

ART. XVIII.—*A late Anglian Cross-head and an Anglo-Saxon Crucifix at Bentham, Yorkshire.* By ANNE G. GILCHRIST.

I. THE LATE ANGLIAN CROSS-HEAD.

THE first fragment here reproduced I noticed last August amongst other "old stones" of varying dates leaning against the house front of Ellergill Lodge, Bentham (on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border, about fourteen miles from Lancaster).

The fragment consists of the centre and major portions of three arms of the cross-head, and measures about thirteen inches high by ten across and nearly four inches thick. A fragment of a roll-border seems to remain at the top end corner of the dexter arm. The remaining portion of each arm is filled with an interlacing pattern, and across the end of the least imperfect arm the surface also suggests the possibility of a now effaced interlacing design. The centre of the cross-head is occupied by a hollowed roundel forming a cruciferous nimbus round a head of Christ, which still has a projection of about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch from the nimbus (the traces of the cross-rays are more visible in the stone itself). The face, which still retains an expression of benign and dignified sadness, is, I think, beardless. The stone is broken off under the chin. The hair comes down to about the level of the ear-lobes, and the head is slightly inclined to the dexter side. The nimbus is decorated with criss-cross lines round the rim.

Wishing to obtain an expert opinion before publishing the find, I sent photographs to Mr. Reginald Smith, V.-P., S.A., Keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, for a pronouncement upon the approximate date and the form of the cross when entire.



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(a) Obverse.

LATE ANGLIAN CROSS-HEAD, BENTHAM.

(b) Reverse.

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In sending congratulations upon the recovery of this late Anglian relic, Mr. Smith said he had shown the prints to the President and Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries and they had all agreed on the ninth century (or possibly tenth) as the date. It was apparently, Mr. Smith wrote, "not a crucifix, as there would be no room for the outstretched arms on the cross-arms, so we must assume a narrow standing figure occupying most of the shaft, perhaps with an inscription below." Mr. Smith, who thinks the cross was probably of the Irton (Cumb.) type, further cited some examples from our late President, Mr. W. G. Collingwood's *Northumbrian Crosses*—a Yorkshire parallel for the tilt and position of the head in fig. 124 (Finghall, Yorks.), and a standing figure that would "serve as a model" from Hoddam (centre of fig. 88). It was the unusual position of the head in the centre of the cross-head that first gave me the idea that the rest of the figure had been continued down the shaft, but having never seen any other similar instance (except in the case of crucifixes) I should have hesitated to suggest it without the support of experts in the assumption of such an arrangement.

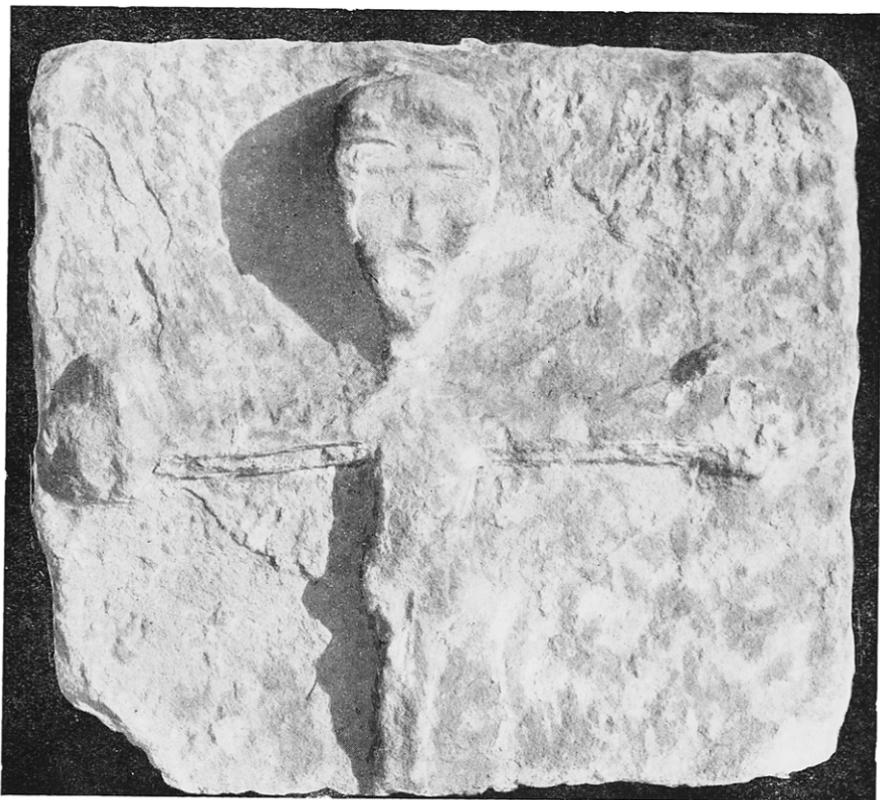
The reverse side of the cross, though much more rubbed down, can be seen to repeat the interlacing pattern and central medallion, but as to the subject of the latter—all but effaced—I have received no suggestions. In one light, the stone itself first seemed to me to suggest a bearded and bushy-locked man with an animal in his arms (? John the Baptist with the Lamb, the Baptist being the patron saint of the church), but the photograph is more suggestive of a head and face of the same size as those of the Christ. The stone itself is a hard yellow-grey sandstone (?) containing mica-like sparkles, and as I found bits of stone which seemed to match it amongst the ruins of an old water-mill near Bentham it is presumably a local stone. The cross-head shows on both faces patches of rusty yellow, and

there are strata of the same colour in the mill fragments. A geologist would probably be able to settle the point by identification of the stone.

Enquiries have so far failed to elicit any history of this ninth-century fragment, accidentally discovered by an inquisitive rather than a practised eye. The present owner of Ellergill, Mr. Dugdale, says he found the stone there when he came, and previous owners cannot recall it to memory. In its moss-grown state it may long have passed merely as an "old stone." As Bentham church was drastically "restored" in 1823, when only the tower and chancel escaped demolition, it may possibly have been found built into one of the walls, like the second object here reproduced.

II. THE ANGLO-SAXON CRUCIFIX.

This very curious early crucifix, now preserved on a window-sill on the S. side of Bentham church, was found, under a thick coat of plaster, in the E. wall of the tower during the restorations of 1877-8. It forms a strange contrast to the other early cross, and as it seems never to have been reproduced or to have received more than the most casual guide-book mention, it may, I think, form a fit pendant to what can be better claimed as a "discovery." Mr. McCall, F.S.A., the editor of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society's *Journal*, has assured me that there is no record of any visit to Bentham or any description of the church or crucifix in their *Journal*. Little seems to be known of the church's history, and for a few recorded facts I have drawn upon H. Speight's *Craven and North-West Yorkshire Highlands*, 1892. The church is a pre-Norman foundation, the manor and also by implication the church, being mentioned in Domesday Book, the only other two adjacent manors then possessing churches being Tatham and Tunstall. The name occurs



ANGLO-SAXON CRUCIFIX, BENTHAM.

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in Domesday Book as *Benetaïn* (the scribe has possibly mistaken 'm' for 'in'), later forms being *Bentame*, *Bentum*, etc. In the thirteenth year of Edward II, that is, a few years after Bannockburn, the church was almost entirely destroyed by Scottish marauders. The lower part of the present tower is believed to date from the reign of Edward III, and though the re-building of 1823 involved the demolition of all the fabric but the tower and chancel, one may presume that this relic of a pre-Norman age remained safely hidden under its thick coat of plaster in the tower wall—perhaps from the time the tower was re-built in the fourteenth century—while other "relics of interest" were suffering a worse fate in being ruthlessly destroyed, or at the best cast out—the font amongst them. The crucifix, after being taken out of the tower wall in 1878, during Norman Shaw's restorations, owes its preservation to the Rev. F. W. Joy, F.S.A., rector of Bentham at the time.

The stone is a hard sandstone boulder, the top, bottom and sides of which have been roughly squared, apparently in preparation for the rood-sculpture, but a portion of its original rounded boulder back remains. A part of this has been roughly struck off by a mason's hammer to reduce its bulk, and this broken surface has evidently never been exposed to weather, though (like the whole of the stone) it has been covered with mortar. This suggests that the rood may, from the first, have been set in a wall, with the unworked boulder side inwards.

The extreme dimensions are: Length 17 inches, breadth $18\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and depth from front to back at base, 10 inches, gradually reduced by the shape of the boulder to 3 inches at the extreme top of the sinister side. The figure is much worn. The present projection of the head is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The arms (a point in which by some accident of light the photograph is deceptive in suggesting horizontal strips of metal) are about 2 inches in width, rising to a

ridge of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches projection along their length. The hands are large and clumsy.

This rude and early crucifix may be compared with various pre-Norman examples figured in *Northumbrian Crosses*, Chap. X, e.g. the Dewsbury fragment (fig. 123), Sherburne, East Riding (fig. 124), Kirkburton (fig. 125), and Kirkdale (fig. 126), but differs from all of them in not apparently forming the upper part of a cross. I hope that the attention here called to it may elicit some authoritative opinion upon its date and workmanship which may help to throw further light upon the early history of Bentham, as the cross-head and crucifix form a strange contrast.

* * The photographs illustrating these notes were specially taken for the writer, those of the Anglian Cross-head being by Wyncspeare Herbert of Lancaster, the one of the Crucifix by A. Foster of High Bentham.

A.G.G.