

VII.—ON THE SHAFT OF AN ANGLIC INSCRIBED CROSS
DISCOVERED IN THE CHURCH AT CHESTER-LE-STREET.

? DATE ABOUT A.D. 700-800.

BY PROFESSOR GEORGE STEPHENS (OF COPENHAGEN).

From materials kindly furnished by ROB. BLAIR, Esq., and the Rev. G. F. BROWNE, B.D. Drawn and Chemityped about one-seventh by Prof. MAGNUS PETERSEN.

READ 28TH NOVEMBER, 1883.

IN June 1883 the Chancel of the formerly Collegiate Church in Chester-le-Street, dedicated to St. Mary and S. Cuthbert, was undergoing repair in connection with the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the See. For this small place has a long history, and we must not be surprised at finding antiquities here. Its Old English name was Cunceaster or Cuneacester, &c. It lies in a valley only 5 English miles north of Durham, on the line of the Roman way called Ermin Street, and was the seat of the Episcopal See of Durham till its removal to that city in 995.

When such restorations take place in our old Churches, Roman or Anglic stones are frequently met with, used as building-stuff. So here.

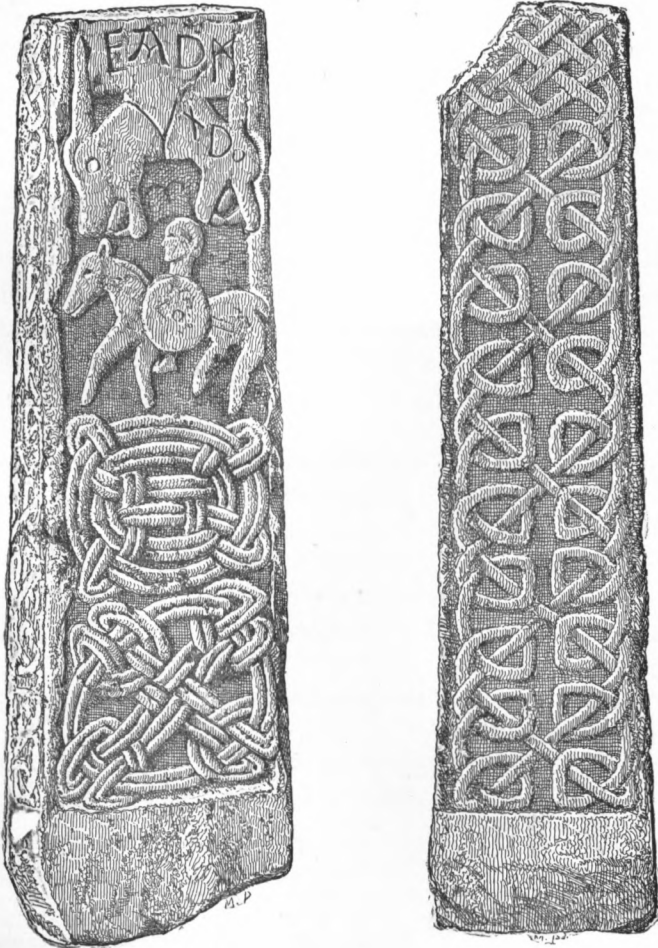


Several Anglic carved blocks, portions of the shafts and bases of Grave-crosses, &c., were taken out of the walls. The Vicar, Mr. Blunt, has published a description of these.¹ Among them was the lowest piece of a funeral pillar, bearing the dead man's name in mixt Roman and Runic staves.

In our days such things are seldom destroyed. This one excited great attention. Mr. Blair, of South Shields, one of your Secretaries,

¹ "A Thousand Years of the Church in Chester-le-Street," by Rev. Canon Blunt, Rector; 8vo. pp., XII., 205.

at once favoured me with a sketch, and afterwards with a lightbild of the front, a squeeze of the same, a pen-and-ink outline of the interlaced work on the sides, and all the information he could supply. I was also assisted by the Rev. G. F. Browne, of Cambridge, with a squeeze and excellent outline (full size) of the front. I heartily thank these old-lorists for all their kindness.



The square block before us, of a closish-grained sandstone, is 2 feet 11 inches high by 8 inches broad below, 7 above. The lowest 5 inches

are not sculptured, as they went into the socket of the Rod. The front, at the top, has the name of the forthfaren, cut in,

EADMUND

the M and N being Old-Northern runes, the EADUD Roman letters. They stand on and above a double Wolf or Dragon in relief, as is all the other ornamentation. Beneath is a warrior on horseback, his sword at his left side and his round shield on his left arm. Still lower are 2 endless knots, the one under the other.—The back has knot-winds almost identical.—The patterns of the right and left sides are given at pages 88-89.—All these motives remind us at once of the similar decoration on the 3rd Thornhill stone and on the Bewcastle Cross.

Now what is the date of this stone? We have no direct evidence. The chancel is older than the 13th century.² The Shield is round, not Kite-shaped, and takes us very far back. The chief is bare-headed, or has a kettle-helm. The intertwined work is also very antique. The runes point in the same direction. It has been suggested that "EADMUND" was that English King, who followed his brother Athelstan in 940 and died in 946. And this chiefly on the ground that on his march to Brunanburgh Eadmund gave large gifts to the Church at Chester-le-Street. But king Eadmund was murdered at Pucklechurch in West Gloucestershire, and Florence of Worcester distinctly tells us that he was buried by St. Dunstan at Glastonbury in Somerset.³ If entombed in Somerset, he could not lie in Durham. The grave-cross here would therefore be a cenotaph, a thing most unlikely. And the style is, in my opinion, a couple of year-hundreds earlier. I therefore think that the Eadmund here commemorated is some unknown local magnate.

The Cross on one of the bases found at Chester-le-Street is similar to that on a coffin cover in the Anglian Church (built of Roman stones from the neighbouring castrum of Binchester) at Escomb near Bishop's Auckland, described in the *Brit. Archæol. Journal*, Vol. XXXV., p.p. 380-4 (1879).

² "The original wooden church was taken down, and a stone one was erected in its stead by Egelric, fourth Bishop of Durham, about the year 1050; and the present church was built about 1260. By way of celebrating its millenium, it has been restored under the care of Mr. R. J. Johnson, of Newcastle, and the three old bells, two of which were cracked, have been replaced by a fine peal of six." I take this from "The Guardian," for Aug. 1, 1883, p. 1136, where is a long description of this year-thousandth highday.

³ "Et Gleastoniam delatus, a. B. Dunstano abbate sepelitur." *Florentii Wigorn. Chron. s. a. 946.*

With regard to the windwork on this stone, I may add that future finds may help us to a nearer date. Thus Mr. Blair informs me that my learned helper Canon Greenwell, now Librarian of Durham, has just had an Anglic block taken from the tower of St. Oswald's Church in Durham. It was removed thence to the Durham Chapter Library by Mr. Greenwell's orders. It formed one of the building stones of the tower, about half way up on the west side, and is well known, as one of its sides has always been in sight, and is much weathered in consequence.

What is characteristic in this inscription is, the intermingling of Runic and Roman letters. It may be well to cast a glance here on how it fared with such things in the Scando-Anglic lands—for only these ever had Runes. Confining ourselves to the first great Scandinavian colony, England, we see that here as elsewhere the oldest ristings are in Runes only (first the older or Old-Northern, then the later or Scandian characters). In England these epigraphs begin in the 5th century.—Thereafter come in tway-staved carvings, the same words in the folk-tung being given in two alphabets, Runish and Roman. The object was, that both classes of the population, the "lewd and learned," the Latin-taught (chiefly ecclesiastics) and the Latin-bare (chiefly lay-folk), might be able to read what was written. In England only one such *minne* has come down to us, the Falstone stone, date about A.D. 700.—Then, as the Latin civilization marches on, we have Rune-words and Roman words. Some words or sentences are in the folk-speech, in Runes, others in Latin with Roman letters. To this group belong, in England, the Ruthwell Cross (680), the Franks Casket (700–800), Dearham (850–950), and Hackness (850–950).—But the Latin A B C continues to advance, and we get mingled Runic and Roman letters. Apart from Manuscripts and Coins in England, my work on Runic monuments has made public the pieces handled under Lindisfarne (698), Alnmouth (705), Æthred's Finger-ring (700–800), and Chester-le-Street 700–800.—But the Runes cannot stand against the Roman letters, the Alphabet of the whole Western Church and Western Civilization. The fight is too unequal. They fall away altogether, in some localities very early. We have Roman letters only, writing English words—we do not speak of such used for Latin inscriptions—at Yarm (684–700), Dewsbury 700–800), Wycliffe (700–800), and Thornhill (867).

As some of these things can be distinctly year-set, others approximately dated, we have here very costly epigraphic and palæographic material, the variants in the shapes of the letters, whether Runish or Roman. As to the Roman, we thus get a fresh clue to dating the development of Roman Uncial and Minuscule staves in England, in addition to those many stones in Great Britain and Ireland which bear ristings in Latin only or in Latin and Ogham characters.

And as to the carved figures and such. Here, as often, we must not forget that we are handling only a fragment. On the higher block or blocks much may have stood, perhaps even additional writing, which would have more clearly identified the sleeping Christian. All this is lost to us, and we therefore can hardly grasp the meaning of the front. What stood above the tway-wolf or double-dragon? If a figure or symbol of Christ, then it would mean the Hell-monster overcome by our Redeemer. In that case (allowing for the dim intermixture of Heathendom and Christendom on our oldest stones) the Horseman would be on his triumphant way Heavenward (to a Christian Walhall), there to enjoy perpetual bliss, as shown by the Endless Knots of Life Everlasting beneath him.—Should all this be disallowed, what is left can only have a hard secular signification. The foul beasts and the knot-winds are only ornamental, while the warrior will be more or less only a conventional portrait of the deceast, as he went out to hunt or foray. So uncertain are all these things. But every fresh find helps us onward in this difficult study. When all our sculptured memorials are carefully drawn and publisht, we shall be able to understand much which is now more or less hidden to us.⁴

⁴ It is rumored that our great old-lorist and famous digger the Rev. Canon Greenwell will undertake the publication of all the Sculptured Stones now left to us in Durham and Northumberland. Should this be so, he will lay his country under a lasting obligation, while at the same time he will add another laurel to his own brow.