

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## Some Saxon Crucifixes.

By M. ADELIN COOKE.

THE cross has always been the emblem of the Christian faith. It is significant to us of the death our Lord died to save the whole world—a fact of which we are often reminded by a cross in our churches, by the cross which we put above the last resting-place of our dear ones in God's Acre, or by the sign of the cross as used in Holy Baptism, whereby we are made members of Christ's Church and are pledged to fight under His banner. In very early times the cross was always represented in the plainest form; then the custom gradually commenced of carving a figure of the Saviour upon the cross. The crucifixes with which we are familiar nowadays represent the Saviour either as dead or dying, thus making a strong appeal to our pity and our gratitude. But the minds of those early sculptors who carved the first crucifixes thought of Christ as a King triumphing in death, and they pictured the Saviour as living, the Divine Nature as Victor, overcoming the sufferings of His manhood on the cross. Sometimes, too, the figure of Christ is represented clothed in a long straight garment, which is considered to be a reference to the seamless robe.

We have some of these ancient crucifixes, or roods, left to us in England, and if the figure evidences the characteristics just mentioned you may be sure it is not later than the eleventh century, for after that date no carvings in this style are to be seen; and, since the Norman period did not begin until William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings in 1066, it follows that these ancient crucifixes go back to Saxon times, when our England was ruled by the Saxon kings.

One of these interesting Saxon crucifixes is to be seen at the old church of Headbourne Worthy, which is only a few miles from Winchester. It is a very interesting church, dedicated to St. Swithun, and the stone rood was placed outside the western door. Weather and time so defaced it, however,

that in the fifteenth century a sort of annexe, continuation, or, as it is often called, a "galilee," was built at the west of the church in order to preserve it. A little low door in the thickness of the wall leads down by two steep steps into this built-on portion, and above the doorway is the stone carving of the Crucifixion of our Lord, very worn and with the head missing. On either side of the Saviour are represented the figures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. John. Battered and defaced as it is, there yet remains a dignity and a mystery about it, and we cannot help thinking of that sculptor who, hundreds of years ago, carved this rood so that all who came to the church might remember the Christ who died for them.

This "galilee" porch had two stories to it; we can look up and see where the dividing flooring came, and the piscina marking the position for the altar; for this apartment was long used as a cell for anchorites, or holy men who retired from the world and lived lives of prayer and meditation.

A very similar crucifix, although in far better preservation, is at Romsey Abbey, and it is so alike that we wonder that some authorities doubt its being Saxon, and consider it belongs to the first years of the Norman period. Certainly it is not so old as the one at Headbourne Worthy; that we can see for ourselves when we carefully compare the details of the two. Romsey was an abbey of Saxon foundation, and the crucifix is just outside the beautiful door by which the Abbess entered the stately church from the conventual buildings. It is an almost life-sized figure of our Lord on the cross, with head erect and open eyes, triumphing in death, victor over the grave, reigning from the Tree. Immediately above a Hand is stretched out from a cloud—the Hand of God the Father over His beloved Son.

Romsey possesses another Saxon relic in a carving of the Crucifixion which is now let into the reredos over the side-altar. It is very rudely carved, but we can see the attendant angels placed on the arms of the cross; there are also the figures of the Virgin and St. John, and beneath them the soldier with the

sponge and vinegar, and the centurion Longinus. There is a tradition that this is actually the crucifix King Edgar presented to the abbey ; but there is no direct authority, so far as I know, for the idea, though it certainly carries with it the air of probability.

Without the porch at Langford is a very celebrated crucifix. The figure of our Lord is 5 feet 10 inches in height, and is clothed in a straight garment confined with a girdle. The head is missing, and it seems very likely, from the small amount of space left, and also from the fact that otherwise the stone is so little decayed, that the crucifix was formerly in another position within the church. Over the porch-door is a small crucifix with attendant figures of the Virgin and St. John, and it is evident that these at least must have been moved at some period, for they are not in their customary positions, and look away from, instead of towards, the Saviour on the cross.



### Christmas Hymn.

Isaiah ix. 6 ; St. Luke ii. 11.

1.

CAPTIVE people, wasted country,  
 Glory faded, honour gone ;  
 Once the greatest of the kingdoms,  
 Now despised by everyone !  
 Weeping sitt'st thou by the waters,  
 Zion's daughter, grief-opprest ;  
 Silent now upon the willows  
 Hangs thy tuneful harp at rest.

2.

Grieve no longer—for a Saviour  
 God hath sent to set thee free !  
 Tune your harps again with gladness,  
 Sing with holy melody :