

# Church of St. Cuthbert and the standing cross, Bewcastle, Cumbria.

The church is set on slightly sloping ground, and near to a Roman Fort and inside which was built a Norman Castle. Some way to the south is Hadrians Wall. In the churchyard stands the now famous Bewcastle Cross, and together with Ruthwell Cross they were noted by Nikolaus Pevsner thus; "The crosses of Bewcastle and Ruthwell....are the greatest achievement of their date in the whole of Europe". The cross is missing its head.

A description of this cross has been noted as follows. *Each of the four sides of the cross is intricately decorated with reliefs divided into panels depicting figures, animals, chequers, vine scrolls, interlaced knots, as well as a sundial. The west side of the cross features runic inscriptions. The largest relief on the side with figures is, as at Ruthwell, Christ treading on the beasts, below St. John the Baptist. At the bottom, below a panel of runes, is a much-discussed figure of a falconer, who is possibly St. John the Evangelist with his eagle in an unusual depiction, possibly misunderstood from a Syrian model of John with an oil-lamp.*

There is useful information to be found on the net. Here is a translation I discovered relating to the runic text on its western side. *The west side is the most interesting to the archæologist, as it contains a long inscription in runic characters, the interpretation of which reveals the origin of the column. It is thus read (substituting Roman letters for the runic) by the Rev. Mr. Maughan: + THISSIG BEACN THUN SETTON HWAETRED WAETHGAR ALFWOLTHU AFT ALCFRITHU EAN KYNIING EAC OSWIUNG + GEBID HEO SINNA SAWHULA, that is "This slender pillar Hwætred, Wæthgar, and Alfwold set up in memory of Alefrid, a king and son of Oswy. Pray for them, their sins, their souls." The reader will observe that nearly all the above words (the proper names excepted) are still in use, though slightly altered, in modern English. Thissig has become this; beacn, a sign or token, is now beacon; thun is thin; setton, set; aft, is the root of after; ean is ane or yan, still used in the northern counties for one; kyniing has become king; gebid, the syllable ge is simply an expletive, and bid, to ask or pray, is still so used in "bidding to funerals"; sinna is now sins; and sawhula, souls, the vulgar pronunciation of which (sawl) is not far removed from the Anglo-Saxon.*



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Grid reference NY565746

All photos these pages are described viewed clockwise from top left.

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1. General view of the church from the west, with the Cross set to the right hand of the picture.

2. The west face, and to the left the north face of the cross.

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3. The lower half of the western face. This digital photo has been enhanced.

4. The southern face.

5. The south face, and on the right the east face.

Dated to circa first half of the 8th century.

Material: yellow sandstone.

Dimensions. The cross stands 14.5 feet high (4.45 metres) and its base measures 0.56 x 0.54 metres.



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