

## The Netherton Cross

The pictures on the Cross are taken to be Christian in origin. The scene carved on the face facing the Church (1) could depict God sitting on top of the world viewing his creation. The missing part of this scene may have depicted another figure, which taken in conjunction with the serpent, would suggest that this image represented "The Temptation".

The other side of the Cross (2) is much less weathered — presumably because it faced East in its original situation. The two fish symbols carved on this face are probably symbols of Christ, whilst the three figures may be taken to represent the Trinity, or Christ with Peter and Paul. Below the beading is the fragment of a picture of a long-jawed animal, which has been interpreted as a lion. This may represent either Daniel in the lion's den or a lion breathing on its dead cubs to illustrate the Resurrection. The double strand interlacing work on this side is very elaborate and suggests that this side was the primary focal point of the Cross.

Both side ends of the Cross have lattice work on the end of each arm. One side (3) represents a coiled serpent above two human-like figures which may represent two of the Apostles (in that they are similar to the figures on side two) while the long-jawed animal may represent yet another lion.

The other side end (4) shows another bird-headed human figure, below which is a person with feet up and head down. This may be taken to represent St. Peter who was crucified upside down. Below is a

pattern of concentric line markings which are in distinct contrast to the elaborate interlacing design of the other side face because of their execution.



1



2



3



4

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## The Netherton Cross Hamilton



## The Netherton Cross, Hamilton

The oldest symbol of Christianity to remain in Hamilton is the Netherton Cross, which stands outside the Old Parish Church.

The history of Christianity in Hamilton goes back to the 6th century. The Old Parish Church, which is the oldest building in Hamilton still used for its original purpose, was built to a design by William Adam, and opened for worship in 1734. This church superceded the Collegiate Church in the Low Parks which was demolished to make way for some enlargements to Hamilton Palace.

The Cross is an eleventh, possibly late tenth, century example of British Strathclyde sculpture which shows the influence of Manx-Norse design, which in turn was primarily inspired by Pictish sculpture. Representatives from the Historic Monuments Commission have confirmed that it is a Christian Cross, not a Norse or Viking Cross as has been previously suggested.

The relatively late dating of the Cross (i.e. the eleventh century) explains its lack of precise ornamentation – examples of which may be seen on the Iona Crosses of a much earlier period. The Netherton Cross is seen to represent the intermediate stage between better sculpture of the earlier period and later sculpture which became so debased and of such poor execution as to be sometimes taken for primitive sculpture. It can be best paralleled by the Rathdown stones near Dublin which show similar chevrons, curves and concentric ring designs.

The Cross originally stood near the site of the settlement at Netherton, approximately 60 yards to the north of the Motte Hill in what is now Strathclyde Country Park. Perhaps it was erected to celebrate some great miracle or happening, or simply as a representation of Christianity in the area. Whatever the reason, it is interesting to speculate on its origins and wonder what its connection with the Celtic Church really was.

In 1857 the Town Council appointed a Committee to confer with the Duke of Hamilton's manager about plans to attempt preservation of the Cross. Some ten years later in 1867, the Provost of Hamilton was requested to communicate with the Duke's manager and to express the desire of the Council that a railing be erected around the Cross in order that the tracing and carving on it be preserved. Presumably the railing was to prevent farmers and the like tethering their livestock to it.

In 1925, the Town Council agreed that the Netherton Cross should be erected in front of the Old Parish Church, and received an estimated price of £30 to move the Cross from its present site to the Church. The Old Parish Kirk Session Minute for 13th November, 1925, shows that the Town Council wrote to them suggesting “– that the Netherton Cross, which was at present in the library having been removed from the Palace grounds some time ago, should be erected in the main avenue of the Parish churchyard.” The Session agreed on condition that the Cross was mounted on a suitable base of stone.

The Cross has been under the protection of the Historic Monuments Commission since 1933. Further efforts to protect it occurred during the Second World War when the Cross was bricked round and then the gap filled with sand so that the Cross would be safe from the danger of bomb blasts or air raids.

The Cross underwent a 3-week “face-lift” in 1972 to discover whether or not it would have to be moved indoors as it was suffering from structural damage because of the weather. An expert from the Historic Monuments Commission stated that the Cross could remain outside as long as it received regular attention.

The cross remains a reassuring reminder of the origins of Christianity in the community and provides a vital link between the Celtic church of the past and the role of the Old Parish Church of Hamilton in the present and future.

For further information see:-

Waddell, J.J. *The Cross of St. Kentigern at Hamilton and its Environment*, Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiastical Society, Vol. 5 Part 3 (1917-1918)

Stevenson, R.B.K. *The Inchyra Stone and other Early Christian Monuments*, Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, session 1958-59, Vol.92

Romilly Allen, J. *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1903