

## Quethiock Churchyard Cross

Quethiock's imposing churchyard cross is one of the tallest and most complete of pre-Norman crosses in Cornwall.

Although it is now such an outstanding feature of the churchyard, 150 years ago its presence was unknown. The story of its discovery is related by AG Langdon in his 1896 book *Old Cornish Crosses*:

'A few months since, whilst some workmen were engaged in excavating the ground preparatory to building a new boundary-wall at the southern part of Quethiock churchyard, they came unexpectedly upon the head and base of a handsome granite cross. The two pieces were discovered just inside the old fence, at some depth beneath the surface.

On making further search, the Rev. Willimott, the vicar, was fortunate enough to find the missing shaft. The monolith had been divided into two parts by hammering and then breaking it, and was doing duty as gateposts to what was then an unused entrance to the churchyard. This gateway is now built up. On putting the four pieces together, it was found that they all fitted exactly into each other, and formed a perfect four-holed ... cross.

After having been firmly cemented together, the restored cross on the 25<sup>th</sup> July [1881], was re-erected ... on the spot where it was found and is supposed originally to have stood.'

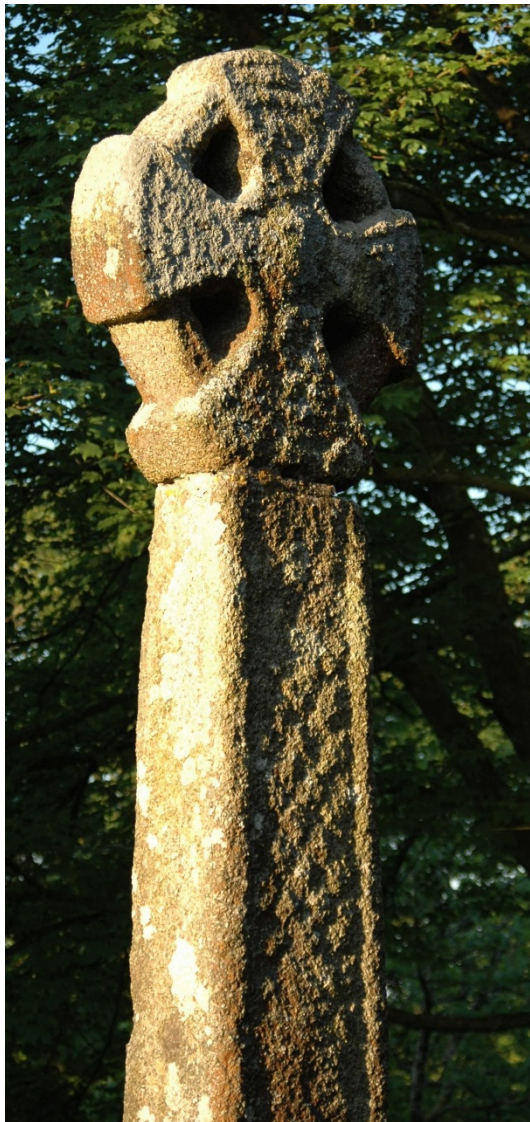
In all probability the discovery was related to the addition to the churchyard of a small section of land to the south containing several small cottages (one perhaps a church house) and a garden or yard. This extension to the churchyard can be seen by comparing the c1840 Tithe Map with the c1880 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS 25 inch map (both available on the Cornwall Historic Environment Record: [Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's Historic Environment](#) ).



Langdon also relates that 'The cross [head] has a tenon fitting into a mortice in the top of the shaft, and, at the bottom of the shaft, one which fits into the base; so that no part of the cross is wanting'. The cross is exceptionally important in being so complete.

This impressive monument stands 4.06m (13ft 4ins) high. It is carved of granite from Bodmin Moor and consists of a ring-headed cross set on a tall, slender shaft which in turn is set onto a granite base-stone. The cross has mouldings (beads) around the edge and is decorated with interlace, plait-work and plant scrolls carved in very low relief with that on the shaft being extremely worn and indistinct.

The cross-head is elliptical, not round. This is believed to have been a deliberate and



clever design feature, enabling it to be perceived as round when viewed from below. The cross-arms are linked by a ring and in the space between each of the arms and the ring are three cusps, forming trefoil-shaped openings. A double bead surrounds the head and at the centre is a boss. A trefoil knot fills each of the arms.

The south face of the shaft contains two panels of decoration. The upper has traces of an angular four-cord plait, and the lower a six-cord interlace executed in wide flat bands, but it is too worn for the pattern to be discerned.

The upper part of the east face contains a very worn plant scroll. The lower panel has a very mutilated double-beaded twist-and-ring pattern, but this is only clear near the bottom of the shaft.

On the north face of the shaft (facing the church) the decoration has entirely disappeared from the lower part but there are faint traces of a single-strand plait in a small area near the top of the shaft.

*The north face of the cross with plaitwork on shaft*

The final, west, side of the cross-shaft has remains of a simple plant scroll with small leaves in the space between the plant stem and the edge-moulding.

The decoration is generally too worn to interpret with confidence, although the overall form and types of decoration link the cross to a group of monuments generally found in mid Cornwall from St Columb Major in the west to St Teath on the north side of Bodmin moor. The type of decoration, the form of the cross and comparison with these others suggests that Quethiock's cross was set up at some time in the century before the Norman Conquest, in the late 10<sup>th</sup> or more likely the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Compared to other members of the same group of crosses, Quethiock's cross is an outlier; the closest comparable monument is a fragmentary cross-head in Pelynt Church. This begs the question of whether Quethiock was in some way special before the Norman Conquest or whether every church in Cornwall once had such a remarkable monument, since broken up and re-used as building stone.

### References

Langdon, AG, 1896. *Old Cornish Crosses*.

Langdon, AG, 1996. *Stone Crosses in East Cornwall*.

Preston-Jones, A and Okasha, E, 2013. *Early Cornish Sculpture*.

Preston-Jones, A, Langdon, AG and Okasha, E, *Ancient and High Crosses of Cornwall*.



*Plant trails and scrolls on the west side of the cross-shaft*

### Links:

[The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: Catalogue \(durham.ac.uk\)](#) (Volume XI)

[The Corpus: Quethiock 1 \(chacklepie.com\)](#) (To see all photos, click on the image of the cross-head to enlarge it. Then click **next**, top right, to see photos of all four sides of the cross.)

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