

ART. IV.—*Find of pre-Norman Stones at St. Michael's Church, Workington.* By J. R. MASON and H. VALENTINE.

AS some of you are aware, the Curwen vault in St. Michael's church, Workington, has recently been opened up. Access to it was gained by driving a tunnel from the outside (south side) of the church. Before the vault was finally closed, we were invited to inspect the masons' marks cut into the walls of the tomb. They were in the form of simple crosses and were not of deep interest, for the vault itself is not very old, only dating from about 1770. On the other hand, these marked stones may be much older than the tomb and may have formed part of the old Norman church.

But we found four stones infinitely more interesting than the masons' marks, and all of pre-Norman character.

The first is of red sandstone, 14½ inches long, cigar-shaped at one end and merging into four flat sides. It has every appearance of having been originally a water-worn boulder chiselled into the shape of a short stope or post. At the square, or rather oblong end, for it measures 6 by 5 inches, is an incised border enclosing some lettering.

Now it is well known that, before the present edifice was built, a smaller Norman church occupied the site; and judging from the finds described in Calverley's *Early Sculptured Crosses* there was certainly a still earlier church.

The recent excavations prove that the Norman walls stood on a bed of soil and rubble, and it was at the bottom of this rubble that this inscribed stone was found with its conical end projecting. Therefore, at any rate, we take it to be pre-Norman; for it must have fulfilled some

other purpose before it was tipped into the Norman foundations.

Although a headstone of this form is unusual, we suggest that it may have been sunk into the ground by its sharp point, to mark a grave with the name of the deceased cut on the upper surface.

The inscription is much worn and it is difficult to make out the letters. It is not Roman; Mr. R. G. Collingwood, on seeing Mr. Fletcher's photograph of the stone, decided that. An examination of the original shews that several of the letters are of Anglian shape. At first sight the word seems to begin with C. The second letter (nearly rubbed away) is like a Z reversed, that is to say the Anglian S. If this be correct, then the initial letter will probably be O with the part near the S rubbed away. The third letter is I, very tall, with the serif at each end plainly marked. The fourth is much defaced; the grain of the stone crosses the upright and breaks its continuity, but the worn forms seem to represent the Anglo-Saxon þ (TH). The fifth is the Anglian G, the sixth is I and the seventh is D. These letters possibly spelt some such name as OSITHGID, which as a personal name is not known to us: but—gid as the ending of a female name occurs in the earlier part of the Durham Liber Vitae. The date of this lettering is about the 9th to 11th cent., but as the D is not crossed, it might be earlier rather than later in that period.

The first ornamented fragment measures $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches; its original thickness is unknown, for the back is broken away. The fracture shews blueish-grey, but the outside is weathered or stained a light brown. There is a raised and rounded rib, running between a raised circle 4 inches in outside diameter, enclosing four flat-topped bosses in high-relief and part of another circle shewing two bosses. From the position of one of these we infer that there were five bosses in this circle.

The curved outline of the fragment in two places



PRE-NORMAN STONE.

9th to 11th century—probably 9th. Found at St. Michael's Church, Workington, 1926.

Photo. by W. L. Fletcher.

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(below the circles as seen in the photograph) is not original, and does not mean the " armpits " of an Anglian cross; the stone may have been a headstone, not a cross; we do not, at present, attempt any restoration. From the workmanship, we should judge that the design on this fragment has been picked or hacked—not chiselled, and the kind of work is that which was usual from the end of the 9th to the 10th century. It was found during the excavation of the main tunnel.

The smallest fragment was also found in the main tunnel and probably dates from the 10th to the early 11th century. It is of warm grey stone and only measures 7 inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It is clearly part of a wheel cross, neatly chiselled but not very deeply incised. Part of the central ring is shewing, and from this we conclude that the spread of the arms would only be about 15 inches. From the little bit at the top, we see that the wheel was decorated with a double-stranded loop having an outer rim rounded off at the margin. On the other side there is a small patch, parallel to the face, of what we think was the original back, indicating that the cross was about 2 inches thick. This portion does not shew any design, but from this we must not conclude that the reverse was entirely undecorated, for all the remainder of the back is broken away. This fractured part shews traces of mortar indicating that, after destruction, this fragment had been incorporated in some masonry—probably the old Norman church.

The last fragment is a cross-head of a different type. The only decoration on it is a central boss 5 inches in diameter encircled by a raised ring 7 inches in diameter. The chiselled curves of the armpits shew in two places. The stone, which is of yellowish-grey bastard limestone, measures $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 10 inches broad, and 5 to 6 inches thick and with the boss 8 inches thick. The back is flat and was thickly covered with mortar; although we

have had most of this scraped away, no design shows. This fragment was found backing up the skewstone of the arch of the vault. This cross is of the latest phase of Anglian workmanship and the date probably late 11th century.

In passing, perhaps we may just mention that after this stone had been safely exhumed, one of the workmen broke off a large piece of the central boss with his hammer just to see what kind of stone it was! And we believe, another piece of decorated stone was utterly demolished before our arrival.

We have submitted the stones to the President who has given us great assistance, and has prepared drawings from the original stones suggesting restoration of the two fragments which are parts of cross-heads. To him we are also indebted for the approximate dates, and we may say that he is of the opinion that some of these stones are the earliest things of this kind yet found at the site. They suggest indeed that when the bearers of St. Cuthbert's relics went in 876 or thereabouts to Derwentmouth, on their way to Whithorn, they found there an Anglian settlement and a church in being.

The late Canon James Wilson inferred (St. Bees, 66, 138) that the earlier name of this church was St. Mary's, as that appears to have been the dedication in the 12th century, afterwards altered to the present saint, Michael. However this may be, the foundation is probably one of the earliest in the west of Cumberland, and the number of relics of pre-Norman age shews that it was a church of some importance in the dark age of our local history.

Mr. W. L. Fletcher accompanied us on our visit to the church and kindly took the photographs which illustrate this report.



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9th to 11th century—probably 9th. Found at St. Michael's Church, Workington, 1926.



PRE-NORMAN STONE.

End of 9th to 10th century. Found at St. Michael's Church, Workington, 1926.



10th to early 11th century. Found at St. Michael's Church, Workington, 1926.



Late 11th century Anglian work. Found at St. Michael's Church, Workington.

PRE-NORMAN STONES.