

7. *Account of a Stone Coffin found near Dryburgh Abbey, being an abstract of a Letter from CAPTAIN ERSKINE, addressed to ALEXANDER SMELLIE, Esq.*

*Dryburgh Abbey, April 2. 1825.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I do not know to whom I can so well address myself (belonging to the Society of Antiquaries) as to yourself, the friend of my earliest age and studies.—A very curious stone coffin has been found at this place, very unexpectedly, under the following circumstances. The farmer had occasion to dig a four-feet drain round his farmhouse; and the workmen at the north-east corner of the house came upon a number of quarried stones, which they had to remove. At last, about three feet deep, they came to a very large one, which, when struck with a pick-axe, sounded hollow. The farmer happening to be passing at the time, the workmen told him that they had found what they supposed the subterraneous passage between Dryburgh and Old Melrose. On raising up the lid of the coffin, we saw a skull, two leg-bones, and one rib; all the other remains had returned to their original dust. It being frosty weather at the time, with three days snow, I had them conveyed to the ruins of the church of the abbey. The workmen put the skull and bones in a box, and buried them in the church-yard, but not before we had taken the measure of the leg-bones, which were nineteen inches in length. The coffin was about a ton weight (for so the workmen estimated it); it measured six feet three inches inside measure in length, and thirty inches broad at the shoulders. It is of the pink coloured stone of this neighbourhood. But the most extraordinary part of the whole was a stone pillow for the head, with a groove for the reception of the skull. The stone is white and very soft, neither of the quarry of Dryburgh (out of which Dryburgh and Melrose abbies were built) nor of Sproustone, but of a stone quarry in this part of the country. Now that it is exposed to the weather, it blows or decomposes.

I have placed this curious stone coffin immediately opposite the burying-place of the Haliburtons, now Sir Walter Scott's by inheritance. There was no inscription on it; it was lying from south-east to north-west. Many pieces of coffins have been found on this

spot before. The site is close to the temple which Lord Buchan has built in honour of Thomson. Believe me, &c.

DAV. ERSKINE.