

No. VIII.—*On an Ancient Saxon Cross from the Church of Rothbury, Northumberland.*

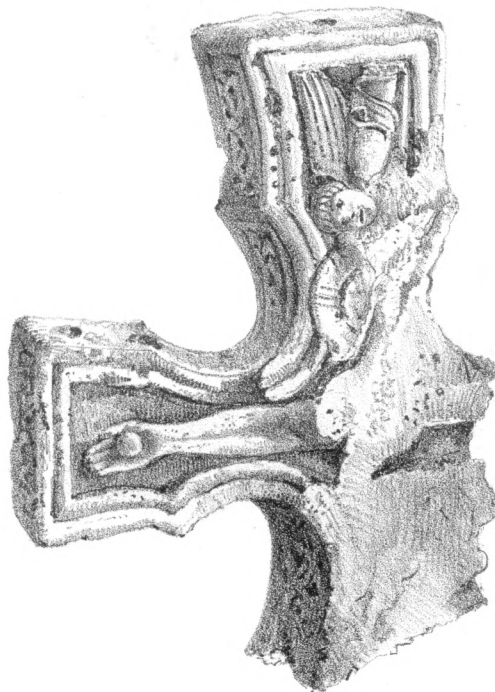
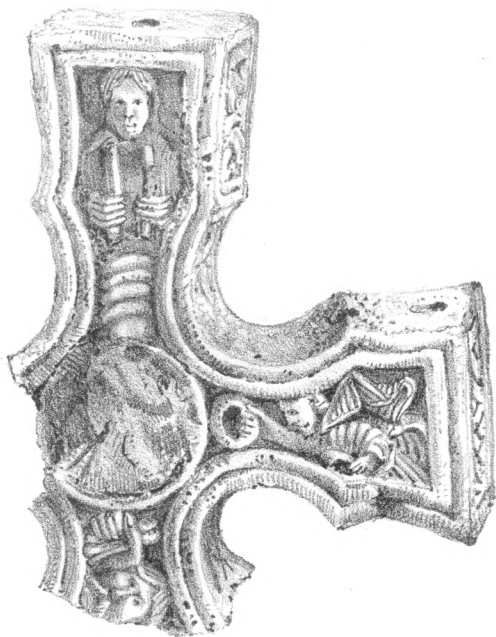
*Read at the Monthly Meeting, March, 1850.*

THE portions of the Saxon Cross figured above, were found in taking down the walls of Rothbury Church during the past winter. We have not learned the exact part of the edifice in which these fragments were discovered; but a great portion of the building was of early English date, and but few reparations had apparently been made from the time that the Church was first erected. The extremely fresh state of the fragments, the absence of weather stains, or of the lesser injuries inflicted by the gradual decay of stone exposed to our damp and variable climate, would lead us to infer that this Cross had only stood for a short time in the church-yard, before it was destroyed, and that the fragments were subsequently preserved by being built up in the walls of the renewed church.

It is much to be regretted that so small a portion of this fine ornamental Cross has been recovered; but the church where it was found has been levelled to the foundations, and no more remnants have been met with, though many sepulchral slabs of great interest, and of much beauty of design, were found in the walls.

In describing the ornaments on this church-yard Cross, we shall adopt the usual phraseology of the north, the south, the east, and the west sides.

Almost all the church-yard Crosses yet standing in Great Britain and in Ireland, are placed facing east and west, with the arms extending respectively north and south. The figure of our Lord is to be found on the western face of the Cross, in order, it is supposed, to meet the universal custom of worshipping towards the east; so that the suppliant kneeling on





the steps at the foot, would, on raising his eyes, see graven on the Cross the image of his Saviour. Upon the western face, then, of the Cross here described, we find the right arm of the figure, while above, on the superior limb we distinctly see the nimbus, or glory, which in very ancient, as well as in later sculptures and paintings, surrounds our Saviour's head. It will be remarked, that the nimbus here is crossed, which is peculiar to the representation of our Lord. Above the nimbus, and grasping or supporting its edge, is the figure of an angel with extended wings.

The eastern face of this Cross has not been so seriously mutilated, excepting the central boss, which is too much injured for any certain explanation. Three well carved figures appear on this eastern face: by some it is thought that they are angels bearing the instruments of the passion; but we confess we have failed to satisfy ourselves in this respect.

The north and south sides of the Cross exhibit the well-known so-called Runic knots; but it is now generally acknowledged, that interlacing patterns of this form do not belong exclusively to monuments bearing Runic inscriptions, but are often met with on crosses of the Dano-Saxon period in this country.

The triquetral pattern formed by making the corners of the wreathings angular instead of round, is seen upon the sides of this Cross. A singularity in this specimen, for we do not remember to have noticed it elsewhere, is, that the limbs of this Cross seem to have been adapted as standards for wax lights or torches. On the top of the upper limb, and on the upper surface of that which still remains entire, holes have been drilled, which cannot, we think have been intended for any other purpose. The perforations are round, and about an inch and a half deep; one is in the centre of the upper limb, and two are on the remaining horizontal limb. If, as is probable, two similar perforations existed on the other limb, the number would be five, and it is possible that by these lights it was intended to symbolize the five wounds of our Lord. Upon the western face of the Cross in Irton church-yard, in Cumberland, are five bosses, and the same is to be observed on the Cross at Rockcliffe, in that county.

The Dano-Saxon Crosses were seldom, if ever, monoliths, but, as in the present instance, were composed of several pieces. In shape the pre-

sent specimen resembles closely the celebrated Cross with a Runic inscription found near Lancaster, and now, we believe, in the Manchester Museum. No inscription exists on the fragments here described, and if there ever was one on the Cross, it was probably on some lower part of the shaft, as has perhaps been the case with the most interesting, but we fear, illegible inscription in Anglo-Saxon and Runic letters, from Falstone, now in the Museum of this Society.

That the shaft of the Rothbury Cross has been as elaborately ornamented as the head, is evident from the other two fragments figured here. On the one side, probably the west, we observe a figure with the crossed nimbus, holding a book, and with the right hand raised in the attitude of benediction. It is possible that this figure represents our Lord, but the book is a rare attribute of the Redeemer. On the opposite face we find a figure restoring sight to a blind man.

On the north (?) side of the shaft, is the well-known Dano-Saxon figure of the dragon or winged monster, while on the south we see a group of heads, probably the celestial choir, of admirable execution and effect. From the general design and excellent workmanship of this Cross, we may conclude that it was sculptured about the tenth or eleventh centuries, and that after standing for no long period, it was destroyed by accident or design, and was subsequently built up into the walls of the restored church. It is not, however, impossible that this Cross may be of an earlier date, and may have been erected by the Scoto-Irish monks, who occupied the monastery of Lindisfarne.

EDWARD CHARLTON.

*Note.*—Since writing the above, I have been informed that in the ancient rubrics, five lights were used in the consecration of church-yards and of church-yard crosses.