

III.

NOTICES OF THE DISCOVERY OF A STONE COFFIN AND FRAGMENT
OF A CELTIC CROSS AT LETHNOTT, FORFARSHIRE, AND OF A
BRONZE CELT AT DURNES, SUTHERLANDSHIRE. BY HEW
MORRISON, F.S.A. Scot., SMITH'S INSTITUTION, BRECHIN.

In the autumn of last year the church of Lethnott underwent considerable repairs to the flooring on account of its decay by dry-rot. It was deemed advisable to remove the pulpit from the middle of the south wall, where it had stood since the Revolution, and place it at the east end of the church, over the spot where the altar of the original church stood. In order to get this done, it became necessary to clear out a large quantity of earth and stones to allow a cross sub-wall to be built to support the beams on which the floor was to rest. While doing this the workmen came upon a stone coffin, which from its weight and position, they were unable to move, and before they had discovered what it was, they had broken off its sides as well as damaged it in other

respects. Many of the pieces broken off were used in the sub-wall just being built.

The minister, who was from home at the time, was only made aware of the discovery by accident. He made every effort to get the pieces of the coffin, and in this he was tolerably successful. It is now preserved in front of the church. It is formed of the reddish conglomerate stone common in the glen, and was hollowed out in rather rough fashion. The chisel marks are still quite fresh. The hollowed part of the coffin is 5 feet 6 inches in length measured along the bottom, and at the top it will measure about 6 inches more. It is 18 inches broad at the shoulders, with a depth of 10 inches. This coffin is that probably referred to in the Statistical Account of the parish written in 1799. It is there stated that a former minister, who had lived a life of celibacy, had left money to roof the church with lead. The church was long known as the "Lead-kirk," and by that name Mr Robert Edward, minister of Murroes, distinguished it in the map which accompanied his "Description of Angus" in 1678. The minister who gifted the leaden roof to the church was said (according to the tradition) to have been buried in a stone coffin under the altar.

While the fragments of the stone coffin were being collected, a fragment of a Celtic cross was picked up, which the minister the Rev. Mr Cruickshank sent to me, and which I have sent up to Dr Anderson. So far as known, no other trace of any stones similarly sculptured has been discovered in the parish of Lethnott, though in the neighbouring parish of Menmuir there are several specimens.

[The fragment of a Celtic cross thus curiously found at Lethnott measures 9 inches in length, 4 inches in breadth, and 2 inches in thickness. It is of the grey fissile rock of the Old Red Sandstone formation, familiarly known as the Forfarshire Flagstones, and consists apparently of the upper limb or head of a small cross having a circular ring or "glory" connecting the shaft, arms, and summit. As will be seen from the accompanying engravings, it presents on one face a very characteristic example of Celtic decoration, bordered by a slightly rounded edging of about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in width. It presents a peculiarity not often seen in

decorative work of this kind, inasmuch as the central circular pattern of diverging spirals is connected with the interlaced scroll-work patterns

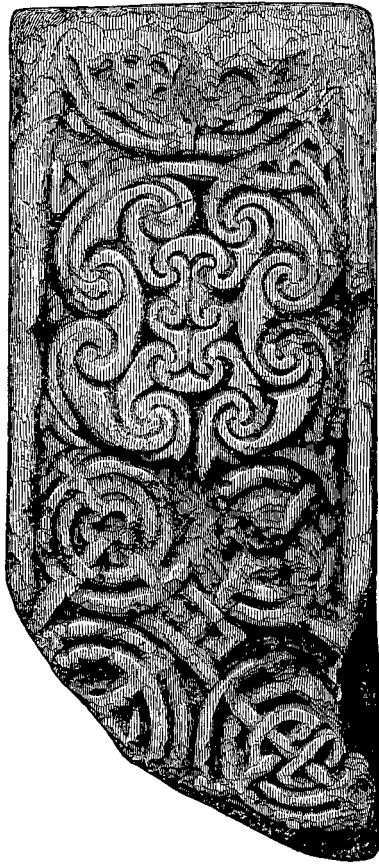


Fig. 1. Portion of Stone Cross found at Lethnott, Forfarshire. Reverse, ornamented with Celtic patterns (9 inches in length).

on either side of it, the escaping ends of the spirals being continued to form the groundwork of the interlaced ribbon patterns above and below

it, and thus rendering the whole of the decoration of the panel one continuous and symmetrical series of patterns of different designs. The upper circle of interlaced-work appears incomplete, and had it been complete, the stone would have been about 2 inches longer. The upper end now shows no sign of fracture, but both ends and sides have been evidently used for a considerable time as convenient surfaces for sharpening edge tools. But the opposite face of the stone, which bears the remains of an inscription, shows that originally the stone must have been longer, because the first line of the inscription evidently shows only about half the lengths of the letters. Unfortunately they are so mutilated that it is now impossible to determine them with certainty. The first has been a circular letter with a central cross-stroke, and there are apparently six endings of long letters which follow each other at regular distances and fill up the line—as it might be filled by the word ENNIL. The other two lines are well preserved, and quite distinctly legible:—

FILII
MEDICII

It is unfortunate that the line which is mutilated should be that containing the name of the person commemorated, but the formula is obviously the one so common on the early Christian monuments of Britain, in which the name of the person is given in the genitive case with the addition of the patronymic formula also in the genitive case. The meaning of the inscription may be thus taken to be—

[THE STONE] OF [THE CROSS]
[OF ENNIUS?]
THE SON OF
MEDICIUS

The names Ennius and Enniaun occur on inscribed monuments in Wales; but the reading here, it must be remembered, is purely conjectural. The Llangian stone in Wales has the inscription:—

MELI MEDICI FILI MARTINI JACIT,

but the name of Medicus otherwise is unknown. The peculiar form of the letters in the Lethnott inscription has considerable resemblance

to the style of the manuscripts known as the Gospels of MacDurnan, in the library of the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth, and the Gospels of MacRegol in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, both of the ninth



Fig. 2. Portion of Stone Cross found at Lethnott, Forfarshire.
Obverse, with Inscription (9 inches in length).

century. With the exception of this fragment and the St Vigeán's stone, no monument in Scotland ornamented with Celtic decoration

bears an inscription in any other character than Ogham. The St Vigean's stone is still unique, inasmuch as it has its inscription carved in the Celtic language and character. The Lethnott fragment is also unique, inasmuch as it has its inscription carved in the Latin language, but in Celtic forms of lettering used by the writers of the Gospels in the Celtic monasteries of the ninth century.

Professor J. O. Westwood, Oxford, the highest living authority on Celtic Palæography, who has seen the engravings of the Lethnott stone, gives his opinion that, judging from the interesting forms of the letters of the inscription, its date can scarcely be later than the commencement of the ninth century, and that both letters and ornament seem to indicate a strong connection with Iona and Lindisfarne acting on Brechin and its neighbourhood. Mr Romilly Allen, who has also seen the engraving, observes that the lettering resembles that on a fragment of a cross found at Carlisle (*Arch. Jour.*, xv. p. 85), and also that on a belt-clasp with Daniel in the Lion's Den on it (*Martigny's Dict.*, p. 258), and that the interlacing pattern is found at Monasterboice and Clonmacnois.]

Bronze Celt from Durness.—The accompanying bronze Celt was found by one of the labourers employed in making the road along the eastern shore of Loch Hope from Cashel-Dhu to Hope Lodge. Knowing little of the nature of the object he took it to his lodgings, where it lay for two or three weeks on the kitchen window sill. It was there found by Mr Donald M'Kay, Portnacon, who kindly lent it to me for exhibition, and who, I hope, will present it to the National Museum.

It is $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches in length and $1\frac{5}{8}$ in width at the cutting edge, which is slightly curved. It has a slight flange on each side. Immediately below the termination of the flanges the width is a little over half an inch, and widens again to $\frac{7}{8}$ inch near the upper end. The wings or flanges are not of equal size, and the larger is bent over so as to keep a better hold of the shaft. It weighs $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz., and is in a good state of preservation.