A PRE-CONQUEST CROSS-SHAFT, FORMERLY AT EAST STOUR IN DORSET

By N. DRINKWATER

An interesting and hitherto unknown fragment of a pre-conquest cross-shaft now exists at Trebles Holford, near Bishop's Lydeard, in Somerset.[1] It was discovered in 1939 during the demolition of a chimney breast in a house in East Stour, Dorset, where it served as a quoin stone at first floor level.[2] The stone was removed and stacked at the contractor's yard at Hatch Beauchamp, Somerset; it was subsequently acquired as a garden ornament by a lady living at Halse, Somerset, whence it was removed to its present site.

Although its earlier history cannot be determined it is conceivable that the stone may have been removed from the walling of the old church at East Stour, or found nearby; this could have occurred during the rebuilding of the church in the early 19th century when the present 'Romanesque' building was erected. The reuse of such a fragment as a building stone in the old church may have been a deliberate attempt to preserve consecrated material from base use. This practice has been referred to by Mr. Ralegh Radford, who has produced early and valuable documentary evidence as well as actual examples.[3] In spite of the scarcity of pre-conquest work in this part of southern England, the adjacent centres of Saxon culture as well as other local examples of cross-shafts of this period are sufficient to allow East Stour to be accepted as its place of origin.

The situation of East Stour on the direct route between Shaftesbury and Sherborne, both places of consequence in Saxon times, added to its importance; even though a Saxon church may not have existed, it was common, as Mr. Radford has pointed out, for consecrated places or enclosures (*loca sancta*), marked only by a cross, to be used for services and burials. Sherborne was the site of a cathedral church from 705 till the removal of the See to Old Sarum in 1075; two Anglo-Saxon kings, Ethelbald and Ethelbert, were buried there.[4] At Shaftesbury was the Benedictine nunnery founded about 888 by King Alfred, with his daughter, Elfgiva, Æthelgeofu or Algiva, as abbess.[5] The Domesday survey shows that the Abbey of Shaftesbury held 17 hides of land at Stour in Dorset[6]; this may have included East Stour.

Fragments of three Saxon crosses in the vicinity of East Stour may now be mentioned. The first, consisting of two fragments, is in the Abbey museum at Shaftesbury. The second is a portion of a cross-shaft built into the north

[1] I am indebted to Mr. Peter Hutton of Trebles Holford for allowing me to record this stone.

[2] I should like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. H. St. George Gray in tracing the place of origin of the stone.

[3] C. A. Ralegh Radford, 'Wooden Structures—Conclusions and Analogies', *The Church of St. Bertelin at Stafford*, ed. Adrian Oswald (1955).

[4] R.C.H.M., *Dorset*, Vol. I, West (1952), p. 200.

[5] V.C.H., *Dorset*, Vol. II, p. 73.

[6] *Ibid.* p. 74.

wall of the Vicarage at Gillingham, two miles north of East Stour, said to have been discovered in 1883-4 when the vicarage was rebuilt.[1] The third, many pieces of which were found and reconstructed in the late 19th century, is in the churchyard at Todber, two miles south of East Stour. The Gillingham fragment is decorated on its exposed face with a fine type of interlace work, now partially worn away; at the time of its discovery similar decoration was noted on the opposite face and carving of another pattern on the sides. Sir Alfred Clapham, who saw this stone, dated it to the late 8th or early 9th century. The Todber cross, also rectangular in section, has carved decoration similar on all faces; this consists of a coarse type of stemmed acanthus work, dated by Clapham to the 10th century.

The portion of cross-shaft from East Stour is between 10 and 11 ins. square and 2 ft. 4 ins. in average height. One upper angle has broken away and a central depression now filled with mortar no doubt contains the remains of a mortice hole for an upper piece. All four faces of the stone are carved in a different manner but they are united by one common feature, a segmental arched band separating the lower third of each face. This band consists of two rounded fillets separated by decoration which again varies on each face. The latter comprises: on face E,[2] small round overlapping plates; face N, bead ornament; face S, a type of continuous chevron work; face W, small pierced annulets.

The segmental band is a rare form of decoration and analogies are correspondingly difficult to find, particularly in view of the variations in its central filling noted above. A possible analogy is the illustration of St. John in the Stockholm *Codex Aureus*,[3] in which the saint is enthroned in an arched surround with his evangelistic emblem in the tympanum. The arch with its pelta ornament and the two decorative roundels on which it rests, all have margins consisting of a bead ornament similar to that on face N. This MS. has been assigned to the third quarter of the 8th century, and internal evidence proves it to be no later than the middle of the 9th century. The variations of the bead ornament on the East Stour stone suggest that the use of this motif was in the later stages of its development and may therefore indicate an 11th-century date rather than one in the 8th or 9th century.

The different character of the ornament on each of the faces may now be considered.

Face E (Pl. XIIA and fig. 1). The area above the arched band is filled with a form of vine scroll; this is conventionalized particularly in the arrangement of the stems, which are long and do not follow the flowing pattern to be seen in the South at Britford in Wiltshire (*c.* 800) and in the North on Acca's Cross at

[1] *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, Vol. XV (1917), 233-4.

[2] The faces are lettered N, S, E, and W in accordance with the compass directions of these faces when the stone was noted. They have no other significance.

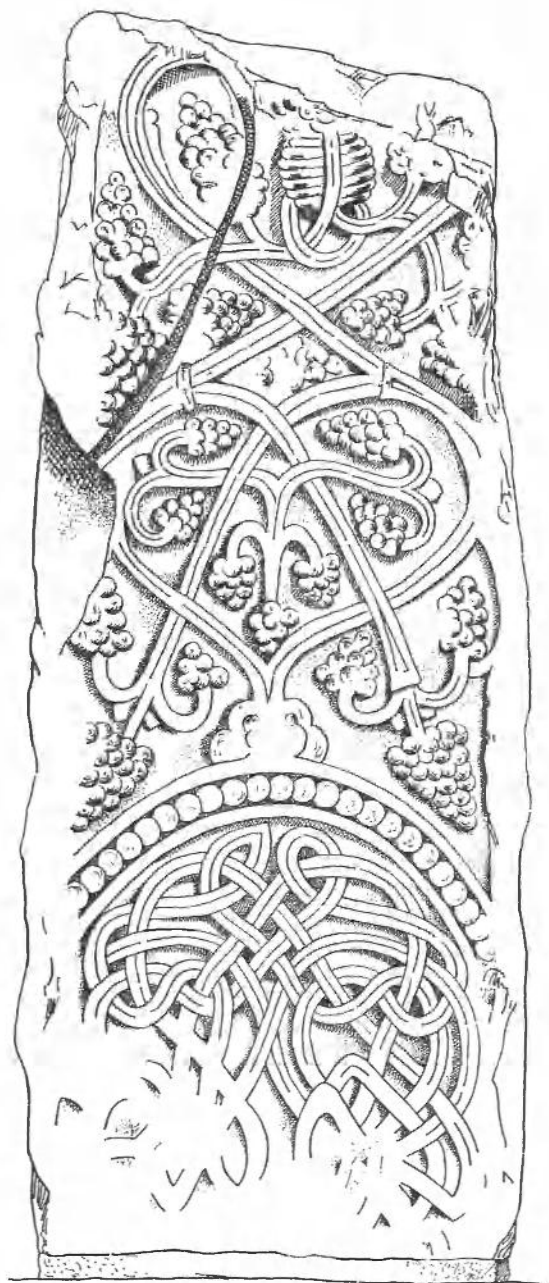[3] *Archaeologia*, LXXXVII, p. 234 *n.*, Pl. xxxviii, fig. 1.
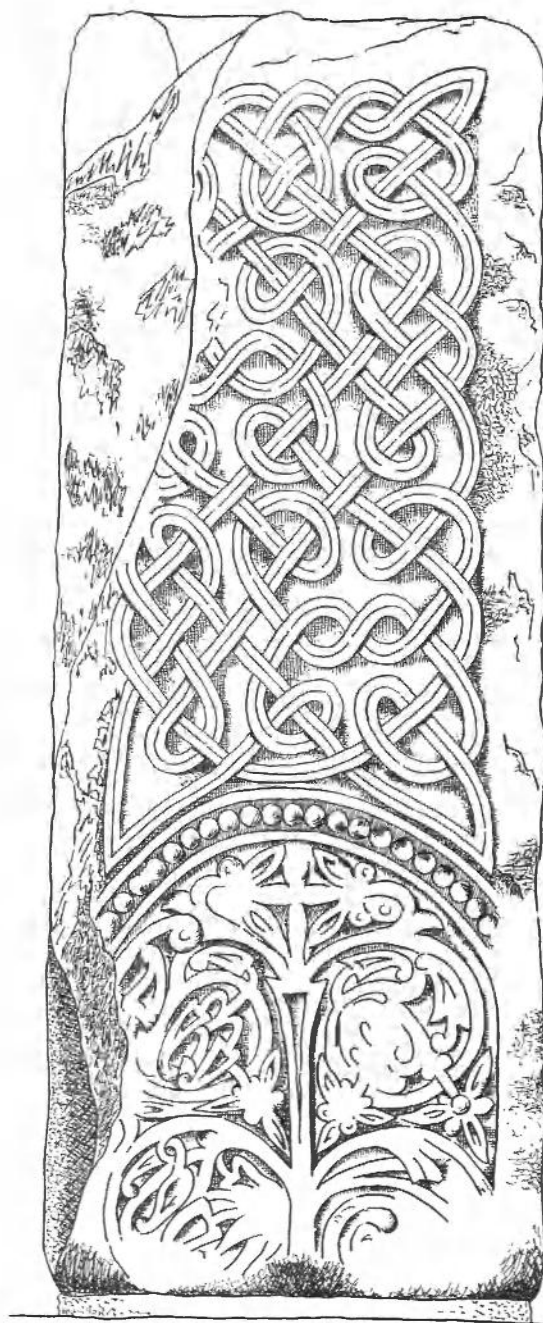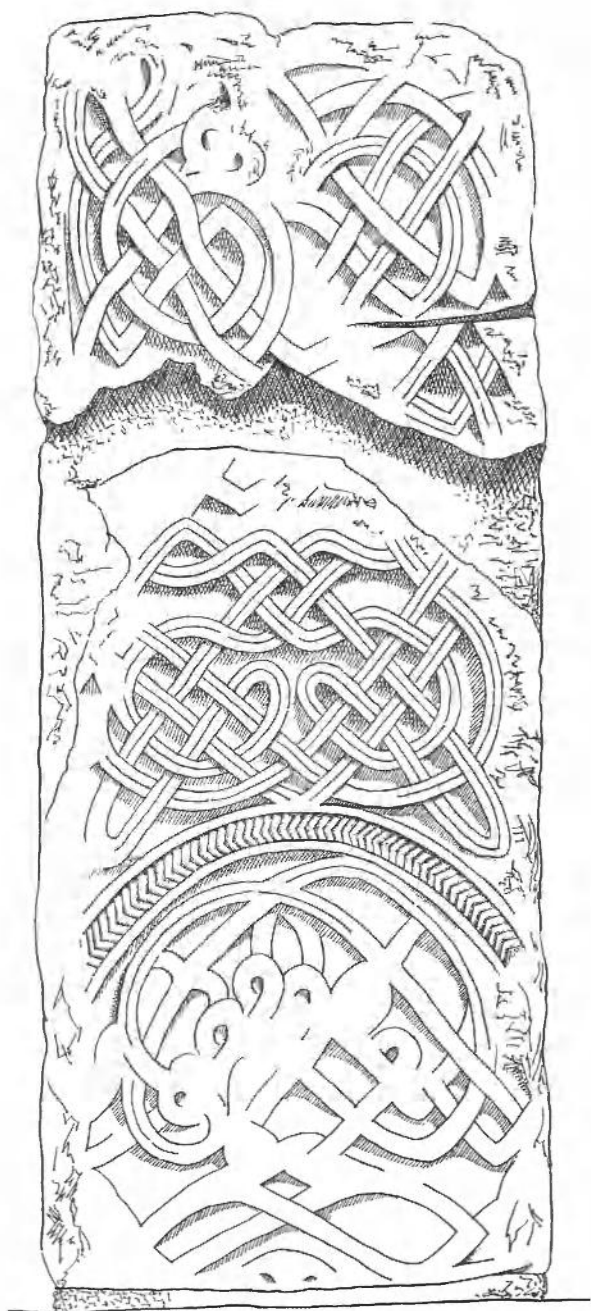
Fig. 1 *Face* E (¼)

Fig. 2 *Face* N (¼)

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Fig. 3 *Face* S (⅛)   Fig. 4 *Face* W (⅛)

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Hexham (early 8th century). The fruit is unexceptional but the stylised form of the stems and leaves indicates a development later in date than the two examples mentioned. A fine type of interlacing fills the area below the band; as in the stems of the vine scroll above, this is formed of double strands superficially not unlike those on the Gillingham fragment nearby. The difference between the two, however, is that whereas at Gillingham these are formed of two adjacent rounded strands, here there is a slight gap with a flat space between the parts, indicative of coarser later work.

Face N (Pl. XIIB and fig. 2). Above the band is a panel of interlaced work similar to that at the base of face E but of rather irregular design. Beneath the arched band is a panel containing a type of scrolled and leafed foliage, the stems and leaves emanating from a central stem which has a finished head for the upper offshoots. Whilst this cannot be truly described as acanthus or palmette there is, however, a certain feeling of Carolingian influence.

Face S (Pl. XIIIA and fig. 3). The upper part has an interlacing ornament corresponding to the opposite face N although of a different form. The lower panel is very worn, but it appears to have vine foliage as in the upper panel of face E although not precisely similar.

Face W (Pl. XIIIB and fig. 4) contains a panel of irregular interlacing ornament in its lower part. The upper panel of this face, however, undoubtedly presents the most interesting ornament of the series—two double palmette scrolls with the leaves or petals emanating from cup-like heads with a serrated finish. The petals have scrolled ends some of which are also serrated. The main stem is similar to the interlacement. The lower flower is damaged by a circular hole, no doubt cut when the stone was reused in the 19th century. One of the earliest examples of palmette ornament known in this country is in the foliage work on objects from the Trewhiddle hoard, dated by the accompanying coins to *c.* 875. This ornament again appears on the late 9th-century Wallingford sword in the Ashmolean Museum. An interesting although late example of this work occurs locally at Knook Church, Wiltshire, where the capitals of the chancel arch compare closely in design and treatment with work on the cross-shaft. These capitals were assigned by Sir Alfred Clapham to the overlap period, and Dr. Zarnecki is inclined to date them to *c.* 1100.

The importance of this rare and interesting example of a Southern cross-shaft lies in the variety of its ornament; the vine scroll of Northumbria and the more common interlace work are combined with an early example of the palmette. The latter was widely used in 10th-century manuscripts of the Winchester School and in Southern architecture of this period. In variety of ornament the shaft may be compared with the late 9th-century font at Deerhurst, also possibly a cross-shaft in origin. The similarity of some of its ornament to that of the finds of the Trewhiddle hoard has been noted by Sir Alfred Clapham.

A.   Faces S and E   B.   Faces N and W

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PLATE XII

PLATE XIII

A. Faces W and S   B. Faces N and W

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The date of the East Stour shaft[1] cannot be ascertained with complete accuracy, but it would seem reasonable to attribute the work to the period of the latest ornament found on the stone, the palmette or Byzantine blossom. This may place it in the 10th or 11th century, and if the latter, as seems to the writer probable, it must be regarded as an unusually late example of Anglo-Saxon art, already showing some signs of Norman influence.

[1] I am greatly indebted to Dr. G. Zarnecki for his help and advice on the dating of this extremely complex fragment.