



VI.—EARLY CARVED STONES AT HEXHAM.

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At Hexham church and elsewhere are various fragments of early carving, either building-stones of the church of St. Andrew or parts of monuments executed by men who worked in the Hexham tradition. This article is an attempt to class them by comparison with other known monuments of Northumbria and to fix their approximate dates. It is hoped that as a by-product of this study some little light may be thrown upon the history of Hexham church in a dark age.

As definite points in that history we already have :—

A.D. 678, St. Wilfrid's church completed (first architectural period).

709-732, bishop Acca adorned and enlarged the church (second architectural period). He died in 740.

821, bishop Tidfrith died, the last of the bishops.

854, the diocese divided.

875, Hálfðan's Danes burnt the church; much of it, however, remained standing until the 12th century.

883, the district given to the See of St. Cuthbert by Guthred, king of the Danes, assuring immunity from all attack by Christians.

923, the battle of Corbridge; possible damage from vikings.

995, bishop Ealdhun driven from Chester-le-Street, and possible further damage at Hexham.

c. 1000, Collan f. Eadred was provost of Hexham.

c. 1020-41, under the two Gamels, priests of Hexham, and Alured (Ælfred) Westou, some removal of relics from the church; those of Acca were placed on St. Michael's altar on the south side.

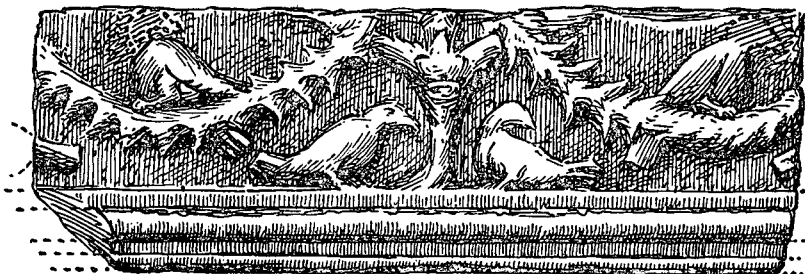
1071, after the devastation by William the Conqueror,

Uthred the provost offered Hexham to the See of York; Eilaf f. Alured being priest.

c. 1080-85, Eilaf began to restore the church (third architectural period).

1138, Eilaf f. Eilaf died, having some time earlier roofed the church and carried out other restorations.

The character and style of these late restorations, though post-conquest in chronology, were pretty certainly pre-Norman in design and taste. Much light has been thrown on this period of overlap by Mr. John Bilson, F.S.A., in his papers on Weaverthorpe and Wharram-le-Street in *Archaeologia*, 72 and 73. Eilaf's workmen were probably not Norman masons, but old-fashioned English craftsmen,



HEXHAM: from the Crypt, 1908.

FIG. 1

imitating clumsily—for it was a decadent age—types of Anglian art of which they had models and traditions. In the architectural fragments preserved we have therefore to look for examples of 7th, 8th and 11th century carving; but among the grave-monuments we may find relics of all the periods, to be dated by comparison with the Northumbrian series and its continuous development.

Fig. 1¹ represents a slab with bird and wreaths in relief found in 1908 built into the crypt, and therefore

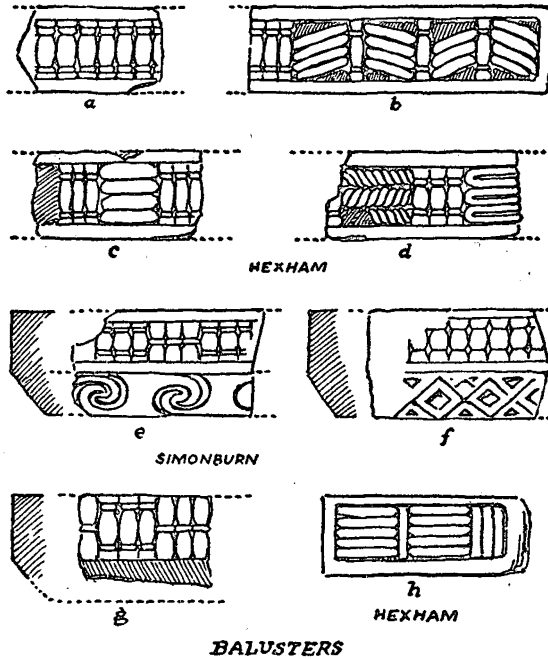
¹ Line drawings rather than photographs are given with the intention of explaining the fragments by suggested restorations. Excellent photographs have been taken of these stones by Mr. John Gibson, F.S.A., of Hexham, to whom I take this opportunity of acknowledging great help in the preparation of this essay. The illustrations here are to the scale of one-twelfth, making it unnecessary to give dimensions of the fragments.



RESTORATION OF FRAGMENTS—
a, HEXHAM CHURCH,
b AND *c*, NOW AT DURHAM

FIG. 2.

probably a Roman stone from Corstopitum not adopted as an ornament by St. Wilfrid's masons, but, like the famous Horseman, used as a mere building stone. And yet examples of the *Ara Pacis* style appear to have been known to early Northumbrian carvers, although this slab seems to be unique.



BALUSTERS

FIG. 3.

Fig. 2; the Archer (*a* at Hexham restored with two fragments from Hexham in the Durham cathedral library). Opinion is divided as to whether this is work of the Roman period of occupation in Britain or of St. Wilfrid's foreign carvers; but it shows the possible provenance of the Anglian beast-and-bird scrolls. This style, however, was not used at Hexham in the earlier stages of monumental art, and perhaps came into England afresh, from foreign influence to other centres of craftsmanship.

Fig. 3, BALUSTERS (fragments *b*, *c*, *d*, at Durham,

from Hexham; *e*, *f*, and *g* at Simonburn; *a* and *h* in Hexham church). The stones *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, are all of the same height ($5\frac{1}{2}$ inches) and no doubt were parts of a string-course, possibly meant to represent almeries or book-cupboards. The Simonburn balusters, by the patterns associated with them, seem to be of the 9th century. The

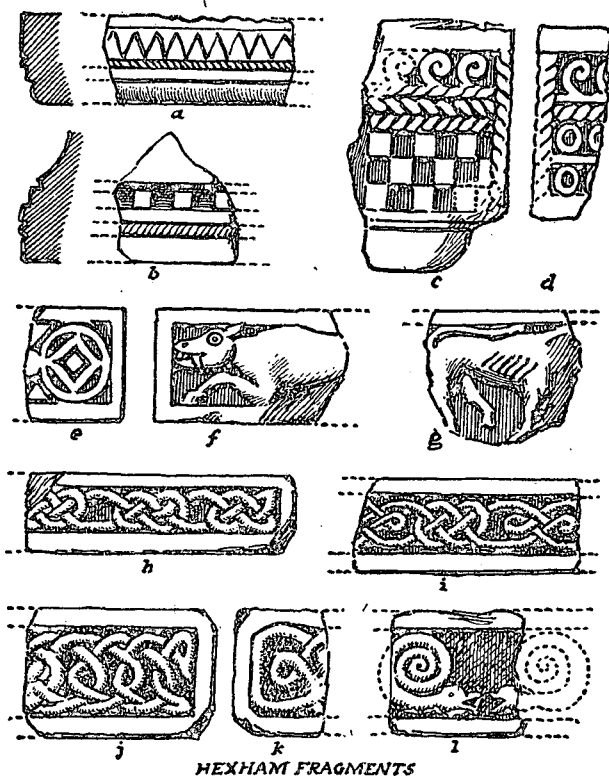


FIG. 4.

piece *h* is obviously a rude imitation of the earlier balusters, perhaps of the 11th century restoration. A reason for dating the first four fragments to the earliest period is that these, like others found at churches associated with St. Wilfrid, are all of one type, with convex-sided shafts; whereas those at the churches of Benedict Biscop (Monkwearmouth, Jarrow and Hart) are straight

sided, with many lathe-mouldings (see Greenwell, *Catalogue* of the Durham cathedral library, pp. 72, 73), and seem like products of a different group of workers. The rude imitation *h* is obviously much later than the Simonburn stones, and those are later than the early Hexham balusters, which may be of the original building.

Fig. 4, HEXHAM FRAGMENTS I (*cd* at Durham from Hexham; the rest at Hexham church). Roman chevrons are sunk; those of *a* are merely incised, and the carving resembles that of *b* (there is nothing to tell which way up these stones were meant to be). The timidity and delicacy of the work suggests an early date. The impost (?) *cd* is like *b* by the alternately raised and sunk squares; reference to the stone will show that on side *c* they are squares and not as drawn in the *Durham Catalogue*; and they are important in connexion with the chequers of Bewcastle Cross. All three fragments show the cable. The last, *cd*, has the volute-crest in use during the 8th century in Italy and its cable is bolder than in *a* and *b*; it may possibly be of Acca's time. The chevron *a* is undoubtedly early, and justifies chevrons in pre-Norman work elsewhere.

The impost (?) *ef* is not the Roman boar of the twentieth legion re-used; but it and the adjacent ornament seem to be imitated from a Roman altar or from some semi-classical source. The fine beast, *g*, has the character often seen in Anglian crosses, though in existing remains more conventionally treated or weathered so as to have lost the modelling here attempted. These two animals may be of the second period.

The rest, *h*, *i*, *jk* and *l*, are of coarser material and less delicate cutting, like *h* in Fig. 3. The forms are in bold relief; the plaits of *i* and *j* are of the eleventh century; spiral snakes are not seen on pre-Danish monuments; so that all these appear to be of the third period.

Fig. 5, HEXHAM FRAGMENTS II. Two stones, *m* and *n*, seem to have been parts of arches, by the cut curves on one edge of each. If *m* were arranged as in the sketch, perhaps a greater knowledge might date its row of bosses and blocks which are rather rudely cut. The stone is four

inches thick and similar ornament is on the back. The stone *n* is very boldly and coarsely carved, like *h*, *i*, *jk* and *l* in Fig. 4. The volutes are clumsy, not crisp as in the early stone *cd* of Fig. 4, so that this *n* classes with Eilaf's work. Its material is rougher than that of *m*; but

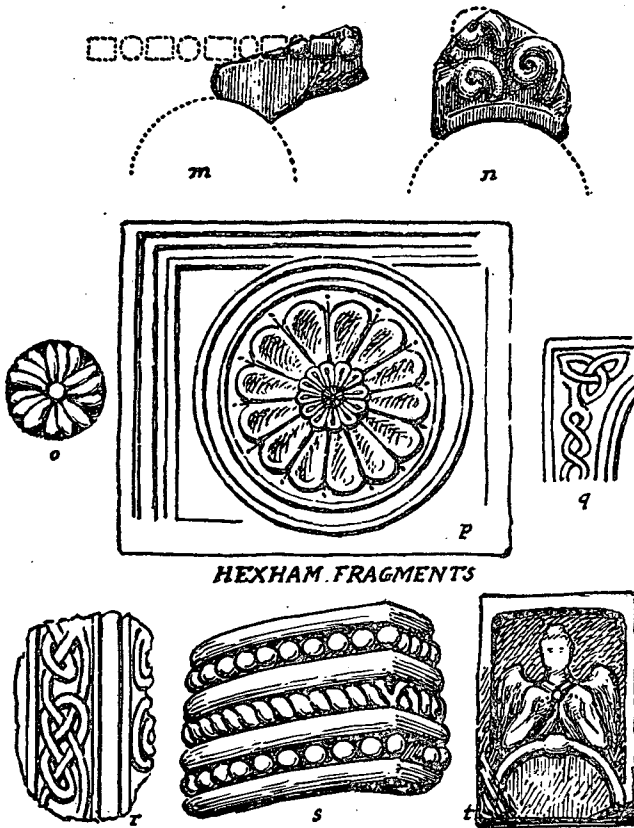


FIG. 5.

there are many possible places near Hexham where stone might have been got and though most of the first period work is in a smooth freestone, no argument can be drawn from material.

The roundel *o* is the centre of *p* on a larger scale. It may be meant for a marigold, and if so, early, because

naturalism is a token of nascent art. In sketching the panel the scabbling with which it has been defaced is omitted. The stone has been thought Roman, but in the 6th and following centuries such panels were common (see for example Fig. 541 from San Clemente, Rome, in Rivoira, *Lombardic Architecture*, English edition, vol. ii.). The carving resembles that of stones already ascribed to the first period at Hexham.

No. *q* is the ornament on the top of the Frith Stool, which may have been a bishop's seat and consequently later than the first building of the church. The *triquetra* is common from the 9th century onwards, but by no means impossible in the early stages of Anglian design; and this, by its simple and timid incised outline, is Anglian. One might imagine that a seat like this would be among Acca's additions to the church.

The stone *r*, found 1907, is not now at Hexham. It is said to be part of a pilaster.

The curious carinated pillar or pilaster base (?), no. *s*, has the material and cutting of the eleventh century restoration; and the angel panel, *t*, is too defaced to show the original work, but its rather clumsy drawing—as compared with the better figures on Anglian monuments—suggests lateness.

Fig. 6, THE ROOD SLAB; attempted restoration of the fragments. The stone is not local, but a whitish yellow freestone, said to be oolite; and the panel, though rising to as much as $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the higher parts of the relief, is only an inch thick in the ground. This would make the stone, which would be not less than four by three feet in size, rather difficult to carry far by land. It might have come by sea, and be foreign work; perhaps imported by Acca, as Benedict Biscop imported pictures. The fragment with what may be the tip of a wing, touching a curved frame, was possibly part of such an arch as is seen over each arm of the Spital cross (p. 79); in this Rood the arch may have contained an angel. Now the Spital shaft seems to date to the later half of the 8th century, and it is likely that the crucifixes upon it and upon the Ruthwell cross

were suggested by some well-known example, such as this Rood would be if it had been put up by Bishop Acca. The Ruthwell cross I date to the second half of the 8th century (*Dumfries and Galloway Ant. Soc. Trans.*, 1916-18, pp. 34-52). In the 9th century the crucifix

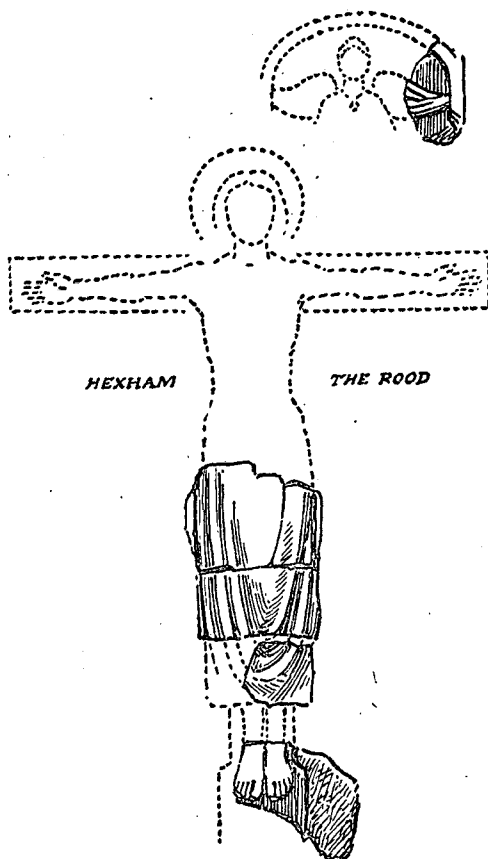


FIG. 6.

became a frequent motive in Northumbrian monuments, but in the decadence of art it was much more unskillfully drawn until its debased forms became unbelievably grotesque. But that is the rule in any art-movement. At first, careful, elaborate and naturalistic, a style or school reaches

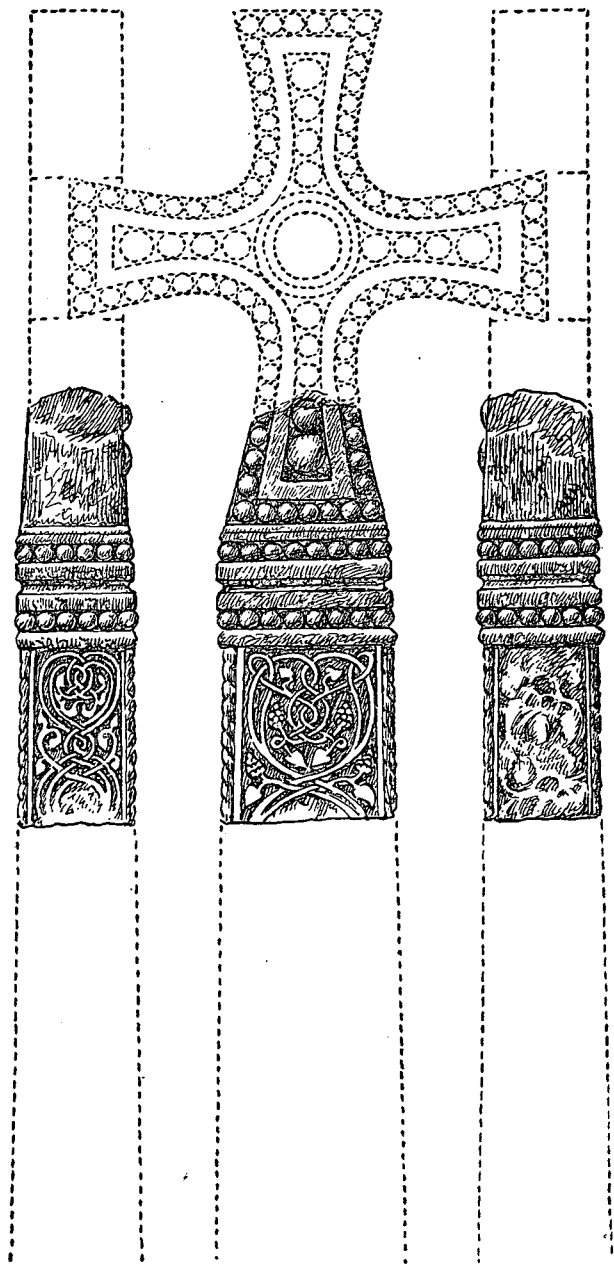


FIG. 7.

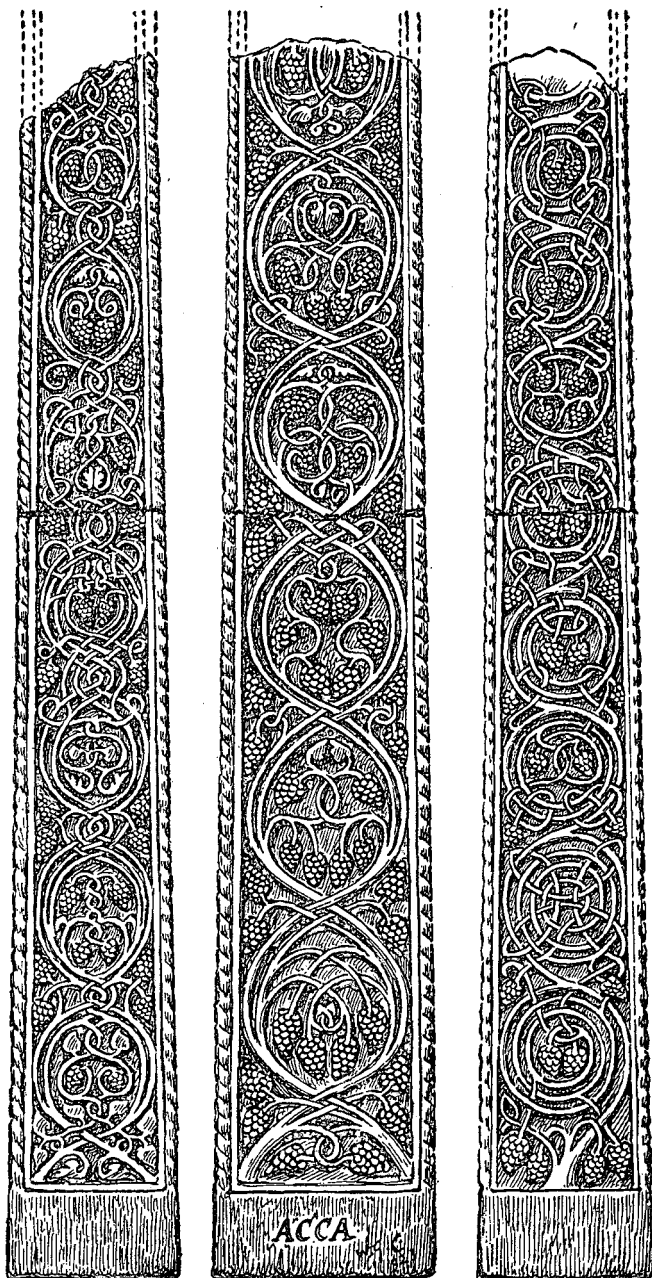


FIG. 8.

its best results in the hands of some unusually capable craftsman; then his followers try to reproduce the standard results with less labour and thought, gradually debasing current motives until some new influence arises to transform the tradition and renovate the style. This law we shall see illustrated in the following series of grave-monuments, although in the Hexham school the earliest known work is a masterpiece, due probably to a great effort and partly to foreign teaching.

Figs. 7 and 8. THE ACCA CROSS (now at Durham: for general description see Greenwell, *Catalogue*, pp. 53-59; see also the reproduction at Hexham cemetery made under the direction of Mr. C. C. Hodges). Accepting the general opinion, endorsed by Rivoira (*op. cit.*, ii, p. 143), we date it shortly after 740, as the work of foreign decorators, perhaps some of those who had worked for Acca in embellishing the church. Whence came the main idea of setting up free-standing crosses is a difficult question. It has been thought that the type originated in the eastern church; but there is no link to justify such an idea, whereas we certainly know that king Oswald must have seen crosses—wooden, and of no great size—at Iona, and his wooden cross at Heavenfield brings us very near Hexham. The step next taken was to carve such a cross in stone, and to ornament it. The ornament used here was such as had been familiar in Western Christendom; possibly in Gaul but certainly in Italy. The twist-scroll of the first side (Fig. 8) was common at Ravenna in the 6th and 7th centuries; running scrolls are well known in Roman design; but this is more elaborate than usual—much more elaborate and more naturalistic than anything of its kind to which a later date can be given. It looks like the special effort of a master in his craft; the kind of man who founds a school.

The inscription on the side not drawn—"A[et O] . . . SC . . . VNIGENITO FILIO DEI . . ."—does not contradict the date here given; nor does a cable-arris, if the worn edges of the stones are rightly so interpreted, for we have seen cables on stones already dated earlier. The naturalism

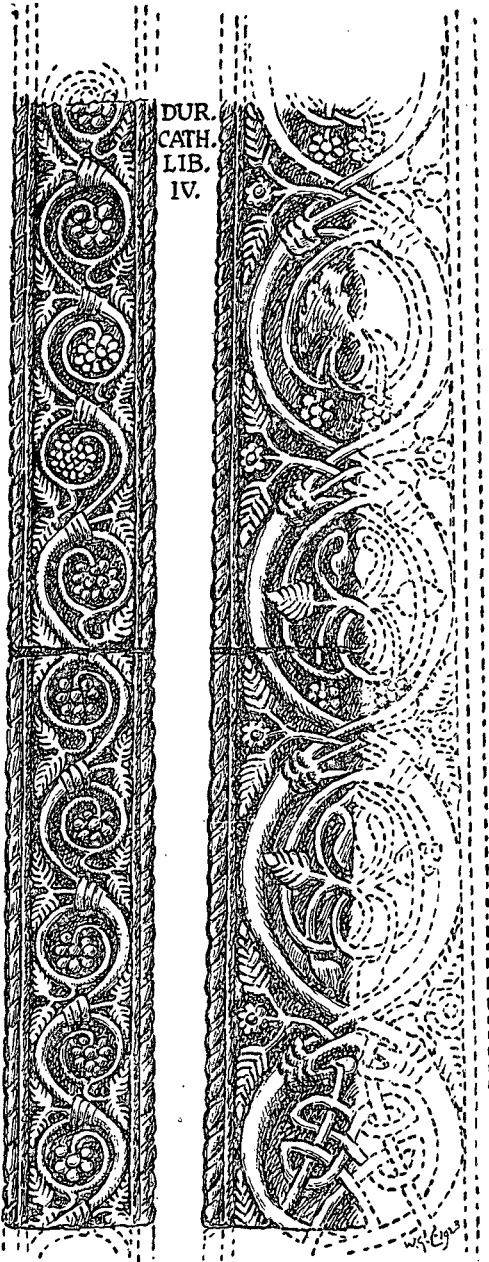


FIG. 9.

of the vine-leaves argues early date and perhaps foreign influence, for most Northumbrian carvers do not seem to have been familiar with the vine, and draw conventional leaves and fruit to their scrolls. On all grounds a date of 740-750 commends itself.

Fig. 9. THE SECOND GREAT CROSS from Hexham (Durham Cathedral Library no. iv). This may very well be the cross seen by Symeon of Durham at the foot of Acca's grave, or—more likely—at the head of an adjacent

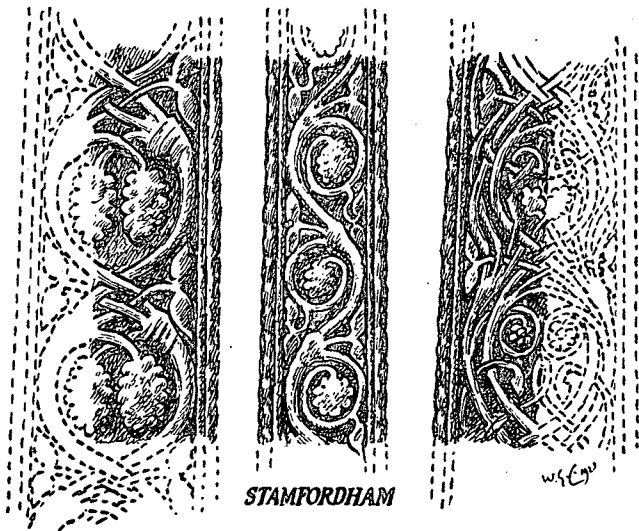


FIG. 10.

grave; for it was not usual to have two crosses to one interment and this is obviously not a work of the same time and style as Acca's cross. To any succeeding carver the extreme intricacy of the first great masterpiece must have been baffling; he would want to simplify the detail and to cover his surface with less labour. Here the vine-leaves are conventionalized: the stems are thickened into trumpets (a trick not unknown in Roman design) and the grape-bunches are as conventional as the leaves. The cable-edging is elaborated; but the one essential characteristic exemplified in Acca's cross—the Hexham double

scroll, interwoven at the crossings of the loops—is preserved. It is impossible to regard this as a predecessor of the Acca cross, tentatively working up towards an ideal. This must be a later work, later by a generation; and therefore towards the end of the 8th century at earliest.

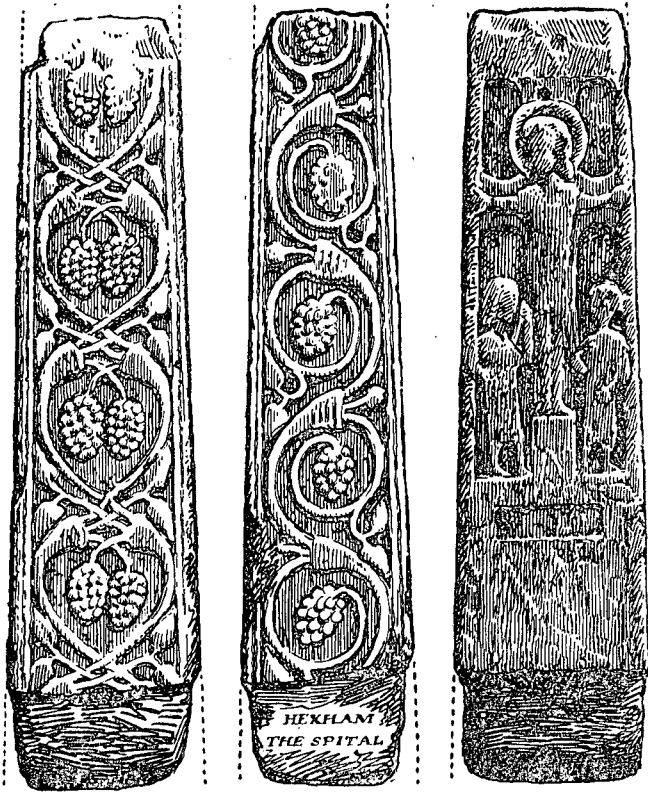
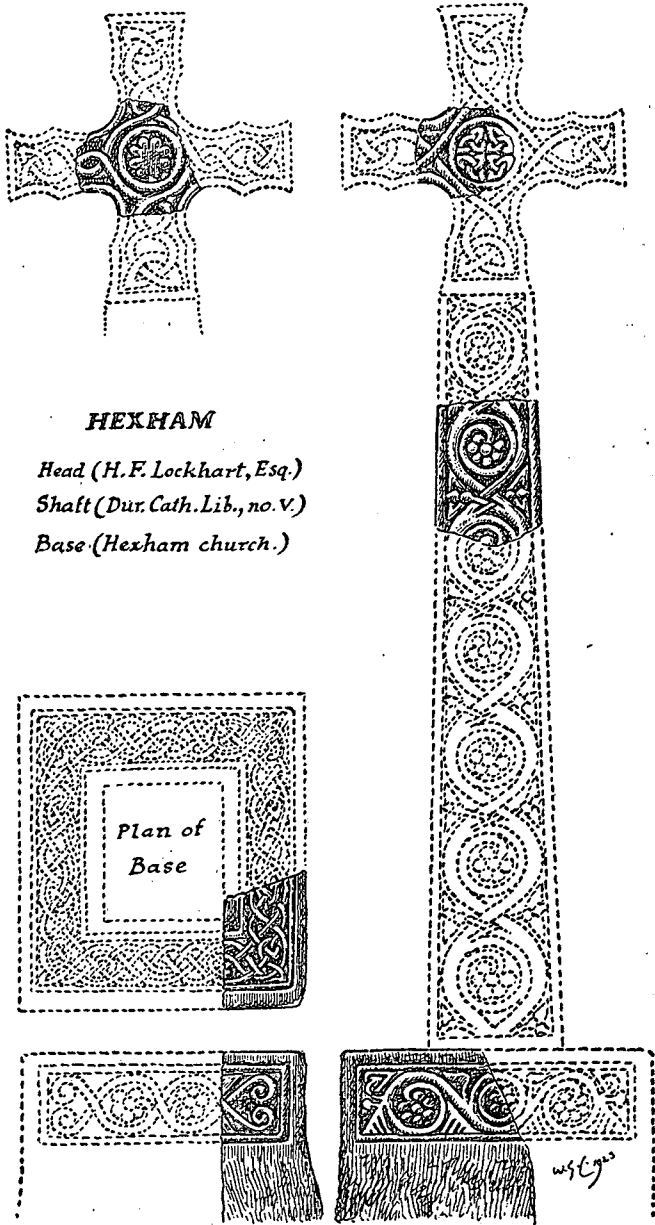


FIG. 11.—CROSS-SHAFT AT THE SPITAL, HEXHAM.

Fig. 10. THE STAMFORDHAM CROSS-SHAFT (Durham Cathedral Library, no. xii; found in the fabric of Stamfordham church). The cross represented by this fragment would be smaller than the last, but still an important work and much in the same style, but rather simpler and less "fidgeted" in the design. The third side, however, is



HEXHAM

Head (H. F. Lockhart, Esq.)
 Shaft (Dur. Cath. Lib., no. v.)
 Base (Hexham church.)

FIG. 12.

much defaced and the pattern as here drawn by no means certain. With its reduplication of flowing lines compare pieces at Lancaster, where are many relics of monuments showing Hexham influence.

Fig. 11. CROSS-SHAFT AT THE SPITAL, Hexham. This seems to be nearer to the "standard" feeling of the Acca Cross than the last two; possibly earlier, but derived from the same source and as already said, with a crucifix which may have been hinted by the Rood in the church.

Without attempting a review of the Northumbrian crosses more or less influenced by the Hexham style, it may be remarked that we find the characteristic double interlaced scroll (the twist-scroll did not come into general favour) in many examples. It is seen, for instance, on the Bewcastle cross, but not at Ruthwell. A shaft at Lancaster gives us the nearest copy of the pure Hexham type; but the fragments of the great Otley cross (reproduced in the war memorial there) show a fine derived version. At Wycliffe-on-Tees is a rather late example, and another can be inferred from broken pieces of what must have been a notable cross at Northallerton, and a still more remarkable monument at Dewsbury. Heversham (Westmorland) possesses a stone with a double scroll in which are beasts, and the interlacing is not carried out as in the true Hexham type; but it is apparently derived somewhat distantly from the same source, like another stone in Ilkley museum. A debased form of the pattern is seen on a stone at Kendal church (perhaps from Lancaster). At Halton, near Lancaster, on the "Sigurd" shaft in the churchyard, a double scroll—the latest development of the motive—appears to be of the 11th century. These instances suggest the far-reaching influence of the Hexham school of design.

Fig. 12. CROSS-BASE, ETC.—attempted restoration of three fragments. Although the base is in Hexham church, a fragment of the shaft at Durham and the centre of the head in the possession of H. F. Lockhart, Esq., at Hexham, these three stones are all of the same age and provenance. In restoring them as parts of one cross there is no violation of probability. Such a cross, with the stiff-

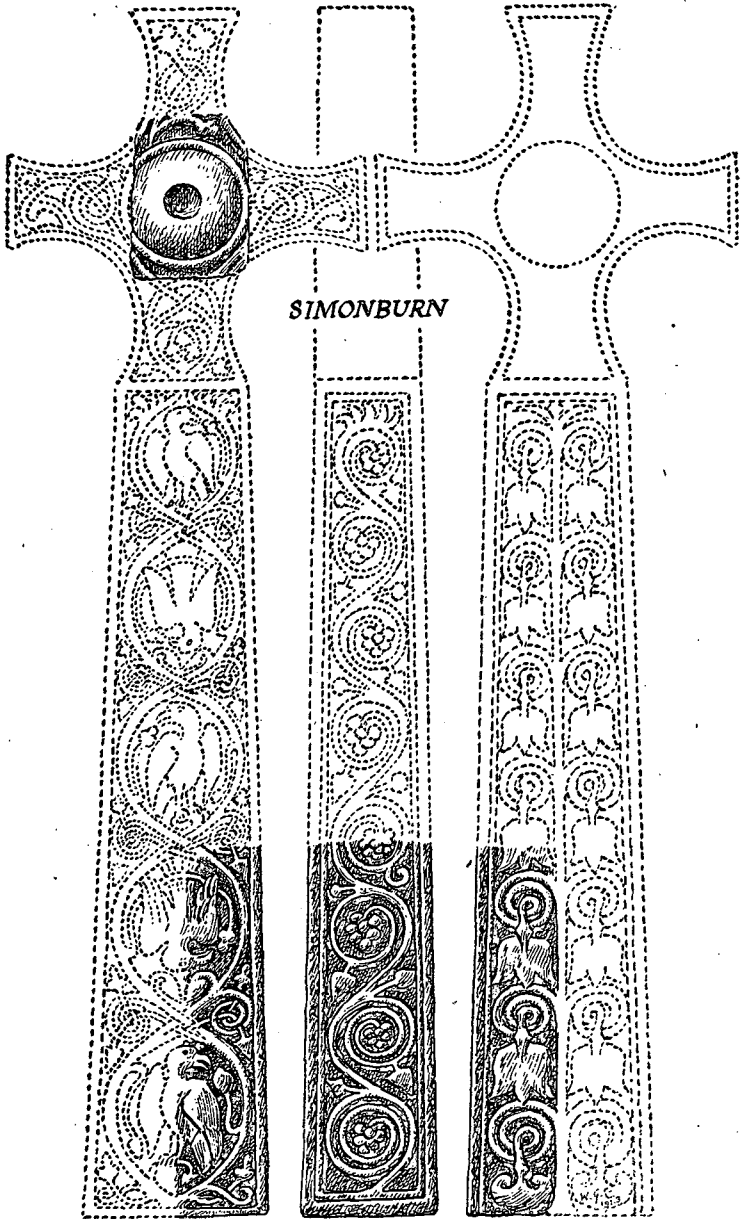


FIG. 13.

set leaves of the scroll, as seen in work datable to the middle of the 9th century at Ilkley and elsewhere; with the ornamented base, which is unusual in the earlier Anglian monuments; and with the boss of the crosshead replaced by a rosette on one side and a group of *triquetrae* on the other, must be of the period after the death of bishop Tidfrith but before Hálfðan's invasion. It dates probably about the middle of the 9th century or a little later and shows the continuance of burial at the church after the cessation of the bishopric—probably after the division of the diocese—at a time when we have no history of Hexham.

Fig. 13. SIMONBURN CROSS, restored from fragments in the church porch. The Hexham interlaced double scroll is evident on the first side, as soon as an attempt is made to complete the pattern by restoring the lost breadth of the stone. The cross-head centre shows a very large boss with a hole in it for a jewel, as in other late Anglian monuments (*e.g.*, the smaller cross at Lastingham) and fragments of stems around the centre suggest a filling of the cross-arms as drawn. The neck of such a crosshead would meet a shaft of which the stone preserved is obviously the foot; and as the patterns of all three sides work out to a simultaneous conclusion with five loops to the double scroll, it gives some encouragement to regard the restoration as plausible. The date of such a stone must be within the period of Anglian influence, but this, in the North Tyne valley, survived Hálfðan's incursion. And yet it is unlikely that work, so accomplished as this, was executed very long after the Danish invasion, which destroyed churches and abbeys and with them the schools of art working for the clerics. Now the large circle of the cross-head centre is something like that of Ruthwell, and of heads from Hoddam, and what is left of the head at Thornhill, Dumfriesshire; suggesting that there was some connexion and a prevailing taste in this area. If so, the Simonburn and Thornhill crosses can hardly be very far removed from the Ruthwell and Hoddam monuments: that is, if the latter were late 8th century, we might look for the place of the former within the 9th century.

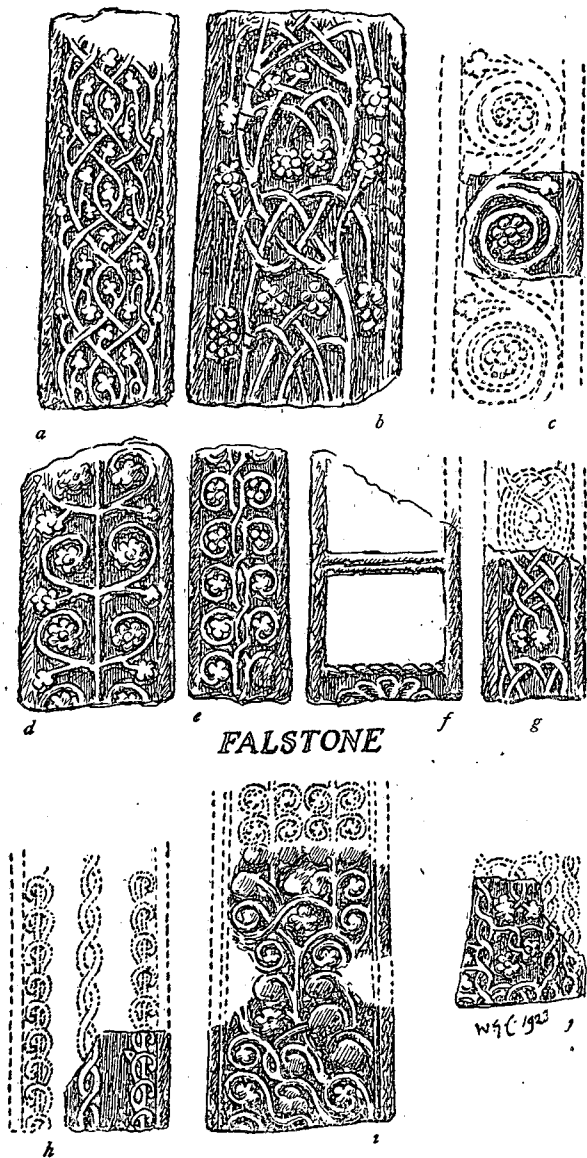


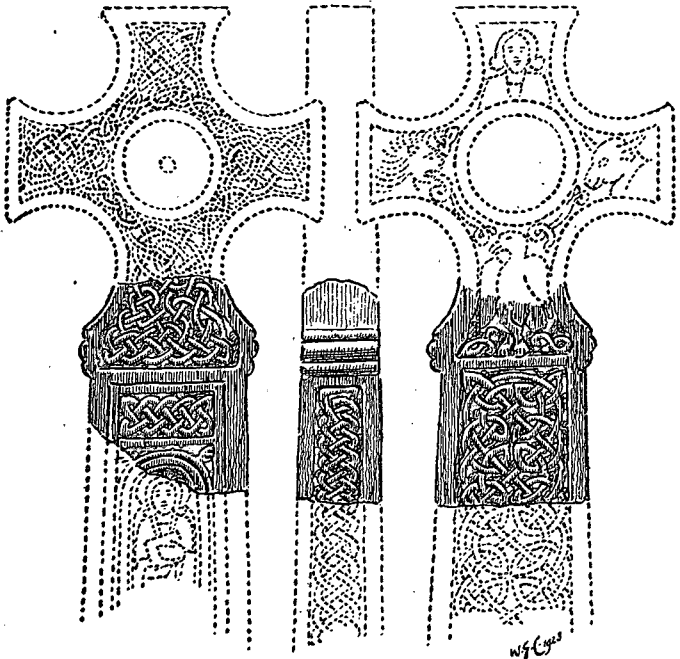
FIG. 14.

With this the stiff-set leaf of the narrower side agrees; compare similar treatment in late pre-Danish scrolls at Ilkley, etc. Also the big flowers of the third side are on a "tree-scroll" of which an instance is seen in the late pre-Danish fragments of the Northallerton cross.

Fig. 14. FALSTONE FRAGMENTS. The earliest in type, *c*, is an ordinary shaft-edge of the middle of the 9th century or thereabouts. The rest of the stones are in the Anglian tradition, but later than Simonburn. In a sense they are ill drawn, and yet there is an artistic feeling in their delicacy and variety, suggesting that they are the work of some man whose natural genius struggled with the want of training which we may believe was inevitable, after the Danish invasion had dispersed the schools of craftsmen. On *a* and *b* we see the Hexham scroll in decadence: *de* (two sides of a stone split and damaged in the fire which occurred at the church some 30 years ago) show tree-scrolls, treated differently from that at Simonburn. No. *hi* represents a very curious and original pattern; in *i* a tangle of knops and flowers working up into a couple of tree-scrolls, and contrasting with the stiff simplicity of *h*. No. *j* is a fragment of what must have been a pretty design, irregularly drawn, but covering the surface quaintly and giving a new turn to the motive derived from Anglian art. If circumstances had allowed this artist to form a school and develop his fresh style, great results might have followed; but the Angles of Northumberland in the Viking Age were in a minority, and there could have been but a poor backing for any new school of design. That they soon accepted the prevailing Anglo-Danish or Norse taste is shown by the little hogback from Falstone (not here drawn but in the Blackgate museum) which must be a work of the middle of the 10th century or later. By the time that hogback was made, the Anglian tradition which is shown in these cross-fragments must have died out.

Fig. 15. THE "EAGLE" CROSS, Hexham church; found May, 1908. The plaits are those in use in the middle of the 10th century, though derived from Anglian tradition, for Hexham was a place in which that tradition

seems to have been lasting. It was not within the area first settled by the Danes, and yet the general change of taste, as the 10th century went on, affected all parts. The arch on the first side seems to have been the old Anglian arch, under which was usually the figure of a saint. The feet at the neck of the cross on the third side may mean an eagle on that lower arm of the crosshead; and if so the



HEXHAM: Cross found 1908.

FIG. 15.

other symbols of the four evangelists may be inferred, filling the other arms; a probable analogy is in the Otley cross already mentioned, where one arm-tip has the Ox's head. The date shows a continuance of the church as a burial-place round about 950, as the next shows further continuance in the later half of the century.

Fig. 16. THE "SNAKE" CROSS, found in 1870 at Hexham church, illustrates a further stage of transition

from the Anglian tradition. The plait of the two narrower sides, in which figures-of-8 with pointed loops are threaded on a simple twist, is regular, and so far Anglian; but it is late, and it was in use in the second half of the 10th century. The badly drawn plait of the front is practically

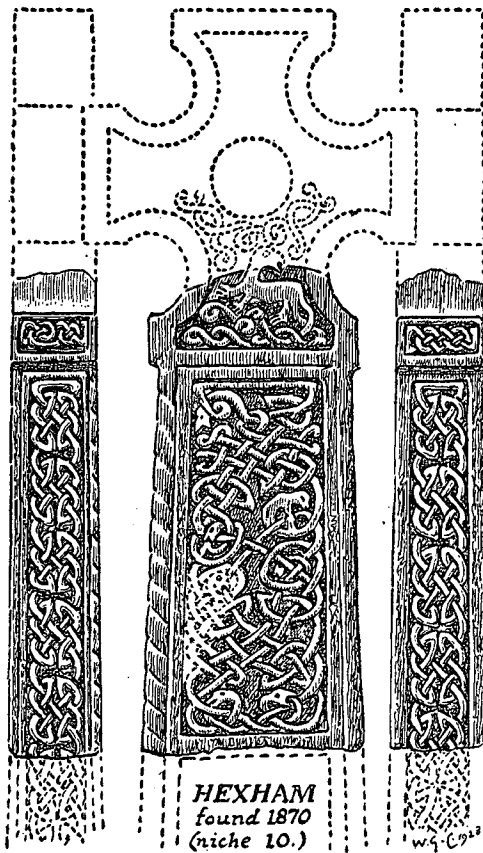


FIG. 16.

the same as that of the third side of the "Eagle" cross, but out of symmetry and interrupted with snake-heads and in one place with more than the head of a grotesque beast. Now on a stone at Lancaster bearing a similar snake-plait there is also the hart and hound of the Viking Age; and

we cannot be wrong in dating this not very far before the year 1000. The animal on the neck of the cross comes out plainly in a raking light at evening; if it was meant for a lion, perhaps it was one of the evangelist symbols as on the preceding cross.

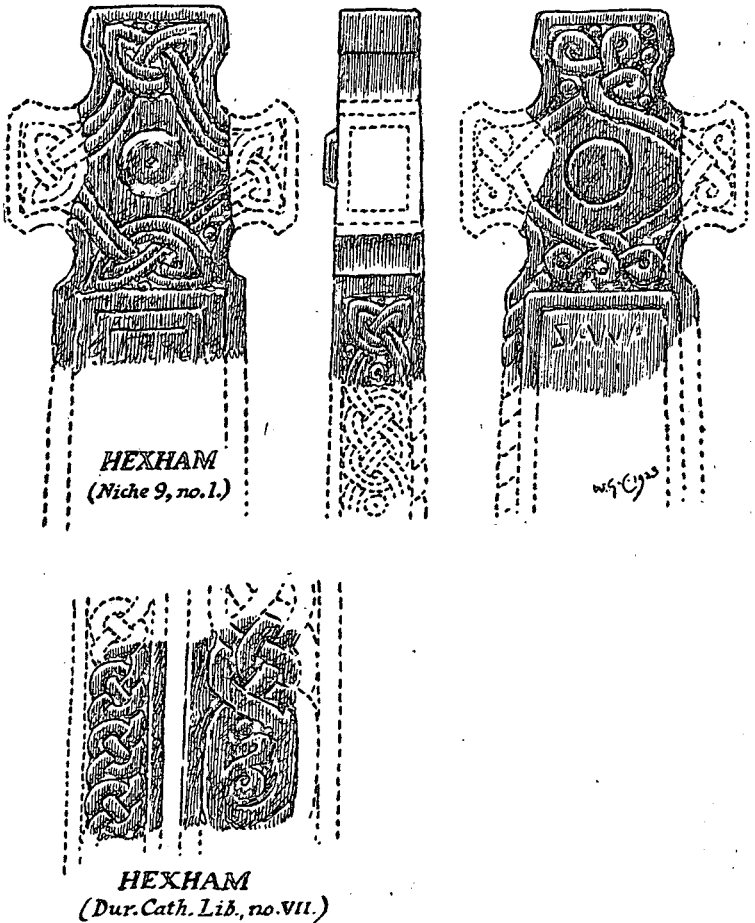


FIG. 17.

Fig. 17. TWO LATE FRAGMENTS. The shaft-fragment from Hexham (*Durham Catalogue*, no. vii) is a piece of a cross, bearing the ring-twist of the late 10th or early 11th

century on its narrow side, and, on what remains of the broad side, forms which suggest a rude and debased version of the trellis of Collingham, Kirkby Wharfe, Barwick-in-Elmet and—perhaps nearly as debased as this

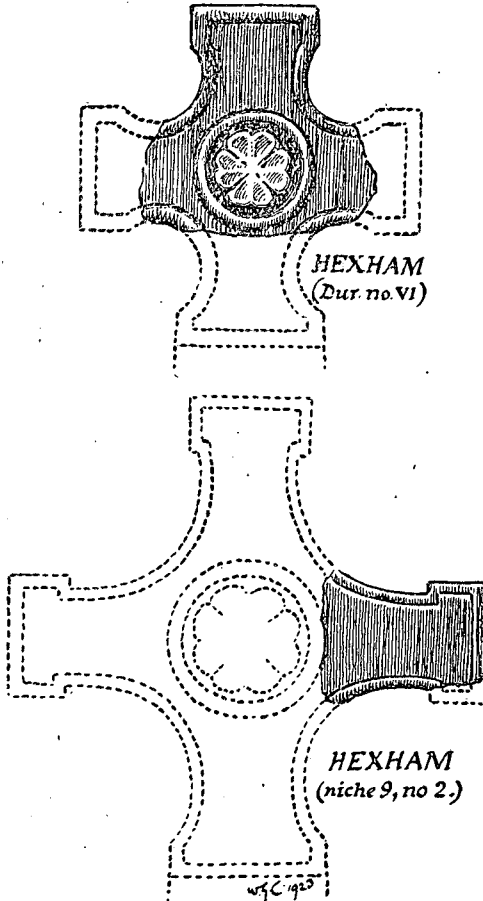


FIG. 18.

—Staveley, West Riding (for figures, see *Yorks. Archaeol. Journal*, xxiii, 137, 160, 206, 241). But the vagaries of the Viking Age in its ruder work defy analysis; and one can only say of this that it is Anglo-Danish work, of some time before or after the year 1000. If one asks why Anglo-

Danish work of a Yorkshire type should appear in this very Anglian place, it might be answered that two Gamels were priests of Hexham *tempore* Cnut; and by their names they seem to have been incomers from some Anglo-Danish district. Their period would fit that of the stone.

The inscription on the cross at Hexham (p. 88) is as it appears in Raine's *Priory of Hexham* (Surtees Society: vol. ii, p. xxxii) but I cannot now see the lettering on the stone, though it is possible enough. The clumsy head, pellets, double-strap *triquetrae* and plait of the first two views might be late 10th century; but the sausage-like twists of the third side bespeak the 11th. Compare work on fragments at North Otterington in the North Riding (*Yorks. Archaeol. Journal*, xix, 376, 379) and, later still, at Micklegate, York (*ibid.*, xx, 208-213).

Fig. 18. PLAIN CROSS-HEADS. In the first, now at Durham from Hexham, a rosette in the centre and Anglian frame-mouldings (*i.e.*, merely an incised line following the outline) are all the ornament. In the second, at Hexham church, the central circle can be inferred from an arc of the circle still traceable. At Dewsbury is part of a head of the Anglian "spatuled" form, with cable-edging and Anglian mouldings but no other ornament; and at Ilkley a plain, "spatuled" crosshead, with rings and a boss in the centre, was found on the site of the Roman fort, in or above post-Roman masonry, by Mr. A. M. Woodward in 1921. It is difficult to date these, but they must come at the end of the series of Anglian and Anglo-Danish monuments. In the crossheads at Cawthorne, West Riding, we see the transition to this form, and Cawthorne monuments seem to date about the end of the 11th century (Tolson Museum, Huddersfield, *Handbook 2*, pp. 54-56). These Hexham heads may therefore be late 11th or early 12th century.

There remain two hogbacks at Hexham church. One (in niche 5 of the North wall) has been very roughly treated to adapt it as a building-stone; but on both sides of the roof, bands of three-ply plait, single strap, between moulding lines, are left. The 10th century hogbacks are

usually tegulated; this one looks like a transition to the coped stones, as at Simonburn and Warden, and may perhaps be of the first half of the 11th century.

Fig. 19. THE HEXHAM HOGBACK (niche 7 of the North wall of the church) with the side now invisible drawn from

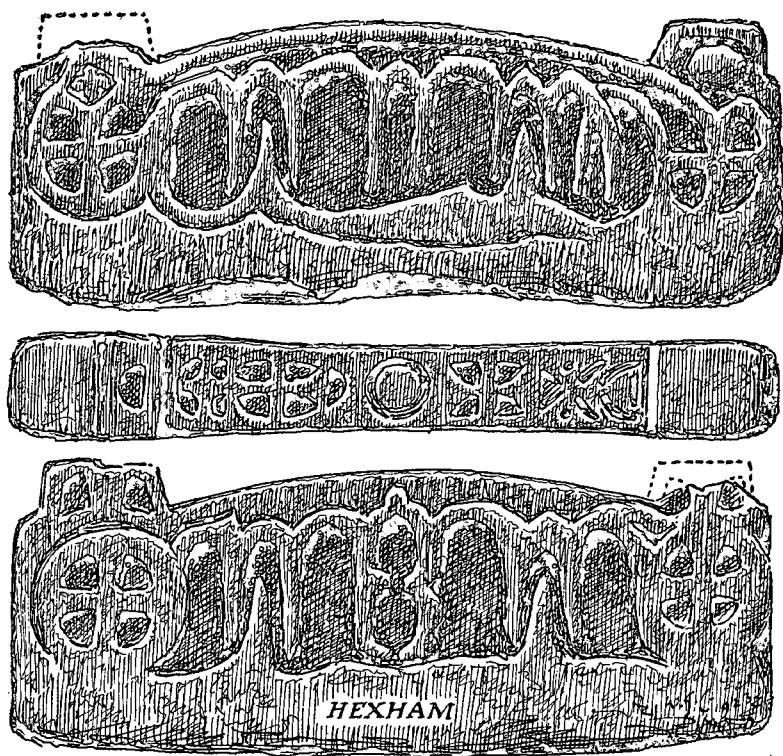


FIG. 19.

Stuart's *Sculptured Stones*, ii, plate xcv. The DC ornament on the top resembles that of Cawthorne (see p. 90) and it seems to be found on some late Galloway stones from Cassendeoch, near Glenluce, and Drummore, near Stranraer. It appears to have been used as a cheap substitute for design that required a little too much thought when art was in a very debased condition—late in the 11th

century and before the dawn of Norman craftsmanship. But we can date this hogback more closely if the forms on the side visible at Hexham church were intended for intersected arcading, seen first in the North of England on a capital at Lastingham about 1078, of which Mr. John Bilson kindly sends me a drawing. In actual architecture it appears first at Durham, 1093. This gives a strong reason for dating the hogback to the last quarter of the 11th century, and its deep cutting and clumsy lines recall the work we have already attributed to Eilaf's restoration. It represents the last dregs of the old Anglian and pre-Norman tradition, surviving after the conquest but soon to perish when the Augustinian canons got to work with their new buildings, perhaps from the time when Aschetil, the first prior, about 1130, is said to have repaired the church. But throughout its long history Hexham church seems never to have been deserted, at least as a place of burial; like some of these "bare, ruined choirs" in the west of Scotland where, even yet, new graves are dug because the place has been sacred from of old.

[*Postscript.*—Since the reading of this paper, Dr. J. Brøndsted's valuable book on *Early English Ornament* (Hachette, 1924) has appeared, a most important contribution to the subject. But incidentally it adopts the theory of prof. Strzygowski, as stated, *e.g.*, in his *Origin of Christian Church Art* (Oxford, 1923) assigning Northumbrian monuments to the actual handiwork of Oriental craftsmen. This, we think, is not yet proved. We have still to find traces of such men in these parts; we cannot learn of any crosses in the east like ours; and our scroll-patterns have much more in common with those of Italy than with the Syrian examples on which the theory seems to be based.]