

III.

MORE CROSS-SLABS FROM THE ISLE OF MAN.

By P. M. C. KERMODE, F.S.A.Scot.

Since my last note on this subject in 1921, only one cross-slab had come to light till the summer of 1928, when two were received from Maughold and a number found on the site of an early church about a mile north-west of the town of Ramsey.¹

1. In January 1925, when excavating the ruins of Keeill Woirrey, on Ballalough, near Peel, in the parish of German, I found a slab of the local slate bearing on one face a simple linear cross (fig. 1); this was used as a support against the north side of the altar. It measures 3 feet by 17 inches at its widest, and $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick. The head has been brought to a round; the cross, 8 inches by 11 inches, has the vertical arms carefully chiselled to a width of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch and $\frac{3}{8}$ inch deep, both ends neatly rounded; the horizontal arms are thinner (about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch), and the lines are prolonged, suggesting pointed ends, but faint traces remain to show that they also had been rounded. It is now in the Manx Museum.

It has long been known and is on record (*Manx Society*, Vol. V,

¹ For previous notes, see *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xlv. p. 437, vol. xlvi. p. 53, vol. l. p. 50, and vol. lv. p. 256.

App., p. 200) that a cross from this Keeill had been removed by a former tenant and built as a lintel in his cow-house nearby. Then came the "murrain" and various other ills and afflictions till at last the slab, accused of "buitcher-aght" or witchcraft, was taken down and secretly reburied; but the tenant was crippled for the rest of his life. When on his death-bed, Mr Corlett, Chaplain of St John's, tried to discover from him precisely where he had put it, but all he could learn was that it was deep down in the sand, not far from the houses. I searched in vain at another site said by neighbours to be the right one, and, when at last I was allowed to excavate the Keeill, was on the look-out for it; no other cross, however, was found there or elsewhere in the district, and it seems likely that this is indeed the notable "Witchstone."

2. In September I received from Mr W. P. Groves one of the smallest of stone crosses, which is now exhibited in the Manx Museum (fig. 2). This had been found about thirty years ago in a lintel-grave discovered by the making of a drain for some houses built at Port y Vullen, Maughold. It is a naturally flat, water-worn pebble of slate, the corners and edges slightly dressed, and

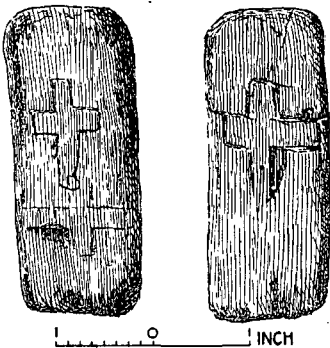


Fig. 2. Cross from Port y Vullen, Isle of Man.

measures $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. One face shows a plain cross, $1\frac{3}{16}$ inch by $\frac{7}{8}$ inch; the lines from $\frac{1}{12}$ inch to $\frac{1}{20}$ inch wide. The other face has a cross of similar form, with another below, even more lightly cut. This, no doubt, would have been carried about on the person of the owner, and buried with him as his most precious relic. It may date from the ninth or the tenth century.

3. In the course of repairs to the wall on the south of Maughold churchyard a broken flake was found by the mason, W. Logan, whom we have to thank for recognising its interest and placing it with the rest in the cross-house (fig. 6). One face had borne a cross, well-chiselled, and displaying, besides an ordinary plait-of-three in the surrounding ring, the remains of a panel with design new to the Isle of Man; the

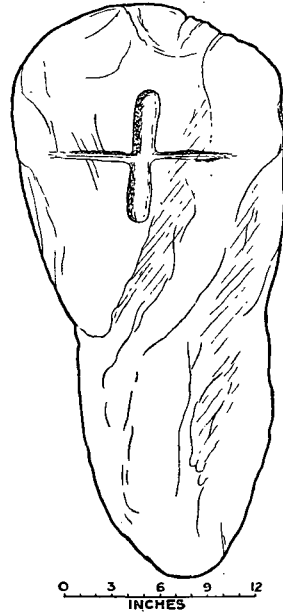


Fig. 1. Cross-slab at Keeill Woirrey, Isle of Man.

nearest approach to it being on the ring of the large broken slab with dog-headed figures at Conchan, numbered 63 in "Manx Crosses." The fragment measures only $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and 1 inch thick; and, to judge from what remains, would have been the right arm of a cross-slab from 4 to 5 feet high by about 20 inches wide and 2 inches thick; the appearance of relief is given by sinking the background of the very close plaits, and the design in the panel is that of a simple plait of two-looped rings in rows, showing a resemblance to

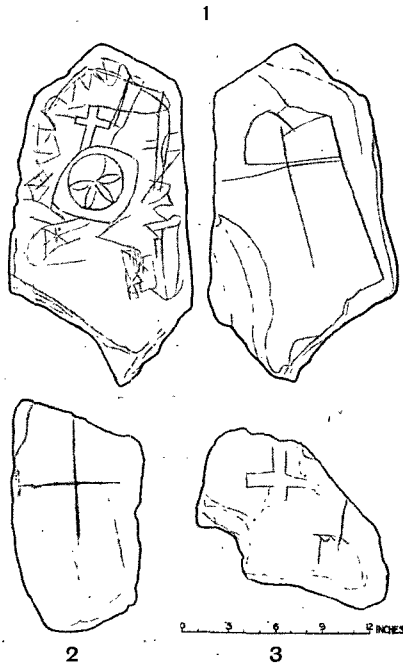


Fig. 3. Cross-slabs from Balleigh, Isle of Man.

Anglian work on some Northumbrian pieces. Except for this, the design and workmanship are very similar to those of two other very small fragments at Maughold, numbered 70 and 71 in "Manx Crosses"; yet each of the three is certainly a part of a separate slab.

This design appears on some Scottish slabs, and, in particular, in a more elaborate and a pleasing form, as a central panel on the fine slab from Nigg. Apart from the design, however, it has been remarked as a characteristic feature of these Scottish slabs that the plait work is particularly small and delicate. As Professor Macalister has recently pointed out, the obvious explanation is that for these carvings in stone

the models were the designs seen in illuminated MSS.; and, with regard to the present example, it has been suggested to me by Mr W. G. Collingwood, to whom I sent a rubbing, that our cross-cutter may have been a Scottish retainer at the Court of our Scandinavian King Godred, who was familiar with this kind of work. Among the 160 cross-slabs now known from the Isle of Man, I have not met with any by the same hand as these three at Maughold. They may date from the eleventh century.

We now come to the series found in August by Mr J. R. Bruce and Mr W. Cubbon, when excavating an early Christian burial-place at Balleigh, in the parish of Lezayre. They are all of the local slate, some fine-grained, some more or less gritty; there is no rock nearer than the hills, about a mile to the south and across the River Sulby, but some of the small slabs might have been found in the soil or in the bed of the river.

Incised. Linear. Having only one Face Carved.

4. A slab of gritty slate, broken below, and now measuring about 16 inches by $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick (fig. 3, No. 2). One side has been shaped at the top to a long curve, and shows a simple form of cross, 8 inches by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; the lines, irregularly cut, being $\frac{1}{16}$ inch wide and deep.¹

5. Water-worn slate, with very thin layers of yellowish quartz, 20 inches by $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick (fig. 4, No. 1). A feebly cut cross is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 4 inches wide, the lines $\frac{1}{16}$ inch wide and deep. Several fine scratches serve to show how the artist set about his work.

6. A badly broken slab, $26\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 8 inches at its widest, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick (fig. 5, No. 1). The cross has been formed by a vertical line, clearly cut, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, to which an attempted horizontal line has been added by lightly scratching in five or six irregular strokes.

7. Worn and broken slab of gritty slate, the sides formed by natural joints, $29\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 7 inches, and about $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick (fig. 4, No. 3). The scabbled figure, about $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 6 inches, with very many finely scratched lines about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide and $\frac{1}{8}$ inch deep, looks like an attempt to gouge out a cross with a knife-blade.

8. A slab having the lower end pointed for setting in the ground, measures $24\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and from 1 to 2 inches thick (fig. 4, No. 2). It bears a simple, well-formed cross, 5 inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, with lines $\frac{3}{8}$ inch by $\frac{3}{16}$ inch deep, hacked out with a pointed chisel. This is the first of the series to show skilled work of a stone-cutter. Its

¹ In the illustration the cross has been inverted.

simple form suggests an early date, seventh or eighth century, but may be due to the inability of the raiser to pay for a more costly monument. If the others look even earlier, it may be for similar reasons; they appear to be the work of amateurs, possibly near relations.

In Outline. One only has been worked on both Faces.

9. Badly flaked and broken, $24\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 11 inches, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick (fig. 5, No. 2). Slight remains of a plain cross, apparently of about $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 9 inches, the well-cut lines about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide and deep. Two lines cross the slab below.

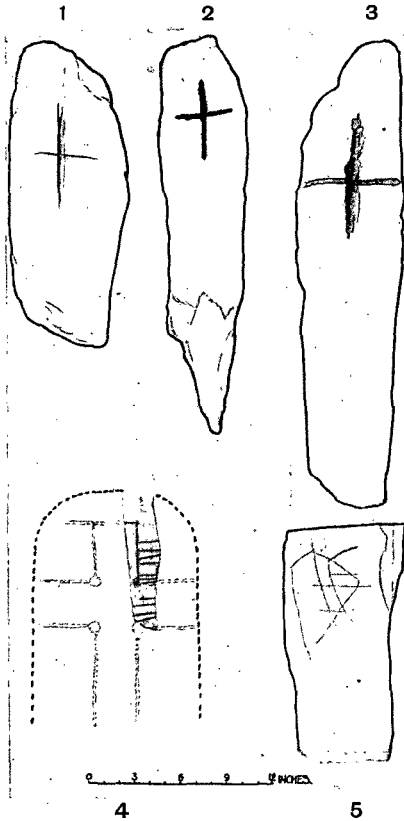


Fig. 4. Cross-slabs from Balleigh, Isle of Man.

10. A broken and decayed fragment, now $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 13 inches wide, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick (fig. 3, No. 3). The cross would measure about 4 inches each way, with lines less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch thick; lower down on the right are slight remains of a chevron design.

11. A slab $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 7 to 8 inches, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick, with a feebly drawn cross set at an angle $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 5 inches; the lines are from $\frac{1}{32}$ to $\frac{1}{16}$ inch thick (fig. 4, No. 5). There is a slight attempt at ornamentation in the form of panels.

12. A broken slab of yellowish grit, 22 inches by 12 inches, and 1 inch thick, having one edge rising about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in a natural ridge on one face (fig. 3, No. 1). The most primitive carving, which possibly was the first, shows a linear cross, cut with the point of a knife, 10 inches by 6 inches. There are two strokes across the slab under the horizontal bar as though for the base of a panel to enclose the cross. The other face bears in the middle space a well-cut hexafoil within a circle carefully drawn with a pair of compasses. To this has been added by another hand an outer border intended to have been circular but left with three almost square corners. Above, set at an angle, is a well-drawn cross, 3 inches

by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The artist has then attempted by a fine line to enclose the cross in a panel more or less rectangular, but conforming somewhat to the shape of the slab. To this has been added a still more feeble attempt at another panel, scratched in with irregular lines. This has been decorated by a chevron scratched all round the panels and the hexafoil, while below are further fine lines drawn with intent though without apparent meaning.

Besides these, a slab of slate was found, with the head neatly rounded, and measuring 29 inches by 13 inches by 2 inches. The face, which is

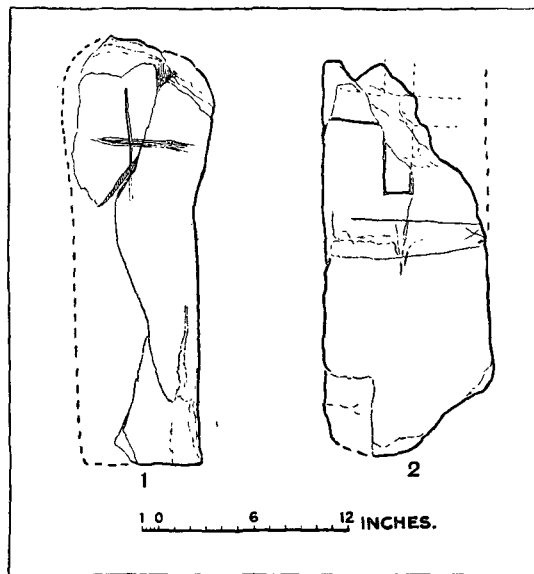


Fig. 5. Cross-slabs from Balleigh, Isle of Man.

flaked off, may have borne a cross similar to some of the above. Mention may be made also of a broken boulder of grit having one face flat, which, though it bears no form of cross, belongs to the series, and shows such similarity of workmanship as makes it likely that it was cut by the same hand as one of those described. The boulder measures 7 inches by 7 inches, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick; and someone has been tempted to try his knife upon it, by drawing a series of more or less rectangular panels, one within another.

Of the nine cross-slabs, the last three may be the work of one individual who, though not trained as a stone-cutter, had noticed some Anglian work with chevron ornamentation. No. 8 alone suggests

skilled workmanship. No. 12 has had the encircled hexafoil carved by a capable hand, but the outline cross from its position and the scratched ornamentation are certainly later. To judge from their appearance, the whole series, including the panel boulder, might date from early eighth to late tenth century.

In Relief.

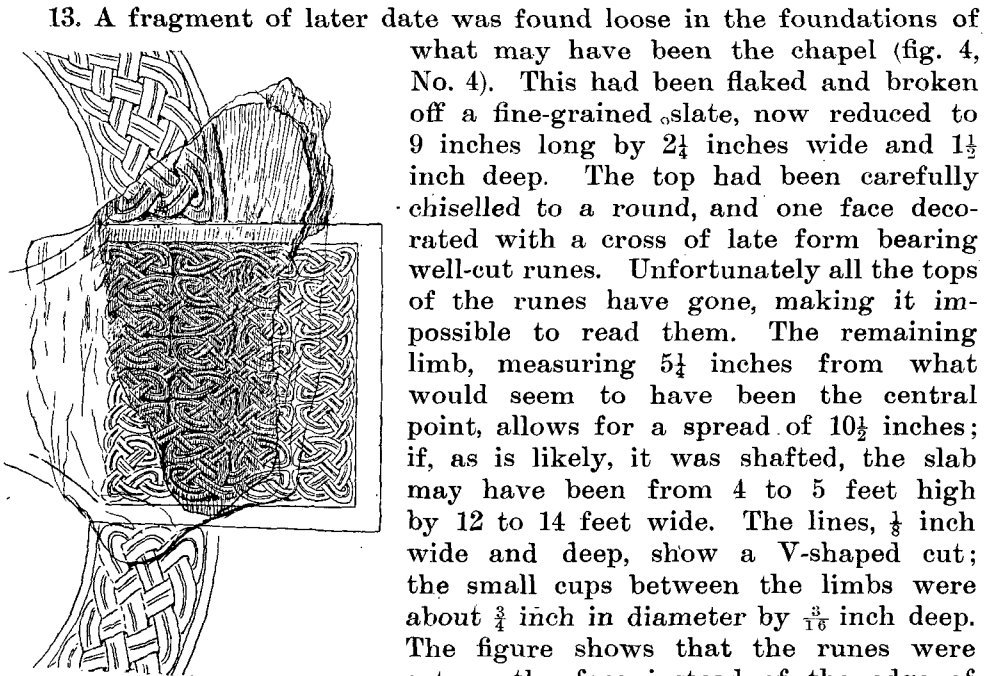


Fig. 6. Fragment of Cross from Maughold, Isle of Man. (1.)

date from late in the twelfth century.

13. A fragment of later date was found loose in the foundations of what may have been the chapel (fig. 4, No. 4). This had been flaked and broken off a fine-grained slate, now reduced to 9 inches long by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep. The top had been carefully chiselled to a round, and one face decorated with a cross of late form bearing well-cut runes. Unfortunately all the tops of the runes have gone, making it impossible to read them. The remaining limb, measuring $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches from what would seem to have been the central point, allows for a spread of $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches; if, as is likely, it was shafted, the slab may have been from 4 to 5 feet high by 12 to 14 feet wide. The lines, $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide and deep, show a V-shaped cut; the small cups between the limbs were about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter by $\frac{3}{16}$ inch deep. The figure shows that the runes were cut on the face instead of the edge of the slab, and there was room for another line to run parallel with them. It may