

ART. VIII.—*A Bridge of Monastic Date and other finds at Furness Abbey.* By PAUL V. KELLY.

A QUARTER of a mile to the south of the ruins of Furness Abbey, in a small coppice locally known as Ennis Wood, is an ancient stone bridge which now carries a public footpath over the Abbey beck. Nothing appears to be known about this bridge—it has not even a local name—and except for the bare mention of its existence by the late W. B. Kendall, it is not even alluded to by any of the writers on Furness Abbey. This is not surprising considering its secluded situation, and the way in which it is obscured by a dense growth of vegetation. Perhaps also it has been overshadowed in importance by its nearness to the great Abbey.

Built originally to carry the road to the monks' New Mill, it has happily survived, while the mill itself has disappeared. This stood a short distance up the stream, at a point where the Park wall crosses it. Traces of the ancient mill-race may be seen near the railway, but the mill-dam which stood in the meadow just below the Abbey ruins, was levelled up somewhere about 1890.

The present structure consists of a low bridge of three arches, crossing the stream, which here flows north and south, at right angles. Two of the arches are in good condition, but the third, on the western side, is partly ruined, having lost its facing-stones from the north face. There is also a vigorous tree growing out of the core, which threatens soon to bring down more of the masonry. This arch is completely blocked up with silt and fallen stones, and very much overgrown with rank vegetation, and the stream, which has at one time been of much greater width,



MONASTIC BRIDGE, FURNESS ABBEY.

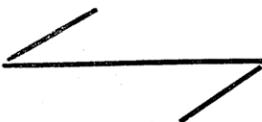
*Photo. by Mr. John T. Ferguson.*

tewaas\_002\_1926\_vol26\_0010

TO FACE P. 262.

is now restricted to the other two arches. The masonry consists of regular courses of hammer-dressed stones, or coarse ashlar. The faces of the arches are quite plain, and the edges, square, without any mouldings or chamfer. The plain semi-circular arches have a span of 7 feet, and rest upon low piers, which are only two courses high. The springers on each pier are single stones cut to suit the voussoirs of both arches. From the bed of the stream to the soffit is 3 feet 8 inches, and to the present level of the roadway 5 feet 4 inches. The parapet has gone, but there are traces of a moulded string-course just below. The moulding is however too much weathered to afford any clue to the date. The piers are 2 feet 4 inches wide and project beyond the springers 4 inches all round. Both ends are square, without cutwaters.

On one of the piers is a masons' mark,



which occurs frequently upon 14th century work at the Abbey, notably in the Chapter House. This stone has probably belonged to some earlier work, and been used up again. The overall width of the stonework is 10 feet 6 inches, the present roadway being 8 feet wide.

The configuration of the valley at the western end of the bridge has been greatly altered by the construction of the railway, so it is difficult to say what its approach would be like from this side, but at the eastern end, the road has been carried on a raised causeway over the flat meadow. Except for the string-course referred to, there is no moulding or ornamentation of any kind to afford evidence as to the date of the structure. A fairly good idea however may be formed by a close examination of the mortar, and comparing it with a sample taken from some other building

of ascertained date in the neighbourhood. On a comparison such as this with a sample taken from the Western Tower of the Abbey, it is seen that both mortars are practically identical in composition and appearance. Both have the same yellowish tinge, and the particles of grit are of the same degree of fineness, much finer than in the mortar used in earlier work, and there is an entire absence of the fragments of charcoal, which is so characteristic of the mortar of the 12th and 13th centuries.

Such evidence slight though it be, when taken in conjunction with the general character of the masonry, seems to afford sufficient justification for assigning to this bridge, a date, somewhere about the same period as the Western Tower—that is 1490-1500. The convent must have been in a prosperous condition at that time, when they could afford to embark upon such costly building schemes as the erection of this great tower. Possibly their import trade in corn from Ireland had developed considerably, and a new mill would be required to deal with the increased supplies of corn. The fact that in the Valuation of 1537, the mill was then known as the New Mill, shows that it could not have been long in existence.

If the date here suggested be admitted, we have in this bridge, the earliest structure of its kind in the district, and what is clearly an ancient monument of great value. Unfortunately, it is outside the scheduled area of the Abbey remains. The attention of the Office of Works has been directed to it, and Mr. Martin, the Superintendent of Works at the Abbey, has personally examined it, so it is probable that the area will soon be extended to ensure its adequate preservation.

At the Dissolution, the Abbey of Furness owned four water corn-mills. These were known as Orgrave Mill, Little Mill, New Mill, and Roose Mill, and were all situated within a few miles of the monastery, on this stream, the only one in Low Furness, which flows through the valley

containing the Abbey ruins. This stream has been spoken of as nameless, but in fact it bears many names—Poaka beck, Orgrave beck, Butts beck, Yarl beck, Brestmill beck, Abbey beck, and finally Salthouse Pool, in its short course of eight miles. It is remarkable that a tiny stream like this should have been considered as capable of yielding sufficient power to drive four great water mills. Whatever its capacity may have been during monastic times, we know that it utterly failed to work the mills efficiently after the Dissolution. There were endless disputes and much litigation in the Duchy Courts, between the tenants and the farmer of the Abbey mills, the tenants contending that it was unreasonable to compel anyone to bring their corn to these mills, which were "decayed, and the dams broken down, and the miller could not grind in due time for lack of water, and that the corn stayed an unreasonable time waiting to be ground, and some of it was stolen." To meet these complaints, William Sandes the lessee of the mills obtained a license to erect a windmill at some convenient place within the lordship of Low Furness, for the better grinding of the corn of the tenants, and in due course a windmill was erected on Walney Island. The New Mill was then allowed to fall into ruin, but the Little Mill and Roose Mill continued to grind corn until a comparatively recent date. The erection of the windmill, which was primarily intended for the benefit of the Walney farmers, did not solve the vexed question of suit and soke, and the law-suits continued intermittently until 1701, before the claim to have all the corn grown in the Manor, ground at the Abbey mills, was finally abandoned.

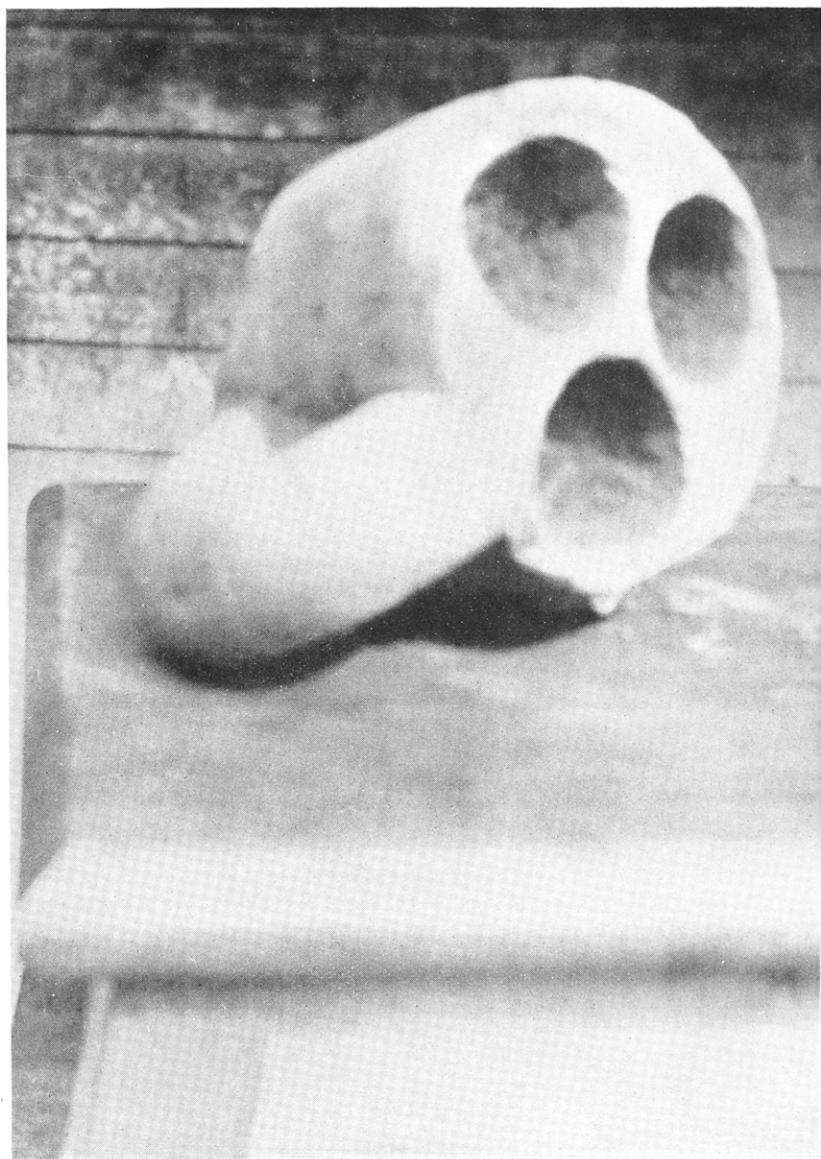
During the excavations which have been carried on by H.M. Office of Works, since January, 1924, at the Abbey of Furness, the number of small portable objects of antiquarian interest that have turned up has been singularly few. With the exception of fragments of painted glass, and

glazed tiles, and some lengths of medieval lead piping, the only find has been the \*cresset stone here described. It was found in June, in the Guest House group of buildings, in the outer court, to the north of the Abbey church. This stone is in almost perfect condition save for a small piece chipped out of the edge of one of the cups. Carved out of the local red sandstone, it is in shape unlike any that I have previously seen illustrated, being cylindrical, and is furnished with a handle. The handle is 2 inches in thickness, but is not however pierced, being only cut deep enough to afford a comfortable grip, and leaving a thin wall of stone about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. There are three cups, each about 2 inches wide, and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, the bottoms being rounded. These cups are noticeably out of line with the handle. The diameter of the stone is 6 inches, and the depth  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches, and although provided with a handle, it is too heavy to hold in one hand, it being necessary to support the weight underneath with the other. It does not appear to have been much in use, and has been long buried, as the tool marks and edges are quite sharp, and this soft stone does not stand long exposure to the air.

Most of the existing cresset stones are square in shape, and contain from four to sixteen, or more cups. Owing to their great weight they were seldom carried about, but were placed in a niche, or other convenient place in the dormitories, and on the night stairs, and the cups filled with grease in which was a floating wick, to light the monks coming down for Matins at midnight. It is difficult to say when they were first introduced, but from the *Rites of the Monastic Church at Durham*, written in 1593, and edited by the late Canon Fowler (Surtees Soc., Vol. 107), it would appear that they were still in use when that monastery was dissolved. In the Chapel of the Nine Altars,

---

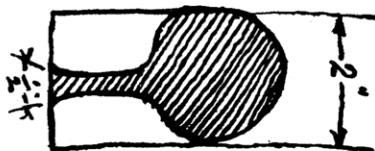
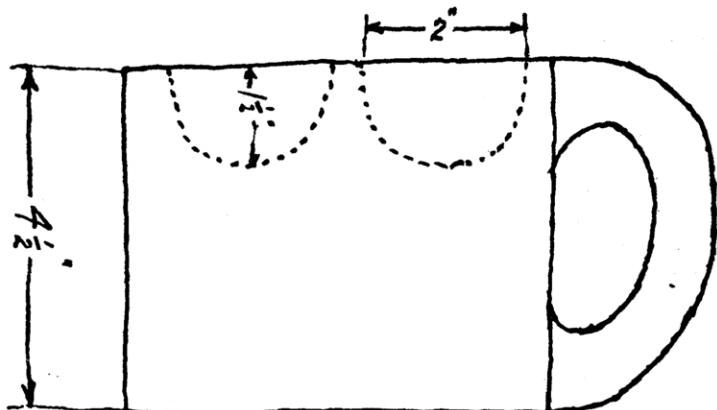
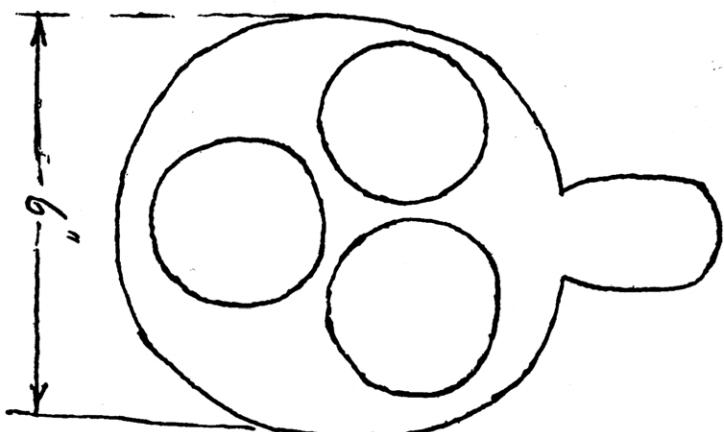
\*Since this section was written there has come to my notice an excellent article on the subject of "Cresses" by Dr. John H. Whitham, and printed in the Thoresby Societies' publications, Vol. xv, "Miscellanea," p. 127.



CRESSET STONE, FURNESS ABBEY.

*Photo. by Mr. John T. Ferguson.*

TO FACE P. 266.



SECTION THROUGH HANDLE.

CRESSET STONE, FURNESS ABBEY (SECTIONS).

TO FACE P. 267.

a cresset of nine cups, not however of stone but of earthenware, was placed in an iron frame below the window of St. Katherine, to give light to the Nine Altars, and St. Cuthbert's shrine. In the *Durham Account Rolls* (Surtees Soc., Vols. 99, 100, 103), these stones are frequently referred to, under the name of "Kersetzez" and "Crucibula."

In addition to the cresset described and illustrated in our *Transactions* (o.s. iii.), by the Rev. T. Lees, which is now in the Infirmary Chapel at the Abbey, there is a fragment of another which has not apparently been recorded. This fragment is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, and 3 inches deep, and contains one nearly complete cup, the stone being broken across through the middle of another. Both of these stones have suffered much from exposure to the air, and are now so fragile, that the surface crumbles into fine sand when handled. (A similar small cresset-stone, but without the handle, was exhibited at our Society's meeting at the Isle of Whithorn by the Rev. R. S. G. Anderson).

Another interesting discovery made this summer, was the finding of two "boards" for playing the ancient game of "Merells," or "Nine Men's Morris." One of these boards is cut in the stone step of the porch of the Guest Hall, and the pattern consists of three squares one within the other, each of the squares being joined by straight lines. This pattern is the same as that figured in Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, excepting that at Furness Abbey the diagonal lines connecting the corners of the squares, and the spots or holes at the intersections for placing the men are missing. The example given in Strutt's book is stated to represent the form in use during the fourteenth century. The second "board" is cut on a loose stone, in what appears to be the kitchen of the Guest House. This is very rudely executed, and is apparently unfinished, consisting only of the three squares, without the straight connecting lines or diagonals.

Excepting for the socket stone of a cross fished up from the submerged church of St. Michael's, Addingham, in the Eden (*Transactions* n.s. xiv, 335), which has the diagonals but only two squares; these "playboards" at Furness Abbey appear to be the only examples which have so far been found in our district.

The *New English Dictionary* s.v. "Merel" derives the name from O.F. Merel=a metal ticket, coin or counter, which refers to the pieces with which the game was played. The earliest quotation there given is 1390, but the game is of much greater antiquity.

Writing on this subject our President says,

In its early form as Mylna (the Mill) of the Norse, it had no diagonals; part of a board marked out for the game was found in the Gokstad Ship (ninth century), and is figured in Du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, fig. 992; and restored in *Saga Book of the Viking Club*, vol. ii, p. 376, to illustrate a paper by Mr. A. R. Goddard; this has no diagonals, and the writer, quoting St. John Hope, and Micklethwaite in the *Archæological Journal*, says that "the lines for the game also appear on the stone seats in Cathedral cloisters . . . . Some have the diagonals, some are without. They are found at Norwich Cathedral and Castle, Gloucester, Canterbury, Winchester, Salisbury, and there is a fourteenth century example at Scarborough Castle." At Athens "a similar board cut in the steps of the Acropolis and elsewhere in that city, occurs" which may have been cut by the Varangian Guard of Northmen in Byzantine service. Mr. Eirikr Magnússon said that the game was played in Iceland to this day, "only on our board we have not the diagonals at the corners." From *Notes and Queries* Goddard gathered that "in Wiltshire, the traditional form with diagonals is called 'Elevenpenny Madell' (i.e. Merelles); in 'Ninepenny Madell' the diagonals are omitted; 'Sixpenny Madell' is played on three triangles, one within the other, and 'Threepenny Madell' requires only one square. The word 'penny' refers not to the coin, but to the pins or pieces. (*Ibid.* p. 381)."

In the article "On the Indoor Games of School Boys in the Middle Ages" by Mr. J. T. Micklethwaite above referred to and printed in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xlix, pp. 319-328, the writer endeavours to prove that where

these playboards appear, some for Nine Men's Morris, and the Fox and Geese, and others for the simpler game of In and Out, in Cathedral cloisters, they were the work of schoolboys and others in pre-Reformation times. "For the last three centuries and a half," he says, "cloisters everywhere in England have been open passages, and there have generally been schoolboys about. It is therefore not unlikely that they should have left behind them traces of their playboards. But if they are of later date than the Dissolution, they would not be found to be distributed in monastic cloisters with respect to the monastic arrangement, and we do find this so."

At Westminster Abbey they are only found in the N.W. corner of the cloister, which if the arrangement agreed with that of Durham, as there is reason to believe it did, was the place of the school. At Norwich where the game boards are very many, they are found in every part of the cloister except the north walk where the monks had their library and studies."

Similarly, in the cloisters of other monastic buildings where the markings appear, they are usually found in that portion where the schools were known to be. The fact that these Merells boards have been found only in the Guest House at Furness Abbey, suggests the possibility that here was the school referred to by West, *Antiquities of Furness Appendix No. viii* where "divers of the children of the said tenants had liberty to come to the school in the said monasterie where they were taught without any payment."

An endeavour was made about 1900 to revive this ancient game in various parts of England, but without much success. On Tees-side, where it became very popular, for a while it was played on wooden boards by means of pegs placed in holes at the intersections of the lines.