

THE DISPLAY OF THE ANGLO-SAXON CROSSES OF THE KEIGHLEY AREA

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The groups of Anglo-Saxon carved stone crosses to the north and east of Keighley, West Yorkshire (Fig. 1), include a number of pieces important for the history of the development of sculpture in the area. Considerable efforts have been made in recent years to display these major sculptures to their full advantage, so that they might be appreciated by a public wider than the purely academic, and the Ilkley crosses in particular show the full potential for display which can be achieved with such pieces.

1. HISTORY OF THE CROSSES AND THEIR SITES

The two main groups of crosses are to be found at Kildwick and Ilkley, with single examples at Addingham and East Riddlesden¹. All but the last of these are located in, or adjacent to, parish churches (East Riddlesden is located in Bingley parish). It is believed that the majority of the Anglo-Scandinavian carved stone crosses of the ninth to eleventh centuries represent gravestones, not preaching crosses², although some of the earlier Anglian crosses of the eighth century may have served a greater range of functions, such as markers for stations within monastic precincts. In western Yorkshire the evidence suggests that the medieval ecclesiastical parishes were already established in the Late Anglo-Saxon period, probably in the tenth and early-eleventh centuries; the focal points of those parishes, subsequently known to have been occupied by the parish churches, also appear to have been in existence by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066³. The relative sequence of the development of churches and the cemeteries indicated by the crosses is not yet certain⁴. In some cases the two may be contemporary, while in others a cemetery may have developed around a church or, alternatively, the church may have been built in an already-existing cemetery. Examples of the last case may perhaps be indicated by isolated finds of Anglo-Saxon crosses, possibly representing the only surviving evidence for a cemetery in which no church was ever established, as with the East Riddlesden cross fragment, which was found in the driveway leading to East Riddlesden Hall.

The second single cross, on the other hand, comes from one of the oldest sites in the area. The church of St. Peter's at Addingham is substantially fifteenth-century in date⁵. The interior of the church is plastered throughout, but when the plaster was removed from the internal walls of the tower in 1982, two pieces

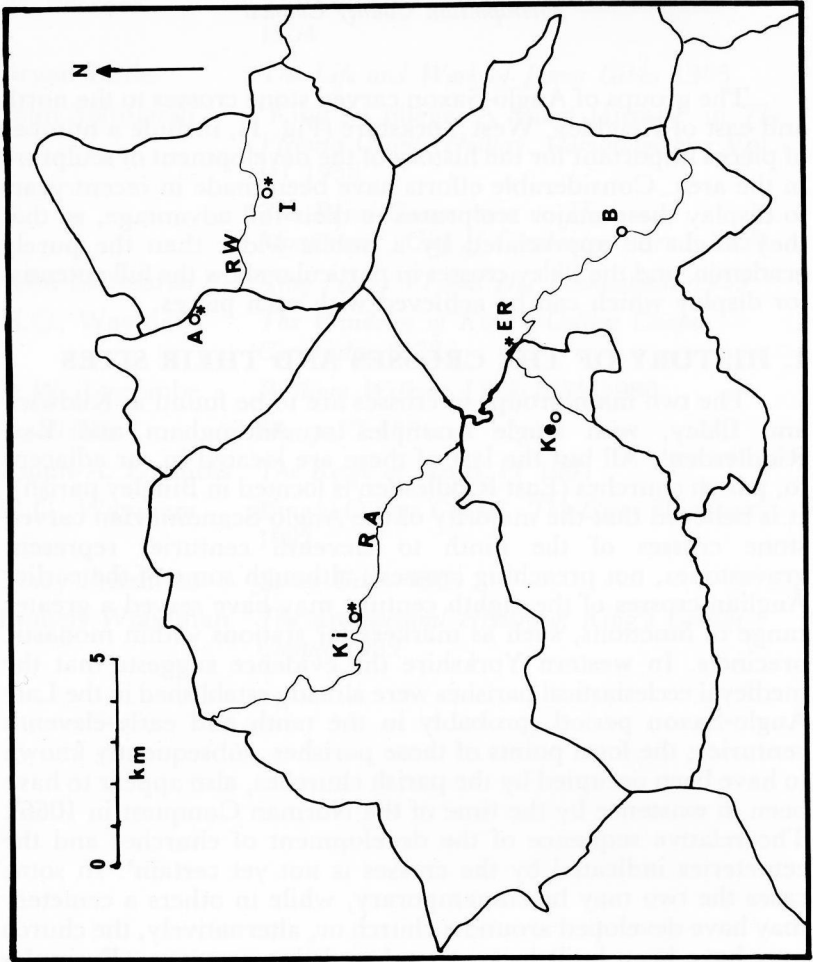


Fig. 1

Parishes and crosses of the Keighley area. Parish boundaries heavy lines, rivers fine lines. Parish centres indicated by open circles, crosses by asterisks. Key: A, Addingham; B, Bingley; ER, East Riddlesden; I, Ilkley; Ke, Keighley; Ki, Kildwick; RA, River Aire; RW, River Wharfe.

of reused stone bearing Norman zig-zag work were revealed built into the fabric. Addingham was the westernmost vill of the Otley estate of the archbishop of York, and the place where Archbishop Wulfhere took refuge after leaving York at the time of its fall to the Danes in 867⁶. Excavations in the adjacent vicarage garden have produced a Viking-period comb-case (now in the church)⁷, although the location of the archbishop's hall has yet to be established. But the site itself is probably older even than the Norman church and Anglo-Saxon cross: part of the churchyard wall runs along a prominent earthwork, and the course of this earthwork appears to continue across the south-western corner of the churchyard. The earthwork could be a prehistoric, possibly Iron Age, defensive work, adjoining the adjacent river, but it could equally well be related to an earlier religious site converted to Christian purposes at the coming of Christianity to the area in the seventh century.

Also of considerable antiquity is the site of the parish church of All Saints in Ilkley. There has been some dispute as to whether the name Ilkley represents a later form of the Roman name *Olicana*⁸, but there is no dispute that the area around and to the north of the church was the site of a major Roman fort occupied until at least the fourth century. Excavations in the church tower⁹ and in the area to the north¹⁰ indicate that the nave of the medieval church lies over the *principia* of the Roman fort. The church itself, which is recorded as being in existence in 1086 in Domesday Book, is substantially Norman and later¹¹, but built into the wall of the tower were two decorated Roman altars (Plates I and II), which had been recut to form single-splay window heads of a pre- or Early Norman church. When removed from the wall of the tower earlier this century, they still bore traces of whitewash¹², indicating that the early church may have been whitewashed inside.

The excavations in 1982 in the church tower revealed the massive stone footings of the original west wall of the church; the date of this wall is uncertain, and there is at present no definite evidence that it is Anglo-Saxon. The wall was cut through when the tower was added in the fifteenth century and the arch was inserted, but the foundations, which consisted of reused material from the Roman fort, survived at a depth of 2.3 ft.

A number of Anglo-Saxon cross fragments are currently kept in the Manor House Museum, close to the church. The two larger of the three major surviving crosses, which are recorded as being in the churchyard as early as the time of Camden in the seventeenth century, date to the ninth century; the smallest cross, however, is of pre-Viking eighth-century date, and so indicates the possible presence of a monastery in the area¹³.

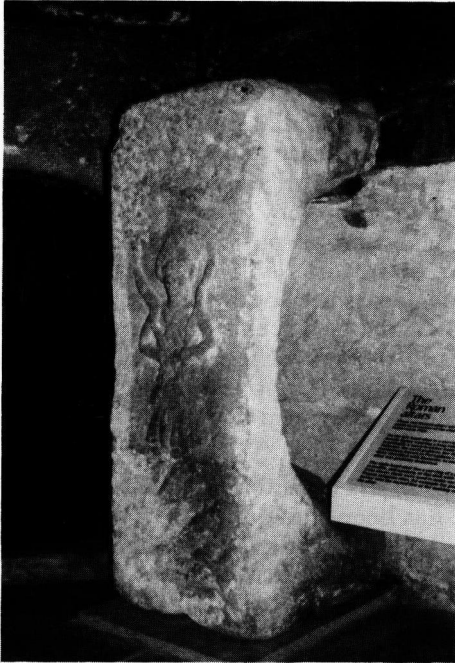


Plate 1

Roman stone altar in Ilkley parish church, with female figure holding torches in either hand — possibly Demeter. The altar had been recut to serve as a monolithic window head in the early church. Late—medieval oak door in background.

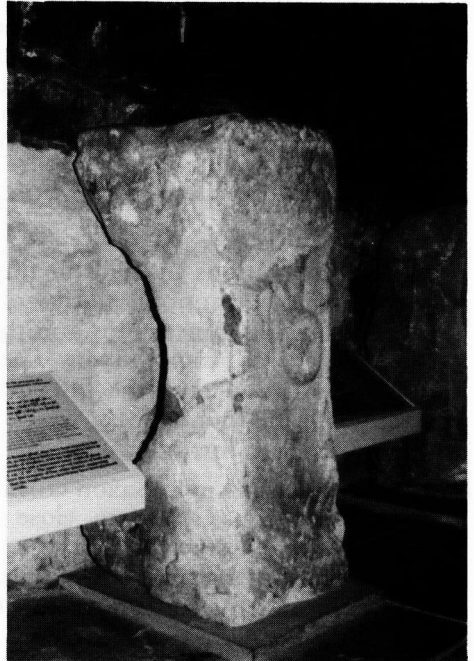


Plate 2

Roman stone altar in Ilkley parish church, with pitcher and *patera*. This altar recut as in Plate 1.

The final group of crosses are those from Kildwick, found in 1901 built into the sixteenth-century north wall of the chancel and one of the chancel pillars¹⁴. As it stands, Kildwick church is an extremely impressive medieval structure¹⁵, but it is presumably an Anglo-Saxon foundation, as Domesday Book records the presence of a church here in 1086, only twenty years after the Conquest.

2. SUBJECT MATTER

Unlike the Irish high crosses, which have a consistent and integrated iconography, the subject matter of the decoration of Anglo-Saxon crosses is varied, drawing on both Christian and pagan themes, and, depending on date, showing Viking or earlier Anglian artistic motifs, together with some Celtic influence from Ireland. The group of crosses with which we are here concerned is no exception. In some cases the decoration consists merely of decorative patterns, especially Anglo-Saxon interlace. The East Riddlesden cross fragment has such decoration on all its faces (Plate III), while at Ilkley this type of decoration is confined to the narrower faces of the medium and large crosses. The Addingham cross has interlace along its narrow sides, while plait work occurs on the narrow sides of two of the crosses at Kildwick and on the main faces of three of the other crosses there.



Plate III
Anglo-Saxon carved stone cross in East Riddlesden Hall.

a. Christian Themes

The most comprehensive series of scenes with a Christian theme is to be found on the large ninth-century cross at Ilkley. This has on one face four figures representing the four Evangelists, depicted as human figures, each holding his gospel, but with the traditional heads of eagle, bull, lion and man. The reverse face has as its top figure Christ enthroned in majesty (see Plate X). One of the scenes on the medium-size shaft at Ilkley depicts Adam and Eve with the tree between them, while the smallest shaft has a figure, possibly an ecclesiastic or saint (although without tonsure or halo), holding a book.

The much cruder carving of the Addingham cross (Plate IV) depicts two small figures looking upwards towards a large circular object. Mr. J. T. Lang has suggested to me that this represents the great ball of fire which will appear in the heavens at the Day of Judgement. The crosses at Kildwick which have figurative ornament, also quite crude in execution and badly worn, are more difficult to interpret. On one a frontal figure stands above five oblongs (Plate V), possibly representing Christ's miracle of the loaves and fishes¹⁶, although without the fish, while on a second fragment a figure with upraised hands and holding a book-like object in his right hand, is shown with a snake on one side and a beast on the other—possibly Christ with the Book of Remembrance and the lion and adder¹⁷.

b. Pagan themes

Perhaps not overtly pagan, but simply artistic decoration, are the entwined animals found on all the three crosses at Ilkley (see Plates VI and X). These are ultimately in the tradition of Anglian manuscript and metalwork art. Their original significance is now lost to us, and they may indeed have ceased to have had any religious symbolism by the time the first of these crosses was carved in the eighth century.

One side of the large cross at Ilkley has a depiction of a tree, possibly representing the tree of life (see Plate X). This was of particular importance also in Germanic mythology, where it featured as Yggdrasil, the world tree, which Viking tradition located in Uppsala, Sweden. This motif may well have been adapted, as were so many others, to a Christian symbolism; less easily adapted to such iconography must have been the extremely realistic carving of an erect penis at the base of the tree (Plate X), presumably either a joke on the part of the carver or perhaps featuring here as a fertility symbol related to the tree of life.



Plate IV
Anglo—Saxon carved stone cross in
Addingham parish church.



Plate V
Anglo—Saxon carved stone cross in Kildwick
parish church with figure standing above
five oblongs.



Plate VI
Detail of medium-sized cross at Ilkley, showing
entwined Anglo-Saxon animals, back to back but
with heads confronted. Below birds in boughs
of tree pattern.

3. DISPLAY

The Anglo-Saxon crosses found in so many churches in northern England are amongst the most neglected and least understood of ecclesiastical monuments. In some places pieces have been given for safekeeping to local museums, but frequently they sit forlornly on church window-ledges or forgotten in obscure, unlit corners of the building, all too liable to be knocked or scratched. Yet these carvings form the most comprehensive body of archaeological material available for studying the Late Anglo-Saxon period, and are also the earliest witnesses to the Christian nature of the North.

Although stone items appear to be substantial and solid, the surface of stonework bearing carvings should always be regarded as intrinsically fragile and vulnerable to being scratched, to having pieces knocked off or just generally crumbling. For those still located outside there are the additional threats of weathering and rising damp, which can also affect items kept on the floor inside without an intervening damp-proof course¹⁸. Fortunately the attitude of neglect is beginning to change, and the new view of these pieces is especially well illustrated by the treatment of the crosses of the Keighley area.

a. Addingham

The cross found in Addingham churchyard is now placed at the western end of the nave, although unfortunately with only three faces visible and supported by a rather aesthetically unpleasing piece of iron. The use of iron in conjunction with stone is not to be encouraged as it is likely to corrode and eventually result in the splitting of the stone.

b. East Riddlesden

The cross from the driveway of East Riddlesden Hall was at first simply placed on the floor of a niche inside the stable block. In 1984, however, the National Trust, who are responsible for the hall, undertook extensive repair works to it, including the conversion of the stable block into a shop and coffee-room and restoration of the great hall of the main building. The cross shaft is now on display in a much safer environment in the great hall, adjacent to the stairway (see Plate III). It is intended that in the near future it should be properly mounted and displayed to its full advantage.

c. Kildwick

The six fragments of crosses at Kildwick¹⁹ are attractively displayed in an area reserved on the south side of the nave (Plate VII). Each cross fragment is placed on a stone slab some 17½ inches square set into a bed of large quartz pebbles matching the colour of the stones. The pieces are not dowelled, which would ensure greater security, but they are numbered and brief notes are provided about each piece.

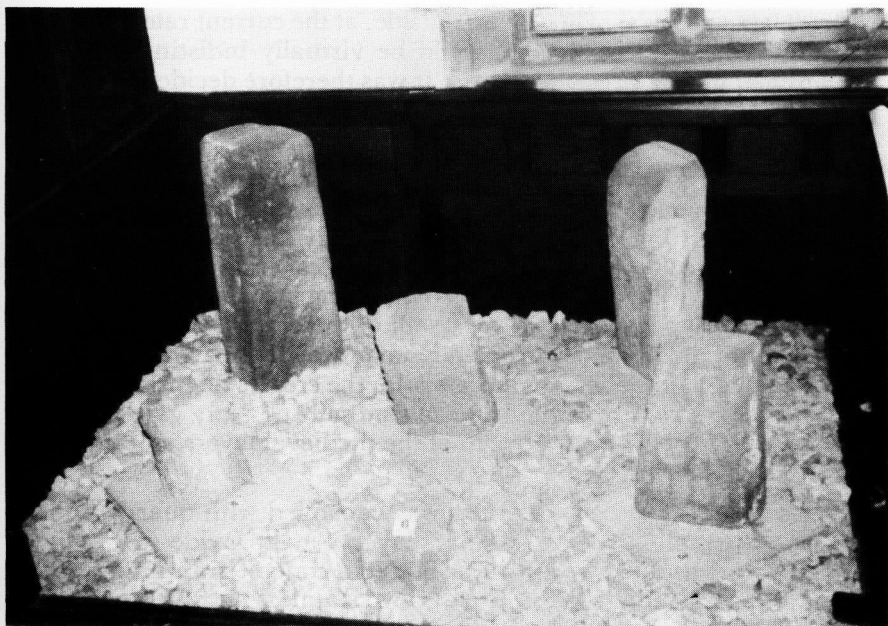


Plate VII
Display of cross fragments in Kildwick parish church.

d. Ilkley

The most extensive work of display, however, is that which has been carried out at Ilkley. Sometime about 1870 the Reverend J. Snowden had the three main crosses, including one which had previously been modified to serve as a gatepost, set in line outside the south wall of the church. The two smaller ones were simply set in the ground, while the largest, weighing some 1½ tons, was supported by a single central iron dowel. In the following century, there was considerable deterioration in their condition, as may be seen by comparing their present condition with photographs taken in the late-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century, and also with the amount which R.G. Collingwood was able to decipher in about 1915. This deterioration was partly the result of weathering, but the situation was exacerbated by atmospheric pollution, particularly from traffic using the adjacent main road (the A65). This resulted in the formation of a black sulphated dirt layer which was visually disfiguring and made the surface more vulnerable to decay mechanisms. In 1982 the medium-sized cross fell, revealing how shallow was the mortar bedding which supported the two smaller crosses, and a detailed examination confirmed the serious condition of the surface of the crosses²⁰. It was considered

that, were the crosses to remain outside, at the current rate of decay recognisable carved details would be virtually indistinguishable within another thirty or so years. It was therefore decided to move the crosses inside the church, and a scheme for their display was prepared²¹.

Initially, to prepare a solid base to carry the crosses, it was necessary to excavate the area within the church tower to a depth of some 6 ft., in order to remove potentially unstable areas of soil caused by medieval burials. The archaeological excavation produced the remains of two bell-casting pits (including the furnace), the stone foundations of the original west wall of the church (see above), a number of medieval burials, and Roman wall footings. It had been hoped that material contemporary with the crosses might be found, but in fact a totally sterile layer of fine soil (possibly garden soil) intervened between the bottom of the medieval layers and the top of the Roman layers.

The area of the excavation was backfilled with quarry-stone waste, consolidated at regular layers, to provide a totally homogeneous fill. Over this was placed a concrete raft into which were set six stainless-steel dowels. Two stainless-steel sleeves were inserted into the base of each cross and the crosses were then lowered in turn into place, so that the dowels located into the sleeves, thereby giving vertical support. This technique of mounting the crosses will also enable them to be moved from their present location should it ever prove necessary in the future. A lead sheet was placed between the concrete raft and the bottom of each cross to provide a damp-proof course, and the area around the edge was pointed with unbond and sand (not cement which can eventually lead to the deterioration of the stone). The entire remaining floor area of the tower between the crosses was then covered with flagstones. The iron fittings in the medium cross (Plate VIII), from when it had served as a gatepost, could not be removed without undue disturbance and possibly splitting of the stone, so the iron was surface-treated to stabilise its condition. Finally the cross-head was placed on the largest cross. Although of the same date, the two are probably not part of the same cross, the lower part of the cross-head having been originally kept at Middleton Lodge and the upper part being found in the River Wharfe in 1884. The three pieces were united while the crosses were still outside earlier this century. After some debate it was decided to retain this arrangement, including the modern piece which joins the shaft to the head, both to ensure the security of the head and also to enable the public to appreciate what the crosses would have looked like originally.

After their reerection the crosses were cleaned using an air-abrasive method, which removed the harmful black sulphated layer

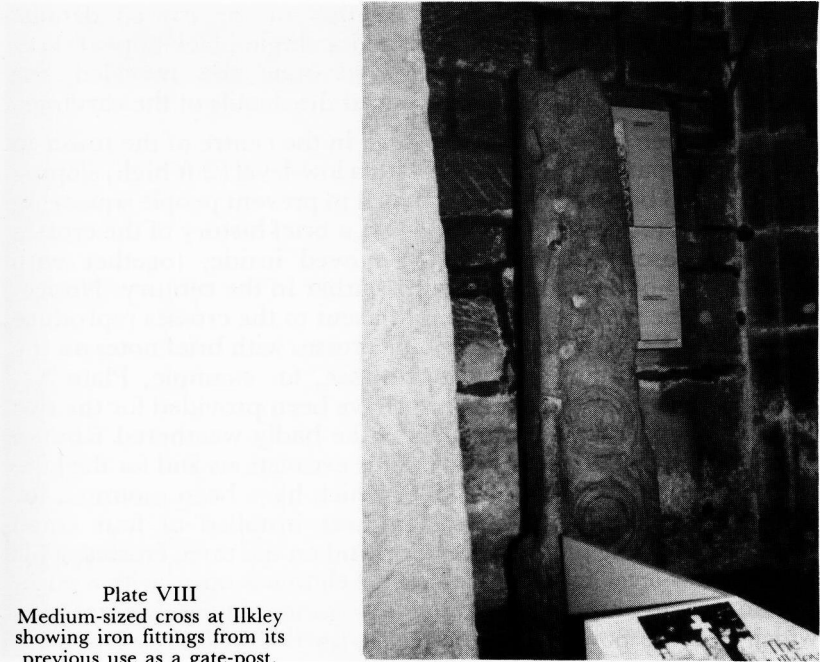


Plate VIII
Medium-sized cross at Ilkley
showing iron fittings from its
previous use as a gate-post.

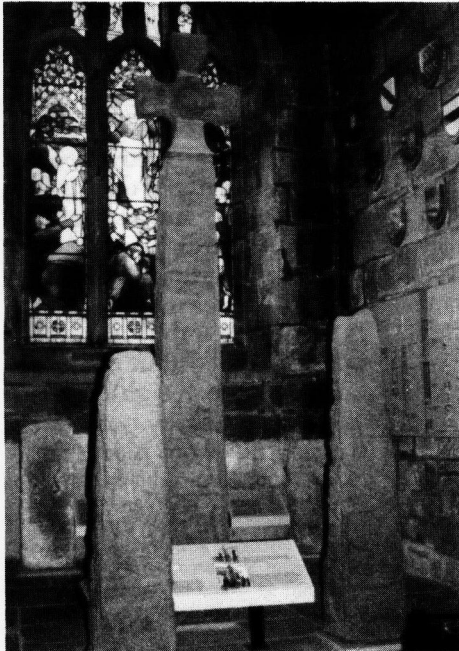


Plate IX
Display of crosses in Ilkley
parish church.

and improved the visual interpretation of the carved details: previously the surfaces had presented a single black appearance, but with the natural lighter-coloured stone now revealed, the patterns of light and shadow enhanced the details of the carvings.

The three crosses were arranged in the centre of the tower in a triangular pattern (Plate IX), with a low-level (2-ft high) sloping notice-board between them, L-shaped to prevent people squeezing between the crosses. This board gives a brief history of the crosses and the reasons for their being moved inside, together with photographs of how they appeared earlier in the century. Notice-boards on the walls of the tower adjacent to the crosses reproduce Collingwood's 1915 drawings of the crosses with brief notes on the subjects of the main scenes shown (see, for example, Plate X). Similar explanatory notice-boards have been provided for the two Roman altars (Plates I and II), for the badly weathered Roman inscription (Plate XI) found during the excavations and for the late-medieval oak door (Plate I), all of which have been mounted for display. Finally a lighting system was installed of four small spotlights focusing on the inscription and on the three crosses. This provides low-level lighting for when the church is open, with a push-button system enabling visitors to bring into play six larger lights which provide powerful illumination for the entire tower area.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The way in which the crosses at Ilkley and Kildwick have been displayed achieves several purposes. Firstly, the notices provide an explanation to visitors of the nature and history of the cross fragments, with the lighting at Ilkley enabling the crosses to be seen to their full advantage. This provides an additional attractive tourist feature in this already popular Pennine region. Secondly the display enables ordinary members of the public to appreciate the craftsmanship and beliefs of the earlier Anglo-Saxons in the environment to which they originally belonged, rather than in the perhaps rather more sterile atmosphere of a museum. The pieces have thus been preserved in the setting from which they came and for which their makers intended them. It is hoped that the work which has been carried out on the crosses in the Keighley area, and especially at Ilkley, may inspire other churches possessing Anglo-Saxon sculpture to consider displaying their pieces in a similar manner.

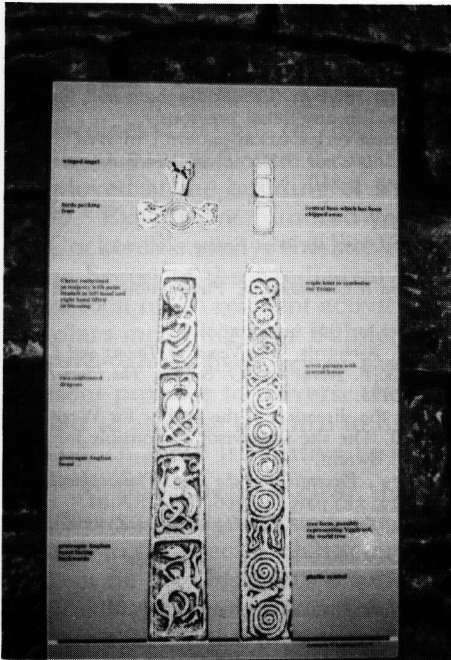


Plate X
Illustrative panel in Ilkley parish church for two faces of the largest cross.

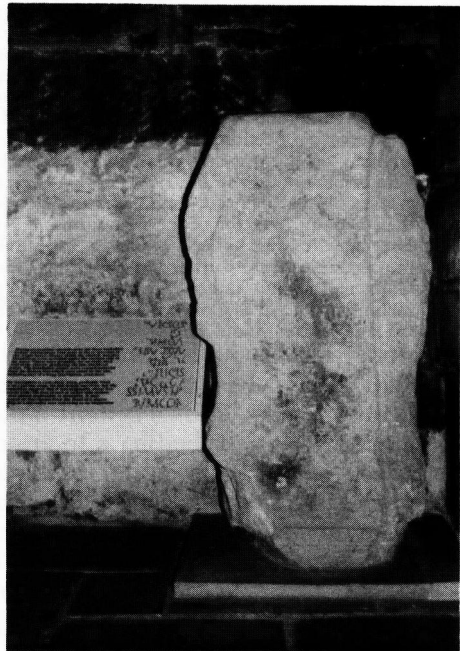


Plate XI
Stone inscription from the front of a major Roman building, reused as a foundation stone in west wall of Ilkley parish church. Originally it would have been about five times as wide. The notice board to the right gives as much as can be deciphered of the surviving inscription.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Kildwick and Ilkley crosses are discussed and illustrated in W.G. Collingwood, 'Anglian and Anglo-Danish sculpture in the West Riding', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxiii, 129-299, on pp.185-200. The Addingham and East Riddlesden pieces have not been discussed in any detail previously.
2. See further M.L. Faull, 'The pre-Conquest ecclesiastical pattern', in *West Yorkshire: an Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500*, eds. M.L. Faull and S.A. Moorhouse, Wakefield, 1981, 210-23, esp. p.210.
3. See *ibid.*, pp.214-221.
4. For discussion of this see *ibid.*, pp.219-21.
5. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire; the West Riding*, 2nd ed., Harmondsworth, 1967, 72.
6. J. Hinde (ed.), *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea; I*, Publications of the Surtees Society, li, 1868, 134.
7. I am grateful to Mrs. H.E.J. le Patourel for this information.
8. M. Gelling, W.H.F. Nicolaisen and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain*, London, 1970, s.n. Ilkley; A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, London, 1981, 430-1, 493.
9. Unpublished excavations in 1982 under the direction of the author for West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council. The site supervisor responsible for the day-to-day running of the site was A.C. Swann.
10. B.R. Hartley, 'The Roman fort at Ilkley', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society; Literature and History Section*, xii, part ii, 1966, 23-72; A.M. Woodward, 'The Roman fort at Ilkley', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxviii, 1926, 137-321.
11. Pevsner, *op. cit.*, 277.
12. Woodward, *op. cit.*, 319.
13. R.N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*, London, 1980, 81-2.
14. Collingwood, *op. cit.*, 197;
15. Pevsner, *op. cit.*, 283.
16. Collingwood, *op. cit.*, 199.
17. *Ibid.*
18. For a full discussion of the handling of this problem see *Loose Stones: Architectural and Sculptural Fragments in Churches*, Council for the Care of Churches, 1985.
19. Fragments a and c illustrated by Collingwood (*op. cit.*, 198) are not now on display, while there is another small piece on display with faint remains of decoration on two faces which is not illustrated or mentioned by Collingwood.
20. This examination was carried out by S.B. Hanna, Stone and Wallpaintings Conservation Section, The British Museum, who was also responsible for advising on the transfer, cleaning and conservation of the crosses.
21. The display design was carried out by C. Johnson-Green and the cleaning of the crosses by the firm of Guidici-Martin. The work was organised by T. Suthers, then Deputy Director of the Museum and Art Gallery Service for Yorkshire and Humberside. The general planning and implementation of the project was under the direction of the author, on behalf of West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council. I should like to express my thanks to the Reverend R. Cleland, then incumbent of All Saints, Ilkley, to the church wardens and vergers, and to the Olicana Museum and Historical Society, for their support and assistance throughout the project.