

## DESCRIPTION - Material, Shape and Decoration

The stone is carved from hard, grey sandstone which may have come from the Ruabon or Cefn area of North Wales. This type of monument is rare in the region, but greater numbers have been found in Yorkshire and Cumbria.

The popular generic description Hogback relates to the curving top of the stone, although the West Kirby example has been damaged in this area. The likely origin of this style, however, is in imitation of Anglo-Saxon stone shrines (eg "Hedda's Tomb" in Peterborough Cathedral), which are themselves inspired by the gabled tombs of the Christian Mediterranean world.

The Hogback sculptors also imitated Norse buildings, hence the curved roof, and often also curved sides. Many Hogback stones imitate a tiled roof, but on this example the tiles have become so stylised as to resemble large tear drops.

The three-strand plait decoration can also be seen on monuments in Cumbria and Lancashire.

The wheel and bar pattern seen above the tiles also occurs in Lancashire and on a cross on the Isle of Man. The non-local type stone underlines the exotic and elite nature of this particular memorial.

The design styles with close links to other northern and western examples, and its coastal position,

probably reflect involvement in coastal trade during the Viking period. The quality of carving is not of the highest order - notice how the sculptor has failed to join up the interlace work.

He has also carved against the grain of the stone, so that exposure to rain, frost and ice has caused the damage to the top portion.

All the surviving Hogback stones have been found within parish churchyards and scholarly opinion is that they served as markers for the burial place of important members of the Norse community, some stones perhaps being combined with head and foot stones, and even with standing Crosses.

These stones can witness to our trust in Christ, who is the resurrection and the life of all the faithful (John 11:25).



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Almighty God  
you have kindled the flame of love  
in the hearts of all who have kept faith in this place  
for a thousand years:  
grant to us the same faith and power of love,  
and as we rejoice in the triumphs of your grace in  
their lives, may we be sustained by their example  
and fellowship;  
through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.  
Amen

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## The Parish Church of St Bridget, West Kirby

# An Inheritance of Faith The Hogback Stone



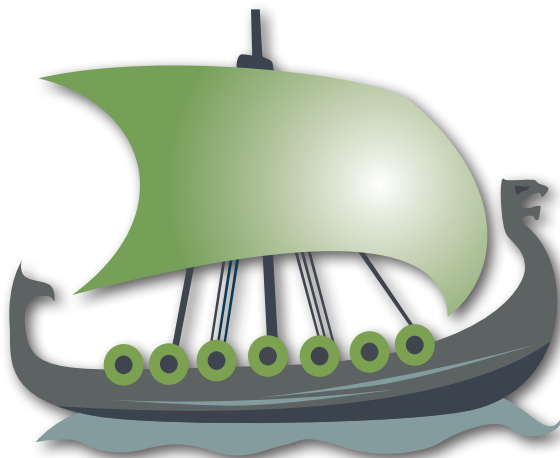
[www.stbridgetschurch.org.uk](http://www.stbridgetschurch.org.uk)

## SIGNIFICANCE - Our Viking Christian Heritage

The Hogback stone is of Anglo-Norse origin, and dates probably from the tenth century, and the Norse (or Viking) settlement of Wirral. It represents evidence of Christian burial and the use of this site for Christian worship at the first Millennium. It is a powerful reminder of the long Christian inheritance of the worshipping community at St Bridget's. It is appropriate that one of the oldest artefacts in this area is one which can witness to the vitality and continuity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is "the same, yesterday, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8)

## BACKGROUND - Settlers Arrive in Wirral

Documentary evidence is limited, but it seems likely that the Norsemen arrived in Wirral (and elsewhere on the north-western seaboard) from Ireland in the tenth century. Their arrival was primarily by settlement rather than military occupation, and there seems to have been a gradual conversion to Christian faith. Indeed, many of those arriving seem already to have been Christian, hence the dedication of this church to St Bridget, Abbess of Kildare. The Norse settlers have left their mark on this area not only in the "-by" ending of many place-names, but in the sculptural tradition of crosses and stones, including our own Hogback Stone. You can discover more about the Norse settlement of Wirral in two books: *Ingimund's Saga* by Stephen Harding (Countrywise Publications, 2000) and *Wirral and its Viking Heritage* by Paul Cavill, Stephen Harding and Judith Jesch (English Place-Name Society, 2000).



## RECENT HISTORY - Rediscovery of the Stone

The stone was discovered during the restoration of the Church in 1869-1870, and is said to have been unearthed on the site now covered by the aisle in which it stands.

It was originally preserved in the Charles Dawson Brown Museum adjacent to the former Schoolroom, and was moved into Church in 2000. Its recent transfer into the church is paralleled by the display of similar stones in other churches such as Gosforth and Aspatria in Cumbria.

The Museum collection includes a number of examples of Cross fragments from the same period as the stone.

The Museum, located in St Bridget's Centre across the churchyard, has now been renamed West Kirby Museum and reopened in July 2013 having been fully refurbished and expanded to increase space for the displays and add interpretation.

Visit [westkirbymuseum.co.uk](http://westkirbymuseum.co.uk) for further information.

