

## A Ghostly Stone

Richard Watts tells a story of a mysterious encounter when he and Elli moved to Shutes Cottage in 1996.

"On the first day we moved in, at six o'clock, we heard a noise outside from the metal gate closing. I went to the door, but nobody was there. The next day, at the same time, we heard the same thing; the sound of the metal gate catch. Every day that week, we heard the same noise - but nobody was there. The next week, I hid in the barn, and sure enough, the gate made a sound exactly at six o'clock.

My son looked after the cottage during the following week, and when we arrived back, he told us that kids or someone had been opening the gate. "When", I asked ... "six o'clock every evening"!!

The next day I removed the gate - but the same noise happened. I cut the gate up ... but still the same sound. We were by now getting flummoxed by this unexplained occurrence. Time for some more extreme action, so I knocked down the pillar with the gate catch on, but the same thing happened.

Nick Tucker was working in Shute's farm with a mini digger so I asked him to knock down the side wall where the gate had hung. He offered to take away the rubble and put in a gateway, but I noticed that the bottom hinge was imbedded in what looked like an old tombstone. I put this to one side, and contacted the council - but they were not interested. However, at last the noise of the gate closing had stopped!

When we sold Shute's Cottage, Elli said it was best to leave the stone with the cross against the barn wall.

The Lawence family purchased the house sometime later, and Jack found the stone. This time the experts were interested and it was identified as a Celtic Pillow stone - possibly for a young boy.

Lucky I saved it from being buried again in a farm gateway ... but would that eerie long ago sound still have been echoing every evening at six o'clock".

*extract from the North Devon Gazette - November 14, 2013*

A CELTIC stone which is thought to be more than 1,200 years old has been unveiled in Barnstaple Museum today. The stone, which bears the inscription of the name 'Guerngen' is one of only two that have been discovered in the whole of North Devon.



Last year 15-year-old Jack Lawrence made the discovery in the wall of Shutes Cottage in West Down, where he lives with his parents. He said: "I spotted some marks on the other side of the stone and they looked quite interesting we decided to turn it over – that's when we found the inscription.

Jack, who hopes to pursue a career in archaeology or history, reported it to the North Devon Archaeological Society, and the stone was taken to the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon to be cleaned, drawn and studied.

Terry Green, who has researched the ancient find, said it was believed to be a memorial stone made from locally sourced sandstone. "It is possible it could be a pillow stone which is placed at the head of a grave," he said.

"It could have found its way from its original position to the churchyard, where it was built into the church in the 10th century. "This was until the chancel was rebuilt in the 17th century and the tower in the early 18th century. "These would have been two occasions where there would have been a lot of rubble available, and at some point this was built into the wall beside Shutes Cottage."

Oliver Padel, of Cambridge University, said it was most probable the inscription dated back to the eight century, before the Anglo Saxons took over in Devon. "This man who was commemorated must have been in the upper reaches of society for his family to afford such an expensive memorial," said Mr Padel.