

Bewcastle, Cumberland

Βυζαντινός

Church of St Cuthbert

Carved cross

Grid refNY 58 74

The Romans built here a fort to which they gave the name Banna, about the year AD120. Their object was most likely to keep a watch on the unruly tribes who harrassed the Wall, which marked the furthest northern boundary of the Roman Empire. The church of St Cuthbert was built about AD 760 near the famous Saxon cross, on the site of this fort, and survived through Saxon and Norman times until about 1291.

Cross Shaft

In the churchyard also is that for which Bewcastle is rightly famed. It is the noble and wonderfully carved cross, which Prof. Collingwood says, must have been erected probably between the years AD 700-800.

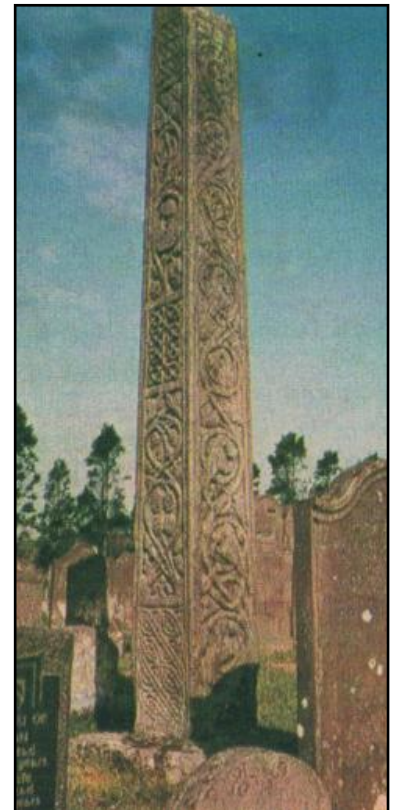
On the West face there are four panels:-

1. (Top) The figure of John the Baptist bearing the nimbed *Agnus Dei*. Above this panel are the remains of indecipherable runes.
2. The figure of Christ standing upon the lion and adder, His right hand uplifted in the act of blessing, and His head surrounded by a halo. Above this panel are two lines of runes reading "*Gessus Kristus*" (sic) (Jesus Christ)
3. A panel containing nine lines of runes reading: "This tall standard of victory set up Hwætred, Wothgar, Olwfwold after Alcfrith, lately king and son of Oswy. Pray for his soul." There have been some varieties of the translation of these runes, but their differences are not great.
4. The figure of a falconer bearing a hawk on his left wrist; below is the bird's perch. The man appears to be wearing a cape. "It may have been that the figure of the man was intended to be that of Alcfrith himself" (Prof. Stephens). The latest theory however is that it represents St John the Evangelist, and that the bird is meant to be the eagle of St John.

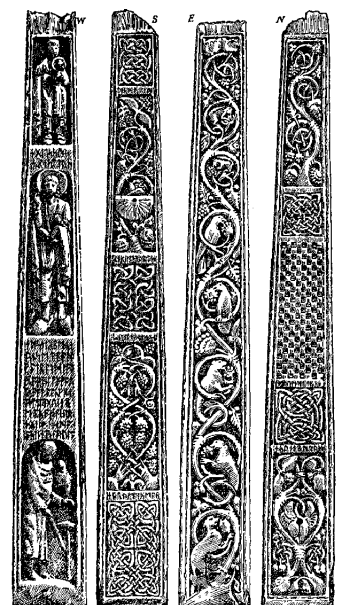
On the south face there are five panels:

1. Panel of intertwined knot work, so-called Celtic design, above which is a line of runes
2. A panel of scrolled ornament, containing a semi-circular sundial, resembling the dial placed over the Saxon porch on the South side of Bishopstone church in Sussex (*q.v.*). There is a similar dial on the South porch of Kirkdale church in the North Riding (*q.v.*). The gnomon is missing on this cross. The rays mark 12 divisions.
3. A panel of intertwined knot work.
4. A panel of double scroll work, consisting of two grape bearing vines
5. A panel of intertwined knot work.

On the spaces between each of these panels is a line of runes which have been read as follows: "In the first year of the King of this Realm Ecgfrith".



Above: Bewcastle Cross from the South West
Below: drawing by W. G. Collingwood



Bewcastle, Cumberland

On the E face there is one panel:

1. A vine scroll running the full length of the shaft. The vine is boldly designed bearing foliage and clusters of fruit. Near the top are two squirrels; below are two birds, probably a raven and a falcon; lower are two conventional creatures, and at the foot an animal eating one of the clusters of grapes. The design is similar to that on the Ruthwell Cross.

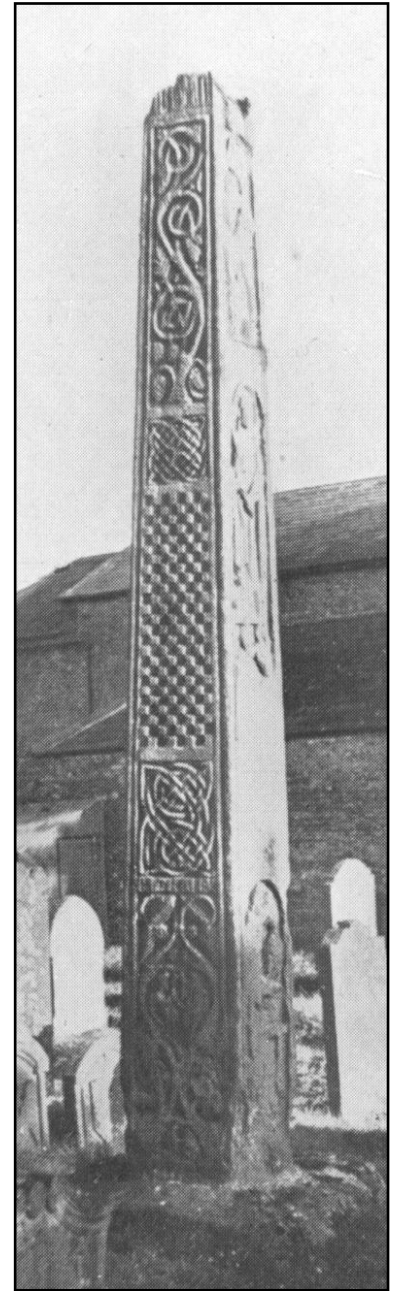
On the N face there are five panels:

1. A panel of vine scroll, consisting of a thick main stem, and three spirals, each ending in a bunch of fruit.
2. A panel of intertwined knot work.
5. A panel of chequer work; there are eight squares from side to side and twenty-five from top to bottom.
4. A panel of intertwined knot work.
5. A panel of double vine scroll with fruit and foliage.

On the spaces between these panels are lines of runes, now almost indecipherable, and said to name three persons - "Wulfhere", King of the Mercians and son of Penda; "Kuniburug" (sic) Alcfrih's Queen, and Penda's daughter; "Kunesviþa" (sic), the Queen's sister.

What became of the cross, which stood at the top of the monument, no one knows. There have been many theories put forward and many legends are current; perhaps the most likely fate is that it found its way into the possession of the historian Camden, who died in 1623. It is known that at least part of it came into his keeping. One tradition is that it was knocked off in 1641 by Cromwell, who had the reputation of destroying many other works of beauty.

taken from the printed guide book



*Bewcastle Cross
from the North-East*