

VI.

ECCLESIASTICAL REMAINS AT CRUDEN AND ST FERGUS,
 ABERDEENSHIRE. BY F. C. EELES, F.R.HIST.S., F.S.A. SCOT.

CRUDEN.

The parish of Cruden is situated on the east coast of the Buchan district of Aberdeenshire, immediately to the south of Peterhead. According to a tradition, which perhaps originated with Boece, the church was founded by Malcolm II. soon after his final defeat of the Danes under Cnut in 1012, which is believed to have taken place at this part of the coast. Boece's story is that one of the conditions of the peace which Malcolm concluded with the Danes, was that the battle-field be consecrated as a burying place for the slain on both sides, and that a church be built there under the title of St Olave, patron of Denmark and Norway. He goes on to say that this church, becoming overblown with sand, was rebuilt in another similar but more convenient place.¹ Now Boece's story, like much that he wrote, is without question partly fictitious. For St Olave was only a boy of seventeen in 1012, and he was not martyred until 1030.

The present church of Cruden is not near the shore. It is in a valley sheltered from the sea by a hill. About a mile eastwards, on a knoll by the roadside, at the west end of the village of Port Erroll, is the site of a former church, where remains of walling were visible as late as 1837, and where human bones were found in 1857. About a mile south-east of this site, in a hollow in the links close to the sea, a well bubbles up through the sand, and is known as St Olave's well. Mr Cock, the parish minister, writing in the old *Statistical*

¹ Templo arenæ ventorum impulsu vt frequentius in illis fit locis agitatae multitudine obruto, alteroque haud ei dissimili loco commodiori reaedificato. *Scotorum Historiæ Hectoris Boethii*, Parisiis, 1526, l. xi., ff. cclii., ccliii.

*Account*¹ in 1792, and Dr Pratt, the historian of *Buchan*,² both assume that this ruin near Port Erroll was not the earliest church, but that there had been a still earlier one on the links. For the existence of this earlier church the present writer has neither seen nor heard any satisfactory evidence. It seems as if Boece's statement as to the similarity of the site of the second church, a statement which is utterly untrustworthy, has misled both writers. It is also stated in the fourth edition of Pratt's *Buchan* that the large blue marble matrix of a Netherlandish brass which lies in the churchyard of the present church was brought from the old church "about a hundred years ago."³ This is most unlikely, and what is more, Mr Cock, who speaks of the slab, says nothing about this removal. The bell of the present church is dated 1519, and there seems no reason to doubt that this church occupies the site of the building to which the bell and the brass matrix belonged. It must be noted that there is neither record nor tradition of the removal of the church from the Port Erroll site to the present site. The present church dates from 1776; the previous church had a ruinous roof and unglazed and unboarded windows in 1623,⁴ and it is highly improbable that it had then been recently built. The brass matrix already alluded to is not earlier in date than the fourteenth century. The font, recently taken from a rockery in the manse garden, and described below, is of the thirteenth century. The thirteenth century was the period when churches were rebuilt or repaired all over Scotland. The writer would suggest that the church near where Port Erroll is now did not succeed any older church dedicated in the name of St Olave, but was itself built under that dedication in the eleventh century, and that it was

¹ "No vestige of this chapel is now to be seen, but the place is well known." *Stat. Acc.*, v., 432.

² "The site of the second church just referred to is still plainly discernible." *Buchan*, J. B. Pratt, 4th ed., p. 43.

³ *Ib.*, p. 43.

⁴ A. Mackay, *Cruden and its Ministers*, Peterhead, 1912, p. 34.

abandoned in favour of a church on the site of the present building about the middle of the thirteenth century.

Cruden has been fortunate in having being made the subject of what is almost a model parish history, written by the Rev. Adam Mackay,



Fig. 1. Font at Cruden, upper side.

the present parish minister.¹ In it Mr Mackay suggests the possibility of a mistake in regard to the question of the early church site, and the present writer has ventured to discuss the matter in greater detail.

TWO FONT BASINS.

When Mr Mackay wrote his book these font basins were half buried. They have now been unearthed and carefully cleaned.

¹ The writer's thanks are due to Mr Mackay for much valuable help.

The first (fig. 1) had long lain covered with moss and other plants and partly submerged in a rockery in the manse garden.

When taken out and cleaned last summer it was found to be a particularly good example of the simple cylindrical type of basin

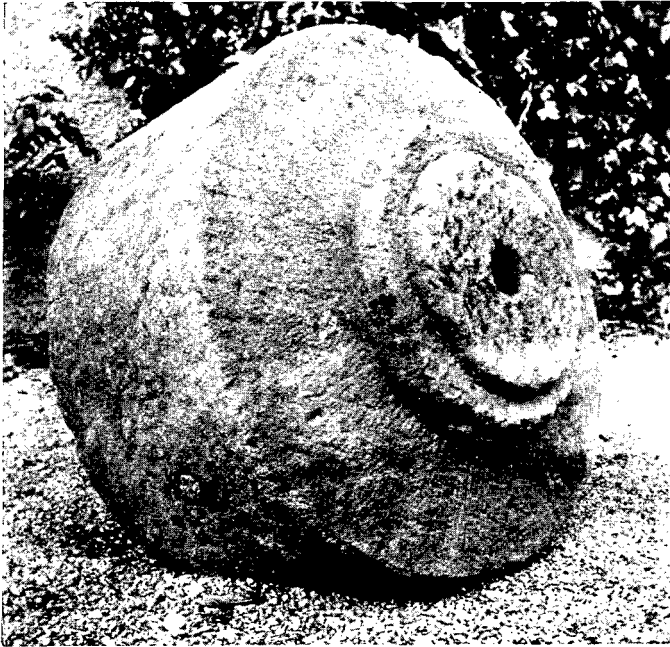


Fig. 2. Font at Cruden, under side.

common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, well cut and of delicate proportions. It is now preserved in the church.

The wall of the basin is fairly straight both within and without, and is $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches thick at the rim. The basin is 1 foot 8 inches wide internally, 2 feet 1 inch to 2 feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches externally. The depth is 10 inches in the middle. The under side of the basin outside is sloped downwards to a simple angle moulding which ran round the

top of the shaft (fig. 2). The centre of the basin is $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide where it rested on the circular shaft, and the middle of it is pierced by a drain. The sloping part of the bottom of the basin outside is from $5\frac{1}{4}$ to $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and the angle moulding between it and the part which rested on the shaft is about 2 inches deep at the sides, and about 1 inch wide below. The only decoration is the very simple and effective nail-head ornament which is placed in a groove round

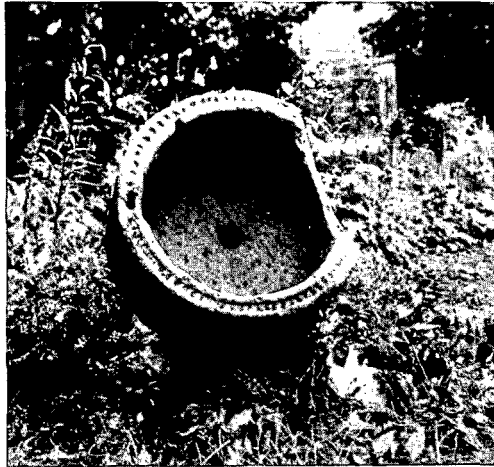


Fig. 3. Ornamentation of the Font.

the rim of the basin and edged with a narrow roll moulding on the outside (fig. 3). The hole which held the staple for the bolt that fixed the cover is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches square and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch deep.

The other font (fig. 4) was similarly sunk in the garden of St James's rectory, where Dr Pratt the historian lived. In his *Buchan* (1st ed. p. 310, 2nd ed. p. 335) he wrote :—

“In front of the old house at Sandend, and in the centre of the area where the people assembled to hear divine service from the window of the house, there might have been seen until a very recent

period a rude granite font, sunk deep into the ground, either by its own weight or for some domestic purpose. It is said to have been dug from the ruins of the old Danish church on the Links, and appro-



Fig. 4. Font from Sandend, Cruden, upper side.

priated to the use of the ejected congregation. Regarded simply as a relic of olden times, it is invested with interest ; but associated as it had become with the history of a fallen hierarchy, its importance is greatly enhanced. On application to the possessor of this remnant of antiquity, it was kindly resigned, without a moment's hesitation,

into the hands of the incumbent of St James's, and remains at the parsonage, an ecclesiastical curiosity."

This statement was repeated by Dr Pratt's widow in the 3rd edition of *Buchan*. It has been said that the font was an old stone basin given



Fig. 5. Font from Sandend, Cruden, under side.

to her to appease a quarrel, and that the donor made it rather more like a font than it had been before. The "ejected congregation" refers to the non-juring Episcopalians, who were particularly strong all over this part of Scotland, and who managed to retain possession of Cruden parish church until 1716, having even succeeded in settling a minister of their own in it some little time after the Revolution.

It is a huge mass of granite, of somewhat irregular shape, about 1 foot 9 inches high and 3 feet 2 inches to 3 feet 4 inches in extreme diameter outside. There is a circular basin 1 foot 10 inches to 2 feet in width and 7 inches deep at the edge, 9 inches deep in the middle. There is a drain, which has almost certainly been recently made, and the base (fig. 5) has been dressed smooth in modern times. At one side, moreover, a sunk vesica-shaped panel, with the sacred monogram in raised letters, has been cut evidently when the drain was made. The bottom of the basin has also been "improved" as regards its surface. It is abundantly clear that someone took no small trouble to make the basin more "ecclesiastical," as he thought. But it is also clear that the basin itself is old, and very like some old fonts of the extremely rude early type. Such a huge stone is unlike a pot quern, and would be most inconvenient either as a hen's meat dish or a pig trough. It is not at all improbable that the traditional history of it as given by Dr Pratt is correct, and that the non-juring episcopal congregation dug it out of the ruins of the old church at Port Erroll, and made use of it when they held services, as they did for many years, at Sandend. If this be the case, the thirteenth-century font which was in the manse rockery probably marks the date when the old church became overblown with sand, and was abandoned for the site higher up the valley.

Drifting sand is notoriously fickle in its movements. At one period a site is covered with a vast accumulation, and at another it may be clear. Seeing that the church had to be abandoned, it was no doubt so far covered, or in danger of being covered, as to be inaccessible, and hence the thirteenth-century men may have preferred to leave or bury the old font rather than to move it. If we may trust Boece, the site was clear again in the sixteenth century, as he speaks of seeing bones there in 1500, and we know that walls were visible in 1837, and that it is clear of sand now.

THE BELL.

In a plain granite belfry of the type usually erected in the north of Scotland late in the eighteenth century, there hangs one of the three

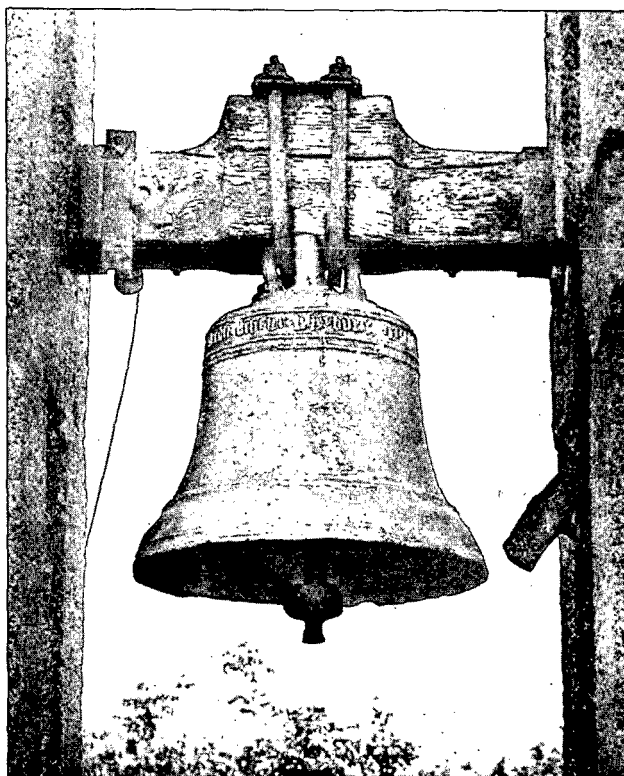


Fig. 6. Belfry with Mediæval Bell at Cruden.

mediæval bells (fig. 6) which are still left in Aberdeenshire. It is usual to treat of bells together rather than singly, as they are a subject very much by themselves, and the writer is now editing a full

account of the church bells of Aberdeenshire for the New Spalding Club. But the almost unique character of the inscription on this Cruden bell makes it very desirable that it should be described in print as soon as possible in the hope that some one may be able to read it, or at least to determine the language in which it is written.

The inscription appears to run as follows :—

† derr * ooplieder * scheue • vhe • borice *
 scelle • intio • uc • ao • xv^c xix •

The diameter of the bell at the mouth is 17 inches, the note A. The bell is somewhat short in the waist for a mediæval bell ; the waist is less curved than usual, and the sound-bow less projecting. There are six canons, which are small and straight, one single canon being broken. The shoulder is rather angular, and the crown slightly curved. The inscription is between rims (one above and two below), in the usual place below the shoulder ; there are three rims on the crown, two immediately above the lip. Between the sound-bow and the waist there is a sort of moulding consisting of three small rims joined together. The bell is on the whole a rather inferior casting, badly weathered and broken-mouthed. It appears to have been rehung when the church was rebuilt in 1776. The crown staple is broken, and a more modern clapper has been hung by bolts through the crown.

The lettering of the inscription is very irregularly placed ; the first, second, and fourth stops seem to have been like small roses ; the third and the last appear to have been plain ; the rest are now of indeterminate form.

The cross, of course, marks the beginning of the inscription. Notwithstanding a mark like a stop on the upper part of the line following

the first letter, the next two words appear to be "dere ooplieder," perhaps the Christian name and surname of the founder. The next three words are unintelligible to the writer. The sixth seems to be "scelle," a word sometimes used for a bell in old Flemish, and clearly derived from the Latin *squilla*, which was used for a small bell. The next two words are unintelligible; then follows the date "ao · xv° xix." The writer would be grateful for any suggestions. He has tried every European language that is in the least likely to have been used, but in vain. The inscription is probably in some old local Netherlandish dialect.

It is much to be desired that this exceedingly interesting bell should be taken down and preserved in the church; the hangings are worn out, the bell itself is much worn, and would scarcely bear quarter-turning and rehangng with a new clapper, a process which might perhaps result in its being cracked.

FRAGMENT OF SACRAMENT HOUSE.

In the course of some alterations made upon the church during the past year a carved stone was found built into the wall. It had evidently formed part of the old church, and was used as building material at the erection of the present structure—an important piece of additional evidence that this church occupies the site of a pre-Reformation church. This stone is 1 foot $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, 1 foot 3 inches high, and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. One face has formed the top of a sunk panel, with an ogee trefoil headed arch, crocketed on the outside. The cusps of the arch terminate in four leaved ornaments, and on the surface of the head of the panel enclosed within the cusps are three circular, rose-like devices. The width of the arch is $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The crockets have been very much broken. There seems to have been a pinnacle on each side of the arch. The whole appears to have formed the top of a Sacrament House, the recess of which would have been

square-headed, but surmounted by the pointed head of the panel or shallow niche. The doorway to the Sacrament House would have been small, it is true, but even in the cases of the large and elaborate Sacrament Houses of Deskford and Auchindoir the width of the doorways is but 1 foot $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches and 1 foot 2 inches respectively. This stone (fig. 7) is now preserved in the church. The carving probably



Fig. 7. Fragment of Sacrament House.

dates from the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth.

INSCRIBED STONE.

Besides the fragment of the Sacrament House there was found in the wall of the church another piece of carving in sandstone (fig. 8). This is 1 foot $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, and $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. Upon it are carved in relief the letters IP·VB, followed by a rose-like ornament; below a raised line are carved in relief the letters GD,



Fig. 8. Inscribed Stone.



Fig. 9. Matrix of Netherlandish Brass.

followed by FIRGOD (= Fear God) incised. The lettering seems to be of late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century date.

MATRIX OF A BRASS.

Against the north wall of the churchyard lies the matrix of a large Netherlandish brass (fig. 9), which has already been referred to. It is of dark blue limestone, 5 feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 3 feet 2 inches wide, $6\frac{1}{2}$ to $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The flat exposed border of the stone which surrounded the brass itself is 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Nine plug-holes filled with lead are visible, three in a row near each end of the stone, and three across the middle. There are the usual shallow grooves at right angles to each other; it is unnecessary to specify their exact position.

ST FERGUS.

The parish of St Fergus was an outlying part of Banffshire until it was transferred to the county of Aberdeen in 1890. It is situated on the Buchan coast immediately to the north of Peterhead. The remains of the ancient church stand in an isolated situation on the flat sand-blown land which skirts the shore round the north-east corner of Aberdeenshire. These sand hills frequently alter their position, and in 1603 the Presbytery found that "both kirk and kirkyard is ourcassin with the sand," and proposed to build a new church at the burn of Cuttie. In 1612 they complained that "the Mother Kirk is now standin at the eastmost end of the paroch in ane wilderness oerblawin with sand" By 1615 they prevailed on the patron, the Earl Marischal, to build a new church two miles west and on higher ground, and this was opened in 1616. Before this time the parish was called Longley, and earlier still Inverugie. From the language of the Presbytery Records it would seem as if the population had deserted the neighbourhood of the old church sometime before the seventeenth century. There is reason to think that the population

of the north and south walls, against which mural monuments happen to have been placed. The north wall now forms a part of the north wall of the large rectangular churchyard, but this was probably not the case originally. It would seem that the church was on the north side of the churchyard, no doubt near the edge, and with no burials to the north, as at Cruden, Birse, Glengairn, and numerous other places all over Scotland. There are heaped-up stones, largely overgrown with grass, against the north side of the present wall, suggesting that at one time the churchyard wall became ruinous and a new one was built slightly further south so as to include the north wall of the church. The churchyard walls are now in good order, and have been extensively repaired from time to time, especially in 1833, when the churchyard was enlarged.

In the midst of the west wall of the churchyard is a plain, semi-circular, arched gateway (fig. 10), above which is a stone inscribed: **ERECTED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PAROCHINERS OF ST FERGUS IN THE YEAR 1751. MR ROBERT GARDEN MINISTER.** This may be compared with a similar gateway at Philorth, and much finer ones at King Edward and at Longside, the latter being extended in such a manner as to form a short covered passage or true lych-gate.

Near the ground in the western part of the north wall of the church is what at first sight looks like the semicircular arch of a niche (fig. 11) that might have held a stoup. Closer examination shows that it is really a portion of the bowl of a rather small font, built into the wall sideways. The edge of the basin is about 4 inches wide, and on the inside there is a broad chamfer about 5 inches wide. The inside diameter of the basin, excluding this chamfer, is about $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches, but not quite half the basin is left. The depth is about 7 inches. The material is red sandstone.

Lying in the churchyard is a small cross (fig. 12) of finely grained sandstone, 1 foot $\frac{1}{4}$ inches high, 11 inches across the arms, and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick. The arms of the cross diminish in width from the inter-



Fig. 11. Part of font basin (?) built into wall at St Fergus.



Fig. 12. Small Cross at St Fergus.

section outwards, in such a manner that the outside edges form, roughly speaking, sections of four circles ; on one side of the cross there are four triangular depressions with right angles marking the intersection of the arms of the cross. The cross appears to have



Fig. 13. Tombstone at St Fergus.

come from one of the gables, probably the east gable, of the old church.

There are no early gravestones visible, and there are none of any special artistic merit or noteworthy character, except perhaps that shown in fig. 13.

All the inscriptions in the churchyard are given by Mr J. A. Henderson, *Aberdeenshire Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, Aberdeen, 1907, pp. 213-232, where there are also notes on the history of the parish.

The church of 1616 at the village of Kirkton of St Fergus has been twice rebuilt, first in 1763 and again in 1869. Fortunately the beautiful belfry has been carefully preserved. It is one of the rather less ornate examples of the type which developed in Aberdeenshire in the seventeenth century, and which are specially characteristic of the period known as that of the First Episcopacy.