



PRE-NORMAN CROSS-FRAGMENT
FROM URSWICK.

Photo. by R. G. Collingwood.

TO FACE P. 307.

ART. XV.—*A Pre-Norman Cross-shaft from Urswick Church.* By W. G. COLLINGWOOD, M.A., F.S.A.

Read at Barrow-in-Furness, September 9th, 1909.

THE Scandinavian settlement of Furness has long been accepted as a working theory, on the strength of place-names and personal names dating back to Domesday Book. Until quite recently, however, no distinctive relics of the Viking age have been found. In 1902 attention was drawn to the Pennington tympanum with its twelfth century Scandinavian runes; early in this year the Rampside sword was discovered, and now we have this Urswick cross, with ornament of Anglo-Scandinavian type, the first pre-Norman stone found in Lancashire North-of-the-Sands.

We owe the find to certain alterations carried out in the church by the Rev. T. N. Postlethwaite, vicar of Urswick. In piercing the north chancel wall to make a recess for the organ this carved stone, which had been used as a through, was taken out, and by Mr. Postlethwaite's kindness it was sent to me for examination and exhibition to the Society.

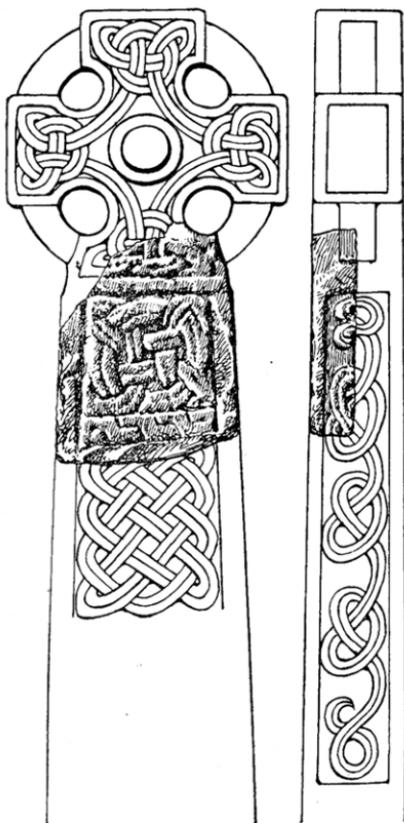
It is of rather soft, red freestone, a fragment measuring $14\frac{1}{2}$ by $11\frac{1}{4}$ by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, representing the upper part of the shaft and neck of a wheel-headed cross. Though the stone has been split, so that one side and one edge are lost, enough remains to give data for the reconstruction of nearly the whole cross. Part of the circumference of one of the four holes, and the spring of the wheel, can be seen, giving the approximate shape and size of the head. The ornament of the four arms can be inferred from the bit of interlacing at the base of the head. Below this, and framed in a tall upright panel with a plain moulding

rounded at the arrises, there is the ornament which must have filled the front of the shaft. The upper member of this panel is the well-known Scandinavian ring-knot, characteristic of tenth century crosses, here worked rudely in a double strap, chiselled and hacked or picked—a style of execution often seen in crosses of the Danish or Norse period. Under this is a bar of step-pattern, imitating a twisted ring of rope. Beneath this bar are the curves of a piece of interlacing which can hardly have been much otherwise than the usual square or oblong of basket-plait; in the restored design it is drawn taller than its width because the carver, following recognised laws of picturesque proportion, would almost certainly have avoided a repetition of the square form.

The thickness and height of the shaft are suggested by the fragment of pattern still seen on one edge. This gives a “Stafford knot” in its simplest arrangement. Mr. Romilly Allen, in *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, part ii., p. 232, quotes Haile and Workington in Cumberland as two of the three English instances of the pattern; we have it also at St. John’s, Beckermeth, fragment B, terminated with a little floriated twist, as this appears to be. There could hardly be less than three knots in the panel, which gives us the minimum length, and the pattern determines the thickness of the stone.

The whole cross was therefore not less than about four feet high; the shaft, near the base, measured about 12 by 6 inches tapering to 10 by 5 inches at the neck. The head had a radius of about 8 inches.

A cross of this type, with a wheel-head, and interlacing partly composed of rings, and executed with the pick as well as with the chisel, belongs to a series well known throughout the north of England, and dated in Yorkshire to about the middle part of the tenth century (see “Anglian and Anglo-Danish Sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire,” by the present writer, in the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, vol. xix., p. 293 and *passim*). But as the



THE URSWICK CROSS.

Stafford-knot pattern connects this example with West Cumberland, where fashions in art seem to have been a little later than in Yorkshire, and especially with the Beckermeth St. John's crosses, which are not early in their series, we may perhaps place the Urswick stone in the later half of the tenth century.

It is obvious that there was already at that time a church at Urswick, and we may be tempted to make a further inference. Comparing the remains of this period along the coast from Workington to Lancaster, though their general resemblance is striking, we find certain small points in which the Urswick stone is akin rather to the West Cumberland than to the Lancashire crosses. This suggests that the christianised Viking colony in Furness in the second half of the tenth century was a little closer in touch with Cumberland than with the people across the Sands; and it lends colour to the theory that there was a central Thingstead in the Lake district, uniting all the settlers between Morecambe Bay and the Solway.

This valuable relic it is intended to preserve in Urswick Church in a glazed case. The freestone, after so many centuries of burial, has lost any patina it may have once had, and will not bear much exposure or handling.

Other carved stones were found in the course of the work at the church, including large fragments of one or more graveslabs; but none of these bear pre-Norman ornament.