

## ST ERTH CHURCHYARD CROSS

### Introduction

Fixed against the wall at the north-west corner of the south aisle are two pieces of a pre-Norman churchyard cross. The two pieces were found built into the wall of the church when it was restored in 1875. For over a hundred years they remained loose in the churchyard until June 1998, when they were brought into the church for preservation.



*Cross fragments prior to 1982*

At the time, it must have been a striking fashionable monument - a real status symbol - but as the centuries wore on it became out-dated and eventually, probably in the 15th century, it was broken up and re-used as building stone when the church was being enlarged and reconstructed. There the pieces lay until the late 19th century when the church was being restored. The stones were removed from the wall and when seen and illustrated by the Cornish historian, A.G.Langdon, in his famous work on Old Cornish Crosses, they stood one on top of the other on a modern granite base, against the south aisle wall. At some time after this, the stones were placed side by side and remained so until about 1984 but for the last fourteen years, until their restoration in June 1998, they lay loose on the ground by the south porch.



*Cross fragments in 1995*

### The conservation work

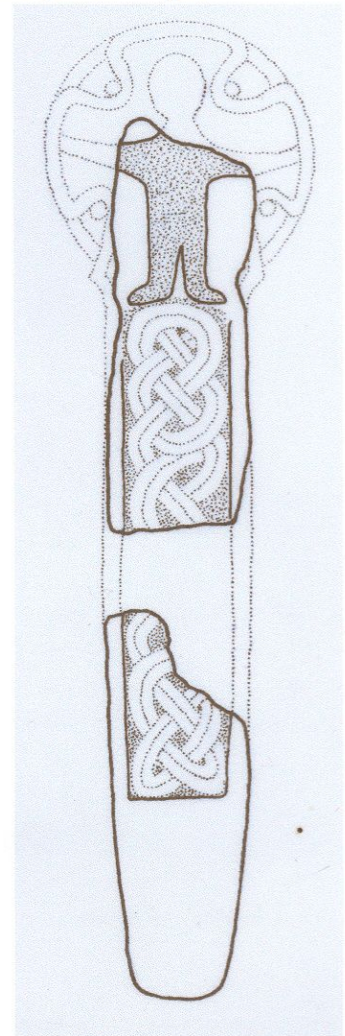
The conservation work was carried out in June 1998 by Sue and Lawrence Kelland, stonework conservators, with help from Andrew Langdon, local expert on crosses. The first stage involved strengthening the floor to take the weight of the cross fragments. An area of floorboard was cut and the void filled with concrete. On top of this a new granite base was set. Then the lower portion of the cross-shaft was set up on the base-stone and fixed to the wall with stainless steel clamps. The upper section was lifted into place with scaffold tower, block and tackle, and supported above the lower on a stainless steel bracket. This too was held in place by means of a stainless steel clamp. Finally, the gap between the two fragments was filled with a lime-mortar, to visually unite the two halves and to add stability to the final monument.

### Description

The two pieces are undoubtedly parts of the same monument, although there is a section missing in the centre and much of the cross-head has been trimmed off to make it more suitable for building stone. In this drawing, a reconstruction of the original form of the monument is suggested, to show how the cross might have looked before it was broken up for building stone. A ring encircles the cross-head, on which is a simple version of the Crucifixion. The shaft is decorated with interlacing strands and key patterns - designs which are typical of the pre-Norman period (often wrongly described as 'Celtic').

### History of the monument.

St Erth church stands on the site of an early Christian foundation, perhaps a small Dark Age monastery. We do not know what the site consisted of in the early days, or whether there was even a church here before the Norman period, but in the late 10th or early 11th century, it was provided with a fine carved and decorated cross, made of granite from the Penwith granite outcrop.



*Cross reconstruction*