

From the *Transactions* of the  
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

## **Lypiatt Cross**

by W. St. C. Baddeley  
1929, Vol. 51, 103-107

© The Society and the Author(s)

## THE LYPIATT CROSS

by ST. CLAIR BADDELEY

BESIDE the high road from Stroud, and within about 200 yards north of the main entrance of Lypiatt park there had been standing (until July 1929), perhaps for a hundred and more years, a squared slightly-tapering pillar of local ragstone, nearly five feet of it projecting above ground and leaning somewhat southwards, owing to foundations imperfectly made upon an earlier edition of the same road. As a squared plinth-stone (2'6" by 2'5"), having a central square pin-hole, lay among the loose rubble and mud and but a few feet from it (yet most probably belonging to it), excavation might, it seemed, disclose to us whether, or not, the divorce of these two had taken place in still more recent days, and so might possibly account for the above leaning, or subsidence. Such proved to have been the case.

My attention was called to the surface of this stone-pillar in September 1928 by Mr Randall, a retired builder, living now at Woodchester, but formerly at neighbouring Bisley—as to signs of carved work on one or more of its four sides. The only face tolerably free from moss and lichen had obviously been planed in its upper section in the 19th century, no doubt to mark it as a Bisley parish boundary stone with large letters B P.

The irregularly-pitted east side of the road, where the shaft stands now upright, represents the Stroud-Bisley road before it was widened for coaching, and otherwise improved in post-Waterloo years. This took place during the occupation of Lypiatt park and farm by Thomas Bagehot (de la Bere) esq., and Paul Wathen esq., his successor; to whom the late Sir John Dorington

used to attribute the many fine roadside sycamores there. Consequently, we may infer that at the re-making of the main road, the old track, (as often was the case), became waste ; and it has served merely for 'quarry' in later times. It was probably then that this monolith was transferred from the cross-roads hard-by (north) next Stancombe farm, where old Catwood lane crosses from Slad to Bisley, and thenceforward it has served as a 'parish boundary stone'. In Faden's map of 1 February 1800, 'Cross' is printed at the spot above indicated : and it is not unreasonable to conjecture that *this* was the cross ! Even before removing some of the moss upon it, the fact became certain that not only was there early carving upon three sides of the four, but that the lower sections of three sides at least had borne figures standing within shallow round-arches rather better formed than those on the sides of the Bewcastle cross, and which just allowed the sharp angles of the pillar itself to be-token their supports. Upon further cleaning with a wire brush above these arches a flat 4-inch space for an inscription became succeeded by a small oblong panel evidencing a former vanished figure. As the soil still concealed the actual base of the shaft for a few inches it was likely that the lowest figures might be partly hidden, and on excavating might show better preservation. This proved to be the case ; and complete exposure discovered further a circular tenon-hole in the base (diam. 7 inches). The breadth of the shaft there was 1' 8" ; the total length 5' 9" ; while the breadth at the highest remaining portion still unbroken is but 1' 3". Each of the four faces had been panelled out in a similar scheme.

Clearly, this venerable portion of a very ancient monument—either belonging to a funerary Romano-British stela of unusual kind, or more likely to the shaft of an early Saxon cross—was not in site. The defacements of all the figures and the total loss of the cross-head may be attributed in part to the days when Puritan iconoclasm

raged against all such religious monuments at our waysides, and more especially, perhaps, in 1644, when royalist troops from Miserden House, under Sir Jacob Astley, unsuccessfully raided Lower Lypiatt in the night and lost some lives there.

In passing, it should be mentioned that, in such a noted Roman-British locality as Bisley with neighbouring Custom-Scrubs, and Sapperton (where a villa was found and totally destroyed when the G.W.R. tunnel was made)—the finding of such a shaft displaying round-headed niches, yet carrying neither a local story nor any saintly legend whatever attached to it, and also evidencing a total absence of 'vine-scroll' or 'strap-work', or even any geometrical ornament—made one shrewdly recall those many small votive anaglyphs that have been unearthed at those adjacent sites, and that now enrich Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bristol museums. However, a closer scrutiny gradually made possible both by working upon it and by obtaining the effectual aid of Colonel E. Sinnott, C.M.G., the County Surveyor, brought one to conclude that it must have had Mercian Christian origin rather than a 4th century Romano-British one.

When, therefore, this difficult question of more precise dating was fully confronted the no less serious consideration equally pressed that Mercian Christianity in this portion of (future) Gloucestershire historically only began with the grandchildren of Penda; for the foundations of Bath, of Worcester, and of Gloucester abbeys, all occurred within the last twenty years of the same 7th century, or (c) A.D. 681; yet each of them, relatively, lay far from Bisley in its respective river-valley.

Nearer, it is true, to Bisley, though ten miles away, lay far-fallen ancient Cirencester; but then its little Saxon college at no time claimed to any earlier origin than the reign of King Egbert, or, A.D. 800–836. On the other hand, the Northumbrian Oshere was founding a mission-house monastery for his kinswoman Dunna and her

daughter, at Withington, in the last decade of the 7th century, when Ealdhelm was abbot of Malmesbury, when Offfor was bishop of Worcester, and when Tetbury was likewise only in its monastic infancy. Wherefore so early a setting-up hereabouts on the lonely hills of such a fully developed sculptured cross, (whether commemorative of some fallen saintly warrior, or of some other especially holy personage, or only upon the site possibly of some long-forgotten Christian conference), at first seemed far from probable. Still, many crosses have certainly survived, the actual origin of which has not transpired, while, of others only the name or the approximate site is known, even in this same county. For example, an early 15th century manor-deed places a 'Crux-Albani' near Paradise, in Painswick manor. Who then was this Alban? and why did a cross commemorate him? Did he work some miracle there? Or, was he martyred there? or buried? No other record survives.

It is almost needless to say that the only inscriptions that still are legible upon this stone are the numerous 18th and 19th century initials and some trade signs (? of wool-men), roughly and carelessly crowded chiefly of course upon the planed upper face that bears the modern letters above mentioned.

Nevertheless, beneath the feet of the vanished or mutilated figures in the panels, both oblong and arched, occur 4-inch wide spaces for titular inscriptions, or for individual saints' names; and it may be that in one example among these some of the letters may become identified by means of a plaster-cast of the entire pillar that may presently be made.

The best-preserved arched panel (3' 6" by 1' 8") contained a figure having upraised arms; but its head is gone (and a square small hole is seen in place thereof). The tunic (?) and super tunic here descended to the ankles, and beside it (left) in a vertical line are seen eight drilled tiny holes equi-distant from one another. Upon the right side occur

PLATE I



LYPIATT CROSS : NORTHWEST FACE

*Ph.* Mr E. Marsland

*facing p.* 106

PLATE II



LYPIATT CROSS: THE PLANED SIDE SHOWING LETTERS B P  
*Ph. A. and G. Stone, Stroud*

only four of these. They suggest the former presence of a symbol of some kind—possibly it might have been such a symbol as S. Lawrence's gridiron. All the figures of the panels seem to have been standing. At the extreme foot of the most planed face both the drapery and feet of a figure alone attest that it also must have carried other panels like its fellow sides.

It is thus abundantly clear that in this sadly and idly despised and punished stone we have one of our earliest Christian county-relics, and it is strange to reflect that this old cross in its aforetime freshness and beauty doubtless for centuries a wayside wonder, and, not to say, a pillar of light in the night of heathen darkness to our West Saxon forbears—should, in far later centuries of enlightenment, have become wilfully disfigured and cast out, and yet again was set up only to become scrawled upon by the ineffective and unskilful pocket-knives of their far more educated descendants.