

II.

NOTICE OF A CELTIC CROSS-SLAB RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT  
KINNEFF, KINCARDINESHIRE. BY F. C. EELES.

Kinneff Church, famous for the concealment of the Regalia in the 17th century, is one of the oldest ecclesiastical foundations on the east coast of Scotland. Its history is very obscure, and little is known about it before the 17th century. Regarding the dedication more than one opinion has been expressed. St Canice, the patron of Kilkenny, has been suggested, but St Adamnan is more probable; and for the following reasons. Till recent times St Arnty's or St Arnold's Kill existed near the church, and, according to Bishop Forbes,<sup>1</sup> Arnty is one of the many corruptions of Adamnan. This is very likely, as St Adamnan is commemorated in several places in the north-east of Scotland, notably at Forvie, on the east coast of Aberdeenshire, and near it, at a chapel in the parish of Slains. There is also a St Arnty's Well, which prevents the supposition that 'Saint Arnty' = 'Saint Tarnty' = The Holy Trinity. Thus it seems certain that we have here a Celtic foundation.

A short time ago the fragment of a cross, which is now described, was found lying in the churchyard among a heap of stones that are believed to have been taken from the north wall of the church when a transept was added in 1876. This wall was probably mediæval; because, although the church was almost rebuilt in 1734, it has lately been discovered that not only were the old foundations used, but that portions of the walls were incorporated in the new building.

The fragment in question (fig. 1) is part of a slab of Lower Old Red Sandstone from the immediate neighbourhood, and is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch in thickness. It is but a fragment, and the reverse of the slab has split off. It has been exposed for some time, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 264.

edges have become rounded through the action of the weather. On the face of the fragment is part of a cross, and this shows that we have part of one of the cross-bearing slabs of the N.E. of Scotland, and an example of the later and richer class of what are commonly known as

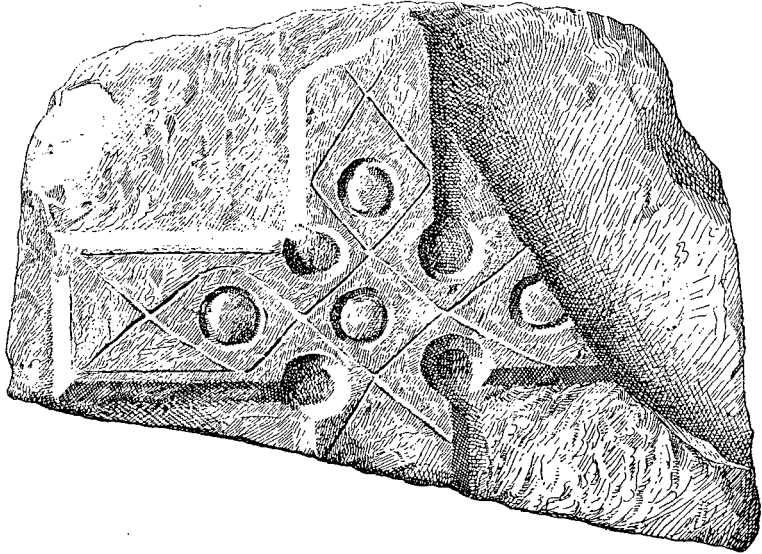


Fig. 1. Portion of Cross-Slab found at Kinnell. ( $\frac{1}{3}$ .)

the Sculptured Stones. The remarkably diminutive size of the cross gives it an unusual amount of importance. As it has been suggested locally that it is a mere mediæval survival, it may be well to make a few remarks *in support of its early origin.*

A consideration of the rougher kind of mediæval grave-stone in the district will show that this cross is not a mere mediæval survival of a Celtic design.

It can be shown that the Celtic form of cross, with embossed and interlaced decorations, did not survive later than the end of the 12th century, nor was it subsequently reproduced or imitated.

Now, if mediæval survivals of early Celtic forms and ornaments were to be found anywhere, it would assuredly be among Celtic people in the West Highlands rather than among the population of the east coast. There has been far less wanton destruction in the west, and plenty of mediæval stones are left, so there is no doubt but that we know what was done in mediæval times. But the character of these western mediæval stones is in no case purely Celtic, but a Celtic-mediæval development of Romanesque work, quite unlike the stone in question.

On the east coast there is not even this mixed Celtic-Romanesque work, and there is a complete break between true Celtic work and true Romanesque and Mediæval work. It may be said that survivals are common—survivals such as a 16th century doorway at Auchindoir of 13th century design. But these are late mediæval survivals of early mediæval forms, and not mediæval survivals of pre-mediæval forms.

Again, take the mediæval grave-stones that we find in the east of Scotland. Disregarding the more usual types of mediæval monument, such as effigies, and slabs with figures incised and in low relief, we find a few 13th century cross-bearing stones, such as those at St Nicholas, Aberdeen, Kildrummy, and Towie ; all these are of most ordinary Gothic character, such as would be met with in the south and east of England. They have nothing Celtic about them. Occasionally we find survivals of a kind—of the same kind as the Auchindoir doorway. At Fintray, for example, are several stones of Pre-Reformation date ; some are carved recumbent slabs, dated examples of 16th century work. Others are ruder and erect ; they are probably of the 13th or 14th centuries. Now, the supposition that the Kinneff cross is a 13th or 14th century survival would drive one to suppose that the rougher stones at Fintray, which are of a very different character, are much later, that is, very near in date to the late slabs which are dated, and it would be absurd to suppose that artistic development was so rapid at a place like Fintray as to allow of these widely different stones all being so near in date.

We thus see that the stone is of the later period of true Celtic work and indisputably genuine. A few words may be added as to its exact

place in that period, and its relation to the other crosses that most nearly resemble it.

Close to Mortlach churchyard, in Banffshire, is an upright slab bearing a small cross in relief, very like the one in question, and little more than an inch larger each way. Above it are two of the fish-like symbols, and below is an incised figure of a beast. On the reverse is another beast, with a serpent, an animal's head, and an equestrian figure, all in relief. This is a very early stone; for here, besides the cross, are the mysterious symbols and an incised figure. Incised work is a characteristic of the earlier or non-cross-bearing slabs of this district. This similarity to the Mortlach cross would point to an early date for the Kinneff cross.

There are, however, one or two points in the Kinneff cross which suggest a late date—late, that is, in the second Celtic period.

These are (1) the absence of the mysterious symbols; (2) the presence of the five bosses.

Now it is true that there are some small crosses of a late date, but they are not of good Celtic form. The small crosses of good Celtic form are among the earlier examples of this period. Such is the cross which the Kinneff cross most nearly resembles, viz., that on St Woloc's stone in Coldstone churchyard (v. *Proceedings*, New Series, x. p. 612). This Coldstone cross is supposed, with great probability, to be even earlier than the slab crosses, so that we cannot suppose the Kinneff cross to be very late.

The good Celtic shape and ornament, coupled with the small size and the similarity to the early crosses of Mortlach and Coldstone, show that what we are dealing with cannot be later than the middle of the best period; these, moreover, are considerations which far outweigh the points which, taken by themselves, might tell in favour of a later date. Of these, regarding the absence of symbols, we cannot definitely say that they are absent, as we have so little of the slab. If we had only a similar scrap of, say, the Dyce cross, we should be in the same position, and the lower part of the slab at Dyce has several symbols. As regards the bosses, it must be admitted that they are not of very common occur-

rence in the east of Scotland; still they occur on stones of the best period, and side by side with the symbols, and it is on crosses of the earlier type that they are most common in the west.

It may be assumed, then, that this Kinneff example, apart from the noteworthiness of its small size, is one of the early embossed crosses: and another important point is that it is the only known example of the diminutive crosses on which the bosses are present.

By the courtesy of the authorities at Kinneff, the cross will now find a safe resting-place in the National Museum at Edinburgh.

When the cross was found, the writer at once exhibited and described it to the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society, by the advice of whose Council measures were taken to preserve the fragment, and through whose kindness the present description is given to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.