

XXXIV.—*Description of an Ancient Cross at Kilmory in Argyleshire.*

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[*Read to the Society 19th February 1838.*]

THE Cross, an accurate drawing of which I have now the pleasure of laying before the Society,² stands in the burying-ground, surrounding the old roofless Chapel of Kilmory, in the parish of South Knapdale, in Argyleshire. It is eight feet in height, but as it is supported by a rude pedestal of stones, laid closely together, its apparent elevation is about two and a half feet more; in all, about eleven feet, as will be more distinctly seen by the scale attached to the drawing. On the one side, being that which looks to the west, in the upper part of the Cross there is a representation of the Crucifixion of our Saviour, and on the shaft there is a sword, surrounded by an elegant moulding, similar to that which we so often find in church architecture of the Early English style, called chain moulding. On the other, or eastern side, the shaft is filled with a rude representation of a deer-chase, and the upper part is ornamented with a rich and beautiful series of inter-twisted lines; an assemblage of forms of that kind usually denominated

¹ Of this communication, a limited number of copies were printed in a separate form, at Edinburgh, 1839, for private distribution, as a memorial of the accomplished writer. These were accompanied with a Preliminary Notice, containing an eulogium of the Author, by his friend James Patrick Muirhead, Esq. In reference to the above Description, Mr Muirhead says, "It is the first of a series of Papers—which it was the intention of Mr Wilson to have laid before the Society—on various topographical antiquities of his country; subjects in which he took a deep interest, and to which he devoted much attention. It is affecting to consider that this Inquiry into the history of this ancient memorial of the dead should so soon have been followed by the removal of the author from these pursuits, as well as from the higher purposes of more extended usefulness, which he was so well fitted to promote." (P. v.)

² For the engraving of the Cross, the Society is indebted to Mr Wilson's representatives. See Plate XXVII.

Runic. In the base, on this side, is the inscription, in Anglo-Saxon characters, "Hæc est crux Alexandri Mac Mullen," of which I now exhibit a drawing, of the full size of the original.¹ These drawings are so minutely accurate, that further description of the object they represent does not seem to be required. They are both the production of Mr William Dobie of Grangevale, to whose ingenuity and industry I am indebted for the valuable and interesting Illustrations of the district of Kintyre² which I had the honour of laying before the Society at our last meeting. It may be proper, however, for me to say, that the carving on the stone is quite as fresh as it is represented in the drawing; a circumstance deserving remark, as it might seem improbable that it could be so, after exposure to the weather for at least three hundred years. I may observe, also, that the Cross has fallen a good deal out of the perpendicular, in consequence, apparently, of some of the stones on which it rests having been moved out of their original places; but it has not been thought necessary to show this irregularity of outline in the drawing.

In the churchyard, where this vestige of former thoughts is found, and in the ruined chapel, there is a considerable number of flat grave-stones, ornamented with the sword and the shears, which form so common an embellishment of the memorials of the dead throughout the Western Highlands; but there is only one which seems to have had any inscription upon it, and that is so weather-wasted as to be now illegible. It is not easy to account for such a number of stones, evidently commemorative of distinguished dead, as are to be seen in this small and sequestered cemetery. There is a kind of tradition that they were brought from Iona; and (though tradition among the Highlanders must be listened to with even greater suspicion than elsewhere) the circumstance of the interior of the chapel being so crowded with them, and of the elevation at which some of them lie being considerably above what can still be traced as the original floor of the building, would naturally lead to the conclusion that they have not always occupied their present site, but that they may have been removed from their former position, and appropriated by the fishermen, to cover the remains of their own unknown and undistinguished progenitors.

It is not my intention to enter into any lengthened discussion at this time

¹ See Plate XXVIII.

² A MS. volume, full of illustrative decorations.

on the history of these interesting remains of art; I should perhaps rather say, to suggest any speculative theory about them. I may state, however, that they seem clearly to indicate a knowledge of art and a refinement altogether inconsistent with any theory which would make them the production of native artists. I am willing to acknowledge that native architects may have erected the rude chapels or cells which are so often seen in this part of Scotland, dedicated to St Colme, St Kieran, St Bride, &c.; but as there is an immense distance between the power of raising such constructions, and the scientific and practical skill required for designing and executing a Cathedral like that of Iona, it is far more probable that the artists employed on such monuments were, as the architects are known to have been, connected in some manner, more or less close, with the larger ecclesiastical establishments.

The inscription tells us that this is the Cross of Alexander MacMillan. A sept of this name had for some generations considerable possessions (considerable, at least, in so far as extent goes) in this rocky division of Argyle. We are gravely told in the Statistical Account of the parish, that MacMillan's charter was engraved in the Gaelic language and character on a rock at the extremity of his estate, but that the inscription was defaced "about thirty years ago" (*i. e.*, about 1767), "by a collateral of the family, prompted by the vanity of having his ancestors considered in future as the aborigines of their property."¹ The same authority tells us, that "from the 'very ancient family' of Macmurachie is descended the present, but unfortunate, royal line of France!" As the same writer, in describing the Cross, says that "on one side there is the Crucifixion of *our Saviour suspending a balance*,"—"there is also an inscription, said to be *in the Hebrew or Gallic character*," it may be as well to require some further evidence of the connection between the House of Bourbon and that of Macmurachie of Terdigan and Kilberrie.

The little Clachan of Kilmory is so "Far from resort of people, that do pass In travel to and fro,"² that we can scarcely expect to find minute notices of its beauties or antiquities elsewhere; and yet this Cross has attracted attention on more than one occasion, and more than one account. Buchanan of Auchmar, the historian of the great House of Buchanan, in enumerating the various branches of that wide-spreading tree, mentions the

¹ Statistical Account of Scotland, 1797, Vol. XIX. p. 311.

² Spenser, *The Faerie Queen*, B. I. Canto i. St. 34.

MacMillan as one of them; and in this statement we have the first notice—the first, at least, which I have seen—of the Cross. The sons of Methlan “went to Kintyre, upon account of a friendship then much cultivated betwixt the families of the great Macdonald and Buchanan,” and “met with a very kind reception from the Lord Macdonald, who, for service, allowed to one of them a considerable estate in Knapdale, in the south-west part of Kintyre, who, for his heroic achievements, was termed “the Great MacMillan of Knap,” as is asserted by an account of his family, conveyed to my hands by MacMillan of Dunmore, in Knapdale, being the principal man of that name or sept; who farther adds, that in all times bygone, as also at present, he and his whole sept did and do own themselves to be descended of the family of Buchanan; and that one of his ancestors caused build a very pretty chapel in Kilmorie of Knap, for devotion and burying-place, in which there is a fine Cross, with divers other figures neatly cut in stone, and a great many characters engraven thereon scarcely legible, which intimate the founder’s name to have been *Æneas MacMillan*, who, or some of his ancestors, built a large tower in addition to Castlesuin.”¹ This notice is interesting, and the description, though vague, is tolerably accurate.

Among the collections of John Anstis, Esq., Garter King of Arms, who died 1744-5, there was found a drawing of the Cross of Kilavoir in Argyle—one of a number of sketches of the same kind, derived from the same source, which illustrate a paper by the well-known and industrious antiquary, Mr Astle, printed in the *Archæologia*.² I happened to purchase Mr Astle’s Essay, stitched as a pamphlet, some seven or eight years ago; and when my attention was directed to the Kilmory Cross as a singular specimen of high proficiency in art, at a very early period, in Scotland, I acknowledge that it never once occurred to me that I had an etching of it in Astle’s Essay. I believe that if the members will “look at this picture and at that,” they will not be surprised that I did not discover “the counterfeit resemblance of two brothers.” At the same time it is gratifying to know, that some one, if not capable of drawing the rather complicated carved-work of the stone, yet knowing enough to decipher the “*Hebrew or Gallic*” inscription, had visited this remote corner so early as the beginning of the last century.

¹ Enquiry into Ancient Scottish Surnames, pp. 278, 279. Ed. 1820.

² Observations on Stone Pillars, Crosses, and Crucifixes.—*Archæologia*, Vol. XIII., p. 308. 1800.

None of the zealous tourists who visited Scotland and its islands towards the end of the last, and in the beginning of the present century, seem to have known of this Cross. Pennant has mentioned several not far distant; thus he gives a very good illustration of one at Oronsay; but he did not touch at all at this part of Argyleshire. Neither did Macculloch find it out, although he visited Ellan-More, a little island close by, where there are some curious remains, of which I may, on a future occasion, give some account.

In 1824, Lord Teignmouth, in making a tour among the Western Islands, happened to visit Kilmory, and was struck by the singular beauty of the detailed work on the Cross. He took a memorandum of it at the time; and when, twelve years afterwards, the notes which had been made simply to aid recollection, were, at the request of friends, collected and published,¹ his Lordship noticed it in terms of high commendation. The drawing which I have now laid on the table had been made in 1834; and his Lordship was most agreeably surprised to find that an amateur of more active fingers than himself had taken so effectual a mode of making this interesting subject known.

Our highly-valued Secretary also alludes to this Cross, in his learned disquisition on the history of the Clans.²

So much for what may be called the bibliographical part of the subject.

In concluding this brief and imperfect notice, I will merely add, that a set of accurate drawings of the many similar monumental remains which are to be found in the Western Highlands is a great desideratum, and would, I think, throw a strong reflected light on the ecclesiastical and genealogical antiquities of that part of the kingdom. In the designs of the decorations—whether suggested by the family whose dignity they were intended to illustrate, or by the artist desirous of celebrating the semi-noble occupations of chieftain-life—we must, to say the least, recognise devices very suitable to those regions,

“ Where the hunter of deer and the warrior trode,
To his hills that encircle the sea.”³

¹ Sketches of the Coasts and Islands of Scotland, and of the Isle of Man. Lond. 1836, 2 vols. 8vo.

² The Highlanders of Scotland, their Origin, History, and Antiquities. By William F. Skene, F.S.A. Scot. Lond. 1837, 2 vols. 8vo.

³ Campbell's Lines on visiting a Scene in Argyleshire.



CROSS AT KILMORY, SOUTH KNAPDALE.

Scale of feet.



W. Dobie Esq. del.

INSCRIPTION ON CROSS AT KILMORY.

W & A K. Johnston Edinburgh.