

CHELMORTON CHURCH, DERBYSHIRE.  
A FEW NOTES ON SEPULCHRAL SLABS AND OTHER VESTIGES.

By CHARLES SPRENGEL GREAVES, Esq., Q.C.

ON the 8th of last October, accompanied by Mr. James Yates, I went from Buxton to Chelmorton, in order to examine some ancient monuments of which we had received information. As we entered the churchyard, the Rev. R. W. Foulger, the curate, appeared in his canonicals at the porch of the church, accompanied by a number of the parishioners. On inquiry, we ascertained that he was about to lay the foundation stone of a new chancel forthwith to be built on the site of the old fabric at the eastern extremity of the church. We attended the ceremony; and this led to our acquaintance with Mr. Foulger, the curate of the aged vicar, the Rev. James Coates, who was too infirm to attend on the occasion. Mr. Foulger came, not long since, from the south of England; he found the church in such a ruinous state that it was essential that it should be pulled down and rebuilt; and most energetically has he worked with a view to accomplish that object. He is anxious that every feature of interest in the old church should be restored as accurately as possible in the new structure; that, in fact, it should be truly a restoration in its proper sense.

First, he brought the undertaking before the Duke of Devonshire, who owns the land in the township which was allotted at the beginning of this century in lieu of the great tithes. His Grace, like a prudent man, questioned Mr. Foulger as to the necessity for rebuilding the chancel; and an answer, which I think was as happy a one as could be given to so great a mathematician as his Grace, settled the matter at once. Mr. Foulger replied, that the walls were a foot out of the perpendicular: and thereupon the noble Duke at once undertook to rebuild the chancel at his own expense, though, as far as I can learn, it is doubtful

whether he was under any legal liability to bear this charge. In addition, the Duke subscribed 100*l.* towards the rebuilding of the body of the church ; and Mr. Foulger is doing his best to obtain such further funds as may be necessary. The outlay, as estimated, will be about 1000*l.*

We then proceeded to inspect the church and churchyard. Among the stones which had formed the chancel, and in the churchyard, I found the slabs from which rubbings have been taken by Mr. Foulger's own hands. The designs occurring on these slabs are here figured. Before, however, I proceed to call attention to these memorials, I will give a brief account of the church and of a few of its peculiarities : and here I am bound to say that I have drawn largely from a description by our valued member, Mr. Fairless Barber, who, though like myself a stranger to the place, takes a warm interest in the restoration of the church.

The township of Chelmorton is in the parish of Bake-well, and about four miles south of Buxton. It abounds with stone walls around the fields ; the few trees and hedges about it have been planted since the beginning of this century. In so wild a country, one would hardly have expected to find so interesting a church. The site of the fabric is, perhaps, the highest in England : the Crescent at Buxton is 1000 feet above the level of the sea, and this church is much higher. It stands, however, at the foot of a still higher hill, called Chelmorton Low.

There exists a tradition that the original church was built in A.D. 1111. I was told that this date was found upon a carved board, which had been removed most improperly from the church to a museum at the entrance of Pool's Cavern, a mile from Buxton. On examining this board, Mr. Yates agreed with myself, that the carving presented no date, but was intended to represent four pillars supporting the floor of a chamber, or some object of that description.

And here I would mention what our visit for the purpose of seeing the carved board led to. We found the museum to be quite a curiosity-shop, full of all sorts of strange articles, from Breeches Bibles down to a fragment of the Manchester omnibus with poor Brett's blood upon it ; amongst them, however, were to be seen some interesting objects that had been found in the adjoining cavern, which

is of large extent. In it there is much stalagmite and stalactite. In the winter, Redfern, who keeps the museum, employs himself in searching under the stalagmite on the floor of the cavern. He has there found a perfect Roman fibula of bronze, fragments of Roman pottery, Samian ware, one piece representing a warrior on horseback, Roman coins, one of them of Domitian, other pottery resembling the urns commonly found in the Derbyshire barrows, an abundance of bones of animals and stags' horns, also burnt earth, indicating that there had been fires in the cavern. As Domitian was emperor from A.D. 81 to 96, this coin may possibly have been in the cave not much less than 1800 years, and yet it was found six feet below the stalagmite. I have mentioned these facts, because it is well worth while for any visitor at Buxton to visit this museum; and it is to be hoped that further search may reveal other curious relics in this remarkable cavern.

I now turn to another origin of the popular supposition in regard to the date once to be seen in Chelmorton church; Glover mentions in 1853, that 1111 was on an oak beam in the chancel. This beam was taken down, and Mr. Barber caused a board which had been nailed upon it to be removed; under this he found a boss of carved oak, with the Christian monogram or initials I.H.S. in such a form that any ignorant person looking at them from the floor might mistake them for the date 1111.

It appears, however, from Dugdale's *Monasticon* and from Lysons' *Derbyshire*,<sup>1</sup> that there was a chapel at Chelmorton at least as early as A.D. 1282, when the Prior of Lenton, Notts, had two-thirds of the tithes, and the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield the remainder; the Prior and convent were bound to provide books and other appliances for the chapel, and the Dean and Chapter a priest with a stipend of five marks a year.

This tends to confirm the suggestion made to me by Mr. Barber, that the church contains "portions of an earlier structure of about the middle of the thirteenth century;" he also thinks that the present church and chancel are not older than the sixteenth century.

The fabric is built of stone, and consists of a clerestoried nave of four equal bays, with north and south aisles, about

<sup>1</sup> Dugdale's *Mon. Angl.*, vol. iii. p. 222; Lysons' *Derbyshire*, p. 38.

40 feet in length and the same in breadth, the chancel being about the same length as the nave. The tower is square, with an octagonal spire, both of good proportions. The south porch is entered by a shallow four-centred arch; a small plainly moulded pointed arch opens from the porch into the church opposite to the north door, which is pointed and trefoliated, with all the plainness of plate tracery, and is of fine character. The roof is of oak, covered with heavy lead.

The most remarkable feature in the church is a stone screen between the nave and the chancel. It is 5 ft. 4 in. high, and has on the nave side, on either half, three panels with raised perpendicular tracery surmounted by an embattled parapet pierced with four open quatrefoils. Another peculiarity in the structure of the whole building is the unusual irregularity of the levels of different parts. The chancel is about 5 ft. higher than the entrance at the south porch, and the original base at the north door is nearly 4 ft. higher than the same point. These are met by a step at the south door and another at the north aisle, in one direction, and by three steps at the entrance to the chancel and one near the altar, in the other, and a general fall of the floor from north to south and east to west. I also noticed in the north wall, close to the tower, a set-off in the courses of the stone just above the ground, which may have been intended to meet the fall of the ground at that spot. In fact, the building seems to have been built so as to fit the sloping ground on which it stands, and so that no part of the interior should be below the level of the soil immediately on the outside. This would, doubtless, obviate the damp which would have arisen from the greater height of the earth outside, if the higher parts within had been sunk to the level of the south porch.

Mr. Barber's view is that "the inhabitants of Chelmorton, in the sixteenth century, were earnest men, seeking to rebuild and enlarge God's house honestly and well, and with native energy sufficient to deal with and overcome, in a characteristic way, obstacles which some architects of the present day would spend large sums of money in reducing, with, in all probability, a less satisfactory result."

I will now turn to the sepulchral slabs. Some of these are in good condition. Two (Nos. 5 and 6) have been pre-

served by being built into the chancel walls ; in others by being covered a yard deep in soil till within the last twenty or thirty years. The slabs all decrease regularly in breadth, from the end where the head of the cross is to the other extremity. They vary from 2 ft. to 18 in. in breadth at the broader end, and are considerably less at the foot. I have no doubt that they all lay flat upon the ground, in their original position. They are only hewn on the front, and on the ends and edges, the back being extremely rough ; indeed so much so, that I think it could not have rested upon any base or stone-work below. Several of the stones appear to be still in their original position. These are on the south side of the church and west side of the porch, and were those covered with earth ; I believe that there is no building under them. The smallest slab lies in the church, close to the tower. About a third of the breadth of No. 6 had been cut away, in order to insert it in the sedilia.

The dimensions of these cross-slabs are as follows :—

No. 1. Part of a slab, 2 ft. 10 in. long ; breadth of the cross, 1 ft. 3 in. ; length of the key,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in. No. 2. Part of a slab, 2 ft. 2 in. long ; breadth of the cross, 11 in. ; length of the dagger, 1 ft.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in. No. 3. Length, 5 ft. 11 in. ; breadth of the cross, 1 ft.  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. ; length of the sword, 3 ft.  $8\frac{3}{4}$  in. No. 4. Part of a slab, 4 ft.  $8\frac{3}{4}$  in. long ; length of the sword, 3 ft. 9 in. This cross seems to have been like No. 6. No. 5. Length, 5 ft. ; breadth of the cross, 1 ft.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. ; length of the sword, 3 ft.  $0\frac{1}{8}$  in. No. 6. Length, 5 ft. 5 in. ; breadth of the cross, 1 ft. 7 in. ; length of the shears, 12 in. No. 7. Length, 6 ft. 5 in. ; breadth at the top, about 2 ft., at the bottom, 1 ft.  $6\frac{3}{4}$  in. No. 8. Length, 6 ft. 4 in. ; breadth at the top, 1 ft. 10 in., at the bottom, 1 ft. 1 in.<sup>2</sup>

I would invite attention, not only to the crosses themselves, but to the emblems accompanying them, as well as to their age, and their signification. Possibly there may be little doubt that those with swords indicate warriors (see figs. 2, 3, 4, 5) ; is there, however, any peculiarity that may serve to indicate what class of warriors they were ? In Notes and Queries there has recently been a discussion as to the monuments of Knights Templar, in which it was doubted

<sup>2</sup> The representations of the crosses were obtained by paper rubbings from the slabs, and are here reproduced by the

new process invented by Mr. Hancock, of 6, St. Germaine's Villas, Lewisham.



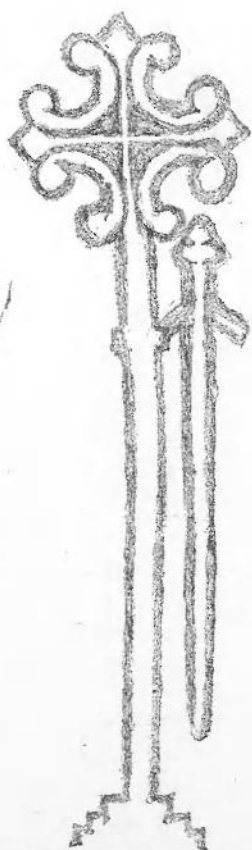
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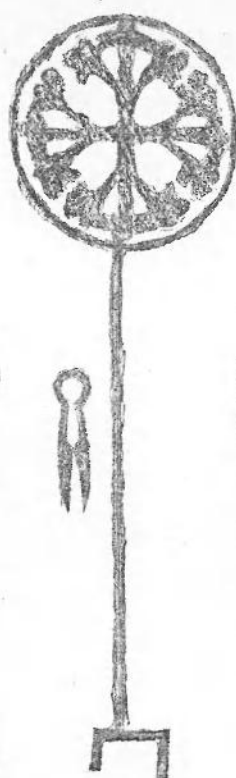
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5



7



6



8

whether they were ever buried under altar or raised tombs. May these slabs mark the graves of any of those knights?<sup>3</sup>

Then what do the shears signify (fig. 6)? In Notes and Queries, 4th s., vol. iii. p. 29, there is an account of brasses at Cirencester on which shears occur; these brasses are supposed to be memorials of sheepowners who exported large quantities of wool. Possibly, therefore, the shears may denote farmers; and there is no doubt that considerable numbers of sheep have been for ages pastured in the hilly districts of Derbyshire. Some persons have supposed that the shears denote a woolstapler or clothier; others have supposed that they may denote the burial-place of a woman. It seems to me to be an objection to the supposition that the shears denote a woman, that all the emblems of this class, whose signification are known, denote some profession, trade, or calling. In fact, their use is to distinguish, in the case of men, one man from another; and the natural inference is that those emblems, the meaning of which is doubtful, were used for a similar purpose. An emblem, which simply denoted a man or a woman, would in fact be no distinguishing mark at all.<sup>4</sup>

Next I must advert to the symbol of the key (fig. 1); this has been supposed to denote a blacksmith. At Bakewell there is a cross with a key on one side and shears on the other, and two similar crosses may be seen at Aycliffe, Durham.<sup>5</sup> These crosses, therefore, must denote some person to whom both those emblems applied.

<sup>3</sup> See in the Arch. Journal, vol. xxvi. p. 86, some observations by Mr. Nesbitt on cross-slabs at Bosbury, Herefordshire, memorials possibly of Templars.

<sup>4</sup> The shears and key occur together on a slab at Bamborough, Arch. Journ., vol. v. p. 256; on another at Newbigging, two keys accompany the shears. A slab at Darlington bears two crosses; that on the right with a sword, the other with two keys. Cutts' Cross-slabs, pl. 62. The only slabs in the northern counties noticed by Dr. Charlton as bearing inscriptions to females have the shears, and the same symbol is found on a memorial of a lady at Norton, Northamptonshire. Cutts, pl. 66; see also p. 42, *ibid.* At Blidworth, Notts, the shears are of the fashion of modern scissors, working on a central pin. The shears repeatedly occur on the rich sculptured slabs at Iona and in Western Scotland, noticed Arch. Journ.,

vol. xiv. p. 88. As regards the key, the supposed symbol of a female, it may deserve consideration that it was accounted in old times the sign of domestic authority; and as such was presented in the nuptial ceremony. In a divorce the key was rendered up. See Ducange *v.* Claves remittere. It is remarkable that in Anglo-Saxon interments the remains of women are not infrequently accompanied by keys. Compare Mr. Akerman's notice of this usage, in his excavations in Berkshire, Archæologia, vol. xxxviii. pp. 331, 334; vol. xxxix. p. 135. See the Laws of Canute, c. 77, concerning the custody of the keys, the insignia of the mistress of the house.—A. W.

<sup>5</sup> Arch. Journ., vol. iv. No. 10, p. 49; vol. v. p. 256, fig. 3. In No. 11, in the present memoir, the blunt ended shears may have been for shearing the nap of cloth.



I would request particular attention to two fine crosses (Nos. 7, 8), which have no emblem on either side of the stem, but are so remarkable in their upper part. I should infer that they denote two persons of the same class, but differing in rank or degree, and perhaps ecclesiastics. They vary from all the series, in the carvings upon them being in low relief, whilst those on the others are incised.

Whilst this memoir was in the press, in taking down the transept wall another cross-slab has been discovered, which differs much from the rest. The cross is inscribed in a circle, having a diameter of nearly 11 in. ; whilst the stem of the cross is only 6 in. long, from the circle to a single step at the bottom of the stem. The stem, as well as the parts of the cross within the circle, are about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide ; and the cross forms four equal segments out of the remaining space within the circle. There is no emblem in this case.

As to the age of cross-slabs of the kind here figured, I may state that at Bakewell and Darley, as well as at Chelmorton, some were found in or under the walls, and had been used as building materials. This shows, not only that they are older than those walls, but that at the time they were built the cross-slabs were no longer held in reverence.

At Bakewell and at Darley some of the crosses have been set up, in each instance, on the inside of the porch, and Mr. Foulger contemplates either doing this at Chelmorton, or placing the slabs together, with an iron railing around them.

In concluding this brief account of the numerous cross-slabs existing at the church of Chelmorton, it may be scarcely necessary to point out the remarkable similarity in certain details that they present, as compared with other like memorials existing in the same county, at Bakewell and elsewhere, as previously noticed. The occurrence of six slabs of this description to be seen in the churchyard at Chelmorton had been stated, in 1847, by the Master of University College, in a valuable memoir on a large series of grave-slabs brought to light in the foundations of Bakewell Church, about 1840.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Plumptre supposed that upwards of seventy examples

<sup>6</sup> Arch. Journ., vol. iv. p. 54. Not less than fifty-seven slabs or fragments of slabs and head-stones were to be seen at Bake-

well ; eighteen were in the possession of the late Mr. Bateman ; see his *Vestiges of Antiquities of Derbyshire*, pp. 183, 186.

had been preserved, and that at least four times that number, in broken condition, had been used again in building the new walls. He was of opinion that the date of these memorials is, for the most part, prior to the middle of the thirteenth century, and that a considerable number might be earlier than 1110.

I may refer the reader who desires to investigate more fully the various types, the symbols occurring on cross-slabs, and the characteristic features by which their date may approximately be ascertained, to the *Manual for the Study of the Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses of the Middle Ages*, by the Rev. E. L. Cutts, in which a large series of examples has been figured. Many notices of memorials of this interesting description have also been given from time to time in the *Archaeological Journal*. See a memoir by Dr. Charlton, M.D., in vol. v. pp. 252-258, on slabs in Northumberland and Durham, with special reference to the symbols that they bear, the sword, hammer and pincers, key, the fish, &c., the shears or scissors, also, regarded as indicating the memorial of a female. Amongst numerous other examples of grave-slabs bearing floriated crosses, incised or in low relief, and of the symbols accompanying them, may be cited vol. i. p. 400; vol. ii. p. 210; vol. iii. p. 164 (a very remarkable specimen at Hexham); vol. iv. p. 60 (a slab in Brougham Church, Westmoreland, bearing a sword and a round buckler); vol. vi. pp. 78, 194, and 394; vol. vii. pp. 180, 196; and vol. viii. p. 203. Two very elaborate slabs at Llandudno, Caernarvonshire, on each of which is introduced a pair of star-shaped brooches, the symbols probably of ladies there interred, are figured, *Archæol. Cambr.*, third series, vol. ii. p. 60. Many good examples have been figured in Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments*, in Lysons' *Magna Britannia*, and in other topographical works.<sup>7</sup>

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The Institute is indebted to the friendly liberality of the Author for the illustrations that accompany the foregoing Memoir.

<sup>7</sup> See also observations by Mr. Way, on incised stone slabs, in the central counties and other parts of England, including those with effigies, &c., *Arch. Journ.*,

vol. i. p. 210. Directions for obtaining rubbings or facsimiles of such memorials are there given, p. 211.