

III.

NOTES ON THE OLD CROSSKIRK AT QUENDALE IN DUNROSSNESS, SHETLAND, AND ITS MONUMENTAL STONES. BY REV. W. FOTHERINGHAM, DUNROSSNESS.

It has been thought desirable to put on record the facts concerning the few remaining tombstones in the graveyard of the old Crosskirk in Dunrossness.

These weather-beaten memorials of other times are fast crumbling to decay, and in a short time will be altogether illegible, and the little light they bring from olden days irrevocably lost.

At the suggestion and expense of John Bruce, Esq., of Sumburgh, these stones have been photographed and their inscriptions, where possible made out and translated.

As is well known, the Crosskirk was the church of the parish of Dunrossness up till the year 1790, when the present parish church was built. The building was evidently in a state of advanced decay before it was vacated, and the graveyard, owing to the drifting sand, in a condition that made it imperative to seek another and better site for both. Mr Low, in his *Tour through Orkney and Shetland, 1774*, describes "the church with the foundations almost blown away, the corpses entirely bare and in many instances bleached white." Probably some violent action of the sea had broken up the foreshore, and the wind, getting underneath the turf, had blown out the sand and gradually reduced what probably was firm turf to a waste of loose sand, moving with every wind. At the present time the old site of the church and graveyard is again firm, close turf, and to a great extent the trouble of drifting sand has ceased to be.

It is also worthy of note that the present position of the site is not quite the same, as regards nearness to the sea, as when it was described by Sir Robert Sibbald and Mr Low. The former describes the church

“ as surrounded with banks of sand, two or three paces from the water ” ; and the latter says it “ is near the sea. ” The site is now about five minutes’ walk from the water. This would seem to say that at this point the sea was receding ; and yet a few miles along the same shore, to the south-east, there is positive proof that the sea has encroached upon the shore, in the fact that quite one-half of a large prehistoric ruin at Sumburgh has been swept away by the sea, as it has advanced over the old-time sea-beach.

The stones in the graveyard of the Crosskirk are thus described by Sir Robert Sibbald : “ To the south wall of this church, are affixed two monuments, one very large, and very curiously cut, at the expences of Hector Bruce of Mowaness ; another (not so large nor so fine) belonging to Laurence Sinclair of Quendale ; there are other two, within the church, standing upon Pillars, one pertaining to Robert Bruce of Somburgh, another to Quendale ; besides these are no graved stone inscriptions or monuments within Dunrossness. ”

The “ large ” monument here spoken of is now—with the exception of a small modern stone—the only one standing erect. It well merits the description “ large, ” for the portion of it still remaining measures about eight feet high by four feet wide, and it is evident that this is only the central portion of the monument, as there are indications that it had both a cap and a base or plinth. These portions, unfortunately, are not now to be found.

On the top of this central portion, as shown in the accompanying illustration (fig. 1), are beautifully cut the arms of Bruce of Mouness and Sinclair of Quendale, surrounded by elaborate ornamentation.

The late Major Bruce Armstrong says of this : “ The coat-of-arms on the big Bruce stone bears on the left shield the arms of Bruce of Mouness quartering Gray, the right shield Sinclair quartering the coat with three hearts. This tomb is peculiar in a heraldic sense, the wife’s arms being in a separate shield with helmet and crest. The Bruce crest is totally different from that I have seen borne by the Mouness family ; apparently it is a demi-lion rampant holding in its paws something like a sceptre,

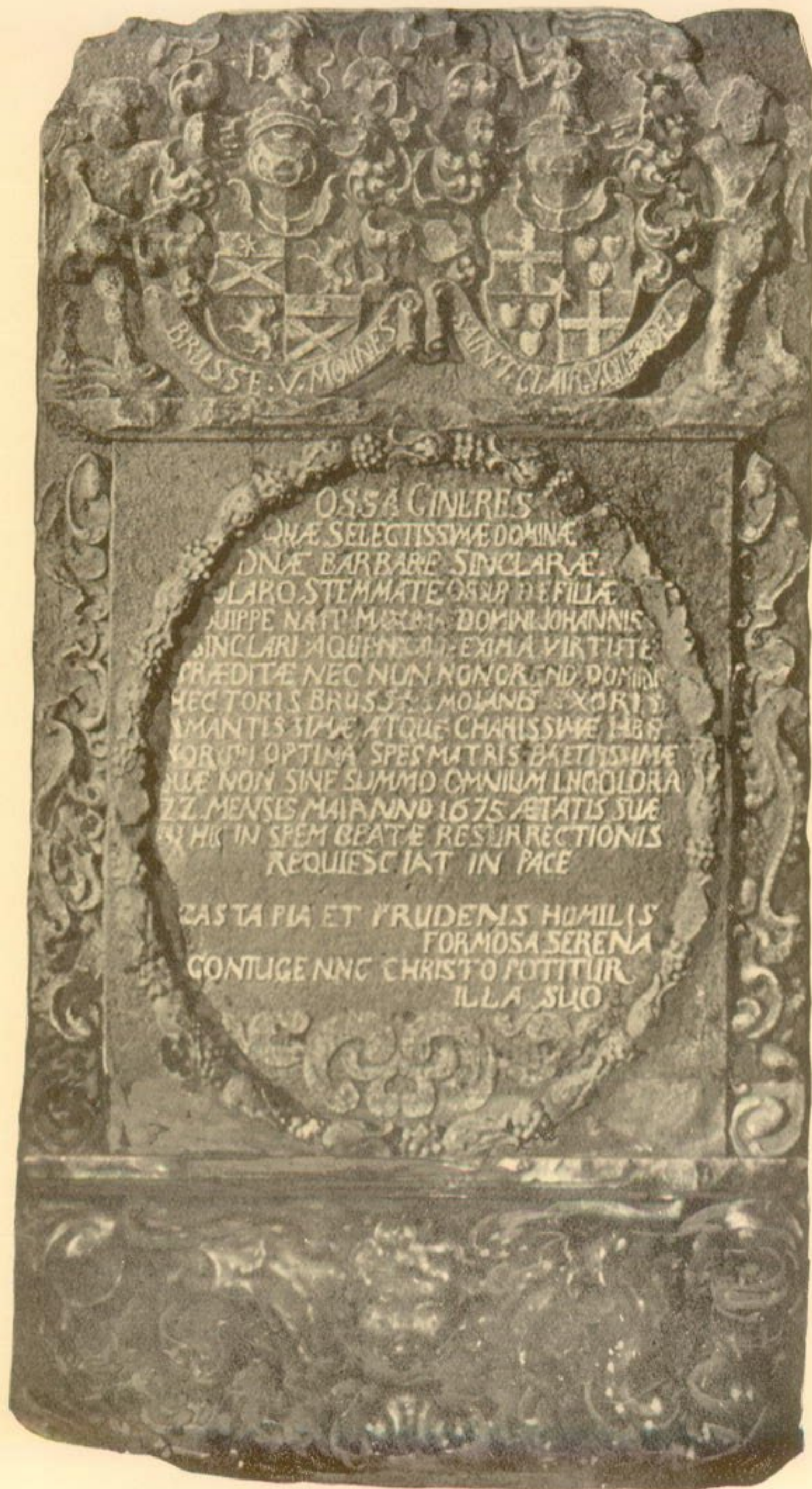


Fig. 1. Mural Monument of Barbara Sinclair, wife of Hector Bruce of Mouness, at Crosskirk, Dunrossness.

whereas in all armorial bearings I have seen of the Mouness family the crest has been a naked cubit arm and hand holding a heart."

The left shield has under it BRUSSE ·V· MOUNES, and the right SAINT·CLAIR ·V· QUENDEL.

Within a panel, underneath the arms, is a Latin inscription, cut in relief, now almost illegible, and only made visible to the quick eye of the camera by a long and tedious process of feeling over the letters with chalky fingers, like a blind man reading raised type. Some of the words are entirely gone, but sufficient remain to make its message complete.

The following is a copy of the Latin inscription, in lines, as it appears on the stone :

OSSA CINERES
 QUÆ SELECTISSIMÆ DOMINÆ
 DNÆ BARBARÆ SINCLARÆ
 CLARO STEMMATE FILLÆ
 QUIPPE NATÆ MAXIMI DOMINI JOHANNIS
 SINCLARI DE QUENDALE EXIMIA VIRTUTE
 PRÆDITÆ NECNON HONORANDI DOMINI
 HECTORIS BRUSSI DE MOUNES UXORIS
 AMANTISSIMÆ ATQUE CHARISSIMÆ
 VXORUM OPTIMA SPES MATRIS BEATISSIMÆ
 QUÆ NON SINE SUMMO OMNIUM INDOLORE
 22 MENSIS MAI ANNO 1675 ÆTATIS SUÆ
 [64] HIC IN SPEM BEATÆ RESURRECTIONIS
 REQUIESCIAT IN PACE.

CASTA PIA ET PRUDENS HUMILIS FORMOSA SERENA
 CONJUGE NUNC CHRISTO POTITUR ILLA SUO

The inscription may be translated into English thus :

"The bones and ashes of that most excellent lady, Barbara Sinclair, sprung from an illustrious race, a daughter of the most potent lord, John Sinclair of Quendale, endowed with every virtue, and the most loving and most beloved wife of the worthy Hector Bruce of Mounes. The best hope of a most happy mother, to the greatest grief of all [she died] on the 22nd of the month of May, in the year

1675, in the (64th?) year of her age. Here, in the hope of a blessed resurrection, let her rest in peace.

Chaste, pious and prudent, humble, comely, placid, now she has obtained Christ for her spouse."

This is a very interesting and loving message that the old stone still tells. It will be noted that the peculiar wording of the last two lines is due to an attempt at verse in Latin, and also that the spelling of some words appears inaccurate. In *The Shetland County Families* there is this reference to this Barbara Sinclair: "Barbara, daughter of John Sinclair of Quendale, married Hector Bruce of Mounes, died May 22, 1675."

For help with this translation I am indebted to the Rev. Frank Knight, M.A., Perth, and to Mr Gilbert Goudie, Edinburgh, and Mr H. F. Morland Simpson, Rector of the Grammar School, Aberdeen.

Lying a little to the west and behind this big stone are three other stones. The first and largest is of red sandstone, and measures about 6 feet 6 inches long and about 2 feet wide. It is, unfortunately, badly broken. It and its neighbour have still patches of mortar adhering to them, which might indicate that they had been originally fastened to the wall of the church, as stated by Sibbald. This stone (fig. 2) bears the Sinclair arms, and has an incised Latin inscription. Part of the inscription runs round the edge of the stone, forming a border round a centre panel, in which is placed the coat-of-arms, a skull and cross-bones, and another inscription.

The border inscription is as follows :

HIC JACET VIR ILLUSTRIS JACOBUS SINCLARUS DE QUENDALE DE NOBIL COMITUM FAMILIA QUI OBIIT JAN. 29, 1636, ANNO AETATIS 56.

It may be translated: "Here lies that illustrious man, James Sinclair of Quendale, of a noble family, who died January 29, 1636, in the 56th year of his age." The missing word after FAMILIA seems to read ORMUDUS, possibly for ORIUNDUS. The word COMITUM may have been VICECOMITUM.

In the centre panel, on either side of the arms, are the initials I.S. and B.S., and below, the fragments of an inscription beginning with JUSTITIAM UTOR.

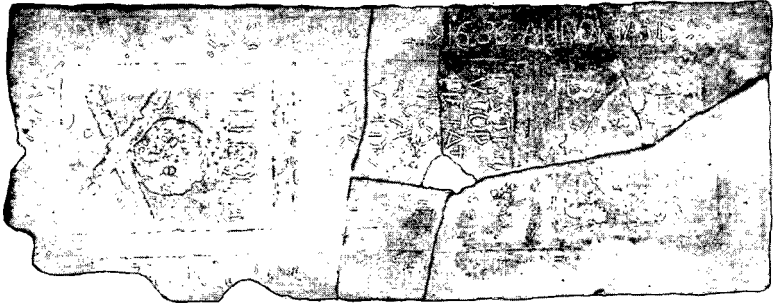


Fig. 2. Tombstone of James Sinclair of Quendale.

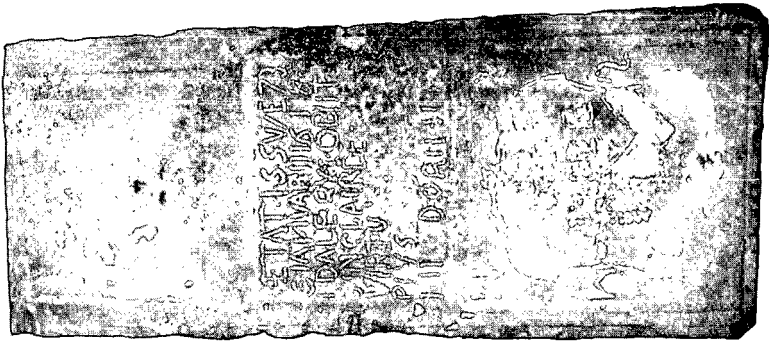


Fig. 3. Tombstone of Malcolm Sinclair of Quendale, Lay Vicar of Dunrossness.

There is a difference here in the date of the death of James Sinclair of Quendale from that given in *The Shetland County Families*. There it is stated he died 21st September 1647, a difference of about eleven

years. This is a little difficult to account for, as there was only the one James Sinclair of Quendale, son of Malcolm Sinclair, "lay vicar and reader" of Dunrossness. The date on the stone is fairly plain, and the year is distinct.

James Sinclair of Quendale was married to Barbara Stewart of Graemsay, and it is not unlikely that the initials "B.S." are the initials of his wife, who probably rests beside him. The initials "I.S." at the top of the shield are his own, and his wife's are at the bottom.

Side by side with this stone is another red sandstone slab, very similar, but of slightly less size ; here also the incised Latin inscription is only fragmentary. The stone itself (fig. 3) is entire, but it is badly worn as if it had been much walked upon. It, however, has the Sinclair arms, still plainly visible. There is a difference in the arms from that on the other stones. In addition to the cross and heart of the Sinclairs, there appears what looks like an anchor, and other forms, not easily made out. The fragmentary inscription, which is curiously reversed, reads :—

AETATIS SVÆ 73
6 IANVARIII 1618
DALE QVI OBIIT
SINCLAIR DE [QVEN]
VIRTV
PIVS

"Sinclair of [Quen]dale, who died 6th January 1618, in the 73rd year of his age."

This is enough to identify the stone as that of Malcolm Sinclair of Quendale, "lay vicar" of Dunrossness, who died 6th January 1618, as stated in *The Shetland County Families*. The initials M.S. appearing twice, at the top and bottom of the shield, are no doubt those of Malcolm Sinclair himself and of his wife, Margaret Sinclair, daughter of Hugh Sinclair of Brugh, although the arms on the wife's side of the shield are not those usually ascribed to Sinclair.

There remains now but one other old stone to be described. Sibbald refers to a stone belonging to "Laurence Sinclair of Quendale, one

pertaining to Robert Bruce of Sumburgh and another to Quendale"; and adds, "besides these are no other graved stone inscriptions or monuments within Dunrossness."

Now there are, as we have described, two Quendale stones, but neither of them is of "Laurence Sinclair."

The one remaining stone is evidently the Bruce stone referred to by Sibbald. It is about the same size as the others, but of a soft white kind of sandstone. The inscription is in English, cut in relief, and now almost entirely flaked off and lost. A few odd words only remain, but I think these will reasonably prove that this is the Bruce stone. These words are—"Within Burial Place in 28th age of year Grace, Bigton," the word Bigton being the plainest word on the stone.

In *The Shetland County Families* there appears "Robert Bruce, IV. of Sumburgh, died 1687." That this is the tombstone of this Robert IV. will appear from the following.

His father, William Bruce III. of Sumburgh, was married in 1656, a second time, to Margaret, daughter of John Sinclair of Quendale, and this Robert IV. was their first-born. This Robert IV. in 1679 married Barbara, daughter of Laurence Stewart of Bigton, and died in 1687; that is to say, he died about thirty years after the date of his father's marriage, so that his age must have been less than, and probably about, thirty. Now the figures on the stone, apparently stating age, are "28," and this agrees with the probable age of Robert IV. of Sumburgh at his death. As he married a Barbara Stewart of Bigton, it seems easy to account for the word "Bigton" appearing on the tombstone, being probably a reference to his wife.

Thus, though no name can now be made out, this stone is apparently the Bruce stone referred to by Sibbald. The only other stone at present to be seen is a little modern one, half buried in the sand, but still erect. Its inscription reads: "Sacred to the memory of Katherine Stout, eldest daughter of Thomas Stout, late of Brew House, aged 75 years. This is erected by her affectionate brothers."