

A PRE-NORMAN CARVED STONE AT DARLEY.

By W. H. HANBURY.

WHEN the White House at Darley was recently demolished a sculptured stone was discovered which is of exceptional interest. It is part of the shaft of an Anglian Cross.

Previous to this discovery, sixty-five carved stones of undoubted pre-Conquest date were known in Derbyshire. These were fully described and illustrated by the late J. E. Routh, in Volume LVIII (1937) of the *Journal*.

The new find is of special interest as the design of the ornament is probably unique. There is certainly no similar example so far known in Derbyshire. Mr. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, of the British Museum, in a letter to the Rector of Darley, says: "I think your fragment is important because of the oddity and purely classical character of the ornament."

The stone has been generously given to the church by Mrs. Featherstone, the owner of the White House.

When the church was restored in 1854, a large number of sepulchral slabs and carved stones came to light, among them a fragment of the shaft of another Anglian Cross. The fragment is only nineteen inches high, but is enough to show that the shaft had a mean breadth of fifteen inches, and a thickness of eleven inches. This relic, together with many others discovered at the same time, passed into the possession of Thomas Bateman, that insatiable collector of antiquities, and was placed in his private museum at Lomberdale House.

After Bateman's death his collection was dispersed, and Western Park Museum, Sheffield, acquired most of the Derbyshire material, including the fragment of the Darley cross-shaft; this was described in Volume VIII (1886) of the *Journal* by the Rev. G. F. Browne, who later became Bishop of Bristol. He says: "It is specially interesting because it has a system of rings with interlacing bands, of which there are very few and partial examples out of Wigton and Galloway, except on a remarkable



CROSS SHAFT, DARLEY

facing p. 84



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stone at Stapleford just across the border of Derbyshire."

The recent discovery at Darley encourages the hope, that as time goes on, more of these ancient relics will come to light; and that as their value is now more widely recognized, they will no longer be regarded with indifference, and put to base uses, but will be carefully preserved. They not only remind us of the early days of Christianity in Britain, they also provide excellent examples of pre-Norman native craftsmanship and artistic ability.

Christianity was introduced into Britain during the Roman occupation. When the last of the Roman legions was withdrawn in 425, pagan Teutonic tribes — Angles, Saxons and Jutes — who, for more than a century before the departure of the Romans, had harried the coasts of Britain, came over in large numbers and subjugated the defenceless Romanized Britons. Christianity, stamped out elsewhere, survived in the fastness of Wales. From Wales it was carried into Ireland, and from thence to Iona by St. Columba in 635.

St. Aidan, from Iona, established a church and monastery on the island of Lindisfarne, and made it the head of the diocese which he founded in 635.

Peada, son of Penda, was the first king of Mercia to embrace the Christian faith. He brought into his realm four missionary priests from Lindisfarne. One of them, Diuna, became the first bishop of Mercia in 656 and made Repton the ecclesiastical centre of Mercia. Later Lichfield took the place of Repton.

In 597 St. Augustine landed in Kent and introduced the Roman rule, which differed from that of the British Church. These differences were composed at the Synod of Whitby in 664.

From about 700 to 850 Mercia enjoyed peace and prosperity under strong rulers. It was during this period that purely Anglian Crosses were produced in Derbyshire. The fine cross at Eyam, the large shaft in Bakewell churchyard, and the fragment at Bradbourne, are some of the best examples of the period.

Then came a break in peaceful conditions. The fierce Northmen, or Danes, who had for many years ravaged

the coast towns, pushed inland. By 874 they had overrun the whole of Northumbria, Lincoln, and Nottingham, and wintered at Repton. In 918 Ethelfleda, the Lady of Mercia, recaptured Derbyshire and the Five Boroughs, but until 1013, when Sweyn became king of all England, the country was in a state of constant turmoil.

Such conditions were not favourable to the production of works of Art. Nevertheless, all through this period, and right down to the Norman Conquest, monumental sculpture was carried on in the Anglian tradition, but modified by Danish influence.

The origin of the free-standing stone cross is not known with certainty. Baldwin Brown favours the opinion that it was derived from the plain crosses, usually of wood, set up for various reasons, mostly as memorials, by the early Irish saints.

This we know, that when King Oswald of Northumbria, after spending some years in exile in Iona, returned to his kingdom in 634, he set up a huge cross of wood on the ridge of Heavenfield.

This, no doubt, started the vogue of the decorated stone cross, which seems to have blossomed out suddenly in Northumbria in the 7th century.

It is thought that the first of these was the work of a foreigner imported by Archbishop Theodore. Whether this be so or not, the art was quickly taken up by native craftsmen, who gave it a distinctive national character which is not to be found anywhere else in the world.

The illustrations are from photographs by the Rev. R. J. Stanford, M.A., Rector of Darley.