



CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND  
ANTIQUARIAN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# The Medieval Cross Slab Grave Covers in Cumbria

by Peter Ryder

Size 246 x 185 mm. 224pp. Case bound with jacket. 560 line drawings and  
four black and white photographs.

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**T**HIS is a complete illustrated and annotated list of the extant grave-covers, bearing a cross not an effigy, in Cumbria. Widely distributed, often misunderstood, frequently neglected, and sometimes wilfully destroyed, such grave-covers are an important class among medieval memorials. Canon R. Bower recognised their importance nearly a century ago, when he published a list of 'Grave-Slabs in the Diocese of Carlisle' in the *Transactions* of this Society for 1907, 1909 and 1912. Since then, some slabs have been lost, others discovered, and their study has advanced greatly, not least by the present author's work.

Peter Ryder is an expert in this field. He has already published similar studies for Durham, East Yorkshire and Cumberland.

Grave-covers without effigies come from all centuries from the eleventh to the sixteenth, but they were most popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Dating them is a challenge to the historian and the archaeologist, because they rarely have inscriptions and commonly appear out of their original context. What is needed is primarily a sensitive assessment of style. Besides the crosses themselves, many slabs carry emblems. What do they mean? Do they indicate sex, or occupation? These questions are discussed.

There is a drawing of each monument. The accompanying text can be followed easily by those with a general interest in the past, as well as by specialists. There are maps and grid references to show where the monuments are, and an index.

Cumbrian parish churches preserve the outline of the past, but nineteenth-century and earlier restorers drastically altered most of them, inside and out. It requires a considerable effort of the imagination, and not a little study, to understand what a medieval church looked like and what went on in it. This book is an invaluable clue in the puzzle to understand what it was like to go to church in the Middle Ages.

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