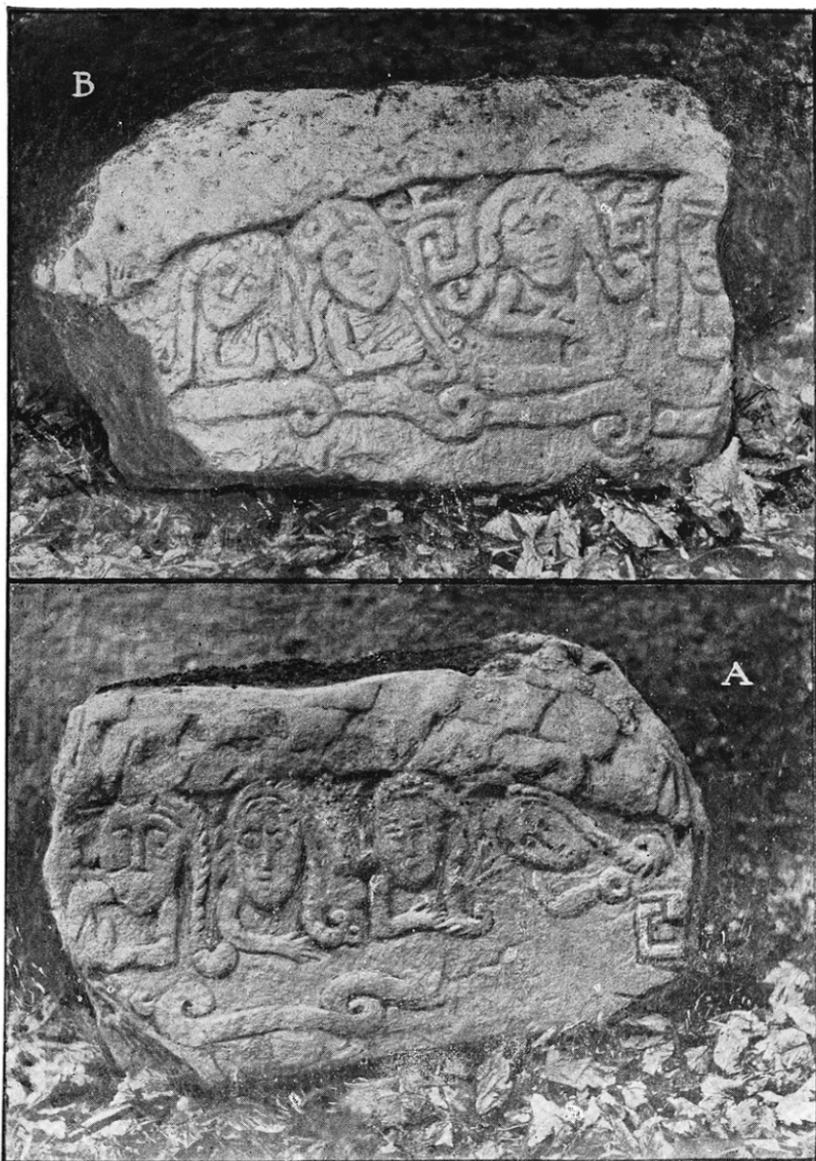


ART. XVIII.—*The Lowther Hogbacks.* By W. G. COLLINGWOOD, F.S.A.

Partly read at Lowther, September 13th, 1906.

THE existence of three hogbacks in Lowther Church-yard has long been matter of common knowledge; but until now two of them have remained so buried in the earth as to be practically unexamined. The third is a mere fragment, though highly interesting. It was noted by the late Rev. W. S. Calverley, F.S.A., on Oct. 1, 1886, photographed by Mr. W. L. Fletcher, and published in these *Transactions*, O.S., ix., pp. 467-471, and in Mr. Calverley's *Early Sculptured Crosses, &c.*, under "Lowther." The curious figures carved in rude, low relief upon it were taken by Mr. Calverley as part of a representation of Christ's Descent into Hell. The Rev. Thomas Lees concurred in this view, quoting in his appendix to the paper just mentioned the Gospel of Nicodemus and its account of the Descent, a fanciful legend woven round the simple statement of the Apostle Peter in Acts ii., 31, "that his soul was not left in hell," and the clause of the creed "he descended into hell." "I take," he said, "the various human figures to represent the Fathers of Old Testament history, warded by Satan and Hades, awaiting in Limbo the coming of the deliverer. The snakes lying in front of the figures, I think, represent Satan and Hades keeping watch on their charge."

Mr. Calverley had pointed out that the conception was modified by Teutonic mythology, which imagined the house of the dead as wattled with snakes; and this roofed and walled stone he supposed to represent such a house, the abode of the departed. In this Lowther fragment, now (September, 1906) lying where he found it twenty



TWO SIDES OF THE HOGBACK FRAGMENT : LOWTHER.

Photo. by W. L. Fletcher.

TO FACE P. 152.

years ago, the tiled roof is plain, and the figures are still to be seen, though less clearly than in Mr. Fletcher's photograph. They have long plaits of hair, curled at the ends (not aureoles nor hoods), which suggests that they are meant for female figures. Two, at least, seem to be in the attitude of prayer, with joined hands; one seems to be asleep. The serpent is not attacking, but merely enclosing them. The bits of straight-lined pattern filling up the ground seem to have no particular symbolism, but to be simply surface ornament of a rude key-pattern kind, such as is common in all these later pre-Norman monuments. There is no doubt that Christ's descent into hell was taken as a suitable subject for grave-stones, suggesting the hope of resurrection; as for instance in the Penrith hogback, where a little figure seems to stand on a serpent's head, to signify the victory over death; and this Lowther subject, though not representing Patriarchs, might possibly be a variant of the well-known symbol.

The art of this stone is very rude; the carving hacked out with the hammer, and not unlike that of the Penrith hogbacks and other monuments which may be dated tenth century. It is of the type common in the parts of England settled by Danes and Norsemen.

Any direct connection of hogback tombs with the huts of a very early period in Mediterranean countries is hardly possible to establish. Their derivation from the tile-roofed graves of the Romans in Britain, of which there are examples in York Museum, is less improbable. The Anglo-Saxons had many pieces of Roman work before their eyes, and made some use of them, selecting the hints that caught their fancy, and without copying the model, adapting it, as all living art does, and as we know all northern art did, to their own devices. In this way may have originated the shrine tombs, of which there are examples in various parts of England dating from the Anglo-Saxon period. The hogback is a development of the shrine tomb, having the ridge curved instead of level;

and it seems to be confined to the Anglo-Danish districts and to the period of the Scandinavian settlements. It is not a Celtic invention, and occurs in Scotland only in Danish or Norse districts.

Like shrine tombs in general, it represents a little house with tiled roof and gable ends definitely expressed. The sides represent the walls of a post-and-wattle house, sometimes with its posts drawn as pilasters, or with the whole wall interlaced. The idea in the minds of the carvers was not that of a Saxon stone-built church or Irish oratory, but the wooden house in a lowland country where clay could be had for the tiled roof and osiers for the wattled walls. On the ends of the gables were sometimes figure-heads, such as are seen in Norse houses of the old-fashioned sort, or on the reliquary shrines (*cumdach*) of contemporary Irish art. At Brechin is a shrine-tomb with the head looking *away* from the stone, as in a *cumdach*. At Crosscanonby, where the population in the tenth century was of Irish-Norse origin, small heads are seen looking *towards* the hogback, of which the roof is not tiled but interwoven with the chain-pattern of the Scandinavians, used on the Dearham and Gosforth crosses as a conventionalization of foliage, and in that hogback, we may suppose, as a representation of thatch, or thatch overgrown with grass and flowers, such as we see in a crofter's cabin or an Icelandic turf house.

But some genius of Anglo-Danish race in Yorkshire appears to have struck out a new idea with regard to these figure-heads. The hogback was the house of the dead; and the conventional symbol of Hades in the art of the time, often seen in tenth century manuscript illuminations, was the gaping mouth of a monster. The Yorkshire sculptor turned his gable heads inwards, and made them signify the gaping powers of darkness trying to swallow up the dead—but trying in vain. To show that it was in vain, for the dead had been buried in the Christian hope of eternal life and resurrection, the sculptor

muzzled the mouth of the monster ; and because even in those times the muzzled bear was not unfamiliar, he turned the whole monster into a bear, climbing up the end of a house, and embracing it with fore and hind paws in a desperate clutch ; but, being muzzled, unable to do more than show impotent malice. Such, I infer, was the origin of the famous bear hogbacks of Brompton in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

From Brompton as centre the bear hogbacks spread over a considerable area. There are thirteen examples in the North Riding alone, beside stones now removed from their original sites to museums. So far east as Easington on the coast the motive is seen, but changed from bear to dragon heads. So far west as Heysham on the shore of the Irish Sea the same bear motive was carried. So far south as Lanivet in Cornwall the bear reappears in an "outlier," as it would be called by geologists, of the "bear formation."

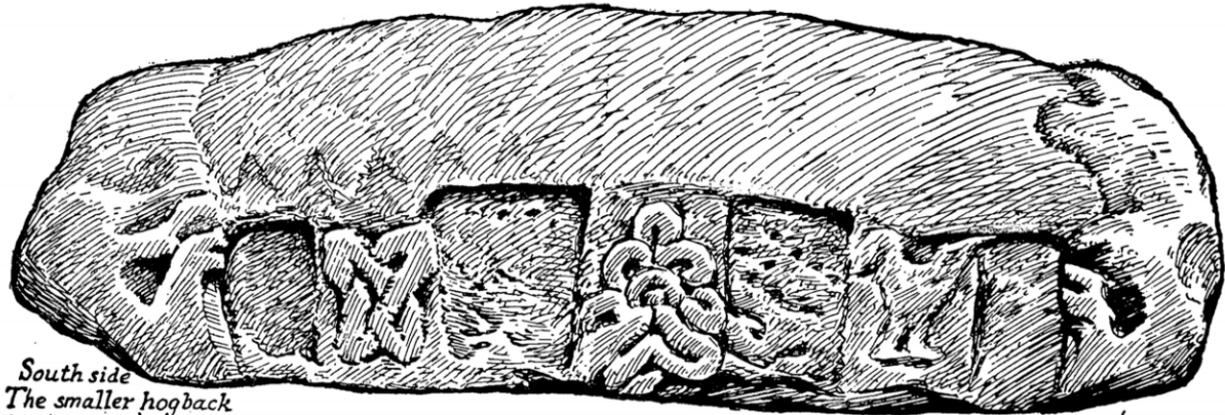
But in our district of Cumberland and Westmorland it has not hitherto been found : the hogbacks at Aspatria, Appleby (Bongate), Bromfield, Gosforth (2), Kirkby Stephen, Penrith (4), and Plumland either had no such figures or are so mutilated that they cannot be seen ; whereas the bears of the Brompton type are so large and prominent a feature that there is little doubt of them whenever they occur. The inference is that in our district the arts, and the population, were not closely connected with Danish Yorkshire ; we have reason to believe on other evidence that our Viking settlers were "Gallgael" from over the Irish Sea ; and this difference in the type of their monuments adds another proof to the argument. One solitary exception, which indeed only proves the rule, has now to be noted since the unearthing of the two buried hogbacks at Lowther.

These two have lain time out of mind on a little mound between the mausoleum and the churchyard wall near the gate ; the roofs of the hogbacks stood above the ground,

nearly weathered away, though traces of tiles were visible, and patterns could just be found on the side of one stone, more than half hidden under the turf. Now, through the kindness of the Countess of Lonsdale, who has had the earth cleared away, they are fully exhibited; the little moss and lichen upon the stones does not materially interfere with examination. In their present position, lying at the bottom of a hole, they are difficult to photograph, but I have sketched them as well as I could in the circumstances.

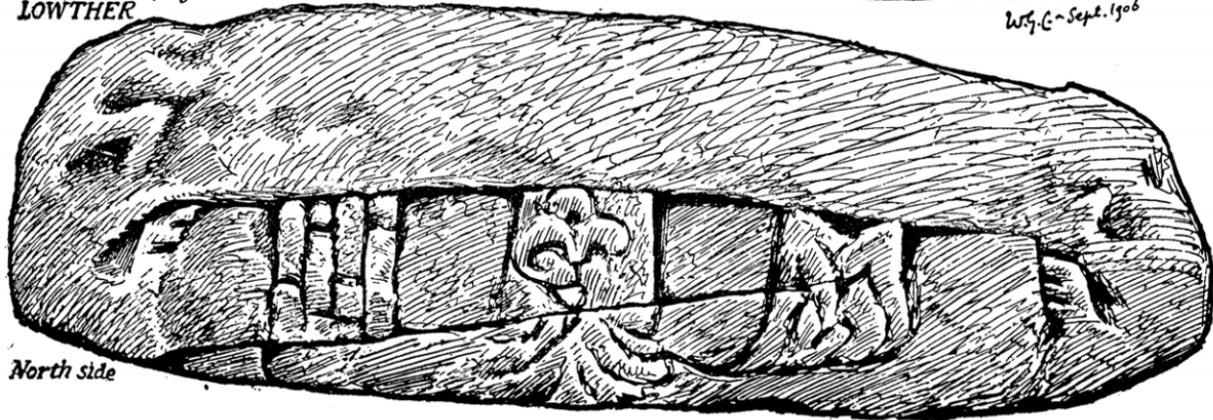
Some new and striking features are revealed. We see that the Brompton bears have invaded our district. Their heads, on the smaller stone, are quite defaced, but any one familiar with the Brompton type can see the rough-hewn forms of the hind legs and the shapes of the fore-paws. The exception proves the rule, for Lowther is in the track of the Danes who came over Stainmoor on their way to the coast and to Dublin; and as the Northumbrian cup now at York Museum was carried to Ormside on the same line of march, so there is every reason to accept the fact of an intrusive colony from Teesdale at a spot so near Edenside as Lowther.

This smaller hogback is of red sandstone, $50\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, 9 inches in thickness, with no taper toward the ends such as hogbacks often show in plan. The height to the ridge in the middle is 16 inches, at the east gable end $10\frac{1}{2}$, and to the eaves in the middle $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The carving is rudely hacked with the pick or hammer, and not chiselled. The roof has been tegulated, but only a few of the tiles are now visible, the greater part being weathered away. Each vertical side bears three pilasters alternating with four sunk panels. On the south side the panels, or at least the two on either hand of the central pilaster, may have had interlacing; the rest of the sunk panels are plain and unornamented. On each side the central pilaster has a figure in relief, of Viking Age character, which seems to be a conventional representa-



South side
The smaller hogback
LOWTHER

W. G. C. - Sept. 1906



North side

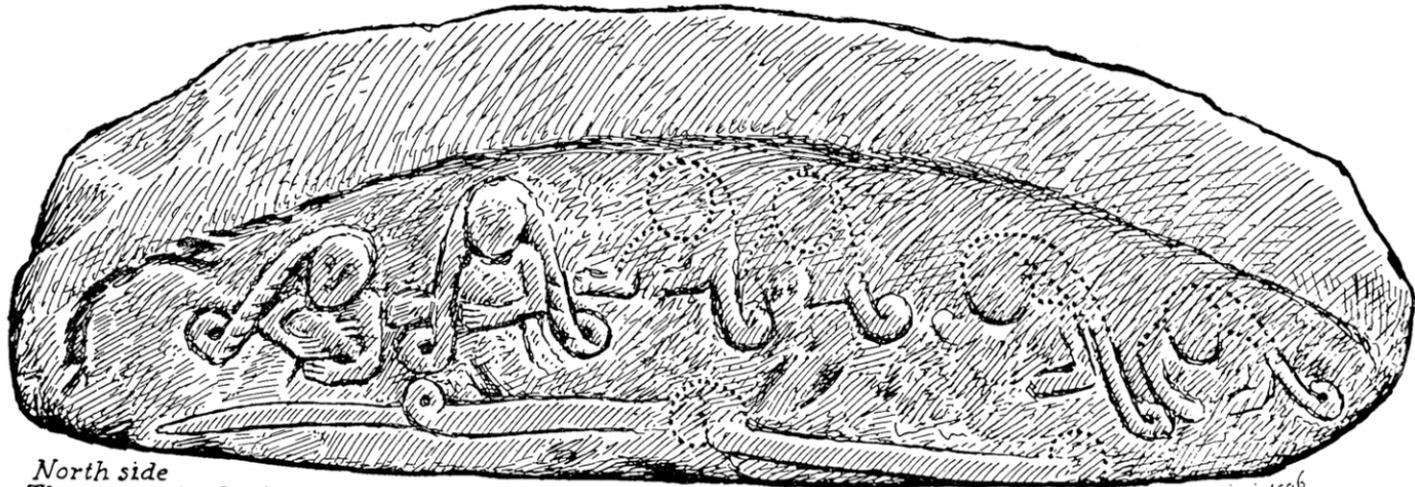
tion of a tree. Here, in a grave monument, this appears to be the remote descendant of that Tree of Life seen as a vine in early Anglian crosses, degenerating into ruder leafage, and then into leafless scrolls; then turning into the chain pattern of Dearham cross, and here reappearing as a mere knop with a suggestion of roots below and foliage above, a sketch of a tree; but always referring to the same symbol, meaning the persistence of life through the apparent death of winter. On the dexter pilaster of the south side and on the sinister one of the north side are plaited knots like those frequently seen in Cumbrian crosses of the Viking Age. The dexter pilaster of the north side is cut into four upright pillars, broken across alternately as if in rude imitation of key-pattern; the form is quite unusual. Finally, on the sinister pilaster of the south side is a bird, which resembles the cocks on a cross-shaft at Brompton, just as the bears on this stone resemble the Brompton bears, though ruder. The cock as symbol of dawn, and of watchfulness, is of course a suitable figure for a monument expressing the Christian hope and duty with regard to death. There is nothing here which has not a parallel among the pre-Norman grave stones in the north of England of the tenth century; even its rudeness can be matched elsewhere, and can be understood as the result of an unskilled carver's attempt to reproduce work he must have seen in the north of Yorkshire. Another cock appears on a Viking Age cross at Michael, Isle of Man. Plot on the map Brompton, Lowther, and Michael, and you have the Danes' road between Dublin and York.

The greater hogback is very curious. It has no bears, and its roof, which is narrower than that of the smaller hogback, does not seem to have been tegulated. On the other hand, it has figures like those on the hogback fragment already mentioned, showing that it is of the same period and perhaps by the same hand; and here the whole series of these figures can be seen, not only a few

which leave the rest to conjecture. Also on the other side is a scene which is quite without analogy in pre-Norman art.

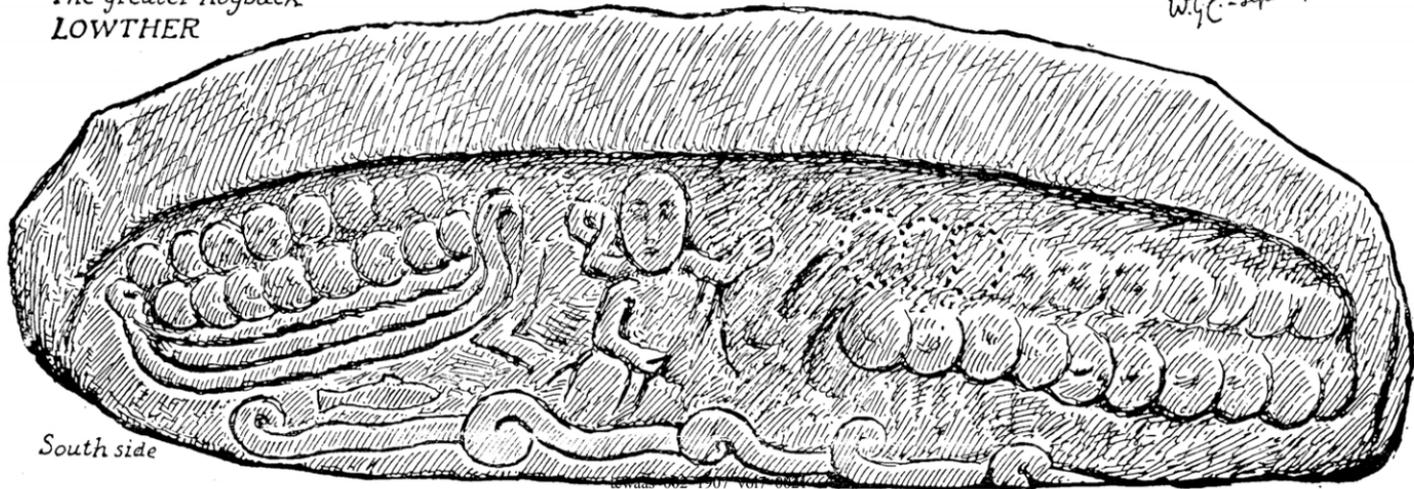
This greater hogback is of the same red sandstone and hacked cutting; 63 inches in length, and 9 inches in thickness, tapering a little towards the ends as seen in plan. The height to the ridge in the middle is $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and to the eaves $21\frac{1}{2}$, the same on both sides. On the north side are six figures; in the sketch the dotted lines supply the forms now weathered away, but pretty safely conjectured from the two figures on the dexter side and from the hogback fragment. They are obviously female, all having long tails of hair, and the two better preserved show that the tails are meant to be twisted and curled, or tied into loops at the ends. Similar tails of hair are seen in the figure of Sigun on the Gosforth cross and, I think, on the Penrith cross, though the last is much decayed. One of these figures has the hands joined in the attitude of prayer, as noticed in the fragment. To her right two figures are reaching out to the one at the dexter end, who seems to be clasping something. Beneath them, as on the fragment, a long snake is coiled.

On the other side, above a similar snake, there is a large figure of a man, half length, holding up his left hand. Near his head is a bit of the same straight-lined plait work as fills the background in the fragment, and perhaps extended over more of the vacant space here, making with the sharply bent band to his right and perhaps another, now quite broken away, to his left an ornamented panel framing this central figure. To his right is a Viking ship with eight men and their shields; the sea in which it floats is shown by the fish beneath it. To his left is a row of ten men with their shields, the round shields of the Viking Age, and, I think, their legs appearing beneath their shields; but this part is broken and weathered. When the stone has been cleaned, and when it can be seen in side lights which will show up the



North side
The greater hogback
LOWTHER

W.G.C. - Sept. 1906



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South side

shallow carving, we may perhaps get a better reading of this remarkable relief.

The ship is often seen on early monuments; there is a Viking ship on a Scandinavian shaft at Iona (figured in a recent number of the *Sagabook of the Viking Club*), and the lymphad became common upon West Highland tombstones in later centuries. In our district we have the boat on the "Fishing Stone" at Gosforth. At Gosforth, too, there is an army sculptured very like this troop of soldiers. But the combination of ship and army, with a figure between them, is unique; and there is nothing on this hogback which supports the idea that the subject intended was Christ's descent into hell. The six ladies on the larger stone are so like those on the fragment that any explanation of the one series ought to serve for the other.

We have certainly here three tombs of the same period; one of which is distinctly Christian, and derived from North Yorkshire. Another has some resemblance to the so-called warrior's tomb at Gosforth, though I think this at Lowther may be the earlier. The interpretation which first suggests itself is that the greater stone is the monument of a lord of Lowther in the tenth century, a Danish settler, who had been a leader by land and sea, and that the figure in the centre of the south side is his portrait; while the smaller stone with its more definitely Christian symbols might be the tomb of the lady of Lowther. This, however, does not quite explain the female figures on two of the stones. Taken in connection with the hero, the army and the boat, they remind one of the Passing of Arthur. Such a stone might have suggested the story, or have been suggested by it. Another Arthurian legend is already connected with this district and period, if Prof. I. Gollancz has rightly made out the relation of Gringalet, the horse of Gawain, the Cumbrian hero, with the boat of Wade, the Scandinavian demigod. This legend is the famous story of Völund the Smith and the Swan-maidens.

Here in Cumbria, Norse and Welsh ideas met and mingled to produce many of the elements of Arthurian romance; and just as other Edda myths are seen on Christian monuments at Gosforth and Penrith, so also the Völund tale is found on the Leeds cross and, as I think, on a fragment of pre-Norman work at Neston in Cheshire, with possible references to the same legend in wing-forms at Gilling, and Smith subjects elsewhere. It might reasonably be considered as a possible subject to be illustrated on a hogback of this class, though it is far from clear what these figures really mean. At any rate the ladies on the two Lowther hogbacks, taken with the boat, the army and the hero, seem to require for their explanation something more than the mere suggestion of saints in Limbo and a portrait group.

Considered historically, these monuments are valuable as showing that Lowther was settled in the tenth century by members of the great Danish colony from Yorkshire, Christianized Vikings. If we cannot yet read all that their artist tried to convey without the use of written words, nor give him much praise for his design and carving, there is great satisfaction and interest in adding one more example to the series of unwritten documents which help us to retrace the story of a dark age.

Since the meeting of our Society at Lowther we hear with pleasure that these hogbacks, through the kind care of the Countess of Lonsdale and the Rev. T. B. Tylecote, rector of Lowther, are to be placed inside the church for safer preservation. They are well worthy of the honour.
