

## III.

## NOTES ON SAINT FILLAN'S PRIORY AND CHURCHYARD.

By T. S. ROBERTSON, F.S.A. Scot.

I found the ruins of S. Fillan's Priory at the foot of the hills on the north side of Strathfillan, half way between Tyndrum and Crianlarich, and saw parts of the original south and north walls of the church, four feet thick, built of hammer-dressed stones, with excellent lime mortar. The other walls, although more broken down and almost wholly overgrown with grass, were sufficiently well marked to allow me to make a rough plan of them, and I have attempted an imaginary restoration of which a reproduction is given in fig. 1, along with a view and the ground-plan as it exists; but the only part of it that could not have been otherwise than as shown is the rectangular church. The building on the east might have been the prior's house, and the apsidal end a round tower. It was this round part that suggested to me the restoration.

The great thickness of the walls pointed to an early building; but no hewn stones, by which the date might be approximately determined, remain. Perhaps there never were any, for a large stone lying on the floor of the church—that was, I suppose, a baptismal font—(fig. 2) is only hammer-dressed, like the rubble of the walls. There is a small spring of water called the Priest's Well, about five minutes' walk uphill, by the side of the burn that flows past the east side of the ruins to join the river Fillan; and I was told that a bell which had belonged to the priory was still to be seen in the hotel at Tyndrum; but the old churchyard, which is north of the ruins, interested me more than anything else; it contains a great many flat-lying gravestones, all plain excepting two that have three crosses on them (fig. 3). It occurred to me that its singular position in relation to the church might be of Celtic origin, as the graveyards connected with the Roman Catholic Gothic churches in Britain are always south and west, or south and east, of the churches, never north of them; and this custom was so

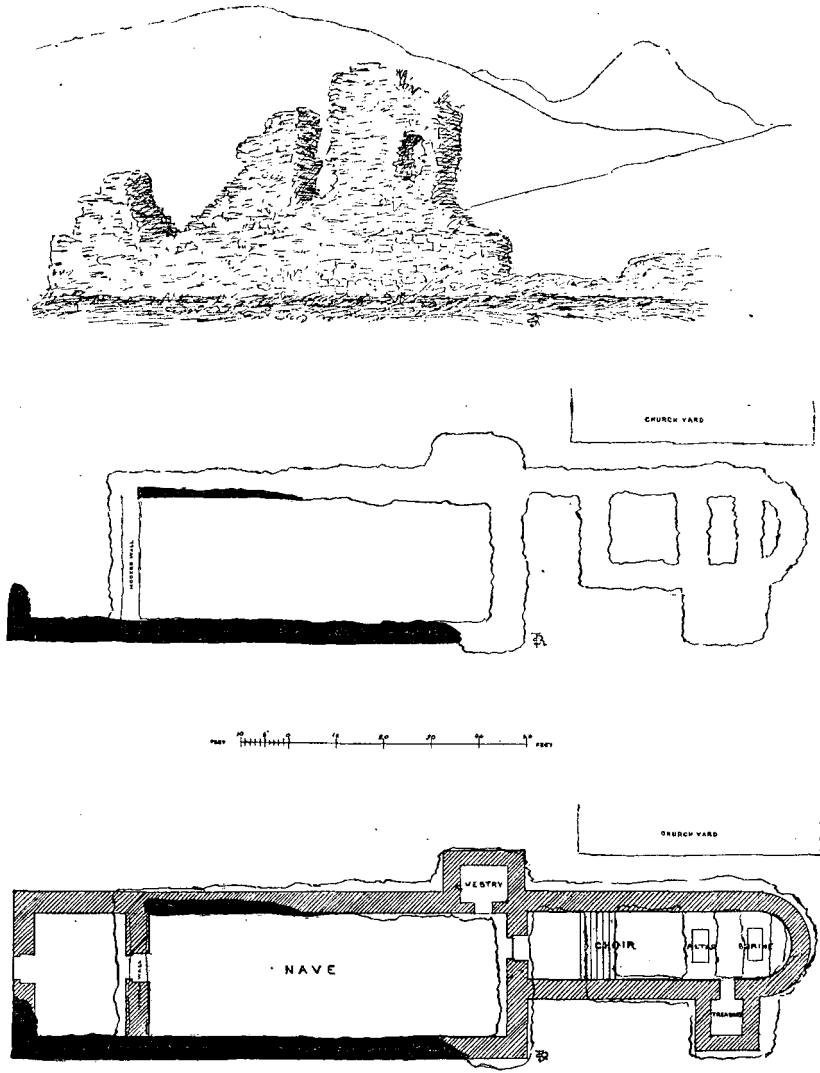


Fig. 1. View and ground-plan of the ruins of St Fillan's Priory, Glendochart.

strongly impressed on the minds of the people that, within my recollection, they believed that ground north of a church belonged to the evil one for burial purposes, and was suited only to receive the bodies of suicides, who were always buried there. At Crossthwaite, near Keswick, the grave of Robert Southey the poet was selected by himself—with the view of putting an end to this superstitious feeling—on the north

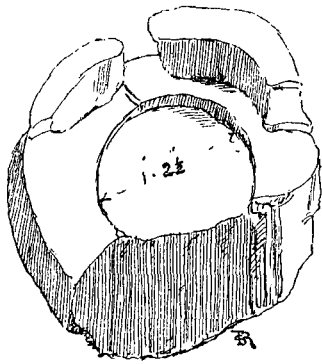


Fig. 2. Font in St Fillan's Priory, Glendochart.



Fig. 3. Recumbent grave-slab, Glendochart.

side of the church. I have been told that there are several burial grounds in Ireland north of the churches. If this was a Celtic custom, the position of S. Fillan's churchyard would go far to prove that the ruins of the priory occupy the site of the original church or cell of the saint.

[Tradition assigns the site of St Fillan's original monastic church to the neighbourhood of St Fillan's pool, a little further up the river. There was a chapel of St Fillan in Glendochart in King Robert Bruce's time, to which he gave the five pound land of Auchtertyre as a thankoffering (as Dr Stuart surmises) for his preservation in the fight

with the men of the Lord of Lorn at Dalry, in the immediate neighbourhood, and in 1318 he gave the patronage of the church of Killin (also dedicated to St Fillan) to the abbot and convent of Inchaffray, on condition that they should supply a canon for the performance of divine service in the church of Strathfillan. Subsequently, but in the same year, it was constituted a Priory, subject to Inchaffray. The deed of constitution of the Bishop and Chapter of Dunkeld is printed in the appendix to a paper by Dr John Stuart, entitled "Historical Notices of St Fillan's Crosier," in the *Proceedings*, vol. xii. p. 178, and the few facts known about the chapel and priory of St Fillan are given on pp. 145-150. See also Dr Anderson's "Notice of the Quigrich or Crosier, and other Relics of St Fillan, in possession of their Hereditary Keepers or Dewars in Glendochart in 1549-50," *Proceedings*, vol. xxiii. p. 110.]