

II.

GLENCORSE OLD CHURCH AND CHURCHYARD. BY ALAN REID,
F.E.I.S., F.S.A. SCOT. (WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES MOFFAT.)

Gray might well have found the subject of his "Elegy" in that quaint "God's Acre," lying under the shelter of "Pentland's towering tap." It has all the glamour of age and the grace of beauty; and over these is cast, and through them runs the spell of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Writing from Vallima in May 1893, he said to his friend Mr S. R. Crockett, "I shall never take that walk by the Fishers' Tryst and Glencorse. . . . Here I am until I die, and here will I be buried. . . . Do you know where the road crosses the burn under Glencorse Church? Go there and say a prayer for me: *moriturus salutat*. See that it's a sunny day . . . and stand on the right-hand bank, just where the road goes down into the water, and shut your eyes, and if I don't appear to you—well, it can't be helped, and will be extremely funny."

Glencorse proper lies midway on the cross-road leading from near the
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Manse at Crosshouse to the Fishers' Tryst at Milton Bridge. The old church, solitary but not lonely, crowns the summit of a water-worn knoll, and close by is Glencorse House, famous as the residence of Lord President Inglis. Singularly shy and retiring for all its elevation and modern wooden spire, the fabric is passed by many, even in the search for it. Great trees conceal it from the casual view, but the steep road by the end of Glencorse lodge leads sheer to the unlocked wicket at the churchyard entrance. Symbolism seems almost to have reached a climax in the nomenclature and disposition of these rural subjects. Accidentally, doubtless, but none the less really, their plan is singular and very striking. The churchyard conforms almost strictly to the orthodox shape of a *coffin*, with the church, a perfect *cross*, attached like a name-plate to the repository of the dead !

The meagre description of the fabric given in the standard work on such architecture scarcely prepares one for so many points of interest and beauty as are easily apparent to every visitor. "It is a long, narrow structure, with a south transept containing the Woodhouselee loft," is nearly all vouchsafed us by authority ; but as a matter of fact there are two transepts, equal in size and nearly similar in style, and these give the building the cruciform appearance so evident in the plan.

The outside stairs giving access to the Lairds' lofts are remarkable enough for detailed description, so graceful are they in structure, proportions, and adornments among their compeers. Then the armorial bearings on each side of both stair doors are quite noteworthy, as is the tower—even with its modern though elegant wooden spire—the vault under the Glencorse aisle, the string-courses and the mouldings generally, and many other details peeping here and there from their dark mantling of ivy.

In connection with fig. 2, which shows the stair and entrance to the Glencorse transept, and on the left the private path leading to the mansion-house, it will be interesting to quote from another of Stevenson's famous letters. In 1875 he wrote from Swanston to Mrs Sitwell, and confessed—"I've been to church, and am not depressed—a great

step. I was at that beautiful church my *petit poème e prose* was about. . . . Old Mr Torrence preached—over eighty, and a relic of times forgotten, with his black thread gloves and mild old foolish face. One of the nicest parts of it was to see John Inglis, the greatest man in

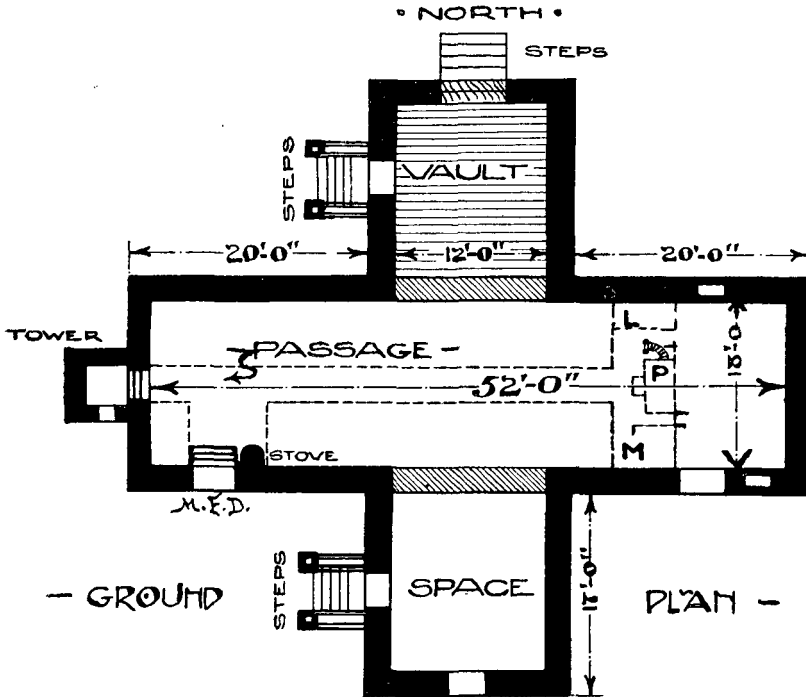


Fig. 1. Plan of Glencorse Old Church.

Scotland, our Justice-General, and the only born lawyer I ever heard, listening to the piping old body, as though it had been a revelation, grave and respectful."

In the plan, and on the authority of the Rev. W. B. Strong,¹ minister

¹ Mr Strong has also informed me that the floor level was "two or three steps" lower than the ground outside. These steps are indicated on the plan at M.E.D. (main entrance door).

of the parish, the position of the pulpit and pews in the later arrangements of the old building is indicated. A gallery filled the west end, access to which was by a short stair leading from the tower. The pulpit was placed against a partition wall which ran to the roof, the



Fig. 2. Stair and Entrance to Transept.

space behind forming a lobby of entrance, and holding the stair which led to the vestry behind the pulpit. The precentor had his 'leteran,' or desk, in front of the pulpit; the Loganbank sitters were accommodated on cross-seats placed on the right of the minister, and the Manse hearers sat similarly on his left.

Chief among the architectural features that remain is the beautiful

traciated window of the south transept or loft. Of this charming detail the authority already quoted remarks—"The south end of this transept is the only part having any architectural value. The traciated wheel-window is remarkable, and very characteristic of the period."

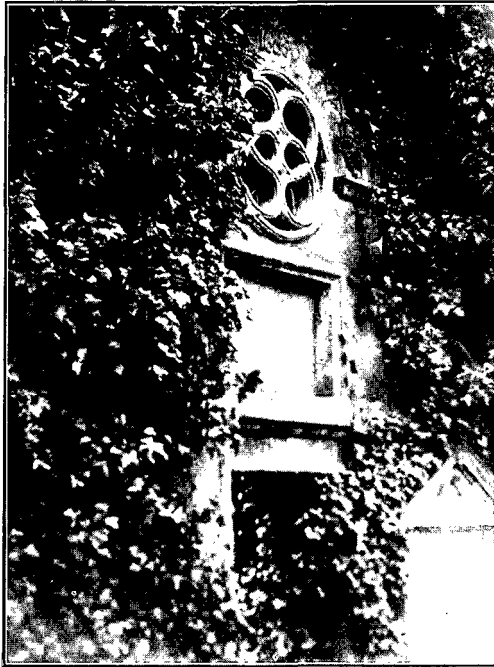


Fig. 3. Traciated Window in South Transept.

The photograph copied in fig. 3 shows a window which is not a wheel-window, nor is it circular in shape. It is fairly oval, and has its traceries disposed, not as the radiations of a wheel, but in the semblance of two hearts intertwined. Outside and inside the mouldings are identical, the workmanship being good and comparatively elegant. A finely moulded panel occupies the space between the doorway and the traciated

light, but the tablet has been removed. The space under this loft was used simply as a tool-house by the sexton, the small 'resurrection house' at the gate being used as a shelter by the elders who 'watched the plate,' placed on a stool outside. Our remarks on the architecture of Glencorse Old Church may fitly close with a further quotation from Stevenson's letter to Mrs Sitwell. He says:—"It is a little cruciform place, with heavy cornices and stringcourse to match, and a steep slate roof. The small kirkyard is full of old gravestones. One of a Frenchman from Dunkerque—I suppose he died prisoner in the military prison hard by¹—and one, the most pathetic memorial I ever saw, a poor school-slate, in a wooden frame, with the inscription cut into it evidently by the father's own hand."

The history of the parish and church is simple in the extreme. In 1588 the charge was held with Penicuick, and from the next year onwards by Lasswade, with which it was conjoined by Act of Parliament before the year 1612. To quote from Dr Hew Scott's "Fasti," "It was proposed to unite the parish to Penicuick, 10th January 1612. In 1615 various communings were held with the Presbytery that a minister might be procured for itself, which probably led to the appointment of a colleague for Lasswade in 1616, who probably had charge of Glencorse, and led to its being stated that the erection of the parish took place in 1616, though it is certain no minister was appointed till 1636."

The date over the main entrance door is 1636. Over the traceried window in the Woodhouselee loft appears the date 1669, the date of a rebuilding after fire, at which time the transepts seem to have been added to the original structure. Again, in 1811, a thorough renovation was made, the tower, crowned with a neat belfry roof, having at that time been added. During these repairs the ancient baptismal font was discovered among the débris of the early burning. This relic of the past has been transferred to the fine new church erected in 1884-5, from the designs of Dr Rowand Anderson. This font is of one block of stone, cubical in

¹ This old military prison was turned into paper-mills by the Messrs Cowan.

form, 19 inches square, with a circular hollowed basin 14 inches wide. It is now mounted on a modern pillared base of some elegance, and is in frequent use. Its only ornamentation is a roll bede worked round the top edge and angles. From the leaded socketings in the top it is evident that the font had originally been covered.

The arms sculptured on the south transept are those of Sir William Purves, Bart. of Woodhouselee, Advocate. In 1669 the Scottish Parliament ratified a royal grant in favour of this gentleman, along with the patronage of the Kirk of Glencorse. (In 1676 the same lands, barony, and patronage were ratified to James Deans, writer in Edinburgh.) At a Presbyterial visitation at Glencorse in September 1673, as is shown by Dalkeith Presbytery records, "the minister did show th^t ther was two Communion cups gifted by Sir Wm. Purves, a table cloath for the Communion table, a laver, and a baisin of tin for baptism."

We come now to examine the Tombstone Memorials, and naturally turn, not to the older monuments, but to those that made their mute appeal to Stevenson, and are sought out by many visitors largely for his sake. The "Dunkerque" stone (fig. 4) stands near the N.E. corner of the church. It is a plain, round-topped slab, bearing on its obverse side a Latin cross, and on its front the simple inscription—

ICI REPOSE CHARLES
COTTIER DE DUNKERQUE
MORT LE 8 JANVIER 1807

"The most pathetic memorial I ever saw" (fig. 5) has its inscription deeply incised on the slate, in a free script hand, as follows:—"Sacred to the memory of Catherine Ogg, the beloved child of James Henderson, 42nd Highlanders, who died at Greenlaw on the 25th October 1869, aged seven months." This simple 'classic' is to be found in front of the Somerville-Dalmore Tomb, a couple of paces northwards of Sir John Cowan's grave, and on the left as the visitor enters the ground.

The older tombstones are remarkably well-preserved, and present a variety of emblems, symbols, and inscriptions, exceedingly interesting, and in some respects original or unique. For example, a monument of

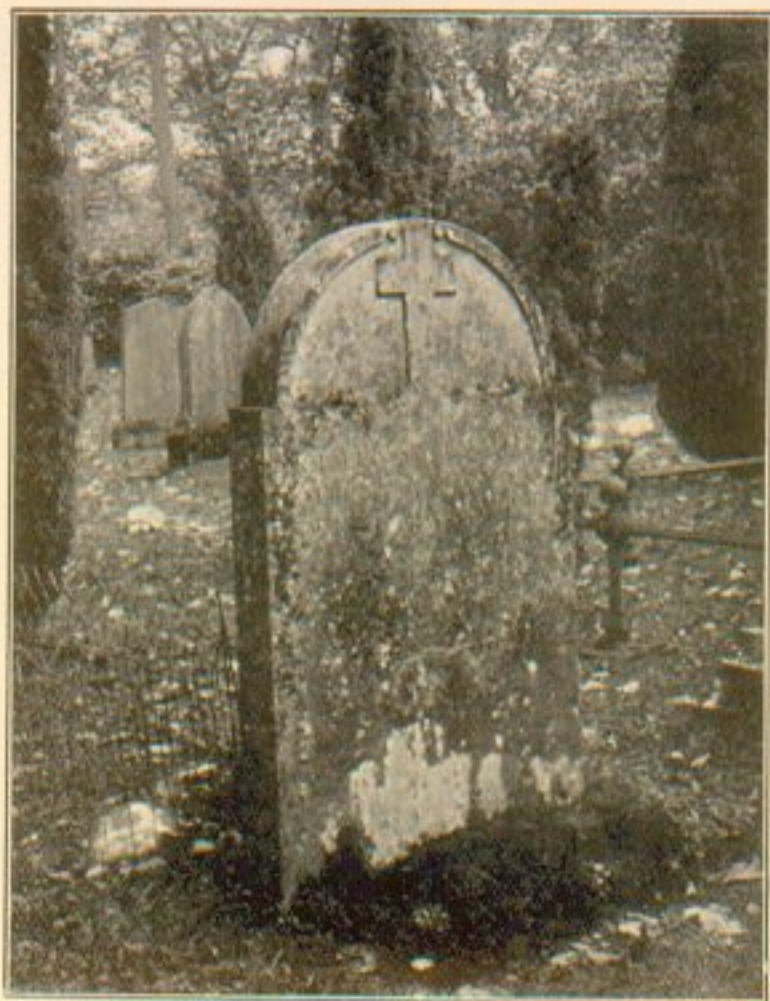


Fig. 4. The "Dunkerque" Stone.



Fig. 5. The "Pathetic Memorial."

1713 (fig. 6), standing against the Woodhouselee stair, has its inscription carved in *curved* lines, with graceful draperies, hanging as if but temporarily removed to show the legend beneath:—

HERE LYES
 JAMES CRAIGE
 DYED NOVE 18
 1713 AGET 48
 WAS TENNENT
 IN THE HOUS OF
 MURE



Fig. 6. The Draperied Stone.

This monument may fairly be termed beautiful; the cherub heads under a floriated pediment are well-proportioned, correct in drawing, and pleasant in expression. Fluted pilasters support the pediment, and a winged cherub head peeps from under the centre of the base moulding. A couple of spades support the pillars, emblematic of the calling of the erstwhile tenant of the House of Muir farm.

Again, there are two stones, very evidently cut by the same hand, and designed by the same mind, which show a peculiarity almost ludicrous. Both of these monuments have sunk panels, as shown in the next photograph, and both exhibit the defect of workmanship which gives them their distinctive character. In the upper front panels, and in the



Fig. 7. The "Squint" Tombstone.

length of only 18 inches, the mason has gone a full inch astray with his parallels, the effect being, as has been said, ludicrous. More, the squint does not appear in the corresponding panels on the obverse sides of the stones, and otherwise these massive 9-inch-thick tablets are carefully worked and cleanly moulded. The example first shown (fig. 7) bears in the squint panel the legend FUGIT HORA, and is inscribed:—

HERE LYES HELEN
IOHNSTOWN SPOVSE
TO IAMES MEGGAT
WHO DEPARTED THIS
LIFE 10 MAY 1622 HER
AGE WAS 32 YEARS.



Fig. 8. A Cherub Head.

The obverse side has initials only, is dated 1694, and bears as emblems a skull, crossbones, and sandglass of inferior design. This very old stone measures above ground 3 feet 6 inches by 3 feet 9 inches.

Close to the entrance-gate is a small stone bearing on the front the

date 1769 with the usual inscription, and on the back (fig. 8) a very striking and quaint example of the winged cherub head. This stone has been mutilated, and a broken stay-band adds to its dilapidated appearance. There is, however, a touch of true character and rude appropriateness in its style and proportions.

A little to the right, an elegantly carved mural tablet, of 1743, invites comparison with the last stone, which is of later date. Here we

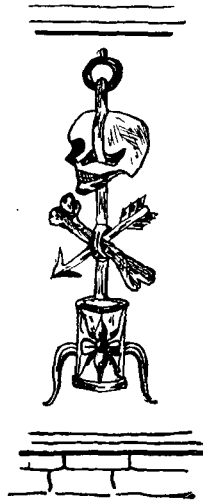


Fig. 9. An Emblematic Centre-piece.

find the legend *MEMENTO MORI*, and the emblems of Death arrayed and arranged in a manner somewhat remarkable. They appear as if fastened together by a ribbon suspended from a ring (fig 9), the centre of a pretty large panel being used to display the finely relieved emblems. The inscription appears to right and left of the sculpture, but no interest attaches to the facts stated in the lettering.

The earliest date legible is 1618. It occurs on a flat, lichen-covered slab, which lies flush with the grass near the S.E. door of the church.

As this stone is very old, and in some respects typical, it may be well to show the arrangement of the lettering of its ancient inscription:—

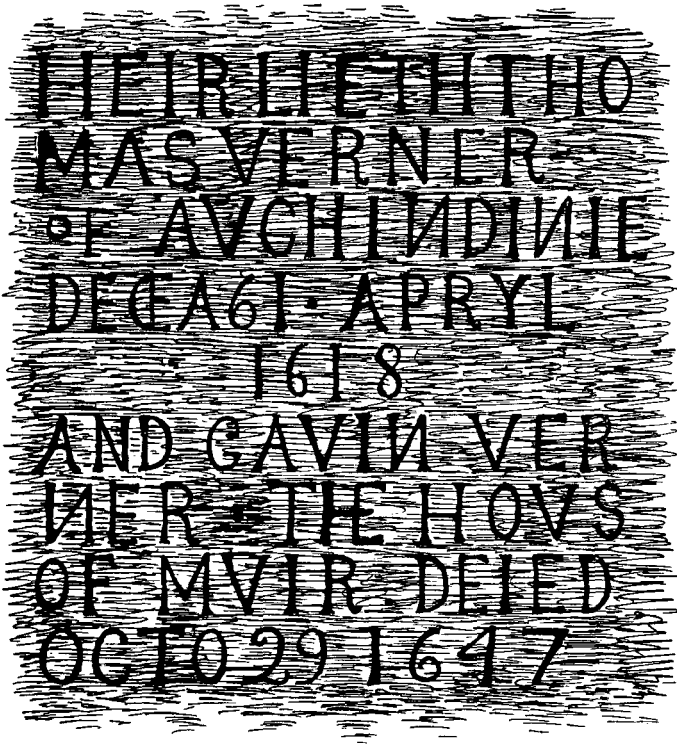


Fig. 10. The Earliest Tombstone Inscription.

Beside the low door of the south transept there is a table stone, the only example in the churchyard, and a makeshift at the best. Examination shows that this stone has at one time been erect, and that its supports—one across each end—are also stones that at some other period have figured independently. The large table slab is

dated 1742, and the westmost support bears the usual mortuary symbols. Among a number of interesting fragments is a portion of a memorial to Alexander Ferguson, Schoolmaster, showing a curious cherub head; and a very finely chiselled monument of 1704, which, though shorn of its pediment, arrests attention by its style and execution. The front is flanked by half-round pillars with Gothic capitals and correct bases, these being repeated on the back by flat panelled pilasters of a distinctly classic type. This carving on both sides of these old stones is noteworthy, as is also the fact that several of them have done duty in commemorating different families.

The classic designs shown in the next two photographs are of much merit, the more so when their age is considered. Both are mural, and the first dates from 1677. The emblematic pediment (fig. 11) is of a character quite different from the substructure, but the divergence is not unpleasant. The winged sandglass and fine cherub head, the skull over the single bone, with the head of Deity crowning the whole, make this a notable example of the class to which it belongs.

Even more elaborate in detail is the second of these classic examples (fig. 12), a stone built against the east gable of the church, and bearing the date 1727 on the keystone of the moulding surrounding the inscribed panel. Here the pediment is filled by a dignified angel head, the base exhibiting as emblems crossed spades, cross-bones, skull, sandglass, and the legend REMEMBER DEATH. In inscribing the stone, the mason has run three of the letters of a word right over the three members of the enclosing moulding, another remarkable feature of his work being the free spelling of the word Abernethy.

In marked contrast with these beautiful sculptures is the monument to Robert Brown, which is dated 1745. On the opposite side to that shown in fig. 13 a couple of flaming torches do duty as pilasters and supporters of the moulding round the pediment. On the top edge of

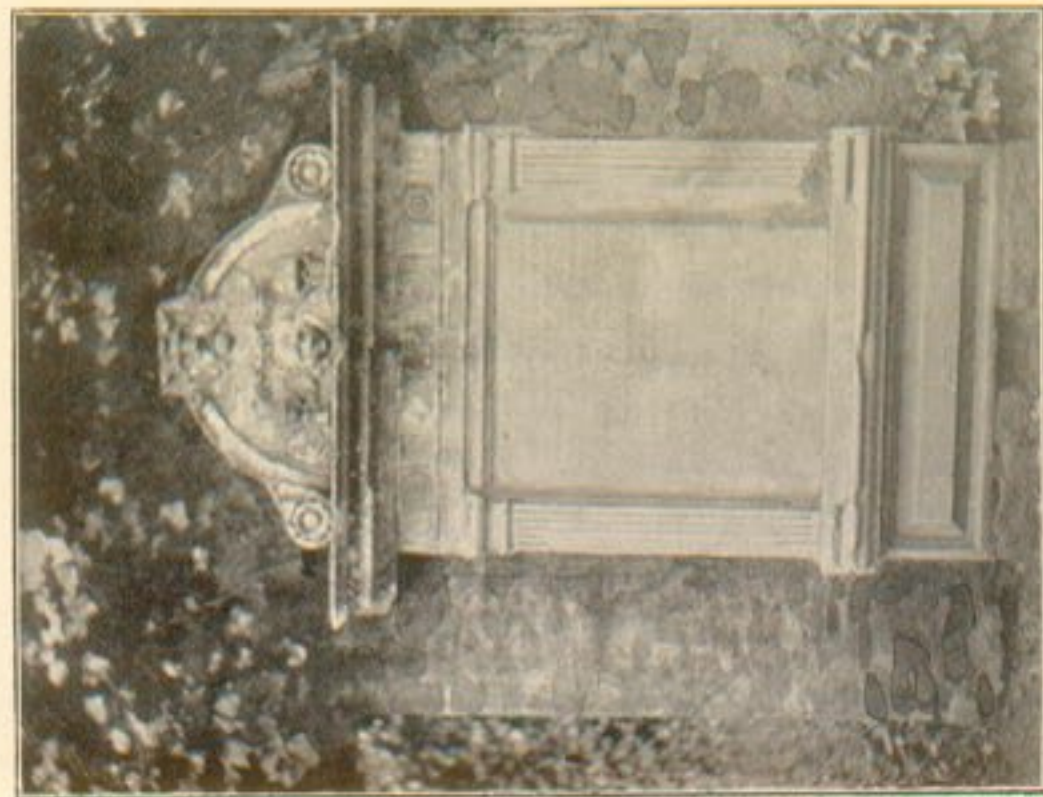


Fig. 11. Emblematic Pediment, of 1677.

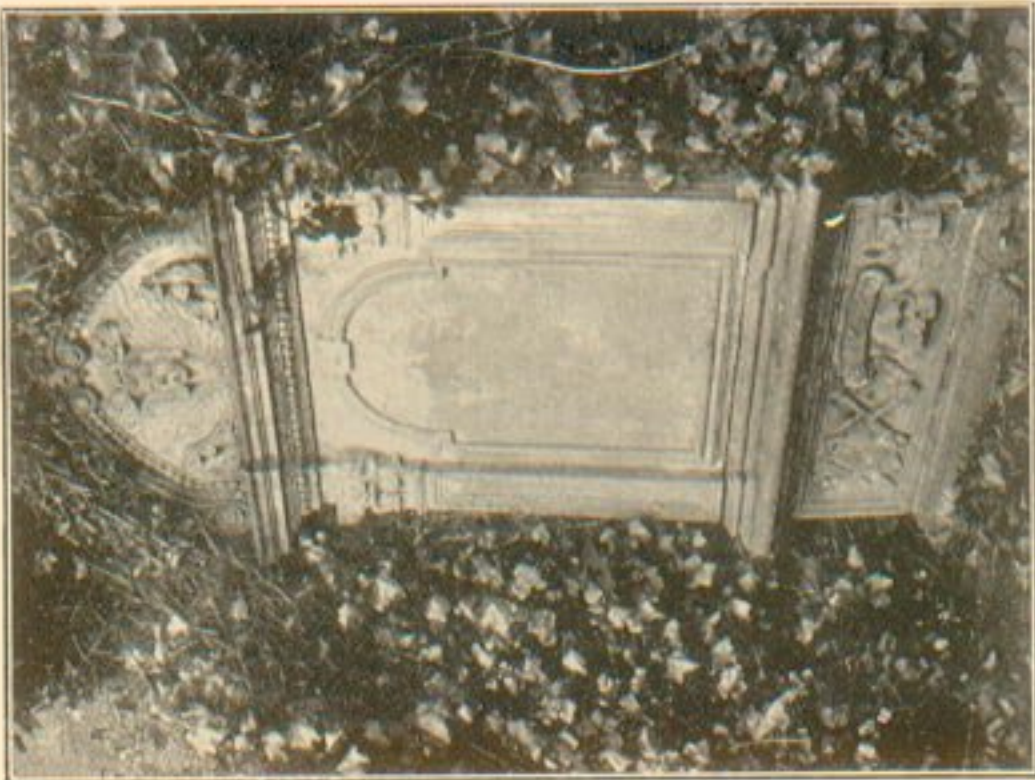


Fig. 12. The "Abernethy" Stone.

the slab *MEMENTO MORE* is incised, and on the east side, here shown, a scroll bears the same legend. The emblems are a scythe, a dart, a skull and crossbones, crudely carved, and cruelly suggestive.



Fig. 13. Art of 1745.

The inscribed front of the next stone, which dates from 1694, shows the remarkable squint before noticed. The obverse, here shown in fig. 14, does not run askew ; and the photograph from the set, kindly made for this paper by Mr James Moffat, presents the design admirably. The pediment is filled with a winged cherub head, the

feathering being very delicately rendered, but the emblems of mortality are rather repulsive.

As is to be expected in a rural parish like Glencorse, the churchyard memorials to Farmers, Millers, and Gardeners are in the majority.



Fig. 14. Art of 1694.

The latter class are represented emblematically by several well-carved Reels, a monument of 1753 (fig. 15) showing the best of these devices. The occurrence of the single bone may also be noted.

The memorial of a Penicuik Miller (fig. 16) bears a grotesque head, the mill stones with the mill-rynd, and a single bone under the date 1754.

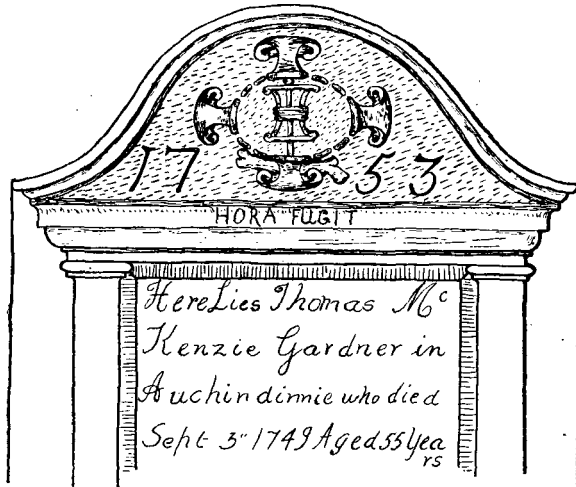


Fig. 15. A Gardener's Tombstone.



Fig. 16. A Miller's Memorial.

The inscriptional gem of the churchyard is found on a roughly pointed slab of no great age, which stands near the east end of the enclosure. Its quaint rhymes have a great attraction for many who visit this charming retreat, and we may leave it, as many do, with their unconscious humour enlivening somewhat our more serious reflections :—

“ Death is not Care, it is not pain,
But it is rest and peace ;
Death makes all our Terrors vain,
And bids our Torments cease.

“ This stone is for to mark the ground
Where Mary Simpson lies ;
Lawful wife to John M’Kean,
Till death did close her eyes.

“ Departed life at Marfield Lodge,
The sixteenth of July,
Eighteen hundred and forty-two,
Where she did calmly die.”