

ART. XVI.—*Towtop Kirk, Bampton.* By Miss NOBLE.

Read at Penrith, August 28th, 1902.

THE remains called Towtop Kirk have been known to antiquaries for some years, but probably little visited by them. Hodgson thus describes it in *Beauties of England and Wales*:—"In Codale is a place called the Old Church, octangular, forty yards in diameter, with a heap of stones in its centre, and formed by a slight vallum of stones and earth. It is a short distance from the hamlet called Carhullan." It seems curious that a native of the district like Hodgson should fall into the error of calling it the "Old Church," unless it may be that it was used as a place of meeting during the disturbed times of the Commonwealth, but this is pure conjecture. The late Chancellor Ferguson was of opinion that "*kirk*, a stone circle," was the correct appellation, though in the catalogue of the various antiquities of Cumberland and Westmorland compiled by him* he has, following Hodgson, listed it as "Bampton Old Church."

It is situated opposite Moorah Hill beyond the Con Beck, about twenty yards from the stream, across which there is a ford and rude stone bridge of unusual construction, probably for the convenience of those going to the peat fell, to the best part of which there is a road from here passing the circle. The hill side to the south is known as Towthwaite, and "Towtop" is the piece of ground—comparatively level, but sloping a little to the south-east—upon which Codale and Wildale converge. The outline of the circle is irregular, but certainly not octangular. On the west an opening has been made at some period, and

* *Archæologia*, vol. liiii.

one of the peat cots, of which there are many in the neighbourhood, has evidently been built here. The stones of which it was built have mostly been carted away; sufficient remain to show they have no connection with the circle, but have been quarried or broken for walling at a comparatively recent period.

On July 25th, 1902, we made an examination of the remains, under the direction of Mr. W. G. Collingwood, with the following result :—

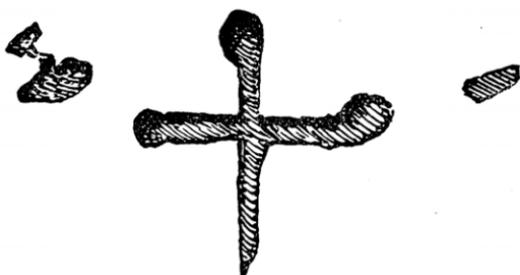
At A on the outer enclosure to the north was a layer of clay of the kind usually found beneath peat, about six inches or more deep and twelve feet wide; and on this stones were piled, forming a low bank, which, in the course of time that has elapsed since its construction, has covered itself with turf and soil to some depth, so that outwardly it differs but little from the surrounding moor. The stones used are cobbles gathered from the land or taken from the beck, and are for the most part only a little larger than paving stones. There has never been any attempt at a fence wall; it is merely a low bank, quite insufficient to keep persons or animals in or out, but such as might be useful to keep wolves or other predatory animals from scratching a way beneath a palisade fence, of which it probably formed the base. We dug for some distance along the crown of the mound to look for the remains of wooden posts, but without result.

At B there seemed to have been a causeway and opening, but digging showed no definite result. At C the appearance of an opening was distinct; the old track from the ford passes close by, and it is most likely it was made for the convenience of taking in the sledges laden with peat when the peat cot was in use, and that the low hillock D was thus formed by the débris. There were no large stones to form a gateway.

In the middle of the enclosure we found a hut circle with the door to the east and of a horse-shoe form, built exactly like the outer rampart, as the section at E showed

—that is, the bank was a mere mound of clay and cobbles. Inside at F the floor was paved with flat stones laid in clay; soot and small fragments of charcoal were found here in the joints of the stones.

The apparent cairn (K), the causeway (near B), and the inner circle (G, H)—or rampart as it seemed to be before digging—were trenched and proved to be merely banks of earth left when peat had been cut in the spaces between the hut circle and the eastern side of the enclosure. Possibly the clay may have been taken from here in making the circle, and, as is usual where peat has been dug, the hole would fill with water in which sphagnum and other mosses grow, gradually forming a new deposit of peat. We trenched the floor of the peat cot also (L), and found a similar pavement of stones here with much crumbled peat, so difficult to discriminate from charcoal. Mr. Collingwood inferred there might have been another hut circle here on which the peat-cot had been built. No pottery or implements of any kind were seen, and no sign of an interment; but on one of the stones lying between L and D was a rudely-cut cross, about an inch and a half in length, evidently ancient and artificial. It may have



INCISED MARKINGS ON A STONE AT TOWTOP KIRK.

been part of a standing stone broken up when the peat-cot was built, and has been set on the top of a small heap so that it may be recognised.

In Towtop Kirk we have a small example of the "British settlement," with rudely-circular rampart and hut circles. The site has been used later for storing peat, but the original structure is of whatever date can be given to the other examples of this type; and the circular burial mounds on Fourstones, about a mile distant, and at Winnyates are probably of the same date.
