

CHAPTER IV

EARLIER RESEARCH

In all of the counties covered by this volume there was little knowledge of, or interest in, the post-Roman monuments until the mid-nineteenth century. Standing monuments in prominent places, such as the Copplestone cross (p. 82), were noted earlier (Lysons 1822, cccix), although not distinguished from British standing stones such as Lustleigh or Tavistock (*ibid.*, cccviii). Even when drawn by Samuel Prout (1812), and published with measurements in *The Antiquarian and Topographical Cabinet*, vol. IV, it could be stated: 'On what account this Stone was erected is uncertain; from its situation it was probably intended for a parochial boundary, or it might be the landmark of the family of Copplestone' (Storer and Greig 1807–11). John Collinson in his *History and Antiquities of Somerset* (Collinson 1791) illustrates mainly the great country houses and churches, and describes in detail the family monuments in churches, all of which no doubt were of interest to his patrons and those likely to purchase his work. 'Old stone crosses' are mentioned by him, but only by location, so they are recorded in the churchyard at Nunney (vol. II, 221) or Congresbury (vol. III, 586) but there is no means of knowing whether these were Anglo-Saxon or High Medieval. The major interest when the Anglo-Saxons were considered centred on mounds or other earthworks in the field, and manuscripts and coins amongst portable antiquities (Sweet 2004, 189–229); as an example, see Warne's *Ancient Dorset* (1872). John Hutchins' great *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* in its first edition of 1774 had no mention of Anglo-Saxon sculpture, but in the later and enlarged edition by Gough and Nichols (1796–1815), and the final, and much enlarged version, edited by Shipp and Hodson (1861–73), the sculpture at Winterbourne Steepleton (p. 125) is mentioned. Nevertheless until the late nineteenth century there was very little understanding of the distinctive character of Anglo-Saxon monuments. As late as 1875, Alfred Rimmer's *Ancient Stone Crosses of England* included mainly medieval monuments, with drawings of a few Anglo-Saxon crosses, but none from this region.

There was however considerable scholarly interest in churches and monastic buildings with their associated documentary evidence, although Lyson's section on 'Ancient Church Architecture' (1822) included only Norman work as its earliest examples, and Collinson described for example the doorways at Langridge as Saxon 'with fine zig-zag arches' (1791, I, 132).

In the earlier nineteenth century there was still little appreciation of what was distinctive in Anglo-Saxon sculptural ornament. Rickman, whose fundamental work identified so many Anglo-Saxon churches, assigned the north and south doors of Britford church (p. 206) to the Anglo-Saxon period because of their long-and-short work and admixture of brick and stone, but both doors were then blocked and so he did not see the decoration on the north door and illustrated the south as the most characteristically Anglo-Saxon example (Rickman 1862, 79). He also illustrated the church at Bradford-on-Avon (pp. 36, 202) and noted that 'on either side of the chancel arch there also were sculptured figures of angels', but concluded that the church must be of a post-Conquest date since 'we know that neither fine-jointed masonry nor sculpture were in use neither in England nor in Normandy before the twelfth century' (*ibid.*, 94). Bradford and Britford remained the only notable Anglo-Saxon stone monuments in Wiltshire for the next twenty years (Allen and Browne 1885, 8).

Charles Pooley's *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Old Stone Crosses of Somerset* published in 1877 was a major step forward in appreciating the crosses of that county. He lists five sites: Keynsham, Kelston, Bath, Rowberrow and West Camel, and his measurements and evidence for discovery as well as his dating are all still useful. Moreover his assessment of these monuments gives them a new value: '...in these remains we possess examples of Saxon art which challenge antiquity with some of the most ancient Crosses known, and which are a rich heritage of historical interest as the durable monuments of early Saxon Christendom' (*ibid.*, 159). Publications such as this drew attention to stones which were emerging in the great rebuilding and reordering of churches in the mid to late nineteenth century, and many incumbents and some architects (notably for this region J. T. Irvine) were interested; and, as the catalogue demonstrates, many of the surviving Anglo-Saxon fragments were salvaged from church restoration by the incumbents. Sculpture is recorded as having emerged from the fabric of churches or from churchyards in the course of reconstruction on at least twenty-two of the sites, and at four sites sculpture was recovered from the rebuilding of domestic structures.

The establishment and growth of the Antiquarian Societies in this region provided not only organs for publication, but advertisement for new finds and

platforms for debate about dating, and many of the references to sculpture in the catalogue are culled from their pages. The aims of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, formed in 1849, as set out in the first volume of their *Proceedings* ((—) 1851, 5), were typical — ‘to explore the treasures of nature and art ... and to accumulate a body of facts in aid of the studies of the antiquary and natural historian’. The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society was formed in 1853, initially as an organisation to purchase and house the antiquary John Britton’s extensive collection of books and manuscripts (Rogers and Crowley 1994, 420), and a publication was established, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, in 1854. Since 1874 the Society’s library has been housed in the present museum at Devizes, and the Secretary, Editor, and Librarian of the Society for forty years, the Reverend E. H. Goddard, was a frequent contributor, and interested in the crosses of his county (Goddard 1894 and 1899). Likewise indefatigable in his interest was C. E. Ponting whose publications on Wiltshire sculpture spanned the period from 1893–1937. The year 1862 saw the foundation of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art (now the Arts) and its associated publication, *Reports and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, while from 1900 *Devon and Cornwall Notes & Queries* was added, and most recently, in 1929, the *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society*. The early volumes of these Devon Societies however hardly advanced the study of early sculptures further than the pioneering work of Lysons.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was nevertheless an important period for improving the understanding of Anglo-Saxon monuments. The publications of the local Societies, together with the earlier antiquarian surveys, enabled scholars to look at styles across the region beyond county boundaries. In this the work of J. Romilly Allen and Bishop G. F. Browne was pioneering; their joint list of stones with interlaced ornament in England in 1885 included for this region only eight sites (with none in Dorset), but these ranged from Devon to Wiltshire. J. R. Allen’s ‘Notes on the ornamentation of the early Christian monuments of Wiltshire’ published in 1894 was however more comprehensive and demonstrated the rigour and accuracy of his recording, which was to be more fully displayed in his monumental publication of the early Christian monuments of Scotland (1903). He was however primarily interested in the geometric ornament of the region, and was probably the first person to realise how difficult it is to fit the interlaces of Wessex into his classification scheme which was based on Hiberno-Saxon

geometric principles (see Allen 1894). Bishop Browne’s work included important studies of individual monuments in the region, such as West Camel or Wells, but he was less reliable and more speculative than Allen in his desire to link the stones into an historical framework. This is well exemplified in his work on Aldhelm and his desire to identify the monuments put up to mark the resting places of Aldhelm’s body on its last journey (Browne 1903, 149–54; id. 1908).

The first half of the twentieth century saw the publication of several county compilations. For Devon the work of Phillips between 1915 and 1938 provided valuable listings of crosses and identification of new pieces such as Braunton. In Dorset, Pope’s *The Old Stone Crosses of Dorset*, published in 1906, added a little to Hutchins’ 3rd edition, but in the large number of standing monuments which he listed, the only Anglo-Saxon cross that he described was Todber (Pope 1906, 137; see p. 114), and it was not until the 1930s that fuller listings for Dorset were provided in the publications between 1931 and 1938 of Dina Portway Dobson.

A milestone in the study of the region’s sculpture was provided by Frank Cottrill’s M.A. thesis (Cottrill 1931) and the more limited publication of the Wessex carvings (Cottrill 1935). His was a seminal work which discussed animal ornament across the region, and has been used as a basis for much of the later work on this theme ever since (see Chapter VI, p. 42). Baldwin Brown’s posthumous work on sculpture published in 1937 was able to draw on the pioneering work of Romilly Allen and others for the south-west, but in comparison with his work on architecture it is a disappointing study. In it are listed 2 monuments for Devon, 4 for Dorset, 14 for Somerset and 20 for Wiltshire (Brown 1937, 102, fig. 13), but since the volume had to be completed after his death, there is little useful discussion of these sculptures, except in a discursive way in relation to a few notable monuments — in this region, Ramsbury’s coped grave-covers and the Bradford-on-Avon slab (*ibid.*, 177–9, 290–1).

These scattered references were however more systematically brought together in the British Museum’s attempt, under Thomas Kendrick, to catalogue all the known finds of Anglo-Saxon sculpture and to provide a new and comprehensive set of photographs. The card index and associated collection of photographs so produced has provided a valuable jumping-off point for the study of this material ever since, and was the source of the chapters on sculpture in Kendrick’s two important studies of Anglo-Saxon art in 1938 and 1949. His work, although at times maddeningly impressionistic and unsupported by reference, was the last to evaluate all of

the known monuments of Wessex in the context of the other English kingdoms. Other writers such as Brøndsted (1924), Clapham (1930) or Talbot Rice (1952) have considered Wessex sculptures selectively, and in addition Taylor and Taylor (1965, 1966, 1978) have considered architectural sculpture in some detail.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the work of the national recording bodies has been rather patchy in this region. Dorset is fortunate in the eight volume survey of all existing buildings and earthworks dating before 1850, which was published by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) between 1952 and 1975. This included much useful information about the sculptures, but Dorset is the only county in this region for which there is a R.C.H.M.(E.) survey published. The region has been more widely covered in the Victoria County Histories: an inauguration of the Victoria County History for Devon took place in 1899, but the project foundered after one volume and no Anglo-Saxon sculpture was discussed (Youings 1994, 122). In Dorset similarly the Victoria County History was inaugurated and two volumes were published in 1908 and 1968 but they were not concerned with this material. In Somerset the project for a Victoria County History began with two thematic volumes which were published in 1906 and 1911, and thereafter six more in the form of parish histories between 1974 and 2004. The Wiltshire Victoria County History project has been however the most successful in output, with seventeen volumes published between 1953 and 2002. For the second volume Lawrence Stone contributed a short account of the sculpture in his section on 'Anglo-Saxon art' (1955b, 35–41), which included many of the well known sculptures from the county. This section is in course of revision. The volumes of the Buildings of England series inaugurated by Pevsner (1952–1975), and Taylor and Taylor's compendious catalogue of Anglo-Saxon churches (1965), provided valuable insights into the context of sculptures as well as short notes on their presence.

In the more recent past there have been some general articles in which many of the monuments in the region were reconsidered (Cramp 1972 and 1975; Bailey 1996, 95–104), but more substantially in 1986 Dominic Tweddle completed a London University Ph.D. thesis, 'The Pre-Conquest Sculpture of South-East England', in which much of the discussion of the style of the monuments had a direct relevance to the adjacent areas covered by this volume. His thesis was revised and published in 1995 as Volume IV of the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture series (Tweddle *et al.* 1995). Other theses have also made very important contributions to

the study of the south-west sculptures. In 1984, Steven Plunkett produced an in-depth treatment of the animal ornament and plant-scrolls in Wessex and Mercia in a Cambridge Ph.D. thesis still unfortunately unpublished (Plunkett 1984), which produced new insights into material from this region. This was followed by a thorough survey and discussion of the sculptures from Somerset in a gazetteer by Sally Foster, prepared initially as a B.A. Dissertation (Foster 1984) and subsequently published in the local Society *Proceedings* (Foster 1987), with significant new evaluations of the material.

Controlled excavation at several sites has produced a body of new evidence: sculptures from the piecemeal excavations over the years at Glastonbury (p. 153) were partially recorded by the various directors (often without illustration), but the first attempt to list all of the fragments was made by Foster (1984; 1987). On the other hand the important collection of material from the ecclesiastical site at Keynsham (p. 164) has been fully published by the excavator (Lowe *et al.* 1987), and most recently the sculptures from Wells (p. 176) have been reassessed as part of the report of the Cathedral excavations (Rodwell 2001a). On the whole, though, twentieth-century excavation has yielded little new evidence from this region, although individual finds such as the sculpture from Congresbury (p. 149) and the Unknown Provenance piece which came to light at Dowlish Wake (p. 189) have added high quality items to the tally of figural sculptures.

The current interest in iconography has however resulted in study of the intellectual context of some of the well known figural sculptures from the region (see Chapter VII, p. 57), and in this Elizabeth Coatsworth's and Barbara Raw's studies of Crucifixion iconography (Coatsworth 1979 and 1988; Raw 1990) have been particularly helpful, as have Mary Clayton's studies of the Virgin and Child (Clayton 1990 and 1994). There have also been new studies of individual monuments such as the Bristol Christ (Smith 1976; Muñoz de Miguel 1997; Oakes 2000; see p. 149) and the Congresbury figures (Oakes and Costen 2003) which set them within a liturgical and temporal context.

The quality and individuality of this figural sculpture is unsurpassed in late Saxon England, and provides a valuable contrast with the monuments of Northumbria and the northern Midlands for this period. With the publication of the present volume, and the previous publication of *South-East England* (Tweddle *et al.* 1995), it will now be possible for the first time to consider the whole range of West Saxon monuments, many of which are not as well known and fully studied as they deserve.