



Original Bewcastle Cross



Sarah Losh's version of the Bewcastle Cross

The Bewcastle Cross

The Bewcastle Cross stands in the churchyard of the hamlet of Bewcastle on the remote Cumbrian moorlands north of Hadrian's Wall. It was carved in the late seventh or early eighth century and for centuries has been reduced to an obelisk with no cross on its broken top. Historians and antiquarians have studied its runes, figures and beasts, knots and interlacings and the images of a falconer with his bird, of Christ standing on the heads of lions, and of John the Baptist holding the Lamb of God. The images recall Syrian sculptures, and this cross on this wind-swept northern border may have been carved by eastern Mediterranean craftsmen.

Sarah's copy of the cross stands in Wreay churchyard to the north of St Mary's. She had conceived it jointly with Katharine, as a memorial to their parents but, after her sister's death, she completed the project by herself. The base bears an inscription in Latin which translates as: 'Two daughters purposed that this stone should be set up: one performed it, greatly sorrowing.'

Antiquarians were puzzled at the time as to how Celtic crosses had been carved. Some believed that the stone was laid on trestles and turned, but most thought that they were carved with the stone in a vertical position. Sarah's copy was an antiquarian exercise. It seems likely that the cross was carved upright with three sides cut sharp by a skilled craftsman, probably William Hindson, and the fourth side more roundly cut. It is possible that Sarah herself carved the figures on the west side. It is likely that Sarah worked from previous drawings. Henry Howard of Corby Castle, close friend of John Losh, had made accurate drawings of the cross and published his findings in *Archaeologia* in 1802. Philip Howard lent them to Sarah.

The Wreay cross is the same shape and size, standing fourteen feet high, as the one at Bewcastle, except that a cross has been added to complete the obelisk. As with all Sarah's work, she has subtly adapted her model. At the bottom of the west panel the hawk perches on a stand facing the falconer, not gripping his hand as on the original; in the centre, Christ stands firmly on the ground rather than on lions' heads; at the top, as in earlier drawings, the Virgin Mary stands with her baby in her arms replacing the original John the Baptist carrying the Lamb of God. The runes are replaced with lines, from Psalms 27 and 57, in memory of Sarah's parents. Inscribed in Latin, they read, 'The Lord is my light and my salvation', and 'Be merciful unto me O God, be merciful unto me: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge.' The lines on the east side of the base translate as: 'May this sign of consolation cast its shadow on the grave of John Losh and his wife Isabella. May you walk safely, beloved souls, through the midst of the shadow of death. Farewell, till the times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord.'

The cross was erected at least 20 years after the death of her father and 40 years after the death of her mother, but the project was carried out with a very strong feeling of personal grief.

The Bewcastle Cross has been re-invented in Wreay. The old cross with its weathered surface and its suggestions of shape and form has prompted a carving that is clean and fresh and delights in the flow of line and form and the stylised suggestion of animation in bird and beast.