

## CHAPTER I

The Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses.—Subjects on the crosses.—Probable date.—Wilfrith and Biscop.—Foreign workmen.—David of Scotland.—Sculpture at Jedburgh.—The Glastonbury obelisks.—The Sandbach Crosses.—Guide-stones.—The Aldhelm Crosses.—Jupiter columns.

*A table of Anglian runes will be found on page 82.*

It is nearly 30 years since I first brought before the University the subject of the great crosses at Bewcastle and Ruthwell. The occasion was the inaugural lecture in the Senate House on my appointment as Disney Professor of Archaeology, in the early part of 1888. During the five years tenure of that office, I dealt steadily with the sculptured stones of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Man, from various points of view, history, art, language, script, besides many investigations of parallel examples in various parts of Europe. There is not, in my knowledge, in any other country, anything to compare with the continuous series of Sculptured and Inscribed Stones in these islands from the earliest times of our Christianity. The English stones form a great consistent whole, endless in variety, varying greatly, too, in interest, but moving steadily on from age to age. There has been serious decadence, especially in regard to the presentation of the human form; art has never since risen to so high a point in this respect as was attained by the artists of Bewcastle and Ruthwell. On the other hand there was remarkable advance in the development of interlacements and other decorative methods of occupying surfaces on memorial and monumental stones. But there has been sufficient continuity to make it impossible to take a group of 7th century stones, especially inscribed stones, and dump them down in the 12th century, as some modern writers have proposed to do. Since the year 1892 I have published in two or three books a good deal of matter in this connection, chiefly in my *Conversion of the Heptarchy* for the Bewcastle Cross and in *Theodore and Wilfrith* for the Ruthwell Cross, and in *St Aldhelm* for sculptures in the south-west.

My aim in the Disney Lectures was to make the subjects interesting, with enough on the scientific side to justify their treatment in professorial lectures in the University and to suggest scientific study of many of the problems which the subjects afforded. The twenty-four years which have passed since those lectures ceased have seen much attention given to some of the problems then dealt with. For the last four or five years these two

crosses have been a prominent feature in the discussion of our earliest mediaeval art by learned experts.

It has been a pleasure to me to see from time to time that all monuments or inscriptions in these islands, which I have seen mentioned in the various discussions, were dealt with in the course of my lectures; as were, also, the principal illustrations from continental art. And I do not remember to have seen reason to correct anything of importance which was said on any of the almost endless points then raised and discussed. I did some years ago, in consequence of a criticism, alter in my stereotype plates my remarks on one Anglo-Saxon word. I have now to withdraw that alteration and abide by the original utterance.

During my tenure of the Disney Professorship, my University work in other spheres was so manifold and so continuous and exacting that I had not opportunity for really scientific study on an elaborate scale. It is needless to say that the twenty-one years of a bishop's life which have followed have not supplied the opportunity which the life in Cambridge lacked. It needs an apology for one long ago *donatus rude* to enter the arena again, occupied as it now is with gladiators thoroughly trained and equipped.

The  
Ruthwell  
Cross

The subjects on the face and the back of the Ruthwell Cross\* are these: a bird, an archer, the Baptist with the Lamb, the Lord treading on the heads of beasts, Paul the first hermit breaking bread with Antony in the desert, the Flight into Egypt, a man with a bird, the Visitation, the woman washing the Lord's feet, the healing of the man blind from his birth, the Annunciation, the Crucifixion.

The rims of the panels on the shaft containing these subjects have inscriptions in beautiful capitals, describing in Latin the subjects represented. The accompanying figure, *a*, shews the inscriptions describing the washing of the feet and the healing of the blind man. The illustration is taken by photography from my rubbing.

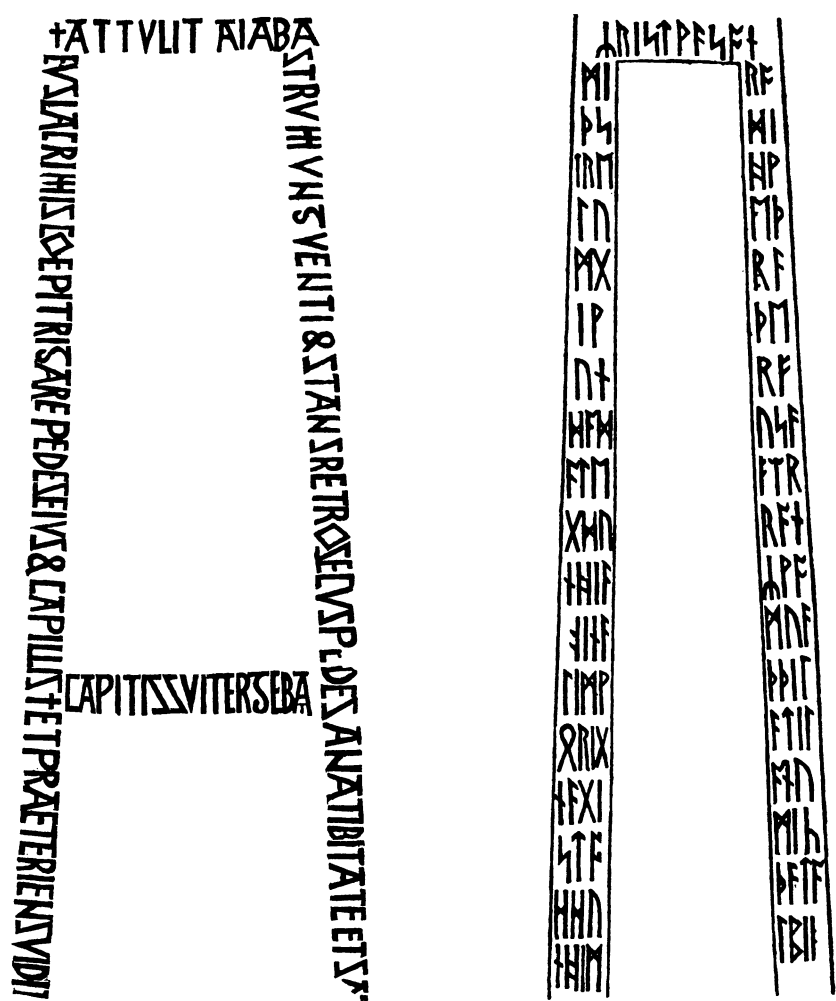
The inscription is taken from the Vulgate Version of St Luke vii. 37, 38, *attulit alabastrum unguenti et stans retro secus pedes eius lacrimis coepit rigare pedes eius et capillis capitis sui tergebat*, in our Authorised Version "brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head." The statement that the woman anointed the feet with the unguent follows this in each case. Thus the scene is not correctly described as the "Anointing of the Feet," the actual representation shews the "Washing of the Feet."

\* Plate V. 8, 9.

The Ruthwell Inscriptions

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Professor Cook (see *Preface*) misreads the inscription. He prints the last letter of *tergebat* as A, with a horizontal line above it to indicate the omission of the T. But the T is there, fitted into the lower half of the A. This mistake misses the interesting connection with the manuscripts of our earliest period, where letters are tucked away in small



a. Ruthwell, Latin

b. Ruthwell, Runes

size into void places, in a curious and puzzling way. It misses also the connection with another feature of our earliest ornamentation of manuscripts to which I call attention in my remarks on the *g* rune at Bewcastle. The ordinary A leaves of necessity a void space in the upper part of the line, and in our early ornamental script a bold horizontal line is placed across the top of the A, as will be seen in the figure under consideration.

Thus from a palaeographical point of view the misreading of the inscription in this one letter is a serious flaw.

The inscription round the panel below, *et praeteriens vidit . . . . a nati-  
bitate et sa . . . .* relates to the scene in the panel, the healing of the blind  
man. Only the early part of the inscription is a direct quotation from the  
Gospel story in the 9th chapter of St John.

The two edges of the shaft are occupied by continuous vine scrolls,  
with birds and animals full of life enjoying the fruit. The rims are  
occupied by Anglian runes, giving portions of the great Anglo-Saxon poem  
known as the *Dream of the Holy Rood*. The second figure, *b*, shews the  
runes containing the portion of the poem which begins with "Christ was  
on the Cross." The whole poem is given in Chapter VI. A table of runes  
and their equivalents will be found on page 82.

The  
Bewcastle  
shaft

The Bewcastle shaft\* has the Baptist, the Lord in Benediction, a man  
with a bird, panels with interlacements, foliage scrolls, grape scrolls, a sun-  
dial, a long panel of chequers, and one whole side occupied by a vine scroll  
with birds and animals as at Ruthwell. There is one long inscription in  
runes, above the man with the bird and presumably referring to him;



c. Bewcastle Runes

\* Plates IV. 6, V. 7.

*Wilfrith and Biscop* 5

above the Lord's head is Gessus Kristtus in runes, and on the horizontal bands separating the panels there are short runic inscriptions. The accompanying figure, *c*, shews a reading of six lines of the inscription, produced in the same manner as *a* and *b*. I return to this inscription later on, at page 16.

These two monuments have on them three-fifths of all the Anglian runic inscriptions. The remaining two-fifths are on 19 monuments, some being mere scraps. Three are in one churchyard.

The Ruthwell Cross is 17 ft. 6 in. high. The Bewcastle shaft is 14 ft. 6 in. high, and its cross-head was 2 ft. 6 in., 17 ft. in all.

The occurrence, on the Bewcastle Cross, of the names of several persons well known in the second half of the 7th century, and the mention of the first year of a king, appeared to indicate the year 670 as the date of that cross. The striking similarity of the representations of our Lord and the Baptist on the shaft at Ruthwell to those at Bewcastle suggested contemporary workmanship, while striking differences between these two great runic monuments suggested some moderate difference of date, and pointed to a period of rapid development, artistic and religious.

If we are right in the main in our readings of the runes on the Bewcastle Cross, that ancient monument appears to account for the mysterious disappearance of Alchfrith the sub-king of Deira, one of the puzzles of our early history. Apart from any inscription, it seems clear that some personage of high position and importance is represented in the sculpture. I have not seen any suggestion of any probable person other than Alchfrith.

It is not too much to say that everything we know in any detail of the history of Northumbria and the Northumbrians, their church work and their script, nearly before and nearly after the year 670, fits in curiously completely with the phenomena of these monuments.

Two remarkable men stood out in the early years of the Northumbrian Church, Wilfrith the bishop and Biscop the abbat. Both were born in the short reign of Oswald, King and Saint. Together they set out to visit Rome, as very young men, in 652 or 653. They went by way of Lyon, the most venerable ecclesiastical centre in France. Thence they went to Rome. Wilfrith had been trained at Lindisfarne in the Scotie usages, but with all the zest of a convert he threw himself into the usages which—as he said at the Conference of Whitby—they found practised in Italy and Gaul, and knew to be the rule in Africa, Asia, Egypt, Greece, the whole Christian world. Inasmuch as I am relying mainly upon eastern evidences in support of the early date of the Ruthwell Cross, I wish at the



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outset to emphasise that pointed reference to the church outside the church of the West. We shall come upon references to the profound impression, religious and artistic, which this visit to Rome produced upon an enthusiastic young man, whose father and mother had been pagan Angles. For the rest, I will only note here that on his return journey Wilfrith spent three years at Lyon. Some years ago I examined Le Blant's inscriptions in Gaul, to see if at or near Lyon there were examples of early Christian lapidary art which might have influenced him in the direction of the art of Bewcastle and Ruthwell. I found that there were in his time at Ansa, and at Briod, and in Lyon itself, notably in the subterranean chapel under St Irénée, examples of scrolls with leaves and birds. But of course the full impulse came from what he saw in Italy. Indeed it would need very special pleading to attribute any influence in the direction of the vine scrolls of Bewcastle to these dull and formal and poor examples from the Lyonnaise.

Biscop           The other great originator of noble church work and art was Benedict Biscop, a Northumbrian noble, born about 638 in Oswald's reign. He was a minister or attendant of King Oswy, and had received from him a grant of land for his maintenance. This he resigned at the age of 25, that he might visit the tombs of the Apostles St Peter and St Paul, those tombs of the twin Apostles being the great attraction to Rome, the Apostolic See because of the tombs of these Apostles. He visited Rome six times, in five journeys from England. He brought back great quantities of MSS., relics, pictures, everything that was needed for the full equipment of the church. He had agents buying for him in Europe. He founded and equipped the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Among other treasures, he brought robes of silk and illuminated manuscripts so rich that the king bought them from him by great grants of land.

Foreign workmen       It is a notable fact that these great ecclesiastics employed workmen from Italy and Gaul. Considering the extreme stiffness of such decorative remains as we have in Gaul proper, I have always been inclined to think that Cisalpine Gaul may have been the district from which the Gaulish workmen came; and the beautiful freedom of the work they did here suggests that by chance or of set purpose artists with Byzantine training were chosen.

Rival date           I have often asked those who dispute the early date of these monuments to name some other period the conditions of which fit in with these phenomena. The answer has been given by an American, Professor Cook of Yale, and he has recently been supported by an Italian, Commendatore Rivoira. These two archaeologists, men, I need not say, of very great

*David of Scotland*

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knowledge, name the 12th century, Professor Cook attributing the erection of the two monuments to one and the same man, David, Prince of Cumbria 1107, King David I of Scotland 1124–1153. Professor Cook holds that one after another of the subjects on the Ruthwell Cross cannot be found in Christian Art at anything like so early a date as the seventh century. This has been completely disproved.

In contrast with the period of Wilfrith, it is not too much to say that scarcely anything—if anything—which we know in detail of the history, the church work, the language, and the script, of David and his surroundings, fits in with the phenomena of these monuments. Indeed the whole tone and air of the great shafts cry out against any such attribution.

David was the son of Malcolm Canmore, whose father Duncan was overthrown by Macbeth. His mother was the English Margaret, sister of Edgar the Atheling. He became an English nobleman by his marriage with Matilda daughter of Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, by Judith, niece of William the Conqueror. He lived as a young man at the court of his brother-in-law, the distinguished Norman scholar, Henry I of England, surnamed Beauclerc. As the leading English noble he was the first of the nobles to swear allegiance to his niece, Henry's daughter, the Empress Maud, and later on he knighted his great-nephew, afterwards Henry II of England. He was thoroughly Norman in his views of church and of state. He introduced the Norman feudal system into Cumbria, as its Prince. As King, he continued his mother's church policy in Scotland, completing the removal of the ancient Culdee system by building great abbeys and founding five of the Scottish sees. In all the remains of the churches which he built, I am not aware that any sculpture has been found that has any artistic or other connection with the shafts at Bewcastle and Ruthwell. Being so great a church builder as he was, we may take it as certain that if he gave to the world those beautiful pieces of lapidary sculpture, some of their characteristics would have been stamped upon his creations elsewhere.

The most beautiful piece of work of this character which we possess, coming from any part connected with David's great church work, was found at Jedburgh\*. It is quite beautiful enough, and quite simple enough, to have been carved by the skilled mason who carved the vine scrolls at Bewcastle and Ruthwell, with happy creatures enjoying the fruit. But instead of its being an argument in favour of David as the author of those great monuments, it is a conclusive argument against him. Only this year, Mr C. H. Peers, on the part of the Board of Works, has been repairing

\* Plate IV. 5.

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the tower of the ancient church at Jedburgh, contemporary with—at least not later than—David. He found embedded in the original rubble core of the tower a piece of the same work. Thus David’s workmen were destroying not erecting these beautiful things at important centres of church work. I need not dwell upon the fact that in David’s time long inscriptions in ancient Anglian runes were completely, hopelessly, out of date.

This design from Jedburgh was adopted by Sir William Richmond for the six clerestory windows on the north and south in the Choir of St Paul’s, an angel taking the place of each of the happy little creatures. At Spalato we have in the scrolls at the side of one of the great doors a man standing upright in each alternate scroll, holding on by a portion of the stem of the scroll. I have not myself found any other example of this. At Lincoln and in other places we have armed sportsmen among the scrolls, but that is a different idea.

Obelisks at  
Glaston-  
bury

We have the direct evidence of a contemporary of David of Scotland that there were in his time in the south of England monuments of this character but on a larger scale, described then as very ancient. William of Malmesbury, who wrote from 1100 to about 1140 and died in 1143, tells us of the Antiquity of Glastonbury. I dealt with this in one of my Disney lectures, delivered Feb. 7, 1888.

One of the abbats, Tica, had fled from Northumbria before the Danes, in 754, and had brought with him relics of many Northumbrian saints, of Bishop Aidan, of Hilda, of five abbats of Wearmouth, and so on\*. Tica was eventually buried in a tomb which William describes as *arte celaturae non ignobilis*, with an epitaph which he had read, setting forth that the tomb was ‘constructed with marvellous beauty,’ as though, one may suggest, he had brought with him patterns from Lindisfarne and Wearmouth. That, however, though it accounts for one or two of the names to be mentioned, is not the point that concerns our present enquiry. William proceeds to tell us that Arthur and his wife were buried there, between two ‘pyramids,’ obelisks, or pillars, identifying it with Avalon, the place of dim mysterious romance, and that king Kenwin† was buried with one ‘pyramid,’ *nobiliter exsculpta*. These three pyramids appear to be distinct from the two lofty shafts next mentioned‡. He proceeds:

\* Two accounts are given of the date of the conveyance of relics from the north, the other placing it about 940. It is one of the numerous apparent inconsistencies of William’s texts, due no doubt to revisers who had a purpose of their own to serve. In this case the inconsistency does not affect the truth of the other details relating to Tica.

† Kentwine of Wessex died in 685. He married a sister of Eormenburh, the wife of Ecgrith of Northumbria, Alchfrith’s brother. This connection is worthy of note.

‡ See further on pages 9 and 10.



*The Glastonbury Obelisks* 9

“I would gladly know what almost no one knows anything about, what the meaning is of those two pyramids which stand a few feet from the ancient church\*. One is 26 feet high, and has five tiers, or storeys, *tabulatus* †. It is very ancient, but it has on it things which can be clearly read though not clearly understood. On the top panel is an *imago* in pontifical dress; on the next an *imago* with the pomp of a king, and certain letters ‡. In the third § and fourth || there are names. In the fifth and lowest, an *imago* and an inscription ¶. The other pyramid is 18 feet high and has four storeys, with these inscriptions, Heddi Episcopus Bregored Beorward. I would not rashly say what these signify, but I suspect the bones are contained within, in hollowed stones, of the persons whose names are inscribed on the outside.” Thus far William. Logperesbeorh was the Saxon name of Montacute in Somerset. Bregored was the next abbat of Glastonbury but one to the abbat of the year 601. Beorhtwald was abbat in Theodore’s time and became Archbishop of Canterbury after him in 693. Hedde was bishop of the West Saxons 676–705. Wilfrith’s life covered all these dates. He died in 709. Leland visited these obelisks. He became the king’s antiquary in 1533 and died in 1552. The pillars were greatly perished in his time, so that even with a magnifying glass he could barely make out enough to follow the description of William of Malmesbury. Willis\*\* says that the two crosses were standing in 1771. I have traced a portion of one of them down to 1790, but I fear it is now wholly lost. When last mentioned it was a gate post at the entrance to the Abbey enclosure.

There is a good deal to be said on the passage above quoted which contains the statement that king Arthur and his queen Guinevere were buried between the two pyramids first mentioned. In William’s first edition—so to call it—of the *Gesta Regum*, in 1125, he says definitely that the place of Arthur’s sepulture is unknown, and he retained that statement in later revisions. Further, in quoting from the *De Antiquitate* in another work the parts relating to Avalon, he omits this passage and yet refers his reader to this treatise. Further still, he condemns elsewhere the practice of giving heed to British traditions, and here he gives the substance of the Arthurian legends. The inference is irresistible that this Arthurian

\* Ini of Wessex, the brother of Aldfrith’s wife Cuthburg, had built a new church at Glastonbury.  
† The *tabolette* of Maximian’s chair at Ravenna.  
‡ Her Sexi Blisyer.  
§ Wemerest Bantomp Pinepegn; Gale prints the last name thus; in the MS. the first *p* is a *w*, and the second a *th*, Wine Thegn.  
|| Hats Pulfred Eanfled; the *p* is again *w* in the MS.; these two names are very Northumbrian.  
¶ Logpor Peslicas et Bregden Spelpes Hyin Gendes Bern.  
\*\* *Architectural History of Glastonbury*, Cambridge, page 30.

and Avalonian legend is an interpolation of later time. This again does not in the least affect anything that William tells us in the second passage quoted above\*. Mr Newell, to whose paper I refer in a note, in each case interprets “pyramids” as “crosses.” I much prefer the word—and idea—obelisks. Surely William knew a cross when he saw it.

We may fairly argue that Abbat Tica brought with him from Northumbria the latest developments of the dragonesque school of surface ornamentation. The fact that the West-Saxon standard was a dragon, witness Harold’s standard at Senlac on the Bayeux “Tapestry,” and that the symbol of the chief foes of the West Saxons, the Britons on their western border, had also the dragon as their symbol, would naturally lead to the adoption of this branch of Northumbrian art. We have very striking examples of this style of decoration in Somerset and in adjoining districts. The sculptures at Ramsbury, Rowberrow, West Camel, Dolton, Gloucester, and Colerne, will be found in my *St Aldhelm*. Some of them are very striking. All bear upon our main subject.

Glastonbury is a delightful place, but no one will credit it with being a district likely to preserve ancient stone pillars by the dryness of its atmosphere. A pillar of north country grit, in dry north country air, might well expect to live in good form more than half as long again.

It is an interesting fact, which Professor Cook might have used with some force in his attribution of the Bewcastle and Ruthwell shafts to David of Scotland, that David’s great-nephew, for whom he fought and whom he knighted, is said to have opened the tomb of Arthur in the cemetery of Glastonbury when he became king as Henry II. One chronicle tells us that in the excavation of the supposed tomb by Abbat Henry, about 1191, a leaden cross was found bearing the legend *Hic iacet inclitus rex Arturus in insula Avallonia sepultus*. Giraldus Cambrensis adds the words *cum Winnevereia uxore sua secunda*, and states that the investigation was undertaken by the advice of Henry II, who had been told by an old British bard that Arthur was buried between the two obelisks. It has been assumed to be fatal to this story that Henry II died 1189, two years before the investigation; but that is not inconsistent with his having advised it before his death. It seems probable that the story was a monkish invention—to the extent of depicting the piece of lead—and that the interpolation in William’s account of Glastonbury was part of the proceedings.

I have dwelt upon these points, partly because of the interest naturally attaching to Arthurian legends, but mainly in order to meet the

\* See a useful paper by William Wells Newell, in the *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America*, 1903, Vol. XVIII, pages 459–512.