

Notes on a visit to Heysham.

By John Robson, Esq (1851)

Having had an opportunity of spending an hour at Heysham last summer, I beg to lay before the Society the notes made then, and hope that some gentleman who has more time, and who may be able to make sketches of the very curious remains in that out-of-the-way village will give the Society such an account of them as they deserve.

Heysham is a small place 8 miles from Lancaster, on the side of a rocky hill which forms the south-west horn of Morecarnbe Bay. The Parish Church and Rectory are on the slope ; and above these, on the top of a rock, is what remains of St. Patrick's Chapel. This rock has been levelled, and the sides apparently cut down, so as to isolate it from the hill, which rises much higher to the south and south-west; it is perhaps 130 to 150 yards in circumference at the top. The Chapel, about 8 yards long, by 3 wide, stands on the north side, and the sea dashes against the rocks below. The whole of the west end is destroyed. A portion of the north wall connected with the eastern gable which is complete and a part of the south wall are still standing. There is no appearance of a window, or indeed any opening at the eastern end. The south wall, which is destroyed towards the east, has a doorway near the west extremity. This doorway, between 2 and 3 feet wide, is the only part that has any architectural character. The sides exactly correspond, each jamb being formed of four stones, which form the whole thickness of the wall. The lower stones are above 2 feet high, and more than a foot wide, the thickness being about 2 feet. Upon these are two stones of the same dimensions in width and thickness, but only 4 inches high. Then upon these two larger ones corresponding with the large ones below, and upon these again two smaller ones, which form the imposts upon which a large stone, worked into a semi-circular arch, rests. This stone is of an irregular shape above, and has on its surface three arched shallow hollows, with small fillets or rounds between. The masonry, except in this doorway, is of the rudest kind. This wall, as already mentioned, is destroyed towards the east, but there is a splay of about 18 inches which shows the existence of a window.

The arch of the doorway on the inside has a similar moulding to that on the outside, but it is more dilapidated; and a third stone worked into an arch, may be seen between them in the soffit, each resting on the imposts or jambs.

The rock graves on the west of the Chapel, on the edge of the rock may have formed a family sepulture. There are seven of various sizes ; one for an infant apparently, and another for a child or young person. Each has a square hole at the head (for which a cavity has been worked) for a cross, but the crosses and covers are all gone. There are two others to the south-east; and below the remains of a perpendicular window abutting on the Church-yard. Under those on the west the rock has the appearance of having been cut down, and the field below may have been entrenched.

The Parish Church, which is to the east, is in a pitiful state. It has a peculiar arrangement

of round arches, as if it had consisted of two or three aisles. The piers are formed in the same way as the door jambs described before, of large and small stones alternately, and ornamented with three bands of the rope moulding for capitals. Some sculptured stones in the Church-yard, of interlaced work, are evidently of a very early period, and well worthy of a careful examination.

There seems a great likeness between the Chapel of St. Patrick and the ancient oratories in Cornwall, which have been described in the *Archaeological Journal*, and attributed to the 4th or 5th century. We are told by Beda, that by the Scottish missionaries in the reign of King Oswald "Construebantur ecclesiis per loca" in the early part of the 7th century. Whether, however, we can refer St. Patrick's to either of these periods, or whether it belongs to a later time, can only be ascertained by a very minute examination, and diligent comparison with analogous buildings, especially those of Cornwall and Ireland. Is there any tradition of any sort connected with the locality?

It seemed a very likely place for the marvellous, but my inquiries were without success. I hope, however, that some other member of the Historic Society may be more fortunate; and indeed the short time at my disposal hardly allowed me any chance of learning the folk lore of a most picturesque neighbourhood.

