

IX.

NOTE ON A STONE BEARING AN INCISED CROSS, FROM THE SITE OF ST COLM'S CHAPEL, WALLS, ORKNEY. BY JAMES W. CURSITER, F.S.A. Scot., KIRKWALL.

The stone here figured (fig. 1) was discovered about the end of the year 1887, at the site of a chapel in the burial-ground in Kirk Hope, Walls, Orkney, in the course of some alterations. It formed part of the foundations of a chapel which were being removed, and happened, in the first instance, to be thrown out on the beach with the rubbish from the building. There it was discovered by Rev. James Russell, and by his instructions taken back to the burial-ground. It is now presented to the Museum by Mr J. G. Moodie Heddle of Melsetter, with consent of Captain Corrigan. The slab is of coarse grey sandstone, measuring 3 feet 3 inches in length by 21 inches in

width, and about 5 inches in thickness, and has on one of its faces an incised cross of Celtic design. The arms of the cross are of equal length and breadth, viz., $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches, with circles $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at each angle of intersection. The lower limb of the cross springs from a base 3 inches wide at the top, and widening at the bottom to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The base is 10 inches in height. The lines forming the sides of the base are joined by a straight line across the foot, but are prolonged on both sides, turning upwards into a spiral volute. There are no traces of any other sculpture or inscription on the stone, so far as I can discover. The top of the cross is slightly incomplete, owing to the slab being broken. From its position in the building, it must have belonged to an earlier period than the chapel recently demolished.

Walls (the Vagaland of the Sagas) is the modernised form of the old name Waas, applied to the southern portion of the Island of Hoy, and it is in the extreme S.E. of Walls that Kirk Hope is situated. Kirk Hope is the Asmundarvag of the Sagas, and the old farm of Osmundwall is in the immediate vicinity of the site of the chapel, which is near the head of the bay on the north side. This chapel

seems to have been at one time the church of the district, and a common kirk of the Canons of Orkney, and the incumbent was formerly sub-chanter. The authority for the dedication to St Columba rests upon the fact that there was a church dedicated to him somewhere in the Island of Hoy, but its exact position was not known positively. Sanson, however, in his map published about the end of the 17th century, marks

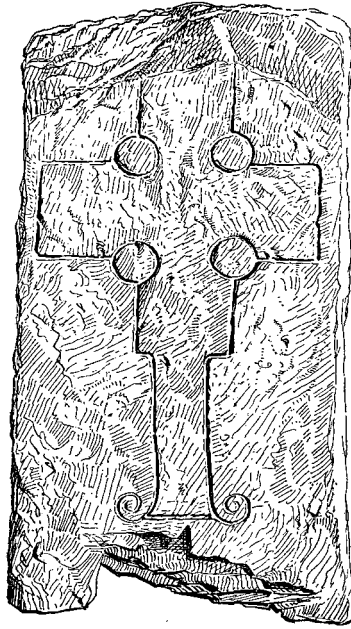


Fig. 1. Slab incised with Cross, from St Colm's Kirk, Walls, Orkney. ($\frac{1}{2}$.)

the site of this chapel S. Kolms K., and I imagine there is little doubt of his correctness. The finding of this sculptured slab tends to confirm it, and points to an early Celtic Christian settlement at this spot. It is strange that the same bay should have become famous in the annals of Orkney as the place where the Norsemen, when in possession of the islands, received an unexpected visit from the King of Norway (Olaf Tryggvi's son) in the 11th century, who compelled Earl Sigurd and all his retainers to accept the Christian faith, under threat of immediate execution.