

A Note on a Fragment of an Anglo-Saxon Wheel Cross found at Abingdon.

By E. A. GREENING LAMBORN.

ON the eastern side of Winsmore Lane, leading from The Square to West St. Helen's Street, is an 8 foot wall of rough rubble enclosing the west and south sides of the garden of The Square House. A middle-aged resident in the lane told me that her father had spoken of getting through the hedge of the garden to rob an orchard. The wall is therefore no older than the present house which appears to have been built about a century ago in Wardour street gothic.

In 1927, when the ivy on the wall was cut, I noticed among the rubble opposite No. 7, Linwood Terrace, a carved stone, and on stopping to examine it recognised the unmistakable marks of pre-Conquest workmanship (Fig. 1). It appeared to be a piece of a wheel-cross and this opinion was strengthened when experiment showed that its curve was part of a complete circle.

It bears the triquetra, or triangular interlacement like the Tyrell Knot, which is the most frequent of all pre-conquest decorative forms. On comparing it with the engravings in Cutts's *Manual for the Study of Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses* I found that the crosses at Glendalough (*Plate LXXVI.*) and Nevern (Fig. 2) show a pattern almost exactly similar, and, aided by them, my colleague, Mr. C. Eason, of Abingdon, sketched a possible reconstruction of the original design. (Fig. 3).

I brought the stone to the notice of a local member of the Society of Antiquaries and suggested that, as the sole remaining vestige of pre-conquest Abingdon it should be removed to some more appropriate position. Nothing however was done until, in December of last year, I observed that The Square House was being pulled down, a Cinema Company having purchased the site. By means of suitable arguments I thereupon induced the workmen to remove the stone from the garden wall and put it into my car. It measures 20in. by 11in. by 4½in. and weighs 66 lbs. It is of the local oolite, probably from Headington.

A NOTE ON A FRAGMENT OF AN ANGLO-SAXON WHEEL CROSS
FOUND AT ABINGDON.



FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

A NOTE ON A FRAGMENT OF AN ANGLO-SAXON WHEEL CROSS
FOUND AT ABINGDON.



FIG. 3.

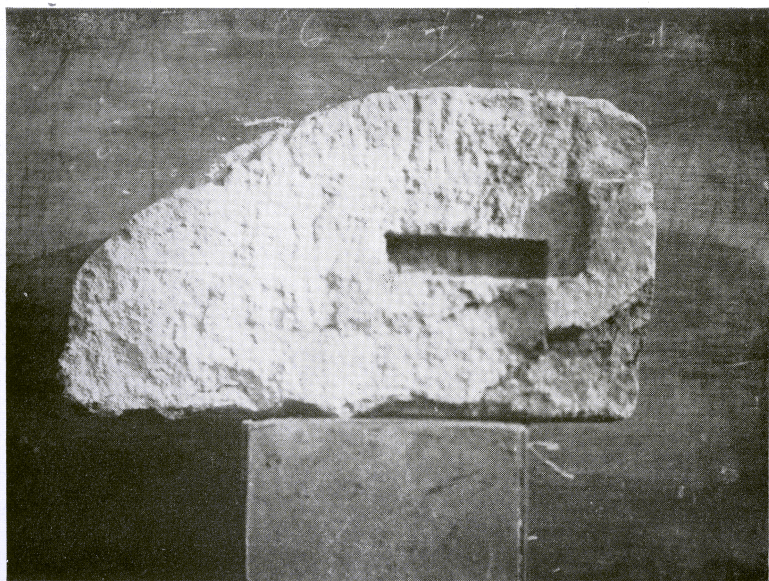


FIG. 4.

I had hoped that the hidden face would reveal further carving of Anglo-Saxon design but it showed only a roughly dressed surface and a mortice for a dowel (Fig. 4), suggesting that the wheel must have been made not, as usual, from a single block of stone but in sections dowelled together—for it is difficult to imagine any purpose for which a dressed face and a dowel would be required when the stone was broken up for rubble. On the other hand it is equally difficult to understand how a composite wheel of this size—40in. in diameter, could have been safely poised upon its shaft, and how the wet could have been kept out of its joints.

Mr. R. G. Collingwood, to whom I showed a photograph, considered that it was undoubtedly part of a cross; and Mr. E. T. Leeds, of the Ashmolean, pointed out that the design is characteristic of the later Anglo-Saxon period. I think there can be little doubt that it is part of the work of St. Ethelwold, who refounded and rebuilt Abingdon in the middle of the tenth century.

The *Abingdon Chronicle* records that "the blessed Ethelwold in King Edgar's reign constructed here a worthy temple in honour of the Holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, and completed it as he had vowed. . . . And bearing diligently in mind the scripture 'Lord I have loved the beauty of thine house' (*Psalm xxvi.*) and applying the saying in the first place to the outside of it, he enriched the building with much costly ornament." The account then goes on to enumerate his gifts to the inside of the church and particularly three large crosses and a great wheel hung with bells.¹

How this fragment of a wheel-cross came to Winsmore Lane it is idle to speculate in the absence of all records. I have given it a temporary home to save it from being once more used as rubble. But as the oldest piece of Abingdon and the only vestige of the Abbey's greatest period it should return and remain there.

I have to thank my friend Mr. William Martin for the photographs.

¹ ii. 344.