

ART. XXXIX.—*Notes on Gosforth Church and Churchyard, and on Sculptured Fragments there.*—By CHAS. A. PARKER, M.D.

Read at Keswick, October the 5th, 1882.

THE quiet country churchyard of Gosforth, which contains, besides the celebrated cross, the heads of no less than three others, lies at the foot of a gently sloping hill, about three miles from the sea. The parish church, dedicated to St. Mary, is a plain unpretentious building; the bell turret bearing the date 1654, which is also the date of the north wall. This bell turret has three arches for bells, the top one is older than the others, and is said to have formerly been on the east end of the nave, *i.e.*, for a sanctus bell.

Above the door at the west end are the figures 1789, in which year the church underwent considerable alterations which destroyed nearly all external marks of antiquity. Inside, however, the ancient chancel arch remains, the piers of which are evidently part of the original building. They are apparently twelfth century work. The arch itself is pointed and said to be of the time of Edward III. The south pier has carved upon its cap three faces, bearded and moustached, connected by a figure of 8 twist, with a beading upon it. These faces are all equal in size and on the same level, and may possibly represent the Trinity. The sculpture on the north pier cap is more irregular. The centre face is highest, the moustache and beard being very distinct. On the east side (of the cap) is a similar face, the twist is only partly shown, and looks like a hood; while on the west side, instead of a face, there is a half length figure with folded hands. In the churchyard is the cap of a pillar of similar character, but without faces. The church

church of 1654 consisted simply of a nave and chancel, with walls about eleven feet high, and was thatched. The seats were forms.

In 1789 a square porch with gabled roof was built on to the west end, the walls were heightened and the porch carried up to contain a stair leading to a large and unsightly gallery. The chancel is said to have been lengthened, shortened, and finally lengthened again in 1858. The south wall of the nave was rebuilt in 1759. There was a pointed north doorway to the chancel which was walled up in 1759, and a door made in the extreme north-east corner inside the communion rails. In 1858 this first door was discovered and opened out, and in it were found several of the carved fragments. The later door was then walled up and the chancel lengthened, and a north transept added utterly out of proportion to the rest of the church, with octagonal tower containing a newel stair leading to another gallery. In 1879 the vestry was enlarged, and a large pointed arch opened into it from the chancel to contain an organ. The old barrel organ was then abolished, and in order to let out the sound of the new instrument an oblong hole, 12 feet by 5 feet, was cut out of the east wall of the transept. The pitiful result of all these alterations and "improvements" may be imagined.

As before stated three cross heads of freestone are preserved in the churchyard along with other fragments.*

The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1799, in an article signed "Carbo," says, that the great cross

"Formerly, as is reported, had a fellow column at about seven feet distance, with an horizontal stone between the two on which was rudely cut the figure of a large antique sword. This stone has been taken away within memory, and the cross which crowned the two columns, (evidently a mistake for second column,) after that column was cruelly cut down and converted into a style for a sundial, was put into the parson's garden at Gosforth and there remains."

* See these on the lithograph, *ante*, opposite p. 373.

Samuel Jefferson in his "Allerdale above Derwent," quotes, without giving his authority, that on the column which was destroyed were two indistinct "figures of horses and men." This act of barbarism was probably committed when the church was so much altered in 1789.

Of the three cross heads, that one which most resembles the head of the great cross has three limbs remaining and half of the circle.* On each limb is sculptured an interlaced pattern in relief, and on a circle a twist or plait, while on the end of the cross bar is more interlaced work, formed by one continuous line. It measures about 1 foot 10 inches in height, and has a tongue on its lower extremity measuring 5 inches more. By the side of this fragment lies a ridge or coping stone with a square socket hole in the top of it, into which the tongue of the cross roughly fits; so this cross possibly was on the gable of the church—but as this is the cross head which was kept "in the parsons garden," it is more likely to belong to the column destroyed in 1789.

The second cross head is more massive.† The upper limb and half the circle or "glory" are gone, the lower is broader than the others, measuring nearly 11 inches across at the base, and is ornamented with an interlaced pattern in relief, closely resembling that on the north side of the standing cross. This pattern extended down the shaft more or less, as the fracture runs through it. The horizontal limbs are ornamented with interlaced work of a simple form. There has been a slightly projecting boss in the centre, surrounded by a ring of cable moulding. The only part of the circle which remains perfect is very beautiful, having a rope-like twist running along each edge, and the same double vertebrae pattern of six or seven pieces which

* This is the upper fragment on the lithograph, between the south and east views of the cross.

† Both faces of this cross head are on the lithograph between the west and north views of the cross.

appears

appears on the east and west sides of the great cross, here apparently signifying the "glory" of Christ in overcoming *the Flesh* on this cross.

On the other face the remains of the boss are more distinct. The cable moulding runs round it. On the lower limb is the same interlaced pattern with the fracture running through it. Two quarters of the circle remain, ornamented with an interlaced or plaited pattern, on one quarter treble, on the other quadruple. The transverse arms have lost their outer ends; on each is carved what appears to be the body of a snake knotted upon itself, the tails being next the boss. These serpents were probably headless, signifying the victory of Christ's cross over the evil one. This fragment measures 23 inches across by $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches high.

The third cross head is much smaller and of quite a different character.* It has a large circular centre on which is a sort of star composed of six radiating leaves, on each limb is a small incised circle.

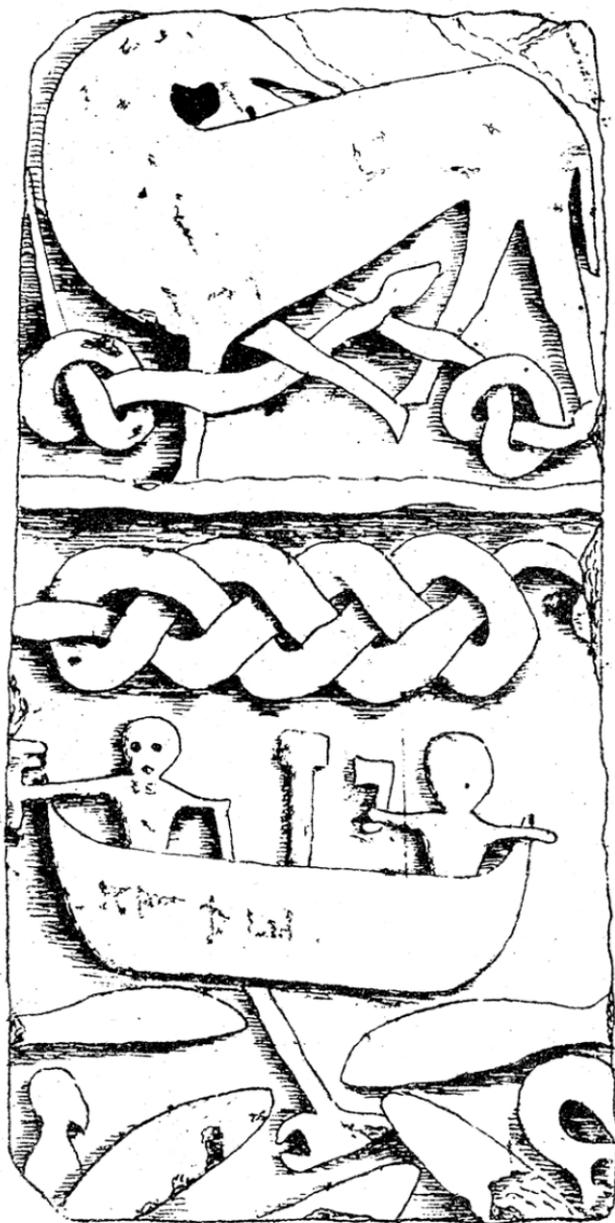
It is said that the "horizontal stone" with a sword cut upon it, now forms the lintel of a door of a house in the village, called Gosforth Gate. If so the carved side is either cut away or hidden by the masonry. This stone was very likely an ordinary sepulchral slab of the 13th century, which had been placed between the two crosses in later times. Three of these slabs are still to be seen in the churchyard.

The sundial mentioned by "Carbo" still remains. It is an *octagonal* pillar rather more than 3 feet high, thickest at its upper end, standing in a plain square socket close to the gate of the churchyard. This socket has evidently not been made for the dial, as it is 2 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 7 inches square, nearly 2 feet thick, and the *square* hole in the centre is much too large for the pillar which stands in it. The distance between the dial and the cross now standing is 15 feet, which coincides with the space between the

* Given on the lithograph below the first cross head.

pillars

Fig 1.



STONE FROM GOSFORTH CHURCH YARD.

Fredk Dangerfield Lith London 4697

pillars at Penrith. The top of the socket is worn hollow by heedless feet, and all traces of carving, if any ever existed, are gone.

By the north-east side of this socket lay a stone with its upper surface just level with the ground, forming a sort of step. This when heaved up in March last by me disclosed on its under side the remarkable sculpture shewn in the illustration.*

This stone is of oblong shape, measuring $27\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 13 inches, and is $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The upper and lower corners on the left hand side have been bevelled off, and the right side has been cruelly chipped away, apparently to make it of more convenient form for a step. The sculpture is in high relief, and is divided into two unequal panels by a transverse line. In the upper panel is a hart, the horns not seen, trampling upon the serpent which is knotted twice. It is doubtful, owing to the fracture of the stone, whether there are not two serpents, if so the head of the second touches the heel of the hart.

In the lower panel is a knotted snake, and beneath a boat or ship, with short thick mast, on the top of which is a "crow's nest." To the left of the mast is the figure of a man facing the spectator, with his right arm extended over the prow, and grasping a hammer. In his left hand he holds a line. To the right is another figure, grasping in its uplifted right hand a hatchet. Below the boat is the line, cut, on the end of it an ox's head, surrounding which are several enormous fish or other marine monsters.

Among the legends of the Scandinavian mythology is the following:—The god Thor wished to catch and destroy the great serpent or Midgard worm, which lay at the bottom of the ocean and encircled the world. Having no bait, he asked his enemy Hyme the giant for his largest ox, and having received it he twisted off its head and baited the hook with it. The great serpent rose and took the tempt-

* Drawn in the middle of the lithograph, *ante* p. 373.

ing morsel, and Thor pulled it to the surface, but the struggles of the serpent were so violent that the bottom of the boat gave way. The god stood in his divine strength upon the bottom of the sea, and again pulled his enemy up, and then it was that Hyme, desperate with terror at the sight of the monstrous serpent, lifted his hatchet and cut the line. The worm sank back again into the billows and escaped.

The story of the stone is now plain :—Above, Christ as the heavenly hart, which is one of the earliest symbols of Him, tramples upon and subdues the serpent; and below the transverse line is the serpent again conquered and head-bruised. We see Hyme with uplifted hatchet, and Asathor with extended arm grasping Miolnir—shortshafted. We see the severed line and the ox's head which the worm or serpent has seized. The giant is alarmed. Not a moment is to be lost, so he swings his knife or axe and cuts the line over. “Between the Ettin and the Hammer—God,” says Professor Stephens, “is the mast with its crow's nest or look-out basket at the top, a feature of great antiquity also in the classical lands.” Not only is the mast highly interesting, but also the shape of Hyme's weapon and of Thor's hammer. This latter is not quite perfect on one side, as being close to the edge of the stone. The whole ship is costly, as the oldest stone picture of a boat used by our “barbarian” Angle forefathers which has come down to us.

The Christian teacher has therefore said to his pagan countrymen :—“Abandon your false belief. Even your famous god Thunor could not slay the great Midgard Worm. But our Christ *did* bruise the serpent's head, and hereafter giveth us life everlasting !”

It can scarcely be doubted that this stone was part of the missing cross shaft, especially when we compare the sculpture with that on the cross still standing. Professor Stephens is of opinion that this block cannot be latter than the 7th century.

There

There is very little tradition to be gathered concerning these stones. Higher up the hill, in a field still called Chapel Croft, about a quarter of a mile from the present church, is the site of an ancient chapel, some stones of which were still lying about within the memory of the older parishioners. About five and twenty years ago a deep trench was dug in the floor of the church, for the purpose of putting down hot water pipes. In cutting this many bones were disturbed which were at once noticed to be of enormous size. Several thigh bones are said to have been nearly 2 feet in length, and I have been repeatedly assured that one gigantic femur measured 2 feet 2 inches.

The village stocks formerly stood close to the cross, and the last man that was confined in them was a person of the name of Sewell, for climbing up the cross and sitting on the top of it, on Sunday morning when "t' priest" was late owing to Saturday night's potatoes. The villagers call the two parallel figures on the east side Adam and Eve, and it is curious with what tenacity they adhere to the belief that there was once another head on the top of the existing cross, but set on transversely.

Of the fragments of 13th century sepulchral slabs which remain at Gosforth, one is the rudest of any I have seen, being covered with heavy pick marks, and simply having incised upon it—the shears.

The second is very thick and is flat on the left side, but bevelled on the right side and at the head end, like one lately found in situ at Dearham against the wall of the church inside. It bears a cross, having an incised head patée with long shaft and calvary steps, and on the left side of the cross are the shears. I see no trace of a book, but below the calvary steps is a sort of ornament formed of curved lines.

These two slabs formed the lintel of the vestry door, and were found in 1879. The third slab is in six pieces, and was found in pulling down the old rectory in 1879, to build
which

which it has been deliberately broken up. It is highly finished, and seems to be of late early English date. Each side slopes away in curved mouldings with two rows of nailhead pattern; on the top is an inner border of nailhead and within that the shears, below which are nine small holes set in a diamond form, with two lines proceeding from them down the slab. This has very much the appearance of a lighted torch.

These slabs are all about 5 feet in length. Small fragments of two others remain, showing floriated cross heads, one of which is in relief.

Beside them lie two stones of what has been a handsome arch decorated with a bold zigzag Norman moulding. Also some pieces of tracery.

There are two small fragments which have upon each of them, in high relief, a circle and cross.

Over the window at the west end is a sort of bracket built into the wall, having a bold beading round it. Evidently a fragment of an earlier building.

Other fragments are said to be in the wall of the church but hidden by the roughcast.

