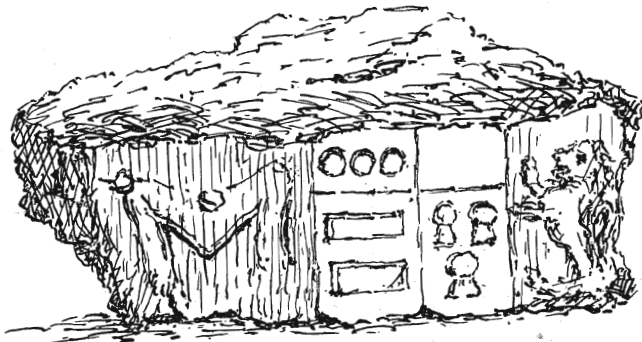


*Sculptured Stone found at Shawell, Leic<sup>re</sup> - 1894  
Size - 12 in X 12 in X 6 in.*



*Sculptured Stone found on site of the Old Angel Hotel*

*G. C. Bellairs  
Delt*

## ON THE DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT REPRESENTATION OF THE "AGNUS DEI," AT SHAWELL.

BY THE REV. E. H. BATES, M.A.

I BEG to report to the *Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society*, the discovery of a very early carved representation of the "Agnus Dei," which once had an honoured place in the Church of Shawell in this County, and has this year been dug up in a garden in that village.

The stone, with some portions of the tracery of a window, had undoubtedly formed part of the old Church which in 1865 "was entirely taken down, with the exception of the tower, and rebuilt from designs by Mr. W. Smith." I suppose that some one had thought that the garden wanted a rockery, and so a wheelbarrow load of stones from the rubbish was easily obtained and piled up in a corner. The carved stone fell face downwards, and remained undisturbed to the spring of this year, when by chance it was turned over and noticed to have some sort of a figure on one side. Some water and a scrubbing brush soon revealed the details; and the stone is now carefully preserved from wind and weather, until a permanent home is found for it.

The block measures one foot in length and breadth, and six inches in thickness; it is white freestone and very heavy.

A margin about one inch in width being left round the sides, except at the top, where the upper limb of the cross is continued to the edge of the stone; the interior was hollowed out to an average depth of half-an-inch, leaving the figure of the Lamb and the Cross in relief. This figure is of a most primitive outline; in fact, if it were not for the accompanying cross, it would be impossible to decide what animal was intended to be represented. I do not think that I err in assigning such a rude carving to the 12th century at the latest. Professor Freeman has remarked in one of his works that the 13th century shews a sudden advance in the carving of figures, as indeed in everything else. Mr. Romilly Allen, one of our best living authorities on early architecture and symbolism in the British Isles, says that the "Agnus Dei" occurs more frequently than any other subject in Norman sculpture; and from his article on Norman doorways in Yorkshire, *Reliquary*, Vol. I., N.S., I have taken the following extract:—

"The representations of the Agnus Dei in art have, like those of most other Christian symbols, undergone many changes as time went on and our religion spread over new geographical areas.

In the paintings of the Catacombs at Rome of the 3rd century, the Lamb is shewn with the shepherd's crook and milkpail, thus typifying Christ in His character of the Good Shepherd. The nimbus round the head was not introduced till about the middle of the 5th century, one of the earliest examples being in the mosaics of the Baptistery of S. John Lateran, at Rome. The nimbus was preceded, first, by the Chi-Rho Monogram, and then by the Cross placed on the forehead of the Lamb. Both these forms, as well as the monogram combined with the nimbus, occur on the sculptured sarcophagi at Rome of the 4th and 5th centuries. In later times the Lamb has the cruciferous nimbus round the head. Upon the celebrated cross at the Vatican, presented to Rome by Justin II. in the 6th century, the Agnus Dei is for the first time represented as carrying the cross. In the 12th century, the banner is attached to the cross. M. Didron calls this form with the banner, the cross of the Resurrection, in contradistinction to the cross of the Passion, the latter being the one on which our Lord was crucified, whereas the former is carried by our Lord in the subsequent scenes, such as the harrowing of hell, and the Ascension, indicating Christ triumphant.

The shape of the cross borne by the Agnus Dei varies in Norman sculpture in different localities, being either a plain Latin cross, or a cross surrounded by a circular ring, or a cross with expanded ends (as in this instance). The most common way of representing the Agnus Dei is the one adopted 'here,' where it is shewn standing up, holding the cross in its foreleg, which is bent upward, and with the face looking straight forward."

The shape of the stone leads one to suppose that it was originally fixed in the wall of the Church; in which case a very favourite position was just over the entrance doorway. In the view of the Church given in *Nichols*, the doorway is completely hidden by the porch, and so it cannot be known if the stone was still in position as late as 1800. Probably not, but at some earlier time the stone was taken out and replaced face inwards, as patches of mortar are to be found still adhering in the angles of the figure.

This stone may be added to the remains which still exist in the neighbourhood to shew the former existence of Churches built in the earliest styles. The Foxton cable pattern, the Swinford font, the Bitteswell chevron moulding, the Broughton Astley holy water basin, the Foxton Norman arcade, with traces of an earlier window in the wall above, to name only those that I have seen, and now the Shawell Agnus Dei, are the flotsam and jetsam of buildings which vanished before the renovator of the 13th and following centuries, as completely as his work goes before his successor of the 19th.

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