



Sandbach, Cheshire

Σανδβάτσε

Market place

Crosses

Grid ref SJ 75? 60?

Descriptive History of The Ancient Crosses of Sandbach, Cheshire

In the Market Place, Sandbach, are situated two Crosses, by far the most interesting monuments of their kind which are to be found in the whole county of Chester, and as such have excited much attention. They consist of two upright pillars, each of which are fixed in a heavy stone socket. These sockets are placed on a wide platform of two steps, having at each of the angles stone posts which have once been ornamented with carving, but are now much defaced. The height of each of the sockets is 2'6", and of each step of the platform 1'6", making a total height of the whole base 5'6". The height of the taller cross is now 16'8" the pillar being 15'10" and 10" of the circular top remaining. The circular top appears to have been 3' in diameter, which would have made the total height of the cross, when perfect, about 19' and including the base, 24'6". The smaller one is 11'11" in height, the pillar being 10'9", and 1'2" of the broken top remaining. The exact size of this cross could not be reckoned.

Each of the four sides of the crosses are covered with sculptures, but it is by no means easy to ascertain what these sculptures have been intended to represent. It is, however, certain that those on the taller cross represent Scriptural subjects, whilst those on the smaller cross are believed not to be entirely Scriptural, but to represent some historical event which led to the crosses being erected.

On the eastern side of the great cross, commencing at the bottom, have been two small figures of Angels looking upward; above them is a large circle containing three figures, to the central of which the others appear to be paying obeisance. Above the circle are three figures, the central one having over the right shoulder a cross and over the left a dove. The figure on the left has a pair of keys in the left hand, that on the right having apparently a book in its hands. This has probably been intended for our Lord, with St. Peter and St. Paul on either side of him. Above this group of figures is a small gap, and then comes a representation of our Lord in the Manger with an animal on each side looking into the manger, and above is an angel hovering over the child. Above this is the

Crucifixion, with two figures at the base of the cross, and in each of the four quarters formed by the limbs of the cross are the emblems of the Evangelists – an angel for St. Matthew, a lion for St. Mark, an ox for St. Luke and an eagle for St. John. Above these are several mutilated figures, one of which is represented head downwards.

The western side at the bottom has two grotesque serpents or dragons, and above them eight figures in pairs. First are two persons or angels, now much mutilated. Above these are an angel and seated figure possibly representing the angel Gabriel appearing to Zacharias in the Temple. Above these again is Simon the Cyrenian carrying the cross, preceded by a man carrying what is described as a curved wand or club. Over these is our Saviour (as shown by the Nimbus round His head) with His hands bound by a cord which passes over the shoulder of a man in front, who is thus dragging Him along, either to appear before Pilate or to be crucified. In the upper part of this side are four mutilated figures.

The southern side consists of scroll work starting from the top, with figures of animals here and there, and a single figure of a man. It has been conjectured this sculpture may be meant for St. John the Baptist in the wilderness.

The northern side appears to have contained eleven figures placed in two columns, each alternate figure being placed a little higher than his opposite neighbour. Above them all is a large winged fish with the mouth downward, with a projecting triply-cloven tongue. This clearly illustrates the descent of the Holy Ghost on the eleven apostles (St. Matthias being purposely omitted). The entire cross has been finished with a circular sculptured head of which only a fragment now remains.

The Small Cross is ornamented in a somewhat different manner to the larger one. The northern side is divided into a double row of square-topped cells, in each of which is the figure of a man, some with instruments in their hands and others without. There are twelve human figures in all. At the top is a double dragon with tongues worked into a skilful interlacing pattern. The whole subject is probably the same as that on the north side of the large cross,

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viz: the descent of the Holy Ghost. The southern side is similarly divided into a double row of round-topped cells, in each of which is the figure of a man, some walking with staves in their hands, and others standing still; at the bottom are two angels looking upwards. The eastern side is divided into five lozenge-shaped compartments, having figures of men and animals in the interstices between them. In the uppermost lozenge is the figure of an animal (? a bull) with its head turned over its back. The next lozenge contains three small figures of men curiously joined together. The next appears to have a serpent or dragon; and the two lowest contain each a standing figure of a man, full faced, with a club in his hand. The top of the cross has been, apparently, in the form of a Maltese cross, the portion now left showing on this side the figure of a man upside down. The western side has two angels looking upwards, then two groups of

three figures, and one or two figures arranged in cells, above which is a group of three standing figures, the central one being taller and larger than the other two. Over the right shoulder of the central figure is a cross and over the left a dove. This is evidently the same subject as that on the east side of the large cross, the side figures carrying a pair of keys and a book. The upper part of this side is mostly destroyed. Enough, however, remains to indicate that there was a crucifixion treated exactly as on the large cross. Both the eastern and western sides of this cross have the figures enclosed within a margin of beautifully interlaced scroll work in several patterns.

Such is as complete a description of these interesting monuments as can probably be given.

*from an excerpt from Earwaker:
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