



PRE-NORMAN CROSS-SHAFT, NO. 1, FOUND AT NORBURY. FRONT AND BACK.
Scale, $\frac{1}{12}$ linear.

Notes on Two Pre-Norman Cross Shafts found at Norbury, Derbyshire, in 1902.

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THE village of Norbury, Derbyshire, is situated on the south-east side of the river Dove, about half-way between Rocester and Ashbourne. The church is five minutes' walk uphill from the railway station.

The two pre-Norman cross-shafts, which are hereafter described, were found at the end of 1902, during the restoration of the church, built into the foundations of one of the buttresses of the north wall of the chancel. The north-east corner of the chancel is supported by two buttresses—one against the east wall, and the other against the north wall. The buttress into which the cross-shafts were built is the one next to the corner buttress on the west side of it. The foundations of this buttress were about 6 ft. deep, and the cross-shafts were found 1 ft. 6 ins. above the bottom. The longer cross-shaft formed one of the face stones on the west side of the buttress, and the shorter one occupied a similar position on the east side. The outer ends of the cross-shafts formed the two corners of the buttress, and the inner ends were bonded into the north wall of the chancel. The information here given was kindly supplied by the contractor for the restoration, Mr. William Gould, of Tutbury.

The Gothic architects seem to have had a very wholesome contempt for the art of their predecessors; so much so, that they felt no scruple whatever in chopping up an Anglo-Saxon

cross into blocks of convenient size, and utilizing the pieces thus obtained as building material. There are numerous instances of this practice in different parts of the kingdom, as at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Scotland, Durham Cathedral in England, Gosforth church, Cumberland, Leeds parish church, and in many other cases. However much we may regret the mutilation of the pre-Norman sculptured monuments by the church builders of a later period, it must always be a source of satisfaction to the antiquary to think that portions of crosses which would otherwise have inevitably perished by long exposure to the weather have, in consequence of their usefulness as building material, been preserved, with the details of the ornamental carving as perfect now as it was nearly a thousand years ago.

We will now proceed to describe the two pre-Norman fragments found at Norbury.

No. 1 is a cross-shaft of sandstone, 5 ft. 3 ins. high by 10 ins. wide at the top and 1 ft. 3 ins. wide at the bottom, by $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins. thick at the top and $11\frac{1}{2}$ ins. thick at the bottom, sculptured in relief on four faces, thus:—

Front.—A single panel of ten-cord plaitwork with double-beaded cords.

Back.—A single panel of interlaced work, composed of circular rings and would-be rings, with four pointed loops joined together, and the same pattern repeated three times. In the upper two repetitions of the pattern the circular rings are double, and in the bottom one they are treble. The circular rings are concentric in each case, and the cords forming the other would-be rings with four loops are crossed over and joined where each of the pointed loops meet, so as to make the interlaced design continuous. The design terminates at the bottom in a small bit of three-cord plaitwork placed horizontally, leaving two cords with loose ends. All the cords are double-beaded.

Right Side.—A single panel containing, at the top, a piece of interlaced work composed of figure-of-eight knots with double-beaded cords; and at the bottom the figure of a man holding an object resembling a staff in his hand.

Left Side.—At the top, a small horizontal band of twisted work, forming the top of a single panel containing double-beaded interlaced work, composed of an undulating cord with Stafford knots in each of the bends. The lower part is defaced.



PRE-NORMAN CROSS-SHAFT, NO. 1, FOUND AT NORBURY. TWO SIDES.
Scale, $\frac{1}{12}$ linear.

No. 2 is a cross-shaft of sandstone, 3 ft. 9 ins. high by 10 ins. wide at the top and 1 ft. 3 ins. wide at the bottom, by 7 ins. thick at the top and 1 ft. thick at the bottom, sculptured in relief on four faces, thus:—

Front.—Portion of a single panel, much defaced, containing at the top a piece of four-cord plaitwork with double-beaded cords; and below the figure of a man with his hands upraised in the ancient attitude of prayer.

Back.—Portion of a single panel containing interlaced work, with double-beaded cords, composed of Stafford knots, having an additional cord interwoven with each, placed with the points of the knots facing outwards and repeated in two vertical rows.

Right and Left Sides.—Portions of single panels containing interlaced work, with double-beaded cords, formed by repeating figure-of-eight knots. On the angles of the shaft there is a peculiar hollow cable moulding.

Only two kinds of decoration are made use of on the two Norbury cross-shafts, namely, interlaced work and figure subjects. The most elementary form of interlaced work is the simple plait. On shaft No. 1 there are plaits of ten and three cords, and on shaft No. 2 a plait of four cords. It is very unusual, either on the Celtic or Anglo-Saxon sculptured stones, to find so large a surface entirely covered with plaitwork as on the panel on the front of shaft No. 1. The only other instances I have come across of anything like such a large panel of plaitwork are on the Maen Achwyfan* in Flintshire, on a cross at Stonegrave† in Yorkshire, and on a cross-shaft at St. Neot‡ in Cornwall. In the case of the Stonegrave cross, figures of men are introduced amongst the plaitwork, thus somewhat relieving the sameness of the pattern. In fact, plaitwork used thus in broad masses belongs rather to the Roman art of the first four or five centuries A.D. than to Celtic or Anglo-Saxon art; not, of course, on that account I wish to suggest anything like so early a date for the Norbury stones.

* *Archæologia Cambrensis*, ser. v., vol. viii., p. 76.

† Bishop G. F. Browne's *Theodore and Wilfrith*, p. 231.

‡ A. G. Langdon's *Old Cornish Crosses*, p. 406.

I have shown elsewhere* how the two most common knots in pre-Norman work, namely, the Stafford knot and the figure-of-eight knot, are derived from a plait of three and four cords respectively. Now, a knot, like the Stafford knot, which is derived from a plait of an uneven number of bands, has this disadvantage when used for purposes of decoration: that if repeated in a single row, the ends cannot be joined up so as to complete the pattern. One way out of the difficulty was to connect the interlaced work into the body of a serpentine creature, with the head of the reptile terminating one of the loose ends, and the tail the other. Another way (as the *Cookery Book* has it) is to introduce an additional cord pursuing an undulating course between the knots, as on the left side of shaft No. 1, in which there are no loose ends. This peculiar pattern occurs elsewhere in the following instances:—

On a cross at Aycliffe, county Durham (E. L. Cutts' *Sepulchral Slabs*, pl. 77).

On a coped tombstone at Bexhill, Sussex (*Jour. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, vol. xli., p. 267).

On a cross at Sancreed, Cornwall (A. G. Langdon's *Old Cornish Crosses*, p. 41).

On a cross at Lanherne, Cornwall (*ibid.*, p. 376).

On a cross-shaft at Water-Pit Down, Cornwall (*ibid.*, p. 376).

In all of these the interlaced work is zoöomorphic—that is to say, the cords are converted into a serpentine creature with a head at one end and a tail at the other. The head of the serpentine creature is at the top of the panel; the body, which is made broader than the tail, then traverses the panel in undulating curves from side to side, until it reaches the bottom, where the direction is reversed, and it makes the return journey from the bottom to the top in a series of Stafford knots, each filling one of the spaces between the undulating body of the creature and the sides of the panel. Lastly, the end of the tail goes into the creature's mouth. It is more than likely that the design on left side of shaft No. 1 was

* *Archæologia Cambrensis*, ser. v., vol. xvi., p. 33.



PRE-NORMAN CROSS-SHAFT, No. 2, FOUND AT NORBURY. FRONT, BACK, AND TWO SIDES.
Scale, $\frac{1}{3}$ linear.

of a similar kind, the head of the creature being on the lower part of the panel, which is now defaced.

The figure-of-eight knot is so common a stock-in-trade of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon decorative artist that it would be tedious to enumerate the number of sculptured monuments upon which it occurs.

The interlaced pattern, composed of Stafford knots with an extra cord interwoven through each on the back of shaft No. 2, is a very effective bit of decoration. It occurs elsewhere on sculptured monuments at Ilam and Checkley* in Staffordshire, Glamis in Forfarshire, and Govan near Glasgow. On the fragment of a cross-shaft at Alstonfield in Staffordshire, a modification of this pattern may be seen, in which a pair of twisted cords are introduced in the middle between the knots.

The interlaced design on the back of shaft No. 1 belongs to an entirely different kind from those hitherto described, because it is not derived from a plait, but from a device composed of a circular ring combined with a ring having four pointed loops. This device, in its simplest form, is probably of Scandinavian, rather than Celtic, origin. It occurs on the walrus-ivory chessmen from the Island of Lewis,† now in the British Museum, and on some of the Norman fonts of Norfolk.‡ The pattern on the back of the Norbury cross-shaft No. 1 is evolved from this device by increasing the number of circular rings and joining the corners of the other rings, which have four pointed loops, so as to make the design continuous when the interlaced rings are repeated in a row one below the other. It is possible that these devices composed of interlaced rings may have had some symbolical meaning‡ attached to them in the first instance. As far as I know, the

* G. F. Browne "On Basketwork Figures of Men represented on Sculptured Stones" in *Archæologia*, vol. 1., p. 287. See also Bishop Browne's paper on the pre-Norman sculptured stones of Derbyshire in the *Journal* of the Derbyshire Archæological and Natural History Society, vol. viii., p. 164.

† *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv., p. 214.

‡ *Reliquary* for 1902, p. 119.

peculiar pattern on the back of Norbury cross-shaft No. 1 is only to be found elsewhere on the pillar-crosses at Ilam and Checkley in Staffordshire.*

There is not much to be said about the human figures on the Norbury cross-shafts, as their meaning is somewhat obscure.

I have already pointed out the remarkable similarity which exists between the designs of the sculptured monuments at Checkley, Ilam, and Alstonfield in Staffordshire, and those at Norbury in Derbyshire. I venture to call the whole of these the Dove Dale sub-group of the larger Mercian group of pre-Norman crosses. If casts of all the Mercian crosses were to be taken and arranged in the museums at Sheffield, Nottingham, or Derby, it would be possible to compare the whole group in a way that is not now possible. Most of the crosses are still exposed to the disintegrating effects of the weather, and the sculpture upon them is slowly, but none the less surely, being obliterated. How could a few hundred pounds be better spent than in preserving some permanent record of these priceless treasures of early Christian art in England before it is too late?

* A similar, but not identical pattern, occurs on the fragment of a cross-shaft at Stowe Nine Churches, Northamptonshire. (See C. A. Markham's *Stone Crosses of Northamptonshire*, p. 108.)