

EXTRACT: PERRI MACKENZIE

Lying at what she assumes are the limits of the estate is a small church and graveyard, though it seems too far away from any village to maintain a meaningful congregation. Yet the interior is well kept, the stone floors clean and all the wood well polished. Instinctively she searches for wall paintings; misericords amongst the choir. In vain. There are no bosses, no angels in formation across the ceiling like at Blythburgh, the high walls over the front and altar are void of images and some of the plaster is blown. There are no tombs to any ancient crusaders. There are names plaqued on the wall and a naval ensign over the name of a dead sailor. Otherwise nothing much to speak of. Until she comes to leave.

It is a carved wooden door, imposing, about two metres by one and a half metres. A decorative scrolled and arched frame houses two human-scale figures carved in relief: two men engaged in an altercation. Their torsos face frontally yet their limbs, tilted hips, and glances direct us elsewhere. They are interlocked by a hand that grabs aggressively versus another hand that pushes away defensively.

The two men stand at different heights on a rough rocky ground. The figure carved to the left is a bearded man with a lined face, furrowed brows, and a frown. Long curls are secured with a solid-looking woven hat studded by a large jewel or emblem. He seems older, perhaps more powerful. He wears a pleated and hemmed chemise locked in place by a riveted chest plate. Finely-textured accessories are strung over his shoulder and around his waist – an important-looking chain, a corded tasselled belt with a large furry purse. One well-draped arm brandishes a big thick stick over his head.

The object of the older man's ire appears to be the figure to the left: a beardless man with a panicked expression contorting his smooth, unlined skin. He is clothed in an open chemise with a padded, voluminous appearance. A small money-purse dangles from his waist. The young man's wavy locks are held in place by a knotted

length of fabric wound around the head, culminating in a jovial knot at the top. The structural complexity of this head-wrap forms a contrast to the looser motions of this figure: his mouth gaping in distress, his costume in disarray.

A sword hangs from the young man's belt, uselessly out of reach. Instead of grabbing it, his hands form protective gestures against his incensed assailant, who grabs the lapel of his chemise, seeming to pull it away. No metal breast-plate secures the drapes of the young man's costume, which bulges oddly at the side.

A clue to the drama lies between the young man's shins. Suspended there, in mid-air, floats a disc within a disc – a plate, falling in a linear fashion. Similar discs peek out of the young man's open chemise: two half-circles. Jostled out of the bulging safety of his shirt, they are falling too. Defensively, the young man is pulling his shirt back over the stolen goods he had stuffed in there. Now the older man's violent action – of grabbing the young man's lapel whilst wielding a stick – reads as a desire to beat the ceramics out of him.

The scene is carved in medium-to-high relief. The figures are clustered tightly into the carved arch frame: the negative space of the relief has been calculated carefully. The wood is oak, which gives a warm tone with some cooler inflections, indicating perhaps the effects of a certain carving process, or even where the wood has been rubbed over the years. Grey daylight picks out the highlights of the scene: the juicy folds of the chemise; the grabbing and deflecting gestures; the distressed expression of the young man with his crying open mouth.