

II.

NOTICE REGARDING THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH OF FOWLIS IN GOWRIE. BY A. JERVISE, Esq., BRECHIN, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the earliest record of the church of Fowlis-Easter, or Fowlis in Gowrie, occurs in the year 1180, when William of Maule, an ancestor of the noble family of Maule of Panmure, made a gift of the church and of the tithes of certain lands adjoining, including those of the mill of Fowlis, to his nephew, Thomas of Maule, who is styled clerk or parson of the church of Fowlis. By this deed, Thomas of Maule was bound to pay a merk yearly, at the Feast of St Martin, to the prior and canons of St Andrews.¹ William of Maule also gave them the chapel of Fowlis, with ten acres of land, and pasture for eight oxen, ten cows, and a hundred sheep; and directed that his body should be buried in the cemetery of the canons at St Andrews.²

The period of Maule's death is not recorded; but it appears that he received Fowlis and other lands from King David I., for his bravery at the Battle of the Standard, fought in 1138. He left coheiresses, and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Roger of Mortimer, sheriff of Perthshire.³

¹ Reg. Prior. S. Andree, p. 40.

² Ibid. p. 264.

³ Chalmers' Caled. vol. i. p. 589. [The Ruthvens had an interest in Fowlis through Cecilia Maule, which was resigned by her grandson, 1262.—*Doug. Peer.* vol. i. p. 659.]

Maule's grants to his nephew Thomas, and those to the canons of St Andrews, were respectively confirmed by his son-in-law, and by his grandson Hugh of Mortuo Mari (Mortimer).¹

It was during the lifetime of one or other of the last-named barons that the church of Fowlis was dedicated to St Mernan or Marnan, a ceremony which was performed by Bishop David of St Andrews, upon the 2d of the Kalends of September 1242.² It appears to have been soon after this—probably on his accession to the throne—that King Alexander II. confirmed to the canons of St Andrews their various properties throughout the country; and among these were—"Item, ex donacione Willielmi Masculi ecclesiam de Foules cum omnibus eidem ecclesie iuste pertinentibus."³

Of the successors of Sir Hugh of Mortimer of Fowlis little has been ascertained, except that the family subsisted in the male line for two or three generations, and that the last knight, like the first, bore the name of Roger. He married Margaret of Menteith,⁴ and by her had an only daughter, Janet, who, becoming the wife of Sir Andrew Gray of Broxmouth (the first Lord Gray), brought the property of Fowlis-Easter to the family of Gray.

The contract of the marriage of Sir Andrew Gray and the heiress of Fowlis is dated 20th June 1377. After giving birth to a son and six daughters, Lady Gray died, sometime before 7th February 1435-6, as, previous to that date, Sir Andrew appears to have contracted a second marriage. Sir Andrew was succeeded in Fowlis and his other estates by his son, as second Lord Gray, who, in 1418, during the lifetime of his father, married Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Sir John Wemyss of Rires and Kincaldrum.⁵ The second Lord Gray was a person of note in his time. Within six years after his marriage, he was sent to England as an hostage for James I., and there he was kept from 1424 to 1427. He was also one of the knights that accompanied Princess Margaret to France, on the occasion of her marriage with the Dauphin, was subsequently ambassador to England, and went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury in 1452. In the latter year he was made one of the royal household, and also

¹ Reg. Prior. S. Andree, pp. 41, 265.

² Ibid. p. 348. In Butler's "Lives of the Saints," the Feast of S. Marnan, bishop confessor, is placed under 2d March.

³ Reg. Prior. S. Andree, p. 234.

⁴ Reg. Mag. Sigill. p. 33, 80.

⁵ Douglas' Peer. vol. i. p. 666; ii. p. 318

obtained a license from King James to build a castle on any part of his estates which he thought proper. The place chosen was that now occupied by Castle Huntly; a portion of which building, mixed with that of latter styles, still exists. This baron probably succeeded his father before 6th July 1445. He predeceased his wife in 1469; and was succeeded by his grandson, Andrew, who died in 1513-14.¹

Such are some of the facts regarding the early history of the church of Fowlis, and of the old lords of the district, as well as of the captivity of the second Lord Gray, the last of which incidents had possibly given rise to the tale of the present church having been raised by the devotion to, or the affection of, a Lady of Fowlis to her husband. Her lord, as the story runs, went to the Crusades, and she vowed, "in case he should return in safety from the holy wars, to build and endow a church."²

It will be seen that the legend or inscription, which has been the means of causing a fabulously old date to be attached to the building, is now incomplete, and that the prefatory part appears to have contained the names of the persons who erected the church. Further, the legend, as is common in similar productions of the period, embodies a monkish fable. In this instance St Marnoch is represented as having gone to Rome in some such capacity as that of a plenipotentiary; but no such incident is recorded in any of the printed notices of his life.

The inscription is painted in German characters, and in one line, upon a strip of wood, nailed to the bottom of the picture of the Crucifixion of Our Lord; and is, I should say, not of earlier date than the seventeenth century. Possibly it was copied from an older, if not a somewhat effaced version; and the painter, having little knowledge of the abbreviations peculiar to such writing, may have omitted some of the markings over the letters, as he has the diphthongs in some words. However this may be, it is now well-nigh twenty years since I first copied the legend. Since then I have frequently examined it; and, so far as I am able to decipher it, the following is the true and present reading:—

. . . . ndā . hoc . temp̄lō . merinoco . cōstr̄brere . beato . Sī .
qberas . qboto . semel . M . C . qbat' . t . iii . Anno .
Mbo . fbit . is . rome . ceb . vns . p̄gre . . C

¹ Douglas Peer, vol. i. p. 667.

² Old Stat. Acc. vol. vii. p. 288.

One might be led to suppose that there had been another inscription here, since the writer of the Old Statistical Account of the parish (1793) gives the following from what he calls "the beam" which "supported the organ loft :"—

*Hoc Templum structum fuit Anno Millesimo centesimo Quadragesimo secundo ab A. Gray.*¹

From the difference between the two inscriptions above quoted, one could scarcely suppose that the first was known to the transcriber of the latter; still I have little doubt but the last is meant for a copy of the first. The last version agrees with the period of Sir Andrew Gray; and the first refers to, and agrees in certain particulars with, the record of the *dedication* of the church of Fowlis. Had the abbreviated mark or circumflex been drawn over the numeral "C" in the first quoted, it would have made it equal to M.CC.XLIIL.—a date which nearly corresponds with that of the dedication before referred to. I am of opinion that the omission of the circumflex over the "C" had arisen either from the badness of the copy, or from the ignorance of the copiest—possibly from both.

But, were more wanting than the style of the architecture of the edifice—(and the fact must not be overlooked that the south-west or principal entrance to the church, also the skew-put stones, bear carvings of the Gray and Wemyss family coats)—to prove it to be a building of the time of Sir Andrew Gray and his wife Elizabeth Wemyss, we have only to point to Fordun, and to Spottiswoode. The first authority gives this entry:—"Fowlis cujus fundator Andreas Gray ejusdem;" and in the latter it is distinctly stated that the church of Fowlis was founded by Sir Andrew Gray, "for a provost and several prebends in the time of James II."² Other authorities corroborate these statements; and Billings says, that it "wants but the bell-turret to make Fowlis as perfect a specimen of the fifteenth century, as Dalmeny is of a village church of the Norman period."³ Why, in the face of these facts, the popular notion

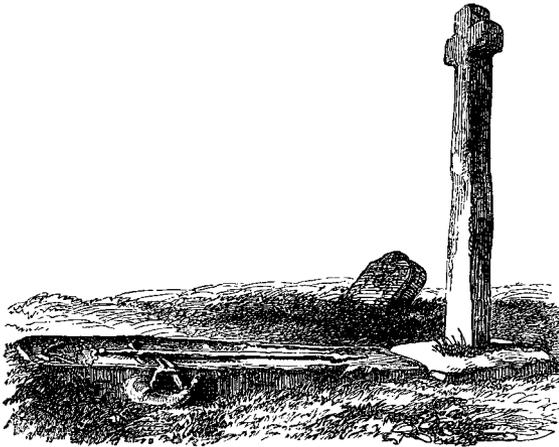
¹ Old Stat. Acc. vol. vii. p. 288.

² Scotichronicon, a Goodal, ii. f. 541; Spottiswoode's Religious Houses, p. 522.

³ Billings' Baronial and Eccl. Antiq. of Scot.; Muir's Old Church Arch. of Scot., pp. 73, 86; Descrip. Notices of Ancient Par. and Coll. Churches of Scot. p. 132. In the last quoted work (Lond. 1848), there is an excellent account of the ecclesio-

should still be advanced, and credited by some, of the present church having been erected in the twelfth century, seems inexplicable. Had the church been a twelfth century building, it would in all likelihood have been in the Norman style ; but there is much reason to believe that the church of William of Maule's day, as well as all those prior to Sir Andrew Gray's foundation, were but sorry works compared with the fine structure now standing.

Tradition further avers that the coffin-slab and cross in the area of the churchyard (here represented) mark the grave of the knight, in com-



Cross and Sculptured Stone in the Churchyard of Foulis-Easter.

memoration of whose return from the Crusades the church is popularly said to have been erected. It will be seen that the cross is rather a poor example of the market crosses which were set up in early times at or near

logical peculiarities of the church, also of the paintings ; and, as I do not know that these particulars could be better given than they are in that work, I have purposely avoided touching upon them in this paper. There are some strictures regarding the removal of the old baptismal font from Fowlis to Ochtertyre. It has recently been restored ; and it is interesting to know that its style is of an age with that of the church. It is engraved in plate 3, vol. ii. pt. i., of Parker's Gloss. of Architecture (Oxford, 1850).

churches; round which, it is needless to say, that down to a comparatively recent date, merchandise of all sorts were exposed for sale, and that for distinction's sake, the fairs were known by the names of the saints to whom the churches were respectively dedicated.¹ On the other hand, the carving and ornamentation of the coffin-slab at Fowlis is of a late type, similar to those which are known to belong to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, of which one, almost identical to that at Fowlis, is preserved, along with several other interesting examples, at the church of St Mary, Dundee. I have little doubt, however, looking at the character of the objects represented upon the slab at Fowlis, but it may have been placed upon the grave of some important local personage—more probably over that of a Mortimer, than that of a Gray.

The outward features of the church of Fowlis are admirably represented in the two views given of it by Billings. Externally it is 90 by 27 feet, and "its masonry," says Billings, "is as beautiful and perfect as the day it was built; but internally all has been modernised save one feature—the ancient rood-loft, which now helps to form a chancel partition." But even this "one feature" is not now where it once was, for it, as well as "the beam" containing the inscription, stood at one time against the north wall of the church.² As now placed, it separates the family tomb of the Lords Gray, which is within, and in the east end of the church, from the nave.

The church of Fowlis is rated in the old *Taxatio* at 15 marks. In 1574 the cures of the three kirks of Benvie, Fowlis, and Longforgan, were filled by one minister; and Patrick Mortimer was the name of the "reidare at Fowlis."³ Possibly he was descended of the "Mortu Mair" of Fowlis, some of whom appear to have been engaged in mercantile pursuits at Dundee as early as 1406.⁴ The parishes of Fowlis and Lundie

¹ The custom of buying and selling goods on Sundays continued longer in some parts of Scotland than is generally known. On 22d January 1693, the minister of Forfar, in Angus, was requested to "give a public intimation from the pulpit, prohibiting all selling and buying of wares upon the Lord's Day."—*Kirk Session Records*.

² Hutton Correspondence.

³ Reg. Vet. de Aberbrothoc, 238; Wodrow Miscell., i. 353.

⁴ Robertson's Index, 161, 4; Chamb. Rolls, ii. 354; Reg. Ep. Brechin., ii. 12. [A branch of the Mortimers settled at Lecchel, Aberdeenshire, where a large part of their property bore the name of *Fowlis*, and where they subsisted down to the

were united in 1618. The church of the former district was put into a good state of repair in 1842, since which time it has been used at stated periods as a place of worship.¹ In old times the church was called "Foulis in Gowrie," to distinguish it from Fowlis in Strathearn. For the same reason it is now called *Fowlis-Easter*, and the latter *Fowlis-Wester*.

The castle of Fowlis, from which a magnificent view of the Carse of Gowrie and of a great part of Fife is obtained, is a building of from 200 to 300 years old. It was suitably tenanted down to the close of the last century, when it was allowed to go to decay; recently it has been rendered habitable, and is now occupied by field labourers and by a dealer in "tea and tobacco." A charter of King James I. is dated from Foulez, 12th February 1448; and on 8th March 1513-14, an inventory of the third Lord Gray's effects was taken at Fowlis.² The origin and history of the castle is obscure. In 1669 the whole lands and barony were purchased from the ninth Lord Gray, and "the several other persons his creditors,"³ by an ancestor of Sir Patrick Keith-Murray of Ochtertyre, baronet, the present owner.

Over the door of a cottage adjoining the castle is part of an altar-shaped tomb. It consists of three compartments, filled by ecclesiastics with hoods and gowns. Possibly this is part of a tomb which had been originally within the church. It probably had marked the grave of some priest—perhaps that of a provost of the old collegiate church of Fowlis.

Probably the name *Fowlis* is of Celtic origin, and may have reference to the position of the church, which adjoins a den and burn, as the Gaelic words *Foil-es*, have some such meaning. Fowlis is not an uncommon territorial name in Scotland; and it appears in various forms as a surname from a remote date. Among the witnesses to William of Maule's gift of the chapel of Fowlis, before referred to, one bears the name of THEOR OF FOULES; and from the place which he holds in the charter, it is probable that he was a vassal of Maule.

The family of Foulis of Colinton, near Edinburgh (one of whom was seventeenth century. The church of Leochel was also dedicated to S. MARNAN.—*Collections on Aberdeen and Banff*, pp. 597-8.]

¹ Stat. Acct. (Old), vii. 281; *Ibid.* (New), p. 467.

² Reg. Ep. Brechin, i. 114; Douglas' Peer., i. 668.

³ Acta Parl., vii. 589.

created a baronet in 1634), claim to be descended from William of Foulis (who flourished in the times of Roberts II. and III.), whose son became archdeacon of St Andrews, and secretary to James I.