

II.

NOTES ON THE SECULAR AND ECCLESIASTICAL ANTIQUITIES OF CULROSS. BY REV. ARTHUR W. HALLEN, M.A., F.S.A. SCOT., EPISCOPAL MINISTER OF ST JOHN'S, ALLOA.

To write a paper on Culross, in which the abbey is not the principal feature, seems like attempting the performance of Shakspeare's greatest drama, with the part of Hamlet left out; and yet this is what, with your permission, I intend this afternoon in a great measure to do. Not because I am ignorant of the antiquarian and historical interest of the abbey, both under its earlier ecclesiastical and later secular owners, but because it has been brought before this Society, I believe, on a former occasion, and because I have found much in Culross, apart from the abbey, which I venture to think may prove of some interest.

The royal burgh of Culross is situated in Perthshire, though isolated from the main portion of that county. Culrossians are very proud of this position which they hold, and have resisted several attempts to transfer them to the more convenient, but in their eyes less dignified, jurisdiction of the sheriff of Clackmannan. Politically, the burgh is one of the Stirling group, while county voters are attached to the Clackmannan and Kinross electoral district. The principal trade of Culross used to be the making of iron girdles, or flat plates for baking oatmeal cakes on, and Scottish soldiers when on the march, were ordered to carry a certain weight of meal and a Culross girdle. The trade is now quite extinct.

The parish is still very extensive, but formerly it included the barony of Kincardine, which was united to Tullyallan in 1672. In the records of the Kirk-Session, dated October 7, 1632, there is a list of "Elders on lite nominate to be chosen for the land and for the toune." In the "toune" division, the only name of note out of fifteen is George Bruce of Carnock, but of the fifteen representing the landward portion, ten are heritors, lairds holding good estates. Sad to say, in only two instances do these properties remain, in whole or part, in the possession of the descendants of the then owners, and in both these cases they have passed through females. One representative of an ancient Culross family, Captain Cuninghame of Balgowrie, has this afternoon presented to the Society the earliest copy of "ane Godlie

Band," signed by his ancestor, John Erskine of Balgownie, in 1557. This has been published amongst the national documents of Scotland. I may also state that, in the Kirk-Session records, mention is made of a general signing of the Covenant in 1643 by 707 persons, J. Erskine and G. Erskine being amongst the number; and again, in 1648, 495 persons signed, J. Erskine of Balgownie being amongst them. In the year 1633, an Act in favour of the burgh of Culross ratifies the erection, in 1588, of the town into a royal burgh, and also the surrender of the small or vicarage teinds by Alexander Colville the commendator in favour of the schoolmaster of Culross made in the same year, 1588. Before proceeding to consider the antiquities, secular and religious, of Culross, I will read a few extracts from the Kirk-Session records which the session-clerk, Mr Penney, most kindly allowed me to search carefully.

After August 1643, there is this note—

“During this intermission the Plaige was havie upon our toune.”

The records recommenced January 7, 1646. Could the “Plaige” have scattered the Kirk-Session for two years and a half?

December 11, 1678—

“The Doxologies is moved to be sung which was nowhere in use here since the restauration of the Government, which was accordingly done the following Sabbath.”

November 24, 1730—

“William Young, son to James Young, indweller in Culross, having had his ear bit off by a horse some time ago, and the fact being notour to the whole place, came in and desired that this might be marked and attested in the Session records, that he might have the benefit of an Extract testifying that he had not lost his ear for any crime, but as aforesaid. And the Session granted him his desire as just and reasonable, which is attested by

“ALLAN LOGAN, *Minister*.

“JOHN GEDDES, *Minister*.”

Culross possesses some very good specimens of domestic architecture; foremost amongst these in dignity though not in age, is the abbey, a mansion which took the place of the monks' lodgings around the old abbey church. This house is stated to have been built by Edward, Lord Bruce

of Kinross, and after having been in the possession of the Dundonald and Preston of Valleyfield families, it now belongs again to the Bruces, Earls of Elgin and Kincardine. Its style of architecture is of a slightly later date than Heriot's Hospital, perhaps resembling rather some portions of Holyrood. The late Sir Robert Preston of Valleyfield, although not residing in it, did much to improve its external appearance. Nearer the centre of the village, and facing the sea, is a most interesting house called the Palace. It consists of a lofty block facing south, and a projecting wing at the west end; at the back, between the house and the bank, which rises precipitously, is a picturesque though small hanging garden, the terraces being many feet in height, and an ancient "doo cot." The principal entrance is in the west wing. Passing through several low rooms, the most interesting chamber in the palace is reached; it is about 18 feet by 20, and is lighted by two small windows. A concave wood-lined ceiling is divided into panels filled with fairly executed, though rather rude pictures: there are explanatory mottoes to each, given in Latin and English couplets, painted in black letter. The date of this house is certainly more ancient than the abbey; indeed, though 1611 is one of the dates on it, the date 1597, and the initials and arms of George Bruce are found, and I think that portions are even more ancient than that. I would, however, refer you to a paper by A. Jervise, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., in part iii. of vol. ii. of our Proceedings.

To the west of the palace is the mansion of Balgownie—the principal portion of the estate lies at some distance towards the north side of the parish—but the laird seems to have made this town-house his principal residence, having a more completely country residence on his estate of Throsk, adjoining Polmaise, in Stirlingshire, on the banks of the Forth also. This house, though old, has been much altered, and has a modern front; at the back, however, are two circular staircases, although the summits have been taken off to slope with the roof. Some old tapestry, still preserved in the house, was on the walls until a few years ago; and in a bedroom in the oldest part of the house, is a painting on panel over the fireplace about three feet by four, representing the Adoration of the Shepherds. In an orchard to the west of Balgownie, and on the estate, is the mouth of an old coal-pit, just opposite to which, but at a little distance beyond high-water mark, is another entrance. This used to

be protected from the influx of the tide by walls of massive masonry. About eighty or ninety years ago the stones of these walls were taken to Leith for the pier then building, and the sea drift has almost filled up this entrance to the pit. It was down the land mouth that, in 1617, James the Sixth was taken while he was on a visit to Culross; probably at the palace, for George Bruce was his host, and the Colvilles had still a hold on the abbey. Playing practical jokes is not a wise or safe habit, and King James was sorely moved, when, ascending to daylight, he found himself on a sea-girt island. His fears of treason were, however, speedily allayed by his host, and he was conveyed to shore in a boat.

West of Balgownie is an estate which the Kirk records call Castlehill, but which is now called Dunimarle, which name it had when the Statistical Account was written. Dunimarle is supposed to mean the castle on the sea, and some traces of building are to be found on a precipitous sandstone rock which also accounts for its other name of Castlehill. Tradition makes it the scene of the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. The present mansion is almost entirely modern, and was built by the late Mrs Sharpe Erskine, one of the co-heiresses of the Erskines, Baronets of Torry, now extinct. The house contains a good library, together with a collection of paintings and works of art well worth a visit.

Further to the west still is Blair Castle. This also stands on a precipitous rocky bank; it is, however, modern. The old house is said to have been built by an Archbishop Hamilton of Glasgow, about the time of the Reformation in 1632. No archbishop of this name, however, was then living. John Hamilton of Blair was one of the heritors of the parish.

In the town of Culross itself there are several very striking buildings, originality of design being the principal feature of the whole place. On the right hand of one of the steep narrow streets leading up to the abbey, is a building, one portion of which rises considerably above the rest, while the circular stair inside, and the form of the massive hinges, attest its age. Just above this building is a house with a square-headed doorway, now converted into a window, above it in Greek capitals:—

Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΠΡΟΝΟΕΙ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΝΟΗΣΕΙ.

It is called the abbey library, though its date is far too late; I should rather take it to be one of the old endowed schools of the place.

The steps of the market cross remain, but the short shaft is modern. To the east of the town are the ruins of an hospital, founded in 1637 by Thomas, first Earl of Elgin, but there is no interesting feature in them. The recipients of the charity live in a more modern building erected by Sir Robert Preston of Valleyfield.

On the north side of the parish is a muir, now wooded in most parts. A great portion of this was the property of the burgh of Culross; and here Hollingshed, in the Scottish portion of his history, asserts that a battle took place between Sueno of Norway and Malcolm of Scotland. I am informed that to the north of Culross Muir is a spot, interesting to those who love to dwell on the sufferings of the Covenanters, a secluded natural amphitheatre called now Prébury, and this is popularly supposed to mean the praying bury or mound, from the fact that the forbidden religious meetings were held here.

I have mentioned most of the secular and military antiquities of the parish and town of Culross. Before I touch on the ecclesiastical antiquities, there is one interesting relic of the past which, I think, deserves some more extended notice. On the highest ground in the parish, about a mile from the sea, stands Bordie Tower. There was formerly a mansion to the east of it, and a well walled garden to the west of it, but now all the more domestic portions of the building are gone, and the tower itself has only one gable and part of each side remaining; but from its age and position, I am inclined to believe that it was of more importance than might at first be supposed from its size. Every antiquarian must be allowed his hobby, and I have been riding a small one about Bordie Tower for several years. I believe it was important as a beacon station. Taking a map of the district, we find that between Edinburgh and Stirling, the two old royal residences, a regular line of castles extends up either side of the Forth; but the line of view between several of these is obstructed, and their use as beacons in any emergency destroyed. Now Bordie Tower is the key to the whole position. I myself have seen from it, Edinburgh to the east, Blackness more to the south, Stirling to the west; these are all hid from one another by intervening hills. Bordie is open to them all, and to Clackmannan Tower (long owned by a Bruce, as was Bordie), from which the beacon would flash north to Castle Campbell in the Ochills, and once lit on them, would speed up Strathallan

to Perth. I do not know whether the subject of beacon signalling has been much studied, but I think that the district of which Bordie Tower forms a centre, would be a good field for exemplifying the capacities of a system which must have been of great importance in the days of our fathers, and in such a district as this portion of Scotland, which was subject to invasion from abroad, and from the highlands. A careful study of the Ordnance map, on which all ruins are given, and the elevation of ground between them, would, I feel convinced, show a very well devised system of conveying intelligence by beacon fires. I may mention, that in some feus granted by the Earl of Mar at Alloa, it was stipulated that buildings should not be erected to obstruct the look-out from Alloa Tower to Stirling Castle.

There have been three churches or chapels in Culross, viz.:—the old Parish Church, situated at some little distance to the west of the town; the Abbey Church, now used as a parish church; the Blackadder Chapel, situated to the east of the town.

1. The Blackadder Chapel has been described in an anonymous work printed for private circulation in Edinburgh in 1872, entitled “The Legends and Commemorative Celebrations of St Kentigern,” &c. In this work is a measured ground plan of the chapel. The south wall is almost entirely obliterated, as its foundations now lie in the footpath by the side of the public road. The northern portion of the chapel is in the plantation of the Culross Abbey estate, and the remains of the pavement and sedilia are better preserved. The author of the “Legends of St Kentigern” (page 89, appendix) has, I think, shown that this chapel was erected *after* 1491, and the few architectural mouldings which remain bear out that view. Whatever interest Culross may have as the reputed birth-place of St Kentigern, it is certain that the chapel on the shore of the sea is comparatively modern, and that no traces remain of an older shrine on that spot.

2. Though not intending to devote much time to the Abbey, I must give it some brief mention. It was founded in the year 1217 by Malcolm, Earl of Fife. It was dedicated to St Mary and St Leof. Its first abbot, Hugh, was before that abbot of Kinloss. Its monks belonged to the Cistercian order, or White Monks, founded in 1098 by St Bernard of Clairvaux. The abbeyes of this order in Scotland were Melrose, Newbattle, Dundrennan, Holmcultram, Kynloss, Glenluce, Sadale, Deer, Balmerinoch, Sweetheart, Machline, and Culross or Kyllenross. John Hog

was abbot in 1484, when Culross was erected into a burgh of barony. Sir James Colville, brother to Alexander Colville, the last abbot, was made Lord Colville of Culross in 1604, with a grant of the abbey property. It is impossible here to enter into details as to the architectural remains, which, though not very extensive, are yet of interest. Slezer's view of Culross gives the abbey tower in its earlier and more characteristic form with a roof on it: the present pinnacles were added by the late Sir Robert Preston. I have never heard any satisfactory opinion given as to the original condition of the west end. The present western exterior shows that the building did extend, or was intended to extend, westward, but its interior arrangements must have differed very much from the ordinary cruciform abbey church, with central tower; for if the nave was in this case west of the tower, it must have been almost completely shut off from the choir. I am inclined to think that either the nave was removed at a very early date, or that after preparations had been made to build it, the plan was departed from, and the tower left at the west end, instead of in the centre of the building. In the adjoining Bruce Chapel, besides some seventeenth century alabaster effigies, there is an interesting brass memorial plate of the heart of Lord Bruce of Kinloss, who was killed in a duel in Holland. This is mentioned, I believe, in a monograph by Miss Hartshorne, on the "Special Burials and Memorials of Human Hearts." At the north-east side of the chancel there has been a good chapel, the figure which occupied the base of the arch which once opened into the church is now placed erect.

3. The old Parish Church is by far the most venerable building, and there are features of great interest about it. Its exterior size is 78 feet by $21\frac{1}{2}$; the walls are about 3 feet thick, and are nearly levelled to the ground in many places. I believe that in its original condition it was entered by a west door, and that on either side were narrow lancet windows,—one of these, situated near the present south door, remains, and measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches. What sort of windows there were in the east and west gables it is impossible to say: the eastern gable was surmounted by a cross, the socket for which, formed of the crowning copestone, still lies in the churchyard, and shows good early canopy carving. On the floor of the church were several long slabs, inscribed with fine floriated crosses, with the knightly sword on one side of the shaft. One of these

slabs bears on the other side of the shaft a device which is very like a pointed arch with a "square" over it. May not this be the monument of the founder of the church, whose name has been utterly lost to us? Such was the original condition of the church, but long before the Reformation it underwent an alteration, in carrying out which the early memorials of a knightly race were taken from the graves they had covered; the west door was blocked up, and instead of it a north and south door inserted 23 feet from the west end. These doorways have flat lintels, the old memorials slabs being pressed into the service,—two slabs are thus employed for each door, and the interior slabs have had their sculpture plastered over, which has doubtless preserved them. The sculpture of the two exterior slabs is hidden by the rubble work that lies between them in the thickness of the wall, their former lower surfaces being placed outside. The south door has also had a sharp-roofed porch, as the state of the wall shows, but no trace of the foundation of this porch remains. When the church was thus "beautified and adorned" at the cost of its primitive simplicity, it is impossible to say; but the work did not prosper, for before the Reformation it again fell into decay. The Abbey Church was nearer the town, nay, in it the church's services were doubtless more attractive, and the county laird could get refreshment in the refectory after the fatigues of devotion. So the old church in the fields was never again to be renovated, for in 1633 an Act was passed making the Abbey Church the "lawful parish church," giving as a reason—"As the Abbey Church has been used for preaching since the Reformation, and that the church called the 'Paroche Kirk' where service is not, nor has been since the memory of man, is altogether ruinous, decayed, and fallen down in certain parts." It, however, long continued to be the burying-place of the parish, and outside and inside its ruined walls are well-executed monumental slabs, in some cases taking the form of altar tombs, and nearly all of them having coats of arms or trade marks. But even in the matter of burial, the more powerful families prepared for themselves a resting-place in the abbey churchyard. The Bruces of Carnock have a mortuary chapel, so have the Prestons of Valleyfield; and on April 27, 1647, Sir John Erskyne of Balgowrie, on request, obtained a grant of burial-place on the north side of the church (that is the abbey), "but nigh to the little aisle (probably the chapel I have already referred to), and gable of the church, with liberty

to build a loft within the side," &c. This mortuary chapel is now the burying-place of the family. Before, however, leaving the old ruined church, Sir John must have raised the tombs of his ancestors, Sir John, his wife Christian Stirling of Keir, and Sir Robert Erskine, their son, from their recumbent position in the chancel to an upright and safer position against the east wall, where they now stand. The centre one is in best order, and is interesting as introducing at the angles the buckle of the Stirling of Keir arms; for Dame Christian Stirling or Erskine, the wife of Sir John Erskine, the first Laird of Balgownie, who was second son of John Lord Mar, was a daughter of the House of Keir. I would briefly refer to some of the coats of arms in this church and churchyard, the tinctures, however, are not now shown. There are several tombs of a family of Callendar, about 1640—A bend between 6 billets; impaling a coat of 3 wolfs' heads erased; also impaling a coat of 3 stars in fess between 3 trefoils, 2 and 1; a coat of, a fess; a coat, in base 3 crescents, 1 and 2, in chief an estoile; a coat, a lion rampant. A family of Gourley were seated here, and there is a slab bearing a lion rampant, with the initial G.

In the floor of the church is the broken portion of a large slab, with the top of the shield broken off, the whole of one initial, and portion of the other. The bearing is a pale charged with a fork, the date being 1597; the broken initial looks like the lower portion of an E. There was an Adam Erskine connected with Culross about this time. Can these be his arms with a difference?

I must now bring my paper to a close, content if I have aroused any further interest in a place well known to antiquaries,—a place where lovers of nature will find that she has laid a gentle hand on the ruins of the past, and where rest, health, and instruction may be found, and artist and architect may work with the antiquary.