



FIG. I.—THE STANWIX TOMBSTONE.

facing p. 103

ART. X.—*A medieval tombstone at Stanwix.* By C. G. BULMAN.

Read at Barrow-in-Furness, July 10th, 1951.

SOME time before the outbreak of war in 1939 the late Rev. W. Bancroft, then vicar of Stanwix, drew my attention to a medieval tombstone which had been discovered in his churchyard, in the following circumstances. For an unknown period there had lain in the churchyard the much-worn effigy of a female, which was noted and described in our *Transactions* (CW1 xv 453 f.) in an article by Canon Bower, "Effigies in the diocese of Carlisle"; he remarked that the figure was well worn, and continued, "There is little to give any clue to the date except the shape of the head, which seems to be without cap, but with a curl on each side. This leads us to believe the effigy to be of the 15th century." This figure remained in the churchyard and continued to grow more and more weathered and, according to Mr Bancroft, latterly it suffered from the attentions of choir-boys. He therefore decided to have the figure lifted and transferred into the church, where it would be protected from the weather and preserved from further damage. When it was finally lifted, he was surprised to find beneath it a flat stone slab, with the figure of a priest roughly outlined upon it. Mr Bancroft then reported the find to me, but with the outbreak of war and other distractions at the time, the slab was never described; it was covered over with turf, in order to protect it from the weather, and after Mr Bancroft's death it seemed likely that the discovery might be forgotten and the stone lost without being noted. I have therefore had it uncovered again, so that it could be photographed and described.

The slab is 3 ft. 4 in. wide by 7 ft. long and is of local red sandstone. A piece about a foot square has been broken away from the top right-hand corner, but the slab has obviously been protected from the weather for a very long time for, although weathering and flaking have occurred to some extent, it is on the whole well preserved. On it is incised the figure of a priest, roughly and even crudely carved on the stone and to no great depth. The figure is shown in a close-sleeved gown instead of eucharistic vestments, and this in itself is unusual. A high collar comes well up the neck on each side, and the sleeves are shown banded at the wrists. On the top of the head is a line which may represent either a flat cap or hair—probably the latter, for where the line terminates at each side of the head, three or four wavy lines stand out at right angles to the head, just at the level of the eyes, to represent a bunch of hair; these lines are not easy to see in a photograph, but are very visible on the stone. On the body is cut the outline of a chalice, also roughly incised, of medieval shape; immediately above it, the hands of the figure are raised as though in the act of consecration, with the palms to the front and the thumbs almost touching; this is probably the most remarkable thing about the effigy, for the attitude of the hands is exceptional, and I do not remember seeing any other representation of a priest with his hands in this position. The usual posture for the hands on a figure is together, as in prayer, or holding a book or, sometimes, a chalice. The folds of the garment are roughly indicated by a few more or less straight lines, two on each side, and these merge into one line as they reach the bottom of the garment; the two parallel lines immediately below the chalice seem to indicate the meeting of the two edges of the outer garment. The feet are not indicated in any way.

There is nothing about the figure or the slab to indicate a date. My own opinion is that it is very late medieval,

Tudor in fact, and to be dated *circa* A.D. 1500. The representations of figures in the medieval period were frequently in the round, and we are all familiar with the magnificent figures on tombs which remain to us as a heritage from the Middle Ages. One type of memorial was flat, however, namely the monumental brass, a common type of memorial which persisted throughout the medieval period, and indeed later; in this type, the engraved figure, cut out of sheet metal, was laid flat on a stone slab which was sunk on the face to receive the brass. This type of memorial influenced the masons who carved figures in stone, and they sometimes produced flat slabs with incised figures, to compete in the trade in flat memorials. Large numbers of such slabs still exist in churches, especially in the Midlands. A fine example remains at Norbury in Derbyshire, where there is a flat incised slab displaying the figure of a priest, commemorating Henry Prince, rector (ob. 1500); this, however, is a far more skilful and elaborate figure, with well-depicted vestments and an elaborate canopy over the head, and it must be regarded as the product of a professional workshop, whereas the slab at Stanwix is only too obviously "home-made". Yet the two slabs are essentially examples of the same type of memorial.

There are some indications that there was originally an inscription on each of the longer sides of the stone, but, most unfortunately, the slab has so weathered at the edges that little remains which can be deciphered; a T was all that I could make out, despite a great deal of effort, on the side to the right of the illustration (fig. 1): it is 2 in. long.

Two questions remain to be solved. First, of whom is the figure meant to be a representation? Next, how does this figure come to be in Stanwix churchyard, and in so curious a position, immediately below the old red sandstone effigy?

In medieval times the living of Stanwix was appropriated to the church of Carlisle, but the bishop always had the patronage and appointed the vicar (N. & B. ii 455). A list, which hangs in the vestry of the present church, names several of the vicars who held the living in the half-century immediately preceding the Reformation, and who might be candidates for the figure with which we are concerned. They are as follows:—

William Byx, 1465.

Thos. Best, 1473.

Edward Rotherion, 1477.

Thos. Boyet, 1487.

George Bewley, c. 1534.

If this list is complete (which is doubtful), the favourite might be Thomas Boyet. If he was indeed vicar for so long a period as 1487—c. 1534, he might well have been commemorated with an effigy such as this, inscribed on a stone set above his grave, so that his parishioners could show their regard for a pastor who had served them for so long; and as little money would be available in so poor a parish, they could not afford a more costly memorial, but employed a local mason to outline the figure of a priest on a slab of local sandstone. The mason whom they employed may well have been used to lettering, for the sole surviving letter, and the small vestiges which remain of the others, are of good workmanship; but that is not to say that he was capable of figure-sculpture, which is a very different matter.

The second question is difficult to answer. My opinion is that both effigies were at one time inside the church, and that they were ejected at some date, and placed one on top of the other, where they remained for so long. There is a difficulty here, however, for Bishop Nicolson's "Visitation" shows that he visited Stanwix church on 6 October 1703,¹ and after a few typically pithy remarks

¹ *Miscellany Accounts of the diocese of Carlisle* (= this Society's Extra Series i, 1877) 104f.

about the state of the fabric and fittings, he abruptly concludes, "No Monuments, in or about the Church, worth the takeing Notice of." Now Bishop Nicolson was a keen and intelligent antiquary, interested in monuments of the past, including inscriptions, effigies and stained glass, and he usually comments upon and catalogues what he has found. Had the figures been in the church when he visited it, I do not doubt that he would have noted them; and had they been visible in their present position, he ought to have seen them—for he says "in or about the church", and he must have been in the churchyard, for he mentions the state of its wall. They could not have been covered with grass or with hay, for it was in October that he paid his visit. On the other hand, I do not know where else either of the effigies could have been, and we can only assume that Nicolson missed these figures in some way or other—unless it was that he saw them, but did not think them "worth the takeing Notice of."