

## The Ballantrae Cross

REV. PROFESSOR JOHN FOSTER, D.D.

In the autumn of 1957 Mr. Douglas, of Shallochwreck farm, on the estate of Lord Inchcape, near Ballantrae, was engaged in repairing a dry-stone dyke. One of the displaced top-stones felt rough under his hands, so he washed it in the neighbouring burn and found the carving of a cross.

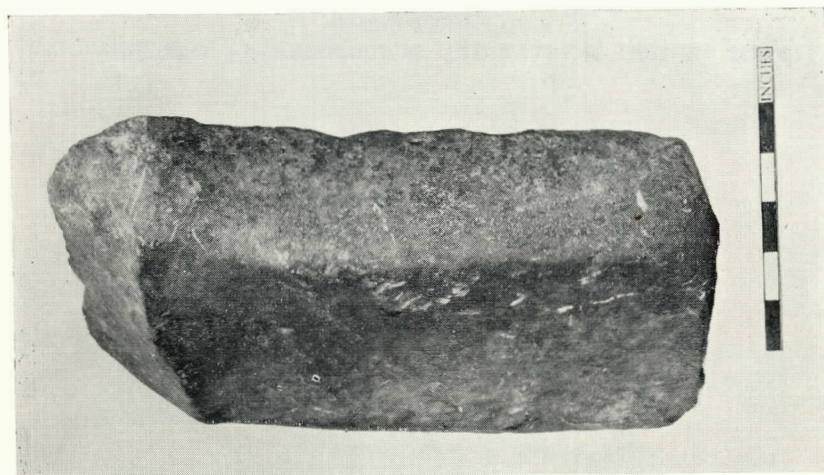
Lord Inchcape kindly allowed the stone to be removed to the Hunterian Museum of the University of Glasgow for photographing and examination, and there for the present it lies. Its measurements are, on the front face, approximately 9 ins. x 13 ins., slightly smaller in both dimensions at the back. The thickness is 3 ins.

The stone has been examined in the Department of Geology. Dr. Douglas S. Weedon gives the following report :—

“ The rock of which the cross is composed is a greywacke, and is typical of the Lower Palaeozoic sediments which make up much of the country to the south of Ballantrae. This particular specimen is fairly rich in micas, showing a preferred orientation, again typical of rocks of the Southern Uplands. Greywackes further inland tend to show a rather greenish hue on a fresh surface, a feature not apparent in this specimen. The probability is, therefore, that the rock was obtained from a local source in the vicinity of Shallochwreck.”

As will be seen from the plate the carving is crude, probably the work, not of hammer and chisel, but of some blunt instrument, whether of metal or of stone. The design is a shallow incised line, drawn as an arch, flat at the top, enclosing a cross in relief, formed by hollowing out a small area around it. The centre of the cross is marked with an incised circle. Its head and arms are crossed to form a T. This is sometimes called a ‘ hammer-head ’ design. It is an obvious, simple ornamentation probably needing no explanation, but I prefer to call it ‘ T ’ rather than ‘ hammer-head,’ since this is recorded as early as the second century as one way of depicting the cross. Tertullian says, “ Ipsa enim litera Graecorum Tau, nostra autem T, species crucis ” (*Adversus Marcionem* III, 22). So here we have, in effect, three crosslets on the cross.

Fig. 1—The Ballantrae Cross





For rough carvings such as this a stone was sometimes selected because of flat surface and regular shape on some of its faces, and in spite of irregularity elsewhere—in this case the rough base and lower right side. On the other hand the base may be broken, and the place where the lower right edge has been chipped off looks less weathered than the rest, though by no means recently exposed. Chips from top and sides, outside the arch, are clearly recent. Dr. Weedon agrees with me that the back and sides are smoothed and cornered in a way which looks like an improvement on nature.

For what purpose was this carving made, and where did it stand? There seem to be two possibilities:—

- (1) The stone may be the upper half of a gravestone. The lower half may continue the pattern, providing a base to the cross, with a foot or two of stone beyond that for planting in the ground. This other half of the stone may be in the same stone dyke—a difficult place to search. Alternatively we may look for the mound where such a gravestone stood, though the irregular configuration of these hill-sides makes that task none too easy either.
- (2) The stone may be complete, or little broken. It may have been built into the wall of some rough chapel, stones from which, long scattered, have contributed to this dyke. In that case we should look for trace of foundations, such as those, with the remains of an enclosure around them, which were excavated in 1950 at Chapel Finnian in the parish of Mochrum. Mr. Radford in his report (Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society, Vol. XXVIII) dated these as 10th-11th century.

Is there in this countryside, as at Chapel Finnian, anything to encourage expectation of such a discovery? Shallochreck appears on some maps as Shallochbraik. The farm itself lies half a mile to the south of Currarie Glen, three-quarters of a mile east from the coast. It is from a burn close by to the south and a hill half a mile to the south-west that the farm takes its name.

Follow the Currarie Burn upstream (eastwards) another mile and there is Kilantringan Loch. This place-name is the indication of a chapel dedicated to St. Ninian. Mr. A. L. F. Rivet of the Ordnance Survey, Archaeological Department, reports another place of the same name about six miles to the north, and quotes the First Survey Namebook for Colmonell

Parish: "Site of an old chapel dedicated to St. Ninian. There is nothing left but the faint traces of a quadrangular site to afford an idea of its probable dimensions."

Such a quadrangular site is exactly what one hopes for somewhere in this other area. The namebook referring to the first (1855) survey of Ballantrae says this about the Loch, the most prominent geographical feature preserving the name Kilantringan to-day: "An artificial lake, the water of which is kept by an embankment at the south-western extremity." It records a break in the embankment and serious flood damage down the glen "some years ago." The entry for the name Kilantringan is as follows: "A small round knoll partly arable and partly heathy pasture. On top of this hillock the village of Kilantringan stood but now no traces of the houses remain. Property of the Earl of Orkney." Clearly this knoll was the place to examine for remains of a chapel. Mr. Rivet produced air photographs, and after poring over them together we both reached this conclusion, quoted in Mr. Rivet's words: "The air photographs of the area [106G/SCOT/UK 149 (16 Aug. 46) 5068-9, and 106G/SCOT/UK 44 (4 May 46) 3273-5] show marks here suggesting occupation but they are too vague to allow of definite identification of structures." It may be possible to obtain air photographs under better conditions, perhaps revealing more, but, unhappily, this seems to be as far as we can get for the present.