

CHAPTER 9 - STAPLEFORD CROSS

Stapleford cross is said to be the oldest religious monument in the county now standing, and one of the finest for its age in the whole country. It is certainly the oldest construction fashioned by man in Stapleford, and dates from between 680 and 780 A.D. although there are some who have placed on it a much later date, i.e. 1016-1035; whichever date is correct, it remains a very ancient and prized monument.

Description

The shaft of the cross is about 10 feet high, is 2 feet thick at the base, is rounded, and tapers slightly towards the top. It has on it three bands of surface sculpture, each band divided by horizontal lines. The two lower bands are covered with interlaced ornamentation, and the upper one, where the shaft tapers and becomes square, has on one face a symbolical bird-like figure trampling on a serpent. This is probably intended to be the emblem of St. Luke, and in corroboration of this it is pointed out that Stapleford Feast, or Wake, is governed by St. Luke's day, or rather old St. Luke's day which corresponds to our October 29th. The Feast Sunday is the last Sunday in October, unless that be the 30th or 31st day of the month, and then it is the last but one; for if the Feast Sunday was October 30th or 31st the week would not include old St. Luke's day. "And we mun hae owed St. Luke with wake wik".

Restored to middle of Church Lane

Before 1760 the cross shaft was lying in the church yard and in that year was removed from thence and set up with a base of steps in the middle of Church Lane at its junction with Church Street. In 1820 the base was reconstructed and was made to look much as it does today. It was about this time that, according to a writer named Stevenson in 1874, the maypole was taken down; this suggest, of course, that the maypole had been something of a permanent nature and not one which was erected each year as the occasion required. About this time the square cap and ball were added to the shaft of the cross, thus giving it a more complete and finished appearance.

Moved to churchyard

After the turn of the century there was concern for its safety; a different and not so leisurely type of traffic was now passing it daily. It also provided an ideal object on which small boys could test their climbing ability-the wife of the vicar of that day complained bitterly that she was always pulling some small boy off the base of it. Several villagers wished to have the cross moved back into the safety of the churchyard and to add weight and reason to their cause, aid was sought from the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire.

A Parish meeting was held on 16th July 1908 to consider whether it should be moved or not. Some villagers, together with the representatives from the Thoroton Society, spoke for its removal to a place of safety, others spoke against the proposal. One would assume that such a matter would not evoke such controversy but disorder, rowdy scenes, and hot words appear to have been the ingredients at that meeting; so much so that a number of the inhabitants afterwards wrote jointly to the Society, apologising for the unseemly behaviour of some of the villagers, and disassociating themselves with such conduct. The outcome of the meeting was that the cross remained where it was

The iron railings which are now affixed to the sloping top of the base were added in 1908 by the Nottinghamshire County Council at the request of the Thoroton Society. The cross was eventually removed in 1928 into the area added to the churchyard but has long since lost the ball with which it was surmounted.

Effigy of the vicar burned

This old cross must have looked upon many sights in its long history, but perhaps none so strange as that which took place in the latter part of the 19th century. At that time Stapleford was saddled with a most unpopular vicar, and the villagers, who were not backward at showing their disapproval, made an effigy of that cleric and burned it at the foot of the cross. On another occasion this same incumbent was assaulted at a funeral.