

XVIII.—NOTES ON A PRE-CONQUEST MEMORIAL STONE
FROM BIRTLEY, AND FRAGMENTS OF CROSSES
FROM FALSTONE, NORTH TYNE DALE.

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THE valley of the North Tyne is rich in remains of many different ages, from that which saw the pre-historic tumuli and barrows, the hill forts and lowland fastnesses of our Ancient British ancestors; down to recent times. The great barrier-wall of Hadrian with its adjuncts, the noble station of Cilurnum and its once-imposing bridge, and the still frequented 'Watling Street,' are among the various relics of the prolonged Roman domination. North Tynedale also possesses many fine remains of the Norman and Mediaeval period in its ancient churches, castles, pele-towers, and bastel-houses, besides its picturesque and stately mansions of more modern days.

There are, however, as we find elsewhere throughout England, comparatively few vestiges remaining of pre-Conquest times, the Anglo-Saxon period which followed the subjugation and partial extirpation of the Romanised Britons, and which continued for many centuries, longer even than the Roman rule in Britain. Our old English forefathers were not great church-builders in stone, though St. Wilfrid's grand cathedral at Hexham was 'the goodliest church on this side of the Alps.'¹ When it rose in finished beauty on its commanding site near the junction of the two rivers North and South Tyne, Hextildesham, or Hagulstad, would become to the dwellers in the surrounding vales in some measure what Rome was then to the Christian world at large—a centre of devotion and a place of pilgrimage.

Among the earliest Christian fonts of the Saxon times (when churchyard wells were not used) appear, in this district, to have been Roman altars upturned and hollowed out to serve their sacred pur-

¹ *Richard of Hexham*, lib. i., cap. 3, *Eddius in Vit. Wilf.*

pose, and thus they became tangible and enduring memorials of the triumph of the Christian religion over pagan idolatries. As at Old Haydon chapel, so at Warden church, where the tower shows pre-Conquest work, at St. John-Lee church, at St. Oswald's church (a fragment found during the recent careful restoration), and at Choller-ton church, such Roman altar fonts have been in ancient use; the last named being probably the finest example, having been dedicated, the vicar, the Rev. Canon Bird, informs me, to Jupiter; though the letters I. O. M. are now illegible, the sacrificial implements are distinct.²

Farther up the vale of North Tyne it is thought that St. Kentigern, or St. Mungo 'the beloved,' reached, during the 6th century, in one of his missionary journeys from the Cumbrian kingdom in the west, the district about Simonburn, or Simondburn, where the mother-church of the whole dale was afterwards erected. In 1877, when this fine edifice was restored, the rector (the Rev. Canon Rogers) records, in speaking of the chancel arch, that 'the stone work above it fell in, and among the stones thus released were found the remarkable fragments of a Saxon cross and other ancient carved stones which are preserved in the porch.'³ This cross shaft bears interlacing ornament with the characteristic grape-clusters associated with the best examples of St. Wilfrid's school of Saxon art, and is well and deeply sculptured. The interesting church at Bellingham, with its now, I believe, unique stone-vaulted nave, is dedicated to St. Cuthbert, and is one of the traditional resting-places of the saint's 'incorruptible body' during its long wanderings between Lindisfarne and Durham. The yearly fair and the perennial spring or well close by the churchyard are still called by his name.⁴ But no trace has yet been found here, where it might well be looked for, of Saxon work, unless it be the original north doorway of the church, which is triangular-headed. The late rector, the Rev. R. Powell-Powell, informed me that the late Mr. Bloxam, who saw it, considered it to be of pre-Conquest date, though the slanting stones falling against each other to form the arch seem to be not straight-lined but slightly concave, and, if so, may be of later date, that is, very Early-English.

² See Appendix.

³ *Trans. Berw. Nat. Club*, Vol. XI., p. 56.

⁴ *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. VIII. (*New Series*), pp. 64, 65.

Still higher in the valley an undoubted relic of pre-Norman days was discovered in 1813 at Falstone, small but most interesting, which now rests in our society's museum in the Black Gate. I refer to the very curious fragment of the cross, unique in Britain in this respect, that it is like the celebrated Rosetta stone from Egypt, bearing, not indeed a tri-lingual, but a *bi-literal* inscription, which has been first graven on the surface of the stone in Runic and then in Romanesque letters, in Anglian (or Saxon) folk-speech.⁵

These remains are the sole representatives of Saxon art that have, until the present time, been observed throughout the whole extent of North Tynedale, which extends nearly forty miles in length from Warden to Deadwater. Any fresh examples of sculptured stones of the early Christian period in Northumbria must be of interest and value to archaeologists. It is, therefore, gratifying to be able to exhibit at our anniversary meeting a small inscribed monumental slab of very rare type from Birtley church, and photographs by our colleague, Mr. J. P. Gibson, of fragments of crosses from Falstone church, all of undoubted pre-Norman date, and which have been recently discovered.

1.—PRE-CONQUEST MEMORIAL STONE OF THE HARTLEPOOL TYPE,
WITH INCISED CROSS AND LETTERS, FROM BIRTLEY CHURCH,
NORTH TYNEDEALE.

Birtley, formerly 'Birkley,' church was anciently one of the four *capellae* in the great parish of Chollerton, the other three being Chipchase, Gunnerton, and Colwell, of which, except the recently uncovered foundations in the case of the last, no traces now exist. The present chapel in the park of Chipchase castle is a modern structure; the original *capella* having been taken down which stood near the front of the castle, and this later edifice built up chiefly from its materials in the first half of the 18th century. The small chapel, now the parish church, at Birtley consists of a well-proportioned chancel and nave, with early Norman chancel arch still intact. For some years the east gable had been in a dangerous condition, and in the autumn of 1884 the much-needed reparation of the building was

⁵ *North Tynedale and its Four Granges*, by Edw. Charlton, M.D., D.C.L., p. 8.

ANGLIAN MEMORIAL CROSSES.



$9\frac{3}{4}$ ins. \times $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins.)

FROM BIRTLEY CHURCH, NORTHUMBERLAND.

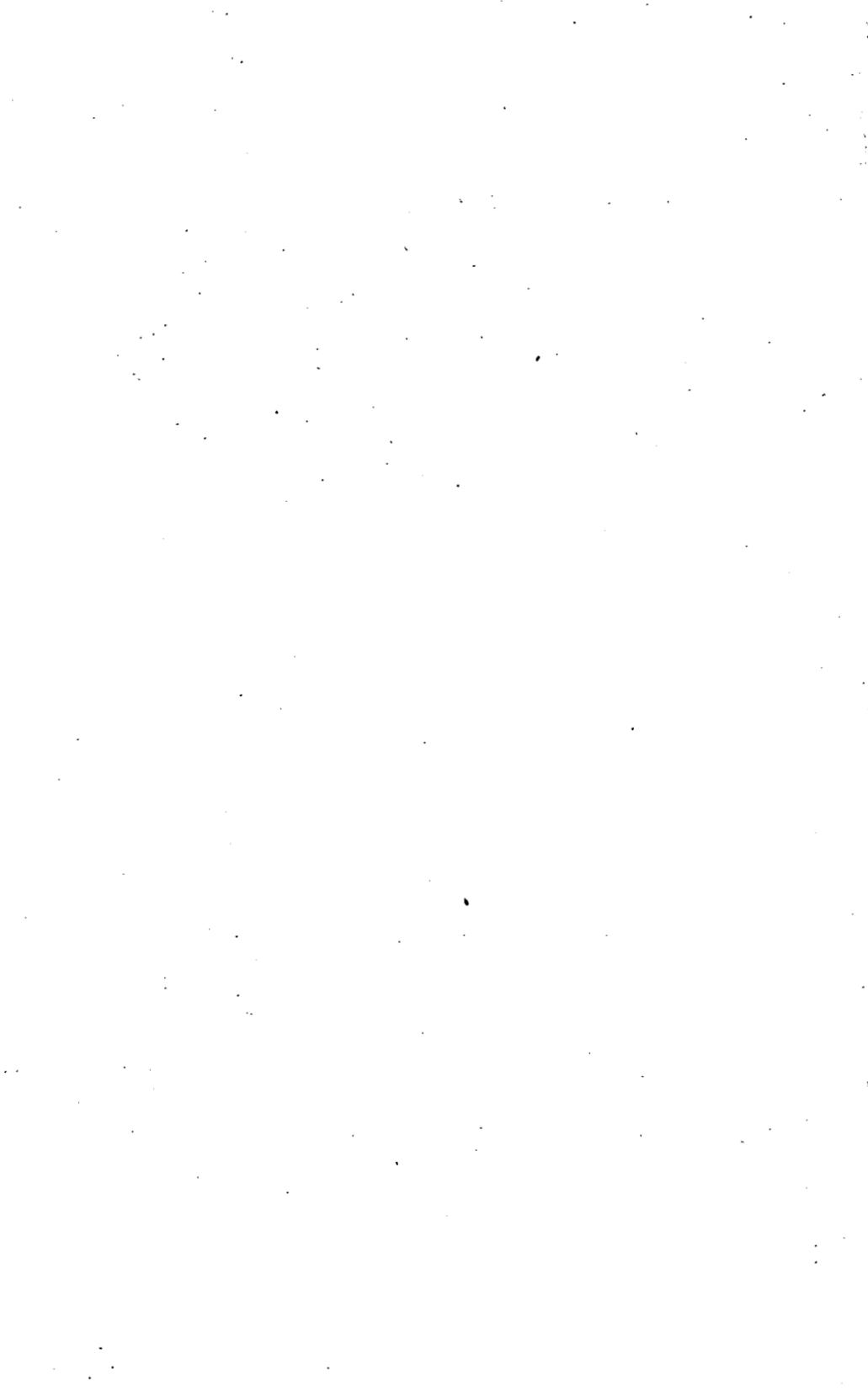
(See p. 255 et seq.)



(8 ins. \times 6 ins.)

FROM HOLY ISLAND, NORTHUMBERLAND.

(See p. 267.)



carried out under the careful supervision of Mr. A. B. Plummer, A.R.I.B.A.; a member of our society. The stone to be described was found built up in the disused south doorway of the nave, together with an early 'consecration' cross, an early Norman capital and base, and other carved stones. The freshness of appearance of the incised cross and lettering on this small, thin, oblong memorial slab is remarkable, as if done yesterday. Though it was at once placed in a safe position, its interest was not at first realized; but the Saxon form of the fourth letter ϵ afterwards drew my attention specially to it.

Its present dimensions are as follows:—Length, $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches; width, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; and from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches in thickness. As with many crosses of similar type, it is formed of very hard material, in this instance of indurated close-grained freestone. Excepting the lower edge and sculptured surface in front, which are untouched, it has been roughly chipped away, but not to any depth, all over. A simple moulding remains on the edge at the right hand side. It is thus very nearly the original size still, notwithstanding injurious treatment; and the finely-chiselled surface at the bottom is reddened by the action of fire.

Incised Cross.—With fair exactitude a Latin cross, of a variety in form associated with the primitive Celtic and Scoto-Irish Christianity, has been carefully incised upon the stone. The space between the continuing lines of margin shows no interlaced work such as is commonly met with on many Anglian or Saxon sculptured stones. The cross is sunk in the centre of the small slab about an eighth of an inch, except at the base, where it is shallower on the left hand; but it is well defined throughout. Though of the Latin form, *cruz immissa*, long-shafted (and thus easily distinguished from the common eastern or Greek shape with its four arms of equal length), it has the Celtic peculiarity of a projecting *oblong* panel at top and bottom and at the extremity of each arm.⁶ But it has neither the semi-circular hollows at the intersection of the arms with the shaft and summit, nor a circle thrown across the spaces between the arms at a little distance from the intersections, nor are there the re-entering angles at the intersections of the arms, shaft, and summit, thus forming a square central panel. Of the two latter forms of crosses examples are found incised upon similar small slabs from Hartlepool. The largest found there most

⁶ The panel at the base of the cross is larger than the others.

resembles the Birtley cross, though it has, in addition, the central square. The Birtley cross is a variant of the second form found in sepulchral slabs at Clonmacnoise.⁷

Incised Letters and Dots.—Near the angles of this stone, between the arms, are four letters crisply and clearly cut, like the whole chiselling of the cross. The first letter looks like a Q, but there is no channel uniting the circle to the small pit-mark or round hollow beneath it on the right. It is certainly an O. The short stroke or line at the top of this letter, on the right hand, well incised, will be noticed, and it is, I think, significant. The second of the upper letters is an R; and both are better and more skilfully shaped and cut than the P and E at the lower angles, the latter letter also occupying a relatively higher position on the stone.⁸ The cross strokes at the top and bottom of the P are unusual, I think, in Saxon inscriptions in Roman capitals. They do not occur in those upon the Hartlepool slabs, where only the common Roman E is met with. The rounded form, probably a corrupted imitation of the other, which, as a usual Saxon form, first drew my attention to the Birtley cross stone, alone occurs on the very interesting fragment of the cross from Falstone, with its bi-literal Romanesque and Runic inscription. It is found also on the early grave cover, most probably of pre-Conquest date, which was found in the cloisters of Hexham abbey about the beginning of this century, and which is briefly inscribed PVER IVRDANVS. Thus the rounded or Saxon form of the Roman capital E seems to have been in general use throughout the district of North Tynedale, judging from these three known inscriptions discovered at the head, the centre, and the lower extremity of the valley.

⁷ *Jour. of Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, Vol. I., p. 187. No. 1. *Early Christian Symbolism*, cf. p. 109, Fig. 17, by J. Romilly Allen, F.S.A., Scot.

⁸ The Rev. G. F. Browne, B.D., F.S.A., Disney Professor of Archaeology, Cambridge, in a communication to the writer (February, 1889), remarks respecting this 'most interesting stone' from Birtley:—'I cannot think the date differs much from that of the Hartlepool stones. It seems to throw us back to the very early times of Christianity in Northumbria, and to the "Irish" influence, the regular Irish inscription in the earliest time being *or do*, "a prayer for." . . . This stone, I think, supports the suggestion I made some years ago at Monkwearmouth, that people in very early monasteries got a number of stones cut by some skilled mason, itinerant, and filled them in as occasion came. The OR seems to me to be cut much more boldly and finely than the PE. At Monkwearmouth they had *Hic in sepulchro requiescit corpore cut on their stone, and a local man, not nearly so skilful, filled in the Hereberecht Prb.*' In this connection see *On Inscriptions at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth*, by the Rev. G. F. Browne, B.D., St. Catherine's College, Cambridge, in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. XI. (N.S.), p. 30; also Hübner's *Inscriptiones Britanniae Christianae*, 197.

Small circular hollows or dots, it will be observed, are impressed or cut here and there on the very smooth surface of the cross-slab, and near the letters O, R, P, €.⁹

At the right hand of the letter R, on a level with the upper part, are three of these points or dots placed as a triangle. The largest of all, already referred to, gives the o the appearance at first sight of a q, and two others may be seen near the top of the cross on the left. The dot near the € might serve as a kind of finish to the inscription, like a period or full stop. It is difficult to assign any special reason for these small circular hollows or impressions, which I have also noticed on an early grave-stone built into the north wall of the chancel (outside) of Chollerton Church. There some of the dots have formed centres for the construction of the four intersecting segments of circles, in shaping the small incised cross (*croix patée*), which is of frequent occurrence in this neighbourhood, especially at Birtley and Chollerton churches, on ancient monumental slabs and head-stones. Dr. Joseph Anderson quotes¹⁰ Professor Westwood (*Lapidarium Walliæ*), who says that the arrangement of three points triangularly placed—as on the Birtley cross—in early inscriptions and manuscripts written in Britain usually indicated a full stop. ‘This use of the three points,’ Dr. Anderson adds, ‘is found in the Psalter of St. Augustine and the Gospels of St. Chad, both written in the eighth century.’ It also occurs, with two single and one double point, on the fine inscribed monument of St. Vigeans, in Forfarshire, ‘the stone of Drost or Drosten;’ and it is placed at the end of the name, at the right hand, and opposite the upper portion of the letter N. This monument bears on the obverse, 6 feet in height, a large cross, extending nearly the whole length of the stone, of the more-usual Celtic form, being hollowed or recessed semi-circularly at the intersection of the arms with the shaft and summit. It may be of any date from the end of the 9th to the beginning of

⁹ It may be incidentally remarked that ‘strong, oval, and sometimes round dots’ form the vowels of the Ogham characters on the Irish crosses of the earliest Christian age, as also on those of similar date in Wales. *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, by Miss Stokes. Part II., pp. 1, 32, and 33.

¹⁰ *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, Second Series, Lecture V., p. 196. Can the more skilled workman, who incised the cross and first two letters O R on this Birtley stone, have added the three dots after the R in token of the completion of his part of the inscription? If so, it would form an incidental corroboration of Prof. Browne’s supposition.

the 11th century. The characters of the inscription are like the Irish and Iona miniscules, and the letter ϵ is the same rounded form which appears on the Birtley and Falstone crosses, and the Hexham grave cover. The cross of simple form at Trawsmawr, in Caermarthenshire (*Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 99, Fig. 13; Westwood's *Lapidarium Walliæ*, pl. 49), consists of two incised grooves, terminating in round holes or dots, and with four round holes in the angles of the cross. It is carved upon a rude monolith standing erect near a similar stone, with a debased Latin inscription.

Meaning of the Inscribed Letters, O, R, P, ϵ . There is an evident contraction in this inscription, and each letter might readily be meant for the initial of four separate Latin words. But when we notice the ordinary sign of contraction, as I consider it to be, over the first letter o, we find at once some help in deciphering the meaning of the brief epitaph. On three of the Irish incised cross-slabs from the royal cemetery of Clonmacnoise, represented in the Rev. Dr. Cutt's well-known manual¹¹ the contraction of the Irish 'Oroit,' 'Latin, Oratio,' 'a Prayer,' into 'OR' is effected by placing the short straight incised line above the first two letters.¹² Upon one of these memorial stones there are two inscriptions to members of the same family, and their meaning is 'A prayer for Conaing son of Congal;' and 'A prayer for Dulcen son of Thadggan;' the date being given as *circa* A.D. 822. Two other cross-slabs bear upon them the inscriptions 'A prayer for Maelfinnia,' who was abbot of Clonmacnoise, and died *circa* A.D. 992; and 'A prayer for Flannchaddh,' also abbot of the same celebrated monastery of 'Cluainmacnois,' (in King's County, Leinster), who died *circa* A.D. 1003. The earliest grave slab of this whole series is that inscribed δR DO CHOLUMBON 'Pray for Columban,' supposed to have been the abbot who died A.D. 628.

As the permanent establishment of Christianity in Northumbria¹³

¹¹ *The Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses of the Middle Ages*. Plates I. and II., p. 59; see Petrie's *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, pp. 320, 324.

¹² On the small cross-slab at St. Edren's, in Pembrokeshire, now in St. David's cathedral, 'the line to signify a contraction is placed below the Omega, instead of above it. Dr. Reeves considers that the contraction is for the word *et*, between the Alpha and Omega.' *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 117, cf. pp. 107, 108.

¹³ The late eminent Roman Catholic historian of *The Anglo-Saxon Conquest of Britain*, etc., the Rev. D. H. Haigh, says, 'the first effectual conversion of Northumbria was the work of Irish missionaries, and, during the 7th and 8th centuries, constant and friendly intercourse was maintained between the ecclesiastics of Northumbria and those of Scotland and Ireland.' *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, Vol. I., p. 191.

was owing to the successful labours of bishop Aidan and his Celtic or Scoto-Irish missionaries from Iona, who settled at Lindisfarne on the invitation of king Oswald in the year A.D. 635 (after his great victory over Caedwalla at 'Heavenfield,' near Chollerford, in North Tynedale), the foregoing instances of the use of a contracted form may serve to illustrate and explain the meaning of the inscription on this Birtley memorial stone. Upon the latter the upper limb of the cross with its panel separates the two capitals 'o' and 'r.' Nevertheless they appear to make simply the beginning of the usual formula, the first two letters of ORA or ORATE, or perhaps a repetition by the Scoto-Irish evangelists of the OR which would be so familiar to them. The 'P' stands for PRO, and the Saxon letter ϵ implies any one of the very numerous Christian folk-names of the Old English stock beginning with that vowel.

This view of the reading of the inscription has been corroborated by the Rev. Wm. Greenwell, F.S.A., who suggests '*Edward*;' and Prof. G. F. Browne, B.D., of Cambridge, '*Edmund*;' '*Pray*' or '*A Prayer for Edward*;' or '*Edmund*;' two of the most common of the Anglian or Saxon names. But, of course, any other name beginning with the same initial letter may be intended; as Eadbert, Edwin, Egbert, and others. In the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, we find at least *seventy-seven* different Christian names of men beginning with E; *twenty-six* of whom were connected with Northumbria. Thus we have a wide field laid open to our conjectures, even if we reject the supposition that a lady was commemorated in this Birtley inscription; for several female names occur, as we know, on the similar cross-slabs at Hartlepool.

The Purpose of this Cross-Slab, and comparison with the few known examples of a similar kind.—We now come to the particular purpose of this Birtley stone, which was evidently from its incised cross and inscription meant for a sepulchral monument, small though it is, and a memorial of the Christian dead.

In Sir Cuthbert Sharpe's Tracts, in our society's library, an account is given of the discovery of 'Sepulchral Stones found at Hartlepool in 1833;' reprinted from the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September, 1833, and *Archaeologia*, Vol. XXVI., 1835. In digging the foundations of a house in a field at Hartlepool called the 'Cross

Close,' not far from the old churchyard, distant about 135 yards in a south-easterly direction from the present church, and on the supposed site of the cemetery of the nunnery, of which St. Hilda was abbess,¹⁴ several skeletons were discovered upon the limestone rock, lying in two rows in a position nearly north and south, at a depth of about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Some of the skulls, it is said, were resting upon small flat plain stones from 4 to 5 inches square; and also some rather larger stones were found 'bearing inscriptions and marked with the cross. The chiselling of the first (drawings of two stones were sent) is as crisp and sharp as if it had been cut yesterday, and the letters are well finished. This stone of compact limestone is $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, and the surface is smooth and polished.' Upon it is incised a cross of peculiar Celtic form, with the Greek letters and Christian symbols W and O above the horizontal limb of the cross, and below in Runic letters the name of a female, HILDITHRYTH.¹⁵ This stone, with others from Hartlepool, is in the British Museum; and its incised cross, as I have already remarked, most nearly resembles that on the Birtley slab; excepting that, besides the four oblong panels, it has also a central square. It is the largest of the Hartlepool stones, being $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, and is figured as No. 1 by Dr. Haigh.

We possess two of these interesting stones from Hartlepool in our Black Gate museum. No. 2. (in Mr. Haigh's list) is there, which, on the lower half of the slab, the sides of which are slightly broken and chipped as in the Birtley example, has the name of another female, HILDDIGYTH, written, like No. 1, in Runic letters. The incised cross is of a different and more usual form; inasmuch as the panels at the extremities are semi-circular, and that at the centre is a circle. But in its special Celtic type and character it is similar. In size it approaches very nearly the dimensions of the Birtley stone, being 9 inches long, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in thickness.

The other Hartlepool cross stone in our society's possession has a

¹⁴ A noble North-Humbrian lady, Heiu, St. Hilda's predecessor, founded the convent, and was its first abbess until the year, A.D. 649. It seems to have been destroyed in the first ravages of the Danes in the ninth century and never restored. See Bede's *Eccles. Hist.*, IV., c. 23, Bohn's edit., p. 212.

¹⁵ See also the Rev. E. L. (now Dr.) Cutt's *The Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses of the Middle Ages*, Plate III., p. 60. *Archaeologia*, Vol. XXVI., Plate 52; and Vol. XXVIII., p. 346. The fullest account is given by the late Rev. D. H. Haigh in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Vol. I., 1846, pp. 185-197.—*Notes on the Monumental Stones discovered at Hartlepool in the years 1833, 1838, and 1843.*

bevelled edge, with which the slight moulding on that from Birtley may be compared. It is in perfect condition, chiselled and smooth on the face, back, and sides. The shape of the cross, detached from its border, is similar to the last, but is in low relief, instead of being incised. The inscription is more worn, but the first word is very distinct, and it requests 'the prayers of the faithful for two persons, ORA PRO VERMVND > TORTSVID.'

This slab is $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness.

Respecting this 'very interesting series of small inscribed cross stones,' Mr. J. Romilly Allen, F.S.A., Scot., remarks:—'The stones found at Hartlepool, nine in number, although resembling the ordinary cross-slabs in general appearance, differ from them entirely as regards size, as the smallest only measures $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the largest about 12 inches square.'¹⁶ They vary in thickness from 1 inch to $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches.¹⁷

Mr. Haigh speaking of the small dimension of these stones, adds, 'so that they were not sufficient to cover a grave, as in the case with such tombstones of a later date.'¹⁸

Another site, on which three cross stones of the same class or not unlike those at Hartlepool have been found, is Wensley church in Yorkshire. When writing in 1845, Mr. Haigh knew only of one example here, preserved in the vestry, but discovered many years before in the churchyard. He says, 'In this country I know of but one sepulchral monument at all resembling the character of those found at Hartlepool.' It is, however, of a much more ornate appearance than the latter, having upon it, in relief, 'the cross, patée, with birds and quadrupeds in the angles, and beneath, in Saxon characters, the name DONFRID.'¹⁹ The length of this stone is $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and its breadth 9 inches.

In 1846, however, Mr. Haigh found a second cross-slab of the same type, lying in the flagged pavement of a path in the churchyard at Wensley, a drawing of which, made in 1854, he had mislaid when

¹⁶ *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 118.

¹⁷ *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, Vol. I., p. 196.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁹ *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, Vol. I., p. 196. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII., p. 75. *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 124.

sending copies of the Northumbrian inscriptions to Prof. Hübner of Berlin. It is now preserved with the first and a fragment of a third stone of this class in the vestry, and is itself imperfect at both ends. The cross of the same form as the other, and the lettering, are also in relief. The inscription was probably *ORATE EATBEREHT ET ARVINI*.²⁰

At Billingham, in Durham, was found a fragment only, about one-third of the original size, of what was, it is believed, a similar inscribed cross-slab, thus furnishing a third site. It still bears the Alpha, only the Omega being broken off, and thus resembling the largest of the Hartlepool grave stones.²¹

Birtley, in North Tynedale, is the only other known site where this very rare type of sepulchral monument has as yet come to light in England. It is the first example discovered north of the river Tyne, and is therefore of considerable archaeological interest. The instances already adduced from Hartlepool, Wensley, and Billingham (?) are all that can be adduced in illustration of the subject; and each place, it will be noted, is within the ancient kingdom of Northumbria.

As to the purpose served by this memorial stone, and its position on the grave, it cannot well have been placed as a head-stone, being so small, nor as a foot-stone, because the lower portion, still intact, is carefully finished, and not intended to be sunk in the ground.

Dr. Cutts observes of the *HILDITHRYTH* monument from Hartlepool:—‘This is not properly a grave stone, as may be seen from its size; it was probably used as a bolster upon which the heads of the corpses were laid.’²² This, however, seems to be a misapprehension, for the account of the discovery in the cemetery of St. Hein’s and St. Hilda’s monastery distinctly speaks of the small plain stones, not inscribed, 4 to 5 inches square, found under the heads of the skeletons. We are aware from Bede that the Anglo-Saxons used cushions of stone for the head, as at the burial in a stone coffin of Sebbi or Sibbi, the pious king of the East Saxons, *circa* A.D. 649, in the church of St. Paul’s, London, when a strange miracle is recorded.²³ Adamnan, in his account of St. Columba’s last days, relates that he

²⁰ *Jour. Yorks. Archaeol. Association*, Vol. VI., p. 45, 1880. *Notes on an Inscribed Stone at Wensley*, by the late Rev. D. H. Haigh. Communicated by the Rev. J. T. Fowler, M.A., F.S.A. The drawing is given.

²¹ Hübner’s *Christian Inscrip.*, No. 202. *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 118.

²² *Manual of Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses*, Plate III., p. 60.

²³ *Eccles. Hist.*, Bk. IV., c. 11.

had a bare flag for his couch, and for his pillow a stone; which stone, he adds, stands to this day as the *titulus* of a monument beside his grave. It is singular that a monumental stone, about twice the dimensions of the Birtley cross-slab, a flattened round-edged granite boulder, 20 inches long and 15 wide, was found not many years since in Cladh an Discart, in the island of Iona, and is now preserved in the cathedral. Upon one of its flat sides it bears a Celtic cross of the more usual form, the intersections recessed, and the arms of the cross connected by a circle. When discovered it was thought not improbable that this was the very stone of which Adamnan speaks, which marked the grave of St. Columba before his remains were removed and enshrined. Dr. Anderson gives an engraving of it (Fig. 53), and of a similar 'flattish, water-worn, undressed stone (Fig. 52), about 22 inches long, 11 inches wide, and 3 inches thick, found in the churchyard of Coldstone, Aberdeenshire. On one of the faces of this slab an oval panel has been sunk, in which is a raised cross of Celtic form of the type from which the form of the Birtley cross may be taken, but without the circle to connect the arms.²⁴

The supposition that sepulchral stones of the Hartlepool type have been bolster or pillow stones may be dismissed. Much more probably the Birtley cross-slab, and all others of similar small size, were placed on the grave, *over the breast*, and not interred with the deceased, who asked, according to the custom of the age, for the prayers of the living, who might look upon his last earthly resting-place in passing by or when drawn there by affection or reverential regard.

Date or age of the Birtley monumental stone.—There is some difficulty in determining the exact period to which it may be referred. Its interest consists both in the rarity of type and in its antiquity, undoubtedly long anterior to the Norman Conquest.

The late Rev. D. H. Haigh, when living, the greatest authority in this country on Runic epigraphy, says of the Hartlepool stones, 'The use of Runic letters marks a period at which the Roman characters had only begun to come into extensive use for inscriptions.' He seems to have identified, from the works of the Venerable Bede, some of the names commemorated there with those of persons living in the latter half of the 7th and 8th centuries; and he adds that these 'curious

²⁴ *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, Lecture II., pp. 86, 87.

monuments . . . are relics of the very earliest age of Anglo-Saxon Christianity.²⁵ This conclusion seems to gain strength from the position of the bodies in the Hartlepool cemetery being, with one exception, laid north and south (not with their faces eastward, as awaiting the Resurrection); proving that they must have been interred before this almost universal custom of Christians was practised by the Saxon converts. Their habits and customs also must have been, to some extent, similar to those of pagan times judging from the appearance of the teeth which were ground down by the use of the same kind of food mingled with grit prepared in quern or mortar; and the placing of pillow stones under the heads of the deceased, which has often been met with in pre-historic and Saxon burial-barrows, as in the stone-lined grave within the Pitland Hills barrow near Birtley.²⁶

Professor George Stephens of Copenhagen, coincides with this view of the very early date to which we may assign such Christian monumental stones as the Birtley cross-slab with the other examples of the Hartlepool type; and Dr. Anderson, referring to them, remarks, without question, that they 'are assigned to the 7th and 8th centuries.'²⁷ Mr. J. Romilly Allen also takes the same view.²⁸

Dr. Cutts, in his *Manual of Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses*, written in 1849, gives a modified expression of opinion as *circa* A.D. 1000:— 'Date doubtful; it may be much earlier than the 11th century,'²⁹ under which he classes the Hartlepool cross stone which most nearly resembles that at Birtley. The inscription on the latter is of the simplest form, and contracted in its expression; and it may therefore be considered to be of earlier date than the sepulchral monuments which follow the later conventional formula, *Orate pro animo*, which, however, Dr. Cutts says was practised from A.D. 600 to 1000.

Miss Stokes, who is no doubt a high authority, would, by comparison with the monumental crosses of Ireland, suggest a later date in the pre-Conquest period to those in Scotland and the North of England. 'We are inclined,' she writes, 'to question the very early dates that have been assigned to such examples as the stone crosses at Ailmouth, Lancaster, Collingham, York, Hartlepool, Bewcastle, Ruth-

²⁵ *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, Vol. I., pp. 190, 191.

²⁶ *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. XII. (New Series), p. 253.

²⁷ *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, Second Series, p. 255; *Note*.

²⁸ *Early Christian Symbolism*, p. 118.

²⁹ Plate III., p. 60.

well, which have been attributed by Stephens to the years 600, 651, 670, 680, some of which have Runic inscriptions.'³⁰ But the accomplished writer herself makes a distinction between the *incised* sepulchral slabs, 'which date from the 7th to the 10th century,'³¹ and the high crosses, such as those fine examples at Ruthwell and Bewcastle on the Anglo-Scottish Borders. Precedence in point of time is also given³² to the Christian tomb slab laid upon the ground, inscribed with the prayer and a cross, over the pillar stone and the high cross standing erect.

On careful consideration I am disposed to agree in the view that the Birtley cross-slab, of the Hartlepool type, may date from about A.D. 700, or even earlier, and not later than the eighth century.

The discovery of this sepulchral memorial to an unknown and unnamed personage (the initial letter of the name only arouses without satisfying our curiosity) leads us in thought to the far distant days when the first Christian church, perhaps of wattled work of wood and thatched with rushes, *more Scottico*, was erected at Birtley, within the easily-defended area, surrounded by ramparts and deep ditch still in great part remaining, of what seems to have been one of the numerous Romano-British camps or hill-forts of this district of North Tynedale. There is little doubt that a Saxon church preceded the very early Norman building of which, in the chancel walls and arch, at least, characteristic portions yet exist unimpaired.

About six miles S.S.E. from Birtley church and village, which occupy an elevated position just over 600 feet above the sea, stands the recently and well-restored church of St. Oswald, distinctly visible from Birtley owing to its commanding site on the range of hills above Chollerford eastward. In the year A.D. 635, it is well known that St. Oswald with his small army of loyal Saxons of Bernicia here met in battle the great host of Britons under the cruel tyrant Caedwalla, king of Cumbria, a Christian merely in name. The Venerable Bede relates that a *cross of wood* was constructed. (Was it made in the form so familiar to St. Oswald during his exile in Iona, the Scoto-Irish, with oblong panels on the arms and head, such as is represented on the Birtley memorial slab, for this could easily have

³⁰ *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, Part II., p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

been done?) This cross was set up, as a battle-standard, near to the protecting barrier of the Roman Wall and its deep fosse, by the king's own hands, who, with his brave followers, before the engagement knelt in fervent prayer 'to the true and living God Almighty.'³³ Caedwalla was slain, and his numerous forces were put to flight. This decisive victory not only restored king Oswald to his rightful throne, but made him Bretwalda or over-lord of Britain. He soon afterwards appointed St. Aidan first bishop of Lindisfarne; and, we read, on his admonitions the king 'industriously applied himself to build and extend the Church of Christ in his kingdom.' 'When the bishop, who was not skilful in the English tongue, preached the Gospel, it was most delightful to see the king himself interpreting the word of God to his commanders and ministers, for he had perfectly learned the language of the Scots during his long banishment. . . . Churches were built in several places.'

From its proximity to the site of the great battle of 'Heavenfield,' its similarly elevated and easily-defended position, having been already an inhabited spot for centuries past, not far from the junction of the vale of Rede with that of North Tyne, it seems not improbable that Birtley may have been chosen soon after this event as suitable for the erection of a simple ecclesiastical edifice, a church of wood, and as an evangelizing centre. 'It appears,' the historian adds, 'that there was no sign of the Christian faith, no church, no altar erected throughout all the nation of the Bernicians, before that new commander of the army [St. Oswald], prompted by the devotion of his faith, set up the cross as he was going to give battle to his barbarous enemy.'

Is this small memorial cross-slab found at Birtley a relic of these or shortly following days? Did pious hands carefully chisel and sculpture the stone, as a tribute of grateful hearts even before a church was built, to some revered missionary of the cross, perhaps laid to his rest in the new 'God's acre,' some devoted follower of king Oswald and St. Aidan or their successors, who had brought the glad tidings of the Gospel to the fierce pagan vale-dwellers by the North Tyne in the very early days of Northumbrian Christianity?

NOTE.—Since the foregoing pages were read a fourth (or, if we reckon in the Billingham stone in its very fragmentary condition, a

³³ *Eccles. Hist.*, Book III., c. 2.

fifth) site is now known where another small cross-slab of the Hartlepool type has been found. Most appropriately it has come to light at the very cradle of the Christian religion in Northumbria. This Lindisfarne example was discovered in the summer of the year 1888, during the excavations undertaken by Sir. Wm. Crossman, Bart., and the Rev. W. W. F. Keeling, M.A., at the Priory church, Holy Island, a few yards from the west front, though not *in situ*, and within the bounds of the parish churchyard. The material is the hard, fine-grained local whinstone or basalt, worn round the edge and on the surface, so that the incised cross and inscription appear faint and indistinct. The stone is oblong in shape with semi-circular top, and its dimensions are about 8 inches high by 6 inches wide, and only about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness. The cross is of true Scoto-Irish (Latin) form, with central circle and circular terminations at the head and the extremity of the arms, but semi-circular base, all in triple lines, concentric and straight. It resembles most closely the cross incised on the monumental slab, No. 8, of the Hartlepool stones, as described and figured in the Rev. D. H. Haigh's learned paper in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, Vol. I., pp. 185, ff. An inscribed name appears in two lines across the stone, AELBERCT, though this reading is rather doubtful.³⁴

2.—ON SOME FRAGMENTS OF SAXON CROSSES FROM FALSTONE, NORTH TYNEDALE.

The very early propagation of Christianity in the remoter portions of the ancient Bernician kingdom, high up the vale of the North Tyne, was attested in the year 1813 by the discovery at Falstone of a small sculptured slab, a fragment formed of a kind of grey freestone, about 1 foot long and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, which had been broken away from a Runic cross or column.³⁵ At each end is an ornamental interlaced knot.

³⁴ *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Newc.*, Vol. III., p. 404.

³⁵ *The Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*, by Prof. George Stephens, F.S.A., Vol. I., p. 456. See *Ibid.*, Vol. III., p. 194, and *Word-List*, p. 362. Cf. also, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. X. (N.S.), pp. 88-92. *On the Shaft of an Anglie Inscribed Cross discovered in the Church at Chester-le-Street*, in 1883, by the same great writer. In describing this 'lowest piece of a funeral pillar, bearing the dead man's name in mixt Roman and Runic staves,' EADMUND, which in this respect resembles some of the Hartlepool cross-slabs, he observes

Through the kindness of the discoverer, the Rev. James Ford; minister of the Presbyterian church in that isolated village, on whose farm it was found, and by the good offices of a well-known local antiquary of that time, Mr. Spearman, residing at Sewingshields on the Roman Wall, not many miles south from Falstone, this most interesting 'find' was secured for the museum of our Society of Antiquaries at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, then in its robust infancy.

Probably the most accurate representation of this Falstone cross-fragment is given in Prof. Stephens's great work. He remarks of the full-size plate engraved in our *Archaeologia Aeliana*,³⁶ that the inscription there is 'most illegible or hopelessly confused.' A small but nearly correct drawing is given by the Rev. D. H. Haigh in his article on the Bewcastle Cross,³⁷ and the same high authority repeats the Runic inscription in his *Anglo-Saxon Conquest of Britain*.³⁸

'This stone,' says Prof. Stephens, 'is as yet probably unique in England, in so far that it is bi-literal. That is, it bears twice over the same inscription in one and the same dialect, but written in two different alphabets, Runic and Roman. It contains the epitaph in English in Old Northern Staves, but also in Roman miniscules, side by side. Still, as is usual in such cases, where words are given in two alphabets—Runic and Roman, Ogham and Roman, etc.—there are small variations, possibly mere results of the floating folk-speech.'

He decipheres the meaning of the inscription to be, 'Eomaer this set after Hroetberht this Beacon (mark or memorial) after his eme (uncle). Bede (pray) for the (his) soul!'

There are, it appears, in West-Gotland, the early centre of Swedish Christianity, three other examples of such bi-literal (Runic and Roman)

that 'the epigraphs in Scando-Anglic lands were inscribed (1.) in Runes only, in Old Northern, and then Scandian characters, beginning in England in the fifth century; (2.) after that date in "tway-staved carvings," the same words being in Runic and Roman letters. In England only one such *Minne* has come down to us, the Falstone stone, about A.D. 700.'—(3.) With the advance of Latin civilization some words or sentences are in the folk-speech, in Runes, others in Latin with Roman letters, as the Ruthwell, Dearham, and Hackness crosses.—(4.) Then there are used mingled Runic and Roman letters, as at Lindisfarne, Alnmouth, and this cross-shaft at Chester-le-Street; and (5.) we have lastly Roman letters only, either in Latin inscriptions, or in writing English words, as at Yarm, Dewsbury, Wycliffe, and Thornhill (A.D. 867).

³⁶ Vol. I., 4to., 1822, p. 103.

³⁷ *Archaeologia Aeliana*, Vol. I., No. 15 of his Plate. See also, *Ibid.*, Vol. I. (New Series), p. 149.

³⁸ See Plate II., pp. 41-42.



FRAGMENT OF SAXON CROSS, WITH BI-LITERAL RUNIC AND ROMANESQUE INSCRIPTION, from Falstone, Northumberland.

Illustration from *The Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*, by the kindness of Professor George Stephens, F.S.A., Copenhagen (the Author).



stones, 'rare and precious,' and 'excellent illustrations of the Falstone Runic cross.' They witness to the existence of two separate classes of the population in the early Christian period, 'lewd and learned' to whom the monuments would speak; the clerks, accustomed to the Roman letters, and the laity, rich and poor, better versed in their native runes, and only learners as yet in the alphabet of Latin lore. Thus the two ranks or classes of the Old English people living toward the head of North Tynedale, then, perhaps, more numerous than now, would be able to read without difficulty, just as, to compare the greater with the less, the famous trilingual Rosetta stone would speak intelligibly to three different nations dwelling on the banks of the Nile.

The late Dr. Charlton, being specially interested, as himself a dalesman by birth, gives a simpler translation of the epitaph of this Falstone monumental cross, dated by Prof. Stephens and others about A.D. 700. 'Eomaer set this (cross) up for his Uncle, Hroethbert. Pray for his soul.' He remarks, 'Hroethbert is equivalent to the Robert of our day, and the descendants of Robert would be Robertsons, or Robsons, which now, as of old, is the chief surname about Falstone. We think we have evidence here of the Robsons some twelve hundred years ago, in the very district where, till lately, they held sway. Whether old Hroethbert was the ancestor of the wight-riding Robsons of the old play—'Honest men, save doing a little shifting for their living'—we will not say.³⁹

3.—NEW FRAGMENTS OF SÁXON CROSSES RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT FALSTONE.

It has often seemed strange to me that other relics of early Christian times, besides the famous stone which could not be passed by without the foregoing reference and description in this connection, had not since its discovery been brought to light at Falstone. In mentioning the subject to my young friend, Mr. R. Owen Picton, who takes an intelligent interest in archaeology, he kept this in mind, when giving attention to the antiquities of the parish, of which his father, the Rev. R. Picton, is rector. The result was an invitation

³⁹ *North Tynedale and its Four Graynes*, 2nd edit., pp. 8-9.

to help him, on a pleasant afternoon in May, to dig up with our own hands, aided by pick-axe and spade, a large stone nearly imbedded in the soil of the churchyard of Falstone, on the south side. Mr. R. O. Picton has written to me from Cheltenham, where on account of health he has been spending the winter, his own record of the discovery, and he has also forwarded careful rubbings taken by himself. His own words had best be given, which are as follows:—

The stone standing upright was first observed by me in April, 1885. One half was in the ground, while long grass hid the greater part of it, only about four inches being left to view (that is, when close by it). My attention was first drawn to the stone by noticing the socket hole at the top, and on pushing the grass aside the design upon it was observable. The stone was dug up on May 26th, 1885, when socket holes were found both at the top and bottom, but no lettering. On digging it up the tenant of Falstone farm-house, who was passing at the time, stated that he had two stones of similar design in the walls of the adjoining farm, which he showed us. The larger of these is now in the church, and from the similarity of its designs may have formed part of a cross, of which the stone found in the churchyard was a lower part. The ends of it seem worn. The design on this second stone was more distinct on the left side (that is, on the side not embedded in the wall). The other sides were covered with mortar, but even after it was washed off their design is not so clear. I am rather doubtful whether the third stone belongs to the cross at all. The design on this stone is on one side only.

The wall in which the second of the three stones was found, as well as some of the adjoining walls, are partly built out of the stones which were left lying about when the old church was pulled down in 1824. These two latter stones were, no doubt, among the heap, and were used to build the walls of the adjoining farm-house. Evidently when the old church was demolished there was no attempt made to preserve any marks of antiquity, however meagre they might be. I know of no additional fragments of the cross having been found, and if there had been I think it would have come to my knowledge.

The interlacing work of the back of the first and largest stone, though very indistinct, might draw out some opinions as to its special character. It is more distinct, however, on the side of the second stone. In the few illustrations which I have seen of Saxon stones I have not come across any similar work.

The question as to whether these stones have any connection with the well-known fragment of a Saxon cross, having upon it a Saxon and Runic inscription, found near Falstone, may naturally arise. On this subject there is one thing I will point out, viz., that this inscribed stone was found at a place marked "Ruins" in Armstrong's "Map of Northumberland" (1769), which is near the mouth of the Hawkhope Burn, and over a quarter of a mile distant from the church.

I have marked the tracings or rubbings of the second stone right, left, front, and back, to make it correspond with the large stone, though the designs of the fronts slightly differ.⁴⁰

Dimensions of the new Saxon Cross fragments.—When we had carefully dug out and extricated the largest (first) fragment from its embedded position on the south side of the churchyard, it was found to measure 2 feet 1 inch in length (that is, in height), 1 foot in width, and 7 inches in thickness. In the wall of the adjoining farm-house, part of which is the ancient and interesting pele or bastel-house of Falstone, the second sculptured stone, also a fragment of a cross shaft, was discovered. It is $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The third stone, which was built into the garden wall, was smaller and different in form, being only $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by 6 inches wide, and $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in thickness. Our colleague, Mr. J. P. Gibson, Hexham, informs me that he discovered a fourth stone, before unknown, in the churchyard wall, which, with the others, he has photographed. This stone I have not seen, nor had Mr. R. O. Picton observed it during his search, which was carefully carried out; though, with so large an extent of walls to examine, such stones would not be easily discernible, unless the light were specially favourable, and might even then escape recognition.

Character of the Sculpturing.—Soon after the discovery of the cross fragments at Falstone, I sent Mr. R. O. Picton's rubbings to the Rev. Wm. Greenwell, F.S.A., whose opinion coincided with and corroborated my own, already expressed, that the local sculptor living towards the head of North Tynedale, probably worked from the remembrance of designs on Saxon crosses and other stones which he had seen and admired in and around the great church at Hexham at the foot of the valley. Mr. Greenwell's view is thus expressed in his letter to me—'The Falstone Saxon sculpture is, I should think, a rude imitation of the beautiful Hexham school with grape branches. It would be desirable to have the fragments taken out of the garden wall, and

⁴⁰ It is with much regret that I have to record the untimely decease of my young friend, Mr. R. Owen Picton, solicitor, in the spring of 1888, after a lingering illness. His blameless life, with excellent abilities, endeared him to all who had the privilege of knowing him; and he had given promise of good success in his professional career, as well as in antiquarian research which he had prosecuted, especially in connection with the parish of Falstone.

then it might be possible to put them together, should they belong to the same cross.⁴¹

As to its characteristic features these sculptured stones may be both compared and contrasted with those of the great Wilfrid's time and his famous school of Saxon art. Different from the Birtley cross-slab, which is well incised, the Falstone fragments are carved in relief of fair depth, and some of it is boldly cut. The ornamental, interlaced knot at each end of the Runic cross stone, first described, is in deeper relief than the chain and other simple interlaced work of the recently-discovered cross shafts and slab. In the former it seems as if in style it resembled the more purely Celtic work, and in the latter the influence, in rude exercise, of the Romanesque classical school upon Scoto-Irish art, appears more evident. So conventional is the representation that it is scarcely conceivable that the ancient sculptor could have ever seen a bunch of grapes, or his memory failed him to design any but the most distant approximation to the true form in the triple-rowed pendants upon the largest shaft.

The small slab at Falstone bears upon it the best carved work as to design and finish. It resembles a similar stone which I have often noticed in the garden of my friend, Mr. C. R. Kendal, M.R.C.S., of Abbey Gate House, Hexham, having within a scroll a conventional bunch of seven grapes. Very rude scrolls with bunches within appear rather unsymmetrically on each side of a central rib on the smaller Falstone cross shaft. The contrast with the beautiful sculpturing upon that Anglian masterpiece, the grand 'Acca' cross in the Dean and Chapter library in Durham cathedral, once one of the glories of Hexham; or that very fine portion of a cross remaining, still five feet in height, in the Spital garden, near Hexham, having on one side a crucifixion scene and on the other sides the vine leaf and grape ornament, will be very apparent when the two excellent photographs of the latter are placed side by side with those of two of the Falstone cross fragments, taken by Mr. J. P. Gibson.

The only other Saxon work, in North Tynedale itself, with which comparison may here be made is the interesting portion of a cross,

⁴¹The three fragments of crosses are now located for safe keeping in the church at Falstone, beneath the tower. See *Proc. Soc. Antiq., Newcastle*, Vol. IV., p. 10.

found built up in the wall above the chancel arch of Simonburn church. This is now securely placed against the west wall of the porch upon the stone seat, and it seems to have been split from top to bottom, the other part being lost. The stone is nearly of the same dimensions as the largest shaft at Falstone, being 2 feet 2 inches in height, $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad at bottom and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches at top; the thickness of the fragment being $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches at bottom and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the top. Here again, by comparison, the inferiority in design and execution of the Falstone sculptures is manifest. For the Simonburn stone may almost certainly be considered the work of St. Wilfred or his school. Bunches of grapes in well-formed clusters are enclosed in spiral circles with ivy (not vine) leaves here and there upon concentric tendrils of the ivy plant.

Purpose and Age of the Falstone Cross Fragments.—My own impression is that these three recently-discovered sculptured stones are portions of different Saxon monuments. After close examination of the relative proportions and designs of the two larger shafts on two or three occasions, they seem to me not to have formed originally portions of one and the same cross, but of different crosses. The smallest fragment also has belonged apparently to another distinct monument.

In the largest stone, I am disposed to believe that we have a considerable portion of, it may be, the ancient churchyard cross of Old Falstone, which may have been erected, as we know such crosses often were, before the first Saxon church of wattled work rose to shelter, during divine worship, the primitive converts to Christianity. The fragment was found by us lying imbedded very near to what may well have formed the original site, on the sunny southern side of the churchyard facing the pleasant river and the envioning hills. Around such a cross we are informed that our Saxon ancestors used to gather for the worship of the One True God and His Christ, as in an open-air church; sometimes under the shadow of a venerable yew tree, and with a well near by, answering at first as a Christian font, where the whilom devotees of Thor, Woden, and other deities of the Valhalla, were baptized.

There seems no reason to doubt that the Falstone cross-fragments, like the Birtley cross-slab, are among our few known relics of the very

early days of Northumbrian Christianity, probably dating from the 7th or 8th century after Christ.

It is difficult to answer the question—Whence arose the first ideas and suggestions exemplified in the artistic productions of the Scoto-Irish and Roman schools of this district illustrated in these ancient Christian monumental stones? The enamelled *fibulae* and other ornaments of the Romano-British period show one phase of Celtic art, which developed afterwards into the very beautiful and intricate illuminations of the Northumbrian and Irish manuscripts, the later being a distinct advance upon those written in the earliest Christian age. But pagan and Christian emblems are often curiously interwoven; and the processes of artistic thought appear sometimes to run in confluent channels drawn from Celtic and classical, and even Byzantine sources. (See Dr. Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland, passim.*)

It has been said that, 'whatever its origin and purpose, interlaced ornamentation was equally familiar to the Saxon invaders and to the British aborigines.'⁴⁰ It is matter of history that the Ancient British inhabitants of this country were expert in intertwining the pliant reeds and willows for many and various purposes. The *bascaudae*, (Welsh, *basged*, whence our English word *basket*.) were among the prized household treasures of the patrician ladies of Imperial Rome. This native art of plaiting was deftly applied in making the domestic furniture of the Britons, their skin-covered coracles, and perhaps war-chariots, their house-walls and the defensive ramparts of their fortifications constructed of wattled work of intertwined branches, trees, and stakes. Can it have suggested the peculiar and distinctive style, with its marvellously varied devices, of interlaced Celtic ornamentation found on stone and metal work, and the paleographic relics, the earliest manuscripts and illuminations of Britain and Ireland?

There is little doubt that they were native British fingers, or those

⁴⁰ *An Attempt to explain the Origin and Meaning of the Early Interlaced Ornamentation found on the Ancient Sculptured Stones of Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man.* By Gilbert J. French of Bolton. Printed for Presentation only, 1858. The writer, who had great knowledge of ecclesiastical art, argues that this arose from the Ancient British plait-work. Cf. *An Account of the Three Ancient Cross Shafts, etc., at Ilam*; by the Rev. Prof. G. F. Browne, B.D., F.S.A., 1888; p. 15. Also, *Archaeologia*, Vol. L., pp. 287-294; and *Jour. Brit. Arch. Assoc.* for 1859, Vol. XV., pp. 63-80 (Mr. French's paper).

of a skilful imitator, which formed the 'basket-work' decoration on the two unique fictile vases from Coventina's temple-well at PROCOLITIA or Carrawburgh towards the close of the fourth century.⁴¹

On the sculptured crosses pagan still blended with Christian symbolism, as we see in the mysterious emblems of intertwining serpents, spectacular ornaments, the comb, trumpet, and other devices, with the familiar scenes of the chase, as if heathen anticipations of the after-life existence were still to some degree cherished; and all these in close association with quaintly carved but easily understood representations of the great scene on Calvary, or drawn from Biblical or primitive church history. In the labyrinthine mazes of curious, elaborate, and endless knot-work in which these were set before the popular gaze, something of the mystery of divine things, of the everlasting life, and the wonders and beauty of all nature (to us grotesquely manifested thereby, though not to them), may well have been impressed upon the simple minds of those who gathered for solitary devotion or united worship before the lofty sculptured cross of Acca, in the cathedral precincts at Hexham, or the lesser church-yard crosses which pious hands erected, even in remote Christian settlements of the earliest age, as at Birtley and Falstone; where the sacred rites of the ancient British church may have preceded those afterwards introduced among their Saxon converts by St. Aidan and his missionaries from the Holy Isle of Northumbria.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since this paper was read the noble volume on Hexham Abbey has been published by our colleague, Mr. Hodges, which, with admirable historical and descriptive chapters, contains fine drawings and the fullest architectural details from the earliest times, including Saxon monumental crosses and sculptured stones of St. Wilfred's church. I am glad to think that so competent an authority may be disposed to investigate the subject referred to in the preceding pages. He remarks⁴²:—'The whole question of the origin and development of the various forms of ornament introduced

⁴¹One of these 'very curious vases or cups of earthenware' bears an inscription, from which it appears that the dedicatory, Saturninus Gabinius, made the vase with his own hands, as an offering to the goddess. *Arch. Aeliana*, Vol. VIII., New Series, pp. 7, 8.

⁴²*Ecclesia Hagulstadensis. The Abbey of St. Andrew, Hexham, 1888.* Chap. V. p. 50, Note.

into the stone work of this period is such a large one that the author feels no justice could be done to it here. It is to be hoped that before long a monograph will be devoted to the subject.'

Also it may be permitted to me here to re-echo the desire, so gracefully expressed by Professor George Stephens, F.S.A., that the publication of all the sculptured stones of the pre-Conquest or Saxon age now left to us in these Northern Counties may shortly be undertaken for our Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne by the Rev. Wm. Greenwell, F.S.A., who is best qualified to accomplish this much-needed and important work.⁴³ In this connection the hope may be expressed that the present series of the Disney Lectures on Archaeology in the University of Cambridge, by the Rev. Prof. G. F. Browne, on *The Anglian Sculptured Stones of pre-Norman Type*, with the excellent illustrations, may hereafter be issued in book form, being a valuable contribution to the knowledge of this subject.

APPENDIX (see p. 253).

That these Roman altars were utilized by the early Saxon converts to Christianity in this part of Northumbria is proved by the remaining portion of a large altar now preserved in the porch of Warden church. It has been upturned, the moulding showing at the bottom where the horns of the altar have been cut off level with the surface of the slab. Its dimensions are 4 feet 4 inches high; 1 foot 8 inches wide at the top and bottom, and 1 foot 4 inches in the middle; and from 7 to 8 inches in thickness. In a sunk panel, which nearly fills the whole side of the altar above the moulding, there is a central figure, rude, but carved in good relief, with the arms extended, not horizontally but at a sloping angle from the sides. The characteristic Anglian or Saxon interlaced work appears in a long band or oblong panel on each side, with the triquetra and cable moulding above on the right, and a convoluted cross on the left. Mr. J. P. Gibson, of Hexham, has obtained an excellent photograph of this interesting Roman altar-slab, which, like an ancient palimpsest, has been put to a fresh use in later (Chris-

⁴³ See *Arch. Ael.*, Vol. X. (N.S.), p. 92, *Note*.

tian) days. In Warden church, near the north wall of the fine chancel which has recently been rebuilt on the larger original foundations by the vicar, the Rev. Canon Cruddas, lies a good example of the Norman *domus ultima* or coped gravestone, tegulated like the fragment in Simonburn church porch. It is 5 feet 4 inches long; 1 foot 4 inches high at the head, and 1 foot 1 inch at the foot; and 1 foot 8 inches and 1 foot 4 inches wide respectively at the head and foot. There are six overlapping rows as of tiles on each of the sloping sides. The exterior angles of Warden church tower show long and short mason-work alternately, and the tower-arch from the nave has the usual Saxon characteristics, part of the moulded abacus remaining under the low rounded arch which is only 5 feet 5 inches wide, the height from the floor to the abacus being 6 feet, and the breadth of the wall 2 feet 9 inches, the dimensions being but little larger than those of an ordinary doorway.



CROSS-STONE FROM CLADH AN DÌSEART
IN IONA. (See p. 263.)



CROSS-STONE FROM COLDSTONE,
ABERDEENSHIRE. (See p. 263.)

(The above woodcuts have been kindly lent by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.)