

On a Sculptured Stone recently removed
from a House on the Site of the Church of
St. Vedast, Norwich.

COMMUNICATED BY

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The Stone, of which two illustrations are here given, has a double interest, partly on its own account, and partly by reason of the historical associations of the spot on which it was found.

Although its real value has now for the first time been revealed, yet the existence of the stone is no new discovery. Being built into the angle of a house in a public street, it was well known to a considerable number of persons, and its antiquity could not be doubted. It was mentioned by the writer of this notice as a relic of St. Vedast's Church in a Paper on "The Stone Bridge in St. Faith's Lane, Norwich," already published by this Society.¹ It was, however, so covered up with plaster that it was difficult to say what might be underneath, except that certain curved prominences and depressions seemed to indicate the possible existence of some sculptured design of pre-Norman origin. At the time of the survey of Norwich some years ago, the Ordnance Surveyors found on the surface of the stone a

¹ *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. x., p. 140, note 9.



SCULPTURED STONE FROM THE SITE OF
ST. VEDAST'S CHURCH, NORWICH.

NO. I.—BROADER SIDE, OR FACE.

convenient place to set one of their marks. Fortunately they avoided the most valuable part of the surface, though certainly not from any knowledge of what they left untouched.

To speak first of the stone. It was built into the angle of a house attached to a stable yard at the north-west corner of the junction between Rose Lane and Cathedral Street South. In the beginning of this year (1896) the house was pulled down for the widening of the street. The stone was secured by one of those who knew its value, Mr. F. B. Crowe, of St. Stephen's. Its superficial cover of whitewash and paint was removed, and the long-hidden designs partially revealed on two sides. A squeeze of each side was taken by the Rev. W. F. Creeny, F.S.A., who shortly afterwards had an opportunity of shewing them to Dr. Browne, Bishop of Stepney, acknowledged to be a leading authority on this subject. By a fortunate coincidence the Bishop shortly afterwards visited Norwich for the purpose of preaching in the Cathedral, and he was then able briefly to inspect the stone, which had been kindly presented by Mr. Crowe to the Castle Museum, where it was deposited in the Muniment Room for temporary convenience. The Bishop pronounced it to be probably a portion of a Churchyard Cross of Scandinavian type, and of the approximate date of about A.D. 920. This opinion has been confirmed by other experts who have seen the photographs. As this is believed to be the first stone of its type and period which has yet been found in Norfolk or any of the adjoining Eastern Counties, it is manifestly of great interest and value.

The stone is sculptured on two sides. No sculpture is now traceable on the other two sides. As it lay built into the wall, it rested on the narrow unworked side the broader of the two sculptured faces fronting the

street. The bottom of the stone formed part of the angle of the house at about five feet above the level of the road. The designs on each side are included in sunken panels. Semi-circular arches, supported by columns with capitals (all plainly distinguishable, though much worn) form a sort of frame to these panels, in each of which are sculptured two animals, one above the other, in reversed positions. The bodies are somewhat contorted, and are bound about with interlacing bands, which also fill the vacant spaces on the panels. The details of the designs are not by any means so clear as might be wished. The surface of the stone is still covered in many places with plaster so hard and so firmly embedded in the hollows that it would be a great risk for any but an expert to attempt to remove it. Still the figures of the animals may be fairly traced. They are of the contorted type commonly characteristic of Scandinavian art, of which sculptured specimens have been found in the north of England. The stone is a hard sandstone, which must have come by sea from the north-east coast of England, probably Yorkshire.

It is impossible to say on what the fragment rested when in situ, or what may have been above it. The dimensions in its present condition are as follow:—The total height is $35\frac{3}{4}$ inches; the breadth of the broader front is at the bottom 17 in.; at the top $12\frac{1}{4}$ in.; the breadth of the narrower side is at the bottom 12 inches; at the top, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The height of the sculptured panels is 20 inches. There are no traces of any Runic inscription to be found.

A stone with an animal of somewhat similar character was found in 1852 in digging some foundations in St. Paul's Churchyard in London. It is now deposited at the entrance to the Guildhall Library, and forms the subject of a Paper by the Rev. G. F. Browne [now Bishop of

Stepney] in the *Archæological Journal*, Vol. XLII., p. 251. This stone is a slab, and has a Runic inscription. It is thought to have been the head-stone of a sepulchral monument to an officer in the court of King Canute, and, therefore, about one hundred years later than the date assigned to ours. Two fragments previously found near the same spot are supposed to be the body-stone of the same monument. They are ornamented with interlacing bands. The animal on the Guildhall head-stone is quite of a conventional type, being much elongated. The Norwich animals are more natural, which may be due to their earlier date, but until the stone is more cleared it is hardly safe to assert this too definitely. The lower animal on the broader face is plainly seen to have a band all along its back, and also along the underside of the body, besides one which seems to pass in and out through the centre of the body. The animal on the London stone is freer, the serpentine bands being employed chiefly as an ornamental pattern filling up the vacant space. The latter seems to be the more ordinary type.¹

Some interesting remarks on the origin of these contorted and conventional animals will be found in one of the South Kensington Handbooks.²

Before speaking of the spot on which this stone was preserved, it may be well to remark that in matters of art-design a distinction is drawn between Scandinavian Art as practised in Sweden and Norway, and Danish Art as practised in Denmark. The type of which we have been speaking is the former. Yet when we speak of an English historical period, we are necessarily obliged to ignore this distinction and speak of these stones as being

¹ A large number of examples, in which the animals mostly resemble that on the London stone, may be seen in *Göransson's Bauta* (Stockholm, 1750).

² *Scandinavian Arts*, by Hans Hildebrand, pp. 49, &c.

relics of what we call the period of the Danish rule over the eastern parts of England.

We have here, then, a portion of what would be called a Danish Churchyard Cross, or at least a churchyard cross with Danish work on it. It is, therefore, important to enquire whether any clue can be obtained as to its possible connection with Danish settlers on the spot. It may be observed on the one hand that the occupation of the spot by the Danes needs no such evidence as that of this stone. It is a matter of unquestionable history that Norwich was one of the headquarters of the Danish settlement in England. On the other hand, it must be also acknowledged that the evidence of this stone is not of itself sufficient to prove the existence of a church on this spot in Danish times. There is nothing Christian in the design, and the stone may have been utilised at a later date for the purpose of a cross. Still, after making allowance for this uncertainty, the writer thinks he may claim that the discovery of the Danish character of the stone furnishes some corroboration of the conclusion he arrived at in the Paper already referred to, viz., that the Church of St. Vedast, which formerly stood on this site, was originally founded for the Danes soon after the time of King Alfred, that is, within a few years of the date assigned to the workmanship on the stone.¹ That conclusion was formed from a consideration of the known antiquity of the Church, and the peculiarity of its dedication. It is not necessary to do more here than add a few details to the arguments there brought forward.

The house, in the wall of which the stone was built, was not a very old one, but the wall itself may have been much older. The Church of St. Vedast was dilapidated and the parish united to St. Peter Permountergate in the

¹ *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. x., pp. 136, 140.



SCULPTURED STONE FROM THE SITE OF
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NO. II.—NARROWER SIDE.

time of Queen Elizabeth, the ground being thenceforward leased out by the Dean and Chapter under the title of "St. Vedast's Churchyard." This wall was part of the enclosing wall of the old churchyard. It is impossible to say how long the stone may have rested there, and it is certainly most remarkable that, if formerly exposed to view, it should never, so far as is known, have been described or even mentioned by any local antiquaries.

The Church of St. Vedast is first mentioned in a Grant of Confirmation by King Henry II.¹ Among the possessions of the Cathedral Monastery is specified "medietatem ecclesie Sancti Vedasti." The grant is not dated, but as one of the witnesses (William, Bishop of Exeter) died in 1160, it must be between 1154, when Henry began to reign, and 1160. Now in addition to this separation of one half of the endowment from the rest, it appears that the other half was further sub-divided. In the Almoner's Register (fol. xii., dorse) are enrolled the two following Grants:—1. "Clemens filius Galfridi de jure patronatus ecclesie Sancti Vedasti. Notum sit omnibus Christi fidelibus quod ego Clemens filius Galfridi de Sancto Vedasto concessi et dedi Deo et Elemosinario² Norwicensis ecclesie jus patronatus quod habui in ecclesia Sancti Vedasti in Norwico scilicet sexte partis eiusdem ecclesie et reddam inde ego Clemens Norwicensis annuatim quam diu vixero in seculari habitu duos solidos hiis terminis Reddam etiam ex institutione domini Johannis Episcopi et concessione Conventus Norwici pronominato Elemosinario² quinque solidos in duabus synodis pro tertia parte predictae ecclesie quam partem Gaufridus filius Gilberti Cerarii secum dedit ecclesie Norwicensi cum monacaretur quam et Rogerus Algar qui querelam

¹ Dugdale, *Mon. Angl.*, vol. iv., p. 17.

² Or perhaps Elemosinarie, the office, not the person who held it.

inde moverat supradicte Elemosinarie (*sic*) dedit et carta sua confirmavit. Et ut hec mea concessio perpetuum robor optineat eam presentis scripti et sigilli mei auctoritate confirmavi. Inde sunt testes, &c." 2. "Rogerus Algar de eodem jure patronatus. Notum sit omnibus Christi fidelibus quod ego Rogerus Algar de fforsete questionem quam moveram aduersus Monachos Norwicensis super patronatum ecclesie Sancti Vedasti in Norwico omnino remitto et quicquid juris habui in eadem ecclesia concedo et do et hac carta mea confirmo in perpetuum Elemosinario Norwicensis ecclesie pro anima Magistri Ricardi de Dreiton et Alexandri filii eius et pro anima mea et meorum et hoc feci in capitulo Norwicensi presidente Girardo priore coram conventu et ipsi receperunt me in societatem suam. Inde sunt testes, &c."

The Bishop John mentioned in the first of these deeds must have been John de Grey, who became Bishop in 1200. Girard, the Prior mentioned in the second, died in 1201. The transaction, therefore, may be set down to A.D. 1200. The point to be noticed is that, while the Monks held *one-half* of the endowment, a private person held a *third*, and another person held a *sixth* part. These facts may reasonably be held to furnish fair ground for Blomefield's suggestion¹ that St. Vedast's is the Church mentioned in Domesday where it is stated that, in the time of King Edward the Confessor, Edstan held two churches in the burgh, and *the sixth part of a third*. Even if this identification be not accepted, at least the sub-division of the endowment in 1160 must indicate a higher antiquity than that date.

For the rest, the reader is referred to the Paper on "The Stone Bridge," where an attempt is made to shew that the very early dedication of a church in Norwich

¹ *History of Norfolk*, 8vo. edition, vol. iii., p. 11.

to St. Vedast may have been due to the school of Grimbold at Winchester, who came over at the invitation of King Alfred to assist in the conversion of the Danes, and who came from the very neighbourhood of St. Vedast's labours in Flanders.

Taking into account these various considerations, it may fairly be said that this "St. Vedast's" stone is one of the most interesting and, probably, the very earliest ecclesiastical relic yet discovered in the City of Norwich.

In addition to the information given about St. Vedast in my former Paper, it may be mentioned that only three dedications to him are known in England, this one at Norwich, one at Tathwell in Lincolnshire, and the well-known Church of St. Vedast in Foster Lane, London, near St. Paul's Cathedral. The Rector of the last-named Church, Dr. W. Sparrow Simpson, F.S.A., Sub-Dean of St. Paul's, has devoted much labour and learning to the life and cult of St. Vedast, and has published several works on the subject.¹

A further interest attaches to St. Vedast's name from the curious way in which it has been corrupted. In my former Paper no explanation could be given why St. Vedast in Norwich came to be called St. Faith, and St. Vedast's Lane St. Faith's Lane. It came out² soon after that Paper was written that both here and in London people had ignorantly confused the name with something which had a similar sound. In Norwich the name Vaast (the original form of Vedast) being locally pronounced Vaist, or Faist, became confused with Faith, owing to the

¹ *The Life and Legend of St. Vedast*, London, 1887; also a revised and enlarged edition of the same, London, 1896. *Carmina Vedastina and Tragico-Comœdia de Sancto Vedasto, edited from MSS. at Arras*, London, Elliot Stock, 1895.

² Through a correspondence in *The Athenæum*, 3rd and 10th January, 1885, pp. 51 and 184.

familiarity of the people with the name of St. Faith through the popular horse and cattle fair at Horsham St. Faith's, near Norwich, called St. Faith's Fair. In London the same word Vaast, being locally pronounced Vorst, or Forst, was subsequently confused with the similarly sounding and better known word Foster. This explains the otherwise puzzling description of "St. Vedast, alias Foster," in London, and "St. Vedast, alias Faith," in Norwich.