

I.

NOTES OF THE SEARCH FOR THE TOMB OF THE ROYAL FOUNDRESS
OF THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY AT EDIN-
BURGH. BY PROFESSOR DANIEL WILSON, LL.D., HON. MEM. S.A. SCOT.,
TORONTO.

The receipt of a copy of the "Historical Notices" accompanying the
Registrum Eccles. Coll. S. Trin. prope Edinburg, etc., from my old friend
the Author, tempts me to resume a subject which formerly engaged the

attention of both, and may not even now have lost all interest for the members of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Exactly four centuries are this year completed since the founding of the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity at Edinburgh by Mary of Gueldres, the widowed queen of James II., in 1462. The death of the Queen-Dowager took place on the 16th November of the following year; and although the work appears to have been carried on with great energy during the interval, under the directions of Sir Edward Bonkill, the first provost, and of the architect, John Halkerstone, nevertheless the church was not sufficiently advanced to admit of the obsequies of the royal foundress being performed there. As appears from the account of costs in the Exchequer Rolls, these were celebrated, with becoming pomp, in the Cathedral Church of Brechin. But there is no reason to doubt that the royal remains were finally deposited in some part of the beautiful church founded by Mary of Gueldres, and expressly indicated in the foundation charter as her destined place of sepulture. Major, whose History was written within less than half a century after the queen's death, thus records the fact:—"Anno 1463, Regina Scotiæ Edinburgi obiit, et in Collegio Sanctæ Trinitatis, quod quidem ipsa fundaverat, inhumata est." Bishop Lesly and Lindsay of Pitscottie repeat the statement; and nothing recovered from the contemporary Exchequer Rolls tends to awaken any doubt on the subject.

When, in 1848, it became apparent that all further exertions to prevent the demolition of the venerable structure were vain, attention was directed to a search for the tomb of the royal foundress, and in this the members of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland took an active part; but as the printing of the Society's Transactions had been interrupted for a considerable time, no account of the operations then carried out was preserved in an accessible form. The result, as is well known, was the discovery, and transfer to the royal vault of Holyrood Chapel, of a female skeleton, the supposed remains of the royal foundress; but which subsequent events led many to believe had thereby usurped the obsequies due to later discovered human remains. Now that an interval of fourteen years has sufficed to efface any slight irritation which even the suspicion of blundering in so grave a matter as the identity of royalty may have excited, and that some of the chief actors in the proceedings are gone,

—far removed from the scenes of such friendly contention, or themselves among those whose names only remain for us who survive;—it may not be out of place to put on record some slight sketch of the facts connected with the search for the remains of the old Scottish queen, of which I have preserved my notes made at the time.

On Sunday, May 14th, 1848, the last religious services were solemnised in the ancient church, prior to its abandonment to the spoilers, with whom the North British Railway Company had already contracted for its demolition. The magistrates of the city attended in their robes on this final service; and as I scanned with unavailing regret the richly carved bosses of the groined roof, and the substantial masonry of the beautiful interior,—then exhibiting little more indication of decay than when the remains of the foundress were laid beneath its flooring,—I still remember feeling that the somewhat incongruous ostentation of the civic dignitaries, by whom it had been abandoned to destruction, rather suggested their presence at an execution, than the rendering fitting honour to a singularly interesting historical monument. The late Rev. Dr Steven, the incumbent of the parish, entered into the feelings which the occasion was calculated to awaken, and preached his last sermon within the time-honoured walls from the text Matt. xxiv. 2, “*Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*”

On Monday, 22d May, the officers of the Board of Works commenced their search for the remains of the Queen. The first excavation was made at the east end of the north aisle, near to which a finely carved though mutilated credence table showed where one of the side altars had stood. The level of the area occupied by the church, in the low valley at the foot of an abrupt ascent to the Old Town, had undergone such changes by the gradual accumulations of nearly four centuries, that the floor had been repeatedly raised in attempts to counteract its increasing dampness, until the bases of the pillars were concealed. After digging through this modern deposit, the excavations exposed, beneath the original floor, the remains of a stone vault, with the skull and other portions of a skeleton—possibly, as was then supposed, of Bishop Spence, interred there in 1480; but it had been broken into at some former period, and everything removed that might have indicated the rank of

the deceased, or the date of interment. Further research sufficed to show that the whole north aisle had been used for sepulture ; and excavations in other portions of the church, including the apse, revealed similar traces, though, as afterwards appeared, the search at the east end was not carried to a sufficient depth.

Attention was then directed to the building on the north side of the church, latterly used as the vestry, but which bore unmistakeable evidence of its original destination as a chapel. It was lighted by a deeply splayed window in the east wall ; and in the north wall, a beautifully sculptured piscina, finer than any in the church, and the portion of a broken stone shelf, or credence table, indicated the site of the altar. The foundation charter provides for a weekly mass to be celebrated at the Altar of the Blessed Virgin ; and it entirely accords with the arrangements in churches of the period, to believe that this was the Lady Chapel and Chantry of the foundress, dedicated to the Virgin Mother, whose name she bore. A special clause in the foundation charter appoints and ordains, that " whenever any of the said prebendaries shall read mass, he shall, after the same, in his sacerdotal habiliments, repair to the tomb of the foundress with hyssop, and there devoutly read over the prayer *de profundis*, together with that of the faithful, and an exhortation to excite the people to devotion."

This chapel was entered from the north aisle of the church by a circular-headed doorway, of fine proportions and workmanship ; in addition to which, the removal of the plaster brought to light a hagnoscope, obliquely piercing the same wall, and affording a view of the site of the high altar from the centre of the chapel, where the supposed royal remains were found. Externally, on the buttress of the north-east angle of the chapel, were the arms of the foundress, Gueldres, quartered with those of Scotland.

To this chapel special attention was directed, and, on digging in the centre of the floor, about three feet below the modern level, the workmen came upon the remains of a paving of glazed encaustic tiles of orange and purple. Below this a mass of solid concrete was found, seemingly enclosing a grave or vault, within which an oaken coffin was disclosed, in extreme decay, containing a female skeleton. The lid or covering was gone, but the ends were perfect, and rose from the sides in a semicircle,

showing that the coffin had been arched or "waggon-roofed" on top. It measured in length 5 feet 11 inches; the sides were straight, and the breadth, both at top and bottom, was eighteen inches. It appeared to have been very low at the sides, the requisite height having been obtained by the arched cover; but the extreme decay of the wood, arising from the soil being saturated with moisture from an ill-constructed drain, prevented minute measurements. When the skeleton was removed, the bottom was found to be of oak planks laid lengthways, with a single transverse bar across the centre.

The skeleton lay in its natural state, with the bones undisturbed. The skull was turned round on the left cheek, and the spine exhibited an abnormal curvature. The remains were minutely examined and measured by Professor Goodsir, who pronounced them to be those of a female of about thirty years of age, and pointed out the following characteristics:—The skull was marked by an unusually short longitudinal diameter for a female, with great posterior breadth. The zygomata and cheek bones were delicately formed, the teeth small and regular, and the lower jaw marked by great delicacy, with indications of a well-formed chin. The forehead was broad but not high, and the prominent nasal-bones indicated a well-defined and probably slightly arched nose. The curvature of the spine was such as must have elevated the right shoulder, but not so much as to amount to a deformity which might not easily be concealed by the dress.

The oak coffin lay directly east and west, with the feet towards the east. The breadth of the chapel from north to south was 16 feet 4 inches, and the centre of the arched head of the coffin was found to be exactly equidistant from either wall. The measurement east and west was 15 feet 6 inches, and the head of the coffin was 5 feet 6 inches from the west wall. The deeply splayed recess of the window on the east side left considerably greater breadth at the feet, where it may be assumed the chapel altar of the Blessed Virgin stood, with the piscina and credence-table, already described, on its north side. The top edge of the arched head of the coffin was little more than six inches below the original flooring of glazed tiles, so that the vault must have been covered with a flat slab, or a raised altar tomb, resting on the mass of concrete, which remained in a very solid state at the head and foot of the grave.

Such were the circumstances attending the discovery of female remains in the north chapel of Trinity College Church, which, under the belief that they were those of the Royal foundress, were deposited in a lead coffin, inclosed in one of wood, covered with velvet, and placed in the royal vault of Holyrood. The demolition of the ancient church was subsequently proceeded with; and, in the progress of clearing out the foundations of the eastern apse, in the following September (Wednesday 20th), a lead coffin was found occupying the centre of the apse, and also containing a female skeleton. The shape of the lead coffin was peculiar, being rounded at the head and shoulders. It had no inscription or other definite indication of the rank of the deceased, and as its contents were saturated with moisture, they only sufficed, as in the former case, to determine the sex. The top of the skull had been sawn off; and Professors Goodsir and Simpson, who carefully examined the skeleton, drew attention to the internal structure, showing traces of acute cerebral disease. Osseous spiculæ protruded into the cerebral cavity. The occipital development was unusually small, and the *dentes sapientiæ* remained undeveloped within the jaw. From the latter, along with other features, Professor Goodsir regarded this as the skeleton of a female, younger than the former; but the abnormal condition both of the cranium and pelvis rendered the ordinary indices of the age somewhat uncertain.

While it could not be doubted that the latter remains were those of a person of some note, popular belief universally assigned them as those of the Queen, and in this some whose opinions were deserving of weight concurred. The lead coffin, with its enclosed remains, were accordingly placed in a wooden coffin, and interred in Holyrood Chapel, outside the entrance to the royal vault. The newspaper notices and current reports of the time added many corroborative indices of royalty to the actual facts noted above, but they proved to be only the wonted contributions which rumour furnishes in support of the faith of the hour. To those, however, who held by the belief that the later discovered grave did contain the true remains of the Royal foundress, there was something incongruous in the idea of her being thus forestalled by some nameless intruder, who now rests beside the dust of Scotland's ancient kings and queens, while the true heir to such posthumous honours lies outside the door, as if watching an opportunity for reasserting her superseded claims.

Yet if so, the fate of the Scottish queen would not be without a precedent. According to Mathew Paris the body of Malcolm Canmore still lay at Tynemouth in 1257, and the translation of his supposed body, along with that of his queen, to the choir of Dunfermline Abbey, was in reality that of an English peasant. The remains of James III. and IV. were abandoned to equally uncertain sepulture; and the fate of those actually deposited in the royal vaults of Holyrood was little to be envied. Nevertheless, this latest case of disputed identity is worth a brief consideration, while the facts are still sufficiently recent to admit of their being determined on trustworthy grounds.

In the proceedings attendant on the search for the remains of Mary of Gueldres, my friend Mr David Laing and myself took a prominent part; and it is through his kind remembrance of me, as evinced in the receipt of a copy of his literary contributions to the "*Registrum de Soltre, necnon Ecclesie Collegiate S. Trinitatis prope Edinburg, &c.*," that my attention has been recalled to the subject. The remarks of the editor show (p. xxxi.) that he retains his later faith in the second "queen," whose "maimed rites" followed on those of the earlier obsequies above recorded. The evidence which satisfies me in holding to my original opinion in favour of the earlier discovery admits of being put into brief compass, and will not, I hope, bring me under the charge of tediousness in thus reviving an old story, whatever may be the conclusion arrived at. The proofs in favour of the later found skeleton are these. (1.) It lay "within an antique-shaped leaden coffin in the Apsis, near the place where the high altar must have stood,"¹ or rather, indeed, directly under its true site; and to this has to be added, (2.) That the top of the skull had been sawn off, possibly for the removal of the brain in some process of embalming, as the example, it will be seen, is not a solitary one. The peculiar shape of the coffin affords the most probable clue to the period to which the enclosed remains should be assigned. More than one published report described it at the time as of the form of the human body,

¹ It is added in the account referred to, "and which two distinguished medical professors concurred in stating was that of a female *probably of about thirty* years of age, but as they conjectured of weak intellect." In the statement of the age here I am led, both by my notes and recollection, to refer this to the first, and not to the second skeleton.

but this was an error. Its head and sides were upright, and the lower end was finished off square, like an ordinary lead coffin; but at the head and shoulders the sides were rounded to the form, so as to present nearly the shape usually presented by the interior of a stone coffin of the thirteenth century; and the cover was a flat sheet of lead cut to the same shape, and soldered at the edges. Possibly renewed attention directed to the subject may lead to a reference to other examples, which may help to fix the date when this form of coffin was in use. I failed at the time to obtain access to any satisfactory instance, but quite unexpectedly the desired evidence turned up at a later date. In the month of April 1850, a search was instituted in the Moray vault, in St Giles's Church, Edinburgh, with the view of ascertaining if the Good Regent's remains were still there, beneath the site of the monument which once bore on its finely graven brass the inscription to his memory from the pen of George Buchanan. An opportunity was then afforded me of examining the vault, a description of which has since been communicated to the Society.¹ It contained only three coffins, of which the one believed to be that of the Regent at once attracted my attention by its correspondence in shape with that found in the apse of Trinity College Church; and to this has to be added the no less noticeable correspondence, disclosed by a portion of the lead cover immediately over the face being broken, that in this case also the top of the skull had been sawn through. The only other example known to me of such an operation is in the case of Jean, Countess of Argyll, the natural daughter of James V., and therefore half-sister of the Regent. She was buried in the royal vault at Holyrood, and her skull was found to present the same peculiar traces of the embalmer's art, which were not likely to occur in one belonging to an earlier period, owing to the ecclesiastical censures with which every thing of the nature of an anatomical operation was visited. The discovery of a leaden coffin of human form in Worcester Cathedral during the present year, has led to its being noted that that in which the remains of the Scottish king James IV., the grandson of Mary of Gueldres, are believed to have been buried at the Monastery of Skene in 1513, was of the same peculiar shape. The other examples noted are those of Mary, Countess of

¹ Proceedings S. A. Scot., vol. i. p. 194.

Arundel, buried in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity at Arundel, in 1557; of Thomas Sutton, the founder, in the Chapel of the Charter House, in 1611; and of Henry, Prince of Wales, in Henry the Seventh's Chapel at Westminster, in 1612. The correspondence of period seems to indicate that the two kinds of coffin may be modifications of the same form, which would thus appear to have prevailed for about a century, and probably suggested the simpler structure of the Scottish coffins. In so far at least as the concurrent evidence of the unadorned lead coffin of the Regent, and the examples of the removal of the upper portion of the skull, furnish any clue to the date of the corresponding remains found in the apse of Trinity College Church, they point to a post-Reformation interment; and to the same period I have always felt convinced that the site of the grave no less clearly pointed. This was just such a spot as would be selected for the most honourable place of sepulture for some lady of rank in the latter half of the sixteenth century; but, as the very site of the high altar, the practice of the ancient church is opposed to the selection of such for the tomb of a foundress, unless in the translation of the remains of a canonised saint: such as those of St Margaret, removed from their original resting-place into the choir of Dunfermline Abbey, four years after her canonisation by Pope Innocent IV. in 1246. It seems obvious, indeed, from the reference in the foundation charter to the tomb of the foundress, as entirely apart from the high altar, that no such site was ever contemplated.

The founding of chantries and chantry chapels had become a common practice in the fifteenth century. Parker remarks of them, in his *Glossary of Architecture*, "They are found in various situations, frequently with the tomb of the founder in the middle of them." In comparing ancient examples of chantries and founders' tombs, it is necessary to discriminate between the mere founder of a chantry in a church already built and endowed, and that of the original founder. Two or three examples may help to illustrate the practice. In Irthlingborough Collegiate Church, Northamptonshire, the chantry chapel of the founder, temp. Edward III., is attached to the south side of the choir; his tomb occupies the south-west angle, and the wall is pierced by a hagioscope looking in a direct line from the tomb to the high altar. The very same arrangements mark the sepulture of William de Bethun at Rothersthorp

Church. At the beautiful collegiate church of Beer Ferrers, Devonshire, the chantry chapel stands on the north side of the choir, separated from it by the tomb of the founder, William de Ferrers, 1328; and in St Kenelm's Minster, Lovel, Oxon, a building of the fifteenth century, the position of the chantry chapel on the north side of the choir, with its doorway, hagioscope, and east window, all exactly correspond to that of Trinity College Church at Edinburgh. So also among contemporary Scottish examples, the founders' chantry chapels in the collegiate churches of Bothwell and Dunglass closely correspond in position and arrangements to the one in question.

It may be added, in special reference to royal founders and builders, that Edward the Confessor is enshrined on the north side of his own chapel at Westminster, and near to his tomb is that of Henry III., the rebuildler of the abbey; while beyond it, to the east, the tomb of Henry VII., which more nearly corresponds in date, occupies the centre of his magnificent chapel. So also that of Edward IV., the rebuildler of St George's Chapel at Windsor, occupies a site in the north aisle; nor am I aware of a single uncanonised founder's tomb, royal or otherwise, occupying such a site as that which was assumed to justify beyond challenge the assignment to Mary of Gueldres the lead coffin dug up in the centre of the apse, where formerly the high altar of her collegiate church stood, underneath one of the finest groined roofs ever wrought by the skilled master-builders of the fifteenth century.

The only point left for consideration is the character of the sepulture disclosed within the chapel, which presented so many characteristics of the founder's chantry. The form of the curious oaken coffin was not less deserving of the term *antique* than the leaden one, the probable date of which has been already discussed; nor does the fact of its being of oak instead of lead militate against the probability of its having been that which enclosed the royal remains. Bloomfield describes a tomb of the fourteenth century at Thornton in Suffolk, which he supposed to be that of the founder Nicholas de Bokland. "The grave was filled up, with a stone slab on each side, and one at each end. The body was laid at bottom, with nothing but common earth under the coffin, which was of very thick oak."¹ The tomb of Edmund the Martyr belongs to too

¹ Collect. Cantab., p. 199.

old a date, and perhaps even that of Edward I. may seem too early to claim much importance for the fact that each of these are proved to have been interred not in lead but in wooden coffins.¹ But other examples belong to dates nearer the obsequies of the Scottish queen. On opening the vault of Edward IV., the rebuilder of St George's Chapel, Windsor, during its alterations in 1789, the remains of his queen, Elizabeth Woodville, were found lying above those of the king, inclosed in a stout oaken coffin; and Leland tells us, when the eldest son of Henry VII., the heir-apparent to the Tudor throne, died in 1502, "The corpse of Prince Arthur was coyled, well cered, and conveniently dressed with spices and other sweet stuff. This was so sufficiently done, that it needed not lead, but was chested."² Were I within reach of the well-stored shelves of Edinburgh libraries, such examples I doubt not might be considerably extended; but these are sufficient to show, that the material of which the antique coffin in the chantry chapel was formed militates in no degree against the probability of its having enclosed the remains of the royal foundress.

In conclusion, I add the following extracts from notes made at the time of the discovery of the oak coffin with its enclosed remains. It is worthy of notice, that such fragments of the wrappings as escaped the destructive influences of damp and decay, proved to be of the finest linen; and a careful examination of portions of the oak coffin afforded evidence of its having been suffused with some resinous or embalming substances. The former fact was pointed out to me by Mr Andrew Kerr of Her Majesty's Board of Works, who superintended the search for the royal tomb, and preserved a piece of linen found adhering to the oaken boards forming the bottom of the coffin. The impregnation of the wood with resinous matter was first noticed and pointed out to me by the late Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Esq., though afterwards abundantly confirmed by personal investigation. The preservation of the planks forming the floor of the coffin from the extreme decay of the other portions was apparently due to their more complete saturation with this resinous substance.

The evidence on which a decision must be arrived at relative to the

¹ Bloomfield's Norfolk, i. 450. Stothard, i. pl. 1, p. xlvii.

² Collectanea, vol. v. p. 374.

tomb and remains of the royal foundress, it is thus seen, is mainly inferential; but, taking the whole into account: now that I look back on all the proceedings, alike grave and satirical, which marked the attempt to rescue the remains of Mary of Gueldres from the sacrilegious destroyers of the Collegiate Church; and viewing such proceedings with the calmness that may be assumed to arise from long residence beyond the reach of any thing more antique or royal than the forest monarchs of this New World: I see additional reasons for adhering to the opinions originally formed in favour of the correctness of the inscription which is thus engraved on the coffin deposited in the royal vault of Holyrood Abbey, containing the remains disinterred from the Chantry Chapel on the north side of the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity:—

“ Mary of Gueldres, Queen of James the Second, King of Scots, interred in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Edinburgh, A.D. 1463; removed from thence and reinterred in the Chapel Royal, Holyrood, 15th July 1848.”

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO,
March 20, 1862.

In reference to the preceding communication, Mr DAVID LAING said, he regretted that his friend Dr D. Wilson should have revived this subject. He would not trouble the meeting with any remarks, having fully considered the point at issue in a paper read to the Society in December 1848. If the members should wish it, this paper might be subjoined to Dr Wilson's, as it necessarily involved another question of some historical importance,—the character of the Queen Dowager. He had also subsequently investigated the history of the Church, while engaged in printing, for the Bannatyne Club, a series of early documents connected with the Collegiate Churches of Mid-Lothian. In that volume, completed in 1861, he had the satisfaction of bringing to light for the first time the fact that the Master of the fabric, that is, *the Architect of the building*, was a native of Edinburgh—JOHN HALKERSTONE, aided, it might perchance be, by the first Provost of the Church, SIR EDWARD BONKILL.

The CHAIRMAN remarked, that it certainly would be desirable that the members should hear both sides of the case. The paper, accordingly, is hereto annexed.

Mr JOSEPH ROBERTSON, while expressing the interest which he had felt in listening to Dr Wilson's paper, did not feel convinced by his arguments, and felt bound to dissent from several of the statements on which his conclusion was based, especially those relating to the position of the Lady Chapel in Middle Age churches, and to the supposed non-occurrence of founders' tombs near the high altar.
