

THE ESKDALE DIPTYCH.

*Photo. M. C. Fair, 1927.*

tcwaas\_002\_1928\_vol28\_0027

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ART. XXV.—*Two Medieval Ivory Diptychs from Cumberland.* By MARY C. FAIR.

I VORY carvings of ancient craftsmanship are not usual examples of medieval art to meet with in remote Cumberland Dales, and I therefore venture to think that a brief note on two which have come to my knowledge may perhaps be of interest to our Society. One is from Eskdale, the other from the neighbouring valley, Ulpha, and I will take them in that order.

#### THE ESKDALE DIPTYCH.

This beautiful piece of carving came to light about 1870, during the demolition of an ancient farmstead on the south side of the river Esk (in the parish of Birker), known as Spot How, occasionally spelt Spot Hal or Hall in registers, etc. This tenement stood on the line of the once important pack-horse road which runs on the south side of the river branching off from the main highway from Bootle to Whitehaven just before it crosses the Esk by the Bridge "built by Men of Grasmere" below Muncaster Castle. The old road is known to-day as "The Old Esk Road," and the westerly section of it from Muncaster Bridge to Forge Bridge is still navigable for a stout-hearted motor car and driver. Further east it becomes a bridle path only, a very interesting walk passing many ancient homesteads on its way to join the "Wain Gate" over Hardknot Pass to Ambleside and Kendal. Probably therefore in pack-horse days considerable traffic passed along this ancient highway; it is said by local tradition that there was a tavern at one of the neighbouring tenements near Spot How, and just east of it

is a wooded slope of Harter Fell still known as " Coup Park " no doubt a relic of those far off prosperous days when the monks of Furness Abbey had their grazing farms at Butterelkeld across the ford of Hardknot Gill.

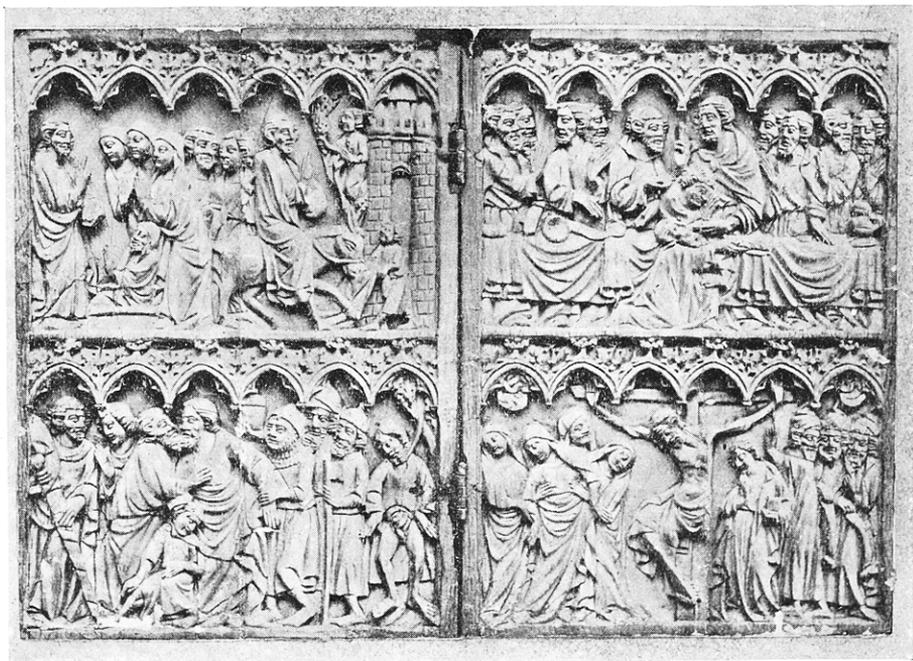
The Registers give information of several families who dwelt at Spot How in former days: Henry, son of William Tyson (bapt.), heads the list in 1663. Down through the years follow Wilsons, Jacksons, Batemans (one Bateman was a Pack-horse driver from Grasmere), Matthewman and Woodend. During the 19th century Spot How, with adjoining properties passed into the possession of the Benson family in whose hands it still remains.

How the diptych came to Spot How will, I fear, never be known, but since its discovery it has been most carefully preserved by its owners, whom I must thank for permitting its exhibition, through the good offices of the Vicar of the Parish, the Rev. J. W. Hall, and for permission to photograph the diptych. It may be of interest to note that one of the men who assisted to pull down Spot How, informed the writer that he noted a quantity of bricks and tiles and carefully tooled stones amongst the masonry of which the old buildings had been constructed, which he felt sure had originally been brought from the Roman fort at Hardknot.

The panels forming the diptych are each  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches broad, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick. The pictures are  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches long by 2 inches across. The hinges have vanished. There are traces of colour (green), and gilding on the ivory. The four pictures (from left to right) are, 1. The Crucifixion. 2. Preparing Our Lord's Body for the Tomb. 3. The Adoration of the Magi. 4. The Virgin (Crowned), and Child. The carving and design are finely executed, and there is much delicacy shown in the carrying out of faces, figures and drapery.

#### THE ULPHA DIPTYCH.

Through the good offices of the Editor of the " White-



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*Photo. M. C. Fair, 1927, from a photograph belonging to the owner.*

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haven News," I have been able to get in touch with the owner of this, who has most kindly forwarded to me a photograph, and permission to copy it for reproduction. He also gives me what information he possesses as to its history.

The Diptych has been in his family for many years, and was supposed to have come from Furness Abbey. The Ivory was examined by experts about fifty years ago, and the opinion expressed that it is early 13th century carving.

The Ulpha diptych is a more ambitious piece of work than the Eskdale example. There are four pictures on the two panels, but each picture is larger, with six arcades instead of three, and many more figures in each subject. The arches of the arcades are not so acutely pointed as in the Eskdale diptych, and the faces of the characters portrayed are of coarser type. The hinges are of silver. The subjects of the four pictures (from left to right) are:

1. The Entry into Jerusalem.
  2. The Last Supper.
  3. The Betrayal. St. Peter to left draws a large sword, while at the right Judas hangs himself.
  4. The Crucifixion.
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