

# Stone Bestiary - Corbels

Art Photos & Guide to the Norman Romanesque Corbels of Kilpeck



Photography By Paul E Williams

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Publishing

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# Introduction

Welcome to this free version of Stone Bestiary Corbels which we hope you enjoy and find informative. A free colour version of Kilpeck Corbels and a Kilpeck South Door sculptures ebook can be downloaded from [pixelpigs.com](http://pixelpigs.com). All links in this ebook are to fully secure https web sites without advertising or trackers.

This free ebook is both an educational guide to the corbel sculptures of Kilpeck Church and a catalogue to the art photos of Paul E Williams.

The ebook is also part of a huge project funded by Paul E Williams to make available photos of historic sites and museum antiquities of Europe, North Africa and the Near East to browse for free and use in educational and editorial projects.

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# Stone Bestiary



# Romanesque Art

Romanesque art is rare in England and the most complete ensemble of Norman Romanesque art can be seen at Kilpeck Church in Herefordshire. Somehow the sculptures at Kilpeck St Mary and St David were overlooked by those who destroyed so much English ecclesiastic art during the reformations and Puritan parliamentary rule, when religious depictions were viewed as idolatrous and removed from churches and cathedrals.

The sculptures at Kilpeck church gives us an idea of the wonderful creative art that used to adorn English medieval churches. Not only sculptures and statues were destroyed but also the frescoes that used to cover the interior walls were either hacked off or painted over. Some survived under whitewash and are still being rediscovered today.

The Stone Bestiary is a series of prints that explores the artworks of medieval man that depicted fantastic animals and beasts that are alien to modern eyes. Medieval man would though have been familiar with the creatures sculpted at Kilpeck and their stories. Fortunately medieval books known as Bestiaries have survived the ravages of time to help us read these medieval artworks. The Bestiary is a medieval encyclopaedia of the animals and creatures Christian medieval scholars believed existed. Bestiaries that have survived are beautifully illustrated with illuminated depictions of the beasts and can be bought as facsimile reproductions.

The Bestiaries help us glimpse what the strange sculptures at Kilpeck may have meant to medieval eyes but we can never really appreciate their impact on medieval viewers. It is to the medieval artisans that created the wonderfully creative artworks at Kilpeck that this ebook and the Stone Bestiary series of art prints is dedicated.

Paul E Williams 2022

# Kilpeck Corbels



# Hereford Romanesque

I am drawn to medieval art because of an underlying honesty in the artworks. Most early medieval art that has survived the intervening 1000 years was made to glorify Christianity and its God. The vast majority of the artists who created these artworks are unknown and were humble craftsmen and masons. As most medieval people believed that the world would soon end and Christ would return to judge them, they worked with great fervour to produce the incredible churches and cathedrals that still dominated many European cities today.

To the uneducated eye Romanesque buildings are not as spectacular as their medieval Gothic successors and are easily overlooked. Maybe this is why the wonderful sculptures at Kilpeck, the best surviving ensemble of Romanesque Norman art in Britain, were overlooked by the Puritan destroyers of idolatrous ecclesiastical art. Its remoteness set in the unspoilt picturesque countryside of Herefordshire probably also helped in saving its artworks.

## Medieval Christianity

The sculpture of Kilpeck depicts a world of beasts and creatures linked to myths, legends, and allegories that were part of everyday life in the middle ages that are no longer remembered today. The age of industrialisation and science cut off our modern civilisations' connection to a folklore culture that dated back thousands of years.

Even though the sculptures at Kilpeck are of Christian intent, they have to be viewed from the perspective of 12th century Christian Britain. The advent of Christianity in Britain is often attributed to the arrival, in 597 AD, of Papal envoy Augustine, but it also spread from Ireland when St Columba founded monasteries in Northern England. Even though the Western European Elites were Christians and paid homage to the Pope, paganism and its folklore myths still thrived especially amongst the peasantry until the Late Middle Ages. Even today in Georgia and Armenia, Christian Orthodox priests still sacrifice lambs at religious celebrations and ceremonies.

It took the force of Norman rule to cement Christianity in England and drive paganism underground and it was under Norman rule that the Romanesque church at Kilpeck was built.

## Norman Rule

Although today Kilpeck church can be seen geographically as provincial, this was not the case when it was built around 1140. Its architecture was very up to date and aesthetically sophisticated with hints that its design may have been influenced by the shrine of St Peter in Rome, as well as the shrine of St James at Compostella. It appears that the Norman lord, Hugh of Kilpeck, wanted to create a building that was like a shrine or reliquary, a building that reflected his high status.

The style of the sculpture is attributed to the Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture which had a unique local flavour merging Norman military, Anglo Saxon and Celtic imagery and styles.

The sculptural details at Kilpeck have been shown to have been influenced by the medieval Bestiary books that were popular at the time. Not all of Kilpeck's beast sculptures can be found in surviving Bestiaries which suggests that Bestiaries used by Hugh of Kilpeck's architects have been lost.

As Hugh of Kilpeck would have been a good Christian, it is surprising to find many pagan and mythical characters that predate Christianity such as the Green Man and the explicit Sheela-na-gig, that may have evolved from pagan mother goddess myths. The sculptures at Kilpeck seem to still reflect ancient folklore imagery that 80 years later would be almost absent from Gothic art that depicted Saints, allegories from the Bible and the life of Christ as well as the every popular depictions of the Last Judgement.

To try and understand Kilpeck art it has to be remembered that Hugh of Kilpeck was a Norman Lord and what that meant. In 1140, when Hugh of Kilpeck built the church, it was only 130 years after his raiding Viking ancestors had been granted the Dukedom of Normandy by the King of France. Even though the Normans were



pious Christians who built churches in every town in England, their brand of Christianity must have still been laced with the violent Viking folklore and culture that they would have been taught from childhood. Normans were brutal overlords who stamped their Lordship on their Saxon vassals with great force. They were superstitious Christians who built churches to buy absolution for the mortal sins they regularly committed and medieval warriors.

The sculptures of Kilpeck seem to represent a Norman Christianity that is hedging its bets of salvation by allowing earlier pagan folklore elements to creep into the designs. The Norman world was full of superstition, violence and sudden death in which the creatures of the Bestiary and the threat of Hell and damnation were believed to really exist and were feared. It seems possible that Norman Christianity had not yet fully abandoned medieval folklore and it wouldn't be until the overtly Christian imagery of Gothic artworks that pagan folklore would finally be driven underground and become heretical.

## Painted Sculptures

From antiquity sculptures were always painted and the stone medieval sculptures we see today would probably have also been painted. If they followed the prevailing style of Romanesque sculptures like the tympanum of the entrance of the Abbey of la Madeleine in Vézelay, France, they would have had a blue background with the foreground being painted with primary colour paint with gilding were applied on top to highlight detailing. Architectural details such as the sculpted ropework above the corbels at Kilpeck would also probably have been painted. It can be imagined then that Kilpeck St Mary & St David would have shone out like a gilded reliquary and few would have passed by without looking at its wondrous artworks.

## The Stone Bestiary Print Series

The Stone Bestiary is a black and white photo art series of prints. Details are on [page 63](#) . If you want to see what the sculptures look like in colour please visit [Colour Kipeck Photos by Clicking here](#).



Corbel No I  
Ref: Kilpeck No 1-2

South Naive exterior wall. Sculpture of a quail that it has just killed its young based on a bestiary story of a Pelican that kills its young.



South Naive exterior wall. Sculpture of a head, half man half lion.

Corbel No 3  
Ref: Kilpeck No-3-2



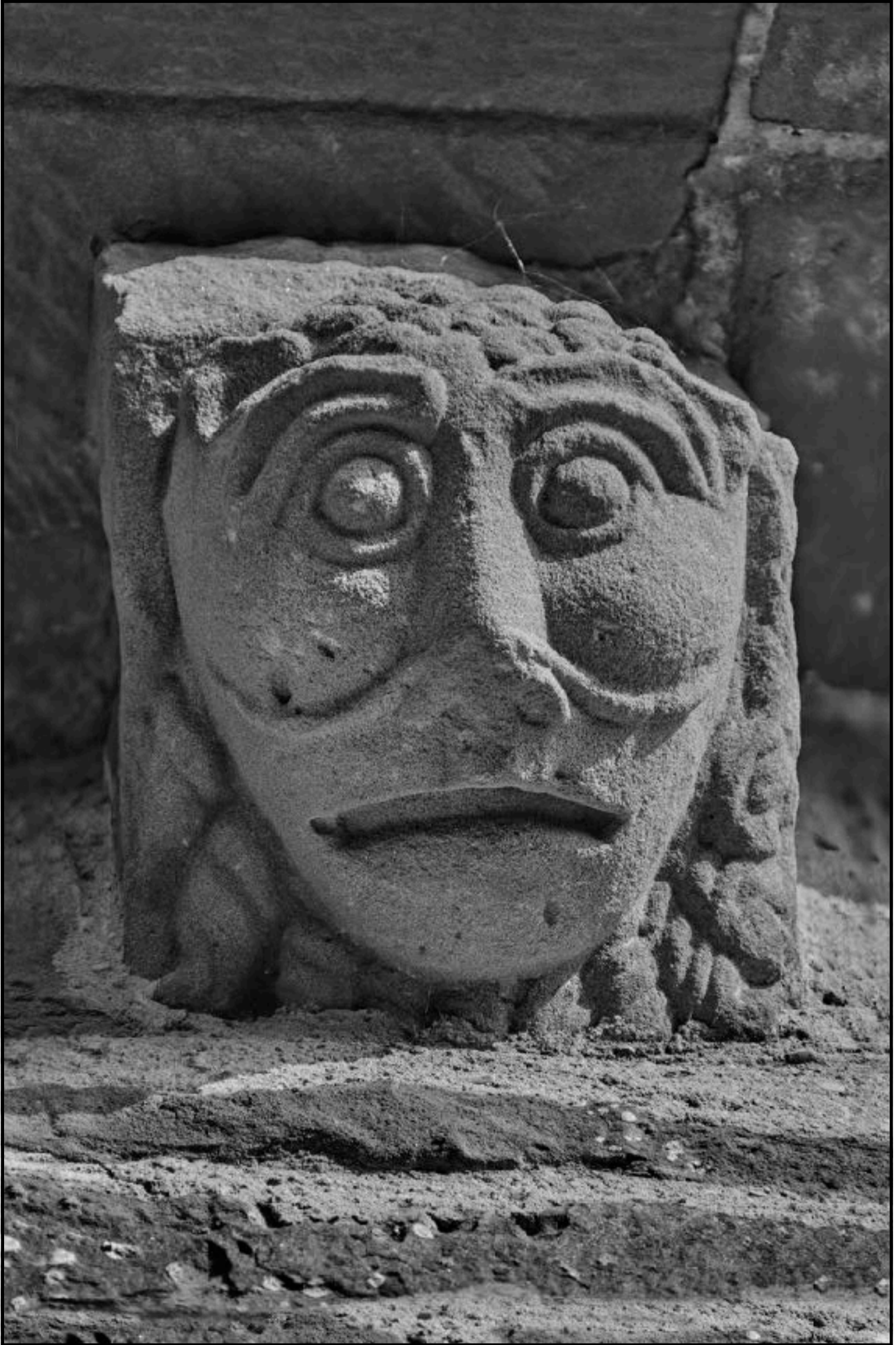
Corbel No 4  
Ref: Kilpeck No 4-1

Sculpture of four intertwined serpents forming a geometric panel. Each serpent is eating the tail of another. South Naive exterior wall.



An unusual Agnus Dei depicting a horse instead of a lamb and cross. Situated over the South door to remind that you are entering the Lords house. South Naive exterior wall.

**Corbel No 8**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 8-1



Corbel No 10  
Ref: Kilpeck No 10-1

South Naive exterior wall. Sculpture of a head, half man  
half lion. South Naive exterior wall.



Sculpture of a head, half man half lion. South Naive exterior wall.

Corbel No 8  
Ref: Kilpeck No 14-3



Corbel No 16  
Kilpeck No 16-1

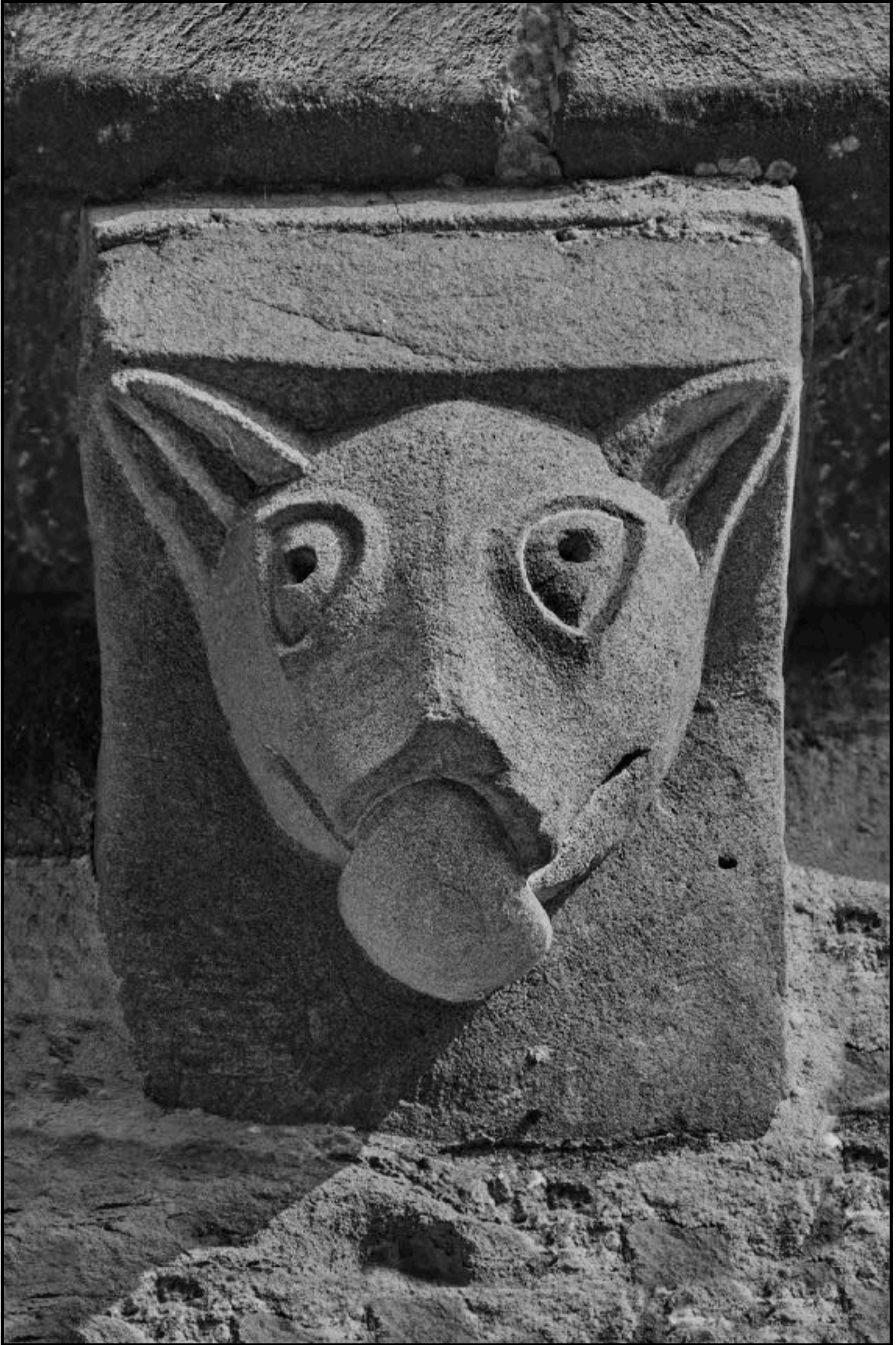
Sculpture of the head of Rams head. South Naive exterior wall.





An unusual Agnus Die depicting a horse instead of a lamb and cross. Situated over the South door to remind that you are entering the Lords house. South Naive exterior wall.

Corbel No 17  
Ref: Kilpeck No 17-1



**Corbel No 21**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 21-3

Sculpture of an animal with a long snout and pointed ears.  
South chancel corbel 2.



Sculpture of a grotesque head with either a huge swollen tongue or something in its mouth. South chancel corbel 4

Corbel No 21  
Ref: Kilpeck No 21-3



**Corbel No 28**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 28-6

Sculpture of a female exhibitionist known as a Sheela-nagig. Apse corbel A2.



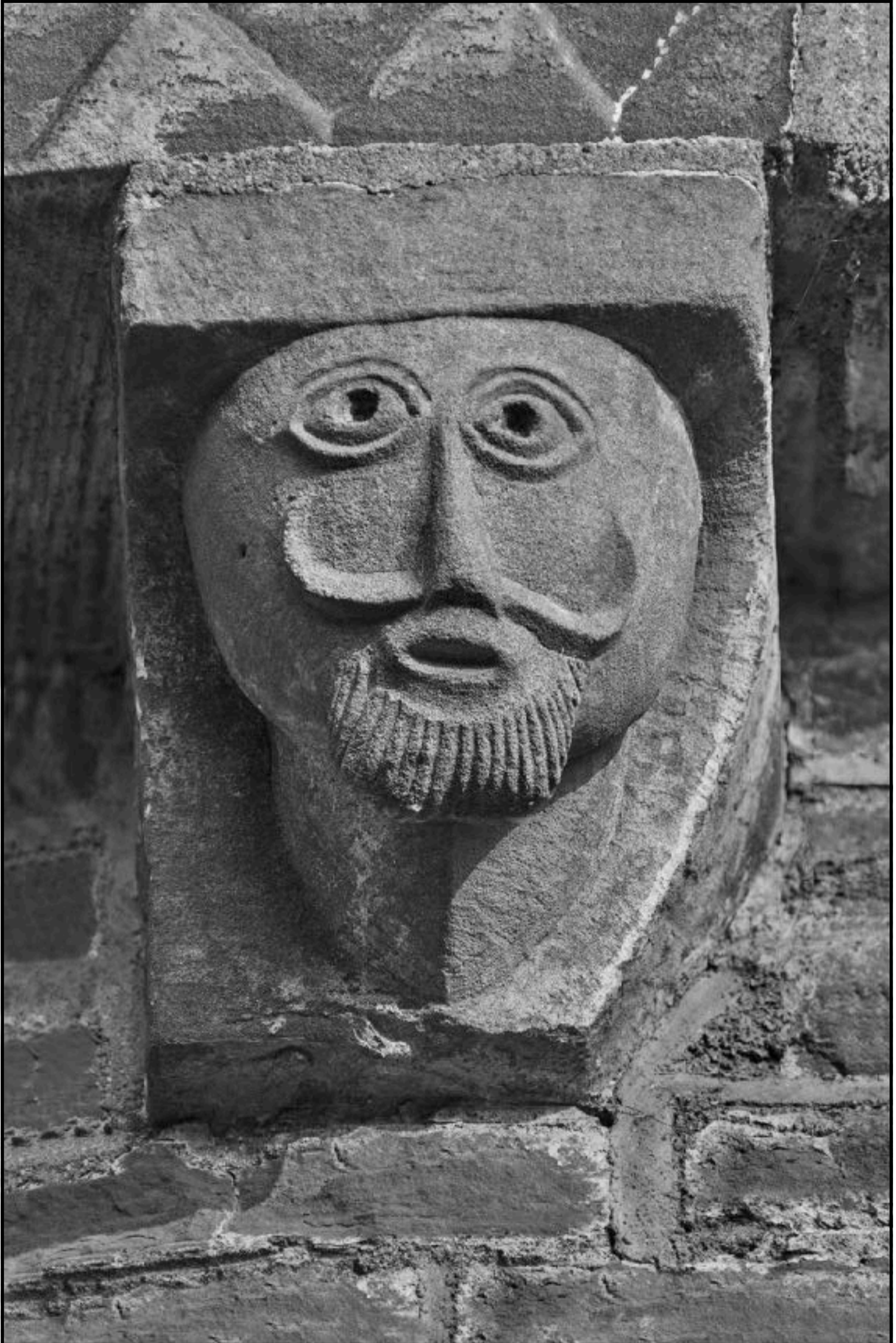
sculpture of a creature with a rounded head, pointed ears and a beaked nose. Apse corbel A3 -

Corbel No 29  
Ref: Kilpeck No 29-3



Corbel No 30  
Ref: Kilpeck No 30-3

Sculpture of a muzzled bears head with two humans in its mouth, their heads poking out either side of its mouth.  
Apse corbel A4



Sculpture of a man with a goatee beard. Apse corbel A5

Corbel No 31  
Ref: Kilpeck No 31-4



**Corbel No 32**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 32-1

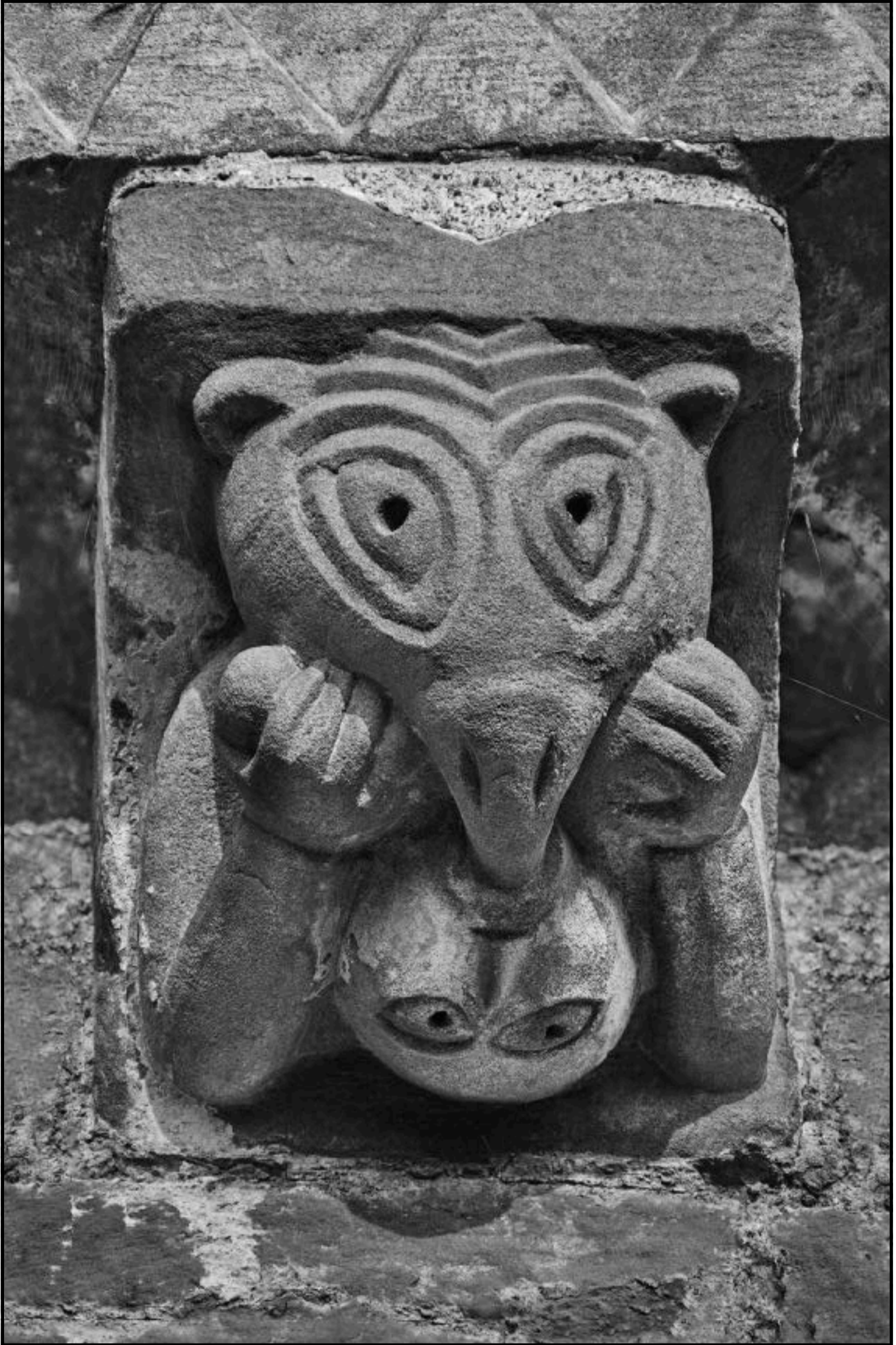
Sculpture of an inverted head of a creature that is a cross between the ibex with a pigs snout. Apse corbel A6.





Sculpture of dog and a hare. In the Bestiary dogs are like preachers who put men back on the right course of righteousness Apse corbel A7.

Corbel No 33  
Ref: Kilpeck No 33-3



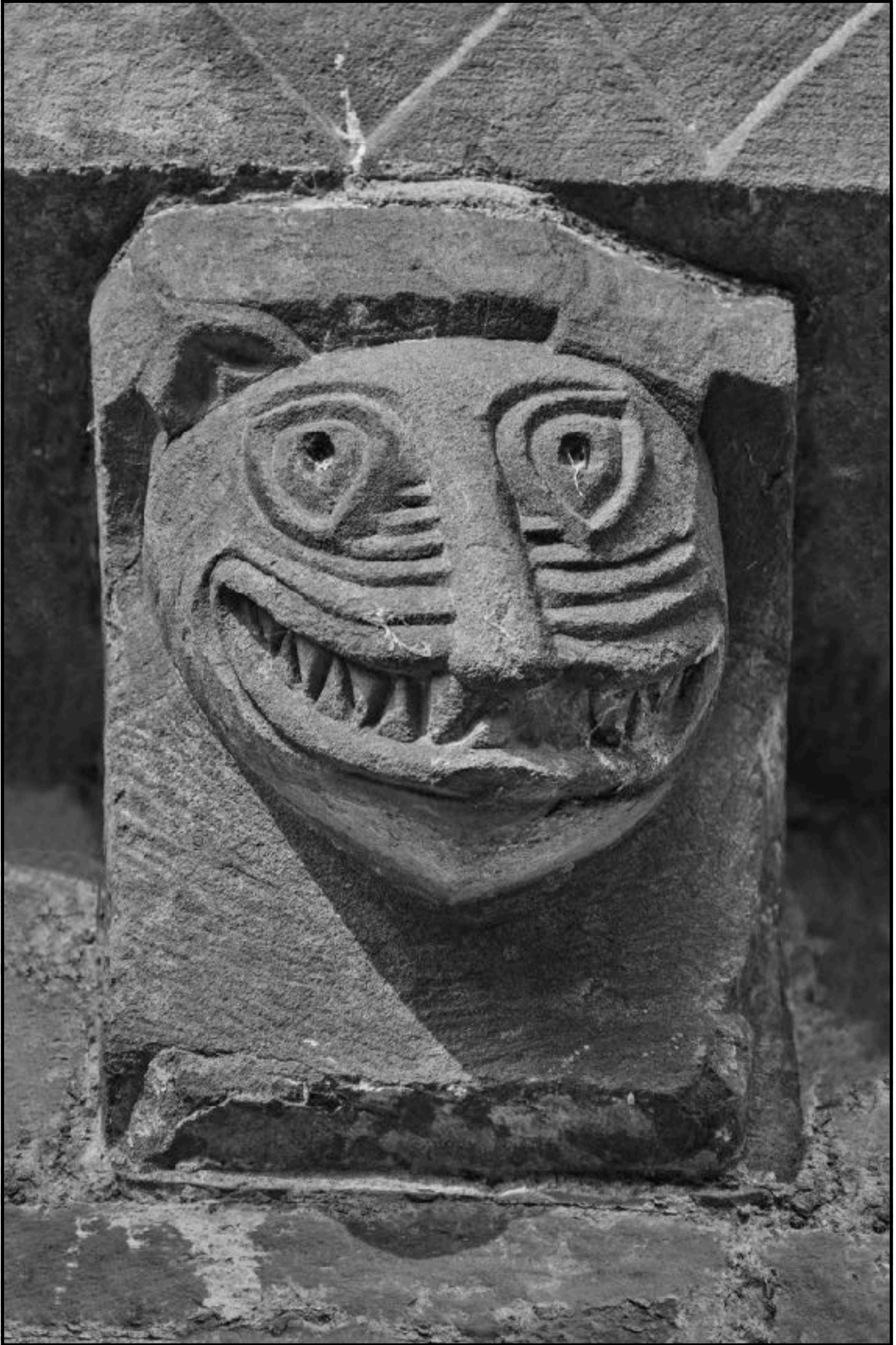
**Corbel No 35**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 35-3

A beaked headed creature holds down a man below its body and is pushing its beak into the man's mouth. Apse corbel A9.



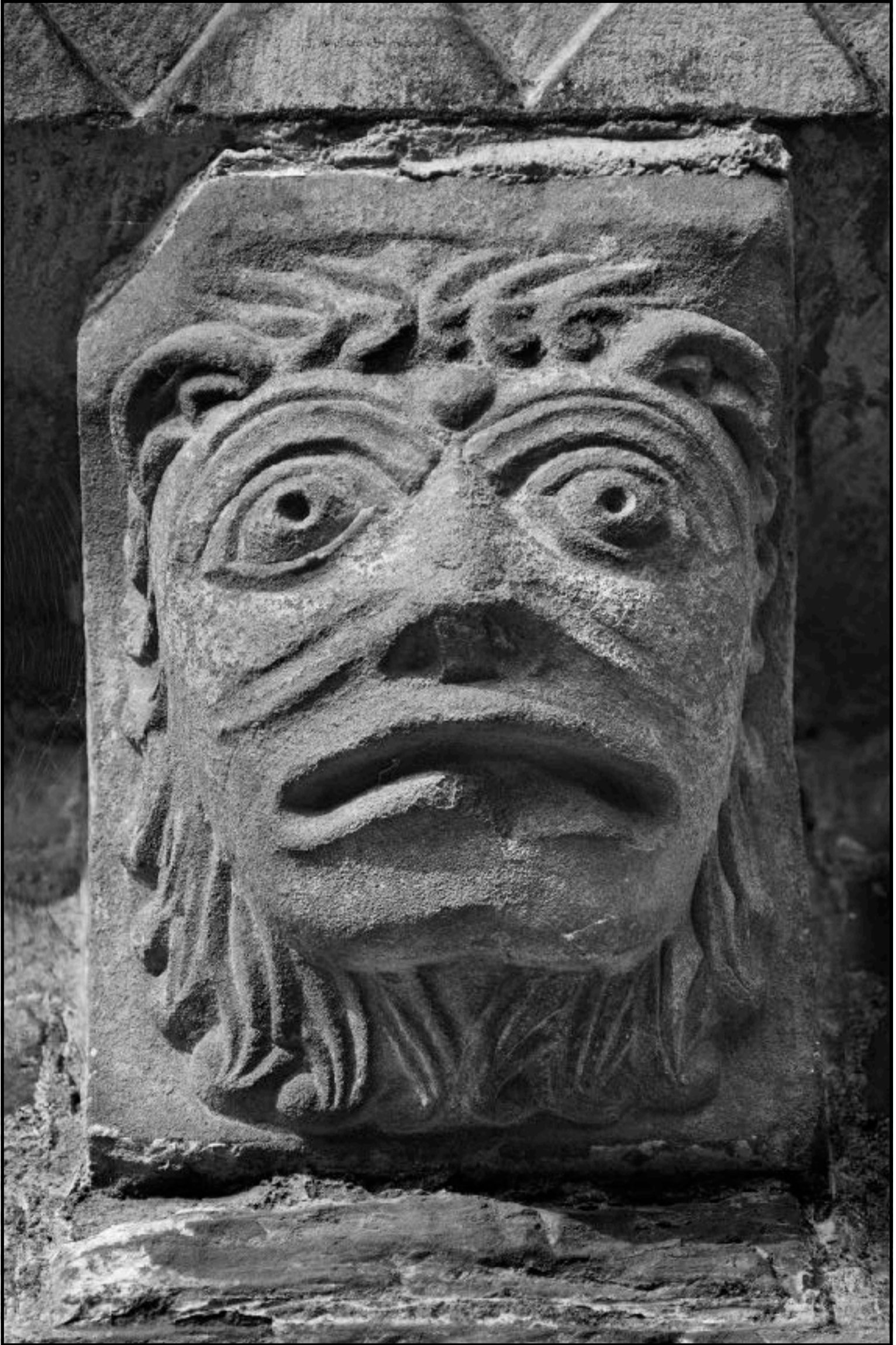
Sculpture of two fledgling birds both biting a serpent. Possible allegory of the original sin man is born with due to Adam taking the apple from a serpent. Apse corbel A10

Corbel No 36  
Ref: Kilpeck No 36-1



Corbel No 37  
Ref: Kilpeck No 37-3

Sculpture of a grotesque head with interlocking teeth.  
Apse corbel A11



Sculpture of a head, half man half lion with a mouth like a theatrical mask. Apse corbel A12.

Corbel No 38  
Ref: Kilpeck No 38-5



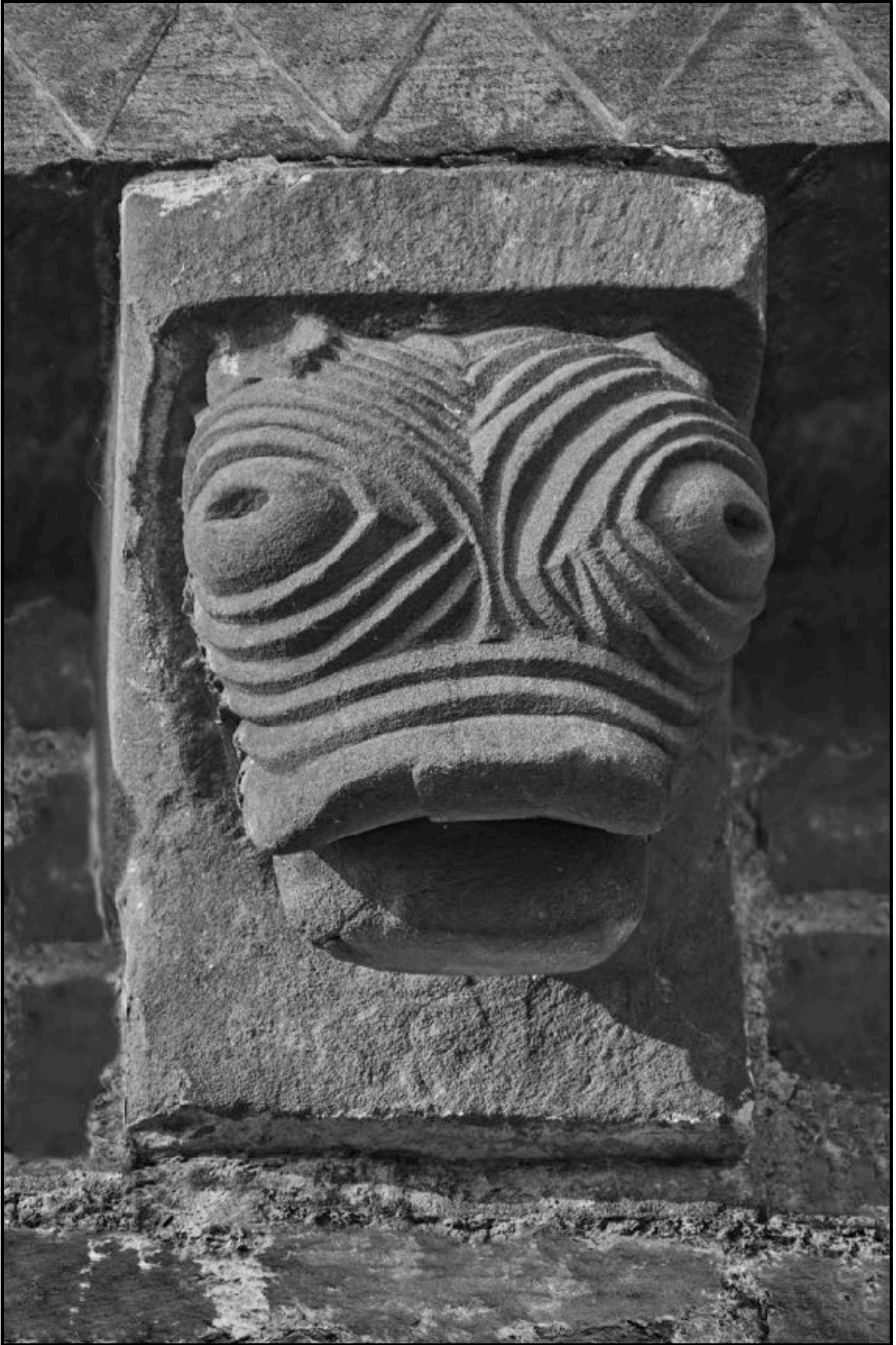
**Corbel No 39**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 39-3

Sculpture of an Angus Dei, the symbol of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God. Strangely the creature holding the cross is a horse not a sheep. Apse corbel A13



Sculpture of a mans head. Apse corbel A14.

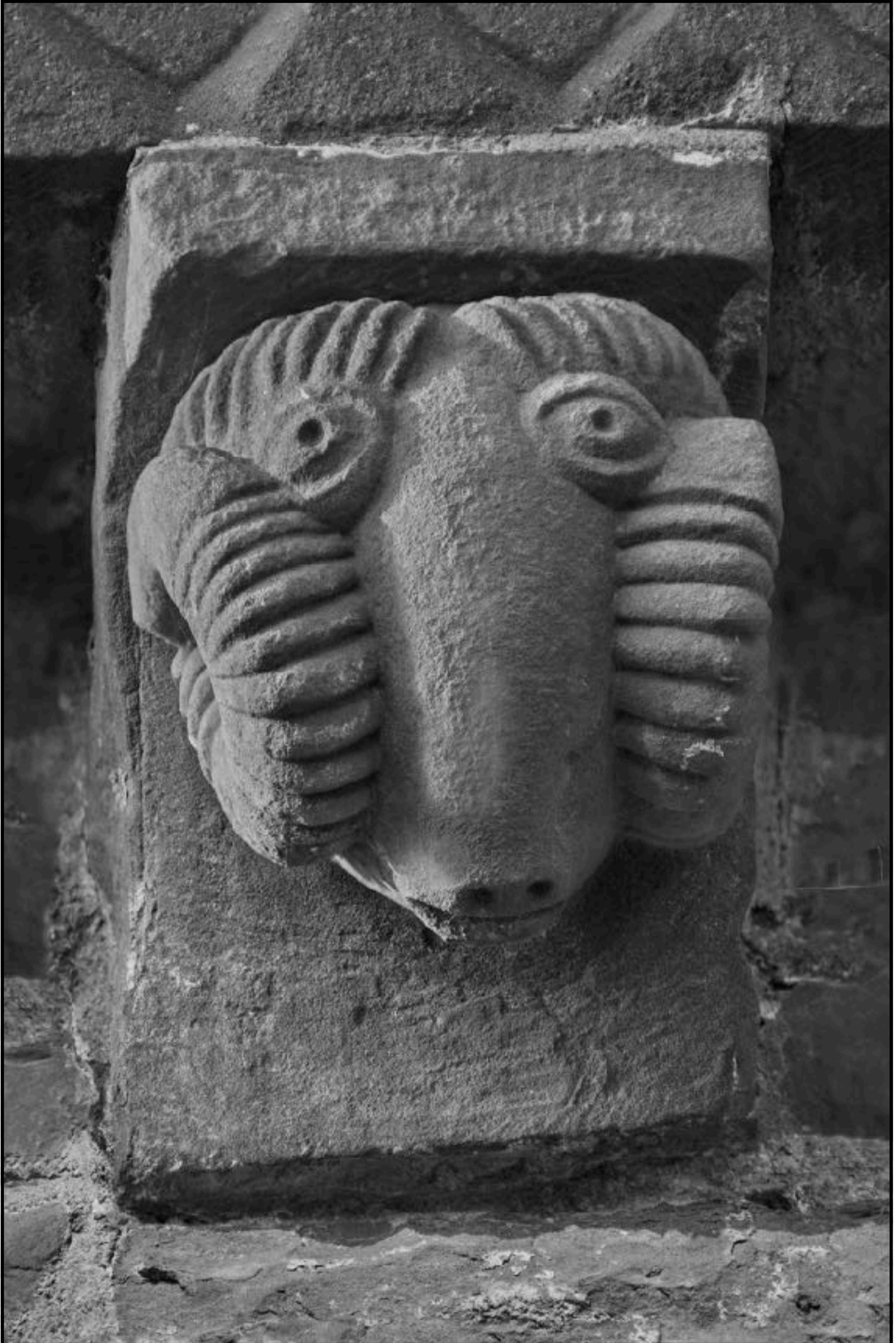
Corbel No 40  
Ref: Kilpeck No 40-5



Corbel No 40  
Ref: Kilpeck No 40-5

Sculpture of a grotesque stylised creatures head with bulging eyes. Apse corbel A15.





Sculpture of a rams head that symbolise the Apostles of the church. Apostles are like rams because they have strong foreheads which toss evil out of the way. Apse corbel A16.

Corbel No 42  
Ref: Kilpeck No 42-1



Corbel No 42  
Ref: Kilpeck No 42-1

Sculpture of an animal head, maybe a cat. Apse corbel A17.



Sculpture of a fiddle or rebeck player, similar style to corbel no 28. Its style is also associated with a corbel on the apse at Courpiac ( Gironde). Apse corbel A12.

**Corbel No 44**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 44-4



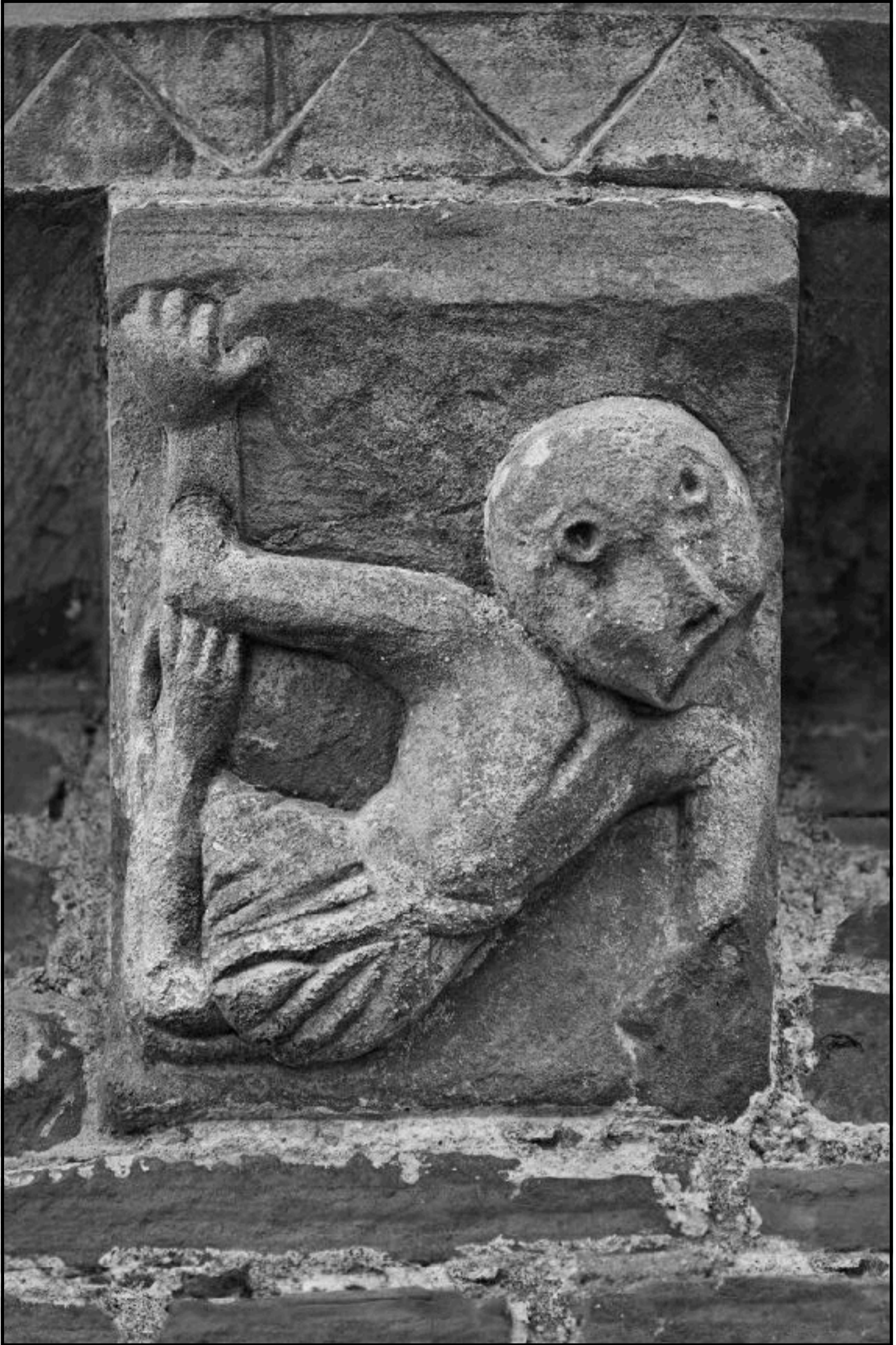
**Corbel No 45**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 45-3

A man and women are grasping each other. The women appears to be clutching the man's buttocks and he is resisting her embrace. A Moral Tale? Apse corbel A19.



Sculpture of a bears head with a man in its mouth. Apse corbel A20.

Corbel No 46  
Ref: Kilpeck No 46-1



Corbel No 47  
Ref: Kilpeck No 47-1

A bald dancing female dressed in a tight filling tunic. The image is probably a warning against the sexual senses that can be aroused by dancing. Apse corbel A21.



Sculpture of a grotesque creature with a long snout and fierce teeth. . Apse corbel A22.

Corbel No 48  
Ref: Kilpeck No 48-2



**Corbel No 45**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 49-3

Sculpture of a bald headed figure. Its perfectly round mouth is filled with a ball like object and may be a moral warning about talking too much. Apse corbel A23.





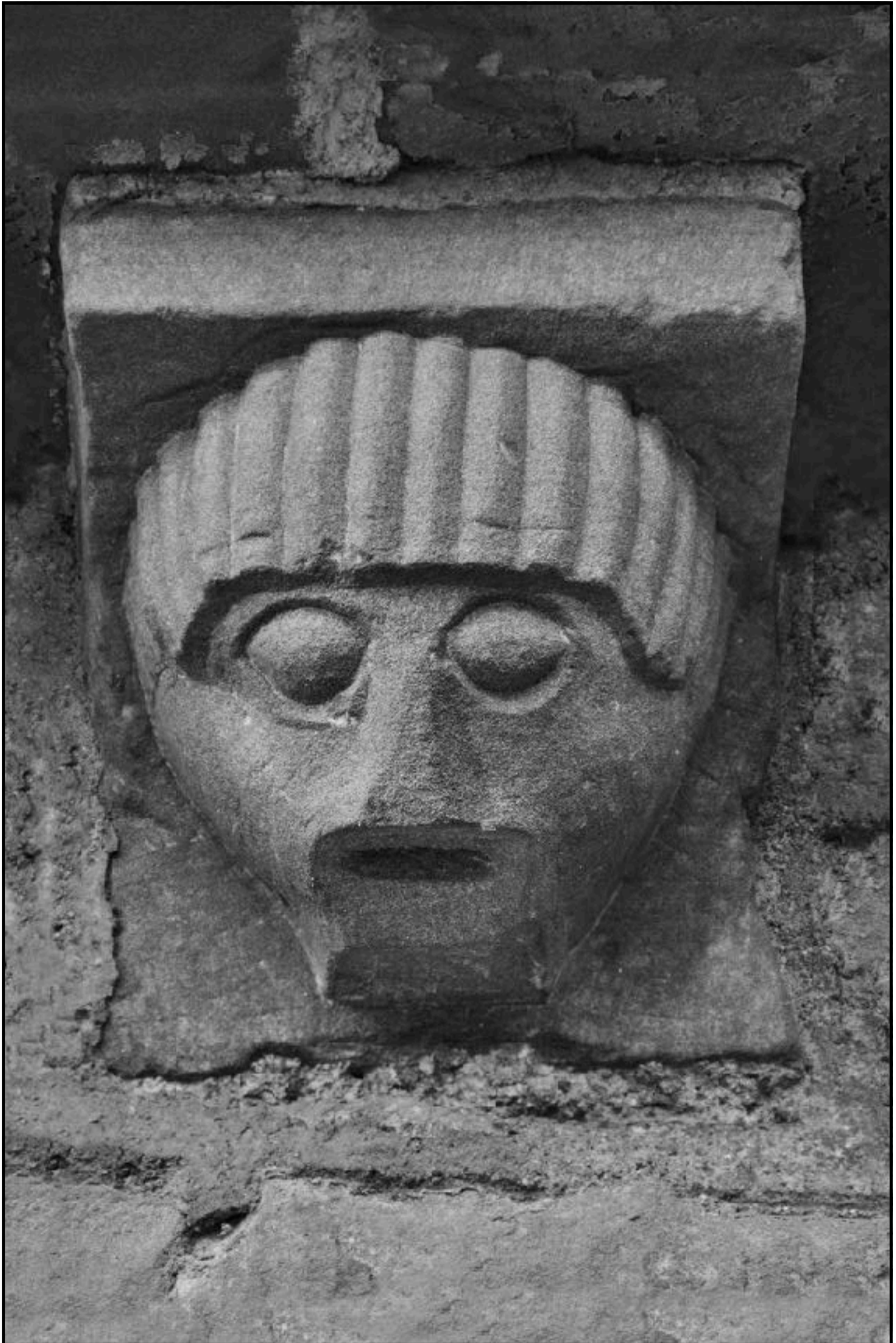
A beaked headed creature holds down a man and is pushing its beak into the mans mouth, The beaked creature seems to be holding something in its hands. Apse corbel A24.

Corbel No 50  
Ref: Kilpeck No 50-3



Corbel No 52  
Ref: Kilpeck No 52-3

Sculpture of a featureless male head possibly with a beard on chin. North chancel NC2.



Sculpture of a human stylised head with braided hair head.  
North chancel NC3.

Corbel No 53  
Ref: Kilpeck No-53-1



Corbel No 54  
Ref: Kilpeck No 54-1

Sculpture of a humanoid stylised simple round head.  
North chancel NC4.



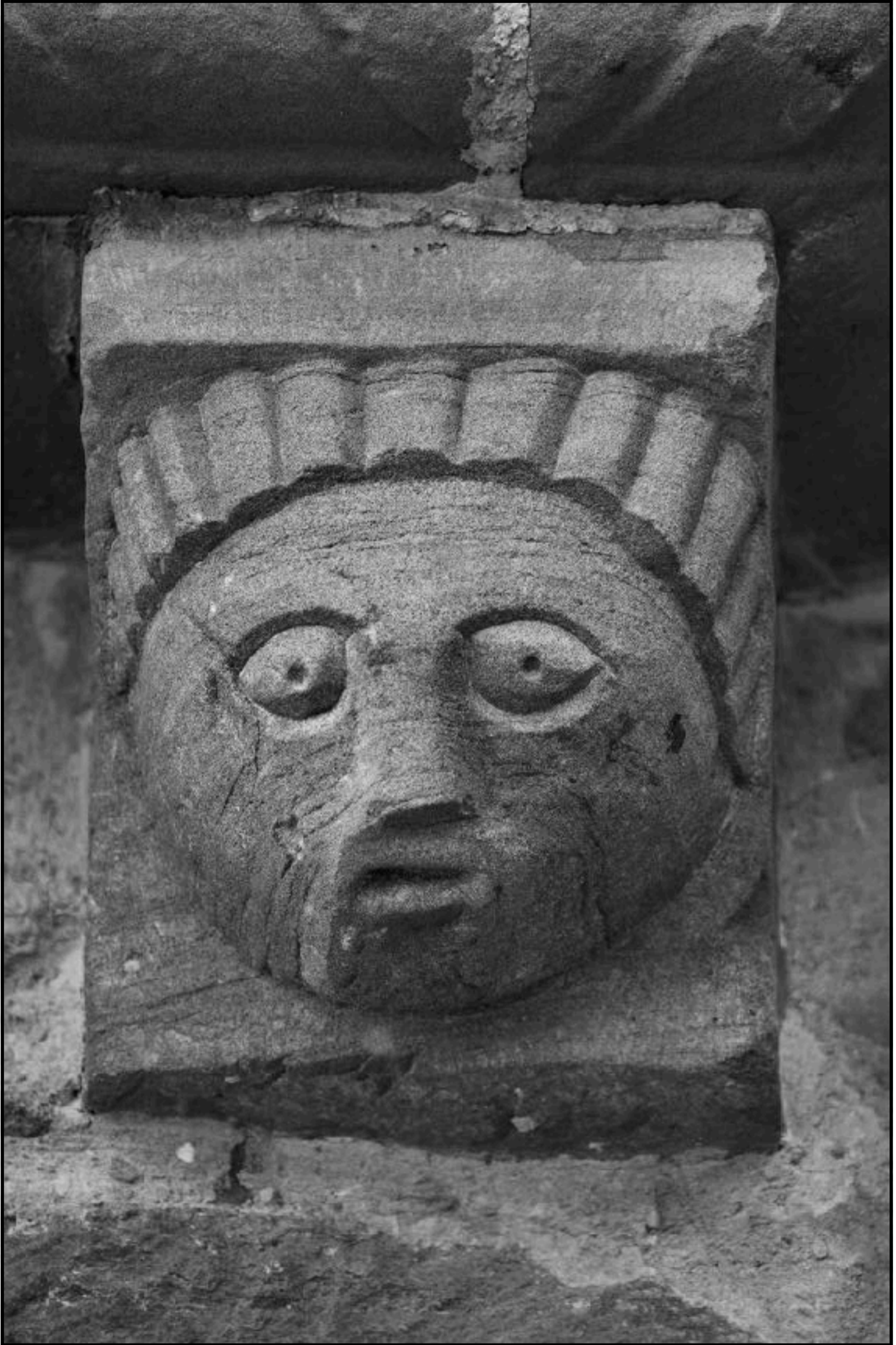
Sculpture of a womens head. North chancel NC5.

Corbel No 55  
Ref: Kilpeck No 55-3



**Corbel No 56**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 56-1

Sculpture of a stylised humanoid head. North chancel  
NC6.



Sculpture of a stylised womens head. North chancel NC7.

Corbel No 57  
Ref: Kilpeck No 57-1



**Corbel No 58**      Sculpture of a stylised humanoid head. North chancel  
Ref: Kilpeck No 58-11      NC8.





Sculpture of a human head with curly hair and beard. North Naive NN2.

Corbel No 61  
Ref: Kilpeck No 61-2



Corbel No 62      Sculpture of a large bird of prey. North Naive NN4.  
Ref: Kilpeck No 62-5



Sculpture of an animal with a cat like head biting the underside of a bowl. North Naive NN5.

Corbel No 64  
Ref: Kilpeck No 64-1



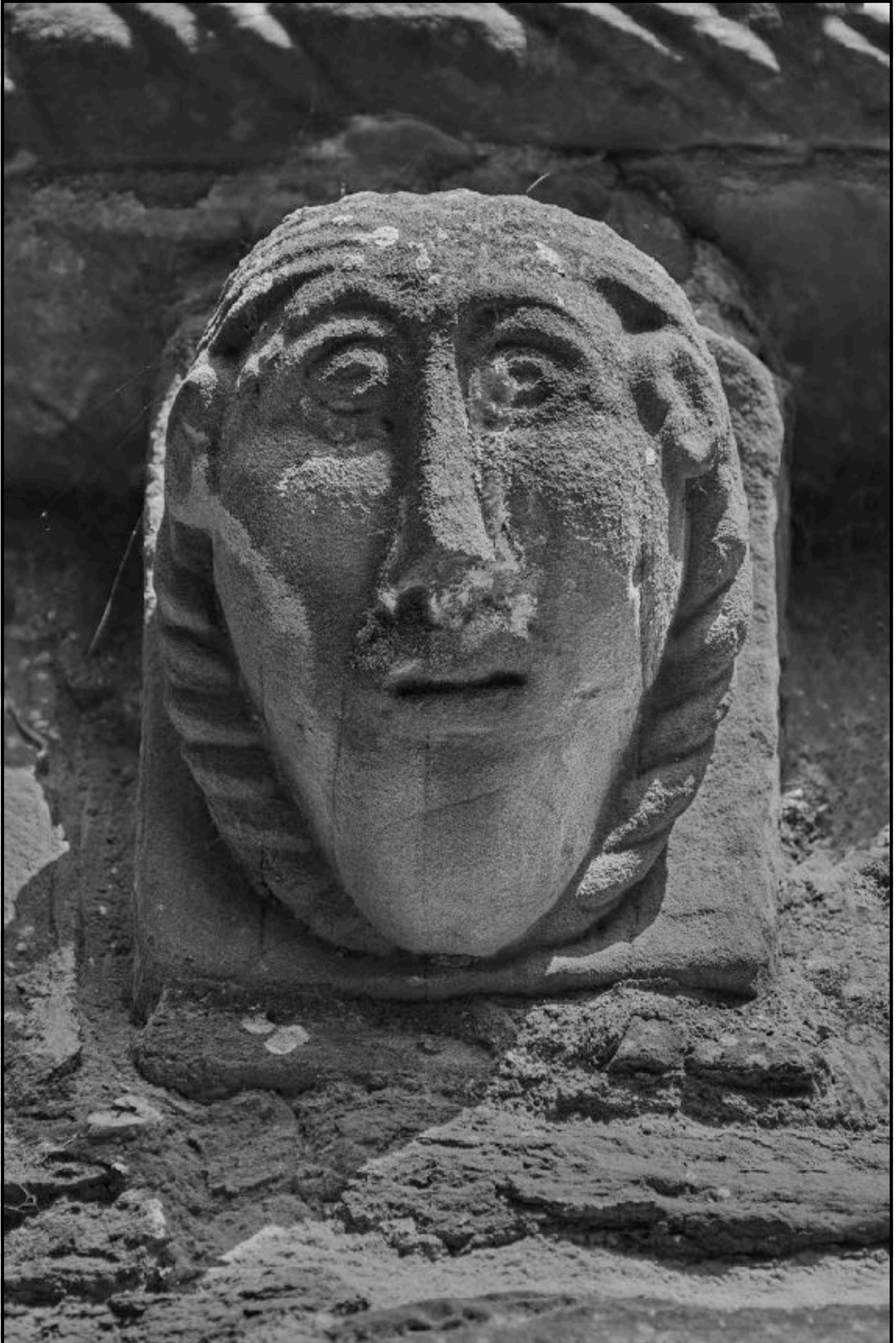
Corbel No 65  
Kilpeck No 65-1

Sculptures of a Stag, representing a Holy Christian that helps others too Heaven. North Naive NN10



Sculpture of two fish swimming upwards. A fish was used by early Christians to symbolise Jesus Christ. North Naive NN11.

Corbel No 70  
Ref: Kilpeck No 70-3



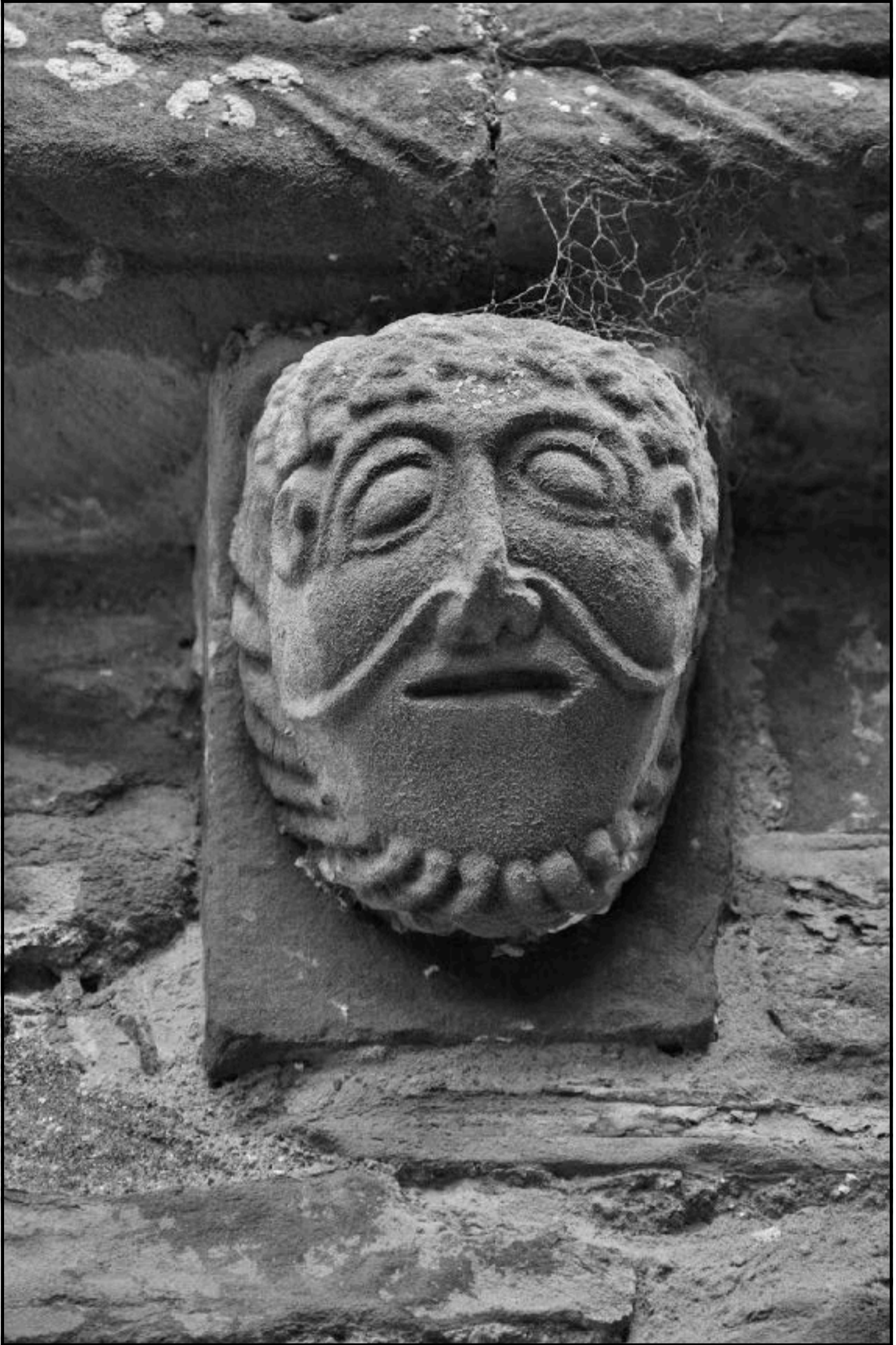
**Corbel No 78**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 78-1

Sculpture of mans head with elongated face from the outside of the West knave No1.



Sculpture of mans head with a moustache and beard similar to no 79. West Naive No 5.

**Corbel No 82**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 82-2



**Corbel No 88**  
Ref: Kilpeck No 88-2

Sculpture of a male with curly hair and theatrical style mouth. west knave No11.





Sculpture of a male with curly hair and theatrical style mouth.  
West Naive no12.

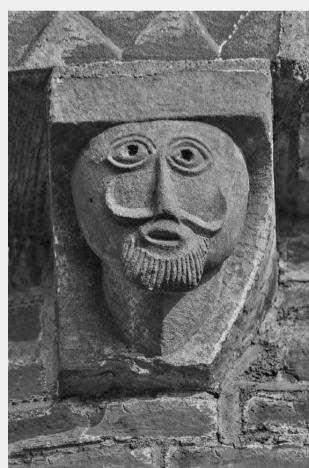
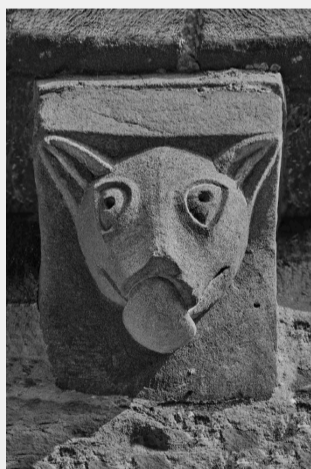
Corbel No 89  
Kilpeck No 89-2

# Links & Downloads

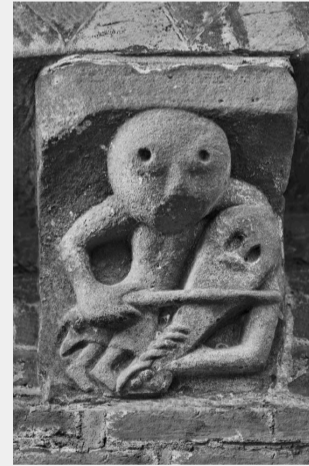
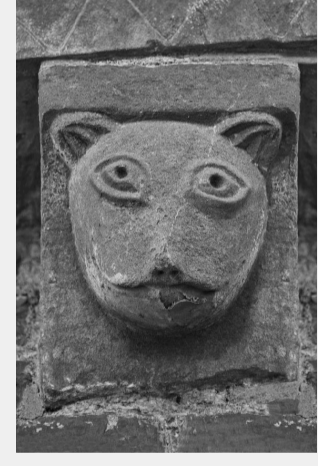
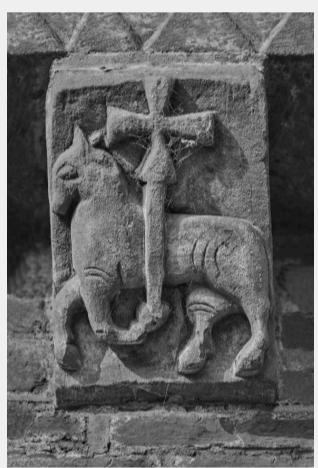
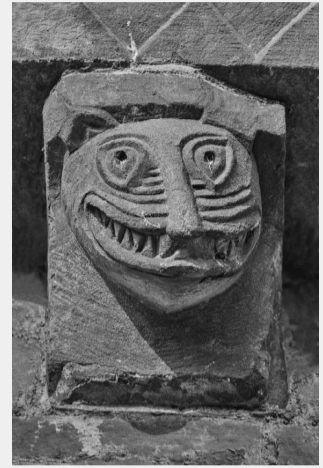
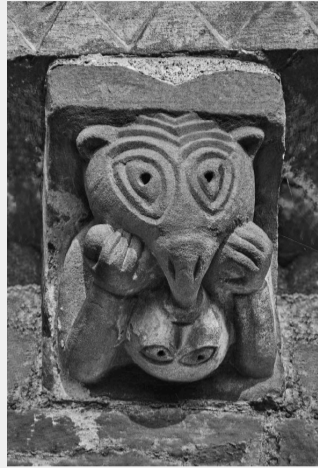
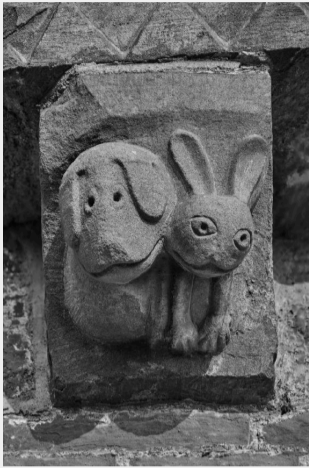


## Links To Photo HiRes Downloads & Print Gallery

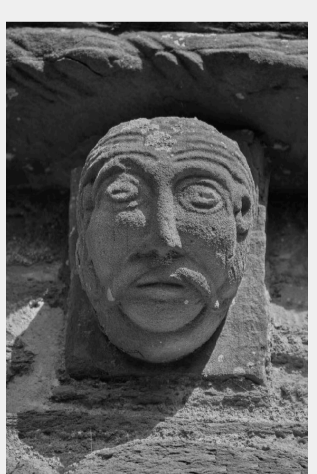
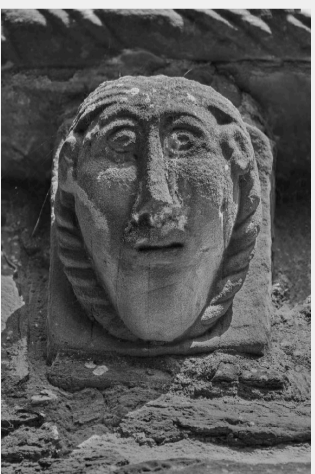
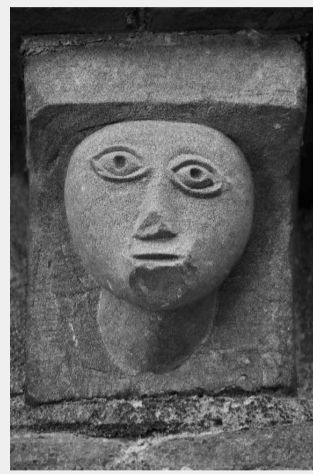
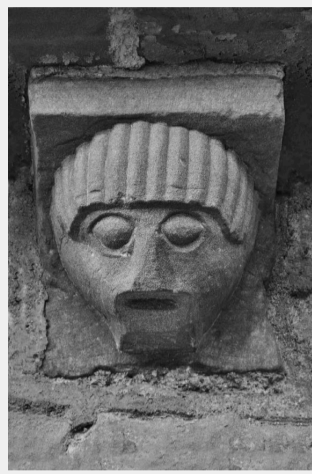
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## About Paul E Williams

Paul E Williams is a multi award winning photographer who worked for 45 years from his London studios in Kensington and Camden making food and still life photos for publishers, advertising agencies and design groups. As well as undertaking photography projects Paul has also directed many TV commercials for big brands like CocaCola and Cadbury, and has made a TV documentary on Death Valley as well as music concert DVD's.

In 2012 Paul decided to work solely on his own projects and gave up his London Studio to travel in a purpose built expedition Defender. This has led to many photography projects many of which revolve around the wonderful historic sites and museum antiquities of Europe, North Africa and the Near East.

This led to an ongoing project called Museopics that aims to bring together photo of museum antiquities from large and small museums into coherent themed photo collections. To date the largest online photo collections of Hittite Art and Mycenaean and Minoan art can be explored at [paulewilliams.com](http://paulewilliams.com) along with 40,000 other photos of museum antiquities and historic places.

The Stone Bestiary photo series of Kilpeck sculpture is part of an ongoing exploration of the medieval artworks. To date the photo collections contain photos of some of the best medieval fresco, mosaic and sculptures including the wonderful sculpture of Kilpeck St Mary and St David Church.

# Useful Kilpeck Links

## Worldwide Print Galleries

All photos are available as photo art prints from these fully secure sites:

USA Print Gallery : [Colour Kipeck Photos](#) - [Black & White Kilpeck Photos](#)

Worldwide Print Gallery : [Kilpeck Photo Art Prints](#)

## Royalty Free Stock Photos

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Photographers Archive : [Paul E Williams Kilpeck Archive](#)

Alamy Stock Library : [Paul E Williams Alamy Kilpeck Archive](#)

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[Contact Kilpeck Church](#)

## Kilpeck St Mary & St David Links

[Kilpeck Church Org](#) - The official home page for the church with history, articles and visiting information.

[Kilpeck Wikipedia Page](#) - History of the Church

## Romanesque Art & Historic Sites Photo Collections

[Romanesque Historic Sites](#) - Photo galleries of historic Romanesque sites of Europe

[Romanesque Antiquities](#) - Photo galleries of Romanesque art from museums and sites in Europe

[Byzantine Art & Historic Sites](#) - Photo galleries of Byzantine art from museums and historic sites of Europe, North Africa and the Near East

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A printable version of this book will soon be made available for a small donation payment which will allow A5 photos to be printed or saved as PDF's and imported into documents. For latest versions visit [PixelPigs Publishing](#).

Full resolution stock versions and photo art prints of Kilpeck's sculptures can be downloaded at:

[Paul Williams Photography Archive](#)

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