

I.

TWO CELTIC CROSSES FROM THE MACHARS, WIGTOWNSHIRE. BY REV. R. S. G. ANDERSON, B.D., F.S.A.Scot.

Recently I heard of a sculptured stone lying at the garden gate of the farm of Brighthouse, about three miles north of Whithorn, on the Whithorn-Wigtown road. This proved to be a portion of a cross-slab (fig. 1), measuring 21 inches in length, and 10½ inches at its widest, and retaining on it the head of the cross and a small fragment of the decorated shaft.

Over thirty years ago this cross-slab was turned up by the ploughman in a rough field on the Brighthouse side of the service road from Castle Wigg, near its junction with the Whithorn road. It was found about a hundred yards to the left of the field gate, and a few yards north-west of the first rocky knoll. The cross-slab is of Silurian sandstone of a uniform thickness of 4 inches, undressed on the back but smoothed on the face. There is some doubt as to the stone having been artificially shaped. The sculptor has possibly selected the most suitable slab he could find lying to hand. It is peaked at the top, with smooth square edges on the left-hand side, but the right-hand side is more irregular and has also suffered from the plough.

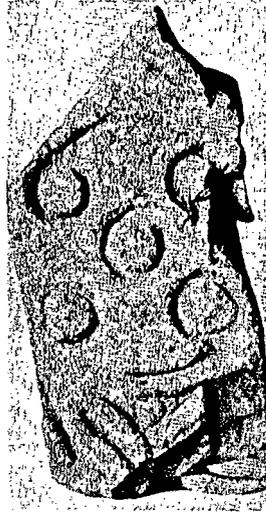


Fig. 1. Cross-slab from Brighthouse.

The designs on the slab have been worked with a minimum of labour. The head represents a Celtic cross of the disc-headed Whithorn type. In
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this case the cross-head has been achieved by the simple cutting in of five rings, 3 inches in diameter, the centre of each ring being left as a plain disc. The two upper rings are joined together, as are also the lower two, by a curved line, thus forming the vertical arms of the cross. The horizontal arms reaching the edges of the stone are not further defined. The fifth ring marks the centre of the cross.

Immediately beneath the head, separated by a band $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in breadth, is a sunk panel containing an exceedingly simple form of ornament in high relief. From the fragment remaining it is difficult to say definitely whether the design is of a single strand interlacing, or of a grouping of four loops or sub-ovals, each about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 2 inches broad, so inclined to each other as to fill the breadth of the panel, and meeting centrally. The latter seems more probable, as there is no sign of any attempt to give the effect of one line passing over another. Between the angles formed by the inclined loops, a pellet 1 inch in diameter is inserted. The motif would possibly be repeated downwards on the shaft.



Fig. 2. Cross-slab from Elrig.

This cross has quite a character of its own, and is not a duplicate of any other yet found. But while differing as an individual, all its details clearly and strikingly connect it with its family type.

There is no record of any chapel or graveyard at Brighouse. On the rocky knoll near where the cross-slab was found there seem to be traces of foundations, but they are not oriented due east and west.

I am much indebted to Mr Brown, of Brighouse, who had preserved the cross-slab, and gave me the details of its discovery, as well as allowing me to take possession of the stone. Negotiations are at present under way to have it placed beside the other crosses of the district in the Whithorn Museum.

While writing the above note I learned of another Celtic cross-slab. This stone (fig. 2) was discovered over twenty years ago on the farm of Elrig, in the parish of Mochrum; but the exact spot or field cannot now be ascertained. Shortly after its discovery it passed into the hands of the late Dr Selby of Portwilliam, and is now preserved by his son and successor, to whom I am indebted for my knowledge of it, and for permission to photograph and describe it.

This fragment is $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 8f inches at its extreme width, and 2 inches thick. It is much weathered, and most of the shaft has disappeared. As in the case of the former cross, the back is undressed.

The design on the face, in a manner similar to that on the back of the cross-slab at Corsewall House,¹ is divided into three unequal panels. The cross in the topmost panel is equal-armed, of Maltese form, but with circular hollows at the points of intersection. These circular depressions open out widely on to the edges of the stone, and their borders continue into the cable design that frames at least the two upper panels. The interior surface of the cross is sunk and filled with decoration in high relief. In the centre, instead of the simple large boss or circular depression so frequent in the Galloway crosses, there has been introduced a Latin cross, hollowed out, and with a pellet or small boss within at the centre of intersection of the arms. Between this central cross and the outer border the space is filled with a single-stranded cord, twisted in the expanding arms into a loose, conventional simple knot.

Beneath the cross-head is a narrow, oblong, horizontal panel, filled with four rows of the key pattern. The drawing is slovenly, and the execution careless. On the third key of the topmost line there is what might be a small linear Latin cross superimposed, if it is not a mere eccentricity of the sculptor in a most eccentrically worked line. That it may have been intentional is suggested by the fact that on the corresponding panel, otherwise blank, of the Corsewall House cross-slab there is incised a similar cross. The key pattern is not found on many of the Galloway crosses, and none has it so elaborately or so prominently worked into the design as this Elrig Cross.

Below the key pattern is a border of cable design which meets a similar border that probably extended to the bottom of the vertical panel below. This panel, it is evident from the small fragment remaining, was filled with a single-cord plait or interlacing.

¹ *Inventory of Ancient Monuments, Wigtownshire*, No. 78, fig. 29.