

II.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL REMAINS EXISTING UPON ST. SERF'S ISLAND, LOCHLEVEN, AT 6TH JULY 1881. BY ANDREW KERR, Esq., ARCHITECT, F.S.A. SCOT.

This paper is prepared at the special request of the late Dr. David Laing, who, in the course of examining historical papers relating to the ecclesiastical establishments formerly existing upon the island, considered it important that a careful examination should be made of the ruined buildings and other remains, recording the result, in evidence of accommodation having existed to the extent set forth in the several documents.

The first journey to Lochleven was undertaken on Thursday the 11th October 1877. Dr. Laing and I left Edinburgh by the 9.40 A.M. train for Leslie, in Fife, and were met by the Rev. Dr. Campbell of Balmerino, Mr. A. Laing, F.S.A., of Newburgh, and Mr. Hodgson, Cupar. As it was snowing heavily, we proceeded in covered conveyances to the sluices which drain Lochleven, and found waiting the Rev. Mr. Peters, Kinross; Mr. Robert Burns Begg, Factor on Kinross Estate; and Mr. David Marshall of Kinross. The storm, with driving sleet, had now increased to such an extent, that it was not without hesitation and some delay that the boatmen were induced to venture from the shore. On reaching St. Serf's Island, now extending to fully 90 acres, the property of Sir Graham Montgomery, Bart., it was found that, under the direction of Mr. Alexander Laing, F.S.A., and the careful personal superintendence of Mr. Burns Begg, F.S.A., and Mr. David Marshall, F.S.A., excava-

¹ Mr Thoms and Mr Goudie have, it is understood resolved to print the interesting documents to which they have referred, along with some other Shetland documents, in a separate volume as the best way of making them accessible to local and other antiquaries.

tions had previously been made all around and within the ruins. These disclosed a large extent of the remains of buildings, which we carefully inspected; also the remains of two bodies, which had been interred in one grave near the centre of the area of the small chapel, one of the bodies being about three feet under the surface and the other about two feet below it. All that remained in form of the under one was the bowl of the skull and the lower jaw; the bones of the other were in a good state of preservation, the skull showing a low receding brow. Both had been buried without coffins, being laid upon their back, with their faces towards the east. The lower body was laid at full length, but the upper one had the knees drawn up towards the breast, and the hands in close proximity to the feet. These were the only traces of interments within the walls of the chapel.¹ The only other articles found were a few broken slates and rusty nails, which had been used in the roof of the building, with some leaden work of the windows, and fragments of rude pottery. Mr. Burns Begg read a most carefully prepared paper, narrating the nature and date of the excavations, and positions where the various articles were found, for which he was most heartily thanked. Although the sleet continued to drive with great violence, the party, under the shelter of a wall, gave a hearty demonstration in memory of Prior Andro Wynton, and towards the health of his distinguished biographer, Dr. David Laing, thereafter returning to Leslie, to enjoy the hospitality of its chief magistrate, Mr. Charles Anderson of Fettyhill.

A few days afterwards Dr. Laing expressed a wish that we should repeat our visit as privately as possible upon an early day, and at the

¹ The undermost skeleton was suggested to be the remains of St. Ronan, prior of St. Serfs, who is supposed to have been interred in the chapel there. The upper skeleton was supposed to be that of Bishop Grahame of St. Andrews, who was interred in the chapel in 1478, but of course there is no evidence sufficient for the identification of either of the burials. The remains had been carefully secured in a deal box, by Messrs. Begg and Marshall, at the time they were first discovered, and were relaid in the spot where they had been found. This box was disinterred in our presence, and we carefully examined the bones, placed them in separate boxes, and again buried them in the spot where they were discovered.

same time inspect the site of the old church at Port Moak, he having ascertained that this was part of the establishment which had existed upon St. Serf's Island, and possibly he hoped to find something relating to it there. If time permitted, he also wished to visit Lochleven Castle, but engagements from time to time prevented this intention being carried out, and in the summer of 1878, he requested, in the event of his not being able to accompany me, that I should complete the examinations. He died upon the 18th October 1878.

Before revisiting the island, I referred to several notices of it, extracting the following memoranda relating to dates and buildings which might apply to the existing remains.

The Registry of the Priory of St. Andrews states that in the year 842, Brude, son of Dergard, the last of the Pictish Kings, bestowed the island of Lochleven upon God, St. Servan, and the Kelidean hermits dwelling there in conventual devotions. The *Scoti-Monasticon* states that they lived in separate cells at Lochleven, but ultimately the Culdee establishments possessed a refectory, dormitory, and chapel, and were required to use the parish cemetery for interments; possibly their own yard was regarded as the "desert" in which their own eremites, according to rule, should dwell. About the year 930, during the rule of Abbot Ronan, the Culdees gave up their island to the Bishop of St Andrews, on condition that he should find them in food and raiment, and they had a grant of a church from each of the three bishops who ruled the See of St. Andrews between 1040 and 1093. A church, St. Mary's, situated on St. Serf's Island, replaced a house of Culdees founded in 838, and dedicated to St. Mary. It was granted to St. Andrews Cathedral, and Bishop Benham consecrated a new church to SS. Stephen and Moac, on 21st August 1243. It appears that the fate of the Culdees was sealed about 1145, when King David declared that he had given and granted to the Canons of St. Andrews the island of Lochleven, that they might establish canonical order there. The Canons regular, who came in place of the Culdees in 1145, continued till the Reformation, probably 1567, when the monastery of St. Serf was deserted. In reference to Dr. Laing's

remarks, previously noticed, regarding the old church of Port Moak, Mr. David Marshall of Kinross, who is now engaged upon a history of that county, pointed out from some charters that the monastery of St. Serf upon an island in Lochleven, and the church at Port Moak upon the mainland, comprised one and the same establishment, but some confusion had arisen in more recent descriptions, making them appear as separate institutions. The monastery proper was upon the island of St. Serf, but a small chapel and burying ground existed at Port Moak, in connection with the monastery, for the convenience of the inhabitants upon the mainland. The venerable chapel has been entirely taken down, and only three of the old monuments remain in the graveyard, the others having been removed to the modern burying-ground surrounding the new parish church, about half a mile distant, first used in 1722, but the church itself was removed about 1660, and rebuilt in 1832.

On the afternoon of 5th July 1881, I met Mr. Burns Begg at Kinross, and read over his very carefully-kept memoranda of the excavations, made in 1877, and those carried out since, all of which he pointed out upon the island on the following day. I cannot speak too favourably of the facilities which Mr. Burns Begg gave, not only personally, but in bringing some of the workmen who made the excavations, and especially one who was engaged in the several works since some years previous to 1830.

The island of St. Serf contains about 90 acres, and is composed chiefly of gravel and sand, with a dressing of mould over the surface. It rises in the middle to about 40 feet, being highest towards the east end, where the ecclesiastical building remains are situated. On the north side there was a bay extending inwards, known in former times as the Pond of the Inch, and to which tradition points as a place where the boats of the monks found sheltered mooring, and which was also frequented by pike during the spawning season. The distance to the opposite shore is about a quarter of a mile, and the site of old Portmoak church or chapel is fully a quarter of a mile further inland from the shore. Upon the northern slope of the island there is an extensive excavation, about 100 yards long,

flat in the bottom, and sloping gradually upwards all round to a height of about 10 feet. It is sheltered on every side, and a view cannot be obtained of the loch by a person standing upon the level surface at the bottom. Michael Bruce, the poet, in a letter, dated 7th December 1766, describes it as not unlike a bowling-green, and can give no guess as to the use of it. He refers to ruins, and the stones of a little house which stands in it. As there is no naturally sheltered place upon the island, this site may have been formed for the separate cells described as having been occupied by the early Kelidean hermits.

In 1830, sluices were constructed at the east end of the loch, and other works executed to give a larger supply of water to the mills, which had the effect of lowering the surface of the loch $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and enlarging the island to its present area. This also led to its improvement for grazing and agricultural purposes. About 1834 the old chapel was roofed over, and a fireplace and window introduced, adapting it as a shepherd's house. A cattle shed was also added to the north side, as shown in Mr. Drummond's accurate sketch (fig. 1), published in the Society's *Proceedings* for 1862.

On again referring to Michael Bruce's letter of 1766, 116 years ago, we have a description of the monastic remains as they then appeared. Speaking of the island, he says, "The middle or highest part of it is covered with ruins. The foundations are visible enough, and it seems to have been a very large building. The whole is divided into a great many little squares, from which it appears not an unpalausible conjecture that not only a church, as they tell us, but a monastery had stood in it." The description of the site as it appeared in 1830, given by the workmen engaged upon the recent clearing and excavations, coincides with that of Michael Bruce.

About the time of building the cattle shed, the large heap of loose stones was removed from the island to the mainland, to erect a wall extending in a north-east direction from the side of the loch. A considerable quantity of dark mould was also removed from the ground around the chapel, to form a surface to the portion reclaimed at the water's edge and the pond of the Inch, now left dry. In doing so it was discovered,

from the quantity of human remains disclosed, that the ground to the south and west of the old chapel had been used as a burying-ground, the bodies having been laid east and west; but the remains were so far decayed that no complete skeleton was found, and the larger bones, after being exposed, soon fell to pieces. In Mr. Annan's paper, read to the Society in 1862, he notices "that on the east side of the chapel a belt of hewn stone laid regularly in a square from corner to corner was discovered." This appears to have been the foundation course of the



Fig. 1. The Chapel on St. Serf's Island, Lochleven, adapted as a Shepherd's House.
(From a Drawing by James Drummond.)

chancel, now removed. On further digging, it was discovered that the inside dimensions were 13 feet 6 inches long by 9 feet wide, divided longitudinally and across, by thin stone walls into four graves, in which were found nine complete human skeletons. There were no indications of coffins, but at the head of each thin stones had been placed on either side.

The roof and other modern additions having now been removed, it stands in the same condition as it did about 1830. In order to show it distinctly, I have prepared plans (see fig. 2), elevations, and details of it

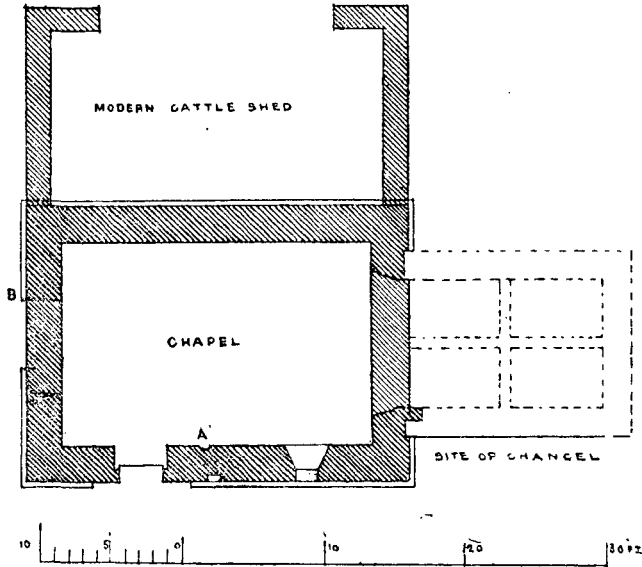


Fig. 2. Ground Plan of Chapel showing Site of Chancel.

form actual measurements. The style of the masonry and the impost moulding of the west arch (see figs. 3, 4), show that it has been a plain building

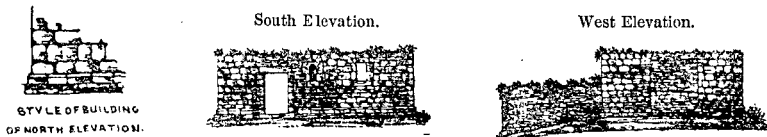


Fig. 3. Style of Building, and South and West Elevations of Chapel.

of the early Romanesque or Norman period, probably the eleventh century, and may be one of those churches stated to have been erected between 1040 and 1093. The dimensions of the chancel have been already

noticed. The nave is 21 feet 6 inches long and 14 feet 6 inches wide inside; what remains of walls are only 9 feet high, semicircular arches now built up appear at each end, the eastern one giving access to the

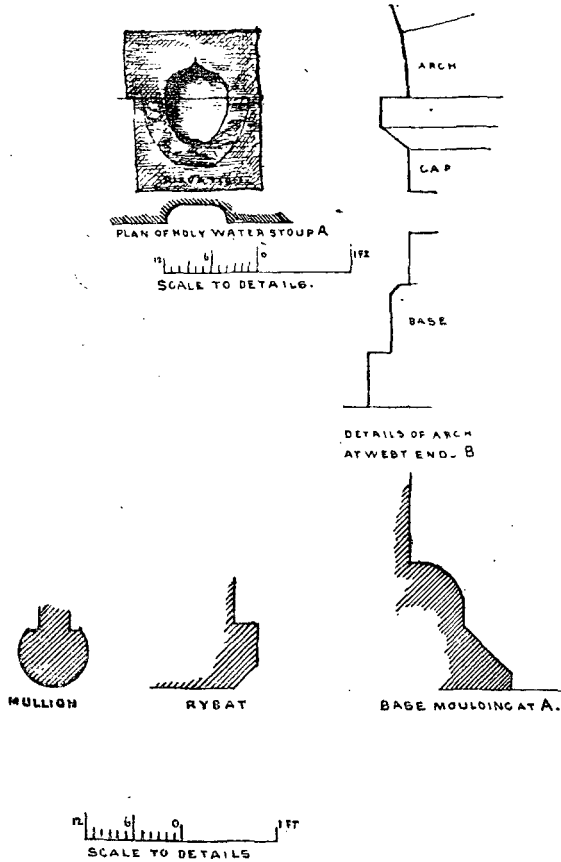


Fig. 4. Details and Mouldings.

chancel, and the other at the west end opening into a porch or other apartment, now taken down. Diggings have been made, but they disclose no foundations, or trace of building, the square window on the

south is not original, as the lines of a circular-headed window can be traced upon the inside face of the wall. The niche beside the door, and the holy water stoup inside (fig. 4), appear also to be of a later period.

About twenty-five yards west from the chapel, the ground has been carefully opened, showing the extent of the remaining foundations of the old walls and the tracks of the others, which enabled the accompanying block plan of the monastic buildings to be prepared (see fig. 5). Some details were also exposed, which indicate that they may belong to about the thirteenth century; but from their irregular form, it is probable that the whole may not have been erected at the same time.

The plan now exhibited represents an area of about 650 superficial yards, exclusive of the chapel, which is sufficient to provide accommodation to the extent indicated by the ancient documents relating to the monastery. The two burying-grounds required also by ancient rule are provided here, the one upon St. Serf's Island, and the other upon the mainland at Port Moak. It is gratifying to state, that from the interest taken in these remains by the proprietor, Sir Graham Montgomery, they are carefully protected and maintained in a good state of preservation.

The stones used in the building are said to have been brought from Nivingston Quarry, near the Village of Cleish, situated at a short distance from the south shore of the Loch. On my remarking to the workmen the great expense and danger in bringing them by boat, I was promptly met with the reply, that they did not see that there was either the one or the other, because when they took the old stones from St. Serf's to the north shore, they got them all ready, and when the loch was frozen over, placed them on

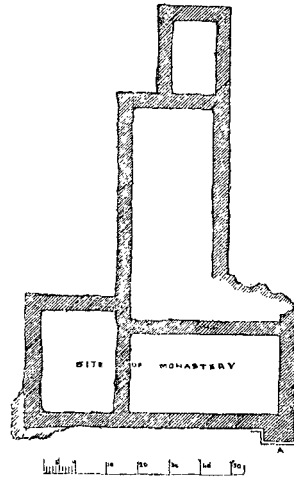


Fig. 5. Plan showing part of Monastery.

sledges, and took them rapidly across; and they believed, that when the stones were brought here and also to build the castle on the other island, they were taken in the same manner.

Extract from a Letter by Michael Bruce (poet), Kinross, to Mr. David Pearson, Easter Balgiedie, dated December 7, 1766. Communicated by Mr. David Marshall of Kinross.

“On the day before St. Lukes fair in Kinross, I made a voyage to the Inch of Lochleven, that being the time you know at which they bring the cattle out of it. The middle and highest part of it is covered with ruins. The foundations are visible enough, and it seems to have been a very large building. The whole is divided into a great many little squares, from which it appears not an unplausible conjecture that not only a church, as they tell us, but a monastery, had stood in it.

“To the westward of this, and in the lower ground, a deep dyke in the form of a trench is cut in the north and east sides of a plain piece of ground, not unlike a bowling-green. I can give no guess for the use of this, though it evidently appears to be the work of art. I sought among the ruins and among the stones of the little house which stands on it, for some marks or inscriptions, but to no purpose, I could find nothing further to assist my conjectures. I would have examined (a word wanting in the MSS.), had not the fishers been in such a hurry to be gone. They who consider it in no other view than as capable of feeding a dozen or fourteen cattle, when their work was over, would not stay a minute longer, had it been to discover the great toe of St. Moag, who is buried there. My descriptions of it in the poem ‘Lochleven’ (which by the way is now finished) runs thus—

“Fronting where Gairney pours its silent stream
Into the lake, an island lifts its head
Grassy and wild,” &c.