

SOME LITTLE KNOWN EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS IN THE WEST OF SCOTLAND

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IT seems worth while to publish photographs of fragments of a few early Christian monuments, some from the island of Great Cumbrae in the county of Bute, two from Ayrshire, and one from the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, which are little known and have not been recently studied, as they have appeared only in early local publications or have never been accurately illustrated.

COUNTY OF BUTE

A small number of these monuments, which seem to have been lost to view for many years, are at Millport, on the island of Great Cumbrae.¹ All except two, which are at a house called Millburn, are now in the small episcopal 'Cathedral of the Isles', where the Provost, the Very Reverend C. J. C. Douglas, has put them for safe keeping.

No. 1. (Pl. XIV: 1, 2 and 3) is of particular interest. It is a very small cross-slab of sandstone, broken off at the bottom and now just under 2 ft. in height, by 4 in. thick, the top being in the form of a disc, 11 in. in diameter; a deep groove gives the impression that it is separated from the lower part, which is 9½ in. wide, whereas it is in fact carved from a single block of stone. The tool used must have had a rounded or pointed end as much of the surface is pocked. Both the front and the back are sculptured. On the front (Pl. XIV: 1) a Maltese cross in low relief, with a rather deep small hole at the centre, and framed in a double incised circle, fills the disc. The lower part of the slab, the sides of which are slightly curved, is outlined by incised lines, double across the top, emphasising the curve of the shoulder, single down each side; while in the centre a marigold, with six deeply cut petals, is framed in an incised circle, curved lines join the outer point of each petal, and a symmetrical pattern of curves fills the spaces above and below. On the back of the slab (Pl. XIV: 2) a marigold, similar to the one just described, but larger and framed in a double circle, fills the disc in place of the Maltese cross; while on the lower part, which is outlined by a single, incised line, there is a deeply-cut linear cross, the arms ending in unusual expanded curves terminating in spirals.

There does not seem to be any close parallel to this monument. The fact that it is decorated with equal care on both sides makes it unlikely that it was a grave stone, but it seems too small for any other purpose. If, however, one pictures it as a taller monument – and although the sides are slightly curved this is possible – one is struck by its resemblance to the disc-headed crosses which are so numerous in Cornwall. A number of these have a Maltese cross in low relief, with a circular hole at the centre,

¹ They are described and a few of them inaccurately illustrated, in a *Guide-Book to the Cumbraes, Firth of Clyde* by Lytteil, W. (Carlisle and Edinburgh, 1886). They are illustrated, also inaccurately, in Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, p. 74, Pl. LXXIV. It is suggested that they may have come from the churchyard of 'Sanct Colmis Kirk', of which no trace remains, but which was at Kirktown, half a mile inland from Millport, and which was described in Dean Monro's *Western Islands*. (*Miscell. Scot.*, Vol. II, p. 114.)

filling the disc.¹ Others have a protruberance at each side, just below the disc,² and the emphasis given to the curve of the shoulder of the Millport slab (Pl. XIV: 3) gives a somewhat similar effect.

The Maltese cross framed in a circle and the marigold are found on Christian monuments in Britain and Ireland over a very long period, although they are uncommon in the N. and E. of Scotland, but when they are carved in relief they are unlikely to be early. The linear cross with expanded ends occurs on early monuments in Ireland and the W. of Scotland.³ To find the two types of cross and decoration on the same monument is unusual. A somewhat similar example is illustrated in Romilly Allen's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, at Cladh a' Bhile, Ellery, Argyll,⁴ of a broken slab which has on one side a marigold with spiral decoration, and on the other a Maltese cross in relief. It is this combination of differing types of decoration on such a sophisticated, and so far as I know, unique form of monument as this one at Millport which makes it so interesting. The Cumbraes, lying to the W. of Strathclyde, were geographically in a position where a monument, British in type, yet showing Irish influence in its decoration might be found.

No. 2. (Pl. XIV: 4) is a small, unshaped block of porphyry, about 13 by 12 by 7 in. On it is carved a simple, rather deeply cut, linear cross with expanded ends, the arms being of slightly differing lengths. This is not an uncommon type of cross on early monuments in Britain.

No. 3. consists of fragments (Pl. XIV: 5 and 6) probably all belonging to the same freestanding cross. The head (Pl. XIV: 5) measures 19 in. across the arms and is 3½ in. thick, and at the beginning of the shaft, where it is broken off, it is about 9 in. wide. It is crudely carved and irregularly shaped, and outlined on one side only by a single incised line. Although there may have been some carving on it, the stone is so rough that it is difficult to be sure. The two other fragments (Pl. XIV: 6) are about 7 in. wide by 3 in. thick, of a similar coarse stone. They are also outlined, with a single incised line on one side only, but have, in addition, key pattern rather roughly carved.

No. 4. (Pl. XV: 1) is a fragment of a slab, now measuring 16 in. in length by 11 in. in width by 3 in. thick. It is rather crudely carved with a three stranded interlace, one strand of which is not carried through at the corner, and which is placed not centrally but to the side of the slab.

No. 5. (Pl. XV: 2) is a very small cross-slab made from a thin slab of sandstone, 20 in. high by 13 in. wide by 3 in. thick. It was presumably a grave stone and now is on the right hand side of the entrance drive of a house called Millburn. The top is a disc, 9 in. in diameter, on which is incised an equal armed cross, the angles at the intersections of the cross being curved, with a circle at the centre. In the panels formed by the arms are oval shaped hollows; the two lower ones deeply cut, the two upper ones little more than outlined, giving the impression that the monument was unfinished. The lower part is undecorated and is roughly rectangular, although

¹ For example at Menabilly. See the frontispiece to T. F. G. Dexter's *Cornish Crosses, Christian and Pagan*, London, 1938.

² Dexter. *op. cit.*, p. 19, fig. 13.

³ At Reask, Inismurry etc. See Lionard Padraig, 'Early Christian Grave Slabs', in *P.R.I.A.*, Vol. 61, 1961.

⁴ *E.C.M.S.*, p. 401.

the shoulders slope slightly downwards, and it is wide in proportion to the disc.

This small monument is possibly a debased form of a type, of which an example stands at the head of a small coped grave stone in the lower part of the churchyard of St Blanes on the nearby island of Bute.¹

No. 6. (Pl. XV: 4 and fig. 1) was probably a similarly shaped small cross-slab, but only the disc and the top of the shoulders remain and it has been fixed with cement to the top of a wall above a doorway in the garden of Millburn. The disc is carved (in low relief), on one side only, with a cross with hollowed angles in a circular frame



FIG. 1. Detail of cross-slab at Millburn (No. 6)

frame. In each of the two upper panels behind the cross is a bird with head turned back, and in each of the lower panels a triquetra knot (fig. 1). This type of cross with hollowed angles is of course a very common one, but when equal-armed and in a circular frame is often found on small unfinished grave slabs in Ireland²; the triquetra is more common in Ireland and the W. of Scotland³ than in the E.

AYRSHIRE

Two fragments of monuments have been placed alongside each other on a farm called Whitehill, in the parish of Dailly, near Maybole, on the property of Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran. A detailed description and careful drawings of each were published in an article by William Galloway, 'Early Christian Remains in Ayrshire' in the *Archaeological and Historical Collections of Ayrshire* in 1883. They were moved to their present position about a hundred years ago from the nearby ruins of a chapel known as Machar-a-chill, of which no trace now remains.⁴ The name has been

¹ Inaccurately illustrated in Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, p. 37, Pl. LXXIV, No. 1.

² See Lionard, Padraig, op. cit., p. 116 and fig. 2. There are no less than sixteen examples at Gallen, all on small unfashioned slabs.

³ For example at Killachtee, Co. Donegal, see Henry, F., 'Early Christian Slabs and Pillar Stones in the West of Ireland', *J.R.S.A.I.*, Vol. LXVII, Part II (Dec. 1937), and on a slab at St Donnans, on the Island of Eigg. *P.S.A.S.*, LXVII (1932-3), 65.

⁴ The ruins of the chapel were mentioned in the *Old Statistical Account* sub Parish of Dailly, Vol. X, p. 53. In 1850 the farmer at Whitehill dug a hole and tumbled all the stones of the chapel into it, at the same time moving the cross base and the other stone with carving to their present position 'to be out of the way of the plough'. See Chalmers, *Caledonia*, Vol. III, p. 537.

associated with St Machar, but the order of the words make this unlikely; it was probably a place name, 'the field of the chapel'.¹

No. 1. (Pl. XV: 5) is a massive cross base, hewn from a single block of freestone, 4 ft. 2 in. high, 3 ft. 6 in. by 3 ft. 3 in. at the base, narrowing by two somewhat irregular steps to 3 ft. by 2 ft. 6 in. at the top, in which a rectangular socket 2 ft. long by 8 in. wide by about 1 ft. deep has been cut. It was said to have stood beside the chapel.

Stepped bases formed from a single block of stone, although not unusual in England and Wales and in Ireland, are rare in Scotland. There are two on Iona, one of them the base of St Martin's cross, but in both cases the base is smaller, and the steps, instead of being more or less evenly spaced out, are near the top. But it is difficult to draw conclusions about free-standing crosses in Scotland as so few survived, and those only in remote parishes, the wholesale destruction ordered by the Kirk Sessions in the seventeenth century.

No. 2. (Pl. XV: 6) is a small boulder, not more than 2 ft. at its widest part, said to have come from within the ruins of the chapel. It seems probable that it was used as a cross base, as on the top is a nearly rectangular socket, 14 in. long by 8 in. wide at the centre, narrowing to 7 in. at each end, and nearly 9 in. deep. The stone has not been shaped at all except that one side, parallel to the length of the socket, has perhaps been levelled a little and on this prepared surface a Latin cross with a small circular depression at the centre has been carved. It is not outlined by a clear incised line, but by a broad, shallow, irregular groove, so that it stands out faintly in relief. It is very much worn; the top of one of the arms has flaked off, and there is now no line, if there ever was one, across the bottom of the shaft. It seems impossible to give any idea of its date, but this type of simple Latin cross with the central depression might well be early; possibly it was carved on the boulder long before its probable use as the base of a free-standing cross.

STEWARTRY OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT

Daltallachan

In the garden at the side of the house of the Holm of Daltallachan, about one mile N. of Carsphairn is an irregular sandstone slab, 2 ft. 9 in. high by 1 ft. 3 in. wide, on which is incised a Latin cross with slightly expanded arms; the bottom of the shaft is joined by a curved line, and there is a circle at the centre between the arms (Pl. XV: 3).²

¹ For further discussion, see Mackinlay, J. M., *The Pre-Reformation Church and Scottish Place Names*. Edinburgh, MCMIV, p. 79.

² It is mentioned in Romilly Allen, *E.C.M.S.*, p. 48, fig. 511, but only illustrated by a line drawing.



1. Cross slab at Millport,
Great Cumbræ



2. Cross slab at Millport,
Great Cumbræ



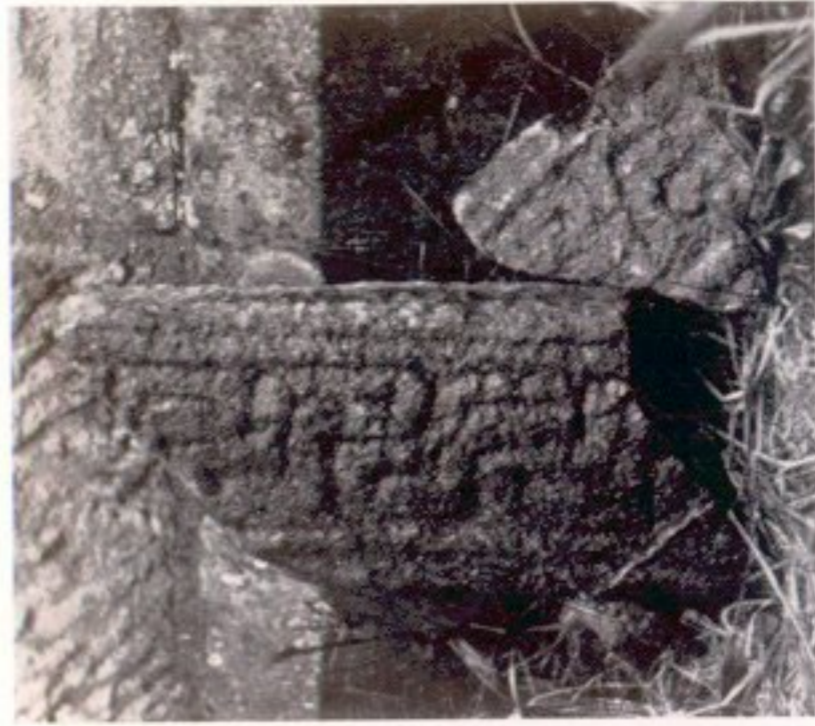
3. Cross slab at Millport,
Great Cumbræ



4. Small slab at Millport, Great
Cumbræ



5. Cross-head at Millport, Great
Cumbræ



6. Two fragments of cross-shaft at
Millport, Great Cumbræ



1. Fragment of slab at Millport, Great Cumbrae



2. Small cross-slab at Millport, Great Cumbrae



3. Cross-slab at Daltallachan, Stewartry of Kirkcudbright



4. Cross-slab at Millburn, Millport, Great Cumbrae



5. Cross-base in the parish of Dailly, Ayrshire



6. Carved boulder in the parish of Dailly, Ayrshire