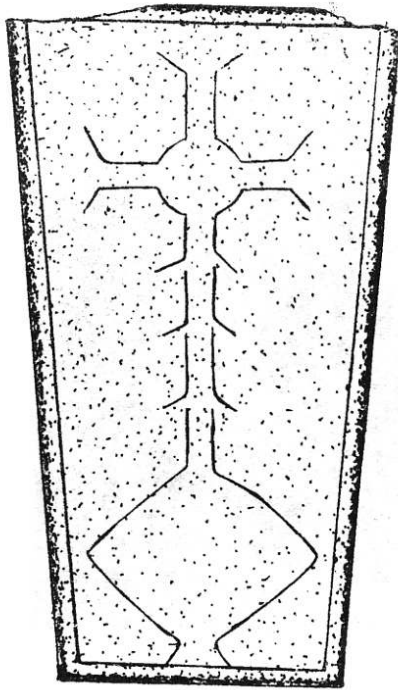
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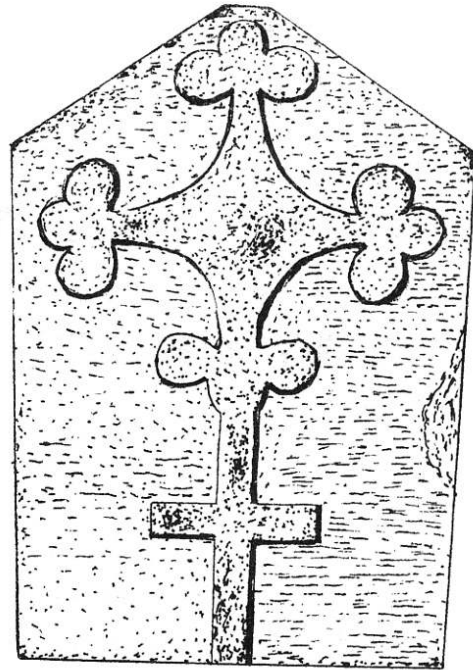


Journal of Yeovil Archaeological and Local History Society



BCG 94

B



BCG 94

A

Plate 21 MEDIAEVAL GRAVE SLABS AT CHURCH KNOWLE, DORSET

The two contrasting designs shown in Pl. 21 are to be found at Church Knowle, Dorset. That on the right (A) stands on the south window sill of the south transept of the parish church (St Peter) and is carved in low relief on a slab of Purbeck marble. It is incomplete, the lower part having been cut away and lost. Its tapering sides show that it was originally coffin-shaped and is quite likely to have formed the lid of a coffin. The type of cross (botonee with trefoil terminals) is very common on memorials of this material, mostly dating from the 13th century. The unusual features are the sloping top corners and the lack of a chamfered border. It is also curious that the background shows pronounced lateral dressing marks. Purbeck marble was attractive as a decorative stone because it would take a polish and this was usually done. The second slab (B) is located in the churchyard, set into the gate post of the eastern entrance. It is coffin-shaped, diminutive and complete, with a flush-beaded edge and a lightly incised, highly individual design. This is not of Purbeck marble and may have been produced from a local limestone but the adherent lichen makes identification of the stone difficult. No close parallels have yet been found for the style of the cross head, shaft decoration or base but the general form again suggests a date in the 13th century. Diminutive monuments of this type were either used for child burials or for secondary burials of organs, such as the heart or bowels, when the main burial was elsewhere. The RCHM Dorset Vol.II, Pt 1 (1970) p.43 records the grave slab on the window sill but makes no mention of the second slab. An article in the DNHAS Proceedings (Vol.XLVIII, 1927, pp.1-8) by Dru Drury describes the church and its monuments. It illustrates a third memorial which shares the window sill with B but makes no mention of the two memorials described here. This suggests that they have both been discovered since 1927.

A project is about to be launched by the Church Monuments Society to draw up a list of all the Purbeck marble coffin lids which remain. The list for Dorset is well advanced but we would welcome information about examples which Society members may chance across on their travels. Good Hunting!

BRIAN & MOIRA GITTS