

III.

NOTICE OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH OF ST HELEN, AT ALDCAMBUS;
AND OF FRAGMENTS APPARENTLY OF A MONASTIC BUILDING
AT LUFFNESS, WITH PLANS. BY THOMAS S. MUIR, Esq.

Of late I have been looking about in divers directions for some authentic particulars touching Alt, Ald, or Old Camus or Cambus, an ancient Berwickshire parish, now incorporated with Coldbrandspath, Cockburnspath, or Coppersmith as the natives have it, lying contiguously westward of the same, and having (pardon the hint) a railway station most conveniently situated for the antiquarian disposed for a day's occupation in a picturesque and venerable locality.

¹ Gen. Hutton's MSS., Advoc. Libr., from the orig. chart.

² New Stat. Ac., ix. i. p. 964.

³ *Ib.* *ib.*

⁴ Or. Par., ii. 2, 698, 700.

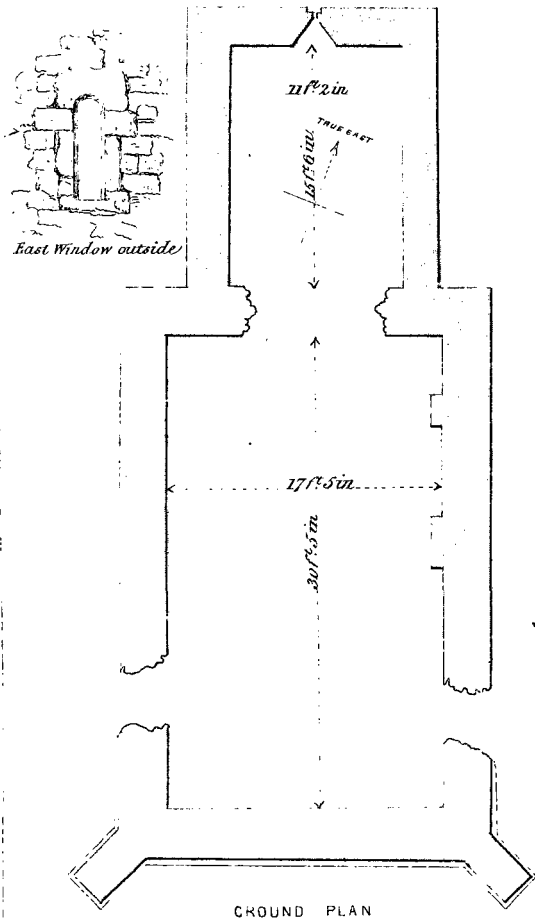
My object was to preface, by a few historical facts, a short description of the Church of Aldcamus, the extremely dilapidated remains of which still form an interesting object above the shore, a small way eastward of the ravine crossed by the stupendous arches of the Pease Bridge, and not much more than a mile and a half from the station. It cannot be said, however, that my looking has been much to the purpose, ordinary and commonplace authorities being the only ones promptly within reach; but as Aldcamus seems at one time to have belonged to Coldingham, and as Coldingham was a Cell of Durham, most likely the "*Liber vite Ecclesie Dunelmensis*," the "Correspondence, Inventories, Account Rolls, and Law Proceedings of the Priory of Coldingham," and others, the publications of the Surtees Society, would be found to contain a sufficiency of information on the subject. Perhaps the Scottish Chartularies might also be referred to with profit; and as these at least are, I presume, in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries, I leave to the Members the task of making such measure of research into them as may be considered worthy in so small a matter. Of the few authorities consulted by myself, the only one that has in any way responded to my inquiries is the bulky Chalmers, who says (*Caledonia*, vol. ii. p. 393), that "the church of Aldcamus was dedicated to St Helen, the mother of Constantine, whose festival was on the 18th August,"—that "the Scottish Edgar granted to St Cuthbert's monks of Durham the manor of Aldcamus, with the lands, woods, waters, tolls, shipwrecks, and other customary dues which appertained to that manor; but," he adds, in a footnote, "not the church of Aldcamus, whence we may be led to doubt whether the church then existed,"—that "Aldcamus parish was annexed to the adjoining district of Coldbrandspath in modern times,"—that "when Pont surveyed Berwickshire, during the reign of Charles I., Aldcamus seems at that period to have been separate,"—and that "these two parishes were united some time before the year 1750; and the church of Aldcamus, which stood near the sea-shore, was a ruin before the year 1770."

To these spare quotations I shall add a note regarding the character and condition of the church itself, just as it is written off-hand-wise in my jottings, dated eleven years ago. That it could not have existed in Edgar's time is all but certain, as the architecture seems clearly to denote a

period not earlier than the first quarter of the twelfth century; but whether it was not set down upon an older foundation, is a question which may be left open to conjecture.

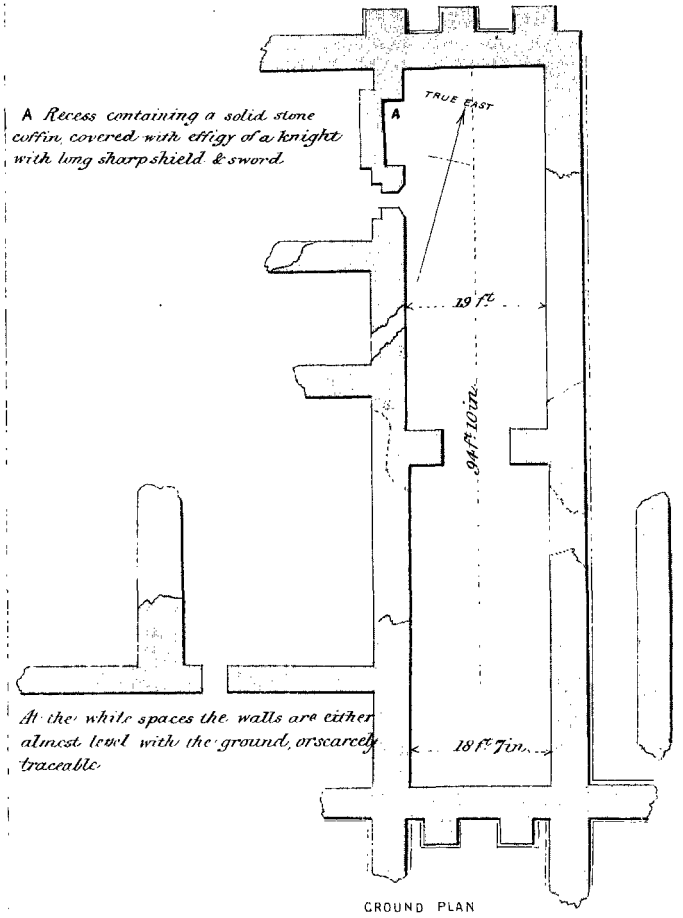
St Helen, Aldcamus, near Cockburnspath, Berwickshire.—Ruined chancel and nave, the former internally 15 feet 6 inches by 11 feet 2 inches, the latter 30 feet 5 inches by 17 feet 5 inches. (See the annexed drawing, Plate XXXI., from a sketch by James Drummond, R.S.A., in 1847; and ground-plan taken by me in 1848, Plate XXX.) The material is red sandstone throughout, the style advanced Romanesque, with detail here and there, enriched with the peculiar mouldings of the time. The nave has traces of a north and a south doorway, near to its west end, and there are two shallow segmental-arched recesses, topped by a broken window at its eastern extremity on the south side. The west wall is almost entire, but appears to have been a re-erection, as, besides angle-buttresses, of probably fourteenth century date, pieces of Norman detail are built into it in various places. It is without a window, though copiously pierced with rows of diminutive square holes, the object of which it is difficult to divine. The north wall of the chancel is of full height and blank: the south wall nearly away: the east elevation almost perfect, and pierced with a short and very narrow round-headed window, flush with the external plane of the wall, and having a deep and wide splay, the window-vault and jambs incised with a single chevron ornament, and there is another incisure of the same sort carried round the head and down the sides of the opening on the wall-plane. Outside of the chancel-arch, which seems to have been of two plain orders, only two or three of the voussours remain: the jambs or responds nearly perfect, and consist of two double half-roll shafts, divided by a very massive single one, projected somewhat in front, to carry the soffit-rib of the arch. The capitals are of the usual ponderous description, plainly, but very characteristically worked, and have their abaci overspread with a tissue of minute crossings of trellis-like pattern.

Such was the graphic sunny-coloured little church of St Helen, when I first saw it on Thursday, the 30th of March 1848, bereft, indeed, of its pristine fulness, yet holding on heartily against the infirmities of age, unworthy neglect, and the wild ocean-gale, whose buffetings it had taken and withstood these seven hundred years and more. Moved by some



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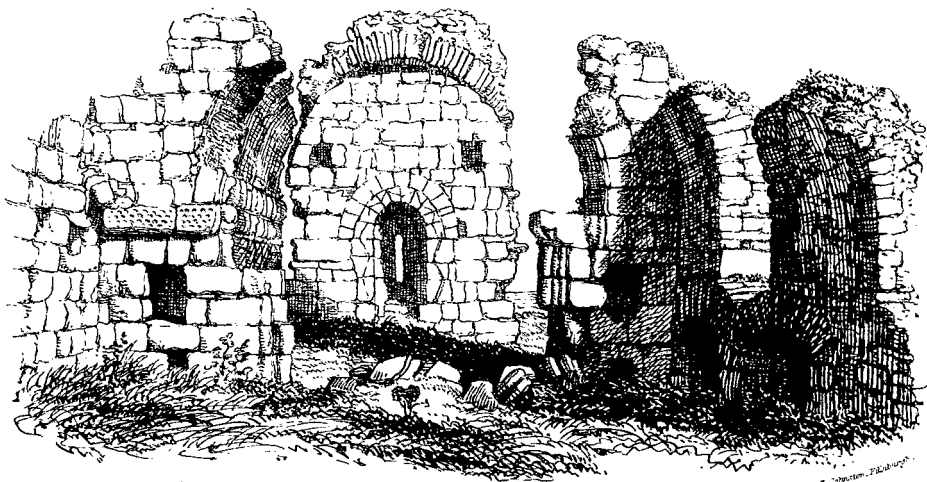
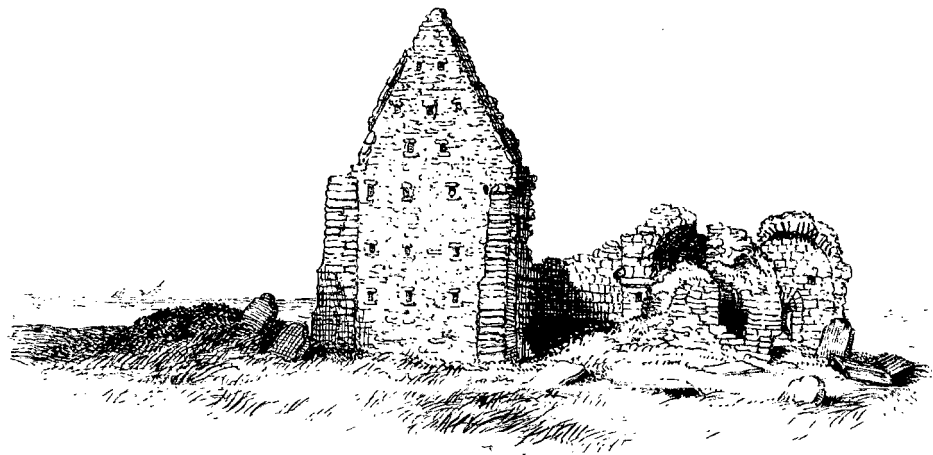
ST HELENS CHURCH ALDCAMUS BK SH.



W.A.A.S. of Inverness, 2012/05/20

LUFFNESS, EAST LOTHIAN

29th October 1858.



ST HELEN'S CHURCH, ALDCAMUS, BERWICKSHIRE

momentary impulse, I was again nearing the place on the 25th March of the current year. Conceive my vexation, when, alas! I discovered by my earliest glance that a foe, more ruthless than corroding time, or the spirit that awakes the vasty deep, had been there between my former and my latter visit,—a fiend, who had barns and dikes to mend! In your mind's eye, you may picture what he did. For the sake of so many cartful of rubbish, all that was most excellent of the time-honoured ruin,—in total, the east wall with its curious window, the pillared jambs of the chancel-arch, and more to boot, did the fiend, without one thought of its artistic value, one kindly feeling of respect for the hand that fashioned it long ago, demolish and carry away, albeit stones thick as leaves, and respectable enough for his purpose, were lying everywhere about, had he been minded to gather them. He was “stoppit,” it seems, in the midst of his barbarous design to erase the whole structure, though considering what was already done, *that* he might have been suffered to do, for all the good he was enforced to leave standing.

One day in November last I happened to be at and about the neighbourhood of Aberlady, and trespassing from the east end of the village, into first a kail-yard, after that through a meadow, and after the meadow into a grove on the estate of Luffness (in East Lothian). I found in the latter the very reduced remains of what must have been a considerable establishment of collegiate or monastic character. It was almost dusk before I got there; certainly there were ghostly shadows gathering around, and reverend crows looking at you from branches, so that, as you may suppose, I had but little time to examine the ruins particularly. However, I returned the next day at an earlier hour, and then leisurely took my notes, measurements, &c., and the ground plan here given (see Plate XXX.), which will convey a notion of its shape and dimensions. The walls, I may mention, are for the most part down to within two or three feet of the ground. At the east end they are higher; but at other parts, again, they are only traceable in the swellings of the sod.