

III.

NOTES ON THE OLD CHURCH AND CEMETERY OF AIRTH, STIR-
LINGSHIRE. BY ROBERT BRUCE ARMSTRONG, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.
(PLATE I.)

Adjoining the eastern wing of Airth Castle is the old churchyard and ruined parish church—the latter a building of very considerable antiquity and interest. The most ancient portion of what now remains is a semi-circular headed arch, which occurs on the north side, and belongs to the Transition period, or latter portion of the twelfth century. This arch springs on the east from an ornamental capital of plain leaf pattern, supported by a semicircular pillar pinned to the north wall. Towards the west the arch springs from a pillar with circular base, surmounted by a capital ornamented beneath the angles with fern leaves, and at the sides with other sculptures of pleasing design. It is clear that at least one arch, similar to the one described, extended towards the west, and that the original building consisted of a nave with a north aisle (and, perhaps, also a south aisle) and a chancel. On the south side of the nave, and corresponding with, but somewhat wider than the arch before mentioned, may be seen what is known as the Airth Aisle. This is in many respects the most interesting portion of the building. The dimensions of this chapel internally are from east to west 13 feet 3 inches, and from north to south 23 feet 10 inches. In the west side of the east wall may still be seen the “Ambry,” and towards the west a small but deeply-moulded square-headed window, divided into two lights by a mullion. In the south or gable wall there is a large Gothic window, the tracery of which has disappeared. An alteration appears to have been made at a period long subsequent to the erection of the chapel, by which the window has been much curtailed in its dimensions. Beneath the window there is a mural arch rising about 2 feet from the flooring, and measuring from east to west 7 feet, and in depth 2 feet 6 inches, the ornamental moulding of which has been almost completely, and purposely, destroyed, the per-

fect condition of the surface of the stones, and of the masons' marks found upon them, show clearly that its present state of dilapidation has not been altogether caused by time. There can be no doubt that this mural arch was constructed to contain a monumental effigy, the probability being that the one we are about to describe once rested in it.

In the eastern portion of the church may be seen a mutilated semi-effigy of a female, 6 feet 3 inches long by 1 foot 10 inches broad (see Plate I.). The figure is represented as lying on a couch, the head resting on a cushion, and the hands placed together on the breast. A heavy covering, folded back, falling in artistic folds on each side and over the end of the couch, covers the figure from the waist downwards, while, at either side of the feet, two hounds are represented. The head-dress, held back from the forehead by two spherical headed pins, falls in folds on either sides of the shoulders, the body being enveloped in a rather closely-fitting dress, which leaves the whole of the neck bare. The features have entirely disappeared, the lower portions of the arms have been broken off, and the monument itself, which is in high relief, has been badly fractured beneath the arms of the effigy, and is now in two pieces. The present position of the monument, with the head of the figure towards the east, plainly shows that it does not now occupy its original situation in the church, and the greater care with which one of its sides has been finished proves that it was intended to occupy a mural arch in some part of the south wall of the church or its aisles. The arch already mentioned as occurring in the south wall of the Airth Aisle fulfils these conditions, and, consequently, we may conclude that it was originally constructed for the reception of this monument. On the exterior of the most modern portion of the south wall, and near the present position of the monument, a mural arch occurs, but the measurements show the effigy to be considerably longer than the width of this arch. On the exterior of the east wall of the Airth Aisle may be observed a highly ornamental Gothic niche and canopy, on the pedestal of which is sculptured a shield with the well-known saltire and chief of the Bruces, the chief charged with two incised cinquefoils. It is considered by the highest authority that

these cinquefoils point to a Livingstone alliance with the Bruces (to which we shall have hereafter to refer). The gable of the south wall is finished off, both at the east and west, with stones, on which are represented the arms of Bruce without the mullet or cinquefoils. On the exterior of the gable, and at either side of the Gothic window, are corbels, one representing a vine branch, the other a bunch of leaves. All the architectural details of the Airth Aisle are in the style of the 15th century. Beneath the aisle itself there occurs a large and lofty vault in which the former barons of Airth and their families were interred. This vault, which is approached from the nave by a flight of eleven steps, measures from north to south 17 feet 3 inches, and from east to west 11 feet 5 inches, and in height 8 feet 6 inches. Whether it was constructed at the same period as the chapel cannot now be ascertained, but some names of persons who were here interred, and the dates of their burial, are, however, recorded on the walls:—"Alexander Bruce of Airth, 1665;" "Anna Van Aeck, Lady Airth, 1673;" "Jane Bruce, Lady Airth, died upon March 20th, 1683;" "Richard Elphingston, Laird of Airth, died June 27th, 1683;" "Lady Mary Graham, daughter to — Alexander, Earle of Callander, and wife to Mr James Graham, &c., 1734." On either side of the doorway are the letters RE and IB, the initials of Richard Elphingston and his wife Jane Bruce (the heiress of Airth), and the date 1682, probably the year in which the vault was repaired. When the church was abandoned the remains of those interred in this vault were, for the most part, removed and placed within a walled enclosure near the present parish church. To the west of the Airth Chapel is the Elphingston Aisle, which was probably constructed at the close of the sixteenth or early in the seventeenth century. A semicircular Grecian arch opens from it to the nave, and on the exterior of the gable towards the south, there is a well-preserved stone, with shield bearing the Elphingston arms, parted per pale with those of Livingstone and Calendar quarterly, with the motto "Cavis Cavis" (Caus Caus),¹ and at either side the letters MA ♦ E and I ♦ LME, the initials of Alexander, fourth Lord Elphing-

¹ The motto of the Elphingstons is "Cause causit."

ston, and his wife Jean, eldest daughter of William, sixth Lord Livingstone, with the date 1593. What is known as the Bruce Aisle occurs to the north of the ancient arch before mentioned; on the exterior of the north wall the arms of Bruce appear, with the initials of Sir James Bruce of Powfoulis, and over the doorway may be seen the letters $\begin{matrix} S \\ I \diamond B \end{matrix}$ and $\begin{matrix} D \\ M \diamond R \end{matrix}$, being the initials of the same gentleman and his wife, Dame Margaret Rollox of Duncrub, together, with the inscription, "The Lord is my trust." On the first crow-step on one side may be seen a curious monogram of the initials of the same persons, and on the other, the date 1614. This aisle is now roofed and is used as a mortuary chapel by a family of Bruce, formerly of Powfoullis. A lofty square tower, having over the doorway IVLY \diamond THE \diamond 15 \diamond 1647, probably the date of its erection, occurs to the south side of the nave and to the north-east of the Airth Aisle. And on the north of the nave towards the east, an aisle of three Grecian arches, of probably seventeenth century work, occurs. In the cemetery, which is still occasionally used, and to the south of the church, there is a curious monument to James Logan, 1773. This monument is a collection of sculptured stones of various periods, one bearing the date 1685, and another, which may be seen close to the ground, has sculptured in relief the arms of Bruce, with a mullet in the dexter chief with savages for supporters; beneath, on a scroll, are the letters A \diamond B, in sixteenth century characters, the initials of Sir Alexander Bruce of Airth, who figured during the reign of Queen Mary.

The visitor to this churchyard cannot but be struck by the number of coffin-shaped boxes of iron of various sizes and dates which are to be seen. These, we were told, were in use when body-snatching was much practised, the coffins being enclosed within the iron shells until the remains were no longer of use for the purpose of dissection.

The church and church lands of "Hereth" were, by David I., granted to the Abbey of Holyrood,¹ and the "Ecclesia de Erthe" was valued at

¹ Acts of Parliament, vol. i. p. 358a or 46*.

65 merks.¹ William de Erth, one of the hostages of James I. in 1426-27, had three daughters—Agnes, the eldest was, prior to 1414, married to “Edward de Brus,” second son of Sir Robert of Clackmannan. He is supposed to have died before his father-in-law, leaving two sons, Robert and William. His widow married, secondly, an Elphingston, and had issue a son, John.

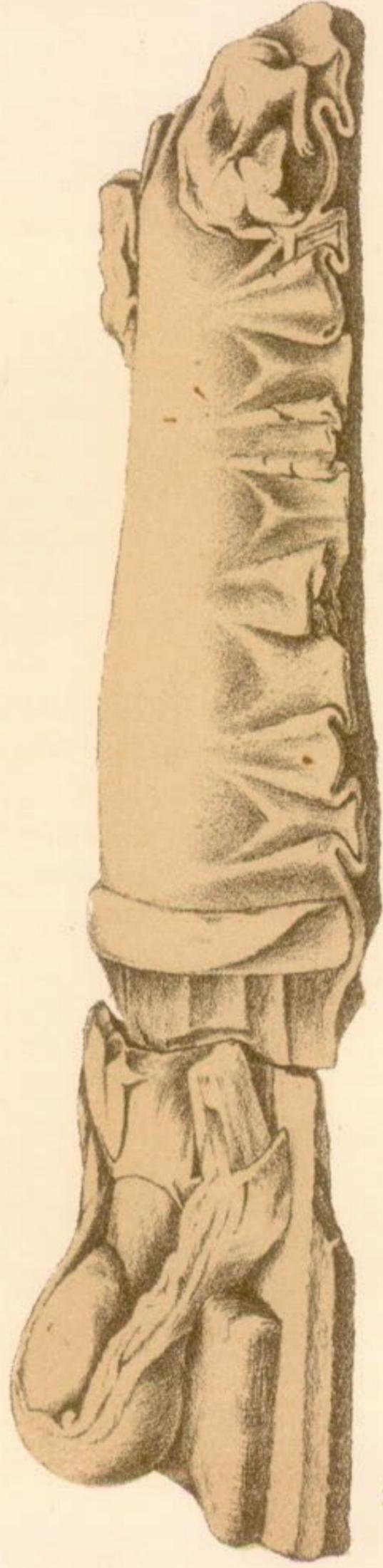
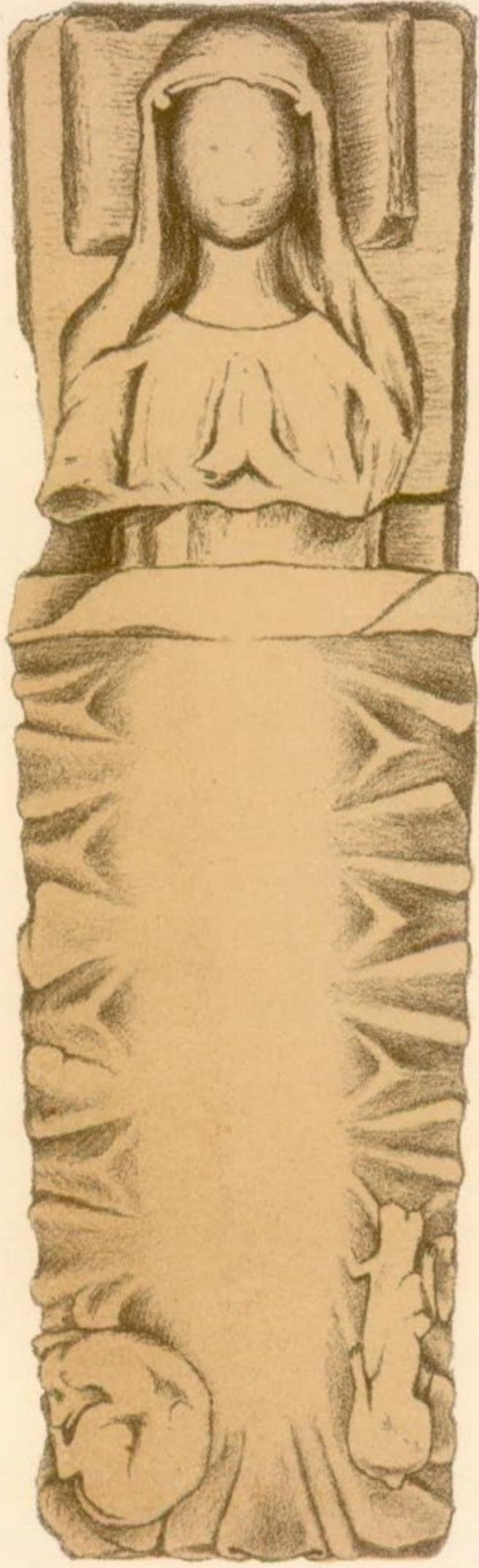
“Sir Robert de Brus” of Airthe, knight, eldest son of Agnes, married a daughter of Sir Alexander Livingstone, and was, as well as his brother-in-law, executed in 1449-50. He had an only son, Alexander. Agnes was in possession of the “Place or Fortalice” of Airth at the time of the forfeiture of Sir Robert. She was alive in 1468, and at her death the principal portion of her property naturally passed to her grandson, Sir Alexander de Brus, who was, prior to December 26, 1451, married to Joneta, daughter of Alexander, Lord Livingstone. It was probably during the lifetime of this baron that the Airth Aisle was erected. He being not only a son but a husband of a Livingstone, may, on that account, have borne on his arms two cinquefoils in chief, as they appear on the shield which adorns the niche in the chapel. The architecture of the building is also of the period in which he lived.

It cannot now be ascertained whom the mutilated recumbent figure before described represents, but there is every reason to suppose it to be the effigy of one of the ladies of Airth, the probability being that Agnes of Airth, the progenitrix of the line of Bruce, and who saved the Castle and Barony from forfeiture, was interred beneath the chapel, and a figure representing her afterwards placed in the mural arch under the south window of the aisle.

Sir Alexander de Brus had no issue by his first wife. He married, secondly, Margaret, daughter of Sir Malcolm Forrester of Torwoodhead. The eldest son of this marriage—Sir John de Brus—married in 1471 Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Menteith of Carse. He was of Stenhouse and apparent of Airth, and before 1483 was killed in the streets of Edinburgh by his wife’s relatives—the Menteiths of Carse.

¹ Registrum de Dumfermelyn, p. 204, No. 313.

His death was the cause of a deadly feud between the two families until the 18th October 1488, when the Lords of the Council undertook to arrange the differences. It was then decided that Robert de Brus of Airth, son of the slaughtered Sir John, and Archibald Menteith were to entertain a priest to sing in the Kirk of Airth for the repose of the soul of the deceased, each party bearing half the expense.



葬

MONUMENTAL EFFIGY AT THE CHURCH OF AIRTH.