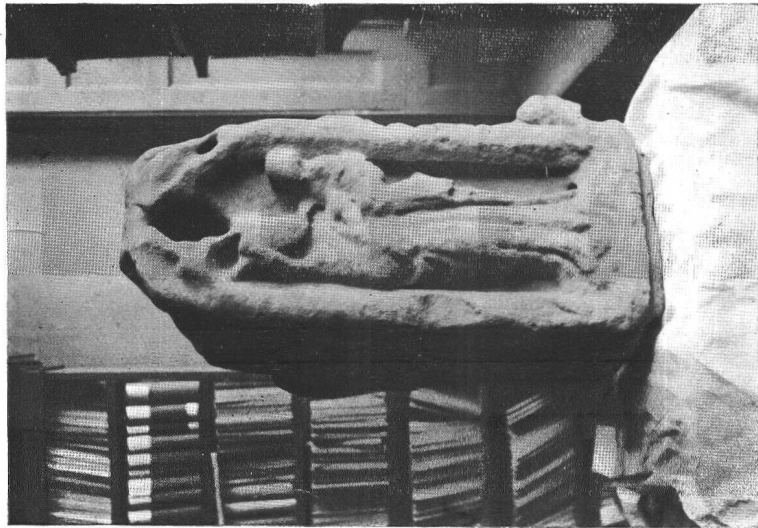


PLATE I.



Photos by T.L.T.
VIRGIN AND CHILD.

PLATE II.

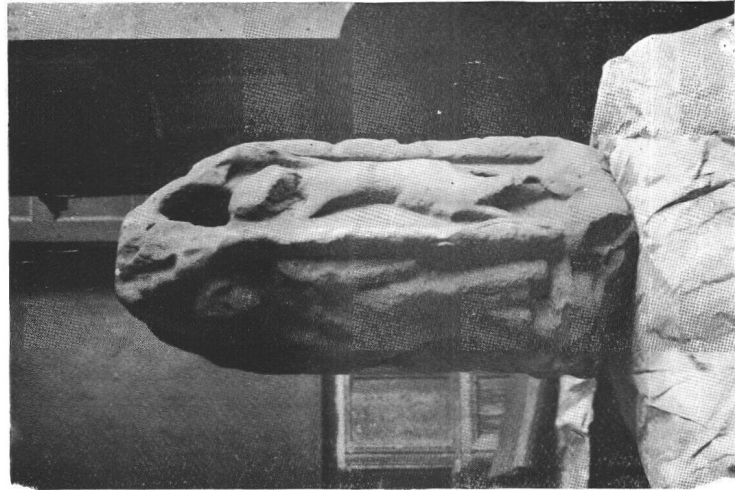
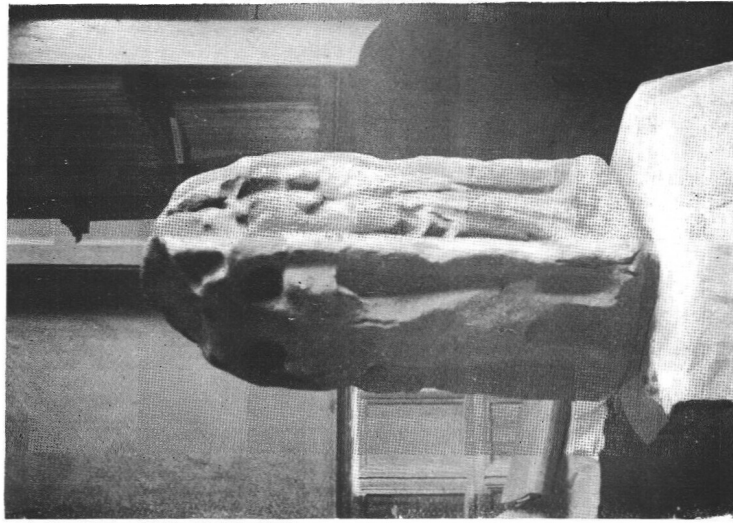


FIG. 1.—ST. MICHAEL.
FIG. 2.—THE CRUCIFIXION.



TO FACE P. 131.
FIG. 1.—A SAINT.
FIG. 2.—VIRGIN AND CHILD.

The Village Cross of King's Newton.

BY THOMAS L. TUDOR.

THE visitor to King's Newton, in the parish of Melbourne, will notice, in the midst of the village, a ring of stone steps, evidently the site of an ancient cross. The steps are old but fairly complete, and from their midst grows a large lime tree. All trace of the actual cross has long disappeared from the neighbourhood, but something over fifty years ago, the Derbyshire author, Mr. J. J. Briggs, in his *History of Melbourne* evidently written before 1859, thus refers to the cross:—“Some workmen, when repairing the bottom of a well near the spot where it once stood (and which still bears the name) found the upper part of it. This stone now ornaments the end of a wall upon the premises of Miss Greaves.” In a *Guide to Melbourne and King's Newton*, by the same author, written a few years later, a further reference says “the cross here alluded to, was destroyed probably a century ago, but the steps, from which, in place of the cross, grows an ornamental tree, still stand.” The author does not tell us what evidence he has for using the word “probably” in the above sentence. Four rude woodcuts are shown in this work, representing the four sides of the stone, and they are tolerably correct.

For some time after the publication of these references, the head of the cross, and, we are told, portions of the shaft also, were known to be lying about, but nothing whatever was done towards rescuing these relics from base

uses. Local interest seems to have been non-existent, and eventually, the cross was lost sight of altogether.

Early last year, the head of the cross was discovered by the present writer, far from its original locality, and when identified, the person in whose possession it was,¹ readily expressed his willingness to hand it over to the Derbyshire Archæological Society, that it might once more become an object of public interest.

The stone, which is now in the Society's library, is an upright, gable-headed block of sand-stone, boldly carved on each of the four sides, with a standing figure in a trefoil-headed panel. The block has not the outline of a cross, but of course, derives that term from the principle figure, which represents the Crucifixion. This figure, (plate II., 2) owing partly to weathering and partly to some peculiarity in the original sculpture, has now a curious and unusual form not quite easy to understand. But the intention is unmistakeable. The figure next in importance, and by far the most artistically interesting, is that of the Virgin and Child. Here the stone is sufficiently well preserved, despite its many vicissitudes, for us to recognize the qualities of the sculpture and much of the detail. The Virgin stands in that peculiar bent-back attitude which is said to have been derived from the natural curve of the ivory in early carvings, and which prevailed all through mediæval times. She faces partly towards the child, who stretches out a hand to touch the mother's face. The pose of the figures and the flow of drapery have a simple and charming grace, and fix the period of the sculpture as late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (plate I). It is the best, and certainly the most ancient example of its kind in Derbyshire.

The two narrower sides each contain a figure, one being in all probability, St. Michael. The other figure is not

¹ Mr. David Smith, Almond Street, Derby.

easily identified, owing to the perished condition of the material. It probably represents some local Saint. As to the representation of St. Michael in such a place, this is likely enough, seeing that King's Newton is in the parish of Melbourne, and that Melbourne Church is dedicated to St. Michael. An ancient fresco in the church represents the saint slaying the dragon of evil. Traces of some animal form will be recognized at the foot of the figure (plate II., 1). The figure which appears to wear a gown or tunic coming just below the knees, presents the most difficulty. Someone has suggested that it may be intended for St. Nicholas, as there was an ancient chapel dedicated to that Saint at King's Newton, and subject to the mother church of Melbourne. The difficulty about this conjecture is that the figure presents none of the usual symbols of the Saint, who was the traditional protector of children. Perhaps the figure represents St. Chad as the missionary of Mercia (plate III., 1).

On becoming possessors of the stone, the Society immediately started a scheme for replacing it in its original position, and Mr. Percy Currey designed a new shaft for the ancient head. Many local people were found to be much interested in the project, and the question of the modest sum required for the purpose presented no difficulty. It was also evident that something more than a mere archæological interest was awakened by the proposal to set up this ancient sign of the church's faith on the spot where mediæval reverence had first placed it. The Shardlow District Council, the Melbourne Parish Council were both consulted and all seemed to be going well, when a party of opposition sprang up in the village, and objections were raised against cutting down the tree growing on the steps. Efforts were made to overcome this opposition, but met with no success, and as the cross could not be replaced without clearing the site, this determined opposition made the

scheme no longer feasible, and the Society had to reconsider its plans.

At a subsequent meeting of the Council of the Society, it was decided to open negotiations with a view to placing the cross head in Melbourne Church. This course was resolved upon after some discussion, the principal view being that the relic should, as far as possible, be returned to its original locality. But a proviso was adopted to the effect that if this arrangement were carried out, it should not prejudice the Society's right to re-open the original scheme, if ever the opportunity should again present itself.

The preliminaries of this second scheme are in progress at the time of writing.