

ART. XXXVII.—*A Runic Inscription on Hessilgil Crag: Murchie's Cairn.* By the late Rev. John Maughan, B.A., Rector of Bewcastle.

Read at Penrith, August 15th, 1873.

DURING the summer of 1872, a Scandinavian Runic Inscription was discovered by a shepherd, named John Davidson, on one of the Hessilgil Craggs, on the Highgrains Farm, in the parish of Lanercost, in the county of Cumberland.

The Hessilgil Craggs are about half a mile north of the Barnspike Craggs, where a Runic Inscription was discovered in 1864, which is recorded in Prof. Stephens's *Work on the Old-Northern Runic Monuments*, page 548. Like the Barnspike, the Hessilgil Inscription faces the north, and is well protected from the weather by another crag, which stands close to it, and forms a barrier against the shower and the blast. The Runes may be read as on the accompanying illustration, being about the same size and shape as those at Banspike. In a modern notation it reads thus:

ASKRHRITAHAF TGILHIMTHIGA
HESSIL LIT

askr hritah aft Gil himthiga
Hessil (lit)

“Askr wrote this in memory of the son of his companion Hessil.” On these words I shall now make a few brief observations.

ASKR. This may be either the name of ASK or ASKR, as in proper names the R final often merely denotes that the noun is in the nominative case. Here, however, I prefer ASKR because we have a remarkable trace of him in the word ASKERTON, the name of one of our noted Border Castles, and probably the ancient residence of the ASKR, whom, with his friend Hessil, we may suppose to have been an old Norse pirate, and to have settled in this district and given his name to it. The township of Askerton lies on the north side of the parish of Lanercost, is about ten miles long, and five miles broad, and contains the Barnspike and Hessilgil inscriptions, which are about three miles from the far-famed inscription on the Bewcastle Cross. In very old records Askerton appears to have consisted of two Askertons, so that we may assume that the family of ASKR had flourished in these

these parts, as the Bueths had done on the north side of them, where they gave the name to the large district of Bewcastledale.

HRITAH. This is a very curious formula, perhaps a perfectly unique specimen not hitherto found in any other inscription. It may be either the third person singular of the perfect tense of the verb RITA; or it may be the infinitive mood with the verb "LIT," of which we have a slight trace. In either case, it simply denotes that Askr "wrote this," or "caused it to be written." The meaning is precisely the same.

AFT. This word, which is common enough in these old inscriptions, evidently denotes that the resting was "to," or "in memory of."

GIL. In the Barnspike inscription this word is GILHES, here we have it shortened into GIL, of which we find many traces in this district. It means "the son"—*i.e.* the son of Hessil—and it is remarkable that these crags are still generally well-known by the name of the Hessilgil Crags. They are thus a venerable old memorial of our foregangers. The rock bears no mark or trace upon it by which we may know whether it has been a christian or a heathen rune-stone, but still it must be regarded as another leaf from the Sybil's book, and I give the resting as I find it, so that everyone can judge for himself. About fifty yards on the north side of the inscription is a distinct trace of a ring-barrow—probably the last resting place of this GIL, from which, if he could only raise his head, he could see the glistening waters of the Solway. It has been adopted as a station by the Ordnance Surveyors. From these two adjacent fast-memorial-stones, Barnspike and Hessilgil, we may infer that these inscribed grave-marks were popular in this district, which was probably far more thickly populated then than at the present day.

HIMTHIGA. On the runic stone discovered at Schleswig, Denmark, in 1858, this word formula occurs as HIMTHIGA: It is said to mean "an attendant warrior who resided constantly with his master or friend." The sign employed for M gives us, perhaps, an intimation that the inscription may belong to the latter Scandinavian stave-row, probably about the 10th century, and, as the stone bears no vestige or emblem of the christian faith, we may further assume that it belongs to a heathen people.

HESSIL. Of this person I know of no historic record. We know little however of the details of these olden times. What we do know is simply this, that these Scandinavian Vikings frequently landed on these shores, and it seems possible

possible and likely that Askr and Hessil may have made a joint irruption, and occupied here, contiguous to and mutually supporting each other. Near the Highgrains Farmhouse are the remains of a very old and strong stone dwelling—about four feet high—with thick walls and very low and narrow doors. It may have been the stronghold of this Hessil.

There is space for the words "this stin lit" and there is a slight but indistinct trace of the letters "lit" as the conclusion of the inscription, but this is not material, for it would merely alter the rendering from "wrote" to "caused this stone to be written."

This inscription adds another laurel to the Runic literature of the county of Cumberland, already rich in these Runic cumbels or grave-marks. We have now, as I fancy, 1, The Bewcastle Cross raised in memory of king Alcfrid. 2, Barnspike Crag for Gilhesbueth. 3, Carlisle Cathedral for Ulphar. 4, Bridekirk for Brokten, and now a fifth instalment for the son of Hessil. Hence we may assume that this part of England was probably a colony of Scandinavia; and the numerous specimens of the Scandinavian language still existing in this district confirm the supposition.

MURCHIE'S CAIRN.

It is a remarkable fact that, about 25 years ago, the skeleton of a man was discovered by the same shepherd, lying on the same range of ground, about half a mile to the north of the Hessilgil Crag. We are well aware that various methods of disposing of the dead have prevailed in different periods, and in different tribes. Here we have a very rude specimen of the grave of one of our forefathers. The body had been merely placed on the surface of the ground, near a peat-hag about three feet high, and then covered with a few stones, which served for its cyst and cairn. The site was on the edge of a small syke, near the head of the Bullcleugh Beck, at the west end of a range of rising ground called the Murchies rigg, which possibly took its name from the person buried here. The body had been laid north and south, a small dry wall built along one side, and then it had been covered with two thin flagstones, reaching from the wall to the peat-brow on the other side. A few stones still remain to mark the spot. The bones were in a good state of preservation, but the legs had been contracted as usual. One of the thigh bones was broken, the other bones were perfect, except the top of the skull which was not to be found, having possibly been crushed
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in battle. These bones are now in Bewcastle Churchyard. All the finger and other small bones of the hands were found in the lower part of the trunk, as if the hands had been laid across the body, and had dropped in when the bowels decayed. Some of the teeth were wanting, but there had been thirty-two cavities in the jaws. The skin was still remaining on one of the arms, from the wrist to the elbow, having probably been tanned by the moss-water. One of the thigh bones dropped from the body when it was lifted, and had a large piece of skin still under it. The hair was on the legs, and generally over the body, and had been of a dark red colour. The bones and joints of the spine were all in the right place. The shoulder bones appeared to have been pushed back under the spine, but the right shoulder was not in its proper position. The body had been laid on the left side, and as it was lying north and south it may be supposed that the man had been a Pagan Saxon, for in many of the Saxon graves which have been opened, it is said that the body has been generally found lying from north to south. No minne-token, or carved stone memorial was found near it, but the cairn had unquestionably been a burial place, and must be assigned to a remote period.

ART. XXXVIII.—*Greystoke Church, Historical.* By C. J. Ferguson, Esq.

Read at Greystoke, August 15th, 1873.

GREYSTOKE Church is said to be the most extensive example of the perpendicular style in Cumberland, and consists of a nave, with north and south aisles, south porch, chancel, sacristy (with chamber over), and a western tower. The first account of it, mentioned in the local histories, is in the year 1358, when William de Greystoke, *pro salute animæ*, gave to the Collegiate Church of Greystoke one messuage and seven acres of land at Newbiggen, also the perpetual advowson of the parish church of Greystoke, whereby it seems that the church was a collegiate at or before that time: the first notice of the building itself is in 1382, when it is stated that the church being made out of repair, the wall crazy, the

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