VI

TWO EARLY GRAVE-MARKERS FROM BILLINGHAM

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THE IMPETUS for this short article was the discovery by the writer of a hitherto-unrecorded example of the early class of Northumbrian grave-markers (sometimes called "name-stones") in St. Cuthbert's Parish Church, Billingham. At present it is kept on a window-ledge in the south aisle, and presumably has not been recognised for what it is because of the more prominent (and later) design on the other face which is the one immediately visible.[1] This article describes and discusses the form and ornament of this stone, and the other early grave-marker from this site.[2] These grave-markers inevitably must be considered in relation to the series at Hartlepool, the well-known monastic site 10 miles from Billingham, and other early Northumbrian grave-markers at sites such as Lindisfarne, but this wider consideration is beyond the scope of this present article—as are later examples of this particular form of grave-monument which persisted as a type in Northumbria, which I hope to discuss in a subsequent paper.

Billingham is a place-name containing an early -ing form, and, as Mr. Watts has pointed out, "looks like an isolated settlement near the mouth of the Tees".[3] A pagan Anglo-Saxon grave perhaps dating from the sixth century was found at Castle Eden,[4] but otherwise this place-name is the only clear evidence of early English settlement in this area prior to the foundation of the monastery at Hartlepool c. 640.[5] All other evidence from this area comes from the Christian period. Early architectural fragments at Greatham,[6] together with baluster-shafts, a ninth-century cross-head, and an early nave at Hart,[7] indicate some expansion of settlement after the seventh century.

[1] The only references to it are: E. C. Gilbert, "Anglo Saxon Work at Billingham", PSAN 4S, 11 (1946-50), p. 204 & fig. of other face; and a record in the British Museum Department of Mediaeval and Later Antiquities "Sculpture Index" based on a letter of 13/8/1946 from Gilbert.

[2] Now in the British Museum, reg. no. 1880. 3-13.5.

[3] V. E. Watts, "Place-Names" in Durham County and City with Teesside (ed. J. C. Dewdney for Brit. Ass. for Adv. of Science, 1970), pp. 253-4; A. Mawer, Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham (1920), pp. 21-2: J. McN. Dodgson, "Various Forms of Old English -Ing in English Place Names", pp. 330-2, "The -Ing in English Place-Names like Birmingham and Altrincham", pp. 244-5, Beitrage zur Namenforschung N.F.2. (1967).

[4] R. J. Cramp, "The Anglo-Saxon period" in Durham County ... (cit. n.3 above), p. 200; D. B. Harden, "Glass Vessels in Britain", in Dark Age Britain (ed. Harden 1956), p. 139.

[5] Bede, Ecclesiastical History Bk. iii, 24, Bk. iv, 23. (ed.) B. Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors 1969, pp. 292-3 & 406-7.

[6] E. Boddington, "Pre-Conquest Discoveries at Greatham Church", AA 3S, IX (1912), pp. 11-24; Cramp, op. cit., p. 202.

[7] C. C. Hodges, "Anglo-Saxon Remains", Victoria County History: Durham, Vol. 1 (1905), p. 232; H. M. & J. Taylor, Anglo-Saxon Architecture, Vol. I (1965), pp. 287-9; R. J. Cramp, "The Position of the Otley Crosses in English Sculpture of the Eighth to Ninth Centuries", Kolloquium Uber Spätantike und Frühmittelalterliche Skulptur, Band II (1970), p. 62, n. 29.

The reference to this area as "Hartness" *sub anno* 800 by Roger of Wendover and *c.* 830-45 by Symeon[8] suggests that enough people were settled here for an early administrative unit to be defined. And it was clearly as a defined unit *a villa quae vocatur Iodene, usque ad Billingham* that the area was handed over in the early tenth century to Scula by the Norwegian King Ragnald.[9]

It is difficult to reconcile the evidence of the early place-name with the historical sources which suggest that Bishop Ecgred of Lindisfarne (830-45) founded Billingham.[10] It is just possible that they refer either to the re-foundation of the vill after the ravages of the Vikings in 800,[11] or to the building of a church rather than the foundation of a vill,[12] but it would be unwise to attempt to be too specific about the early history of Billingham. Most modern architectural historians would allot the nave of St. Cuthbert's Church to the mid-ninth century, and the tower to the late Saxon period,[13] but this is not independent dating being simply based on the statements in Symeon. Billingham was seized wrongfully by King Aelle in the mid-ninth century,[14] but was obviously back in ecclesiastical hands by the early tenth century when Bishop Cutheard granted Billingham along with other places to Elfred—who had come over from the north-west in flight from the *piratas* or Norwegian Vikings.[15] It was later taken by Ragnald,[16] and did not return to ecclesiastical hands until after the Conquest.[17] However the erection of the tower, and the existence of fragments of sculpture betraying a later taste in ornament, indicate that church-life was not dead in the last period of the Saxon era.

THE BILLINGHAM GRAVE-MARKER

The history of the grave-marker at Billingham (Pl. IV, 1 and 2) is unknown except for a note in the British Museum Department of Mediaeval and Later Antiquities "Sculpture Index" based on information from E. C. Gilbert that it was "from the roof". It is likely that it was found during the extensive re-building of the chancel in 1938. It is a large piece of what appears to be magnesian limestone now measuring 11" (27·9 cm) in height, 5¼" (13·3

[8] *Flores Historiarum* s.a. 800 in *English Historical Documents*, I, ed. D. Whitelock (1955), p. 255; *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, Lib. II, 5, in Symeon of Durham, *Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, Vol. I (1882), p. 53.

[9] *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, S23 (*op cit.*, n. 8 above, I, 209).

[10] *Hist. Dun. Eccl.*, *loc. cit.* & Lib. III, 20 (I, 108); *Hist. de Sanct. Cuth.*, S9 (I, 201).

[11] *Flores Hist.*, *loc. cit.*, n. 8 above.

[12] The previous passages in both the *Hist. Dun. Eccl.*, II, 5, and *Hist. de Sanct. Cuth.*, S9, are concerned with the foundation of churches.

[13] Gilbert, *op. cit.*, in n. 1 above; E. A. Fisher, *The Greater Anglo-Saxon Churches* (1962), pp. 50-2; Taylor & Taylor, *op cit.*, I, pp. 66-9.

[14] *Hist. Dun. Eccl.*, II, 6 (*op. cit.*, p. 55).

[15] *Hist. de. Sanct. Cuth.*, S22 (*op. cit.*, p. 208).

[16] *ibid.*, & 23 (p. 209).

[17] *Hist. Dun. Eccl.*, Lib. III, 20 (*op. cit.*, p. 108).

cm) in depth, and 1' 3½" (39·4 cm) wide, except at the top where it has
been cut back to a width of 7½" (19·1 cm). It has clearly been cut to shape
for use as a building-stone, and so it is difficult to determine its original
dimensions, and the shape at the head can only be a matter for conjecture.[18]
However, the width and depth dimensions show clearly that this was one
of the early Northumbrian grave-markers. It is considerably wider than
the other one from Billingham—whose full width was probably about 10⅛"
(25·7 cm)—and twice as deep.

The design on Face 1 (Pl. IV, 1) is of a "lorgnette" cross incised, but
shallowly, to a depth of about ⅛" (0·3 cm) on the dressed surface of the
stone. It has clearly been set out with instruments including a compass, for
the horizontal and vertical lines are visible as well as the holes for the point
of the compass. The remaining circular terminations and the central circle
are 2" (5·1 cm) in diameter, and join cross-arms of a mere ⅝" (1·6 cm)
in width. It is possible to trace a faint medial incision along the arms but
otherwise there is no embellishment of the design. Indeed it has the appear-
ance of being only at the outline stage. The absence of an inscription also
suggests that the design was not completed. There is a large break in the
surface of the stone above the left lateral arm, but it is not now possible
to determine whether it is modern or ancient, and hence whether it could
have been the cause of the apparent incompleteness of the design.

Face 2 (Pl. IV, 2) has a design of completely different character from the
last. It has a cross with arms that splay outwards and are joined at their
ends by a circle. A loose ring "interlaces" the arms near their junction,
and it is noteworthy that the vertical cross-arm over-rides the horizontal,
and a small hole, perhaps remaining from the laying-out of the design, or
else indicating a nail-joint on the cross, is at the centre. The design is cut
⅜" (1·0 cm) in relief, but the effect is secured partly by cutting a groove
around the outside of the outer circle so that some effort in cutting-back
was thereby reduced. No trace now remains of any earlier design, so that
a later dating of this design than that on Face 1 would have to be solely
on typological grounds.

This grave-marker, then, has a completely different design on each face.
That on Face 1 is quite distinctive—being a "lorgnette" cross—and imme-
diately calls to mind the series at Lindisfarne.[19] Indeed the nearest parallels
for this particular design are Lindisfarne grave-markers I, II, IV, V, VI,
VII, although all of these, in one way or another, are more complicated in
design.[20] It would be foolish to draw wide-ranging typological conclusions
based on what may be well have been, as indicated above, an uncompleted
design. However, it is interesting that the design, incomplete though it

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[18] One might guess that the diagonal shaping
of the stone on either side was the result of
its originally having been curved at the top.
[19] cf. Sir Alfred Peers, "The Carved and

Inscribed Stones of Lindisfarne", *Archaeologia*,
lxxiv (1925), pp. 225-70.
[20] Two grave-markers at Hartlepool, nos. 0
and 8, bear even more elaborate versions of
the basic "lorgnette" cross.

may be, links Billingham with the sculptural output of the primary Celtic monastery in the north. It is difficult not to see this design as being linked chronologically with the Celtic foundation at Hartlepool, and its possible missionary success at early settlement-sites nearby such as Billingham. Thus one might tentatively date the design on this face to the second half of the seventh century. However, one must remember that anachronisms can occur in art and memorial stones would tend to be fashioned in a conservative taste, so that it might conceivably be later.

The design on Face 2, raised in relief in contrast to the shallow incision on Face 1, is unusual, and in this area the closest parellel that I know of is a stone at Stanwick (now built into the porch)—without, however, the central loose-ring. As for the detail of one cross-arm over-riding another, I know of no parallel in sculpture in the pre-Conquest period.[21] There is certainly no parallel for the design as a whole in the context of the middle Saxon period, and I should therefore postulate a re-use of this particular stone—possibly as late as the post-Conquest period.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM GRAVE-MARKER

The grave-marker now in the British Museum (Pl. III, 2) was first mentioned by Haigh in 1873-4, who stated that it had been "recovered by the Rev. Canon Greenwell during the restoration of the church",[22] one of which was in 1864-5.[23] It entered the national collection in 1880 as part of the Franks Bequest, having previously been part of the Greenwell collection.[24] The fragment, of soft magnesian limestone, consists of the top left-hand corner of the grave-marker. It is $6\frac{1}{8}''$ (16·0 cm) high, $6\frac{7}{8}''$ (17·5 cm) wide, and $2\frac{1}{2}''$ (6·4 cm) deep, and has been dressed on all four faces, although only one bears any form of decoration.

The focus of the design clearly was a cross with expanded semi-circular terminals incised in V-shaped lines by means of a scriber to a depth of $c.$ $\frac{1}{16}''$ (0·15 cm). The width of the cross-arm is $\frac{5}{8}''$ (1·6 cm) and the diameter of the terminations $1\frac{3}{8}''$ (3·6 cm), so that there is a better proportion than on the other grave-marker. The compass-points for the semi-circular terminations are barely visible because of damage, but it is just possible to make out the faint laying-out line for the semi-circle over the lateral arm. Linking the terminations is a similarly incised line which forms a $\frac{3}{8}''$ (1·0 cm) wide border around this face, and within, and parallel, is a second incised line which

[21] A similar detail in metalwork is to be seen on the Faversham vase-escutcheon (F. Henry, *Irish Art*, vol. I (1965), pp. 73, 164, fig. 20c), but this, surely, can be no more than coincidence.

[22] D. H. Haigh, "On the monasteries of S. Heiu and S. Hild", *Yorks. Arch. J.*, III. (1837-4), p. 367.

[23] E. Okasha, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (1971), p. 52.

[24] F. S. Scott, "The Hildithryth Stone and the other Hartlepool Name-Stones", *AA* 4S XXXIV (1956), p. 211, n. 23.

forms a second border $1\frac{1}{8}''$ (2·8 cm) wide. This second line does not, however, join the semi-circular terminations but itself terminates in neat serifs about $\frac{1}{4}''$ (0·6 cm) away from them. Within this second border is an inscription, ORATE PRO, incised in Insular majuscule letters. This continues with an F in the upper semi-circular termination and is preceded by -INIBZ in minuscule over the semi-circular termination. The letters ORATE PR are fairly carefully made, with the two Rs, the A, and the T showing clearly a uniformity of style, but the O of PRO is mis-shapen, and contrasts strangely with the opening O. The F, of curious design, is carefully drawn, but the last few letters of the inscription, INIBZ, are less carefully drawn and less deeply cut than the rest, which themselves are about half the incised depth of the borders and cruciform device. In the interspace between the cross-arms and the border is a capital A whose tip joins the border at the top.

The A would appear to be a capital Alpha, and almost certainly would have been balanced by an Omega in the other upper interspace—as seen on Hartlepool I and VI. Dr. Okasha suggests that the F.. of the inscription in the border may begin a personal name, and offers no elucidation of the ending—on the grounds that "since the size of the letters varies, it is uncertain how many are lost, and no reconstruction can be other than conjectural".[25] Haigh's conjecture[26] that it might read ORATE PRO F(RATRIBUS NOSTRIS ET PRO CUNCTIS CHRISTIANIS H)OMINIBUS did at least have the merit of suggesting sensibly how the last letters might be understood and the sort of complex inscription that would have been required to fill the border of such a grave-marker. This of course is based on an assumption that the inscription is homogeneous. The character of the last few letters is entirely different from the earlier ones, and might be explained as an addition in a different hand. Alternatively, careless setting-out, which did not leave enough room for the whole inscription to be cut at a uniform majuscule scale, but had to be completed in minuscule, may be the reason.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of this stone is the placing of the second inscription in an extra border around the edge, and even across the arms of the cross itself. The extra border is paralleled at Lindisfarne (e.g. nos. II, III, IV, VII)—where however it is a very minor part of the design and clearly subordinate to the cross-design—and at Monkwearmouth[27] where it is relatively more important, but not so integrated with the cross-design as at Billingham. Instances of inscriptions in a border around the cross can be semi-paralleled in Ireland[28]—where, however, they are neither so obviously

[25] op. cit., p. 53. It is quite clear from examination of the stone that part of one letter such as an M or N exists before the I which Dr. Okasha restores cautiously.

[26] loc. cit.; Hübner Ae., Inscriptiones Britanniae Christianae (1876), no. 202, pp. 72 and 90; and R. A. Smith, British Museum: Guide to the Anglo-Saxon ... Antiquities.... (1923), p. 123, follow this reading.

[27] R. Cramp, "A Name-Stone from Monkwearmouth", AA 4S XLII (1964), pp. 294-8 & pl. XVI, Fig. 2.

[28] e.g. from Clonmacnois and Inis Cealtra. cf. P. Lionard, "Early Irish Grave-Slabs", Proc. Roy. Irish Academy, 61 (C) (1960-61), Fig. 6, nos. 3, 7, 12, 13 & Fig. 19.

long, nor, in fact, in a delineated border, but simply in the area between the cross-design and the edge of the stone. There is an instance in the Isle of Man of a similar inscription in a circular border around a hexafoil geometrical cross-design of the seventh century,[29] but otherwise no parallel exists from memorials of the early period.[30] However there is an inscription around the edge of the Durham Ms. A ii 17 f. 38ᵃᵥ, with the Alpha and Omega to the sides of the upper cross-arm, and this folio has letters across this arm—though in this case obviously referring to the Crucifixion scene.[31] There are also instances of words being inscribed across the cross-arm in Ireland[32]—but this was clearly a less expert copying of similar inscriptions placed above the top arm of the cross.[33] An English parallel is York VIII[34] —which however does not have the heavy border of the Billingham piece or indeed the inscription in a border, but simply across the face of the stone. An early stone at Whithorn,[35] and one or two in Wales[36] incidentally cross the cross-arm, but no real parallel for the deliberate placing of the inscription seems to exist.[37] The possibility of this being a secondary inscription cannot be ruled out—particularly in view of the apparent "scramble" to fit all the letters in at the end. Certainly the inner border, with its neat sérifs echoing the curve of the line of the expanded cross-arm fits in well with the general design as a secondary feature, and the re-use of existing memorials can be attested at Monkwearmouth.[38]

It is extremely unfortunate that the lower part of the grave-marker is missing, for it would be interesting to establish whether it was originally a tripartite inscription. On the analogy of Hartlepool nos. I and VI, it should contain the name of a deceased person—in which case the outer inscription may perhaps be better taken, as Haigh suggested,[39] as a pious general petition for prayer, rather than as recording another personal name. If the outer inscription is secondary, it may represent a later desire to generalise one's veneration as one passed by a grave of a person perhaps dim in the memory.

The cross design on this stone is a common one found at Lindisfarne (nos. II, III, VIII, X), York (no. VIII), and Hartlepool (nos. II, III, IV,

[29] Irneit's Cross, Maughold. P. M. C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses* (1907), no. 27, p. III; A. M. Cubbon, *The Art of the Manx Crosses* (1971), no. 47, p. 7.

[30] The use of the borders for lettering foreshadows the great inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross and Franks Casket—both products of the immediately succeeding, or even contemporary, age. It is also attested in a pagan context e.g. the Frankish brooch from Charnay with a runic inscription. cf. R. W. V. Elliott, *Runes* (1959), Fig. 6 on pl. III.

[31] cf. R. A. B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts* (1939), p. 17.

[32] e.g. from Inis Cealtra, *op. cit.*, n. 28 above, Fig. 11, 11.

[33] e.g. Inis Cealtra & Lismore, *ibid.*, Figs. 6, 4; and 11, nos. 5, 6, 8 and 14.

[34] Okasha, *op. cit.*, no. 153, p. 135.

[35] J. Romilley Allen, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1892), p. 497.

[36] V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (1950), nos. 54a, 110, 181, 410.

[37] The TUNDWINE grave-marker at Hexham would seem to be the nearest—while looking very different; cf. Okasha, *op. cit.*, no. 52, p. 80.

[38] Herebericht grave-slab. Okasha, *op. cit.*, no. 92, p. 101.

[39] *Op. cit.*, n. 22 above.

VI, VII). No doubt the direct inspiration, if not the stone itself, came from Hartlepool, the nearest by far to Billingham.

As far as dating is concerned, this is possible in only general terms. If one postulates a two-phase inscription, then, initially, the design links in with the Hartlepool series which almost certainly post-date *c.* 640 (the date of the foundation of the monastery), and probably pre-date 800 (the date of the Viking attack on Hartness). The relationship of this and the two Hartlepool stones with Alpha and Omega to the Durham Ms. A ii 17 would perhaps . make one incline towards a late seventh/early eighth century date. The second inscription could have been added at any time thereafter. If the inscriptions and design are seen as homogeneous, then, on typological grounds, the design would come later than both York VIII and Monkwearmouth—which have much lighter outer borders. Since Monkwearmouth was founded only in 674, a date in the eighth century is to be preferred.[40] Professor Forrest Scott, in studying the Hartlepool stones came to the conclusion on linguistic grounds that "the indications favour the seventh and eighth centuries"; art-historical grounds perhaps then support this.[41] Dr. Okasha's verdict of "prob-ably eighth to ninth century" for the inscriptions on this stone from Billingham need not be seen as being too much at variance with what has been said if it is remembered that placing of the outer border and inscription has been seen as a later feature—it is a pity that the detailed reasoning for her view has not yet been set down in print.[42]

These two grave-markers from Billingham are, then, vital pieces of evidence for the early Anglo-Saxon period in Durham. If their provenance is sound (and there seems no reason to doubt it), then they provide tangible evidence of the early settlement indicated by the *-ingas* name. They also provide evidence of the early process of Christianisation of this area of Northumbria, at a site that is not known to have been monastic. The close links on grounds of form and style with Lindisfarne and Hartlepool fit in with what we know from Bede of the work of the Celtic mission in Northum-bria. However, we need feel no compulsion to pre-date the Synod of Whitby in 664, for clearly for many people the religious basis of life will have gone on unchanged. It is difficult on grounds of form and style to date these stones with any precision, but neither would be out of place in the late seventh or early eighth centuries.

[40] The report on the excavations at York Minster, when published, may assist by demonstrating the stratigraphical and chronological relationships of the York stone.
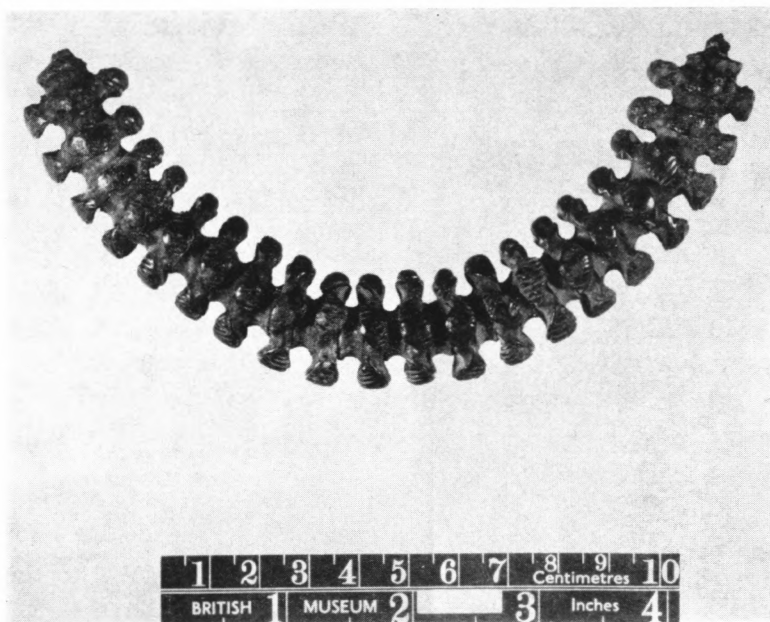
[41] *Op. cit.*, n. 24 above, p. 205.

[42] *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-3. Dr. Okasha's article on "The Non-Runic Scripts of Anglo-Saxon Inscriptions" in *Trans. Cambridge Bibliog. Soc.*, 4 (1968), pp. 321-38, does not attempt it. Her conclusion there is that "an Anglo-Saxon inscription cannot be dated at all closely on epigraphical grounds".
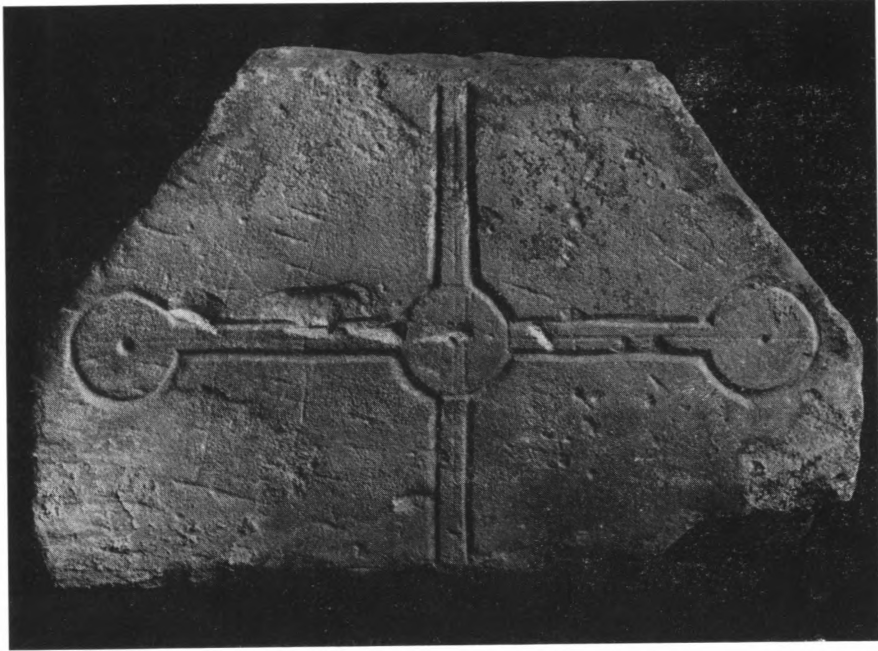
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. The Perdiswell Torc

2. Grave-marker from Billingham at the British Museum

Photo: British Museum

1. Billingham grave-marker, Face 1

2. Billingham grave-marker, Face 2

Photos: T. Middlemass, Department of Archaeology, Durham University