

## **Blackwell, and its Sculptured Cross.**

BY WILLIAM STEVENSON.

**B**LACKWELL, even without its sculptured cross, is a subject not unlike a nettle, difficult to touch or handle ; physically it presents itself as a typical hill-top, with the additional feature of a promontory, which in part has been artificially shaped into a defensive or an offensive earthwork by levelling or flattening the crown. The Ordnance surveyors now inform us that the churchyard is, so to speak, hedged or ringed round by the 500 feet contour line, connecting it with that elevation above the mean-level of the western sea.

Approached from the nearest railway station (Tibshelf), the gradients are easy ; passing through what may be termed the hamlet or outseat of Newton, nothing striking occurs until the commanding elevation of the church-site is reached. By the more distant route from West-Houses station, a fine prospect of the domed or rounded hill, capped by the church, is obtained, especially so from the valley a quarter of a mile west or distant, where, mounting over one hundred feet, its early selection as a settlement, a place of safety, or one of natural defence may be justly estimated.

It was to this elevated stoneless spot that a monolith, hewn from the millstone rocks six miles or more westward, was laboriously conveyed, wrought into a christian monument and there up-ended, where now its lower or major part, if only as an interesting land-mark in the district, still remains.

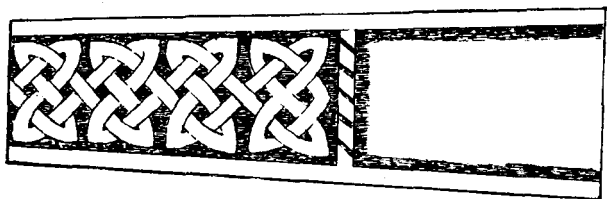
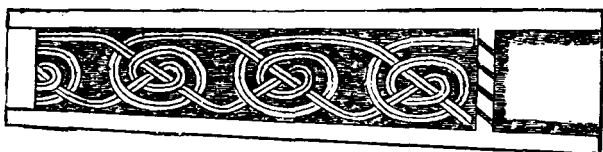
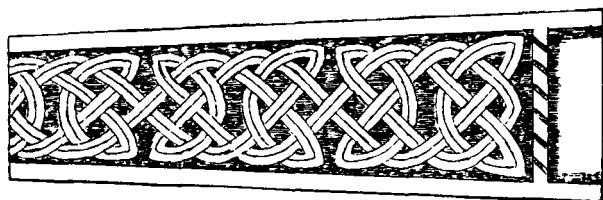
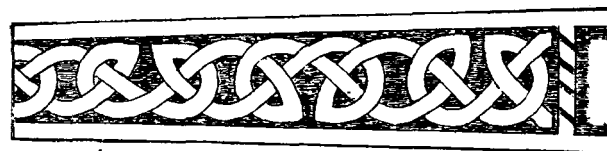
We have nothing in our records which enlightens us on the subject of these hill-top-sites, or places of early

settlement that abound in this eastern part of Derbyshire and the western one of the adjoining county of Notts, where it seems fitting they should be viewed as a whole.

Alfreton is a fellow instance, although its hill or promontory is not so patent or pronounced ; but viewing the extensive lands of the township as in a ring fence, we see its capitol and its church are not central, but stowed away on an elevated or dominating site, otherwise a waterless hill, in the north-west corner.

From beneath the pall of darkness, that Time has spread over the hill of Blackwell, some light may be obtained by studying its earliest record—the great or Domesday survey of 1086 *and before*. It was not then surveyed under the name by which it is now known but by that of Newton, the lordship, in pre-Norman days, of two brothers—"Leuric and Levenot," taxed as three carucates to the Danegeld (for other than arable land?) and had land area sufficient for the working of five ploughs ; this, with its "value, four pounds." is all the details vouchsafed to us at this early date, or, the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066). We find those brothers, joint or several, the lords of sufficient estates, mostly lying about the east side of this county and the west side of that of Notts, to enable us to view their nameless father or predecessor as an important thane in both the counties. Leuric had one church in Derby with one carucate of land, and we seem to read through his Norman successor that he or his brother had eleven houses in Nottingham, and that their townships were exceptionally well endowed with churches. Our vision is clearer (1066-1086) when the dispossessed brother's estates were in the hands of the Norman baron "Ralph the son of Hubert."

"There is now [in Newton] one plough in the demesne, and thirteen villeins and four bordars having five ploughs. A priest has there one bordar, and [there are] seven acres.



1 2 3 4

THE BLACKWELL CROSS.

The four faces of this Cross-Shaft of Stone, standing S. of the Church of Blackwell, Derbyshire—just over the Notts. border. It is of the Derbyshire type in having scroll-ornament on one edge, the stone is here broken out at the top—one side of the socket of a late cross being torn away. The bottom is the grass-level. Slight sketches of three sides of this stone appear in vol. viii of this *Journal*, Plate xiv.

of meadow, wood pasture one mile long and half broad, value thirty shillings, Ralph [himself?] holds it." This allusion to a priest in the fiscal survey appears to read:—*there is a church and a priest, the latter, who holds the church-land, which is not free, is the unit assessable.*<sup>1</sup> A depreciation in the value "four pounds to thirty shillings," owing to the conquest, is noticeable; this negatives any view that a church was erected, or a priest established at Blackwell, or that Newton was *new*, during the short and troubled reign of the Norman lord north of the Trent, and the making or compiling, letting alone the codification of the survey which represented at most, seventeen years, 1068-1085.

Ralph, the son of Hubert, as successor of Leuric and Levenot, held in Derbyshire twenty three manors—*plus* seven appendages, and ten manors in Notts with four appendages; only three *in all that total* had maintained their old values!

Reading between the lines we may see where the Normans holding direct from the crown, held demesne lands and ran their own ploughs, as in Blackwell, that they retained and upheld the manor-halls, which, in their earliest and most troubled days, occasionally took the form of earthen-castles, echoes of which were or are traceable in improved recorded values. Hereon, unlike the incident of the church, no light is shed upon us. All we can truly say is that a sphinx-like-earthwork dominates the hill.

The Domesday allusion to a priest at Blackwell, behind whom is the shadow of one of the Anglo-Saxon brother-owners, lord of a church-manor in Derby, coupled with the presence to-day of an ancient headless cross, goes far to record as a fact that we have here the site and foundation of an early, if not a Saxon, Church.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that the church is dedicated to St. Werburgh a Saxon Princess of Mercia, who died A.D. 699, argues that the original church was ancient.

A slight account of this shaft, with a sketch of three of its sides, appears in Vol. viii. of this *Journal*, p. 176.

In dealing with the "headless cross" it may here be noted—seeing it is ornamented on all four sides, and diminishes as it ascends, that the descriptive term here applied is the correct one. A writer in a popular Gazette terms it a "Runic stone"! A glance at the lower blank space on the western face of the stone (No. 1 on the drawing), is suggestive of a panel for such an inscription, but the writer has not been able to trace any lines. The broad faces of the stone (Nos. 1 and 3) being placed west and east go far to prove that it stands undisturbed on its original site—now central with the church and a few yards to the south of it. It measures 4 feet 8 inches above ground (it does not appear to be known what part of this monolith is below ground). The square of the stone on the ground level is 18 inches by 13 inches, and at or near the top 13 inches by 11 inches. The shaft has a socket at the top, one side of which is broken away. This may imply that its upper half was here jointed on, or that in a more recent age the upper face was so treated to receive a more modern head. It will be seen in the illustration that the cables dividing the wrought and unwrought panels are at different levels; the ornaments being in line in the upper or lost part suggests that this disparity is largely tracable to the accident of design, the stops—given as cables—being subservient thereto. The basis of the ornamental designs is the "band" or "strap," a favourite form was to convert it into a ring or loop by joining the two ends. No. 1 design is obtained by one loop: No. 2 by two bands: No. 3 by a series of loops—two only being given perfect: No. 4 is again two separate bands. This latter in design is nearly akin to the one on the north side of Eyam Cross. Nos. 1 and 3 are set or balanced interlaced designs. No. 2 and No. 4 are of the free-hand scroll type. In Nos. 1 and 4, the bands are

plain, whereas in Nos. 2 and 3 centre lines are introduced as enrichment. It may here be noted that the "ring" or "diminutive loop," worked in or interlaced, which the late Mr. Romilly Allen was inclined to view as characteristic of tenth and eleventh century work, is here, as indeed in the Bakewell, and Eyam crosses, entirely absent.<sup>1</sup> In close fellowship of design Nos. 3 and 4 agree with the Runic grave-cross at Crowle, Lincs., the date of which is generally given as A.D. 650-750. As above stated No. 4 design is akin to Eyam cross, which is identical with some similar remains discovered in the church of Hough on the Hill, Lincs., the latter, having the rare detail of "small turned balusters placed side by side," finds its counterpart only in the interior of the ancient church tower of Monk-Wearmouth in the north. It need scarcely here be said that the dating, of these early examples of art-workmanship, has not yet—although some able workers are engaged upon it—been reduced to an exact science.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Cox in his *Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol. I., p. 95, remarks with respect to this cross "In the S.E. of the churchyard is part of an ancient cross that points to very early Sepulture at this place. It is coeval with the cross in Taddington churchyard which it closely resembles . . . . . The cross, when perfect, has been in two pieces for at the top is a square cut socket about 4 inches deep for the reception of the upper part."

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