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A new side to treasure

SOUTHWELL Minster's well-travelled tympanum stone is now back in its resting place after a year's absence.

The tympanum, a stone door-lintel, was taken from its position above a door in the north transept of the minster on November 7, 1983, and taken to London for a prestigious exhibition. It returned in July and was re-erected last week.

The Arts Council asked the minster authorities in the middle of last year if it could borrow the lintel for an exhibition of Romanesque art at the Hayward Gallery, London.

Originally the Arts Council intended to pay for the stone to be removed, repaired and restored, and then put back, but the whole idea was then almost abandoned because of the likely cost.

The minster came to the rescue, having become enthusiastic about the lintel going to London, and reached a compromise.

They agreed to pay for the removal and replacement of the lintel, at a cost of about £500, and the Arts Council paid for the repair and renovation of the stone for the exhibition.

Finest

The Provost of Southwell, the Very Rev Murray Irvine, said at the time: "It's a once-in-1,000-years opportunity to have the stone repaired, so we're using some spare appeal money."

The compromise suited the Arts Council, which was particularly anxious to

show the stone, one of the finest examples of its kind in the country.

Various experts, including one from the Victoria and Albert Museum, studied the stone in the minster and the main concern was whether or not it could be successfully removed.

Archaeologists, stonemasons, an architect and an expert in historical church sculptures agreed that it could be moved, not in one piece, but in three.

The minster's own consultant architect supervised the removal of the stone, which is believed to date back to about 1050. It is thought that it was in the Saxon building that stood on the site before the Normans began building the minster in 1107.

As stonemasons Mr Tom Anderson and Mr Peter Martin gradually removed the stone, the considerable

weight it carried was propped up by supports inserted in its place.

A surprise discovery when the stone was removed was a carving on the reverse side, which had been hidden since the lintel was placed in position 850 years earlier.

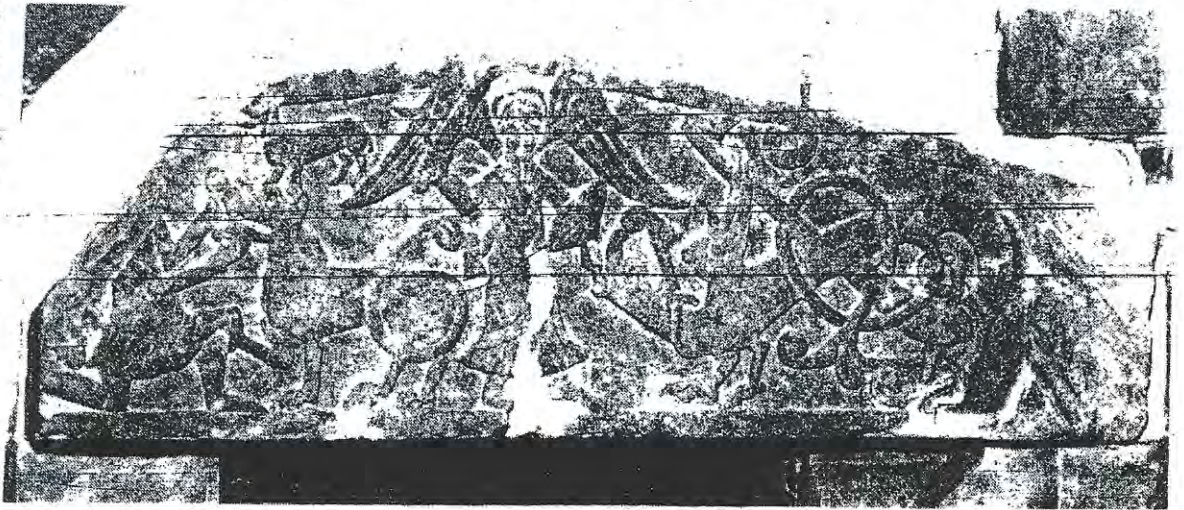
Once the three sections of stone were safely removed, they were put into the care of conservateur Mr Paul Harrison of Little Oakley, Northamptonshire, for restoration and repair.

Dragon

They were in position in the Hayward Gallery for the opening of the exhibition in March.

In June, more than 40 Southwell parishioners visited the gallery to see the stone in its exhibition setting.

When the exhibition ended in July, the stone was taken back to the minster.



THE CARVINGS on Southwell Minster's tympanum can be seen clearly in this picture, showing the stone restored to its place over a door in the north transept. On the left is David rescuing a lamb from the mouth of a lion and on the right St Michael killing a dragon.

where it was left on the floor of one of the side aisles awaiting a mounting that would allow both its carved sides to be seen.

The stone's original resting place was a relatively dark corner of the minster, so after the delicate three-day operation of replacing it, there are plans to have it illuminated to show each side of the stone to the best advantage.

The two carved scenes depict what are thought to be St Michael slaying a dragon and David rescuing a lamb from the mouth of a lion.

Professor George Zarnecki, chairman of the working party that prepared the London exhibition, described the carvings as "a mixture of Christian motifs influenced by strong Scandinavian pagan sculptures."

The only drawback to the removal of the lintel was that it was absent from the minster during the diocesan centenary celebrations and for the Maundy visit by the Queen.

But the provost hopes that the stone's brief visit to London may prompt people to visit the minster and see it in its proper surroundings.