

MARCHANTS CROSS, MEAVY.

BY R. HANSFORD WORTH.

Two hundred yards south of Meavy Ford, beside the road leading from Meavy to Plympton, at the foot of Lynch Hill, and at the point where the road to Yeo Farm branches off to the east, there stood, and happily still stands, a fine granite cross, now known as *Marchants Cross*.

One is tempted to identify this as the *Smalacumba Cross* which was one of the bounds of the lands given by Amicia, Countess of Devon, to the Abbey of Buckland. But, although the stream which flows from Ringmoor Cot past Yeo Farm to the Meavy is Smallcombe Lake, and there is a Smallcombe Wood in the valley, it would appear that, assuming the present parish boundary to represent the bounds of the land originally granted, *Smalacumba Cross* must have stood near Ringmoor Cot, at the head of the Smalacumba Lake.

Another cross mentioned in this thirteenth century grant is Siwards (or Nuns) Cross. That is identifiable, and is of an earlier type than Marchants Cross, although I would certainly not be prepared to maintain that the latter might not well be thirteenth century work or earlier. I feel that, in speech but not in writing, I may in the past have too positively claimed the identity of Marchants Cross and the bond-cross of Amicia's charter.

In November, 1937, Marchants Cross was broken and thrown down. A motorised machine, proceeding up Lynch Hill, got out of control, ran down the hill with gathering speed, mounted the roadside bank, crashed into and broke the cross and flung the wreckage six feet from its base. The machine then crossed the road and ended its course in a galvanised iron shed; the final crash waking the neighbourhood. This took place at night, the owner of the machine having reason to prefer night travel.

The result might have been expected to be irremediable disaster; but, notwithstanding its age and the fact that it had undoubtedly been cut from surface granite, the cross stands yet again, to all ordinary observation, unharmed. The cost of its re-erection was met by local subscription organised by Capt. Gerty, R.N., and the work was done by

Mr. Trathen of Walkhampton. The countryside proved adequate.

Always, within living memory, the cross had risen (to a height of 8ft. 4ins.) from a surface of greensward. It broke at a depth of six inches below the surface, as indicated by the dotted line "B" on the figure in the text. No other fracture or flaw could be found.

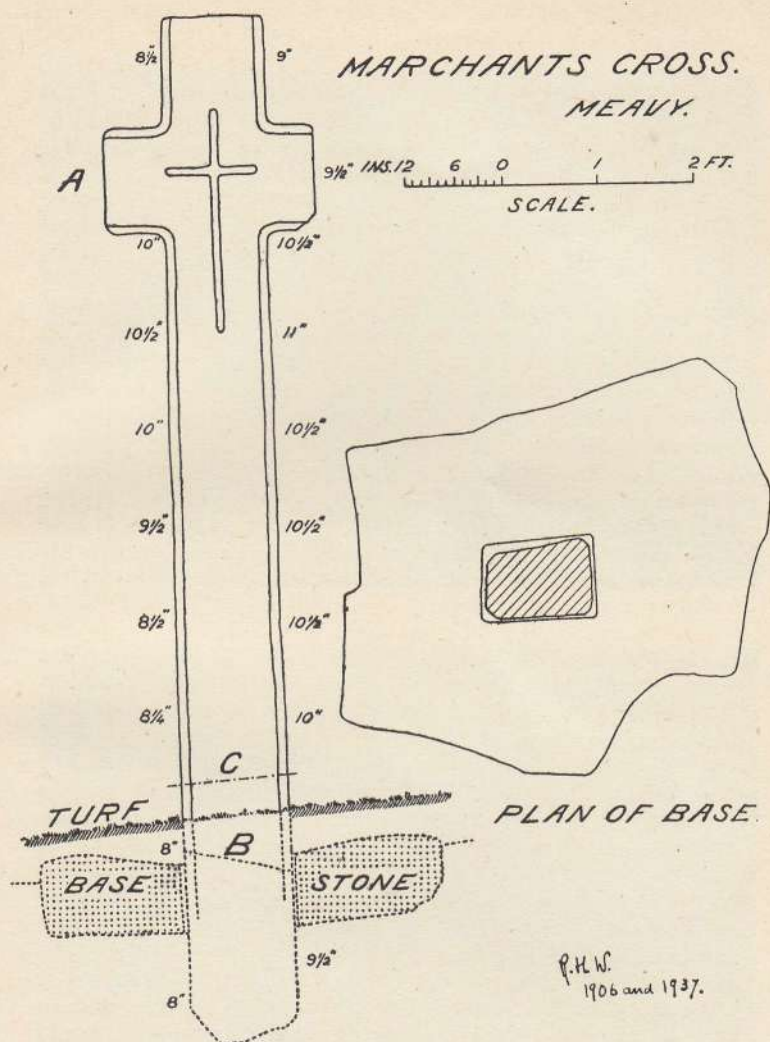
From the manner in which the break occurred it seemed probable that the shaft was in some fashion held at or near that level. By lifting the turf a base was disclosed, consisting of a very irregular slab of granite, with a socket cut completely through it. Except for the socket this base was wholly unworked, and it was probably not intended to be seen. The shaft of the cross went through the base and fourteen inches into the ground below. The broken stump was withdrawn, the hole in the ground partly filled with concrete, and the cross reinserted in the base-stone up to the dotted line "C" on the figure. The turf was lifted, the upper surface of the base exposed, and the surrounding ground lowered somewhat. The base has been left exposed, and the cross now stands 7ft. 11½ins. in height, having lost 4½ inches in visible length of shaft. But the top is really ten inches below its original level.

The Ordnance Surveyors have, or had, a flair for disfiguring ancient monuments, and had cut a bench mark on the shaft at the level of 519.0 above datum. In consequence of the necessary shortening of the shaft that bench mark now indicates 518.17 above datum. The shaft was shortened by the length of the broken stump because the stone at that end was not found to be fitted to take a dowel, and the broken parts could not be safely rejoined. The stump has been preserved at Meavy Church.

It may be of interest to record that the original total length of the cross was roft. 8ins. The figures beside the shaft on the drawing indicate the thickness of the stone. The arm marked "A" is to some extent defective on the other face, but that defect may be original.

Cross bases which are pierced instead of being socketted are known elsewhere on Dartmoor; this accident would appear to indicate the manner of their use; and there may be other such bases, buried and hidden, which are still playing their part as supports to cross-shafts.

By way of record I have prepared Plate (8), on which Fig. 1 is a view of Marchants Cross as it stood fifty and more years ago, and Fig. 2 shews the cross as re-erected.



W. ELEVATION.

DETAILS OF MARCHANTS CROSS.

P.H.W.
1906 and 1937.



R.H.W

Fig. 1. MERCHANTS CROSS, 26/4/1890.



R.H.W

Fig. 2 MERCHANTS CROSS, 12/2/1938.