

XXVII.—*A short Account of some Carved Stones in Ross-shire,
accompanied with a Series of Outline Engravings.*

By CHARLES CARTER PETLEY, ESQ.

[*Read to the Society 23d May 1831.*]

THERE is in the county of Ross, as in every district of North Britain, a variety of stone pillars, raised to commemorate events which, being without inscriptions, they have not transmitted, but which, as they exhibit sculptures, are curious from their known antiquity, and show a progress in Monumental Art.

In giving some account of a few found in this County, recourse must necessarily be had to the traditions of persons to whom, from generation to generation, they have been orally transmitted; and great allowances made for inaccuracies which must, of course, in so great a length of time (as from their erection) have crept in, particularly when it is considered such traditions are for the most part found amongst the lower class, whose ancestors were a rude and uncivilized people. An account which may be true, or in some measure so, is better than none; and if such as can be collected now is to be discredited altogether, whence can we expect to find a more satisfactory one? Books will give us little, and what they do is taken from no better authority, for we have none published which mention these subjects of older date than fifty or sixty years ago, since which time the traditions can have received no change of consequence.

Chalmers, in his *Caledonia*, divides the sculptured stones so frequently found in North Britain into three classes: 1st, Religious Monuments; 2d, Monuments of Events; and, 3d, Funereal Monuments.

It is not easy to determine precisely under which of these heads the stones in the county of Ross can be properly classed. He conceives them to be funereal ones, which idea must, I should imagine, have suggested itself from the *tradition* of their being raised over the bodies of a King of Denmark's sons.

I should rather class them under one or other of the former heads, conceiving that, if they were *funereal* ones, the chief subject of the sculpture

found upon them would not be sports of different kinds, as hunting, shooting with a cross-bow, &c.

Be this as it may, tradition uniformly refers them either to the Danes¹ themselves, or the times in which they were continually invading this country, in the ninth and tenth centuries. Some may consequently be supposed to have been raised over the slain of either side, while others were erected to commemorate victories, or the subsequent expulsion of these barbarous invaders.

As my only intention is to give a description and the traditions of such of these monuments as I have been enabled to make drawings of, I shall confine myself to the accounts I can gather in the country respecting them, taking it for granted such information will at least be as good as any that could be collected from tourists or any other source.

Clachcarra. (Shandwick Pillar.) Plates XVIII. and XIX.

This being the first to be taken notice of, I conceive it according to my plan to give the tradition respecting it, as it has a connection according to such tradition with several pillars in the country.

One account makes this the burial-place of three sons of a King of Denmark, who were shipwrecked on a rock about a mile from the shore, and which is to this day called the Three King's Sons.

This might do very well, if we were not told by another tradition that these three sons were buried beneath a large flat stone (of its natural shape, without any inscription), upon the top of the hill immediately opposite to the fatal rock. I had this stone raised, and the ground opened and removed to about the depth of three feet, when the natural soil appeared.

A daughter of one of the kings of Lochlin was married to a chief of this country. One day after dinner, in the presence of a large company, the husband (said to be an ancestor of the Balnagown family) being displeased, gave her a slap on the face. She, in return, replied, that if her nine brothers were present, he would not dare treat her so. She afterwards contrived to make them acquainted with his conduct, and they, coming over to take revenge, were slain one after the other by the husband; and a stone of this description was raised to mark the place where they each fell and were buried.

¹ These stones are very common on the coast of Denmark.

There are several gross inconsistencies in this the most generally believed tradition, but which it is not worth while entering into the consideration of, as it would lead to an uninteresting, useless, and endless dissertation.

It is situated on the top of a small bank, near the fisher-village of Shandwick, in the parish of Nigg, and about a quarter of a mile from the sea-shore.

The following are its dimensions :—

Height,	.	.	.	.	.	.	9 ft. 11 in.
Width,	.	.	.	.	.	.	3 4
Thickness,	.	.	.	.	.	.	0 7

The length of the cross on the west side is 5 feet 7 inches. It is supposed that the workmanship of this is much more modern than that of the east side; it has undoubtedly the appearance of being the labour of a different hand, the work being ruder in the execution.

The weather has made little or no impression on the sculpture on the east side; the animals, considering their size, are for the most part very spiritedly cut, and the large circle is very curious for its nice regularity.

I see nothing on this stone that can lead to a supposition of its being a funereal one, unless we were to consider the plaited circles inclosed in the snakes as emblems of eternity, and *these* are on the side imagined to be the work of a later age.

Bardvour. (The Stone near Hilton.) Plates XX., XXI., and XXII.

The same tradition attaches itself to this as to the former stone. It lies on the west side of a small inclosure, with its sculptured face downwards, a few hundred yards from the sea-shore, and about the same distance from the small village of Hilton; close to it are the remains of the chapel of Mhuor.

It was not known that any sculpture was on the lower side till about twenty years ago, when Mr Cordiner, in company with Mr M'Leod of Geanies, went to see it in its present position, being at that time remarkable only for the following inscription :—

He that lives well does well
Says Solomon the wise
Here lies Alexander Duff
And his three wives.

Mr Cordiner,¹ supposing this stone from its size might be of the same description as the one at Shandwick, out of curiosity put his hand beneath it, and immediately found his conjectures true. Procuring several men, it was turned over, and presented this curious relief. Alexander Duff appears, from accounts, not to have been buried here with his three wives, but at the Abbey of Fearn, and that this stone was intended, after the inscription, &c., had been cut, to have been carried there, but was found too heavy to be removed.

On minute examination, I have no doubt whatever but that this side also was originally ornamented with sculpture, as a kind of regular indentation is traceable, and that it was erased when it was intended to have been converted into a grave-stone.

That it once stood upright, I have also no doubt.

The horses are particularly spirited in this relief; and the countenances of the men were distinctly seen when the sun shone obliquely upon them.

The most curious thing, perhaps, of the whole is the ingenious contrivance of the circles. At first sight they appear to have no determinate form, but on examination they are found perfectly regular.

The large circle is copied correctly from a cast I had made in wax, and is the exact size of the original.

The dimensions are as follows :—

Length,	7 ft. 9½ in.
Breadth,	4 2½
Slope on the sides,	0 2
Thickness,	0 7
Width of the border on the sides,	0 9
Depth of the upper compartment,	2 8
Width of do.	2 5½
Depth of the lower compartment,	2 7½
Width of do.	2 6¾
Broken ornamental work at the bottom, from	{ 1 3
	{ to
	{ 1 4
Narrow border, or division line,	0 1

¹ [Mr Petley here refers to the Rev. Charles Cordiner of Banff. In his work entitled "Remarkable Ruins and Romantic Prospects of North Britain, &c.," London, 1795, 2 vols. 4to, he has introduced engravings of this and of other Ancient Monuments in Ross-shire. *Edit.*]

Edderton. Plate XXIII.

Another of the King of Lochlin's sons is said to have fallen at Edderton, and a stone situated at the west end of the churchyard is supposed to mark his grave.

The cross on the east front, in point of shape, is the same as that on the Stone of Nigg, but possesses none of its curiosity now in point of sculpture, whatever it might at one period have done.

Some Runic characters were intelligible over the cross on the east front about forty years ago, but time has now obliterated them almost entirely.

The figure on horseback is supposed to represent Edward the Prince, and after whose name the place is called.

The dimensions of the stone are—

Height,	.	.	.	.	.	5 ft. 6 in.
Breadth,	.	.	.	.	.	2 3
Height of the cross on east front,	.	.	.	.	.	2 0
Breadth of do. do.	.	.	.	.	.	1 4
Cross on the west side, height,	.	.	.	.	.	2 7
Do. do. breadth,	.	.	.	.	.	2 4
Diameter of the circle,	.	.	.	.	.	2 0

In the compartment below the figure of Edward are two horses with their riders, lined out with great spirit, and apparently intended to have been executed in the same bold kind of relievo.

As only part of these latter figures are visible above the surface of the ground, it may reasonably be supposed they are complete below.

Carrablaire.

About half a mile to the west of the Church of Edderton is another stone, but to which tradition has not attached so much consequence as to suppose it to mark the burial-place of one of the kings of Lochlin's sons.

It is situated in the centre of a flat circle, twelve paces in diameter and raised about three feet above the natural ground.

All the stones which are said to denote the spots where the sons of the King of Lochlin fell, are invariably executed with great skill and ingenuity and the same character and style observable throughout.

This stone, possessing neither a regular figure or form, nor any of the curious workmanship found on the others, cannot be supposed to be one of

the same class, but (as the oral tradition of the country says) raised, in all probability, over the body of some chieftain who fell there in one of the bloody battles, of which several were fought in this part of the country some centuries ago.

What is here represented¹ is all that now remains of sculpture visible; but I was informed that about forty years ago there was carved work on the west side, but it is effaced.

It appears to have been set up in the rough shape in which it came from the quarry.

Its dimensions are—

Height,	9 ft. 0 in.
Broadest part,	3 2

and varying in thickness, tapering to a point at top.

Nigg. Plates XXIV., XXV., and XXVI.

Another stone of the same description as those at Shandwick and Hilton, once stood in the churchyard at Nigg, but the precise spot of its original situation cannot now be ascertained.

It was broken off during a violent hurricane in the year 1727, after which it was placed against the east gable of the church, where it remained till about twenty or thirty years ago, when it was removed for the purpose of gaining admittance to the family vault of the Rosses of Kindean, and on that removal it fell and broke; only a small piece, however, is wanting to complete it.

There appears to have been more labour bestowed upon this than upon any other of the stones; as on a small part of one of the circles, which is more perfect than the others, some very minute ornamental work is visible, and in all probability the whole stone was wrought in the same laborious and curious manner.

On one edge of this stone are discernible two cords, very neatly executed, running parallel nearly from the top to the bottom; on the other edge no such remains are visible, though no doubt it was equally ornamented.

On one side the ornaments are very much raised, the circles and lozenges in the compartments on each side of the cross being an inch and a half above the level of the base.

¹ [There is no engraving in the series to correspond with this description.]

The carved work on the other side is not in such strong relief, but is exceedingly curious, from the regularity, variety, and ingenuity of the circles, the different compartments which surround the centre, some of the figures on which are so much mutilated as to be scarcely traceable, while others are in a tolerably perfect state of preservation.

The men on their feet have their due proportions of height, or nearly so; but the one on horseback has that absurd magnitude of head and diminutiveness of body that all the others on horseback have; at the same time, like the rest, the horses and animals of all descriptions are accurately and spiritedly executed.

The whole dimensions, including the fragment, are as follows:—

Height,	. . . . .	8 ft. 6 in.
Breadth,	. . . . .	3 5
Compartments in the border, height,	. . . . .	1 3
Do. do. breadth,	. . . . .	0 6½
Centre compartment, height,	. . . . .	5 2
Do. do. breadth,	. . . . .	1 8½
Space inclosing the compartments in the broad border,	. . . . .	0 1½

About half a mile to the east of Dornoch stands a stone, commonly called the King's Cross. On what occasion it was erected is not known, nor does it deserve much notice, either in point of sculpture or apparent antiquity.

NOTE.—The stones at Nigg and Hilton are both prostrate;—the first Mr Petley discovered in a neglected corner of the churchyard, and the fragment was lying on the other side of the churchyard wall. The probability, I think, is, that it was conveyed to that situation by some *Goth*, who thought he could smooth it into a very serviceable horizontal grave-stone for his family, which was very nearly the fate of the Hilton Stone, the beauties of which were only accidentally discovered on the underside of a stone with a modern inscription, and on this modern surface there are traces of its having been carved, which the chisel has not quite annihilated. The tradition supposes eight or nine of them in different parts of the country, and I rather think it questionable that all those Mr Petley took drawings of are referable to

the same date; that at Shandwick, for example, is exceedingly likely to have been put up in memory of the three Danish princes said to have been wrecked and lost on the rocks called the King's Sons, which lie just off that part of the coast where the stone is erected.¹

Letter from Mrs Petley to the Secretary.

St John's Hill, near Seven Oaks. (No date.)

DEAR SIR,—As the widow and sole executrix of your lamented uncle Petley,² I wish to present to the Antiquarian Society of Edinburgh a series of his beautiful Etchings of the figures on the Carved Stones in the North of Scotland, and also the plates on which they were etched; and I trust you will have the goodness to allow me to do it through you.

The drawings were taken in the years 1811 and 1812; and Mr Petley was assisted in the etching by a person of the name of Hayes.

The *only* Society that ever had a set of them was the Northern Institution at Inverness. There are some manuscripts of the traditionary accounts which he picked up about them at the time he made the drawings, which I have also sent; and I should feel particularly obliged by a line as soon as you can conveniently write after their arrival, as I shall be glad to hear of their safe receipt.—Yours,

ELLEN PETLEY.

Donald Gregory, Esq.

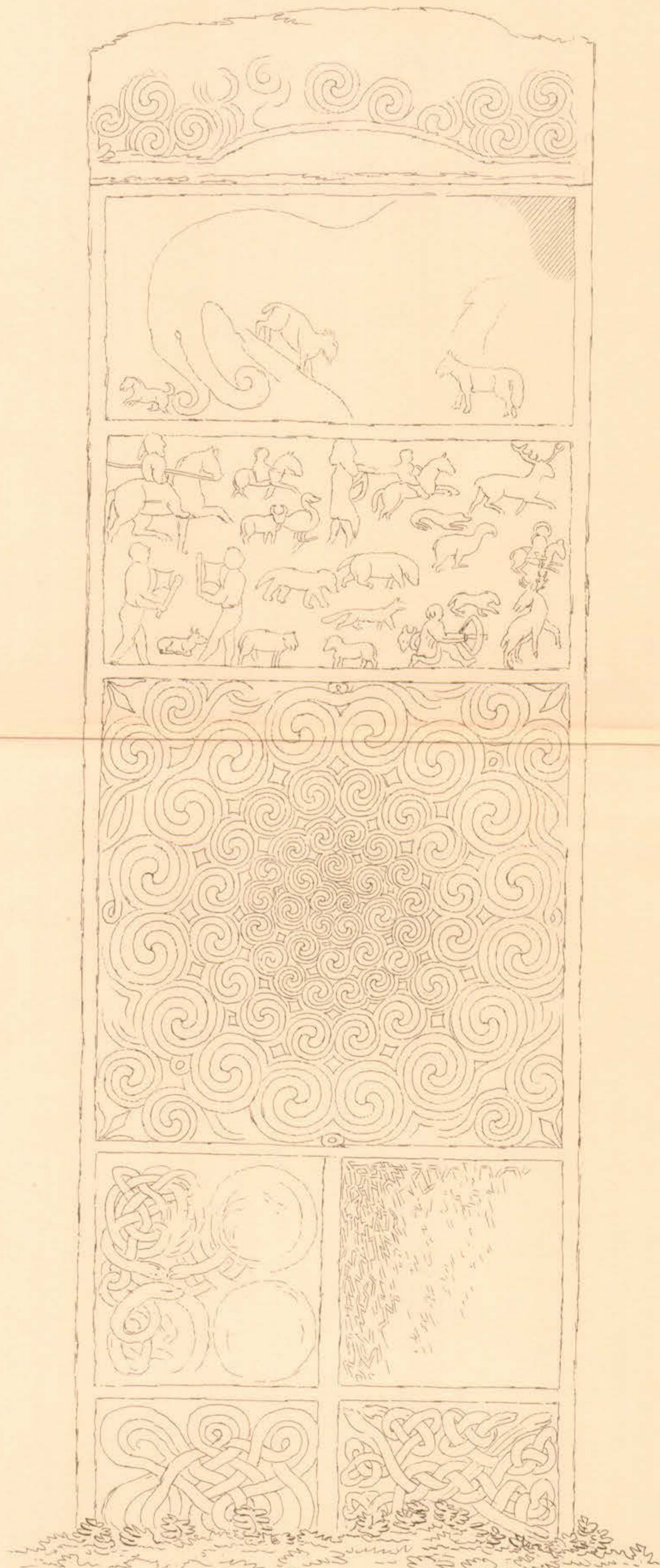
Secretary to the Antiquarian Society.

¹ [The above note is appended to Mr Petley's MS., but the name of the writer is not specified. *Edit.*]

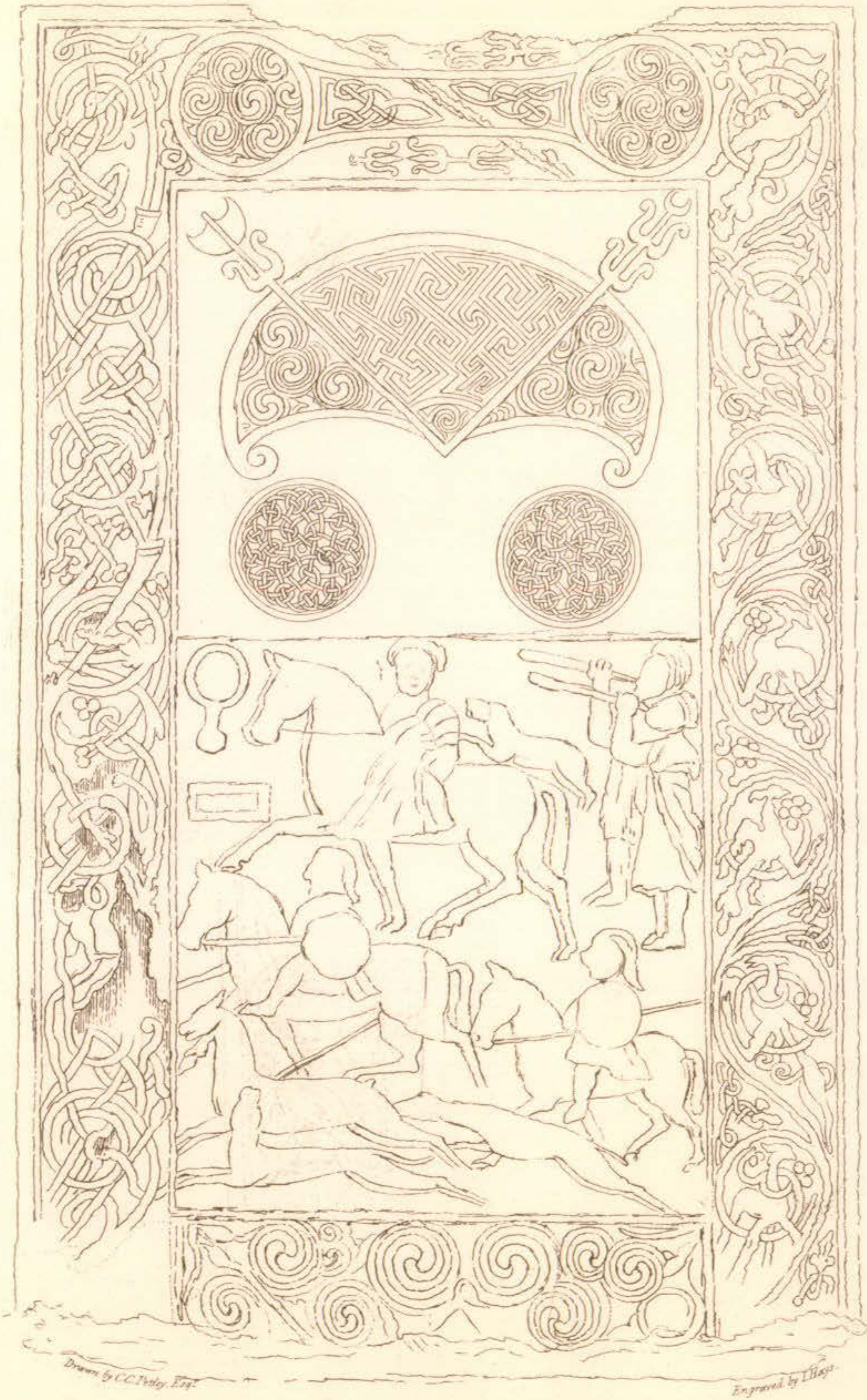
² August 25, 1830. Died at River-head House, Kent, CHARLES CARTER PETLEY, Esq. (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 1830, vol. ii., p. 381.)



PILLAR AT SHANDWICK, WEST SIDE.



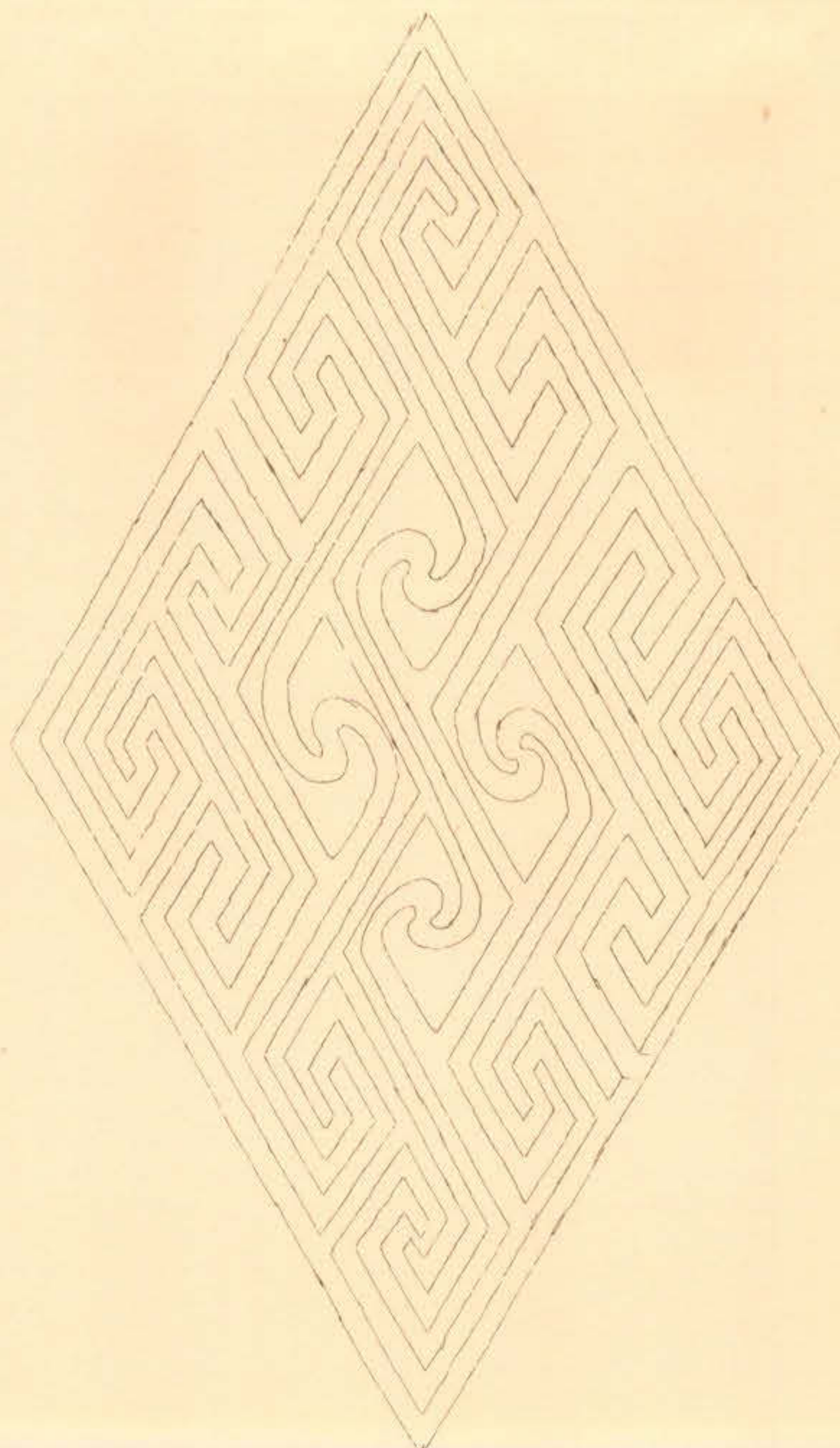
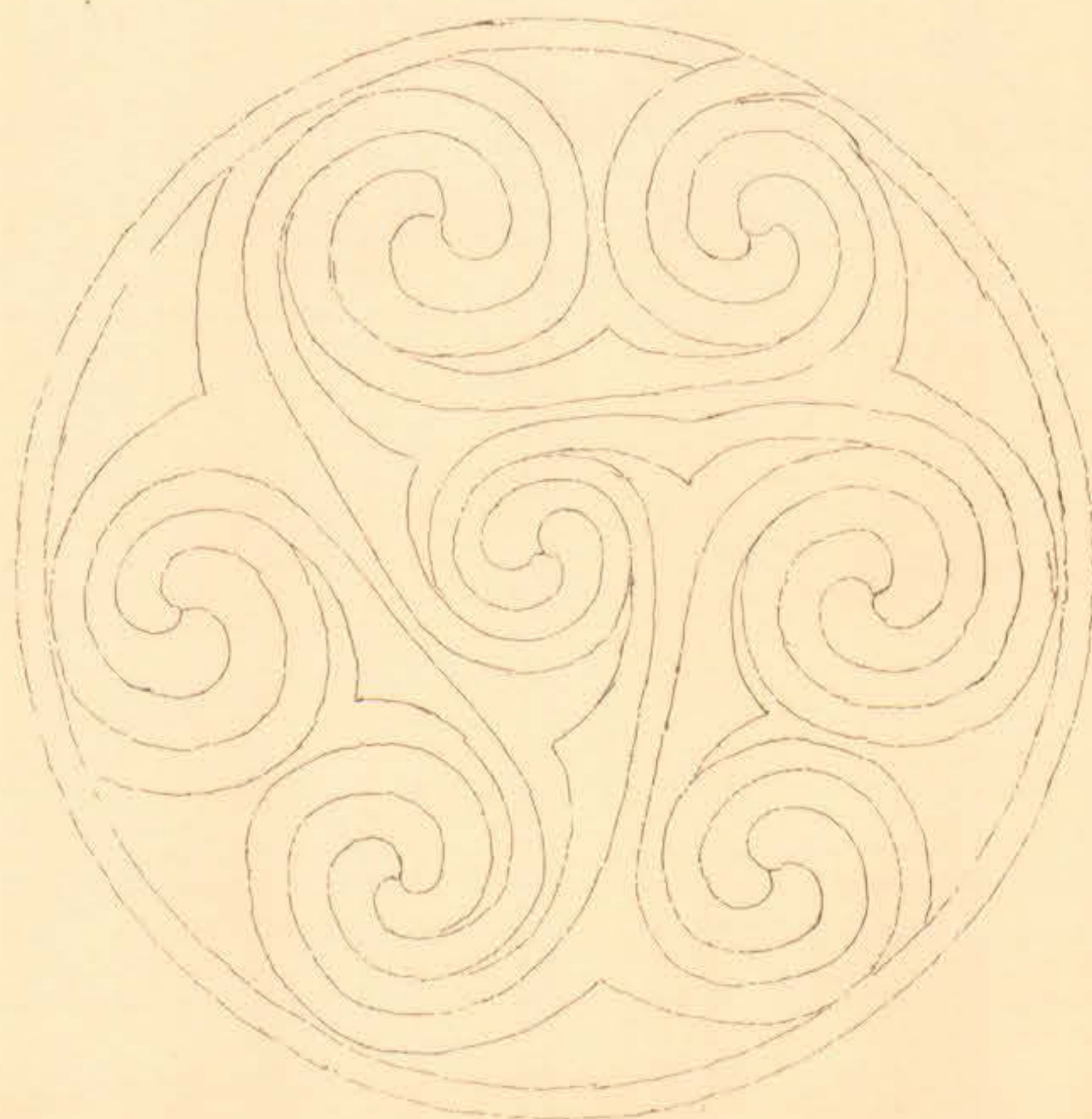
PILLAR AT SHANDWICK, EAST SIDE.

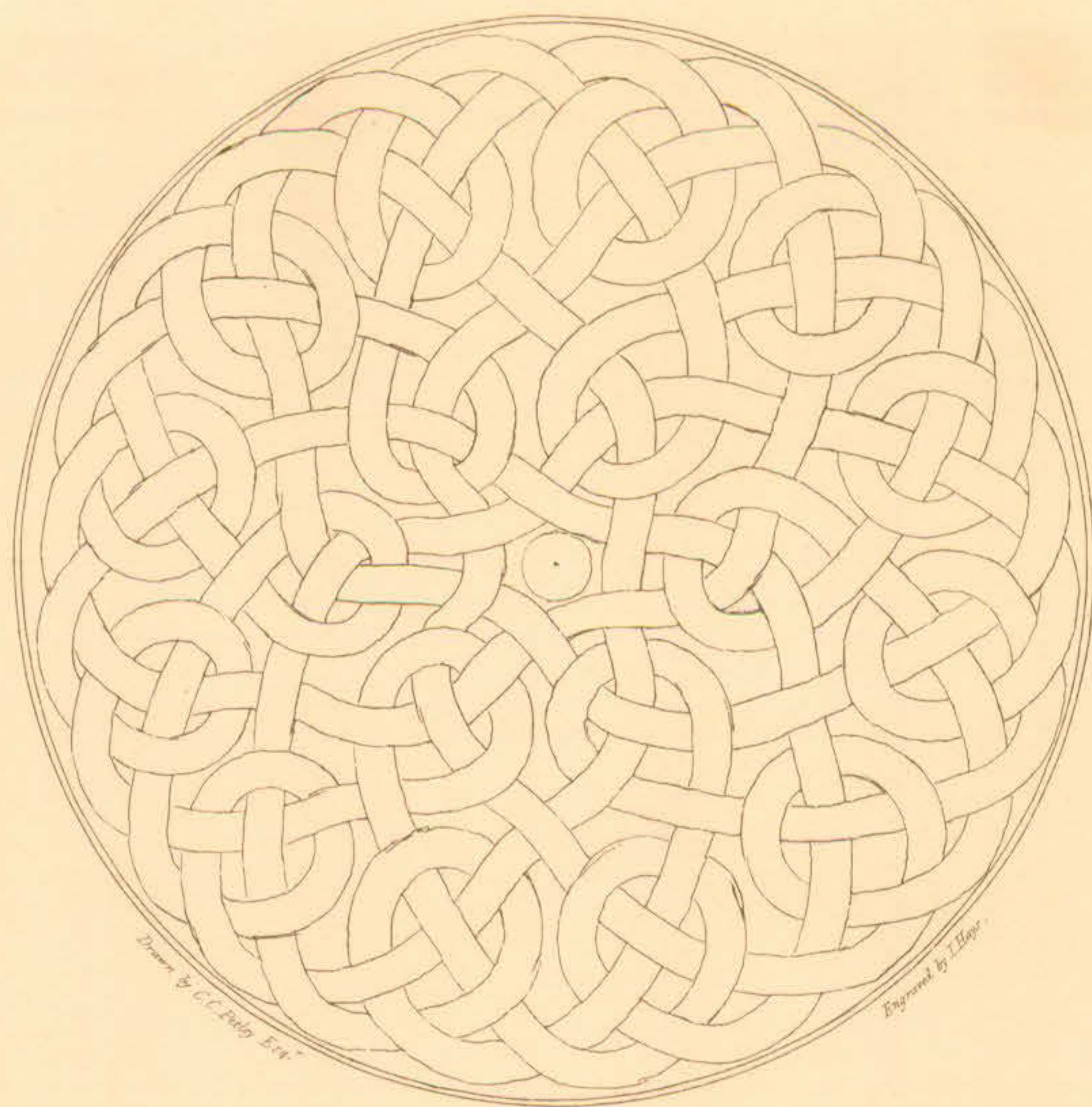
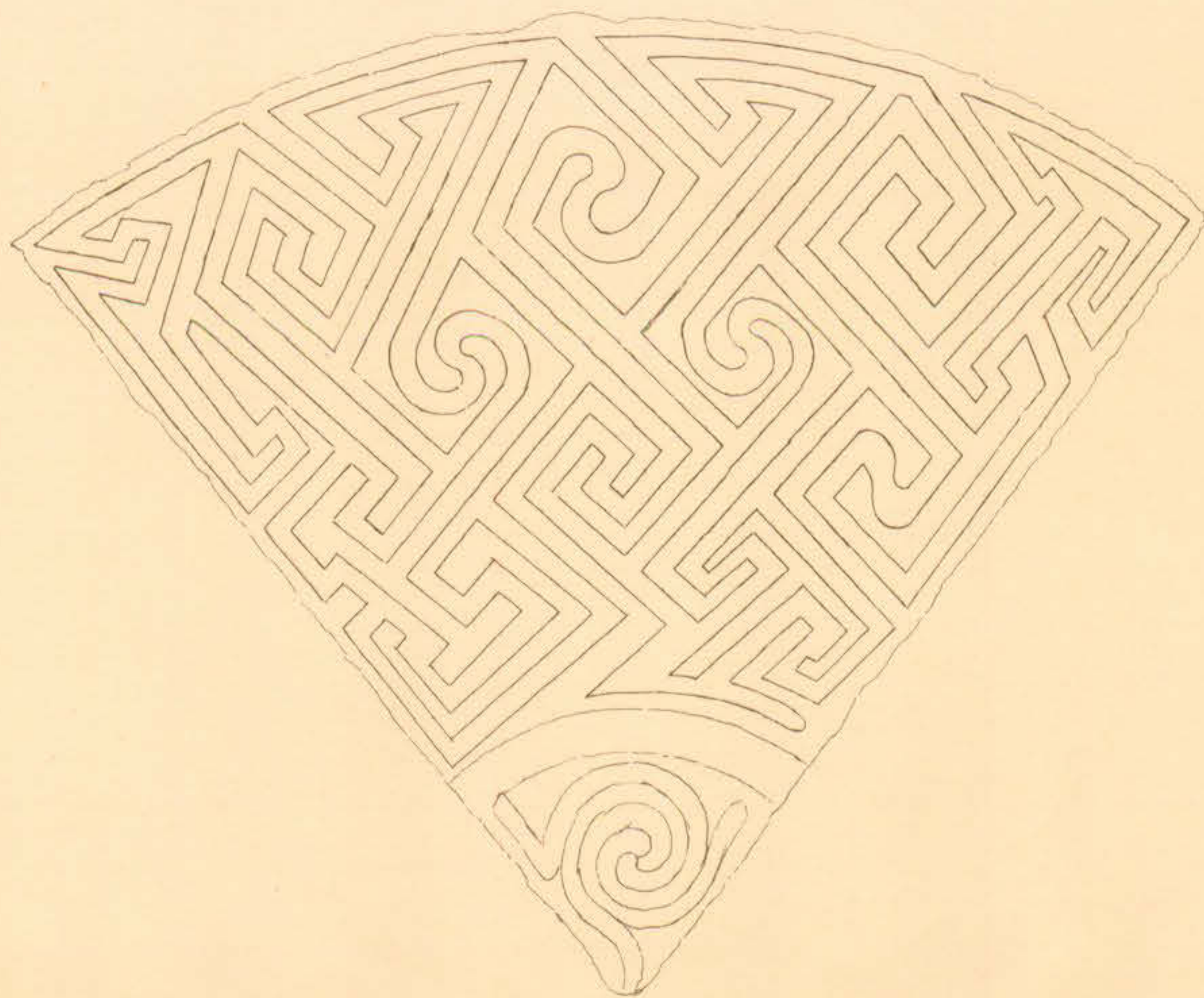


Drawn by C.C. Pidge, Esq.

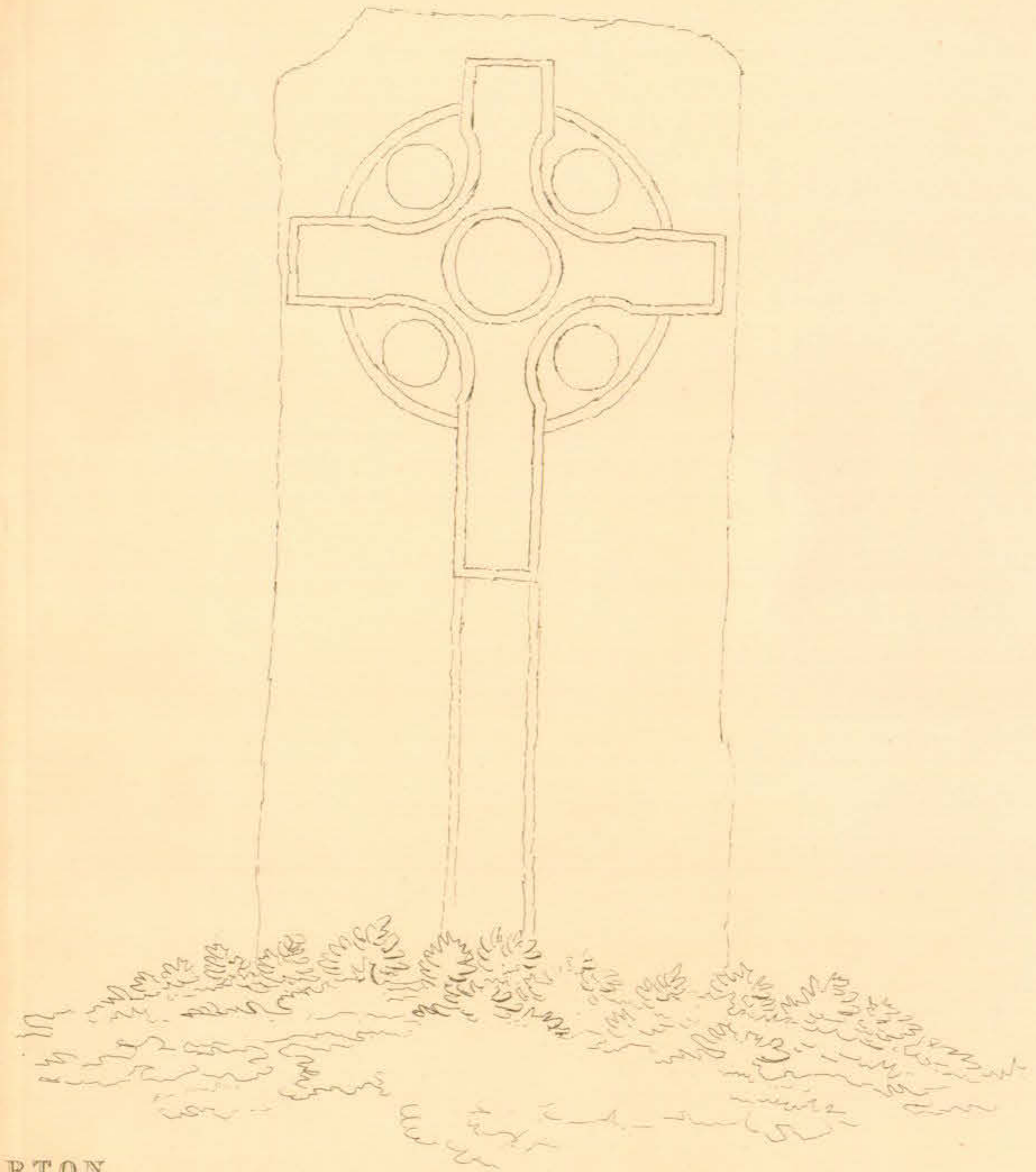
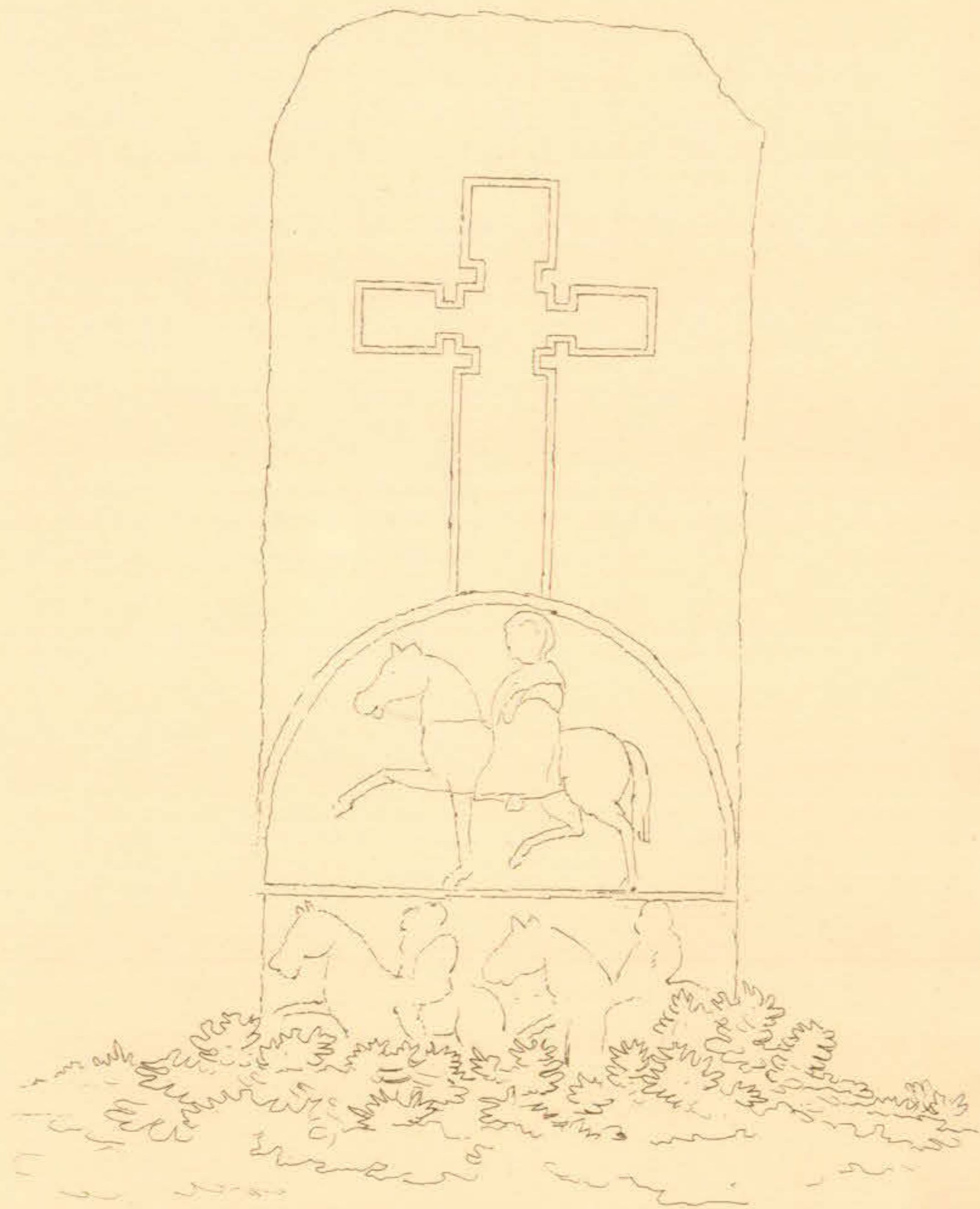
Engraved by Briggs.

STONE AT HILTON.





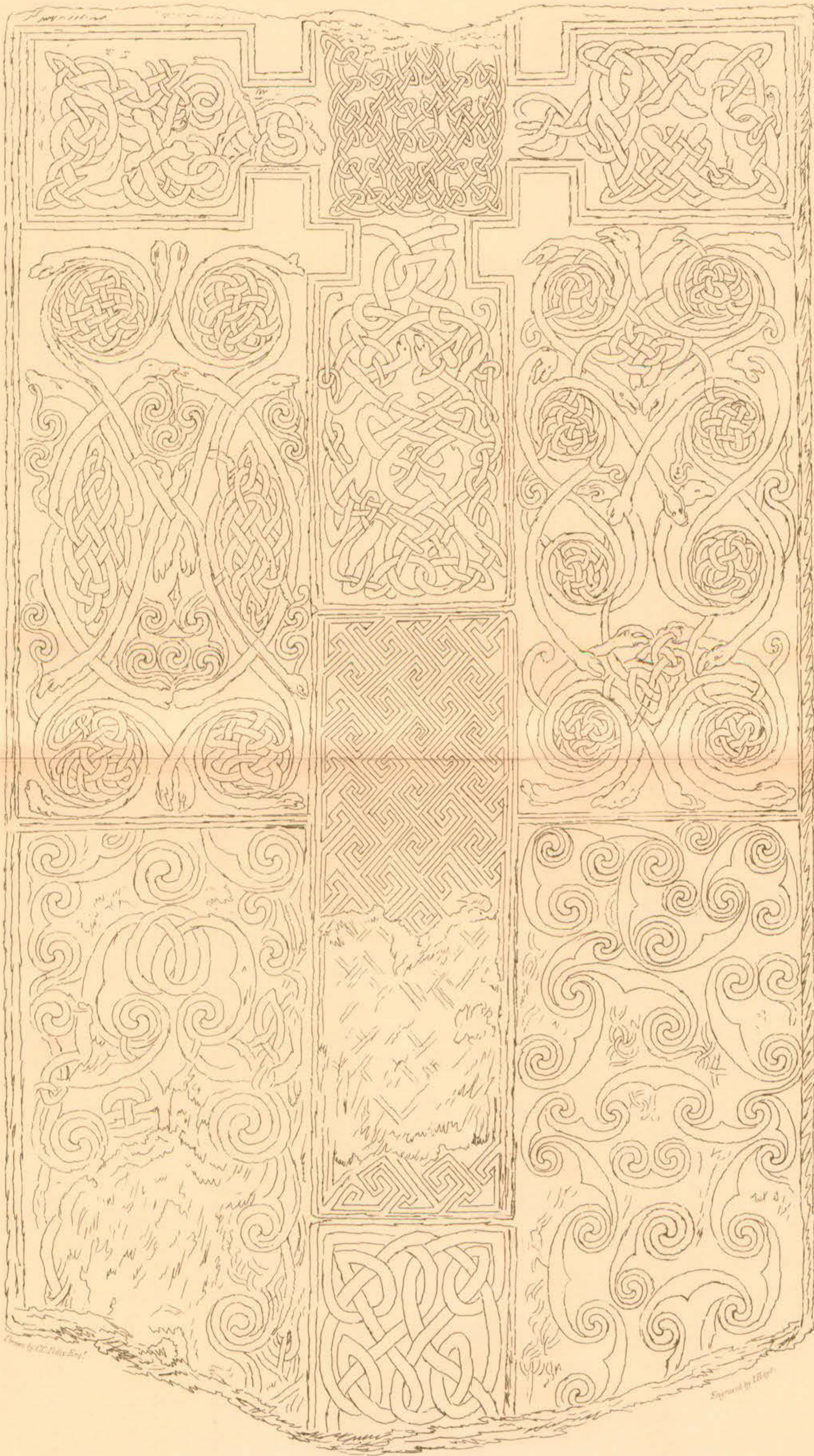
FROM THE STONE AT HILTON.



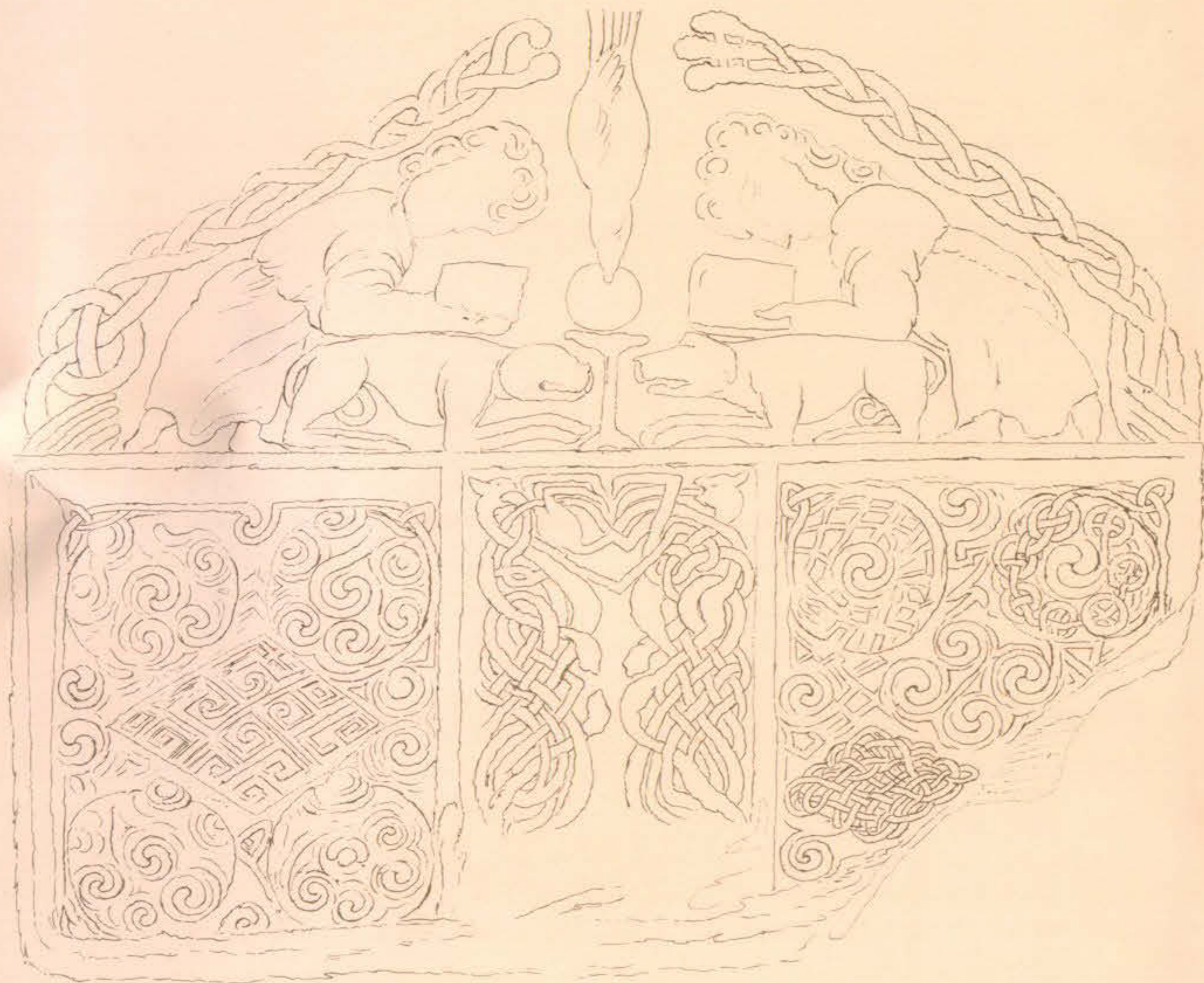
STONE AT EDDERTON.



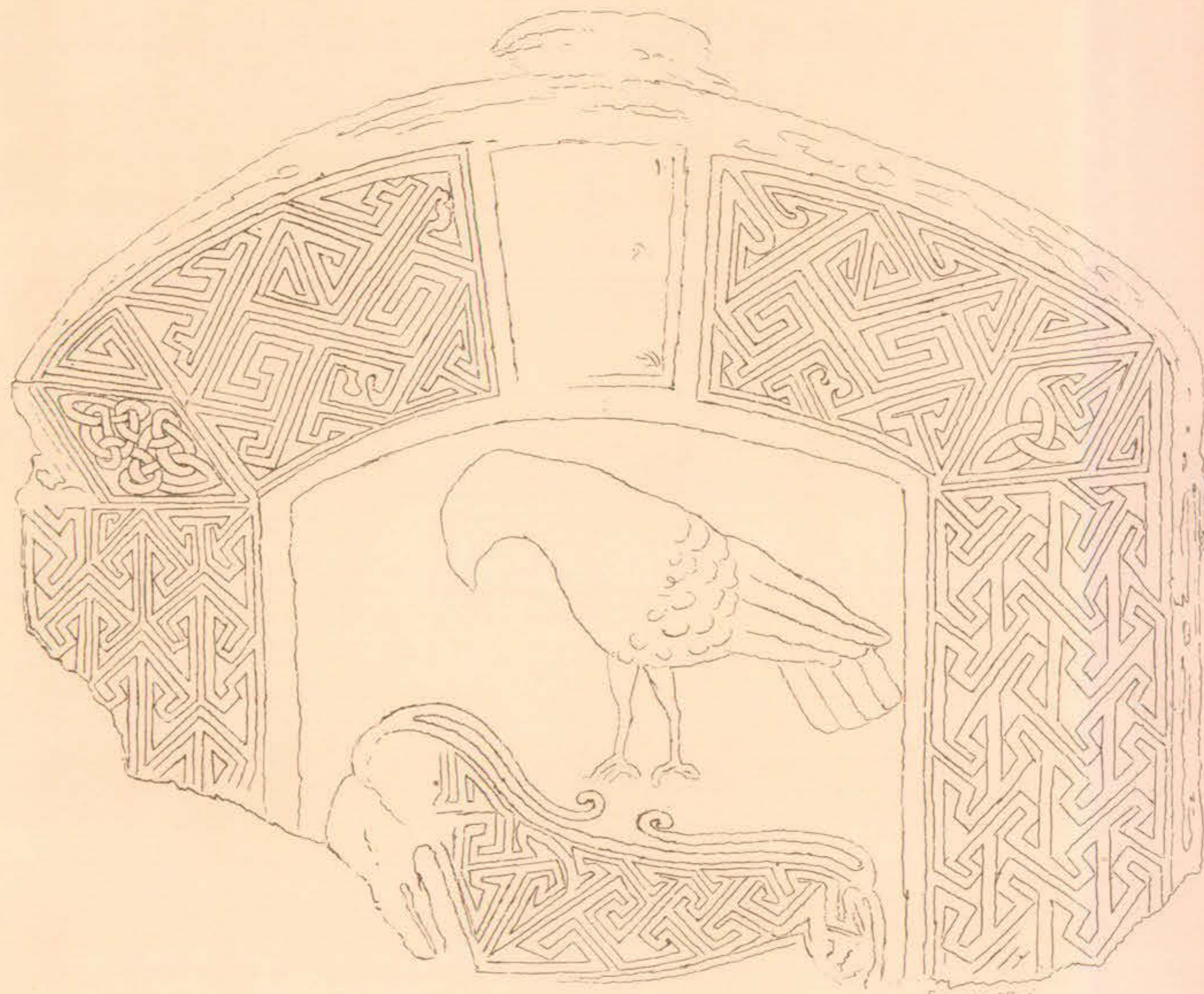
STONE AT NIGG.



STONE AT NIGG.



Drawn by G.C. Pigg, Esq.



Engraved by J.H. Pigg

PART OF THE STONE AT NIGG.