XII

THE STONES OF ST. ANDREW'S, CORBRIDGE

Walter Iley

THERE ARE four main phases in the history of St. Andrew's, Corbridge:

1. 675-1200 A.D.: The construction of the Saxon church, its partial destruction about 920, and the heightening and replanning of the tower and main entrance in the 11th Century.
2. 1200-1296: The reconstruction of the nave and construction of the chancel, transepts and aisles.
3. 1296-1850: Periods of destruction in the early 14th Century, mid-16th Century and mid-17th Century, and of temporary repair and maintenance over the remainder of the period, with minor rebuilding from time to time (e.g. final stage of tower, clock in tower, window in south transept).
4. 1850 onwards: extensive and thorough restoration, renewal of windows and glass, reopening of tower and vestries and damaged aisles, new font, porch, lychgate, interior fittings and windows at several points.

In all these periods things have been taken into and out of the church, and many things have been put to new uses within it or in its environs. Some of them have been recorded; some of the recorded things are still there, some have disappeared. A few unrecorded things have been discovered or rediscovered. The rest of this paper gives some notes on the Roman, Saxon and later medieval antiquities now in or near the church, or which have been recorded as being there in the past.

THE ROMAN ANTIQUITIES

1. It seems that the Saxons used only Roman worked stones for the building of their church. The large stones at the base of the tower, in the quoins, and high up in the north wall of the nave (where they were apparently placed to take the arch of the windows, as in the west window of the tower) are especially notable. From their similarity in size and the frequency of the cramp holes, it seems likely that they came from the cistern and fountain at Corstopitum.

2. The Roman arch between the tower and nave has had the impost at its southern side roughly hacked off. It is said that this was done when the

organ was moved into the tower as it proved a little too wide for the arch. It is now not possible to discern the difference in the sections or mouldings of the two imposts which led Mr. C. C. Hodges in 1893 to the opinion that they were not originally a part of the arch, but "from the base or cornice of some great building".[1] The damage then has been done at some time since 1893, but I have not found when it was perpetrated. The organ is long since removed from the tower.

3. A stone inscribed "LEG II AUG. COH IV Fecit" was recorded by Bishop Pococke as "at the N.E. angle of the church" in 1760. It was much defaced then, and may now be wholly unrecognisable. I have failed to find it.

4. A sculptured stone representing a boar's head is recorded in 1883 as "in the belfry",[2] possibly the same as that mentioned in 1865 as "built in" at the back of the church[3] though that is designated a boar. I have searched for it diligently without success. Its fate may be recorded by Mr. Hodges in 1893 when he says /"The internal south jamb of the east window of belfry had a curiously moulded impost stone, which for some reason was hacked off in 1887"/.[4]

5. In the churchyard, outside the north transept, stands the upper part of a large Roman altar, much defaced by exposure and by its use for some purpose which entailed removing one scroll from the top, and cutting a deep groove across its upper surface. I have found no record of it, and it seems to have been unknown locally until it was rediscovered by a visiting archaeologist in 1971. It has a sculpted figure in low relief on each side, but I have seen no trace of the inscription.

SAXON STONES

6. Mr. C. C. Hodges in 1893 mentions the finial cross which he thinks probably stood on the gable of the tower after its second stage of development in the 11th Century.[5] This may be that which now stands on the sill of the east window of the south transept (Plate XVIII, 1). Though much damaged, it bears little sign of weathering, and it may be that the stone fell from the tower during one of the attacks on the church and was protected from weathering by being buried under other debris. The dark patch at its centre may have resulted from chemical changes from burning. Another finial cross, illustrated in Vol. 10 of the County History, is now, I am informed, embedded in a Corbridge wall.

7. Another relic of this era is the YRIC stone, next to the finial cross in the south transept. The lettering and its execution (Plate XVIII, 2)—it is not chiselled but scratched into the surface—and the name itself,

[1] *The Reliquary*, N.S., Vol. VII, 12.
[2] *PSAN*, Vol. I, p. 296.
[3] *AA*, N.S., Vol. VI, p. 18.
[4] *Reliquary*, New Series, Vol. VII.
[5] *Loc. cit.*

suggest that this may be part of a grave slab of the 10th Century. In or about 924 the Norsemen from Cumberland united with the Danes from the Humber area to defeat the Northumbrians and Scots at Corbridge, and thereafter a small sub-kingdom of the Danes was centred on Corbridge until they were driven out some thirty years later. Their king was named Eric, but this is not likely to have been his stone, as he seems to have survived the overthrow of his power.[6] But it may have been one of his men: it seems not unreasonable to conjecture that this stone is linked with this episode in Corbridge history.

8. The stones with the saltire decoration over the former west entrance to the tower from the churchyard can be seen in the right light, but are indistinct.[7] It is noteworthy that Hodges in 1893 seems to have been in no doubt that the pattern was continuous around the arch.

9. Fortunately, no one has filled in the hole at the top of the north western arch of the nave, where the Roman stone has been cut to provide a suitable arch for a Saxon window, and then, six hundred years later, the medieval masons have intersected window and stone with their arch.

NORMAN AND LATER MEDIEVAL STONES

10. The Norman doorway, presumably moved to its present position when the south aisle was built in the 13th Century, has attracted less attention than it deserves. The 19th Century antiquarians saw in it the marks of burning, and not long ago children were being taught that its central moulding represented a snake, the remains of the two small terminal heads or bosses (presumably knocked off by one of those iconoclasts, of several persuasions, who have infested the church over the centuries) being its head and tail.

11. There are at least eleven medieval grave slabs within the church and eight in the Vicar's Pele, either whole or in recognisable fragments.

They are as follows:

(a) In the north west corner of the western aisle to the north transept.
  (1) a small grave cover with shears, perhaps a girl's, and
  (2) the calvary of a cross to its right, inset in the west wall.
  (3) two fragments, one with a shaft of a cross, the other with a curious carving not identified (see Plate XIX, 1) are acting as sills to the modern windows.

  (Note also the small cross near the floor in north wall.)

(b) In the north transept, in the recess in the north wall, is a grave slab

[6] *AA*[2] X, p. 99 (1885).

[7] "Anglian Masonry", G. W. D. Briggs, G. Graham, D. Parson, *AA*[4] XXXIX.

with an inverted pastoral staff. As the staff ordinarily denotes a bishop, abbot or prior, it may have marked the grave of Robert de Morville, who was at one time Prior of Carlisle but for some reason unknown was sent as vicar to Corbridge. He was vicar from 1258 to 1290, although most of that time he spent in Carlisle Priory. It may be that in death his pastoral staff was restored to him. He was a de Morville of Burgh on Sands, and a connection of that Hugh de Morville who was one of the assassins of Thomas à Becket in 1170 (Plate XX, 1).

(c) Beneath (b) is the slab of Hugo the son of Aslinus, more usually known as Hugh the son of Asceline, a merchant prominent in the borough of Corbridge at the end of the 13th and early 14th centuries. He had messuages in the Market Place, Princes Street and Hill Street, and paid the fourth largest subsidy of all Corbridge freeholders in 1296. He was fined for selling wine "contrary to assize", and sent his son to join the new scholars at Oxenford, from which the lad returned mentally deranged, leaving Hugh without an acceptable near heir. The grave in the arched recess was a great honour usually reserved for important founders and benefactors. It seems likely that Hugh, rich and without near kin to inherit his wealth, was a main subscriber to the costs of extending the church in the 13th Century (Plate XX, 1).

(d) In front of the recess, inset in the floor, are two slabs, the one almost completely defaced, the other with an axe and three hunting horns within a roundel. This no doubt marks the grave of one of the several men known as John the Forester, or interchangeably as John Forster, who were prominent in Corbridge between 1300 and 1350. The three hunting horns were later incorporated in the arms of Forster of Corbridge.

(e) In the west jamb of the window above the recess is another calvary from a grave-slab—faintly but clearly visible in the right light. It was the chance discovery of a visitor late in 1971.

(f) Above a window in the chancel (the "low-side window") is a very large and fine grave-slab with shears and foliate cross, the cross head partly embedded in the wall. It acts as a lintel, and is of admirable size and strength for supporting the heavy wall above.

(g) In the floor of the chancel, and separated from the altar by the fine range of slabs dating from 1669-1720,[8] are two especially interesting priests' slabs, each with the curious taper made by reducing the angle at one side of the slab only, leaving the right side rectangular (Plate XX, 2). Since they are of the same angle, and as one has its head and the other its foot towards the altar, they together make a rectangle,

[8] The slab to Henry Guy has at its foot the calvary of a 13th or 14th century cross, and has evidently been re-used.

and so overcome the difficulties which such stones produce from their irregularity when they are inset singly into a flagged or tiled floor. Stones of this type are "common alike in England, France and Belgium" according to an expert in sepulchral monuments.[9] He goes on to say that "they are rarely if ever inscribed or indented with crosses or inlaid with brasses: the surface is always flat, but the sides are occasionally moulded". These, however, do not conform with this dictum: one is a cross in relief, the other a cross partly in relief and partly incised. He considers it "most desirable to ascertain whether the inclined line is always on the left"; both these examples conform. Another Victorian expert says such stones "were evidently designed to be placed in immediate connection with one of the walls of the church".[10] This seems improbable: it is perhaps more likely that they were designed to lie as at Corbridge, especially in monasteries or chantries where one brother in due time took his place beside another. Mr. D'Aveney suggests that such slabs may distinguish the graves of deacons and others not in full orders, and says that they are "most generally" found at the entrance doors of churches. The Corbridge slabs may mark the graves of mass priests from the adjoining chantry of St. Mary, or of two of the several unbeneficed clergy recorded in the period 1250-1350, if they are not those of former vicars.

The northerly slab was well known: it is represented in two Victorian books on church monuments. The foliate cross-head is almost wholly worn away, and I find no trace of the wafer said to be part of the design one hundred years ago. The calvary, chalice and paten are exceptionally well preserved.

The southerly slab is much more worn, and the middle part has been replaced. The foliate head is elaborate and beautiful; originally the indentations would be filled with some material—lead, pitch, plaster, coloured cement—which would emphasise its design.

Both slabs are probably of the 13th Century, when the design of such monuments was perhaps at its best.

(h) There is a fragment of a slab on the window sill in the south transept, again with shears and cross, but in a simpler manner.

(i) The last of the grave-slabs within the church is perhaps the most interesting, although it is no more than a fragment measuring 14″ by 10″. It is at the right hand of the east window of the south aisle, and was detected, when it was much less clearly visible than now, by a visitor from Dorset in the autumn of 1972. The halbert of the Stagshaw Fair exhibit intersects it.

The fragment has on it the point of a sword, indicating that it once

[9] H. D'Aveney, *Notes and Queries*, 2nd S., IX, 1860.

[10] Canon C. Boutell, *Christian Monuments*.

marked the grave of a knight, squire or man-at-arms—a "gentleman". By its side is a crude engraving of a pot, with a lily plant with three blooms growing from it (Plate XXI, 1). It is an emblem of the Blessed Virgin Mary which originated in the medieval legend of the Christian and Jew who were arguing about the Christian faith over a pot of wine. The Christian illustrated the Virgin Birth by exemplifying the lily, the immaculate pure flower which sprang from the soil. The Jew pointed out the obvious flaw in this—flowers and many other beautiful things ordinarily came from the earth, there was cause and effect in a perfectly normal way. "Now," he said, "if a lily had sprung from that wine-pot there"—and, as he pointed, a lily plant in full bloom was growing from the wine-pot. It was a favourite story, and the pot of lilies a favourite emblem over several countries and times, most often found in churches or chapels named after the Virgin. Very often it is part of a group—the Virgin and the Angel of the Annunciation, with the Pot of Lilies between them. It appears in this form on the bell dedicated to St. Mary in St. Nicholas' Cathedral, Newcastle upon Tyne,[11] and also on a stone formerly in St. Mary's Abbey, York, and now in the York Museum.[12] It is presented alone, without the Annunciation scene, in the series of emblems sculpted to the north of the High Altar in Hexham Abbey, where it appears with the fox preaching to the geese, St. George and the Dragon, the ape, the pelican in her piety. There is an elaborate and late example (probably 16th Century) in the Lily Window of the church of St. Michael North of the Wall, Oxford, where the lily rises from a jar of many tiers, and has five blooms, and among them is the crucified Christ. In 1454 it was represented in a tapestry in the New Chamber in Durham Castle, the gift of the Prior.[13] But the Corbridge example is the classic one of the 12th or 13th centuries. The bowl is the simplest possible shape, and the lily plant exactly resembles that illustrated by H. Bayley in his book *The lost language of symbolism.*

There is said to be a stone with a bowl and lilies built into the east end of the north churchyard wall at Mitford, but a somewhat cursory search in September 1972 did not discover it.

Though the emblem is known throughout Western Europe it is far from common, and the Corbridge "pot" is the only example I have traced of the emblem on a grave-slab. It is therefore a most interesting stone to go so long undetected in its prominent position in the body of the church. Yet within two months of its discovery another possible example was found at St. Andrew's. It is a fragment used as a building stone on the outer wall of the church, about four feet high at the west

[11] *PSAN*, 2nd S., Vol. VII.
[12] Anderson, *Imagery in British Churches*, pp. 101-3.
[13] *Surtees Society*, Vol. XCIX, p. 149.

end of the north wall of the north transept. It consists only of the lower part of the bowl (Plate XXI, 2); no trace of a lily plant remains. But the style and curvature are those of the "pot" inside the church, to a scale three times as large. The outside pot has a base of 15″, the inside one of 5″. There is nothing to indicate of what type of monument the outside stone was once a part, but it seems much too large for a grave-slab. There is very little to form an opinion on, and it can be no more than a suggestion that it may have formed part of a tableau of the Annunciation, and that the curiously carved stone (Plate XIX, 1) within the north transept may be part of the wing (or perhaps the vestments) of the Angel. Such a sculpture would be a fitting entablature or reredos for the chapel of the Virgin nearby.

(j) There are a number of grave-slabs in the Pele, including two large slabs each bearing the shears (one of them a lintel) and a very well preserved small slab, presumably a child's, with a sword and floriate cross. Another very well preserved slab, of an early type, forms part of the roof at the top of the second stairs. The coped slabs may be early and interesting, but it is not yet possible to examine them closely.

12. Other medieval stones include:

(a) A fragment of a pre-Reformation altar on the sill of the south transept window (east wall). It contains two of the symbols denoting the five wounds of Christ. Mr. Hodges in 1893[14] mentions another fragment inset into the wall of the south aisle, east of the main entrance, but I can find no trace of it. It is unlikely that it has been removed: it may reappear when the plaster used in repointing has perished.

(b) The two headed corbel (Plate XIX, 2).

This stone in the south aisle no longer serves any structural purpose; it must have been placed there as a decoration or point of interest after serving its original purpose elsewhere.

A paper in *AA*[4], Vol. V, says:

"The peculiar double headed corbals, the heads facing outwards at an angle of 45°, are rare, but occur at Corbridge, old St. Nicholas, Durham, the gateway at Prudhoe Castle, and Stockton Castle." I have also seen two-headed stones at Mitford and Ponteland. It is doubtful whether any is at an angle of 45°, and the only similarity they share is in being two heads cut in one stone. Those at Prudhoe Castle are coarse, heavy and in low relief. Those at Mitford are nearer the Corbridge type, but as they are in the outer wall they are much more

[14] *Reliquary*, Vol. VII.

decayed, and little detail remains. Those formerly in Stockton Castle, and reported in Vol. IX (3rd ser., p. 204) of our *Proceedings* as in the garden of Elton Hall, are shown in an accompanying illustration to be very rough and powerful. They are said to be the heads not of men but of lions, and this seems possible, and indeed probable. Those at Ponteland are illustrated in Vol. VIII of our *Proceedings* (4th Series) and are said to represent Adam and Eve before and after the Fall. The motif of joy and sorrow is the same as at Corbridge, but there is little resemblance in style. They are very fine, in good condition, and much more detailed than the Corbridge examples. They may have been recut: this would account for their excellent preservation, and also for what seems to me a style more Victorian-classical than 13th Century. I have not seen the heads at St. Nicholas, Durham.

There is another two headed stone at Corbridge, that now serving as a quoin in an outhouse in the Wheatsheaf yard. It is probably ecclesiastical too—St. Helen's Church and All Saints' Church were both nearby, and many stones from them survive in Corbridge walls and rockeries. The Wheatsheaf heads are on different faces of a cubic stone, and are in low relief. They are much rougher than those of St. Andrew's—more like those in Prudhoe Castle gateway.

The St. Andrew's heads have not escaped the injuries to be expected from their long turbulent history, but with their mutilations they remain a work of art. The mason who fashioned them still conveys to us the vigour and vitality of his conception and its execution. A surprising proportion of visitors to the church identify the heads at once—often at first glance—with the classical mask of Tragedy and Comedy, of Sorrow and Joy. But if it is so, there is nothing classical about them except the inspiration, for they are wholly medieval in style. The mason may well have seen Roman sculptures in English Roman towns or in those of France or Italy, but if he has obtained his inspiration from a classical source, he has reproduced it in his own idiom.

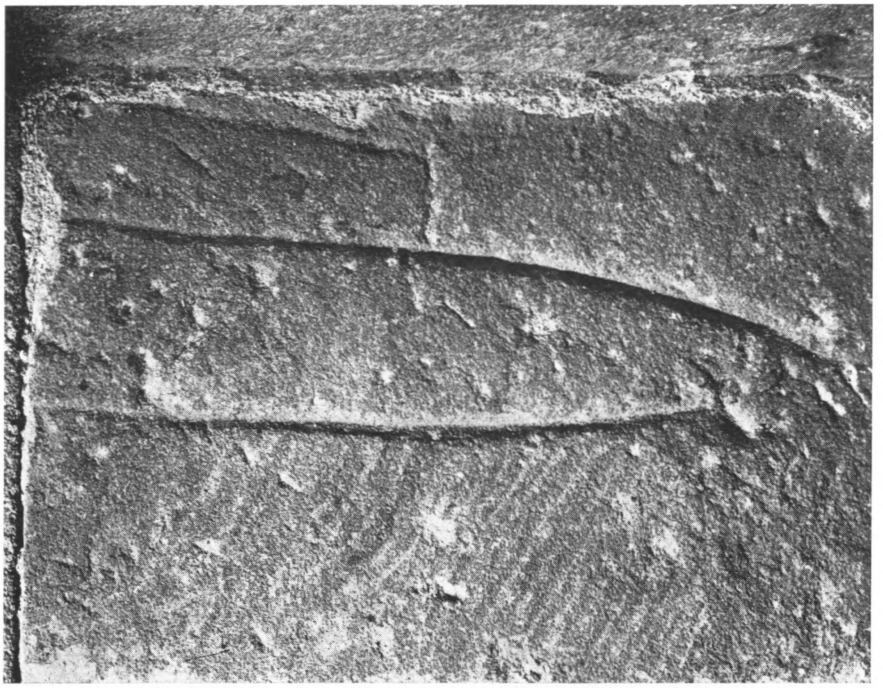
13. THE MASONS' MARKS

Vol. III (1887) of our *Proceedings* gives twelve examples of masons' marks in St. Andrew's. I have found only three of these again, but have found five new marks. A very fine and elaborate mark will be found low down on the first pillar to the left on entering the church, and five more on the first pillar to the right and in the spring of the arches above it. Masons' marks may date from early in the 13th Century to about the middle of the 19th: it is rarely possible to date them accurately, but these appear chiefly in 13th Century work, and are probably early. Two of them may be duplicated—one of them

1. Anglian cross, south transept

2. The YRIC stone, south transept

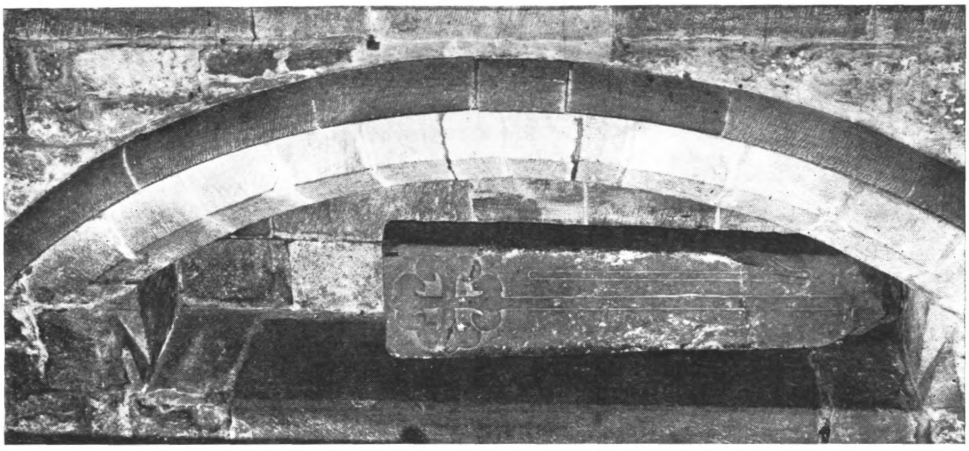
Photos: H. Edgar



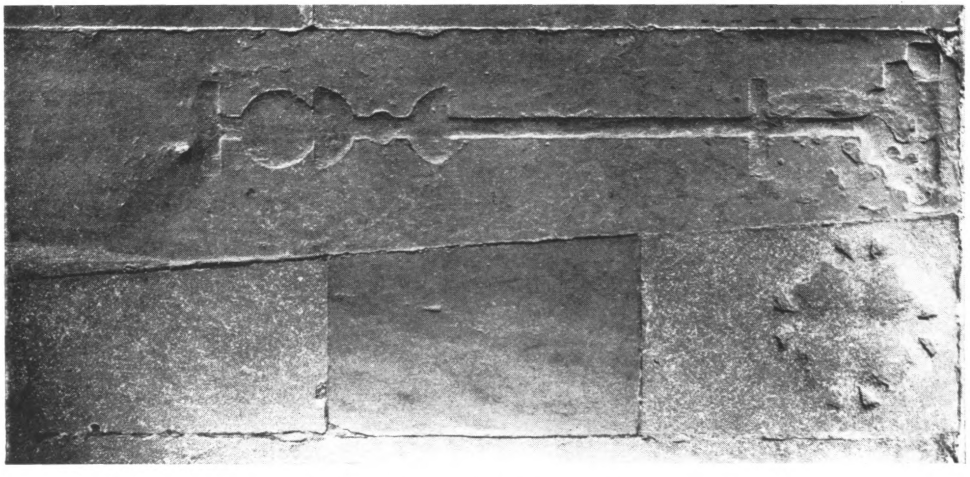
1. Sill in north transept aisle

2. The two-headed corbel

Photos: H. Edgar



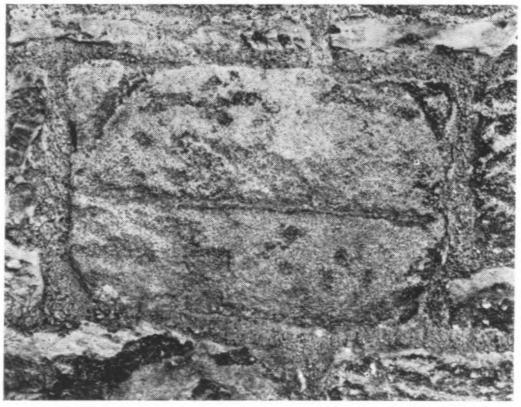
1. Grave slabs, north transept



2. Priest's grave slabs in chancel

Photos: H. Edgar

1. The pot of lilies, south aisle



2. Stone in north wall (exterior)

Photos: H. Edgar

on a postern gate at the Castle at Newcastle, the other at Pontefract Castle.[15]

14. There are two puzzling stones in the churchyard outside the north transept and chancel. Both are ornamented cross heads possibly of the 12th Century, but they seem too big and massive for sepulchral slabs and it is not easy to see where they can have fitted into the church of that period. There is also a small decorated stone, possibly a holy water stoup, probably of about the same period.[16] The most puzzling of all is a hollow stone, possibly a font, which seems to me, and to a stone merchant who visited the church, to be modern, but which an archaeologist has declared to be ancient.

15. THE MISSING STONES

Some of these have been mentioned above, but there are many more. In 1885 our Society visited St. Andrew's, and the reporter of the visit in the succeeding volume of our *Proceedings* did not spare his criticisms.[17] "In the chancel is a grave cover with rudely sculptured legend 'Hic iacet Alicia uxor William de Tynedale orate pro'. Other slabs have been unlawfully removed from the church and lie about the vicarage garden. The vicar had refused to restore (them) to the church." And again, "The interior string moulding of the chancel had been destroyed to accommodate a framework of oak on which the creed and commandments are inscribed". There is no oak frame now, and at least part of the string moulding is still there, but the slab of Alicia de Tynedale, and those in the vicarage garden, are no longer to be found. Perhaps the vicarage slabs were returned after all and now lie in the Pele. Perhaps Lady Alicia's stone serves some useful purpose as a lintel or in a garden path, and may eventually return to us. (It is not that which now supports the wall over the "low-side window", for that is mentioned in the same account.)[18] I fear, however, that there is a suggestion that the antiquarians and the vicar, and that vicar's successor, came to be on very bad terms, and that some deliberate removal or destruction of antiquities cannot be ruled out. The vicar's successor in the year following the visit was a pious man of evangelical principles. It seems to have been in his time that the impost of the Roman arch was so rudely damaged, and "the curiously moulded stone", possibly the legionary boar or boar's head, was "for some reason hacked off". The keystone "of a groined vaulting, bearing an inscription around, apparently Johannus"[19] also seems to have disappeared from the

[15] Since this was written Mr. F. Melville of Corbridge has identified, drawn and "plotted" no fewer than 94 masons' marks in the church.

[16] Since this was written, Miss Barbara Harbottle has identified this stone as a creeing trough, a relatively common stone mortar.

[17] *Proceedings*, New Series, Vol. I.

[18] The Alicia de Tynedale slab, and several others which have disappeared, are illustrated in *NCH*, Vol. 10.

[19] *Proceedings*, 3rd Series, Vol. II. A photograph was exhibited to our Society in 1906 and may be in the archives, but it is more probably (if it survives) with the descendants of Mr. J. A. Irving of Corbridge, the exhibitor.

Mary chapel about this time. The sepulchral slabs then numbered 31 and now number about 20—and this despite the Act 24/25 Victoria, which made anyone who wilfully destroyed or damaged a memorial of the dead liable to six months' hard labour. The vicar of that time may well have thought the antiquarians as bad as, or worse than, the papists who had so distressed his forbears, and expressed his feelings by destroying their idols or ejecting them from the tabernacle. His church was not a museum, but the place where he would furnish his poor sinful villagers with the strength and grace to fight the devil and all his works. If this was the feeling, and there are pointers to it in Corbridge and in other places, and if this feeling led to the active repudiation of antiquarian values, there is a moral for us today. So far as I have observed, the more deeply the many visitors to St. Andrew's are impressed by the beauty and antiquity of the church the more reverent is their behaviour and the more religious their approach, but there is sometimes resentment if the historical interest is not strictly subordinate to the prime purpose of the church.

16. THE REV. J. WALTON'S COLLECTION

It is also probable that for quite different reasons an earlier vicar robbed and despoiled his parish of its monuments. The Rev. John Walton (1742-65) was a keen antiquarian and collector. The most notable part of his collection was the vicarage "necessary house" (the 18th Century euphemism for the place of so many modern euphemisms—lavatory, toilet, loo, comfort station). It was built almost entirely of Roman altars and armorial stones, and several people commented on this unique temple to Corbridgian culture. The Rev. Mr. Walton left instructions in his will that his collections were to be disposed of for the benefit of his heirs, but either his necessary house was not included or there were no buyers. It was still there in 1828 when Archdeacon Singleton commented on it, and particularly on a coat of arms containing "three most volant horses and three rings".[20] One suspects that the armorial stones came from the church: there are none there now. The present vicar, the Rev. G. B. Chadwick, and I searched for any remnant of the necessary house, but found none unless the lion and stag sculpture (very much defaced) in his stable wall derives from it. It may be that the present vicarage is not that of Mr. Walton's time. But what is clear is that we have no old armorial stones in the church, and that the necessary house which may have incorporated them is also gone.

Incidentally Bishop Pococke in 1760 does not refer to the necessary house, but refers to the Rev. John Walton's collection of antiquities, which included

[20] The three rings suggest a connection with the Lowther, de Halton or Carnaby families, all of Halton within the parish, but I have not been able to trace the "three most volant horses".

the sculpture of a boar and one of a "capricorn". There were also "leaden tesserae". The tesserae may have been Roman, but may also have been medieval insets of the floriate crosses of the 13th Century. Like all other items of Mr. Walton's collection, goat and boar and tesserae are now unknown.

17. THE RODIS STONE

It is pleasant after such dire losses to record a stone missing from Corbridge, but returned to its place of origin and there worthily displayed. In Volume VIII of our *Proceedings* we hear of a visit to St. Andrew's on which was seen "In the chancel, lying loose, a boss from the tower of All Saints, Newcastle. This bears a shield with the arms of Rodis surrounded by a ribbon, and the inscription *Orate pro anima Roberti Rodis*". Robert Rodis represented Newcastle in Parliament in 1427, '28, '32, '34, and '41, and was probably responsible for the building of the famous steeple of St. Nicholas. It is possible that this recording in our *Proceedings* led to its return to Newcastle. It could not go back to old All Saints at the junction of Pilgrim Street and Mosley Street as that church has been demolished in 1786, but has found a fitting place in the lovely neighbouring church of St. John, where it adorns the southern wall, and can be seen from Westgate Road.