

## IV.

NOTICE OF AN UNDESCRIBED SLAB SCULPTURED WITH CELTIC ORNAMENT, AND SOME CHURCHYARD MONUMENTS AT GIRVAN, AYRSHIRE. BY JAMES A. MORRIS, ARCHITECT, F.S.A. SCOT.

For many years prior to 1907 the old churchyard of St Cuthbert's, on the north bank of the river, was a veritable wilderness of neglect. A rank vegetation covered its graves, and one at least of its enclosure walls, that bordering the public road, was dangerously inclined outward and in the last stage of decay.

In the year named, Mr Alexander Johnston, a native of Girvan, in memory of his father and mother, who are buried in the churchyard, and because of disquiet of mind at its deplorable state, obtained leave to remedy the evil. He rebuilt or repaired the several walls, erected a large memorial gateway, and laid out the ground ; so that the churchyard is now in well-ordered and seemly condition, with closely cut turf and carefully trimmed borders.

While this work was proceeding I uncovered many overturned tombstones, partly, but sometimes wholly, buried under the surface of the ground. I also excavated for, but found only the veriest fragments of the foundations of the church, of which I made a careful plan, and also marked out the track of the walls on the surface of the churchyard as clearly as I was able.

In *The Charters of the Abbey of Crosraguel* reference is repeatedly made to the Kirk of "Invergarvane," "Garv-Avan," or Garven, signifying the rough or rapid river, at the mouth of which lies the town. The first reference is in a charter granted at Linlithgow by Robert III. on the 24th August 1404, in which are mentioned, with others, three churches of the same name, whose lands were confirmed to the Abbot and convent of Crosraguel ; these three are "St Cuthbert of Straton,

St Cuthbert of Invergarvane, St Cuthbert of Innertig" (called Ballantrae in 1617). Quintin Kennedy had "the Vicarage of Girvan," whence he went to Crosraguel as Abbot in 1547. Further reference to the church is made in the Charters in 1561, 1565 or 1566, 1571, and 1573.

Chalmers mentions a charter by Robert I. connected with the grant of St Cuthbert's to Crosraguel; also that John the Vicar of the Church of Girvan swore fealty to Edward I. in 1296. The church figures in Bagimont's Roll, and again in the reign of James V. In 1617 the patronage was given to the Bishopric of Dunblane, and in 1689 it was vested in the King. Long prior, however, to the date of the earliest of these references, a church, a cell, or at least a churchyard must have been in existence at Girvan; unless it is assumed that the fragment of the Celtic Cross found there has no proper connection with the place. During the digging operations consequent upon Mr Johnston's renovation of the churchyard, besides certain interesting tombstones of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, three mediæval slabs were uncovered, as well as the upper middle portion of the Celtic Cross now to be described.

The portion of the Celtic Cross yet remaining (fig. 1) is the shaft of the original cross with part of its circular head. It measures 2 feet  $11\frac{3}{8}$  inches in height, from  $12\frac{1}{8}$  tapering to  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches in breadth, and from 4 inches on one side and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  on the other tapering to about 3 inches in thickness. The broken lower portion of the front face is enriched by a rudely cut interlacing pattern, which measures  $12\frac{5}{8}$  inches in height. Immediately above and in somewhat pronounced relief is a carved cross, with a calvaried base of two steps, a short shaft and proportionally large head, but otherwise very similar in appearance to the incised cross on St Cuthbert's coffin preserved at Durham, which is ascribed to the year 698. The cross is  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, its calvaried base has an extreme spread of 8 inches, the shaft is 4 inches wide, the lateral arms of the cross  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches between extremities, while at their



Fig. 1. Front view of Celtic Cross at Girvan.

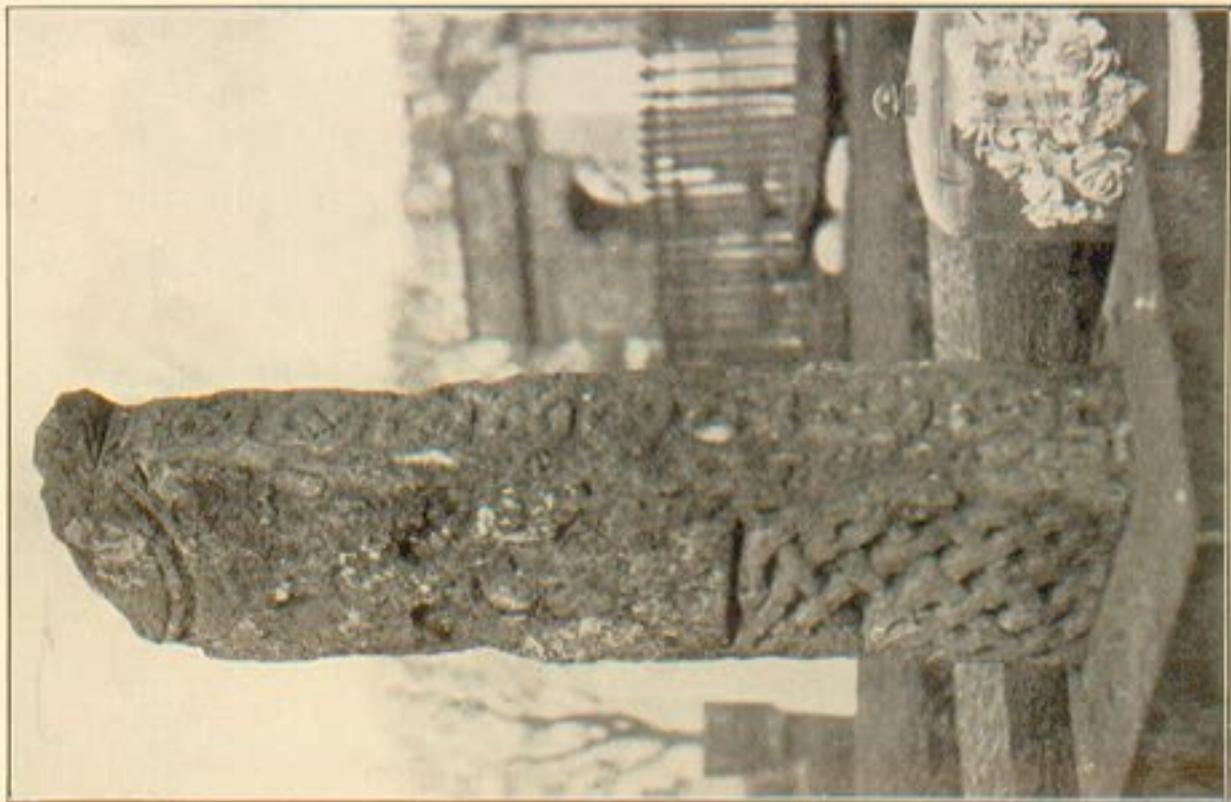


Fig. 2. Angled view of Celtic Cross at Girvan, showing ornamentation on one side.

circled intersections they measure 4 inches diagonally from circle to circle. On each of the four angles of the main shaft is a roll edge, and on the front face at the top this roll is carried across as the under part of the destroyed head, and is valuable as indicating at least something of its form, which would seem to have been circular in shape, and the cross itself formed by four pierced circled openings, small portions of the bottom arm and the two lower openings still remaining.

The sides of the shaft (fig. 2) have been enriched with a pattern of interlaced circles, connected in each case by the two interlacing bands, the upper but square finishing figure being still visible on the right side, which is fortunately much less obliterated than is the left. The material of which the cross is formed is a coarse conglomerate of red colour, and this may in part account for the rudeness in the execution of the enrichment, as also possibly for its weather-worn appearance.

The back of the cross (fig. 3) has apparently also been enriched, and a swelling in the stone would seem to show that at least that part of the ornamentation was in relief. All of this side has, however, been entirely obliterated within comparatively recent years, when the stone was appropriated as a modern tombstone, the appropriation being indicated by a rudely cut and sunk panel near the top, bearing in incised letters a modern name.

Some interest is attached to this fragment of a cross, when one remembers that Celtic Crosses are uncommon in the South-west of Scotland; the map in *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, dated 1856, and published by the Spalding Club, showing only four—namely, at Wigton, Anwoth, Auchinlary, and Thornhill. To these should of course be added the famous Ruthwell Cross, and possibly others.

Of the three mediæval sepulchral slabs, the most important (fig. 4) (5 feet long, 1 foot 5 inches broad, and about 9½ inches thick) bears an incised calvaried cross of three steps, with, on the left side as it lies on

the stone and hard up against the arm of the cross, a sword showing a cross hilt slightly bent on one side with a terminal of three points, and a pommel of three or four incised lobes. Close to the pommel is



Fig. 3. Back of Celtic Cross at Girvan.

a mullet of five points. Above the two cross arms, and filling the rectangular spaces between them and the upper arm of the cross, are two square figures, each filled with an eight-pointed enrichment.

The second mediæval slab (fig. 5) (4 feet 7½ inches long, 1 foot 4 inches broad, and 10 inches thick) is different in shape, being narrower



Fig. 4. Sepulchral Slab with cross and sword at Girvan.

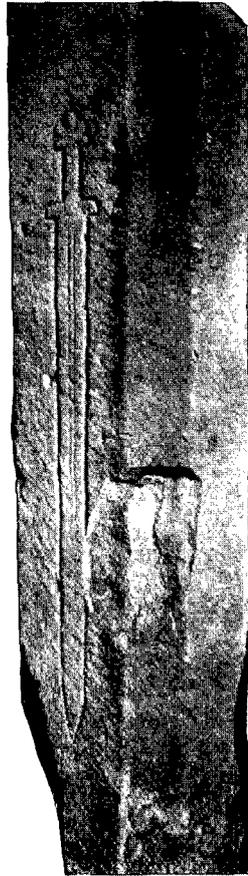


Fig. 5. Sepulchral Slab with sword at Girvan.

and thicker, and with a broad chamfer or splay on both sides. The stone bears a very clearly cut incised sword with a sharp point, the

fluting being shown by two incised lines down the middle of the blade. The cross-guard is very short, and the pommel is terminated by a lobe of five points. On the back of the stone and cut at a later date are :

WILAM  
MCALM  
1681

The fragment of another mediæval slab (fig. 6) (about 3 feet long, 1 foot 8 inches broad at the widest part, and 3 inches or 4 inches thick) shows a broad-bladed cross-hilted sword. The hilt is small with a single lobe terminal, and the cross-guard is square. It is on the right side of the incised shaft of a very broad cross, with immediately under the point of the sword the first step of an incised calvaried base. Above the cross-guard of the hilt is a portion of an incised circle of two lines, possibly the head of the cross; the space between the lines being treated as a roll.

There are several other mediæval stones in the churchyard, all purposely defaced on the front, and the back utilised for later inscription purposes, one with the letters :

M  
A R  
S M K

Another, with a small sunk panel, and therein in raised letters :

R M C

In design and execution the Girvan stones of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries express in a very direct, if crude manner something of the characteristics of the people and craftsmen by whom they were wrought. As a rule nearly the entire surface of each stone is covered with vigorously designed carving, well grouped and arranged,

more original perhaps, if less architectural, than is found in the stones of a similar period in the East of Scotland. On the other hand, the Girvan stones lack the elegance of design and execution noticeable in those of the Lothians, and, where the human figure is used, there is

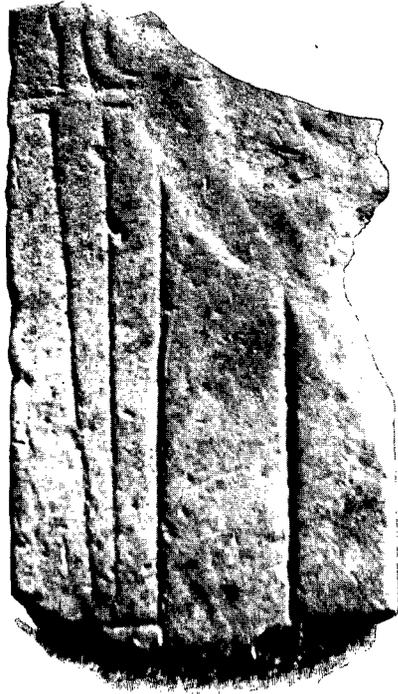


Fig. 6. Sepulchral Slab with sword and shaft of cross at Girvan.

nothing in the Girvan or in any South Ayrshire stones approaching the remarkable refinement, almost Italian in feeling, evidenced in work found in Tranent and Prestonpans churchyards, and elsewhere. One must, however, remember that South Ayrshire was part of a district of Scotland whose people were virile and lawless, and less

accessible for many centuries to external influences than those of most other parts of the Lowlands ; and, just as in the architectural detail of Crosraguel Abbey, so in these stones we find an art largely indigenous, for which reason it is possibly also more interesting in its robust aloofness, than an art more readily touched by the varying trend of contemporary thought and expression.

Until comparatively recent years roads in South Ayrshire were practically unknown, and Carrick, a seething backwater, lay outwith the main stream of progress ; the people as a class being turbulent, isolated, and independent, for feudalism in all its strength, truculence, and insolence was dominant till almost recent years.

There was undoubted truth in the old couplet :

'Twixt Wigton and the town of Air,  
Portpatrick and the Cruives o' Cree,  
Nae man need think for to bide there  
Unless he court wi' Kennedie.

Bitter and internecine strife prevailed for long centuries, and those influences dominating to some extent alike the thought and work of the locality, may so far account for the comparatively few tombstones on which contemporary trades are noted. Those named, but only once in each instance, are merchant, vintner, mason, musician, "seid's man," taylor, wright, shoemaker, farmer, smith, and sailor.

Peaceful crafts may perhaps have been deemed too unimportant for recognition in a warlike community, or to have found prominence in a place which even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a forlorn little fishing village. In 1793, a writer records that the houses "are so low as to seem, at the south end of the village, rather caves dug in the earth than houses built upon it," and this although Girvan had been granted its charter as a burgh in 1668.

Twenty-one years later is the date of the earliest of the seventeenth-

century tombstones (fig. 7) now remaining, and the inscription on the back of the stone simply reads : " This stone is erected in the Memory of the Cathcarts, 1689." It is 3 feet 1 inch high, 2 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad, and  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches thick. Cut out on the top of the stone, and reclining on something resembling a voluted couch, is a prone figure. The border of the stone is formed of an interlocking ornament of small triangular figures, in treatment remotely suggesting an echo or a survival of the chevron or dog-tooth of Norman or early English days. Above the square sunk panel of the stone are the letters I.C.M.B.A.R.W.C. The panel itself is divided by a subsidiary horizontal member into two unequal parts, upper and lower. In the upper are three rudely carved and disproportionate figures, two of which have their hands resting on, or holding an object between them, possibly an hour-glass ; and, on their left, a smaller figure, probably that of a child, clothed, as is the man, in what appears to be a pant-like garment reaching to the knee. In the middle of the lower and smaller panel is a skull, on its left cross-bones on a panel, and on its right the remains of what appears to have been an hour-glass.

In 1691, two more elaborately carved stones, both somewhat similar in design, were erected, each with a countersunk panel and raised border moulding. On either side of the panel of one of them (fig. 8) (about 3 feet 11 inches by 2 feet 8 inches) is a fluted pilaster with moulded base and foliated cap, supported on the outer side by moulded and foliated scrolls. Above the panel is a frieze and truncated pediment bearing a cartouche supporting a horned head. Immediately below the left-hand pilaster is an hour-glass, and below the right a winged skull. Beneath the panel is a large and vigorously cut skull almost in profile, the lower border of the panel being curved for its accommodation ; while on either side, as supporters to the skull and in high relief, are strongly carved volutes, the upper terminal of each being a bird's neck and head, the lower of characteristically foliated carving ; these bird volutes are linked together by a straight

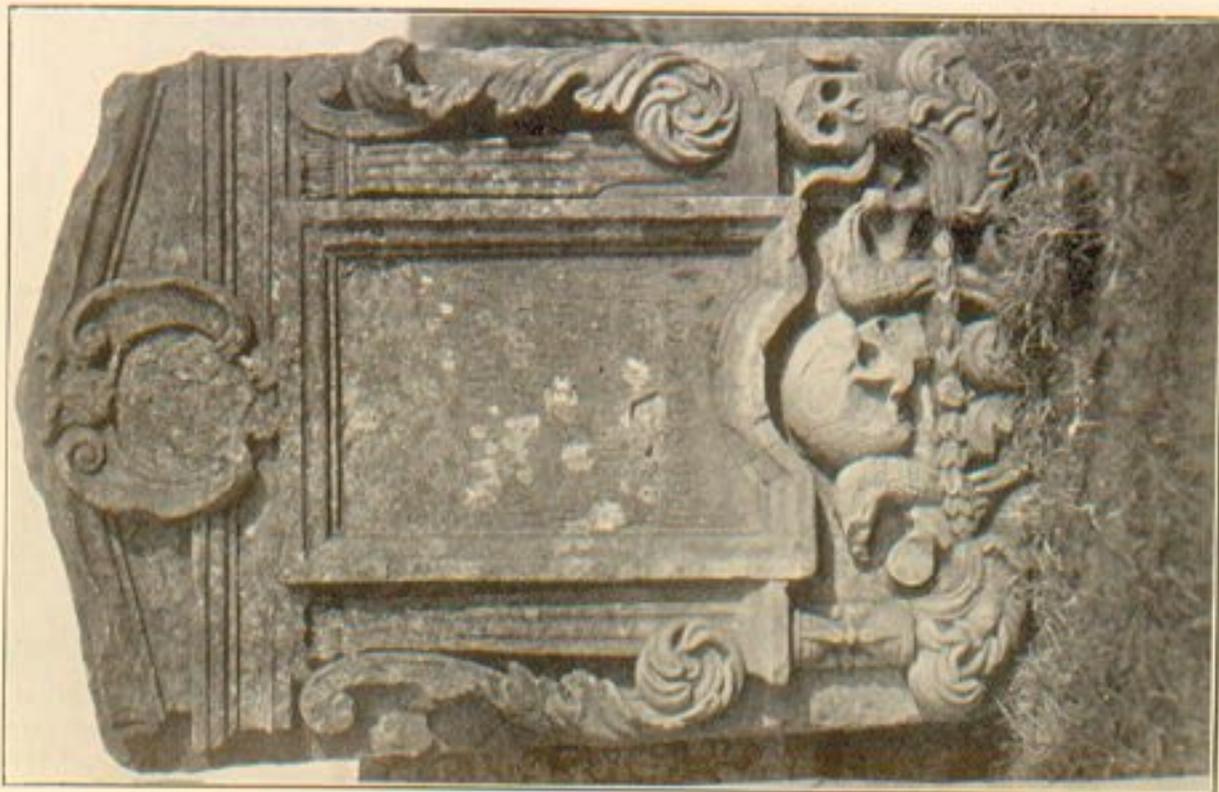


Fig. 8. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard, 1691.



Fig. 7. Headstone in memory of the Cathcarts, 1689, in Girvan Churchyard.

band of threaded foliations. The portion of the inscribed panel still legible reads :

of. the.  
 Gospel. at. Bar. Who.  
 dyed. feberuar, 1689.  
 his. age. 72. This mon.  
 ument. was. erected.  
 by. Jean. mcKerrel. his.  
 spous. may. 1691.

The other and larger stone (fig. 9) (about 4 feet 4½ inches by 3 feet 9 inches), also dated 1691, carries an almost obliterated inscription on a somewhat similarly designed centre panel; the only words now decipherable thereon being: "who died June, 1669. age 58." The bottom line reads, "and Jean Alexander his spous." On the lower edge of the panel, as also on the supporting strap-band, is inscribed: "who erected this monument over his parents 1691."

On this stone the panel is entirely surrounded by vigorously modelled and excellently cut sculpturesque if archaic figures, while the foliation is crisp and effective. The inscription panel rests on the strap-band with voluted ends, from each of which hangs a foliated enclosing member supporting a winged female figure (facing inward), each terminating in a foliated tail, which latter die into and form part of a crisply cut centre design, out of which in turn rises the depression in the strap of the volute carrying the inscription panel. Standing on each volute and facing outward is a rampant winged and crested animal, and poised upon each triple crest a small grotesque animal nibbling thereat. Above the panel and resting upon it are two winged animals, somewhat resembling miniature Ninevitic bulls, in front of the forefeet of each being a small human skull, while the tails growing into volutes abut against each other and form the seat for a winged hour-glass.

A confused medley of volutes of worm-like formation, and without any effort towards foliation, cover the lower part of another stone



Fig. 9. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard, 1691.

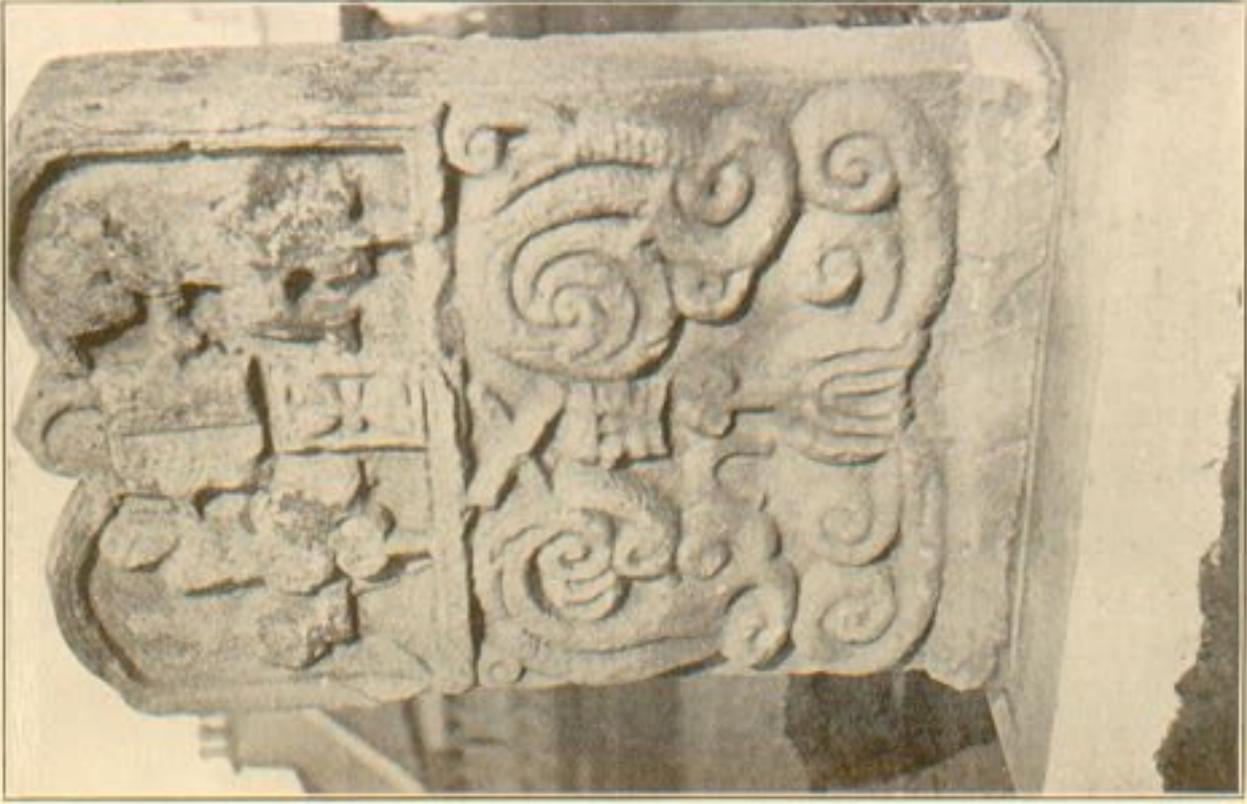


Fig. 10. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

(fig. 10) (about 3 feet by 2 feet and  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick); they are none the less exceedingly well handled even if crude in utterance, while between them is a figure which may be a rude attempt at a skull or crown, and immediately above are cross-bones. The upper part is surrounded by a narrow projecting border enclosing a panel, which border at the top forms the outer circled canopies of two figures, a man and a woman; and in the middle, and dividing the outer canopies, a small centre canopy above an open book. Possibly an Adam and Eve, each figure appears to be seated on a conventional form of plant-growth, while their hands hold the open book of life, and in the space between and beneath the book is the hour-glass, as the symbol of mutability. It is interesting to note that carved on one of the wall-shaft capitals in the Sacristy at Crosraguel Abbey are two squirrels facing each other and seated in a very similar manner. On the back of the stone is the following inscription:

IN HOOPE OF A GL<sup>O</sup>RI<sup>O</sup>US  
 RESUREIIION HIRE LYS  
 THE CORPS OF ANIRE  
 GRAY WHO LIVED IN  
 THE<sup>1</sup> SNAd OF TRO E  
 AND OF HIS CHILD  
 REN HE DIED AGUST  
 1680 AND AL<sup>S</sup>O THE  
 CORPS OF AGNES  
 GARDINER SPOUSE TO  
 ANDREU GRAY SHE  
 DIED MARTH 1735  
 HIS YONSEST SON ERECT  
 ED this MONOMENT.

The headstone fig. 11 (about 3 feet by 2 feet  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches and 4 inches thick) is a curious memorial with a rude pediment, the entire tympanum being filled by a winged cherub-head. Beneath

<sup>1</sup> Query: Snaid near Trochrague?—J. A. M.

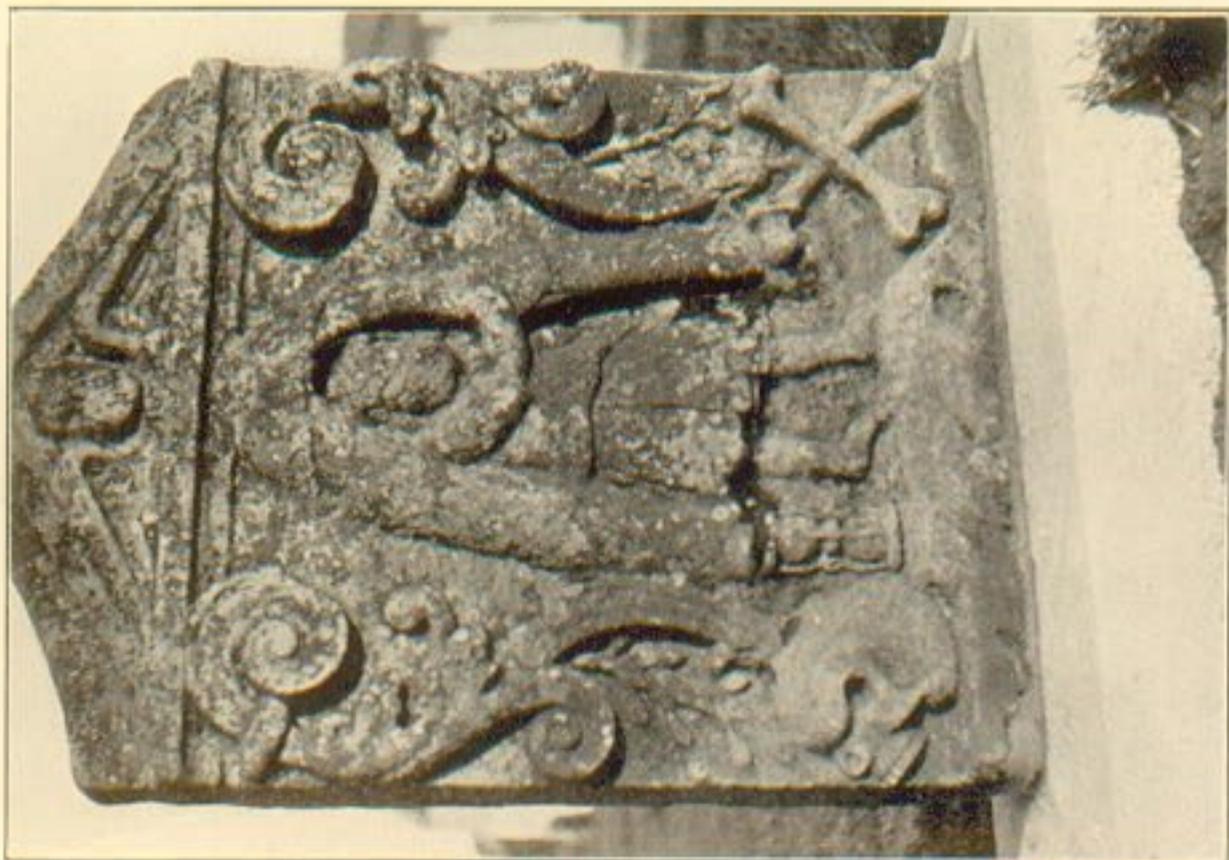


Fig. 11. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

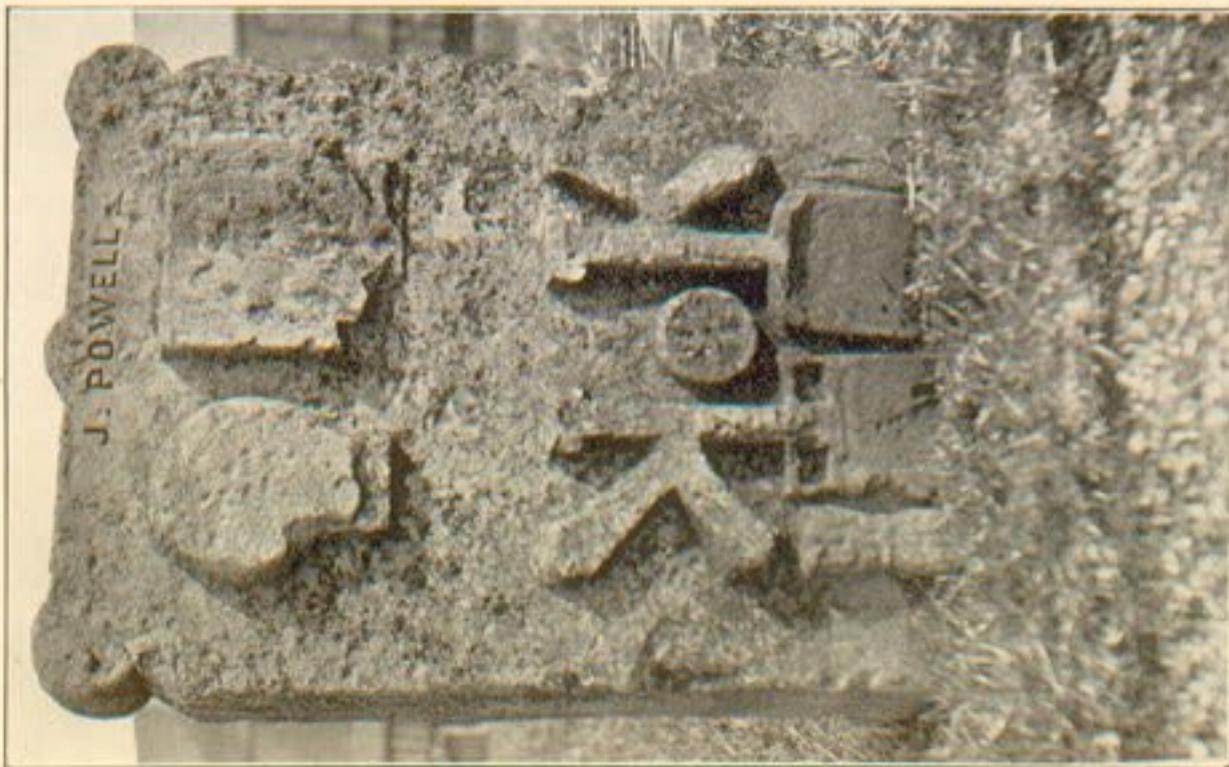


Fig. 12. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard, 1715.

the pediment, and on either side of the stone, are large slightly foliated volutes, that on the left rising from a skull, the right from cross-bones. Between these volutes is a kilted figure, standing on a slightly raised base. Enclosing the figure on top and sides is a canopied device, in shape something like the outer legs of the letter A. It is probably a tent, the man standing in the door; and, at the apex, not, however, well shown in the photograph, is the usual tent apex covering-piece. The left leg of the tent rests upon an hour-glass, the right on the head of the right femur, which forms one of the two cross-bones. The inscription reads:

HERE LYES THE CORPS OF  
ELIZABETH MCLAVACHAN  
SPOUSE TO ANDREW M<sup>c</sup>CU  
EEN WHO DIED FEBUAIKY  
THE 26 1716 HER AGE 72  
THIS IS ALSO THE BURIAL  
PLACE OF THE SAID AND  
REW M<sup>c</sup> CUEEN IN MILTOUN.

An unusual stone (fig. 12), about 3 feet  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch by 2 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches and 5 inches thick, bears side by side, and in high relief, a spade with a double pierced top, and a shovel, the shaft in each case forming the vertical limb of the letter K. These letters are placed back to back, and between them is a raised rosette with an incised ornament of six points. On the left of the spade-head is an hour-glass. Near the top of the stone are two unfinished projecting blocks, possibly from their outline intended to have been carved as a skull and open book. A long inscription on the back of the stone bears that it was erected in 1715 by one James Lamb, a shoemaker, in memory of his "parents and children." The name "J. Powell," shown on the photograph, is modern.

Another somewhat original stone, with a shaped top (fig. 13) (2 feet 8 inches by 1 foot 9 inches), is divided into two panels, the upper containing a device of two converging outer limbs meeting in a shaped

block. Forming the sides of the lower panel are two very elementary rounded pillars, which carry the upper panel; between these pillars are



Fig. 13. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

a large skull and cross-bones. There is no date on the much obliterated inscription, which reads :

HEIR.LYETH  
THE.CORPES.OF  
MAR M<sup>c</sup>  
SPOUSE.TO.UIL<sup>d</sup>IAM.

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A stone with a sunk moulded panel (fig. 14) (2 feet 10 inches by 2 feet and 4 inches thick) bears on its lower left corner a skull, above to the right cross-bones, and again above, but on



Fig. 14. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

the middle line, an hour-glass. The top of the stone is shaped, and the outline emphasised by an incised line ornament, beneath which is, in the centre, an incised heart. Only a few words of the inscription remain :

THIS IS THE  
 BURIAL  
 OF JOHN MA  
 AND AGNES ELY THE  
 SPOUS WHO DAYED  
 IANN 2 1727 AGED 55.

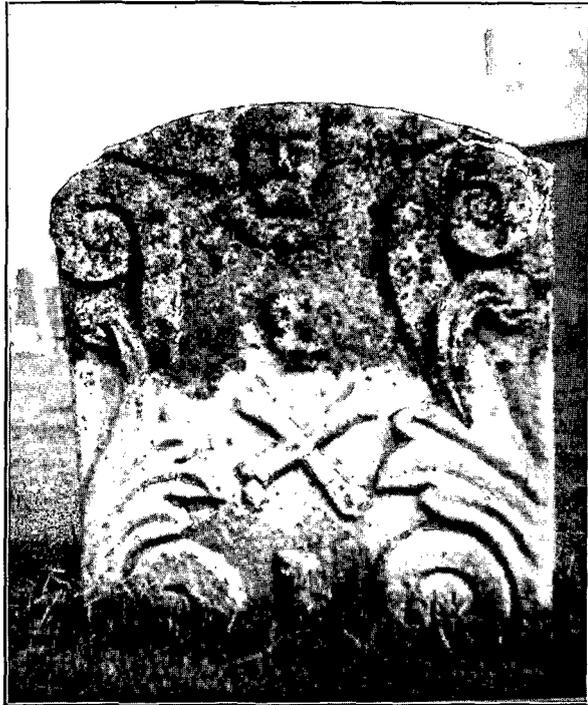


Fig. 15. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

Three stones (figs. 15, 16, and 17) are very similar in form and design. Each is slightly rounded on top, and has side volutes carved on the face of the stone, with between the top scrolls a winged cherub-head. On two of the stones—fig. 15 (2 feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 2 feet 2 inches)

and fig. 16 (2 feet 6 inches by 2 feet),—and immediately below the cherub-head, is a skull, lower down cross-bones, and again below and between the lower scrolls an hour-glass. On the third stone (fig. 17) (2 feet 4 inches by 1 foot 11½ inches), below the cherub-head is an unfinished block in the shape of an open book, immediately beneath and in a horizontal line are cross-bones and a skull, while below and again in one line are a small hand holding a hammer, the head and bust of a prone figure, and an hour-glass. The relative inscriptions are as follows :

HERE LYES THE  
CORPS OF WILLIAM M<sup>c</sup>CAUL<sup>l</sup>  
IN LAGLARTRIE WHO DIED  
AUGUST 9<sup>th</sup> 1764 AGED 75 YEAR  
LIKEUISE JANET ROS<sup>s</sup> HIS WIFE  
WHO DIED NOV<sup>r</sup> 17<sup>th</sup>, 1763 AGED  
63 YEARS. ERECTED BY ANDRE<sup>w</sup>,  
GILBERT & JOHN M<sup>c</sup>CAULS HIS  
SONS 1766.

This is the burial  
place of JAMES GOOD in pinim  
aher. here lyes the Corps of JAMES  
GOOD his son who died janu<sup>r</sup>  
30<sup>th</sup> 1764, 2years 5months.

Here lyes the Corps of Helen  
Mcandlish Spouse To John  
Clacher in Bridge Miln  
who dyed January 5<sup>th</sup>  
1777 and aged 53 years.

Fig. 18 is a large flat stone 6 feet long, 2 feet 11 inches broad, and about 4¾ inches thick. Incised upon it is a large axe, also another figure partly unreadable because of a broken and lost part of the stone. Above the axe are the incised names and date :

DONEL.ROGER  
THOMES.ROGER  
C W.1674.



Fig. 16. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.



Fig. 17. Headstone in Girvan Churchyard.

and upon the lower broken portion :

Hei  
ous      Died  
7 3 A d 57.

A small splayed stone is interesting because of its Latin inscription. Unfortunately, several of the words are now illegible,



Fig. 18. Stone with two axes in Girvan Churchyard.

but the following approximate transcription by the Rev. R. G. Colquhoun, B.D., has been given me by the kindness of Mr W. S. McArthur, Clerk to the Parish Council, in whose custody is the churchyard.

## APPROXIMATE ORIGINAL OF INSCRIPTION.

Pastor hic fidelissimus precibus et labore votis et (verbis ?) quibus in colum conscenderet (quidem ?) correctus hic speciosos portus attigit quem non accumulabo laudibus quia nunc versatur ubi non laudari sed laudare negotium est verum magna illa renascentis mundi dī obliviscetur immortalitas cinericii hujus hospitii dedecus.

## APPROXIMATE TRANSLATION OF INSCRIPTION.

This most faithful pastor—, set right here by the prayers and struggles, the vows and utterances by which indeed he might set sail for heaven—, has reached the fair havens. I shall not honour him with praises : for he now dwells where the occupation is—not to be praised—but to praise. But assuredly that glorious immortality of God's Resurrection World will throw into oblivion the unworthiness of his ashy resting-place.

The Parish Council is much to be commended for the very excellent and complete inventory which it has made of every stone in the churchyard. A plan, divided into sections, shows the position of each individual stone, while by means of a carefully compiled index-book, ready reference can be had to all inscriptions and dates presently decipherable ; a procedure other custodians of similar memorials may well be encouraged to emulate, before time of necessity obliterates the original records.

Besides those enumerated there are several other interesting inscribed stones in the churchyard, and it is matter for congratulation that they have remained so long untouched, and that all, save the notable Celtic Cross and the defaced mediæval stones, are insignificant enough to have escaped mutilation or destruction by the hand of the restorer.

In these old stones the quiet of the churchyard is not once broken by discordant and noisy epitaphs ; they come to us much as they were left by those who made them, and in this we may esteem ourselves fortunate. Lastly, and if late in the day, they have been enduringly preserved to Girvan by the generosity of Mr Johnston, who spent a sum of several thousand pounds in carefully raising and making secure the several memorials, and in building gateways and enclosure walls, within which may rest in seemly manner his own revered dead.