Chest

Place of origin: Great Britain (made)
Date: 1200-1300 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: Oak, carved
Museum number: W.30-1926
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

Chests were the earliest form of furniture used for storage and could easily be carried from place to place. This one is smaller than most and easily transportable. Chests were used for storing clothes, linen, documents or money and often had locks for security, as in this case. They were used in churches, as well as in houses, to store valuables. This chest is said to have come from a church in Hampshire. The decoration is contained entirely in the chip-carved roundels on the front. Other chests with similar chip-carving have been found, mainly in Surrey and Sussex.

Descriptive line
Chest, British 13th century, with roundels of chip-carved decoration

Physical description

Chest of clamped-front type, the front carved with three large roundels incised with geometric patterns. The front and back are composed of a single panel flanked by wedge-shaped stiles. The end panels slope slightly inwards and are faced with a framework of chamfered rails halved together and tenoned into the stiles, with a removable mid, upper, section (one missing, one replaced). The plain back board (which is split at its bottom edge) is recessed between the rear stiles, where the front is flush with the front stiles. The lid, which is a single, wide board, is fitted with pin hinges (repaired originals), and has rails (one replaced) with curved chamfers fixed on the underside (using large trenails) which fit down into slots. A long hole has been drilled diagonally through the replaced rail into the stile, presumably for a long peg to secure the lid. The bottom boards (replacements) are aligned side to side and sit in a groove cut along the bottom edge of the front, back and side panels. These four panels were riven and are noticeably thicker along their bottom edge, also having been cut back to create a deep 'lip' on their inside face at the bottom edge, into which a deep groove was cut to receive the bottom boards (probably originally aligned front to back). Inside the chest are grooves which originally held a lidded till (now missing). There is a large lockplate in the front.

Along the front edge of the lid are four holes, more or less equally spaced, and now partly plugged. The two central holes possibly held two iron staples that engaged with an internal sliding lock mechanism. The two outer holes are countersunk and appear to be of relatively modern date, possibly having been used with screws to fasten the lid shut.

Relatively fast growth oak was used throughout. The lid if wedge-shaped, having been riven.

Condition and modifications

An infill patch in the front with some geometrical carving (top, centre) where a lock has been removed.
Bottom boards repaired.
Hinges replaced.
Right side of lid - lid batten and removeable section of transom replaced

Dimensions

Height: 53 cm, Width: 111 cm, Depth: 49.5 cm

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Object history note

Bought for £100 from Arthur Watson, (a dealer) of 13, Saville Row, London W1.
RF 26/3246 H.Clifford Smith notes that it had been received 'from a dealer in the West of England', and was 'said to have originally come from a church in Hampshire'.

A replica chest, apparently based on W.30-1926, is at the Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton (2016).

Historical context note

On English chests with roundel decoration see also, Christopher Pickvance, 'The medieval chest at St Mary's church, Horsham: an important unrecorded pin-hinged, clamped chest', in Sussex Archaeological Collections, vol. 155 (2017), pp.203-07. [Dept copy filed F4265]
URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93911/chest-unknown/