

# A NOTE ON A BONE CRUCIFIX FOUND IN LONDON AND SOME OTHERS.

By FRANCIS W. READER.

The small bone crucifix illustrated on fig. 1, which I had the pleasure of exhibiting at the meeting of the Institute on 2nd June, 1909, gains additional interest by being associated with the series which Miss Layard brought together on the same occasion.

I obtained it from a workman who found it in the neighbourhood of Clare Market, but I was unable to learn any further details of its discovery except that it came from a depth of about fifteen feet below the present street level. From its stained and lustrous condition, it appears to have been preserved in the mud-filling of one of the small streams which passed through this district to the Thames.

It is of rude work-  
from a small splinter of  
of which did not admit  
out in proper proportion.  
of the cross are very  
part tapers away to a  
consequently been  
favourable conditions, the  
large for the body, which  
ing material so that  
lower limbs are  
by a slightly marked

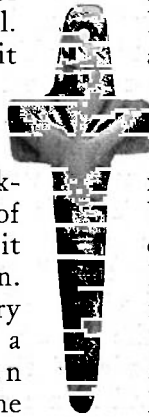


FIG. 1.

BONE CRUCIFIX FOUND  
NEAR CLARE MARKET ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

manship and is made  
bone, the shape and size  
of the parts being carried  
From this cause the arms  
narrow, while the lower  
point. The figure has  
adapted to these un-  
head being relatively too  
dwindles with the taper-  
the much curtailed  
represented merely  
line to indicate the

division of the legs, while no attempt is made to show the feet or other details. The loin-cloth is simply a horizontal band divided centrally by an incised line, emphasized by being carved so as to project considerably above the level of the body. With the exception of a row of incised lines at each side, marking the ribs, no other detail is shown on the body or the arms. The latter are straight and shapeless: they rise at an angle



THE ROOD AT ST. DUNSTAN'S CHURCH, STEPNEY.

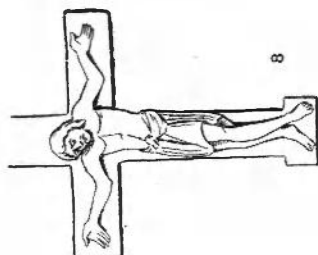
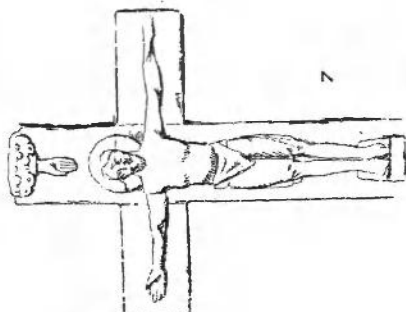
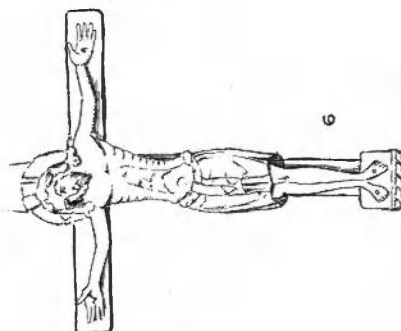
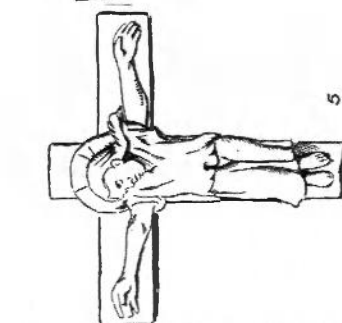
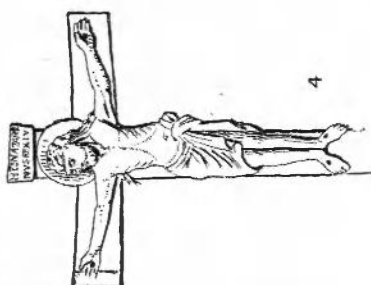
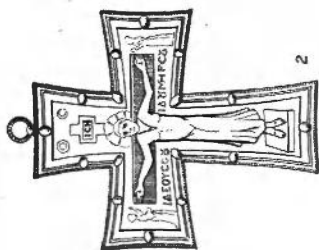
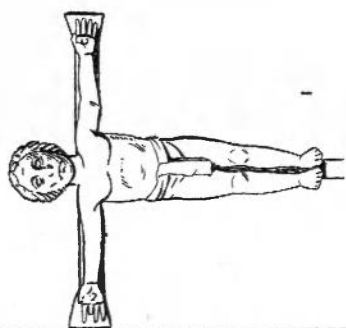
from the shoulders to the top outer corners of the cross-arms. The features are indicated with some character, and the pointed termination of the face suggests that it was intended to be bearded, although this may have come about by the upward inclination of the arms. The top of the cross above the head is pierced for suspension : its length is only  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches.

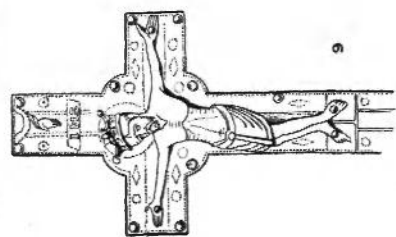
Rough work has been done at all periods, and it is necessarily difficult to assign such objects to any definite age. Beneath the crude simplicity of this little relic, however, there is sufficient character to denote that it belongs to a somewhat early period ; this is particularly noticeable in the straightness and angularity of the features ; the fact, moreover, that the head is erect and its position well above the horizontal arms of the cross support the view that it is of early date. The inclined direction of the arms might lead one to consider the crucifix as of a later period, but there is little doubt that the artist has resorted to this device in order to lengthen them. It will also be noticed that had the cross been made in ordinary proportions, the arms of the figure would naturally have been almost horizontal.

The rare occurrence of crucifixes of this description makes it difficult to find examples with which any kind of comparison can be made. Miss Layard has already given the historical description and general change of treatment which the representations of the crucifixion underwent. To further illustrate this development, I have sketched a few examples from the national collections and elsewhere. Although this series is very incomplete, it may perhaps serve to indicate broadly the change from the simple, severe, early treatment of the central subject, to the contorted and agonised representations of later times (figs. 2 and 3).

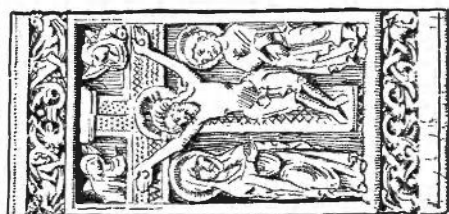
It will be seen that the examples fall broadly into two divisions, the earlier lasting down to about the end of the twelfth century. The change that came about after this period was comparatively sudden, and it has been difficult to find examples displaying any very gradual transition to the later treatment.

Although subject to slight modifications, there are certain characteristics more or less common to the examples

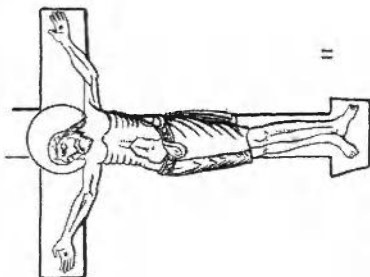




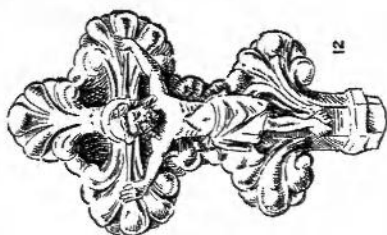
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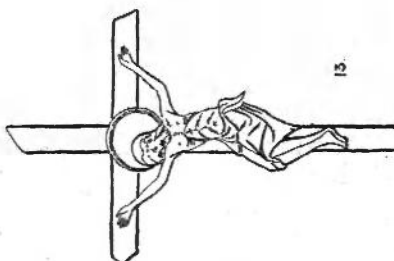
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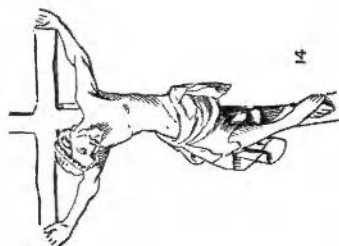
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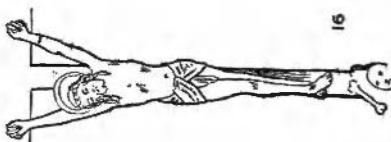
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of the earlier division. The head is erect or only slightly inclined, and there is a placid expression on the features. The arms are stretched straight on the bar, or fall so little that the head is either above the bar or at the junction of the cross. The body and lower limbs are straight, the feet being placed side by side.

Fig. 1, no. 1 is taken from the remarkable ivory panel in the British Museum. It is Roman (Italian) and is attributed to the early fifth century. This is one of the most ancient representations of the subject, and is an extreme example having the earlier characteristics.

During the succeeding centuries the figure of Christ was frequently represented in flowing robes reaching from the neck to the feet, as will be seen by the examples from Monza,<sup>1</sup> the ancient capital of Lombardy.

Fig. 1, no. 2 is a pendant cross on which the crucifixion is represented at the centre, the traditional attributes appearing quite small in the space left by the ornamental border which follows the lines of the cross. Above the head, appear the sun and half-moon. At the two ends of the bar respectively are Mary and John.

The inscriptions in Greek characters such as commonly appear on crosses of this period are over the head IC X (C), under the bar ΙΔΕ ΟΥC CΘ, ΙΔΘ ΜΗΡ CΘ. (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. ἴδε υἱὸς σου. ἴδε μήτηρ σου.)

There is reason to believe that this is the cross sent by Gregory the Great to Adaluwald, the son of Theodelinda, or that which the queen herself received from the pope.

Fig. 1, no. 3. An oval pendant also shows Christ fully draped as if in a dalmatic. In addition to the figures of Mary and John are the soldiers with the spear and the sponge. The usual sun and moon are not represented. This, like the last example, belongs to the sixth or seventh century, and is also from Monza.

Fig. 1, no. 4 is from an ivory plaque of the ninth century (Carlovingian) which is in the South Kensington Museum.

Fig. 1, no. 5 is from a similar plaque of the tenth century, also in the South Kensington Museum. The central figure is clothed.

<sup>1</sup> Garrucci, *Storia dell' Arte Christiana*, lichen, s.v. *Kreuzigung*.  
vi, 453. Kraus. *Real Encyklopädie Christ-*

Fig. 1, no. 6 is from a Byzantine ivory of the tenth century also in the south Kensington Museum.

Fig. 1, no. 7. The rood built in the exterior west wall of the south transept of Romsey abbey church which dates from 1120-1130. The character of the carving, however, suggests an earlier period, and as the stone from which it has been made differs from that of the wall in which it has been inserted, it is quite probably a relic from the earlier church which was built in 974. Even if not so early as the foundation of this church, it may safely be assigned to the succeeding century.

The simple grace and quiet dignity of this figure and the excellence of its execution, make it a striking example of the high quality of English sculpture at this early period.

Fig. 1, no. 8. This is from an ivory of the eleventh century in the Pierpont Morgan collection now in the South Kensington Museum. The arms, although stretched upon the bar of the cross, are bent in an unusual manner, while one leg is drawn a little in advance of the other.

Fig. 2, no. 9 is taken from a book cover of the early twelfth century in the South Kensington Museum.

The arms are straight, but the line of the body and legs is slightly curved. The feet are uncrossed and are each fastened separately.

Fig. 2, no. 10 is an ivory panel, German, twelfth century, in the British Museum. This curious example, while retaining the general arrangement of the earlier Carolingian panels, shows, in the central figure, signs of the coming change of treatment. The arms and head are considerably lowered and the legs are bent, but the feet are still uncrossed.

Fig. 2, no. 11 is from a Limoges enamel bookcover of the thirteenth century in the British Museum. It retains generally the graceful dignity of the earlier style, but the arms of the figure are slightly dropped and the head consequently lowered. The feet are uncrossed, although one leg is somewhat in front of the other.

Fig. 2, no 12 is from a plaster cast, in the Architectural Museum, of a crucifix on the tomb of bishop Aquablanca (1268), in Hereford cathedral church. Examples of English

crucifixes of the thirteenth century do not appear to be very numerous, and this one is valuable as it possesses the intermediate character of the two general divisions.

The head is still somewhat erect and not much below the point of intersection of the cross, owing to the arms being but slightly dropped. The legs are crossed and the feet are fastened together.

Fig. 2, no. 13 is from a gilt metal panel in the British Museum, of French workmanship of the early fourteenth century. This example has the more pronounced later characteristics. The arms are dropped, bringing the head below the bar of the cross. The body is bent and the legs drawn up with the feet crossed and fastened with one nail.

Fig. 2, no. 14 is an example similar to the last, from an ivory crozier-head in the South Kensington Museum: it is French, of the fourteenth century.

Fig. 2, no. 15 is also from an ivory crozier-head in the South Kensington Museum: it is English, of the fourteenth century. The head is still further lowered and is quite clear of the bar, while the legs are more violently drawn up.

This may be regarded as the full development of the later style, although further variation took place, but it is partly in the nature of a reversion to the earlier type. The tendency during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was to lengthen the figure by bringing the hands closer together and by again straightening the body and lower limbs, although the feet are usually crossed and fastened by a single nail, of which Miss Layard's specimen from Ipswich, no. 4 on the plate facing page 92, and the Cross of the Order of St. John (plate 11) form examples.

A German example is here shown, fig. 2, no. 14, which is from fifteenth-century stained glass window at Ehrenstein.<sup>1</sup>

In its most exaggerated form, this variation is to be seen mostly in Spanish and Portuguese examples, but in a modified way it remains the type mostly in vogue at the present time.

<sup>1</sup> *Zeitschrift für Christliche Kunst*, ix, 64.



## CRUCIFIX AT STEPNEY.

This is a fitting opportunity to notice some other London crucifixes which have received but scant attention. The most interesting of these is the early stone carving in the church of St. Dunstan at Stepney (plate 1.) It is now preserved on the east wall of the north aisle, although it was formerly built into the exterior, over the south porch, but was removed to its present resting place in 1899.<sup>1</sup>

This stone is traditionally said to have come from the earlier church, which, according to Matthew Paris, was rebuilt by St. Dunstan in the year 952. There is nothing in the work to make this improbable, and it is strange, therefore, that the general trend of opinion has been to place it much later. The compilers of the Survey Committee Monograph regard it as a survival from the Norman rebuilding of the church and attribute it to the latter part of the twelfth century.

Mr. O. M. Dalton who has recently given a very able description of this monument,<sup>2</sup> admits that there is little or nothing inconsistent with its origin in the tenth century and mentions the close of the twelfth century as the latest probable limit from which it could date, but he hesitates to fix any definite time between the years 1000 and 1200, but seems rather to favour the latter part of this period.

Unfortunately, its long exposure to the weather has obliterated much of its surface detail, and it appears also to have been rather clumsily executed. The conventional arrangement by which the cross was enclosed in an ornamental framework with the figures of the Virgin and St. John in the two lower spaces beside the cross, and the sun and moon above, lasted for a long period. It was more common, however, in Carolingian art from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, and the ornamental border of the Stepney carving certainly seems to have been derived from this source.

Details taken by themselves may be found to have parallels in later monuments, but it is doubtful, if, taken as a whole, any such design can be found later than the

<sup>1</sup> Maitland, 1755. The 6th Monograph of the Committee for the Survey of Greater London.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* 2nd ser. xxii, 225.

eleventh century, which is equally characteristic of the two preceding centuries. The central figure is not of a pronounced early type, but it is by no means necessarily later than the end of the tenth century.

The German ivory (fig. 2, no. 10) might be instanced, but here the figure of Christ shows a nearer approximation to the later types, and the ornamental border has ceased, while a band of distinctly later ornament is placed at the top and bottom of the panel.

Considering the design as a whole, I find it far less difficult to place it at the end of the tenth than in the twelfth century.

#### CROSS AT ST. JOHN'S GATE, CLERKENWELL.

Although connected only with London by having recently become domiciled here, the silver processional cross belonging to the Knights Hospitallers and preserved in their hall at St. John's Gate, forms at least a good example of a crucifix of a late type.

It was purchased abroad by the late Sir E. H. A. Lechmere, Bart. who was Chancellor of the Order.

As is usual with this kind of cross, it is constructed of thin plates of metal supported on a framework of wood. The terminations of the cross are of a fleur-de-lys form near to which is a quatrefoil containing the emblems of the evangelists, as is usual with such crosses of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

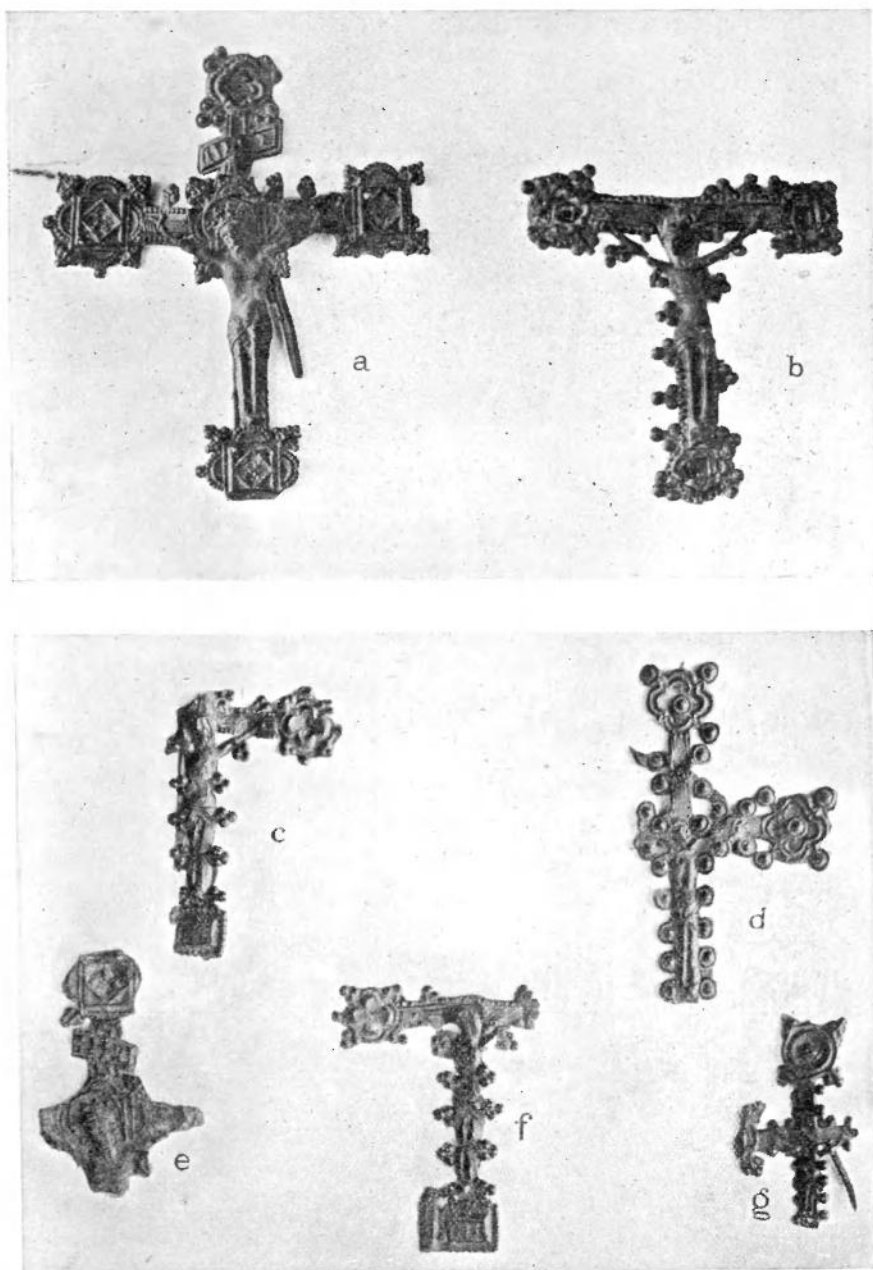
The ornament is in low relief and appears to have been stamped out with a die. It was possibly made for the Order, as on the panel at the junction of the cross, which usually bears the Agnus Dei and does, in this instance, at the back, it has given place to a plate with the eight-pointed cross of St. John.

Below the figure of Christ is a shield fixed in a bezel bearing a lion rampant and a chief of the Order of St. John. The traces of red enamel still exist in the field of this chief but there are no traces of enamel on the coat proper. It is 22 inches in height and 18 inches wide.

On the back there is a tablet, also fixed in a bezel, inscribed F. P. DECLVYS—15—27. This may be the name



FRONT AND BACK VIEWS OF THE PROCESSIONAL CROSS AT ST. JOHN'S GATE, CLERKENWELL.



EXAMPLES OF LEAD CRUCIFIXES FOUND IN LONDON, NOW IN THE GUILDHALL MUSEUM.

of the first owner, as it appears to agree with the period, although these additions seem to have been made by other hands. It is probable that the cross may have been purchased complete, and subsequently altered to suit the wishes of the owner, and may, therefore, be somewhat earlier than the inscribed date.

The work appears to be French or Italian of the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries.

I am indebted to Mr. H. W. Fincham for having drawn my attention to this example, and for his kindness in supplying the photograph which is here reproduced as plate II.

#### THE PILGRIM SIGN CRUCIFIXES IN THE GUILDHALL MUSEUM.

Considering the esteem in which the cross was held in early christian and mediaeval times, not only as a symbol of faith, but from the power it was supposed to possess as a protection against demons, disease and dangers of all descriptions, it is remarkable that crucifixes for personal wear are of such comparative rarity.

St. Chrysostom, indeed, tells us that every faithful christian wears the cross suspended round his neck. The numerous references to the cross by other early writers also, would naturally lead us to expect that it must have been very commonly worn as an ornament or as a talisman. This does not, however, seem to have been the case, and examples of such crosses will be found to be few and far between in our national collections. Again, many of those which have occurred, seem, like the examples from Monza, to have come from the bodies of dignitaries of the church, or people of distinction who had received them as a mark of favour from the church itself.

The most common objects in the way of ornaments of a religious nature, met with in London, are the pilgrims' signs (*signacula*)<sup>1</sup>, made of lead or pewter, and these do not seem to have come much into use before the thirteenth century, while the great majority of them belongs to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among these, the most numerous are those bearing the effigy of the saint denoting the shrine which had been visited, and crucifixes

<sup>1</sup> *Archaeologia*, xxxviii, 128, and various Association.  
papers in the *Journal British Archaeological*

seldom occur. The same thing was observable in a collection of pilgrims' buttons or amulets which the late Sir John Evans exhibited a short time ago at the Society of Antiquaries.<sup>1</sup> These are a little later in date than the pilgrim signs, belonging to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. They are flat discs of bronze having a loop for attachment at the back, and are engraved on the front with devices of various saints, one-third of which bore representations of St. Barbara.

Out of twenty-one examples exhibited, three were found in England; the remainder were nearly all from France or Germany. On none of these was the crucifixion represented.

Among the pilgrims' signs found in London the most popular device is that of St. Thomas of Canterbury, but in the Guildhall collection are several portions of crucifixes which are here reproduced (plate III).

These little objects are very delicate and are mostly fragmentary. The most perfect (a) is furnished with a top of another but similar specimen, and is altogether not quite four inches long.

The design of all these examples is that of the crocketed cross of the late fifteenth century, having quatrefoils at the ends of the arms, which, in these instances, are mere ornaments, but on the larger crosses on which they are modelled, these panels contain the emblems of the evangelists, as in the cross of the Order of St. John (plate II).

The workmanship of two of these specimens (a and e) is very creditable, but all the rest show signs of degeneracy in varying degrees. The crockets cease to be a subservient ornament, but encroach on the cross and obscure the figure which also shrinks in proportion as it gets lost in the profusion of ornament. In the more debased specimens the figure of Christ is very poorly modelled, and not readily recognisable. All these little objects seem to have been furnished with a pin at the back for fastening as a brooch, and were not apparently worn as a pendant.

The scarcity of crucifixes such as these, suggests that the image of Christ was considered too sacred for ordinary purposes of adornment, while for protection it was more reverential to employ the mediation of a saint.

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq.* 2nd ser. xxii, 102.