

Town's historic Viking cross to be restored

A GROUP of experts recently met at the Church of St Mary and Helen in Neston to plan the reconstruction of a cross believed to depict some of the events in the life of a Viking couple that once lived there 1,100 years ago when the peninsula was colonised by Scandinavian settlers.

The team, comprising Neston's town manager Dr Peter Rossiter, Rev Neil Robb, Viking expert Prof Stephen Harding, Dr Martin Cooper, from the Merseyside Conservation Centre, and archaeologist Prof Roger White, first of all inspected the fragments which belong to at least three former crosses made of local sandstone. Two of the pieces were identified as belonging together and plans were drawn up to construct a replica of what it once looked like. Only a small piece of the ring head of the cross remains so the team will study a more complete ring head at West Kirby to help complete the replica. The reconstructed replica will show the Viking couple -

the woman with pigtails - holding hands with an angel above, hunting and fighting scenes and what is believed to be the earliest depiction of a jousting contest.

The next phase will be to laser scan the two fragments to create highly accurate 3D computer models of what still exists and then digitally recreate the missing sections to produce a computer model of the complete cross. Dr Cooper will be responsible for this phase of the plan.

Prof White, who carried out original research on the stones in the 1980s, said: "It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of these carvings. The images on them demonstrate contacts throughout the Viking world of the 10th Century, to Ireland, the Isle of Man and Scotland. The depiction of a joust is an extraordinary image familiar from the Middle Ages yet here it is 400 years earlier.

"In contrast, the other side has a tender and touching image of a couple celebrating



Left to right: Dr Peter Rossiter, Rev Neil Robb, Prof Stephen Harding, Dr Martin Cooper and Prof Roger White.

their life together and making the transition from pagan to Christian belief. This was a time of profound change in Viking life that this group of stones captures forever. They deserve to be more widely known and this project offers an ideal oppor-

tunity to create a spectacular and colourful replica of an outstanding monument."

With the reconstruction of this remarkable find plus the original stones on display in the parish church, it is believed that schools in the area will benefit and inter-

ested parties from around the country will seek to visit this unique display.

The late Geoffrey Place, the local historian, first brought the attention of the world to these finds and the reconstruction and display will be a fitting tribute to his work.