

II.

TWO INCISED SLABS : AT FOVERAN, ABERDEENSHIRE, AND OATHLAW, FORFARSHIRE. By F. C. EELES, F.S.A. Scot., F.R. HIST. S.

While the early Christian monuments of Scotland have been described and illustrated with exhaustive fulness, and while the more elaborate class of mediæval monuments has received what may be called a fair share of attention, there are two groups of stone memorials which have been undeservedly neglected, though in different degrees. The first is the large class of cross-bearing stones of mediæval date which succeeded the early monuments of definitely Celtic character. The second group is that of mediæval slabs, incised or carved in low relief, which seem to have occupied much the same place in the monumental art of Scotland as brasses did in that of England.

In the following notes an attempt is made to describe two of the most remarkable of these slabs.¹

¹ Leaving out of consideration the monuments of the West Highlands, which form a separate class, incised slabs at the following places may be noted as having already been illustrated :—*Creich*, David Barclay and Helena Douglas, 1400-1421, in Russell

FOVERAN.

This fine slab (fig. 1), which unhappily is cracked across the middle, is lying on a modern base in the south part of the churchyard of Foveran near the mouth of the Ythan in East Aberdeenshire. It is of a hard greyish sandstone, perhaps from Morayshire. It is 7 feet 3½ inches long, 3 feet 4½ inches broad, and 5½ inches thick. It bears the incised figures of two knights in armour, and is traditionally said to represent two of the Turings of Foveran. In a paper in *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iii. p. 14, where there is a very inadequate sketch of the stone (pl. 3, fig. 4), which was read in 1823, James Logan writes:—

“The old church had an aisle on the south side, which is still inclosed with a low wall, and contains an old slab stone, in memory of Sir Alexander and Samuel Forbes, formerly lairds of Foveran. . . . If it really belongs to the Forbeses, I am puzzled at the arms represented.”

This aisle evidently still existed about 1730, as Alexander Keith in his *View of the Diocese of Aberdeen*² says, “Foveran has an aisle for the Turings of Foveran.”³

These figures are shown standing under a simple form of canopy not unlike a window, with two trefoil-headed lights under a single four-centred ogee-headed arch crocketed on the outside. The inscription has never been finished: it begins “✠ Hic : Iacet.” and then stops abruptly. The middle panel of the tracery contains a shield charged with a bend, and there is another smaller one outside the canopy on the left side of the stone. This slab, like other similar monuments, was undoubtedly

Walker, *Pre-Reformation Churches of Fife ; Aberdalgie* (low relief), Sir Wm. Oliphant, late fourteenth century, in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxix. p. 361 ; *Dundrennan*, Patrick Douglas, cellarer of Dundrennan (low relief), 1480, *ibid.*, p. 366 ; a nun, 1440, *ibid.*, p. 367 ; *Longforgan*, John Galyehtly and Mariot his wife, 1401, *ibid.*, vol. xxxiv. pp. 463-6 ; *Kinkell* (Aberdeenshire), Gilbert Greinlaw, 1411, *ibid.*, vol. xii. pl. viii.

² *Collections for a History of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1843, p. 364.

³ For the family of Turing see W. Temple, *The Thunage of Fermartyn*, Aberdeen, 1894, p. 565.



Fig. 1. Inscribed Sepulchral Slab at Foveran.

painted of old, and further charges on the shield and even the completion of the inscription may very likely have been painted.

The figures, which are drawn with a good deal of spirit, are slightly turned towards each other, and their hands are clasped in prayer. They are girded with swords, and one has the addition of a small dagger. There are slight differences in the armour, but the type is that which prevailed late in the fourteenth and early in the fifteenth centuries. The bascinets are high and pointed, and the camails of mail extend very low and cover the shoulders. The swords are of large size, and are sheathed; in the right-hand figure the buckle on the belt is shown, and the end of the belt is wound round the sheath of the sword. Slight differences between the armour of the two figures may be noted, especially at the elbows and on the insides of the legs. Scrolls, no doubt originally painted with inscriptions, are represented near the faces of the figures, but not issuing from their mouths.

OATHLAW.

This slab (fig. 2), now carefully preserved within the modern parish church of Oathlaw, was until recently lying in the corner of a field on, or close to, the site of the old church of Finhaven or Finavon.¹ It is of local red sandstone, has been broken across in several places, and a small piece is missing from one side. It bears the figure of a priest in eucharistic vestments, and an inscription runs round the edge between the lines that generally form a border in slabs of this class. Unfortunately the piece of the stone which contained the second half of the surname is missing. The inscription is as follows:—

Hic ◊ iacet ◊ honora
 bilis ◊ vir ◊ dñs ◊ reched^o ◊ breic[h ?] . . . vicarius
 de ◊ fynnevyn ◊ qui ◊
 obiit ◊ 2^o ◊ die ◊

¹ The church was rebuilt about 1380 by Sir Alexander Lindsay of Glenesk, who gave the living to Brechin Cathedral as the prebend of a canon. In the early part of the seventeenth century a new church was built in the western part of the parish on the site of an old chapel of St Mary, and the parish thereafter became known as Oathlaw. The present church was built in 1815. No remains of the old church of Finavon exist.

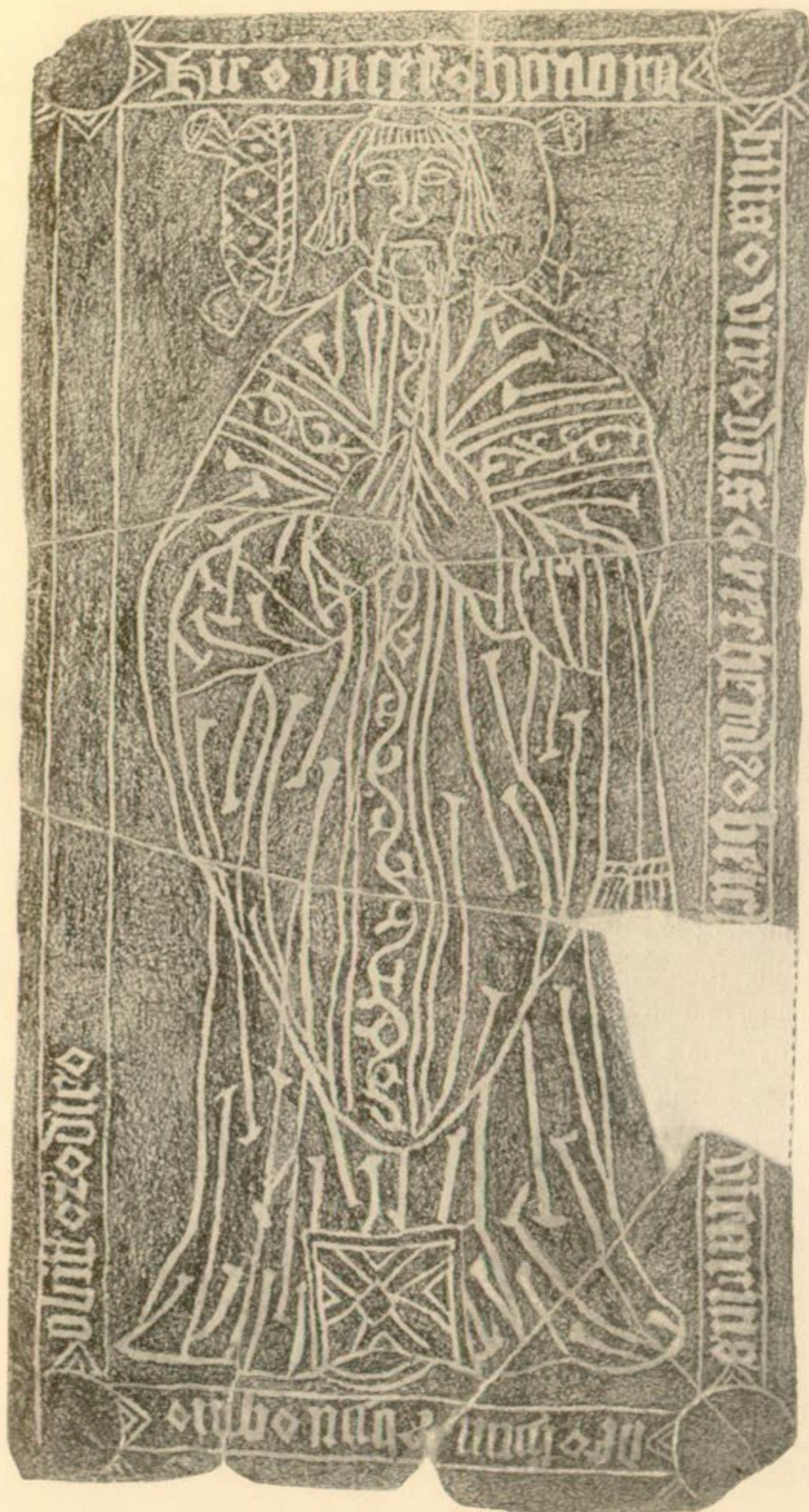


Fig. 2. Inscribed Sepulchral Slab at Oathlaw.

It has never been finished. On mediæval monuments erected in the lifetime of the persons they commemorate unfinished inscriptions are common, the blank space left for the date of death never having been filled in. But in this case the inscription breaks off after the day of the month was added. The figure is represented with the head resting on a cushion which has tassels at the corners, and the hands are folded on the breast.

This monument has been noticed and illustrated, though in a rather unsatisfactory manner, by Jervise in his *Epitaphs and Inscriptions in the North-East of Scotland*, vol. i. pp. 334-5. His suggestion that the name of the vicar represented may have been Bruce is due to his mistaking the apparel of the albe for a shield with the Bruce arms, to which it has really very little resemblance. The name seems to have been Breich; but it is impossible to do more than guess what it was, as so much of it is gone.

The vesting of the figure presents several peculiarities. These do not, however, form as much guide to the date as one might have hoped; for, as far as is known at present, there is little or nothing to form a standard of comparison. The straight hair, cut straight along the forehead, but left rather long at the sides, is suggestive of the end of the fifteenth century or beginning of the sixteenth. The general character of the vestments is undoubtedly late, and would support this date or even a later one. But the black-letter inscription and the medallions at the corners of the slab have not the appearance of being later than the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

Looking at the vestments in detail, we may note that neither amice nor stole are shown. This is most likely due to carelessness. Apparels for amices are universal in Scottish inventories as in English. All English pictures show them, and they also appear in most Dutch and Flemish pictures, although in a peculiar short form visible at the back only. But even in these latter, as in the case of the unapparelled amices in late mediæval French miniatures, the amice itself is large and prominent. In the figure before us there is only a suggestion of something like a

small collar visible on one side, and this is far narrower than any apparel would be. It looks as if the sculptor left the upper part of the figure till last, and then found there was only just room for the face after finishing the upper part of the chasuble. It will be noted that there is no space for the neck, and that the crown of the head touches the border at the top of the slab.

The omission of the stole is not uncommon in effigies, and probably results from its often being worn in such a way as not to show beneath the chasuble. This might be caused by the ends hanging near each other in the middle, or by the centre of the stole being thrown rather far over the wearer's shoulders instead of being kept close to the neck.

The albe is remarkably full and large, both in the skirt and in the sleeves. It is larger and fuller than the albes shown on most English brasses and effigies and on the effigies of canons in Aberdeen Cathedral. There appears to have been a tendency to increase the size of the albé and its sleeves in the sixteenth century, just at the time when the cutting away of the sides of the chasuble began. The disuse of apparels, particularly on the sleeves, commenced at the same time; and we may note that although there is an apparel on the skirt of this albe none are shown on the sleeves. The fragment of the lower part of an effigy, in low relief, of a priest at Parton, Kirkcudbrightshire, shows no apparel on the skirt of the albe, and the same is the case with some examples in the West Highlands.

The maniple is long and straight, and the fringe appears to have a knotted heading. It is worn unusually far up the arm, close to the elbow. This is another late characteristic. Mediæval practice was generally to wear the maniple just above the wrist, almost at the end of the albe sleeve; in more modern times on the Continent the tendency has been to wear it near the elbow.

The chasuble is full and loose, long in front and fairly pointed; but it is much shorter over the arms than the average Gothic chasuble, such, for example, as those shown in most of our remaining effigies, which generally seem to be of earlier date, or in English representations. There is a

broad Ψ -shaped orphrey with a branching floral design of conventional character. This orphrey is wider than those on the earlier type of chasuble, and is reminiscent of the orphreys in certain foreign examples. The chasuble has no border. The average chasuble of the English parish priest as shown on brasses has a border, but seldom any orphrey, and it is much larger at the sides and comes farther down the arms.

That a type of chasuble with the sides cut away came into use in Scotland before the Reformation is shown by the following descriptions of older vestments in an inventory of Aberdeen Cathedral in 1549 :

“Una capella veterum more ampla et lata continens casulam amplam. . . .”

“Similis vetus capella ampla veterum more vt supra. . . .”

“Alia vetus similiter capella habens tantum vnam casulam amplam et latam. . . .”¹

Now the chasuble represented on this Finavon stone is probably a sort of cross between the ordinary full mediæval vestment described in these extracts from the Aberdeen inventory and the more cut-down vestment in contrast with which the writer designates the older form as *ampla et lata*. That the development of stiff embroidery which made it difficult to move the arms freely gradually caused the degradation of the shape of the chasuble on the Continent is well known, and can be traced in foreign pictures and effigies. It never seems to have reached England, or at least not to any extent. But its effects in Scotland may be seen in the chasubles represented on many of the monuments in the West Highlands,² and on the figures of bishops on the Guthrie bell,³ the decoration of which is very Celtic in character though late in date. It is more than doubtful if these West Highland effigies represent the form of vestments used elsewhere in Scotland, however. West Highland ecclesiastical art was strongly Celtic, and very local in character, as long as it existed, and

¹ *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, Edinburgh, 1845, vol. ii. p. 189.

² See R. C. Graham, *The Carved Stones of Ilay*, Glasgow, 1895; and Jas. Drummond, *Sculptured Monuments in Iona and the West Highlands*, Edinburgh, 1881; and T. P. White, *Architectural Sketches in Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1873.

³ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. i.

the shape of chasuble shown in West Highland effigies appears to have been peculiar to the district, and only to have agreed with forms used elsewhere in the mere fact of being cut away at the sides. These chasubles are so reduced at the sides as to show nearly the whole arm in a few cases ; but the sharp point and Ψ orphreys of the Gothic form of the vestment are retained, the Ψ orphrey very often branching below as well as above. It may be that chasubles in the East of Scotland, such as that on the stone under consideration, were afterwards cut away into the form shown in the West Highland figures, but it is far more probable that they were akin to the Low Country vestments of the day. The cutting away of the sides of the chasuble on the Continent was generally accompanied by more or less reduction of the length back and front, making the ends more square than round or pointed, as may be seen in the Roman chasuble of the present day.¹

¹ On the Continent at the present day chasubles of various shapes are in use. Although most of them are more or less stiffened and cut down, and in many cases have something the appearance of sandwich-boards, national and even local varieties of form are very distinct. See Joseph Braun, *Die liturgische Gewandung*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1907, for the fullest treatment of the whole subject.

The present writer may perhaps be allowed to refer to an attempt to deal a little more fully with West Highland ecclesiastical effigies which he has made in connection with a description of an effigy at Shiskine, Arran, for the forthcoming *Book of Arran*.