

ART. VIII.—*Three West Cumberland notes.* By MARY C. FAIR.

I. THE LOST DEDICATION OF DISTINGTON CHURCH.

WHEN the ancient church of Distington was pulled down in 1886 and replaced by an entirely new (and very beautiful) edifice, the original dedication was unknown, and the new church was dedicated to the Holy Spirit. The two pre-Reformation bells were retained, and the treble bell bears, cast upon it, the legend "Sancte Cudberte Ora Pro Nobis", which made me think that this fifteenth-century survivor probably bears the name of the saint to whom in antiquity the church had been dedicated. Charters and documents gave no help, referring only to the "Ecclesia de Distington". On 7 March 1951 I was engaged in examining the oldest Distington Register, with the help of the rector, the Rev. C. J. Warren; this Register, which begins in 1662, had been rebound at some time in the past, and we found, bound up in the middle of it, four pages of earlier date, the first of 1653: and on this page, faint and faded, worn and stained as it is, we could read quite clearly "The Church of St. Cuthbert"; in 1653, therefore, the dedication was evidently still known. The old church of Distington was the most fitting, above all others I know within our district, to bear the name of St. Cuthbert; the body of the saint, after its long journeying, is said to have been taken by ship from "Derwent Moue" to Whithorn; from the ridge overlooking the Solway at Distington, Whithorn can almost be seen, and Derwent Moue is quite near, and it was on that ridge that the ancient church stood. Workington church, near at hand to Derwent Moue, is

also a pre-Norman edifice, but its dedication is to St. Mary, or St. Michael, and not to St. Cuthbert; we may be justified, therefore, in postulating that Distington was the last halting-place of the monks conveying the saint's body, before they embarked for the crossing to Whithorn.

I have to thank Mr Warren for his help in examining the Register, and both Mr and Mrs Warren for their kindly hospitality.

II. THE LOWESWATER BELL.

One of the two medieval bells from Loweswater, which lay about neglected for some time, was fortunately rescued by the late Canon Rawnsley, who purchased it and took it to Keswick. At first it was hung in the parish hall at Crosthwaite, but later it was taken into Crosthwaite church, where it is now rests upon the sill of one of the south windows, where it can be well seen. Mr B. L. Thompson kindly took the photograph of the bell, here reproduced as fig. 1; my thanks are due to him, and to the vicar and the sacristan of Crosthwaite, who helped to carry the bell from the church to a tombstone in the churchyard, where the lighting conditions were more favourable for photography.

The bell has an inscription round its shoulder, in small Lombardic letters of late type; there is an initial stop, but no interval stops between the words; the letter S is reversed each time, and one O lies on its side; the text is as follows:—

SANCTA MARIA ORA PRO NOBIS

Mr Frederick Sharpe, to whom a print of the photograph was sent, kindly reports as follows: "Judged by its shape, the Loweswater bell appears to me to be of the normal late 14th century English type. It may well be by some very early 15th century North Country founder, because the shape of bells developed later in the north and west. The canons are of the English type, and not of the same type as those on the Lamplugh bell. The

latter was cast in a foundry, probably an Irish one; but the Loweswater bell may have been cast by an itinerant founder. Its moulds were made by the 'clay-model' process, and the lettering was first formed in wax and then stuck on to the clay model, instead of being impressed into the cope by means of metal stamps. Apart from these observations, there is little I can say about the bell. As it is wide in the waist, it should have a major-third tierce and a flat seventh hum-note, which one would expect in a late 14th-century bell, or in one cast early in the 15th century. One might even go so far as to say that the shape of the bell is early 15th century, and that the lettering and the inscription are of late 14th century type."

Loweswater received parochial status in 1404, so that it may well have been given its bells at that time. It was one of the chapelries within the great parish of St. Bees, the others being Ennerdale, Eskdale and Wasdale. Its dedication is unknown; the only one of the chapelries with a recorded dedication is Eskdale (St. Catherine), which was granted parochial status about the same time, and which still retains its early 15th century bell—not so well cast as that from Loweswater.

III. THE IRTON CRUSADER'S TOMBSTONE.

This ledger-slab tombstone was formerly beneath the altar in Irton church, but it was thrown out on the restoration and rebuilding of the church in 1856, and taken to Irton hall, where it remained for some time; thence it seems to have been moved to Drigg, and from Drigg to the Distington museum, on the dispersal of which it found a home at Museum House, where it still remains, propped against the garden wall and much overgrown with ivy. Its owner, Mr Mitchell, kindly communicated with me towards the end of 1950, inviting me to go to Distington to see the stone, and with his help I photographed it (fig. 2). It is broken into three pieces and so

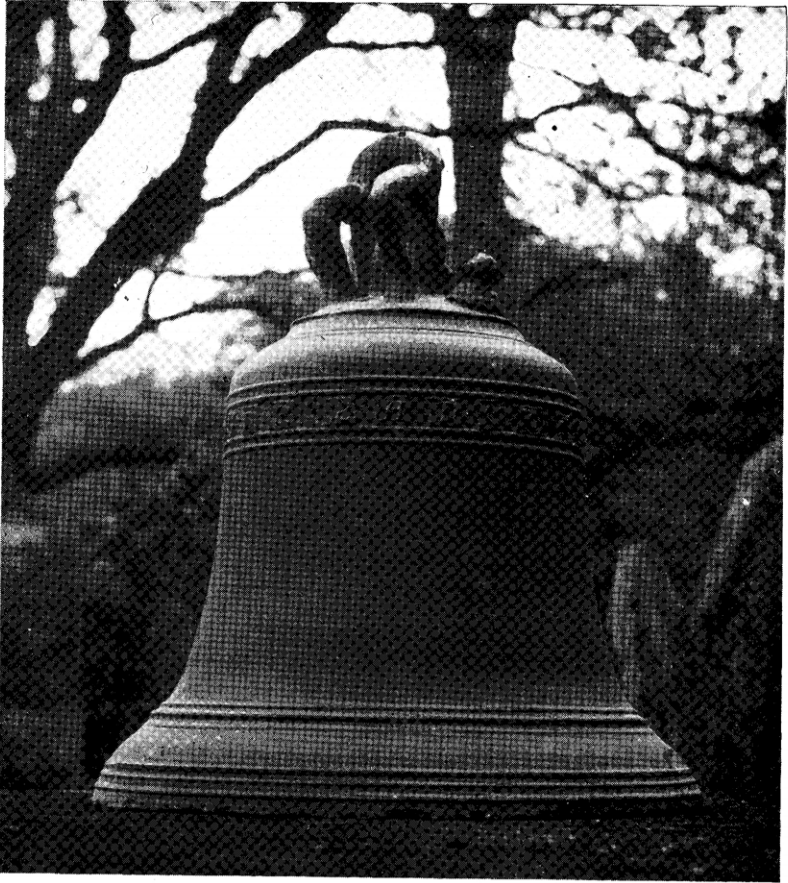


FIG. 1.—THE LOWESWATER BELL.

Photo: B. L. Thompson

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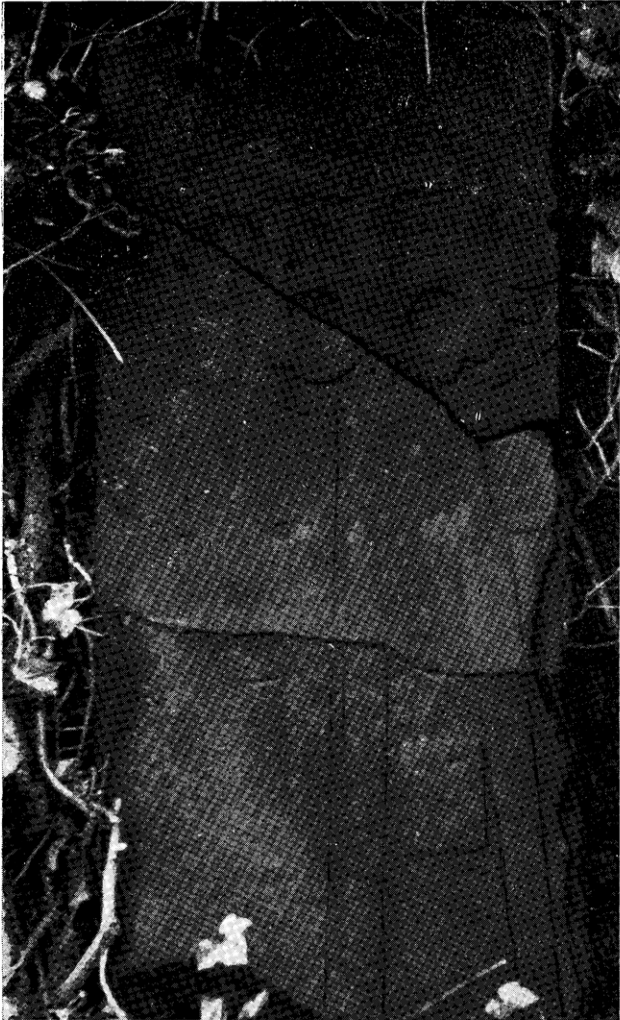


Photo : Mary C. Fair

FIG. 2.—THE IRTON TOMBSTONE.

facing p. 95

worn as to make the carving difficult to make out, and photography almost impossible; but the stone does retain sufficient detail for it to be made out. It shows a cross, the head of which is enclosed within a circle, and around it are eight annulets; on the sinister side of the shaft is a sword with straight quillons, and between the sword and the cross-shaft is an object suggesting a wallet or scrip. The significance of the latter was difficult to interpret, but at the suggestion of Dr Philip Corder I referred the matter to the Rev. Thomas Romans, F.S.A., who points out that the wallet signifies that the tombstone was that of a pilgrim, probably a knight who had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from piety, or in expiation of sins. Mr Romans adds that the total of eight annulets is unusually large, four being the normal total; they may represent wreaths or garlands. Mr Mitchell is preserving the stone carefully in his garden; perhaps some day it might be possible for it to return to Irton church.