

ART. XVI. *Bromleys of Keswick — a family business.*

By J. HUGHES.

Read at Carlisle, September 27th, 1974.

DURING the planning of the Society's Summer Meeting of 1972 to the Keswick-Cockermouth area, our member, Brigadier J. W. Kaye drew my attention to several remarkable slatestone monuments in Crosthwaite Churchyard. Local historians have made scant reference to monumental masons and their craft, despite the fact that Cumberland and Westmorland have long been stone-producing counties with an abundance of capable craftsmen. Within the two counties the mediaeval mason was frequently called upon to display his talents in the production of grave-slab covers. As shown by Canon Bower (CW2 vii 165, ix 1, and xii 86) these memorials range from the simple 12th-century forms to the highly ornate 14th-century types demanding exceptional skills not normally associated with the ordinary stonemason.¹ Not infrequently inscriptions accompanied the usual incised or embossed cross motif, calvary steps at base and insignia of rank of the deceased. Such slabs generally commemorated the local lord, his family and occasionally the village priest and were placed in the chancel of the church.²

In common with the rest of the country the erection of churchyard monuments was not general practice in the Lake Counties until the late 17th century. The ordinary villager was not slow in accepting the fashion

¹ L. F. Salzman in *Building in England* (Oxford 1952), 32, shows that there were several types of mason and that a school of monumental masons was not unknown.

² The usual fee for burial within the church was 6s. 8d. and the stone laid over the grave was a "lairstone" — see Rev. J. C. Cox, *Churchwardens Accounts* (London 1913), 169.

of post-Restoration times in commemorating his dead with headstone, slab or table tomb. It is noticeable that most of our examples of this period display a lack of skill and workmanship which distinguished the later mediaeval types. For the most part the inscriptions were essentially vernacular in design, little regard being paid to the spacing or sizes of letters, indeed not infrequently letters were so mis-shapen as to be almost undecipherable. Words begun at the end of one line were continued at the beginning of the next and spelling was not always of the highest order.

Gradually, with improved education, travel and a wider distribution of material assets, there was a demand for memorials of a higher quality. The 18th century saw the rise of professional monumental masons — well trained men with skills equal or superior to their mediaeval counterparts. One such craftsman founded the family firm of Bromleys of Keswick, which operated for a period of 165 years.

1792-1840. JOHN BROMLEY (III),³ the eldest son of James (I) and Mary (II) Bromley, was born at Beckermeth and baptised at St John's Church on 23 February 1772. Unlike his father, a local weaver, he chose to become a stone cutter and engraver. Such a vocation called for some form of formal education and John may well have attended a school in the area, perhaps Egremont or Ponsonby.

Details of his apprenticeship are lacking, though family tradition asserts that as a young man he spent some time at Ulpha. It may be noted that slate quarries then in operation in the Manor of Ulpha were owned by Miss Singleton of Drigg⁴ — a parish near his birthplace. Alternatively his apprenticeship may have been served at Whitehaven where several monu-

³ Heads of the firm are shown in capitals. Figures in brackets refer to pedigree chart.

⁴ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 21 February 1772, advertising quarries to let.

mental masons were established. At all events, it was in this town that he set up in business on his own account in 1792.

Two years later he married at Gosforth (15 June 1794) Elizabeth (Betty) (IV), daughter of Martin Ashburner, a well-to-do farmer of Seascale Hall. They had issue:

1. John (V), baptised at St James's Church, Whitehaven, 29 January 1797.
2. Martin (VI), baptised at St James's Church, Whitehaven, 4 June 1799.
3. James (VII), baptised at St James's Church, Whitehaven, 19 July 1801.
4. Thomas (VIII), baptised at St James's Church, Whitehaven, 27 November 1803 (born 10 August 1803).

Thomas married Elizabeth Pattinson (IX) at Crosthwaite (Keswick) Church 28 March 1826. He followed the trade of his father as an engraver and stonemason and is thus described of Wilson Street, Workington, in 1828/29.⁵ Inscribed headstones to Stamper Atkinson (died 1845) and John Atkinson (1851) in St Michael's Churchyard, Workington, are signed T. Bromley. His will, dated 7 April 1860, refers to him as a builder. He died in 1863.

One of John Bromley's early commissions, while still at Whitehaven, was the engraving of a headstone at Crosthwaite in memory of Elizabeth Hodgson, née Leathes, who died in 1797. Mr B. L. Thompson records that the probable author of the epitaph (Thomas Leathes) considered it well engraved and that it cost £7. 9s. 4d.⁶

Sometime after 1803 John moved to Gill House, Gosforth, where his eldest daughter was born:

5. Sarah (X), born 26 May 1805, married Joseph Postlethwaite (XI) of Keswick 6 November 1830.

A few years later the business was transferred to

⁵ Pigot & Co., *Nat. Commercial Directory*.

⁶ CW2 1x 118.



PLATE I.—John Bromley, 1772-1840.

Keswick.⁷ This no doubt was a shrewd move on Bromley's part. Having already received the patronage of the Leathes family there would be further scope for his services among the local gentry. About this period a number of wealthy and influential people had "discovered" Keswick and were living there. The early 19th century but undated *Guide to the Lakes*, published by Hudson Scott of Carlisle, describes Crosthwaite Church: "... There are few grave-stones in the church yard, probably on account of its great distance from freestone". It is perhaps even more surprising that few were worked in slate before 1800 despite the fact that the church is in the very heart of "slate country".

Clearly Bromley recognised the advantages of working in this hitherto neglected material. It was ideal for the production of fine engraving, gave sharp arrises and had excellent weathering qualities.⁸ Relative transport costs from available quarries gave a clear cost advantage over the alternative imported sandstone. Elsewhere slate headstones were not unknown; the Swithland district of Leicestershire had a high output dating from the 17th century. Other centres of the industry were at Kesteven in Lincolnshire and in parts of Wales.⁹

John and Betty Bromley had further issue (all born at Keswick):

5. Richard (XII), born 3 July 1808, who set up in business as a stonemason and engraver in Penrith.
6. WILLIAM (XIII), born 3 June 1811, who succeeded his father as head of the business.
7. Ann (XIV), born 4 September 1813, who married George Graham (XV) 4 February 1856.

⁷ Jollie's *Cumb. Guide and Directory*, 1811.

⁸ Evidence of lasting qualities of slate may be seen in at least two Roman inscriptions — see *Recent Discoveries at Ambleside* by Mary E. Burkett, CW2 lxv 86; and *A Hadrianic building inscription from Hardknot* by R. P. Wright, *ibid.*, 169.

⁹ D. Neave and V. Heron, *Slate Headstones and their Engravers* (Local Historian viii, no. 6 (1969), 13-17. A number of 17th century slate stone monuments may be seen in Cartmel Priory.

8. Robert (XVI), born 11 February 1817, who became a pencil maker of Brow Foot, Keswick, and married Mary (XVII) the daughter of Isaac Hodgson 25 October 1838.

John rarely signed his work but his distinctive style is easily recognised. Quality of line, easy flowing arabesques and a fondness for set motifs and phrases were his hallmark. "Life how short — Eternity how long" may be seen on several of his pieces in various churchyards. In his frequent use of symbols such as the lily of purity and the anchor for hope in his designs he was conforming to the fashions of the day. Such ideas, if not original, were readily available. An advertisement in the *Cumberland Pacquet* dated 31 July 1792, offered for sale "Designs for Monuments, Grave Stones, Compartments, Wall pieces and Tombs, 40 plates, 16/-. Printed for I. & J. Taylor at the Architectural Library, No. 56 High Holborn, London." Early Bromley memorials used comparatively large pieces of slate with an almost standard working area of 6 ft. 6 in. by 4 ft. 0 in. wide.

He may well have earned a justifiable reputation as a carver of coats of arms. Several heraldic headstones testify to his skill in this respect. A fine example may be seen in the churchyard near the priest-door in the south wall of the chancel at Crosthwaite Church. It is to the memory of George Wood of Queen's-head Inn, Keswick, who died 6 August 1812 aged 64 years.¹⁰ The family arms are marshalled and correctly hatched thus: *Quarterly 1. & 4. Or on a chevron Sable between 3 eagle heads erased Azure as many cinquefoils of the field. 2. Gules 3 boar's heads erased. 3. Azure 3 trees Proper. A dexter arm in armour holding a scimitar* for the crest and the motto *Retinens Vestigia Framae* complete a centre panel at the head of the stone flanked

¹⁰ A notice in the *Cumberland Pacquet*, 15 March 1791, announced that Mr G. Wood, lately of London, had purchased the inn, previously owned by Miss Hodgson.

with side panels each depicting a symbolic eye over a paschal lamb.

Another bears witness that he was remembered as a craftsman after leaving his birthplace. A well executed stone fixed to the south wall of St John's Church, Beckermeth, records the death of William Hartley of Wodow-Bank (died 1815 aged 76 years) and is surmounted with the following arms: *Or a cross between four martlets Azure.*

One of the few pieces signed by John is to be seen at Gosforth where a single slatestone is conspicuous among the local red sandstone. Erected to the memory of his parents-in-law, it also includes a fine display of heraldry with a coat of arms, viz.: *Or a chevron between three bugle horns stringed Gules* surmounted with a crest of a *fox passant on a wreath of the colours.* The stone was probably erected c. 1827, with later inscriptions by a different hand.

John Bromley died 20 June 1841 and is buried at Crosthwaite. That his fame as a craftsman had spread throughout the district may be judged from his obituary notice which appeared in the *Cumberland Pacquet* dated 22 June 1841:

"At High Hill, Keswick, on Sunday night, last, in the 70th year of his age, Mr John Bromley, the celebrated stone cutter. Mr Bromley was for many years a well known character in this country; he was in fact a man of no ordinary cast of mind. By his memory, which was astonishingly retentive, he amused his friends by discanting upon past events, whilst his abundance of anecdote and his ready wit, made him at all times an interesting and agreeable companion, and furnished him, like Shakspeare's Yorrick, with an ample store of 'infinite jest' and a constant means of 'setting the table in a roar'."

1841-1861. The successful business was taken over by WILLIAM (XIII), the sixth son of John to whom he had been apprenticed. William married Miss Mary Wilson (XVIII) a dressmaker of Keswick. They set up home at Way Cottage and had issue:

1. JOHN (XIX), baptised 24 March 1833.
2. Mary (XX), born 1835, died 15 July 1862.
3. James (XXI), baptised 14 October 1835, buried 1 December 1836.
4. JOSEPH WILSON (XXII), born 20 November 1839, died 24 December 1906.

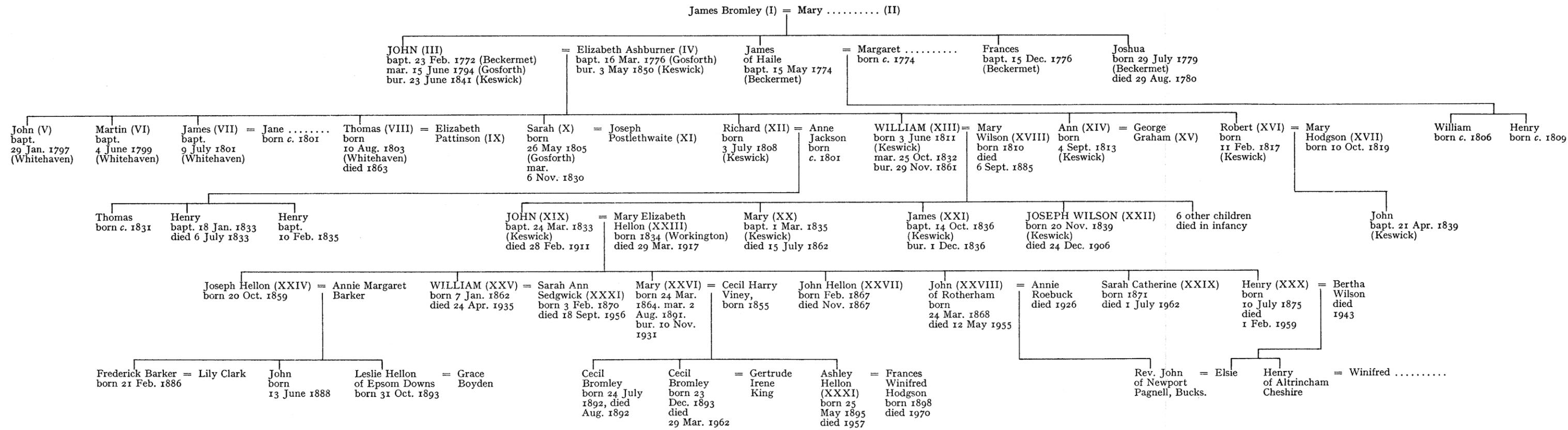
And 6 other children, all of whom died in infancy.

It is generally believed that William, referred to as Old Will by later descendants, was the genius of the family who turned out the best work. It is probably true to say that the two finest slatestone headstones ever to be produced within the county came from the Bromley workshops during his lifetime. They are to be seen at Crosthwaite and created particular interest among our members during their visit to the church. Both include panels of partially freestanding sculpture, and credit for the work is usually ascribed to William. The dates suggest, however, that they were produced when his father was alive who may well have supervised the work.

The first, affixed externally to the south wall near the porch, is to Joseph Dover, a woollen manufacturer of Keswick, who died 24 September 1810.¹¹ A centre panel at the head depicting Hope is flanked with two side panels, one containing a dove with olive leaf and the other a paschal lamb. All have been exquisitely carved by the sensitive hand of a master craftsman. The lettering of the inscription displays the same attention to minute detail as may be seen in the sculpture.

The second to Joseph Cherry, who died 28 February 1818, is situated against the east wall of the church and is of equal merit. A carving of Father Time with the Tree of Life and a ruined building fill the centre panel. A side panel contains a bound volume — “The

¹¹ See also *The Millbeck woollen industry* by J. W. Kaye, CW2 lvii 159.



Figures in brackets refer to members of family mentioned in text.

Heads of firm shown in capitals.

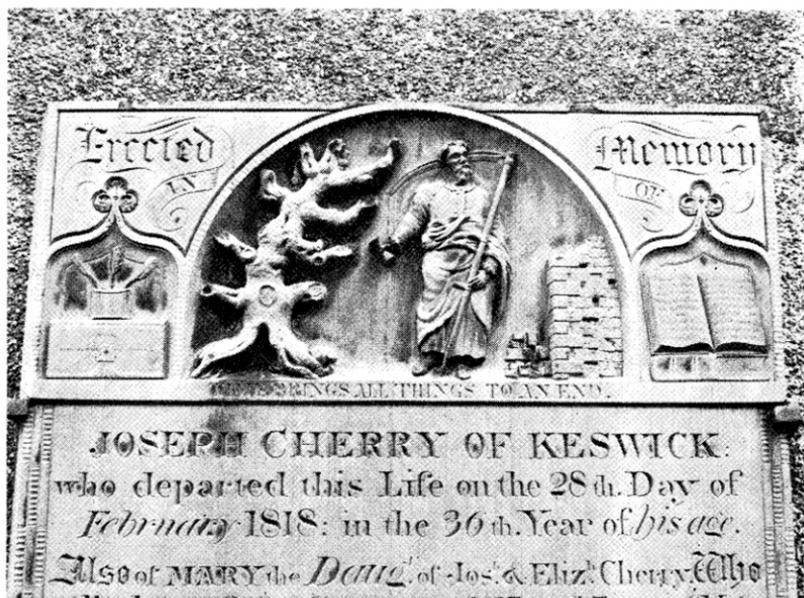


PLATE II.—Headstone, Crosthwaite Churchyard.



PLATE III.—Border Regt. badge, Chevat, Peshawar.

Register of Time'', complete with quills and inkstand. In the other may be seen two books, one of which is open and containing the following inscriptions: *Left-hand page* — "Dispose of time past to Reflection: time Present to Duty, and Time to come to Providence so Make use of time if thou lovest ETERNITY." *Right-hand page* — "For yesterday can not be recalled, tomorrow cannot be answered; today is only thine, which if once lost, is lost for ever. VITA EST IN SE REFLECTION." Such reflections on mortality were current in the period. It should be added that the lettering of these lines is barely $\frac{1}{4}$ in. high yet it still retains its original sharpness of outline. Both monuments are of Brathay slate and may have taken four to five months to complete.

By 1861 the business had prospered to the extent that there was sufficient work for William, his two sons and an apprentice.¹² Later that year William died at the age of 50.

1862-1906. William's sons, JOHN (XIX) and JOSEPH WILSON (XXII) carried on the business, trading as J. & J. Bromley. John married Mary Elizabeth Hellon (XXI) and had issue:

Joseph Hellon (XXIV), born 20 October 1859.

WILLIAM (XXV), born 7 January 1862.

Mary (XXVI), born 24 March 1864.

John Hellon (XXVII), born February 1867, died in infancy.

John (XXVIII), born 24 March 1868.

Sarah Catherine (XXIX), born 1871, died 1 July 1962.

Henry (XXX), born 10 July 1875.

John was a man of wide interests and a keen member of Keswick Literary and Scientific Society. He lectured on subjects such as architecture, sundials, the telescope

¹² 1861 Census.

and the solar system. In 1877 he delivered a lively paper to the Society on "Burial Customs", wherein he extolled the advantages and virtues of the practice of cremation. He was a member of the Congregational Church and a staunch Liberal.

During this period the firm was responsible for many memorials over a wide area. As many as 50 were erected at Cockermouth, twelve miles away. By 1871 there was sufficient work to keep 7 men and 2 boys in employment.¹³ In 1889 considerable refurbishing of Crosthwaite Church was carried out to the designs of Charles Ferguson, the Carlisle architect. Messrs J. & J. Bromley were entrusted with work in connection with the chancel steps consisting of native stone mixed with black Irish and white Italian marble. Later they were commissioned by Canon H. D. Rawnsley to carry out work in connection with the well-known memorial tablet on Helvellyn to the memory of Gough and his dog. The ledger account is not without interest:

1891 per Rev. H. D. Rawnsley. Helvellyn.	
To Erecting Borrowdale Slate Memorial and cutting and blacking inscription upon the same to the memory of Charles Gough and his Dog. 1805.	6. 0. 0.
Conveying and fixing tablet in Cairn	
Wallace & Eastons Horses (2) took the stone up on a low wheeled bogey. R. Coles acted as guide 5/-	5. 0.
Willie Birkett, Builder. G. Birkett, labourer. W. Bromley and A. Hutchinson fixing. 3 days each.	
Expenses	2. 3. 9.
Wallace on 2nd & 3rd days brought Cement and Sand and Stones to build Cairn Gibsons account	3. 3. 9.
Wallace, Hutchinson & Bromley put up at Nag's Head	1. 14. 0.
Wallace account	1. 19. 0.
	<hr/>
Total	£15. 5. 6.

The following year they undertook to erect a Runic Cross in Borrowdale slate for Canon Rawnsley as a

¹³ 1871 Census.

“British Way Side Cross” on Lonscale, at a cost of £13. 13s. 6d.

In 1896 John retired from the business at the age of 63 and died 28 February 1911. It is recorded that he was “a man to be fully trusted, as one up to whom we all looked as an example of integrity, patient heroic endurance, and quiet strong helpfulness of character”.¹⁴

Joseph continued the business with the assistance of his nephew William. Both played a part in the creation of the Ruskin Monument erected at Friars Cragg, Derwentwater, on 6 October 1900. Mrs Arthur Severn, unveiling the monument, said: “We have to thank Mr Bromley, the stone cutter, for his care in selecting the block and his nephew for his cutting of the letters so well.”¹⁵

Joseph died at Ashley Terrace, Keswick, 24 December 1906.

1907-1957. The firm was now in the capable hands of WILLIAM (XXV), son of John. His elder brother, Joseph Hellon, was also a mason but concentrated on general building work. Working on his own account he was responsible for the stonework of Keswick School and bridges at Ashness, Stonethwaite, Seathwaite, Stair and in the Ambleside district.

William, like his father, took a keen interest in local affairs. In 1894 he was elected to the Keswick Urban District Council and became Chairman in 1902. He continued to serve the electorate until the death of his uncle in 1906 when the business claimed his full attention.

His high degree of skill may be seen in the leaf and acorn motif to the slatestone base of the pulpit in Crosthwaite Church. His commissions were not

¹⁴ *Cumberland & Westmorland Herald*, 4 March 1911.

¹⁵ The lettering was designed by W. G. Collingwood and the bronze medallion by Signor Lucchesi — see H. D. Rawnsley, *Ruskin and the English Lakes* (Glasgow 1902), 216-217.

limited to the immediate vicinity of his workshop, but included monuments for Westminster Abbey and St Paul's. After 1918 the firm were responsible for several war memorials such as Underskiddaw, above Derwent, and elsewhere.

William died in 1935. His widow, Sarah Ann (XXIX) with the aid of her nephew Ashley Viney (XXXI) kept the business going. Ashley had been trained by William and was an outstanding carver. During the First World War he served in India, and an early example of his work may be seen at Chevat in Peshawar. It consists of a 15-ft. high regimental badge of the 2/4th Battalion The Border Regiment carved on hillside rock face. In this he was assisted by George Airey, a native of Appleby.

Ashley Viney was the last member of five generations of the Bromley family to have practised the art of monumental sculpture at High Hill. He died in 1957, his aunt having predeceased him the previous year. The business was then taken over by Messrs W. & J. Creighton whose successors continue to trade as Lakeland Stonecraft Ltd.

APPENDIX.

An analysis of the firm's ledger from 1882 to 1891 reveals the following information:

Brathay slate Headstones	97	Crosses	2
Borrowdale green slate Headstones	10	"	11
Buttermere slate	6	"	3
Loughrigg slate	"	"	2
Yorkshire stone	3	"	0
Road End slate	"	"	0
Freestone	2	"	1
Honister slate	"	"	0
Granite	"	"	0
Marble	"	"	3
Other slate or stone	"	"	3
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	214		25
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Average costs and numbers per year:

Year.	No. of Headstones.	Average Cost.			No. of Crosses.	Average Cost.		
		£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
1882	10	13.	10.	7.	1	24.	1.	3.
1883	34	16.	6.	5.	1	44.	7.	7.*
1884	13	16.	1.	10.	5	9.	14.	6.
1885	27	14.	9.	4.	2	5.	17.	9.
1886	35	13.	10.	8.	2	14.	7.	10.
1887	13	16.	4.	7.	2	21.	8.	3.
1888	16	10.	17.	2.	2	32.	0.	4.
1889	14	18.	12.	5.	1	11.	10.	0.
1890	24	14.	17.	0.	3	16.	17.	3.
1891	28	14.	14.	11.	6	20.	10.	11.
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214					25			
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*This cross was charged at the rate of 5/7d. per day for 32 days' labour. Ten years earlier the daily rate for labour was 6/-.

Other monumental work, such as occasional ledger tombs, tablets, cleaning, etc. averaged approx. £46. per annum. Rates for lettering were almost constant throughout this period at 3/- per dozen.

The usual form of monument demanded by the public was a simple headstone. The output of memorial crosses did not exceed that of headstones until 1907. In that year a typical Celtic type cross was charged as follows:

Stone for Cross 30/- and carting 8/-	} — Quay Foot	1.	18.	0.
Stone for base 12/6 and carting 4/-		16.	6.	
Sub-base, freestone 7/- Polishing sand 3/6		10.	6.	
Dressing Cross 137 hours @ 7d plus 51 hours @ 5d.		5.	1.	0.
Dressing Base 58 hours @ 7½d plus 11 hours @ 7d.		2.	2.	8.
Drawing and setting out 7/3 — Carving 27/3		1.	14.	6.
Cement 3/4, Gravel 6d. Fixing 18/-		1.	1.	10.
Profit		1.	15.	0.
		<hr/>		
Inscription — 12 dozen @ 3/9		15.	0.	0.
Vicars Fee		2.	5.	0.
		1.	1.	0.
		<hr/>		
Estimate		18.	6.	0.
		<hr/>		
Discount		6.	0.	

Acknowledgements.

The production of this paper would not have been possible without the kind help of many friends and correspondents. I am greatly indebted for much assistance received from Miss M. Watts, Rev. J. Bromley, Mr L. H. Bromley, Mr R. B. Viney, Mr W. Creighton, Brigadier J. W. Kaye, Mr C. Roy Hudleston, M.A., F.S.A., and Mr B. C. Jones, M.A.