

CRESSET STONES.¹

By the REV. T. LEES, M.A.

A cresset was a cup of earthenware or metal, fastened to the top of a pole, and containing a light, and so forming a portable lantern. When the pole was fixed in the earth, and so became a stationary light, the whole apparatus was styled a *beacon*. In heraldry the beacon was the badge of Henry V.; and appears on the frieze within the chantry over his tomb in Westminster Abbey. The Harleian MS. 104 says, "The cresset, with burning fire was the badge of the Admiralty;" and Mr. J. R. Planché, in explaining this assertion, writes that it was probably "founded on the fact that the badge of John Holland, Duke of Exeter, was a cresset. . . . The cresset of the Hollands, Earls of Kent and Dukes of Exeter, was probably derived from the lordship of Wake, such lights being carried by the watch of the middle ages, and the motto of the Wakes of Somerset being still 'Vigila et ora,' Watch and Pray" ("Pursuivant of Arms," p. 251). The Marquis of Northampton bears for his first crest "on a mount a beacon fired."

But we are concerned at present not with the Heraldic use of the cresset, but with the Ecclesiastical; for cresset stones, so far as any evidence has yet appeared, were used only in churches and monasteries.

Dr. Johnson (vol. i., 4to, 1786) defines a cresset as "a great light set upon a beacon, light-house, or watch-tower;" and gives the derivation from the French "*croisette*, because beacons had crosses antiently on the top." In his anxiety to give a plausible derivation the good doctor has made more than one mistake. The old French for a "little cross" is *croisette* with one s. The word *croisette*, with two s's, which he uses, means, "a slip of vine for planting," and is derived from *crescere*, to grow. This idea that "cresset" is connected with the word cross is not borne out so far as my knowledge goes, by any example of a cresset surmounted by a cross. The cup containing the light or fire forms the top of the instrument, and has nothing above it.

These fire cups were themselves the cressets apart from the handles to which they were fixed. So we find in the "Rites of Durham" (Surt. Soc. pp. 2, 3) in the description of the St. Katherine window: "And in the said window was there a frame of iron wherein did stand nine very fine cressets of earthen mettall filled with tallow, which every night was lighted when the day was gone, to give light to the nine altars and St. Cuthbert's Ferriture in that part, and over all the church besides, did burne unto the next morninge that the day was broken."

This application of the word cresset to the cup containing the light

¹ Read in the Section of Antiquities at the Carlisle Meeting, August 3rd, 1882.

brings us to the derivation of the word. *Cresset* is the middle English word for a cup or vessel containing light fixed on the top of a pole, and comes to us through the Old French *crusset*, a cresset; *croiset*, *creuset*, a cruet, pot, crucible (with which last word it seems most reasonable to ally it) from the Old Dutch *kruyse*, a cup or pot. This account of the derivation I owe to Professor Skeat's most valuable "Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language," and I believe it contains the true lineage of this much disputed word.¹

From the cup, metal pot, or crock, the word cresset was transferred to a cavity hollowed out in a stone, in which a light was burned. Hence the stones containing these cavities are called "Cresset Stones." There were three of these in the Church and Monastery of Durham, and we find them described in the "Rites"; one was in the Church itself, and the two others in the Dormitory. The account of the first runs thus:—

"Also there is standing on the South pillar of the Quire doore of the Lanthorne, in a corner of the same pillar, a foure-squared *STONN*, which hath been finely wrought, in every square a large fine image, whereon did stand a four-squared stone above that, which had twelve cressetts wrought in that stone, which was filled with tallow, and every-night one of them was lighted, when the day was gone, and did burne to give light to the monkes at mid-night, when they came to mattens."

The description of those in the Dorter or Dormitory is as follows:—

"In either end of the same Dortor was a four [fair, *Dav*] square stone, wherein was a dozen cressets wrought in either stone, being ever filled and supplied with the cooke as they needed, to give light to the monks and novices, when they rose to their mattens at midnight, and for their other necessary uses."

From the above extracts we learn that the cressets named in this case were not earthenware or metal cups *standing on*, or *inserted in*, the stones, but the actual hollows themselves "wrought" in the stone. This I trust will prove the fitness of the word which heads this paper to describe these simple *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica*. At a meeting of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archæological Society held at Furness Abbey, August 7th, 1877, I read a paper on the "Probable Use of Certain Stones found in the Ruins of Calder and Furness." Two of these stones are undoubtedly Cresset stones; and since the appearance of that paper I have received information regarding such stones from various quarters. Sir Henry Dryden has shewn the greatest interest in the matter, and it is at his suggestion, and encouraged by his advice and kindly assistance, that I now venture to present this subject to the notice of the Institute. The following list contains particulars of all the examples yet brought to my notice. The Swedish ones I know are called "Holy Water Stones," or "vats," but this term seems misapplied.

¹ As an illustration of the word "*Cressyt*" in the Promptorium Parvulorum, Mr. Albert Way gives the following note:—"Batulus, a cressed, quoddam vas in quo ponuntur prunæ." ORTUS. 'A cressett, batillus, crucibulum, lucubrum; a crosser, crucibulum, lucubrum.' CATH. ANG. A curious representation of the cresset of the time of Henry III. occurs in one of the subjects from

the Painted Chamber, engraved in the Monum. Vetusta, vol. vi., where Abimelech is portrayed attempting to set fire to the tower of Thebes. Gower relates that in Gideon's little troop every man had

'A potte of erthe, in which he tath
A light brennyng in a cresset.'

Conf. Am. lib. viii.

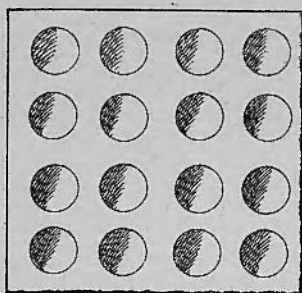
This word is derived from the French, '*crusset lampe de nuit*.' ROQUEF."

I. *Calder Abbey*.—When our society in 1872 visited Calder Abbey, a stone in the N. Transept of the Church attracted the attention of the members, and various conjectures were hazarded as to its use. (See Plate). One suggested that it was intended to hold censers; but that could hardly be the case, for 16 censers could never be in use in the same church at one time; and in its palmiest days the Abbey would neither require nor possess such a number. A second gentleman, of gastronomical aptitudes, would contend that it was intended for baking College puddings. A third thought that it might have been used for some monastic ball-game resembling bagatelle. Ridiculous as this last idea may seem, I was for a time inclined to think there might be some ground for it—though the game might not be bagatelle, but some form of nine pins, or skittles. For in passing along a country road in the West Riding of Yorkshire (some-time before the Society's visit, but after I myself had first seen the stone) I caught sight of a very similar stone embedded in coal ashes in the yard of a wayside inn. As the place was very near the ancient nunnery of Kirkclees, I at once concluded that the stone had been brought thence; but on making inquiry, I found that it could lay no claim to antiquity, but was used for the game of nine-pins, the wooden pins being placed upright in the holes, and bowled over by a ball. With this experience in my mind, it will not seem after all so ridiculous that I should for a short time have regarded the Calder stone as having been used for a similar purpose. Yet all along I seemed to have a glimmering reminiscence of having read somewhere or other of such a stone; and a subsequent reperusal of "The Rites of Durham" recalled to my notice the passages above quoted of which my memory had retained faint traces. These at once settled in my mind the use for which the Calder stone had been designed, viz., to supply light to the monks in their night services. The stone is a rectangular slab of new red sandstone of which the Abbey itself is built, $22\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $21\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. Though somewhat mutilated, it showed clearly that when perfect it had 16 circular cup-shaped cavities, each $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches deep, scooped out of the plane surface in four rows of four each. Though so long exposed to the weather, this stones still retains fire and soot-stains.

II. *Furness Abbey*.—A stone in the Hospitium at Furness had long provided food for conjecture to visitors. (See Plate). It is (or rather was) a flat block of square red sandstone, 14in. long, 12in. broad, and 5in. thick. The upper surface is surrounded by a bevil $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. wide, and shows five circular cavities, viz. :—One large central one 5in. in diameter, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. in depth; two of $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ in depth; and two of 3in. diameter, and $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. in depth. The two last-named holes are flat-bottomed, and the three other and larger holes cup-shaped or hemispherical in form. It had been suggested that this had been the capital of a cluster of five pillars, the tops having been inserted in the holes. But this cannot have been the case, the round bottoms of three of the holes and the varied diameters forbid it. For a time I regarded it as having been used as a stand in which to place the ampullae containing the Holy oils for unction of the sick and catechumens, and chrism. These I thought would occupy the hemispherical cavities, and the flat-bottomed ones would be used to hold either the cruets containing wine and water for the ablutions after Mass, or the vessels containing the salt and ashes used in Benedictions. This

CRESSET STONES.

1.9 $\frac{1}{2}$



1.10 $\frac{1}{2}$

4 $\frac{1}{4}$



CALDER.

10

9

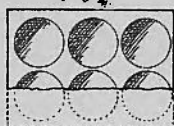


10



DEARHAM.

1.0 $\frac{1}{4}$



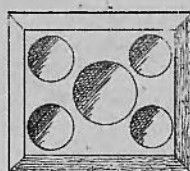
4 $\frac{1}{4}$



YORK.



1.0



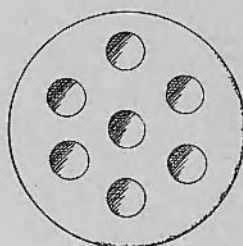
1.2

5



FURNESS.

1.6



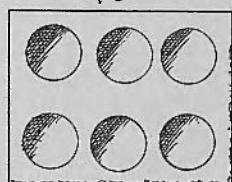
7



LEWANNICK.

1.5

1.1



10



STOCKHOLM.

Scale of 0 1 2 Feet.

idea the many examples recently discovered of cresset stones compel me now to lay aside; and instead of calling this vessel as I did formerly, an "Oil Stock," I now feel convinced that it is a "Cresset Stone." The flat-bottomed holes, instead of burning tallow, may have been used to hold candles, torches, or lamps, which formed the *portable* lights of the Church.

III. *Wool Church, Dorset*.—At the time I was preparing my paper on the above relics for our Furness meeting in 1877, a friend brought to my notice the account of a stone of similar character, of which a drawing had been exhibited at the Institute's meeting of July 7th, 1865. This example was found in the south wall of a small chapel on the north side of the chancel of Wool Church, Dorset, and had most probably been brought, like many other stones in that fabric, from the neighbouring Cistercian Abbey of Bindon. It is a block of coarse Purbeck marble, 10 inches long, 8 inches broad, and 5 inches high. "On one face there are four cup-shaped cavities, each 3 inches in diameter and 2 inches in depth; the surface of these caps is blackened, as if by unctuous matter burnt in them. It has been supposed that they may have been used as cressets or lamps." (*Journal of Archæological Institute*, vol. xxii.) After referring to the stones in Durham Dore, the report goes on to say, "We are, however, indebted, to Canon Rock for the suggestion that the cavities in the stone at Wool are intended to hold the three *ampullæ* for the holy oils, and the vessel for the salt used at baptism." It seems to me that the statement of the cups "being blackened as if by unctuous matter burnt in them" is decidedly in favour of its use as a cresset stone, and not an oil stock.

IV. *Lewanick Church, Cornwall*.—During the preparation of my former paper in 1877, I was informed that a flat, round stone, similar in character to the above, had been found near the font of an old Cornish Church. This proved to be at Lewanick, where Mr. Henry Hems of Exeter had discovered a stone, of which he sent me the particulars. (See Plate). An interesting correspondence between Mr. Hems and Mr. Micklethwaite on this "find" will be found in the *Building News* of June 13th, 20th, 27th; and July 4th, 1879. Another letter, signed "M.," appeared on July 18th.

The Lewanick stone is of polished granite, of a much finer and better sort than the immediate neighbourhood provides. It is a truncated cone 18 inches diameter at top and 14 inches at bottom, and 7 inches thick. It contains 7 holes each $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. Two of these holes are flat bottomed like two in the Furness stone. It stands on a base some 14 in. high, and the total height from the ground is but 1 ft. 9 in. As Mr. Hems observes, "it is quite possible that the base had no original affinity with the upper part. The two are not cemented together in any way; the top stone merely stands *in situ* by force of its own weight. It (the circular portion) is just as heavy as I, who am an average strong man, can fairly lift." For a time I thought that this stone was originally intended to hold the vessels for the various ingredients used in the consecration of an altar at the time of their "Benedictions" by the Bishop, and during their subsequent use in the consecration of the altar itself. There may have been other altars consecrated at the same time or afterwards as chantries were founded, and as the stone was portable it might have been carried from altar to altar as need required; and that subsequently it might have been used to hold the vessels for the

Holy Oils at baptism, and so had been placed in its present position near the porch and font. This opinion I now feel, as in the Furness case, compelled to relinquish; and both must be classed as cresset stones.

V. *Carlisle Cathedral*.—During the restoration of the Fraternity here in 1880, Mr. Creed, the clerk of the works, discovered a cresset stone among other relics stored in the room over the chapel of St. Catherine, in the south transept of the Cathedral. Like the fabric itself, this is new red sandstone. What the size or thickness of the stone, or number of cups was, we have no means of judging. It seems, however, to have been rectangular in shape, for a portion of one straight edge remains. It contains the remains of six cups; the circumference of one only being complete, and its base “shaved off,” from the natural splitting of the stone. These cups, though not symmetrically placed, seem all to have been of the same size as the one which is tolerably whole, viz., $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter and 3 in. deep. Soot and fire marks remain in the cups, and there can be no doubt as to the original use of the stone as a cresset stone. Mr. Creed pointed out to me the interesting fact that the hollows are of such a shape as would ensure the entire consumption by the wick of the fat with which they would be filled.

VI. *St. Mary's, Monmouth*.—In the autumn of 1881, a cresset stone was found by the workmen excavating in the interior of St. Mary's Church, Monmouth. Mr. Creed, having seen the Carlisle specimen, at once recognised this as of similar use. Mr. Waugh, an enterprising local antiquary, furnished me with particulars. The grain of the stone, which is a gritty free-stone, is very close, and the fragment remarkably heavy—probably it is a stone of the coal-measures, say Pennant sandstone. This fragmentary block measures 18 in. by 11 in., and contains the remains of six cups, each about $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter and 2 in. deep. The bottoms and sides of the cups have dark discolourations as from the action of fire.

VII. *St. Mary's Abbey, York*.—In the museum of the Philosophical Society at York is a stone from the ancient Abbey of St. Mary. When perfect it has been rectangular in shape, $12\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep, and 5 in. thick, and is bevelled round the lower edge. (See Plate). It has contained six cups in two rows of three each. One row is nearly perfect; and the cups are $3\frac{5}{8}$ in. diameter at top, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. at bottom. All the bottoms are flat. The material is light-yellow limestone. The stone is so soft that it discolours the clothes. The holes bear no traces of fire. In the bottom of each is a small puncture as if they had been bored with some instrument like a joiner's brace and bits. These details I owe to Sir H. Dryden; and to a letter addressed to him by the Rev. Geo. Rowe, who kindly supplied rubbings, measures, and sketch for Sir Henry's drawing. Dr. F. R. Fairbank, in a letter to the *Building News* for April 2nd, 1880, first suggested that this was a cresset stone.

VIII. *Llanthony Abbey*.—Mr. C. R. Homer, in a letter to the *Building News*, March 12th, 1880, mentions a stone at Llanthony in Monmouth. It is circular, about 1 ft. in diameter and 6 or 8 in. thick, and contains three hollowed cups.

IX. *Dearham Church, Cumberland*.—This church is now being partially rebuilt. Used as building rubble in the wall on the north side of the chancel arch the Rev. W. S. Calverley has very recently discovered an ancient Norman corbel, 19 in. long, 10 in. broad, and $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. (See Plate). When inserted in its proper position in the wall it would exhibit

an upper surface of 10 in. square ; and the whole would project 10 in. Two of the perpendicular sides are perfectly flat ; and the front consists of a fillet one inch broad, beneath which is a shallow cyma recta moulding. Three inches from the front edge of the horizontal upper surface is a cresset, 4 in. in diameter, cup-shaped, and 2½ in. deep, which still retains black traces of burning. This cresset-cornel, containing only *one* cup, seems to connect the examples above given with the single cressets mentioned in Sir H. Dryden's *Lamp Niches*.

X. *Sweden. Stockholm Museum.*—I am indebted to Sir H. Dryden for the particulars of four stones in the Stockholm Museum. There they are named "Holy Water Stones," but Sir Henry thinks with me that they are Cresset Stones. (1). The first is from the church of Balla. This is oblong in form, with the corners rounded off. It measures 17 in. by 12½ in. ; the base is bevelled off on the four sides, so that the width is 10 in. on the flat bottom. (See Plate). It holds six cups, in two rows of three each, placed symmetrically. The cups are 4 in. diameter and 1½ in. deep, and are round at the bottom. (2). The second is from the Ounarps Church in Skane. This is also oblong in form but apparently more mutilated than the last ; 14 in. long, 10 in. broad, and the thickness varies from 6 in. to 4. It has six cups, in two lines of three each ; varying from 2½ in. to 2¼ in. in diameter ; and from 2½ in. to 2⅝ in. in depth. The lower edge has been rounded off on all the four sides. (3). This stone is 9½ in. long, 9 in. broad, and 7½ in. deep, it holds four deep holes much worn and running together. (4). The last is in good condition, 15 in. long, 14 in. broad, and 6 in. deep ; has five saucer-like shallow holes.

XI. *Sweden, other examples.*—Besides the above four stones at Stockholm, there are, I find, letters in the *Building News* of March 5th and April 9th, 1880, from Mr. J. Romilly Allen, which mention more Swedish examples of these interesting relics. (1). One at the church of Stro, in the diocese of Sund, of five holes, forming the cushion cap of a pillar, and somewhat like the Lewanick stone. (2). Another, which was originally in the church of Nöbbelofs, also in Sund. "It has," says Mr. Allen, "six cups arranged in two rows, and measures 17 in. by 13 in., being supported on a pillar of three feet high."

On what ground these Swedish stones are called "Vigvattens-sten," holy water vessels, I know not. I know of no instance where a holy water stoup is divided into different compartments. Why should it be? One large stoup or basin would serve the purpose far better than a stone block of equal dimensions hollowed out into a series of cups. For what object these stones were used in England has, I trust, been made clear by the extracts from the Durham "Rites ;" and the soot and fire-stains on some of them strongly confirm the correctness of the conclusion that these stones have been simply blocks in which lights were burnt for the convenience of the ecclesiastics at the night offices of the church, or for domestic use in their dormitories. How far their use extended to the lay-folk we have at present no means of judging.

It does not seem as if any symbolical meaning were attached to the number of cressets in each stone ; for we find these numbers varying, sometimes one, sometimes three, sometimes five ; six seems a favourite number ; and 16 (in the Calder stone) the highest number yet known. From the "Notes from the Muniments of St. Mary, Magdalen College, Oxford, from the 12th to the 17th century, by W. D. Macray," we learn

that in 1365 "a cresset with 15 holes and four lamps" was maintained in the Church of Chalgrove, Oxon.

The examples brought forward in this paper all belong to mediæval times; but is it not probable that our forefathers of the Middle Ages derived their use of hollowed stones for light-holders from still earlier times? May it not be that the discovery of the use of cresset stones is a step (and a long one) towards the elucidation of the purposes to which those cup-marked stones were put, which have formed so long a puzzle to the pre-historic archæologist?

LAMP NICHES.¹

By SIR HENRY DRYDEN, BART.

(*Hon. Mem. Soc. Ant. Scot.*)

In several buildings are small niches or receptacles of lamps, and these are connected with cressets, inasmuch as several of them have in the floor or flat bottom single cups or cressets. Some have chimneys or flues which pass upwards—in some cases passing into the chimnies of fire-places. Others have conical hollows in the heads or roofs, which I suppose to have caught the soot and prevented its passing out into the room or church as the case was. The date of each must be decided not by the niche itself but by the structure in which it is.

The earliest niches which I know are those in the crypt at Hexham. These are four in number. In the floor of each is a single cresset, and in the roof of each is a conical hollow (see Plate). They are all rectangular, without any ornament, and are nearly alike except that one is in a party wall and open on both sides. Drawings of them have been kindly supplied me by Mr. Hodges, the author of the great work on "Hexham Priory," recently published. The one illustrated is 1 ft. 1 in. high, $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, and $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. recessed. The cup is $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter and $3\frac{1}{2}$ deep, and the conical hollow in the head is 5 in. diameter, and 5 in. high.

Probably the next in date is the curious one in a boss at Patrington. A drawing of it and measures have been procured for me by the rector, the Rev. F. Sheppard.

This boss is a cube about 11 ins. square and 1 ft. 5 ins. deep (see Plate). In it is a rectangular chamber. It has no cup in it, and has no chimney or conical hollow, but has a small aperture in the north side and a similar one in the south side, besides the opening in the east side of it to admit the lamp. This boss is next to the east end of the south transept, and the lamp in it shed light on the altar against the east wall. The boss (in this case a cube) is ornamented on the north-west and south with figures in low relief—the virgin, a figure with a sword, and a saint with a book. Probably originally these were painted, but repeated coats of white-wash have annihilated all traces of colour. The angles are fluted projections, with finials. The base is a large rose.

The sacrist must have had a ladder to get to this lamp, and why this curious position was chosen is a question.

Not far from the same date is an arched niche at Dorchester Abbey

¹ Read in the Section of Antiquities at the Carlisle Meeting, August 3rd, 1882.