

GREAT ASHFIELD CROSS.

Standing in the grounds of Ashfield House is a unique feature for Suffolk—a complete stone Cross—which proved of very great interest to the members of our Society on the occasion of their first excursion in 1930. Its close inspection was made possible by the kind permission of Mrs. Hollond, who also allowed measurements to be taken freely by the writer and excellent photos by Rev. J. D. Sayer, of Elmswell.

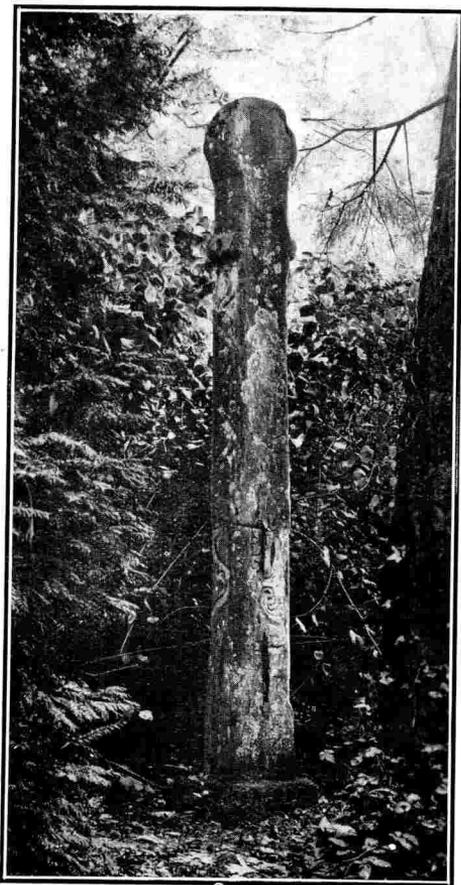
Tradition avers that the Cross once formed a bridge across the stream at the entrance to Great Ashfield Churchyard, but it is more likely that the upper part was used as a stepping-stone across the water.

Attracting the attention of Lord Thurlow (the famous son of Thos. Thurlow, a former Rector) who became Lord Chancellor 1778–92, dying in 1806, when he built Ashfield House, he is said to have removed it to its present situation, erecting a bridge in its place. (At Wansford in Northants where the river Nene is crossed by the old bridge there was once a Cross, at the beginning of the bridge, which served as a “bridge chapel.”) Its surroundings now are not happy—everything having grown up around it, being rather close to a wall on its East and to a large tree on its West, with shrubs, etc., overhanging it. However, it has survived, intact, for our delectation, distraction and interest, even if it defies the assiduous attempts of our photographer to get a “close up” on its Eastern side.

The Cross in early Christian days took several forms. Probably the earliest was in the form of a menhir or monolith, a rudimentary affair. Thence evolved a tapering stem, with shaft raised on a step or steps, the head growing or being fashioned into a Cross proper, i.e., with short arms.



INSCRIPTION ON GREAT ASHFIELD CROSS.



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The next form was that of a pinnacle or spire. Later on we get the "Preaching Cross," an erection round a Cross or with that emblem above a shelter or roof, supported by standards; from which came the "Market Cross," a much larger affair in the centre of local trade. In addition, in the Middle Ages, many parishes had a Churchyard Cross, generally, placed mid-way between the chief entrance to the Churchyard and the South porch, to the East of the principal path. Even now-a-days, by probing into the ground the base or steps might be found, but not the Cross. There were many of this class in existence in those days—often showing a little niche or recess sunk in the side of the socket. Antiquarians differ as to the use of this hollow. Some say "for a light," others that it was a receptacle for the Pyx, enclosing the Host, and used during the course of a procession on Palm Sunday—hence we get the term a "Palm Cross" (Conf. at Eyam, Derbyshire). Another suggestion is that when the hollow was on the base or steps—the cavity was made to receive the "offerings," or, again, to hold water or vinegar, for use as a disinfectant of the coins placed there when sufferers from the plague paid for their food, distributed perhaps at the Porch.

The remarkable absence of all these crosses—even of their remains—is probably due to the action of iconoclasts on at least two occasions. In 1531 the destruction of Church ornaments within and without began. If a Cross survived, later on it may have become an object of distaste to some bigoted Bishop, Archdeacon or Churchwarden (we will allow the Clergy in general to have been devoted to their Church and its possessions) and it met its doom in time. Later on came William Dowsing in 1643-44, famous for his destructive work—amongst most things—of "Stoneing Crosses." However, as Rev. Evelyn White in his

paper (S.I.A. Vol. VI) on these latter says—that “if the Churchyard Cross escaped the iconoclast in Reformation times, it fell in Puritanical ages, for Dowsing does not mention the destruction of one such Cross,” therefore we may acquit W.D. of this.

Whether the Churchyard Cross was “the Sanctuary” for criminals, from its position, is beyond this paper—as is the term “Weeping Cross.” There is, however, one other class, the “Boundary” Stone or Cross; these were probably, more after the first type, monolithic, with an inscription perhaps, mention being frequently made of them at Rogation-tide or on “gang” days. If of a rather more elaborate type, they were sometimes designated “Wayside Crosses.” The Monolithic often showed a “roll” formed where the arms of a cross would appear and had a rounded top.

That which has now to be described, stands as far as can be judged at present, on a base of rubble, in its original socket-stone, which is 22-in. by 21-in. by 6-in. high—the upper part of which is very slightly reduced, 21-in. by 20-in., with a sunk moulding. The main stem is 10-ft. 6-in. and was either broken when found or in course of removal. Lord Thurlow resided at Ashfield Lodge, across the road, whilst building his new house and set up the cross there. It was broken whilst in process of removal to its present site. The broken part is 45-in. to the first breakage and the upper does not exactly fit on to it. The joints have been mended by leaden fastenings, and where a crack shows towards the base in one place a piece of iron has been inserted to prevent collapse. The stem is 14-in. by 12-in. on the North and South sides, these being in the best preservation. A scroll pattern is continuous on these sides, similar to the well-known classic vine-scroll; if anything rather more deeply worked on the North.

The vine leaf scroll, in Saxon times, was usually associated with wheat-ears—symbolic of the Christian vine and the true bread. A scroll to the West, $8\frac{3}{4}$ -in. wide, is much more elaborate. The sides are flat—not chamfered. On the East the stem is divided in its lower part into two panels—that on the South having eleven letters, $2\frac{1}{2}$ -in. high covering a space of 29-in. They seem to be

? O

R E G - 5-in. space - DOURIVIAG
read downwards. A similar panel matching this on the further side has completely disappeared—with the exception that on a level with the last of the above letters is what seems to be a large G, reading upwards. The letters are enclosed in panels with a sunk moulding. There are traces of a letter after

? O

R E G - at $3\frac{1}{2}$ -in.

All are in Roman style.

The upper part of the Cross on its East and West side is hollowed as if worn by foot traffic; one can almost measure the footsteps, and suggests that, either it lay on the ground in the Churchyard, a temptation to boys to use in passing or was thus worn at the stream.

The top is wheel-headed and has a cross with four equal arms cut in the centre, which, however, may have been a later addition as, although in a slight hollow, its edges are rather sharply defined. Below the "wheel" are two very short arms in "roll" form, with a moulding above. At the centre of the actual top is a hole, as also just above each rolled arm.

Archbishop Grindall's Injunctions of 1571 state that "none shall rest at any Cross in carrying any corpse to burying, nor shall have any little crosses of wood there." This was a reference to the custom

of placing wooden crosses for the dead upon Wayside or Churchyard Crosses, which must have prevailed in olden days and had been still observed in spite of the changes in religion. Another use when the Cross was drilled with holes for the affixing of some object—such as above or the stems of flowers or branches for adorning the Cross on certain occasions, e.g., Palm Sunday and Rogation Days—was that of hanging thereon the heads of wolves (and foxes) when a reward was offered “that they might be seen of all.” As to date—the lettering and the scroll pattern do not tally—yet at Fletton in Huntingdonshire is a cross with this mixture of early scroll and later letters, to which is assigned the date of 12th Century. At Hexham, Northumberland, is another with somewhat similar scroll work, but more deeply incised. William de Bloys, Bishop of Worcester, ordered “Palm Crosses” to be set up throughout his diocese in 1229.

So far no reference has been unearthed to a cross in either Great Ashfield or Badwell Ash, sometimes known as Ashfield Parva, whose boundary is close by the Church. Again, as in the Suffolk Subsidy for 1327 there are no less than 27 references to Crosses being near a place of residence and in that for 1524, another list—with no reference in either to Great Ashfield, we are led to conclude that this Cross was not a Boundary or Wayside, but stood in the Churchyard, where the upper part was knocked off, to lie for years on the ground, until used at the stream; that the base may have remained *in situ*—to be moved, put on one side, forgotten, until the advent of Lord Thurlow who erected it as we now see it, in his former home. The nearest remains of a Cross to Ashfield are at Thelnetham (near Diss) where it is, or was, a “Wayside.” However, in the Will of Robt. Garrad, of Ixworth (S.I.A., Vol. 1, Page 106–7) we read, “I

give on pyctell lying aygenst the Crosse at the Townysende and next the pyctell late Herry Rogers " and " all my londs &c. lying within ye towne and fylde of Elmyswell aforesaid."

Samuel Tymms adds in a note " Pedestall of a Cross still remains in grounds of Cross House, at end of town on road to Stowlangtoft."

This property would therefore come very near to Ashfield. If a cross was ordered to be erected by " will," one word usually found on the Cross would be " rogavit," i.e., " desired " its erection. Another hint, perhaps, for deciphering the letters on the Cross is, that Theodred Bishop of London and of Hoxne left Eadgiva 50 marks, and land at Ashfield to Asgrad (his sister's son). The Bishop died in 955 and Eadgiva was Queen of Edward the Elder. In Domesday Book " St. Edmund had lands " in Ashfield.

Amongst Kings to whom the inscription might refer (if a regal one) are Edmund (941-6), Edgar (958-75), Edward the Martyr (975-78) and Edward the Confessor (1042-66) ; on coins of the latter P is sometimes used for W. In Vol. I of our Proceedings we are given an account of the visits of Edward I (1277-1305) to E. Anglia. He came to Bury St. Edmunds no less than 13 times, journeying to and fro to Burgh ; was at Bardwell in 1277 and in the near neighbourhood 8 times. The main road or nearest way to and fro Burgh would seem to be in the direction of Scole, via Ashfield. At this latter is still a big mound, enclosed by a large moat, on which was probably a castle, perhaps that of le Blond or Blund (Crikelot, sometimes spelt Kirklot, married his heiress temp Edward I), who built Ixworth Priory.

If St. Edmund's body was brought from Hoxne c. 900-3 to Bury St. Edmunds the main route would be via Great Ashfield which is just a half-way resting-

place after about $13\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Some have suggested that the letters of the first be B and not R a reading of "Beoderic's Way" — Beoderic has been spelt Beodouric. Both Ixworth Priory and Butley Abbey were once landowners in the parish.

The letters seem to be : 1, R or B ; 2, E (if an E, not according to type) ; space of 5-in. ; 3, D ; 5, 6, 7, OUR (tied) ; 8, I ; 9, V ; 10, I ; 11, A. Before D is the suspicion of an A. 12, G the last letter, a combination of C, G and E. No. 2 is rather similar. If it be Edmund, the spelling would be Aedmund.

The photographs are the work of the Rev. J. D. Sayer, Rector of Elmswell, who also kindly helped to take the measurements, etc.

Miss Redstone kindly looked into A. S. Charters for a reference to a Cross here—but found none.

Authorities differ as to the probable date of this Cross, varying between Saxon c. 900 and 12th century.

H. COPINGER HILL.