

ART. VII.—*The Addingham cross-incised slab*. By R. N. BAILEY, M.A.

Read at Carlisle, January 23rd, 1960.

THE cross-incised slab here illustrated was discovered in 1913 on the site of a church at Addingham which was drowned by a change in course of the River Eden in the Middle Ages.¹ The discovery was published in 1914 (CW2 xiv 333) but the lack of any comment on its significance, either at the time of its recovery or subsequently, prompts this paper.

The stone is roughly squared and is 55 in. in height with a width of 15½ in., narrowing to 11½ in. at the foot. Its depth is uneven but averages about 7½ in. On the upper part of the slab there is an incised linear cross with expanded terminals. Between the arms of this cross are four shallow cup depressions. The position of the incised cross on the upper part of the slab, together with the narrow foot, indicates that the stone was designed to stand erect, and since it was found on the site of a church, it almost certainly marked a grave.

Such erect, cross-incised slabs have a limited distribution in the British Isles; a distribution which points to a non-Anglian origin. They are found in Ireland, Cornwall, Wales, the Isle of Man, along the west coast of Scotland and up the Great Glen as far as the Moray Firth. They do not seem to occur in heavily Anglicised areas of the country and the distribution clearly indicates a Celtic origin.

It is possible to show that this type of funereal stone is a development of Christianised versions of the pagan Roman tombstone. In asserting this one should bear in mind an alternative derivation which is indicated in the

¹ CW2 xiv 328 ff.

literary sources of the Christianising of pagan standing stones by incising a cross upon them. The Addingham slab is, however, most probably a funereal stone and is best linked to the Roman tradition.

The evolution from a pagan to a Christian memorial stone took place, not in Britain, but in Gaul, the Rhineland and North Africa in the 5th century. The fashion reached the lands around the Irish Sea, in the course of that century, by the western sea route from the continent.² Evidence for such contact between the Irish sea area and the continent, in this post-Roman period, is found in the Lives of the Celtic Saints, whilst certain classes of imported pottery, found on excavation in the Celtic West, support this literary evidence.³

On these early Christian stones the inscription is sometimes headed by a Christian symbol, and this tended to become more and more the dominant feature of the slab.⁴ In the earliest stages the symbol was usually a chi-rho, but this was later replaced in popularity by other cross shapes, and, as epigraphic practise declined, crosses are found alone without any inscription. Since many of these inscriptions can be dated, both on the continent and in this country, it is possible to work out a chronology of the types of crosses associated with them which will be equally valid for those stones which, like Addingham, carry no inscription.

The earliest of these Christian tombstones in Britain carry inscriptions in Roman capitals. In Wales there are three dateable examples of this type⁵ which all belong to the mid-6th century. Two other dateable inscriptions⁶ indicate that uncial lettering was being used alongside Roman capitals as early as c. 530 and that by 625 the use of uncial lettering had almost completely replaced

² V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*, 1950,

3-4. K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 1953, 163 ff.

³ C. A. Ralegh Radford, *Dark Age Britain*, 1956, 59-70.

⁴ Radford, *D.G.*³ XXXIV, 1957, 175 and references.

⁵ Nash-Williams, *op. cit.*, nos. 104, 138, 139.

⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 32 and 13. For a later dating of no. 13 see K. Jackson, *op. cit.*, 160-162. This does not radically affect the argument.

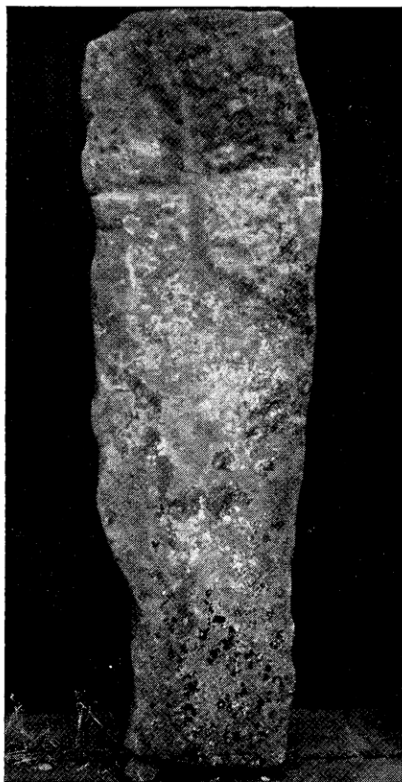


Photo: C. Chaplin

The Addingham cross-incised slab.



Brigham: the vine scroll fragment.

that of Roman capitals. The period of use of Roman capitals with no admixture of uncial forms can therefore be limited to the time between the mid-5th and the late 6th century. At this period, the evidence in Wales and Scotland shows, the cutting of an incised Christian symbol above the inscription was not popular in Britain. Where such symbols do occur they are either chi-rhos or the cross circle derivative of the chi-rho. In Wales there are three examples⁷ and there are a further two, or perhaps three, in Scotland.⁸

The type of incised linear cross found on the Addingham slab is not therefore found in association with inscriptions dating from before the late 6th century. This type of cross belongs to a later period, and this is clear from the number of Welsh inscriptions in Roman capitals which have been scored through by linear crosses.⁹ This cross form is found, on other monuments, to be contemporary with inscriptions, either partly or wholly, in uncial script. The earliest dateable example is fixed to 625¹⁰ and there are others from later periods showing the same association.¹¹ The evidence of the incised crosses with inscriptions indicates therefore that the type of cross found at Addingham belongs to a period after the turn of the 7th century. The various associations of this type of cross with ogham stones does not seem to negate this conclusion, though the evidence is here not so clear.

The problem, then, is less to establish the earliest possible date for this slab as to decide upon its latest. Nash-Williams¹² argued that this incised linear cross had lost its popularity in Wales by the 9th century. The latest dateable example from Wales belongs to the 9th century.¹³

⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 101, 106, 138.

⁸ Kirkmadrine, C. A. Ralegh Radford, *Ministry of Works Guide to Whit-horn and Kirkmadrine*, 1953, 45-6, nos. 2 and 3. Manor Water Stone as restored *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* lxx, 1936, 35-9.

⁹ Nash-Williams, *op. cit.*, nos. 401, 128, 143, 400.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 301, 260, 120, 248.

¹² *Op. cit.*, 18-20, 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 301.

It is reasonable to assume that the introduction of Anglian motifs and the free standing cross into Wales, after the mid-8th century *rapprochement* between the Welsh and the Anglo-Saxon churches, would tend to drive out the simple Celtic type we are examining. If a simple monument were required then the incised outline cross would be a natural choice since it could reproduce the shape of the free standing crosses and their decoration. There is one piece of evidence supporting this 9th-century *terminus ante quem* which comes from St. David's,¹⁴ for, in what must have been a culturally advanced centre, a simple incised linear cross was replaced in the 9th century by an outline type.

At the same time Nash-Williams wisely pointed out that this simple kind of monument could have continued much later in the more backward areas. There seem to be several instances of an erect funereal stone, with an incised linear cross, dating to the Norse period¹⁵ while in the Faroes and Greenland, countries without a sculptural tradition, the type flourished even later.¹⁶ North of the Solway a related type of inscribed stone seems to have been used to mark routes in the 9th and 10th centuries.¹⁷

The Addingham slab is, however, a funereal stone and is not likely to have been as late as the Norse period. It has been demonstrated that this sort of monument is Celtic in origin. As such it is not likely to have survived long in Cumberland after the mid-7th century beginnings of Anglian settlement in the area, and the late 7th-century introduction of the more prestigious Anglian free standing cross with its relief decoration. The fact that the Celtic tradition was deeply rooted in Anglian Cumberland must be taken into account, for evidence such as

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 380.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 7, 5. J. Romilly Allen, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, 1903, 37.

¹⁶ *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, lxxv, 1931, 373 ff.

¹⁷ *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of Scotland (Selkirk)*, 1957, 70.

that of the place-names of Birkby and Briscoe¹⁸ perhaps shows that the Celts were still a distinctive element at the time of the Norse invasions in the 10th century. If, however, there was some large scale adherence to Celtic funereal forms in Cumberland during the 8th and 9th centuries, it is strange that this is the only example known, in contrast to the large amount of Anglian material.

A date in the 7th century would therefore seem the most acceptable, and even if the stone belongs to a slightly later period, it is essentially a Celtic piece and belongs to the Celtic West.

Types of cross with the shallow cups between the arms are found over a wide area around the Irish Sea. There are examples from Wales,¹⁹ Scotland,²⁰ Man,²¹ as well as from Ireland and the continent. There are a host of associated types with a circle incised between the arms.

If my argument is correct therefore, and this is a 7th-century monument, then this is the earliest post-Roman stone there is in the county, demonstrating important links westwards which no other evidence had indicated. Its presence at Addingham places that church in the almost unique position of possessing Christian monuments which reflect the sculptural taste of its successive Celtic, Anglian and Norse communities.

¹⁸ *English Place Name Society*, XXI, 1950, 424, 340.

¹⁹ Nash-Williams, *op. cit.*, nos. 48, 51, 52, 131, 173, 178, 227.

²⁰ J. Stuart, *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, 1867, i, plate xxix, *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, lix, 1925, 145. *Ibid.*, xlv, 1911, 335, 336. *Ibid.*, xlix, 1915, 44.

²¹ F. Kermodé, *Manx Crosses*, 1907, nos. 6 and 13.