

A PROBABLE LATE-MEDIEVAL LANTERN CROSS HEAD FROM STAPLETON, MARTOCK, SOUTH SOMERSET

In November 2009 attention was drawn to a carved stone built into the south-east corner of a barn on the west side of the road in the hamlet of Stapleton in Martock parish (NGR *c.* ST 46252085 – house called ‘Eweleaze’). In photographs, the stone appeared to have a niche under an ogee arch inhabited by a female figure in a long dress. Examination in the field however showed that the photo was only one side view of a two-sided stone built into the corner of the building, with one face to the south and one to the east (Fig. 1). The second face also has a female figure under a niche. Close examination suggests that these visible faces form two sides (of four) of a square block of stone which looks like the head of a lantern cross. The stone therefore probably has two other decorated panels, facing inwards into the wall. If these faces have figures on them, they are likely to be less weathered and better preserved than the two faces currently exposed to the weather.

The stone is made of Jurassic limestone, and the south face is 490mm tall and 190mm across, the east face 420mm by 260mm. At each of the visible corners is a column-like pillar, the best-preserved of which is 460mm high and around 60mm in diameter. The two niches are occupied by female figures which are quite eroded so that the details of the carving are not clear. The figure on the south face may be holding a lily (the Annunciation?) or a sceptre in her right hand. The figure on the east face may be holding a baby in her folded arms. The iconography of the scenes on the stone remains unclear. It would be useful to see the other two sides of the stone (if they are still intact) and perhaps then some attempt could be made to explain the carvings.

This stone looks like the head of a late medieval lantern cross, but if so what is its context? Nearby is Stapleton Cross, the junction of the road running north from Martock to Long Load, and the road from Ash to Coat – other hamlets of Martock. This stone



Fig. 1 A probable medieval lantern cross head at Stapleton, Martock; south and east faces

could be part of a monument that stood at the crossroads. Another possible context however is that it is a fragment of a churchyard cross and that it was taken from the yard of the demolished chapel known to have stood in Stapleton. A chapel is recorded in 1535 and 1548 and was still in existence in 1625 and 1678. It had probably been demolished by 1798 and it is not on a map of 1774 (Bush 1978, 105). This could easily be the date of the barn into which the stone is now incorporated and so a load of demolished medieval chapel and cross rubble could well have been used to build a new barn at that date. No other carved stones have been observed in the

barn, which has been recently restored, so far.

The stone remains in situ. Thanks are due to Julie and Clive Hetherington for reporting the existence of the stone, and to Nigel and Janet Short for allowing access and study of the stone.

Reference

Bush, R.J.E., 1978. 'Martock' in Dunning, R.W. (ed), *A History of the County of Somerset Vol IV* (=VCH), Oxford, 78–109

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