

THE MARKET CROSSES OF SUFFOLK.

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It is necessary to go back to early Mediaeval times in order to find the origin of Market Crosses.

The wayside Cross, the symbol of the Christian religion, is found in its earliest form in this country in the granite monoliths of Cornwall. Some authorities state that these were pagan menhirs re-incised or sculptured in bas-relief with the crucifixion at the top, after the conversion of this country from paganism.

This form of monolithic cross is said to have been erected in every churchyard in the country and that proclamations were made from them after church services. It was also here that the Palm Sunday Procession halted. These churchyard crosses were first erected in the second half of the thirteenth century, some few may have been erected earlier, others more elaborate, later; probably, in a good many cases, to replace earlier and more crude examples.

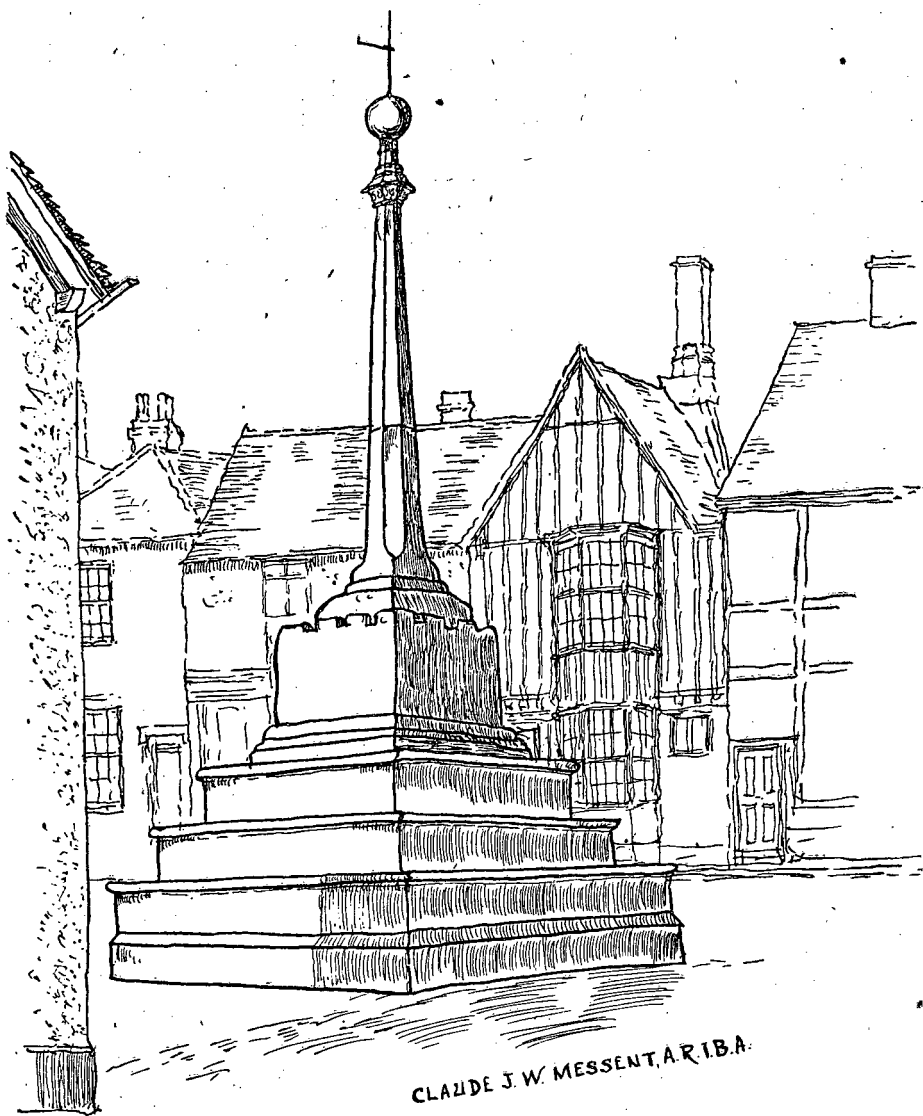
In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, there was very little difference between the design of the churchyard cross and of those erected by the side of the highway and on Market Places; they were all symbols of the Christian faith. The use of those in the churchyards has just been mentioned; those by the highways were used as preaching crosses; some authorities state that they came into use with the arrival of the preaching Friars, others state that they were used by the priest of the church. Those on the market places were used for issuing public proclamations, as well as by preachers, for they stood as a symbol of Christian fairness in all dealings on the market.

In later Mediaeval times we find a pent-house erected round the market cross for the shelter of those who bought and sold, this covered up the centre piece and sometimes the cross above as well.

After the Reformation we find the market cross taking on quite a different design with external pillars arranged in a square, circle, octagon or other kind of polygon, in some places quite a covered-in building was erected, this being the forerunner of the modern market hall. Thus it will be seen that after the Reformation all symbolism of the Christian religion disappeared from the market cross, in fact the name cross became a misnomer.

It will be seen that there are thus three distinct types of market cross.

In the county under consideration, there are unfortunately only three market crosses remaining, those at Lavenham, Mildenhall and Bungay. However, each of these is a typical example of one of the three distinct types aforementioned.



LAVENHAM MARKET CROSS.

At Lavenham there is the simple single shaft cross raised on stone steps. At Mildenhall there is the open timber pent-house type of the later Mediaeval period, and at Bungay we have the strictly classical type of the Georgian period.

The date of erection of the Mediaeval market cross at Lavenham has only recently been definitely established. On account of the style of its architecture, expert authority has stated it to be early fifteenth century, but research has proved it to be later; an antiquary came across a will dated 1501, in which William Jacob states, "... I will have a crosse made of my proper cost that shall be sette upon the Market hylle wt' in the town of Lavenham, and the patrens thereof shall be the crosse standing at Cambridge in the Market Place. . . ." Enquiries about the cross at Cambridge revealed that it had been taken down in 1786 and that its architecture was transitional fourteenth to fifteenth century, but only a vague description of the cross itself could be obtained, but this was sufficient to show that it was very similar to the one at Lavenham, thus it will be seen that it is not always safe to date a building by the style of its architecture.

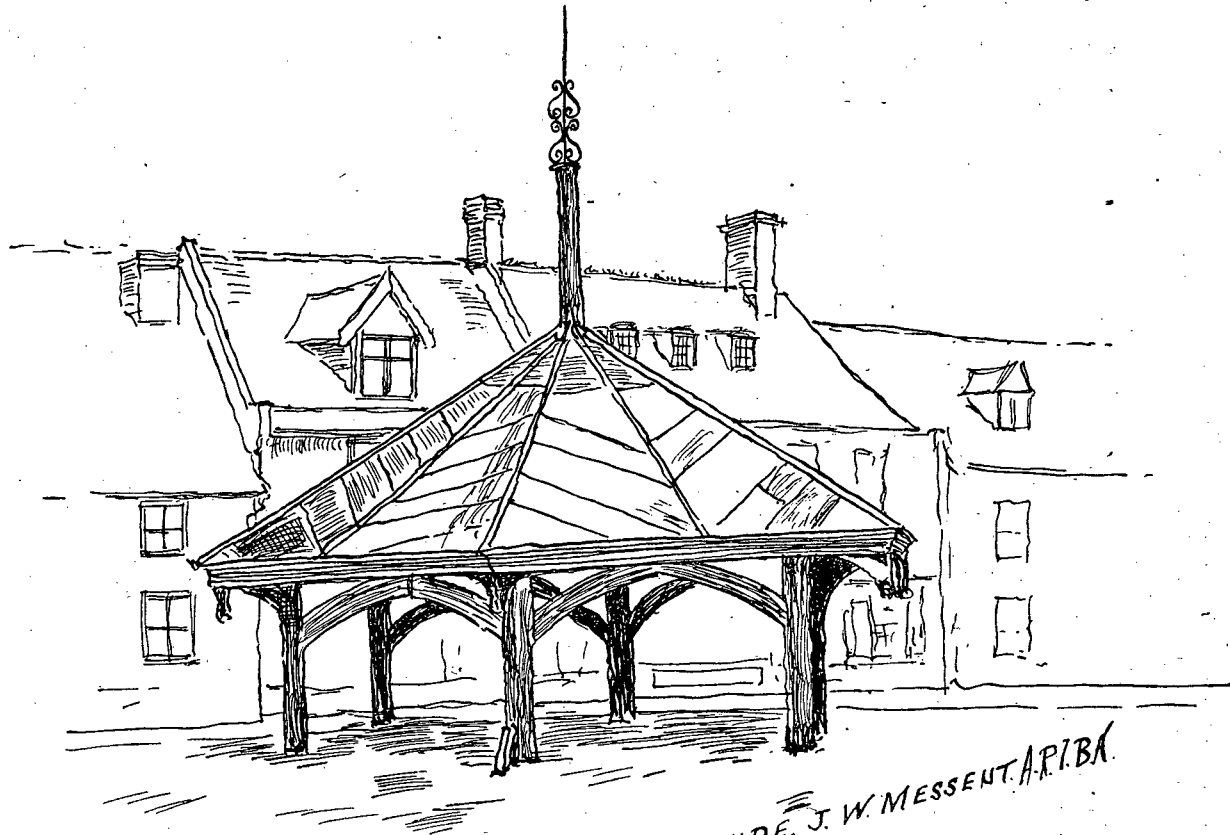
The cross itself, is of the "Shaft-on-Steps" type. The shaft is octagonal on a square plinth, this in turn stands on a square base made of three steps graduating on the four sides to a small step at the top. At the top of the shaft is a cornice of Fleur-de-lys, above this, and on the capital is a large ball, which is symbolical of the world. The actual cross, or crucifixion, with its canopy, was removed sometime after the Reformation, and was replaced by a cross of iron upon one of the arms of which there hung, until a few years ago, a small cross, a heart, and an anchor. There is documentary evidence that on one side of the original stone cross under the canopy was the Crucifixion, and on the other side, the Virgin and Child. There are complete examples of this type in existence in other parts of the country so that a good idea can be obtained of what the Lavenham market cross was like before its mutilation by the Reformers. Close to this cross were the Halls of various Guilds.

During the eighteenth century and before the weekly market was abolished, this cross was used to display butter and cheese, but later it came to be used by the younger folk for burning the Guys upon on Guy Faux's Day.

The last restoration was in 1913, when it was found that grave-stones from the churchyard had been used to repair the cross.

At one time there was a stone cross in the churchyard, which was said to have been removed to the market place. The date at the base of the column, 1790, was supposed to be the date of re-erection, but parish records show this to be the date of restoration, and various wills of merchant clothiers point to the existence of two crosses.

It is regrettable that this market cross at Lavenham is getting into a rather sad state of repair and it is hoped that steps will be taken to preserve this monument for future generations.



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MILDENHALL MARKET CROSS.

Very little indeed is known about the Market Cross at Mildenhall. It is constructed of timber, hexagonal on plan and of the penthouse type with a lead covered roof. It is said to have been erected during the reign of King Henry V (1413-1422). It is in a fairly good state of preservation.

The present existing Market Cross at Bungay, known as the Butter Cross, was erected in 1689, to replace the one which had been destroyed with the greater part of the town in the great fire of Bungay in the previous year.

This Market Cross is octagonal on plan and consists of eight attached columns of the Doric order of architecture with their appropriate architrave, frieze and cornice above. Semi-circular arches with key-stones fill the eight openings and a hemi-spherical dome covered with lead crowns this building. At the apex of the dome is a pedestal on which is fixed the figure of Justice, of casted lead, it is one of the best of its kind in the whole country, and was added to the cross in 1754, i.e., sixty-five years after its erection. It was bought for £29 13s. 8d., with a further £1 1s. 2d. for "ship freight," which suggests that it may have come from London, where a certain John Cheere then had a noted lead-yard, which he had taken over from a Dutchman. It is of interest to note that a very similar figure of Justice exists at the Town Hall at Middelburgh in Holland.

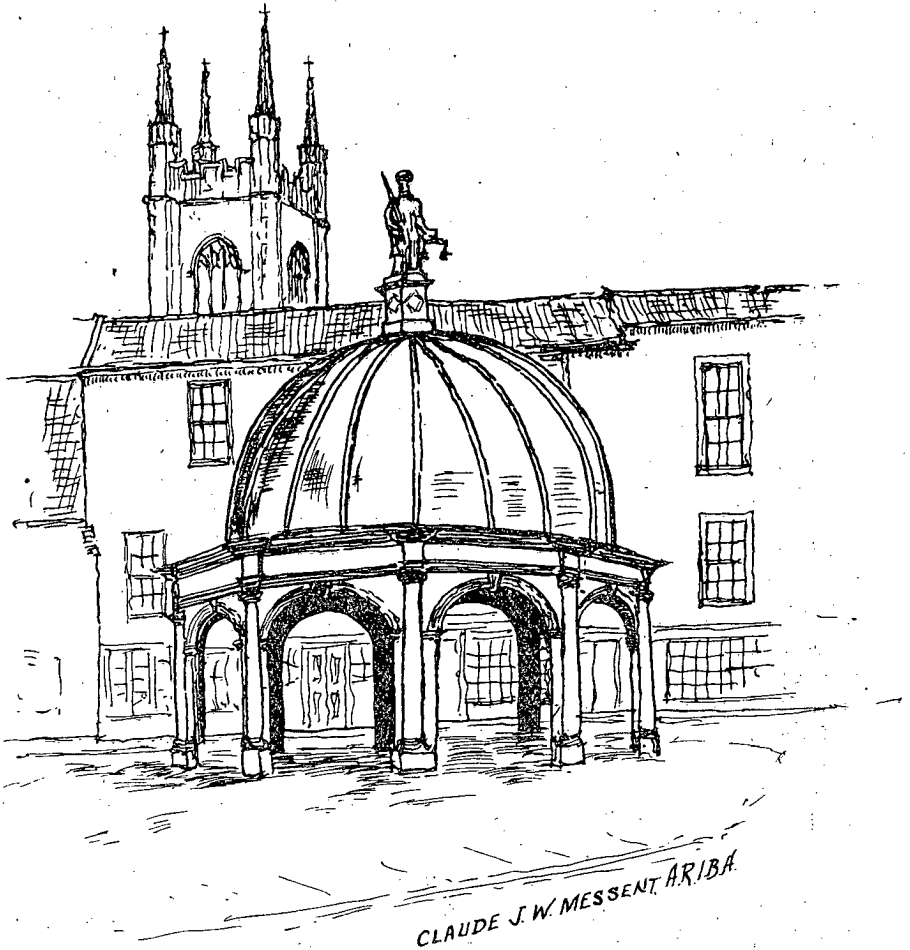
Mr. Lawrence Weaver, in his book on English Leadwork, speaks of it as a figure of Astraea, the last deity to leave the earth at the end of the golden age. She was the goddess of Justice, and took her place in the Zodiac as Virgo; she was represented by the ancients as a Virgin bearing a sword in one hand and a pair of scales in the other.

Till 1836 there was a prisoners' cage in the centre of this market cross, which helped to support the dome. The steps on which it stood were removed in 1863 when a dungeon beneath was disclosed. A thorough restoration took place at this time. Some of the charred remains of the former market cross were discovered. The dungeon was octagonal in shape, measuring 6-ft. 4-in. in diameter and its height was 5-ft. 1-in. At the time of this restoration the wooden plinths on which the eight columns stood were replaced by stone ones.

The other Bungay Market Cross, known as the Corn Cross, was originally used to shelter corn placed there for public sale and the Lords of the Manor also held their courts within it. From an illustration copied by G. B. Baker in 1831 from a picture of the Market Place in 1811, it will be seen that this also was octagonal and was raised on three steps from which rose slender columns supporting a low roof. It was unfortunately demolished at the end of 1809.

There is documentary evidence that every other market town in Suffolk originally possessed a market cross, but unfortunately all have been destroyed. In some cases we have evidence to show what they looked like, judging from old prints we can see that the Ipswich cross was especially ornate.

It is to be hoped that those remaining, not only in Suffolk, but in other parts of the country will be preserved.



BUNGAY MARKET CROSS.