

III.

THE CHURCHES AND CHURCHYARD MEMORIALS OF ST HELENS ON
THE LEA AND COCKBURNSPATH. BY ALAN REID, F.S.A. Scot.

ST HELENS, OR ALD-CAMUS.

To the romantic charm of the old Berwickshire folk rhyme—

St Abbs on the Knabs, and St Helens on the Lea,
But St Anns on Dunbar sands is nearest to the sea—

must be due much of the attention awarded the interesting and venerable sanctuary, standing noble in its decay, a couple of miles eastwards of Cockburnspath. Nearly all of our ecclesiological recorders have surveyed and described the ruined fane of Ald-Camus, Mr T. S. Muir (*Proceedings*, vol. iii. p. 296, with plan and views) and Messrs M'Gibbon and Ross most helpfully; but Chalmers, in his *Caledonia*, narrated the facts of its history so concisely and so well that all subsequent writers are compelled to found their observations on the statements contained in that remarkable book:—

“The parish of Cockburnspath, lying on the northern verge of Berwickshire, within the presbyterie of Dunbar, comprehends the ancient parishes of Ald-Camus, and of Colbrandspath. Ald-Camus derives its name from the Gaelic *ald*, and *camus* a creek or bay: And the village, in fact, stands on a streamlet, which, at no great distance below, falls into an *inlet* of the sea.¹ The Scottish Edgar granted to St Cuthbert's monks of Durham the manor of Ald-Camus, with the lands, woods, waters, tolls, shipwrecks, and other customary dues, which appertained to that manor, and Ald-Camus, thenceforth, belonged to the monastery of Coldingham, as a cell of Durham. The church of Ald-Camus was dedicated to St Helen, the mother of Constantine, whose festival was on the 18th of August; and its ruins are still called St Helen's-kirk.² We have seen, above, that Edgar granted the manor, but not

¹ The recent map makers have vulgarised this name into *Oldcamus*, supposing the prefix to be the Saxon *ald*, or old, and not the Gaelic *ald*, which is here, in fact, applied to a rivulet.

² The minister of the parish says: “From the nature of the building, and other circumstances, the church is supposed to have been erected in the eleventh century.” *Stat. Acc.*, xiii. 231.

the church of Ald-Camus; whence, we may be led to doubt whether the church then existed. This was a *vicarage*, as we might suppose, from the circumstance of the church being the property of the monks of Coldingham. In the ancient *Taxatio* the vicarage of Ald-Camus is rated only at fifteen marks. On the 28th of August, 1296, Huwe [Hugh], the vicar of the church of Ald-Camus, swore fealty to Edward I., at Berwick. In 1446 some doubts were entertained whether the vicarage of Ald-Camus was absolutely annexed to the priory of Durham: now Eugene, the Pope, empowered the abbot of Melros to examine the point; and the abbot appears to have confirmed the union of the church of Ald-Camus to the priory of Coldingham. Ald-Camus parish was annexed to the adjoining district of Coldbrandspath in modern times. When Pont surveyed Berwickshire, during the reign of Charles I., Ald-Camus seems, at that period, to have been separate. Those two parishes were united, sometime before the year 1750, and the church of Ald-Camus, which stood near the seashore, was a ruin before the year 1770. The name of *Cockburn's-path* was anciently *Colbrand's-path*. The corruption of the old name began, however, as early as 1506. The original name was nothing more than the *path* of *Colbrand*, the name of some particular person. The church of Colbrand's-path does not appear in the ancient *Taxatio*, as it was, perhaps, then only a chapel; and it seems never to have been connected with any religious house. The patronage of the church appears to have remained with the lord of the manor till its union with Ald-Camus. The territory of Coldbrand's-path belonged of old to the Earls of Dunbar, where they had a castle in which they sometimes resided, etc."

Quite recently it became possible, through the kindness of the legal agents on the Dunglass estate, to make a close examination of the ruins and churchyard, and thus to submit some fresh testimony regarding both. Fig. 1 gives a fairly adequate representation of an exterior which, viewed from almost any standpoint, is singularly venerable, and, from several, extremely picturesque. But the "tooth of time," and the scour of the storm, have robbed the external walls of all that was distinctive; and it is to the interior that we turn for evidences of the original individuality of the fane. Digging here to a depth of 3 feet, the base mouldings of the chancel arch were exposed to view, and with these the data on which are founded the carefully measured drawing shown in fig. 2.

On this drawing, and on the remaining architectural features of the church, Mr John Watson kindly supplies the following notes:—

“The church of St Helens was founded in the twelfth century, the earliest remnants dating probably about 1150. These consist of a chancel 15 feet 6 inches long by 11 feet 7 inches wide, and a nave 30 feet 7 inches by 18 feet, which was reduced at a later period to a width of 17 feet 4½ inches. In the chancel the four lower courses of the east side of the southern jamb of the chancel arch remain in good



Fig. 1. The Church of St Helens from the South-East.¹

condition, as seen in fig. 2, which also shows, by dotted lines, a restoration of the complete jamb. The chancel arch was narrow, measuring about 7 feet, and pointing to a survival of earlier dimensions. Mr T. S. Muir has described the ruins in his *Ancient Churches of Scotland*, but in his time the bases shown on the drawing were not visible.

¹ The interior north wall of the chancel appears to the right of the fig., a small window in the north wall of the nave showing through the chancel archway. The curvature of the added barrel vault is also to be seen to the left of the ruinous window in the south wall of the nave. Note also the “put-logs” in chancel wall and western gable.

Very probably the chancel was raised two steps above the nave, these steps originally being placed in the archway. Apparently the

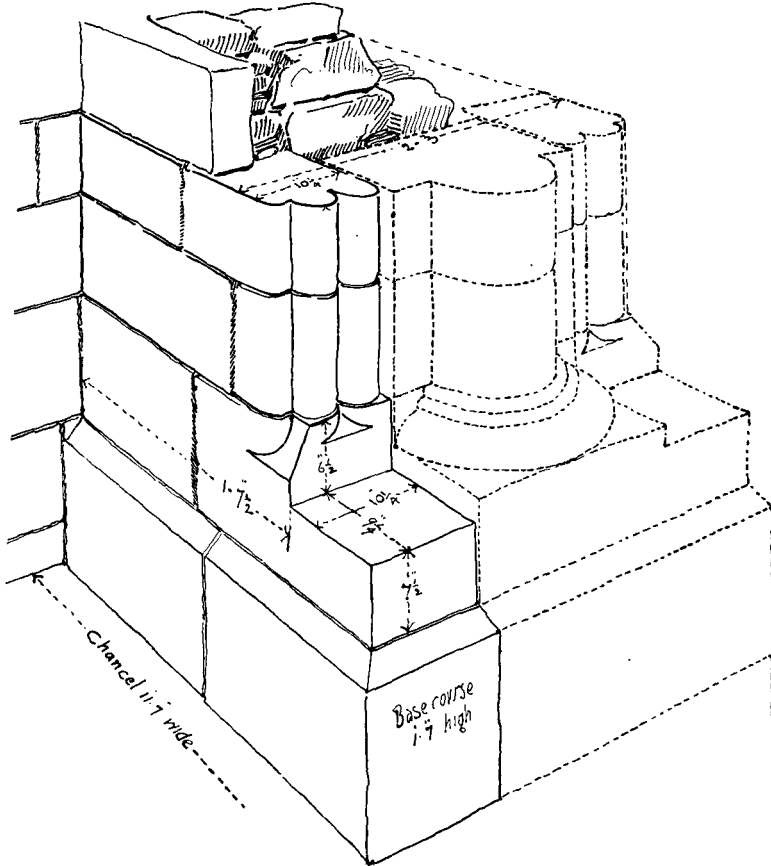


Fig. 2. Base Mouldings of Chancel Arch, St Helens.

whole church was covered by an open timber roof, which, at some later period—at all events, in the nave—was replaced by a stone

barrel vault. This is indicated by the thickening of the side walls, a thickening not incorporated into the older masonry, as is still clearly observable, and evidenced also by the actual remains of the arch itself. The west gable has angle buttresses, the character of which points to a fifteenth-century rebuilding of this portion of the structure. Its interior masonry shows a number of Norman arch voussours with chevron mouldings, which, with numerous 'put-log' openings, invest it with more than common interest."

The interior also shows the very worn remnants of an ornamental string course, which had run from the chancel arch to the walls of the nave, and may have surrounded the archway. A projecting stone in the left angle of the nave and chancel suggests the support of vaulting, but this must be regarded as evidence of the slightest that the arched roof of the nave was thus adorned. Considerable difficulty also attends the two arched recesses, formed in the south wall-thickening noted by Mr Watson, which are shown in fig. 3. It has been suggested that these recesses were intended as supports of the nave vaulting which rises over them, but this theory fails through the absence of any corresponding features in the opposing north wall. In all probability they were sepulchral or monumental in character, and one of them may have contained the sadly defaced warrior figure now lying among the tombstones outside of the church, and seen over the more remarkable monument depicted in fig. 5.

A little digging and probing of the burial-ground extending southwards of the church was rather disappointing in its results, but the relic shown in fig. 4 was worthy of far more than the labour expended in its recovery. This crudely-shaped and ornamented memorial was found in an erect position, but entirely buried, in a line due south of the intersection of nave and chancel, and was placed against the western interior wall of the nave, where it now remains. It measures 26 inches by 15 inches, narrowing to $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the foot, and is about 5 inches in thickness. On its face, as shown in fig. 4, it bears

an incised cross, which has considerable resemblance to similar figures at Whithorn and St Blanes, as also to those at Bakewell, Derbyshire, figured in Cust's *Manual of Sepulchral Slabs and Crosses*,¹ and there assigned a twelfth-century date. The reverse side also bears a roughly



Fig. 3. The Arched Recesses, St Helens.²

incised cross, which, however, has the symbolic segments *closed*, a curious variant on the *open* segmentation drawn with more skill or care on the obverse. It is possible, also, to determine that this cross

¹ Parker, London, 1849.

² The south jamb of the chancel archway, at whose base the digging was done, appears to the extreme left of the fig., which also shows the later thickening of the walls for the support of the nave vaulting, also clearly indicated.

has been enclosed within a circle, distinct traces of which appear to the left of the slab, as seen in fig. 4. The smaller stone appearing to the left of both was also found among the tombs. It is a mere fragment of worked masonry, and may be regarded as a portion of a *benatura*, or of some other hollowed vessel of that type. It may here



Fig. 4. A Mediæval Cross-Slab at St Helens, obverse and reverse.

be suggested that these, and other relics of equal or greater rarity, are worthy of safer shelter than can possibly be afforded by lonely and roofless St Helens on the Lea.

The tombstones generally now lie heaped in confusion at the south side of the ancient walls, as shown in fig. 1. Three of these, at least, are of extreme importance among the relics of Scottish churchyards,

and some of them may safely be regarded as unique. Fig. 5, for instance, shows the southern aspect of a coped grave-cover, bearing ornamental features that carry us back to the period and style of which the Govan Collection is the chief exemplar, but presenting details of line, proportion, and symbolism that are strongly individual in



Fig. 5. Southern and Northern Splays of a Sculptured Coped Grave-Cover at St Helens.

character. The striking pictorial design represents, in two different panels, a man on horseback, and an animal whose head is turned backwards and its tail curved over its back. The slab is much weathered, and is extremely worn towards its narrower and slightly mutilated end, but, even as it stands, the object is most uncommon in character, and Cust's *Manual* must again be consulted for reference to and records of its type.

The reverse or northern side of this interesting memorial is also shown in fig. 5. Greatly weathered, its ornamentation cannot be determined with precision. A panel-like depression is seen clearly in the illustration, but the entire splay is so worn, especially towards the top, that nothing definite remains. Unfortunately, the slab is broken at the foot or narrow end, by how much may be judged by the entire absence of the panel "return" seen so clearly 6 inches from the wider end. The length of the slab now is 4 feet 11 inches. It is 11 inches in thickness, tapers from 15 inches to 13 inches in breadth, and is splayed towards a ridge which is slightly rounded and tapers from 4 to 3 inches in breadth between the splays.

The churchyard also contains four tapering grave-covers, all of a very plain and quite unornamented character; and three others that are massive, but simply rectangular in form.

The portion of a hog-backed grave-cover, shown in fig. 6, adds another to the Society's records of this type of churchyard memorials. Here several lines of scale ornamentation are drawn within a slightly recessed panel, over which appears a curious band of greatly-worn sculptures, which are somewhat suggestive of animal forms akin to those depicted on a larger scale on the southern side of the relic. It measures 25 inches in length—about half of its original size, presumably; is 16 inches broad at the base, and 12 inches in depth, or thickness, at its centre. The massive proportions and pronounced curvature of the type are not prominent in the fragment, but the steep splays, the characteristic scallops, the sloping end, and the sharp ridge, declare its relationship to the fairly determinate class of memorials known as hog-back stones.

Most interesting but scarcely visible also is the sculpture on the southern splay. As in the case of the coped stone shown in fig. 5, the ornamentation here depicts a bestiary subject, and is slightly recessed within a panel which, like that containing the scale ornament on the opposing splay, shows a boldly projecting and rounded "return"

of over 3 inches in breadth. A single animal, drawn on a scale that fills the entire breadth of the panel, is here represented, but further than that the sculpture refuses to be explicit.

Even less can be hazarded regarding the remaining portion of still



Fig. 6. Portion of a Hog-backed Grave-Cover at St Helens, obverse and reverse.

another and more worn relic of a contemporaneous character. This fragment is fully 3 feet in length, only 8 inches in thickness, and tapers from 16 inches to 14 inches in breadth. It has a strong suggestion of the hog-back type in its slight curve, steep angles, narrow ridge, and scale markings; but the designs on its principal splay are

so faint that it is impossible to determine either their subject or character.

Another grave-covering slab, and of an unusual type, is 58 inches in length, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness, and tapers from 20 inches to 15 inches in breadth. Unlike the relief designs worked upon the older cope and hog-back monuments, the archaic outlines of the figure here depicted are incised; the whole work being so weathered or trodden, perhaps, that it is scarcely visible. Evidently, however, we have here the delineation of a warrior in the attitude of prayer. His sword has a straight guard, and it seems possible to recognise the texture of chain armour on part of the slightly rounded surface lying within the outlines of the arms and upper part of the body. The wide skirts of an outer garment spread round the feet of the figure, whose toes reach to within 8 inches of the bottom of the slab. Unfortunately, there is neither helmet, shield, name, nor date, whereby to identify this erstwhile knight of long-forgotten days.

It is evident that at some time or other all the tombstones at St Helens were removed from their original situations in the churchyard and dumped into a heap almost, along and near to the southern wall of the church. The reason for that regrettable procedure doubtless was that the large enclosure might be the more available for pasturage, for it is fertile to a degree and rapidly recovers after such interferences as have been noted. It is surrounded by a dyke largely built of the squared ruddy sandstone blocks that once occupied positions of greater honour in the walls of the church, but the ancient relics are virtually unprotected. There are a dozen of table-stones in the pile, and that some care was exercised in their "re-planting" is shown by several massive end-supports having been laid flat to form a foundation for a few superincumbent through-stones. One of these foundation slabs bears the incised initials and dates "R B 1665" and "W B 1666," another, showing an hour-glass and spade, with the date 1667. One of the re-set table-stones is of enormous size, measuring 6 feet

8 inches in length, 40 inches in breadth, and 9 inches in thickness. It commemorates Agnes Booth, spouse to John Swanston. Another, which still rests on its own end and central supports, is of the same size, but of the more normal thickness of 5 inches. This example shows a row of nail-head ornamentation set in a double bead that runs round its edges, and bears more than the usual number of inscriptions. Three of these may be reproduced as typical of the epigraphy prevailing on this most interesting site :—

HERE · LYES · EVPHAN · SIBBALD
WHO · DEPARTED · THIS · LIFE
THE · 6 · OF · MARCH · 1672

ALSO · MARGRET · ATCHISON
WHO · DEPARTED · THIS · LIFE
THE · 27 · OF · DECEMBER
1627 · AND · OF · HIR · AGE
41 · YEARS

ALSO · IAMES · SUANSTON
WHO · DEPARTED · THIS · LIFE
THE · 15 · OF · AGUST · 1717 · AND
AND · OF · HIS · AGE · 75 · YEARS

The erect stones are few in number, and of no particular merit, architecturally or symbolically. One, dating from 1712, shows a cherub with the wings rather artistically folded; another, dating from 1776, shows much cruder ornamentation, in which the winged cherub-head, skull, and crossbones are prominent. But these emblems, and others commonly met with elsewhere, may here be said to be “conspicuous by their absence.” The *Memento Mori* legend occurs several times; but the charm of the remaining tombstones of later date lies in their inscriptions. These, though illiterate at times, are significant of the ways and phraseology of the past, and occasionally present us with the quaint earlier forms of such names as Buglass.

This surname occurs as follows upon a flat slab, which has chamfered edges, and measures 6 feet in length by 27 inches in breadth :—

HEIR · LIES ·
 IOHN AND IENIT · BOOK
 LESSES · 1668 · 1669
 HERE LYES GEORGES
 BOOKLESS WHO DEPA
 RTED THIS LIFE THE
 SEVENTH OF IVN 1748
 AND OF HIS AGE 70 YEAES, etc.

COCKBURNSPATH.

There is no Scottish parish richer than Cockburnspath in the variety and interest of its historical and ecclesiastical remains. The beautiful Gothic church of Dunglass is just beyond it westwards, St Helens on the Lea enriches its seaboard eastwards, while its own pre-reformation fane occupies a central position within a quaint old-world village which still shows the " castle " of its former lairds and a charming market cross. Its bounds and environment teem with evidences of prehistoric occupation, and the remarkable ravines that carry its hill waters to the sea bear striking testimony to the natural difficulties that beset Cromwell in his fiercely contested passage towards Dunbar.

The ancient church of the parish has been sadly mangled by a series of utilitarian alterations and repairs, but enough of the old work remains to attest its original charm of character. Its builders seem to have reared its western gable against the round tower of an earlier structure, their angle buttresses and quaint sun-dial forming, with this unusual and striking object, the remarkable architectural group shown in fig. 7. An example of the old tracery has also been preserved, possibly that of the original east window, displaced by the building of the Arnot burial aisle in 1614. It now forms a bit of rather feeble ornamentation over the modern south-east doorway, which is further enriched by a dated lintel, evidently an interpolation,

of a character quite foreign to its present position and use. The illustration also shows two of the original wall-openings or windows of the tower. These were lights to the stair, which entirely fills the



Fig. 7. West Gable and Tower of the Church of Cockburnspath.

building up to the belfry stage, and are rectangular in form and widely splayed towards the interior. The openings in the upper walls are larger, cross-shaped, and without splay, and it is evident from their poor construction that they were formed by the widening of the older windows, or by the slapping of the wall for their own insertion. The

newelled stair leads from a doorway on the church level to the bell chamber, in which is hung a large bell, inscribed in Roman letters : " Thomas Mears of London Founder 1837." It measures 24 inches in diameter at the mouth, and is 21 inches in height from the lips to the bottom of the crown.

Within the manse is treasured one of the finest examples known of

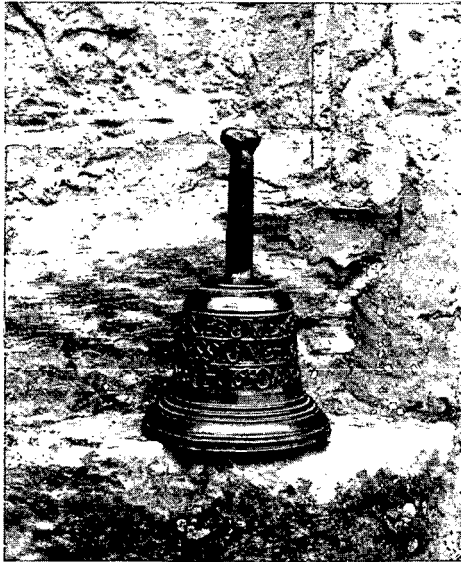


Fig. 8. The " Deid Bell " at Cockburnspath.

those hand-bells once common to Scottish villages, used when intimations of death and burial were made by sextons or public criers, and known, generally, as deid-bells. This beautiful object measures $9\frac{3}{8}$ inches from its mouth or base to the top of the handle ; the handle is $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches long, and $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch in thickness ; the bell having a diameter of 6 inches over its mouth, $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches at the top of its mouldings, and a height of $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches from lips to root of handle. The lower mouldings,

or encircling beads, are of a rich Gothic type, the general design chaste and effective, the metal solid and heavy, and the tone extremely good. There is the further charm and interest of a lengthy inscription which, in finely raised letters $\frac{5}{8}$ inch in height, tells the story of the bell, and in these words :—

GIFTED · BE · IOHN · HENRIE · BOWER · ¹
 IN · EDINBVRGH · TO · THE · SESSION ·
 AND · KIRKE · OF · COCKBVRNSPETH · 1650.

In the year 1614 William Arnot, Lord Provost of Edinburgh and Laird of Cockburnspath, built the mausoleum, now a picturesque adjunct of the eastern gable of the church. The Arnot arms (chevron, mullets, and crescent), the initials W A, and the date 1614, appear on and under the gable finial of the aisle ; while over the entrance remains the matrix of a vanished panel which doubtless had borne references to the Arnot pedigree. The massive stone in which this panel had been set, acts also as the lintel of a three-light window whose mullions have given place to a bit of old iron grille work, which, to all appearance, had done duty in the defence of some other building, and at some very distant date. Clearly, also, the original entrance under these objects was much wider than the present doorway, and that the vault was much used for burial purposes was amply proven some years ago when its interior accumulations were disturbed in order to place a furnace for church-heating purposes some feet beneath their surface.

The Arnot aisle measures 15 feet 8 inches in length by 21 feet, a splayed base adding 10 inches to the breadth indicated by the latter figures. It is remarkably well built of finely squared sandstone ; the

¹ Sir J. Balfour Paul kindly notes that John Henrie, son of Adam Henrie in Leith Wynd, was apprenticed to John Forrest, bower [*i.e.* bowmaker], Edinburgh, 21 April 1630 ; and that he married Janet Wallace, 2 November 1637. He was probably the son of that Adam Henrie who married Beatrix Aleson, 25 April 1610.

heavy stone roof, the boldly moulded projecting eaves, and the masonry generally being of a massive and superior character. The flagged roof is supported by a pointed arch, whose apex rises 13 feet over the present floor level, and may have been 3 or 4 feet higher in



Fig. 9. Arms of Hay of Errol.

other days. Of tablets or inscriptions the interior walls are entirely void ; but the vault holds one feature of interest, and of not a little speculation, in the form of a late seventeenth-century flat stone, whose only adornment is the armorial panel shown in fig. 9.

We have here a representation of the arms of the Hays of Errol with their motto, *Serva Jugum*, dating, so far as style and work-

manship can determine, from the latter half of the seventeenth century. The initials D·I·H· might be read alternatively as Dominus, Johannes, or Jacobus Hay (if we knew who they were), or they may stand for those of Dame Isabel Hay, twelfth child of William, 10th Earl of Errol, who, according to the register of Canongate Parish, was baptised there in 1611. This lady, as is noted in the new *Scottish Peerage*, had, in 1635, a birth brieve under the Great Seal, "probably intended to secure consideration for her on her travels, as she was an invalid and obliged to live abroad for her health. She was one of the three noble ladies whom Gilbert Blakhal served" (see his *Brief Narrative*, Spalding Club). There is no information recoverable meantime regarding the reason for the interment of D·I·H· within the burial vault of the Arnots, but the period is not remote, and the point may yet be satisfactorily explained. The slab, which seems to have been of the table-stone type, has moulded edges, and is 6 feet long by 30 inches in breadth. The central shield, shown in fig. 9, measures 21 inches by 16½ inches, and was photographed from a rubbing made in August 1913.

The surrounding graveyard, which, quite recently, was the subject of a thorough and very commendable renovation, shows only a few specimens of the characteristic symbolism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The scales of the merchant, the crown of immortality, the skull and crossbones, the winged cherub-head, the hour-glass, and, curiously enough, the *ribs* of a human body, all appear in conformity with prevailing custom and design; the best representation of emblems more purely secular appearing on the un-inscribed memorial of a blacksmith, shown in fig. 10. The boldness of the relief seen here is quite remarkable, the designs being raised nearly 3 inches from the surface of the stone. A winged cherub-head (very worn, but showing the curls of a periwig), crossbones, skull, pincers, anvil, and two hammers, form the designs so realistically depicted here.

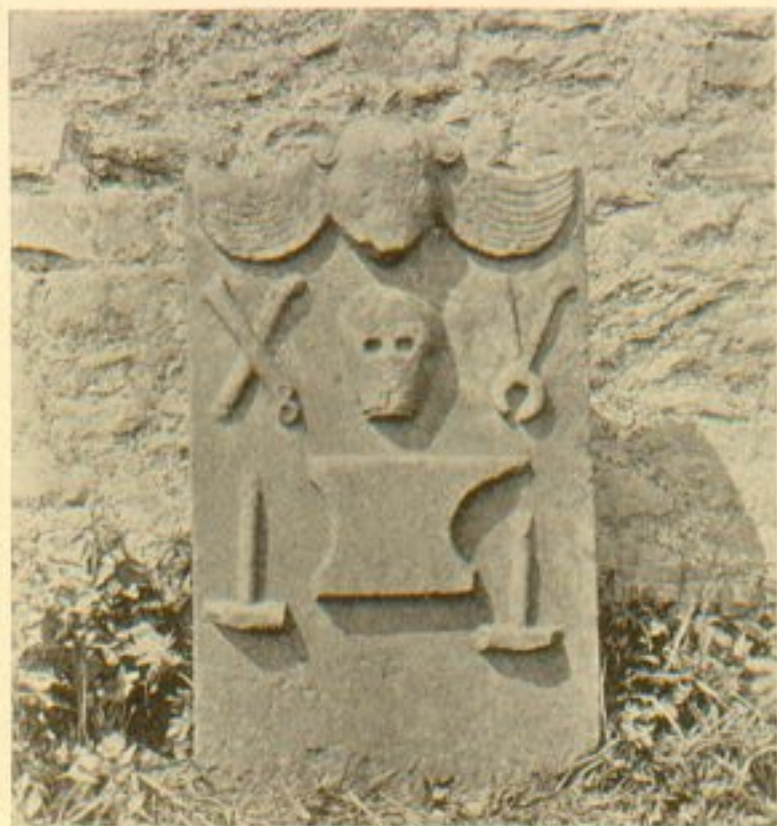


Fig. 10. A Blacksmith's Memorial at Cockburnspath.

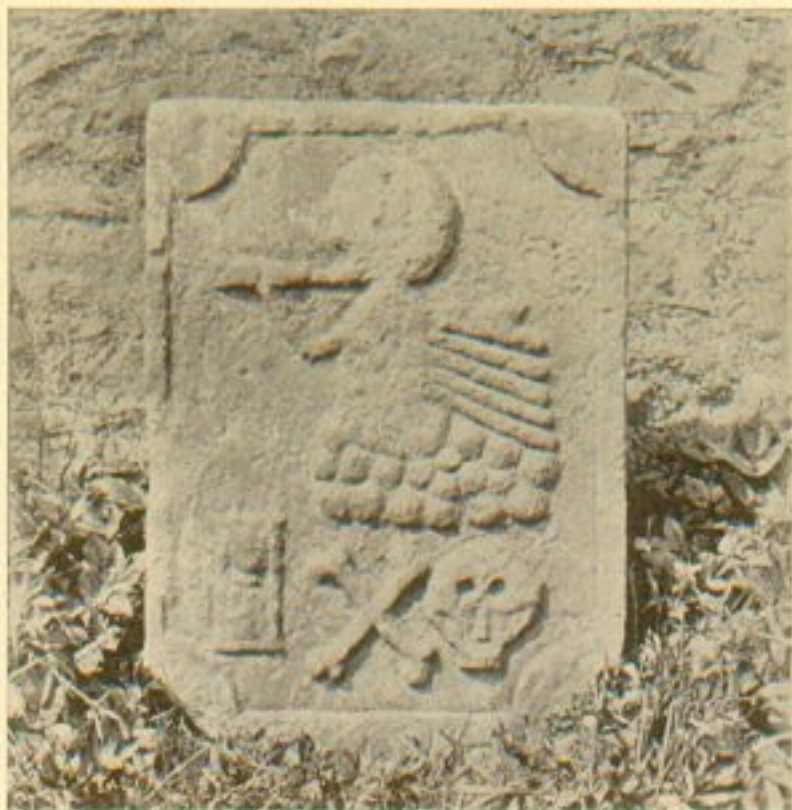


Fig. 11. A Resurrection Angel.

Nothing quainter could be found anywhere than is the trumpet-blowing angel represented in fig. 11. The design is crude to the point of absurdity, but it tells its story well; and the angelic wings are attached to the body with more certainty than is commonly experienced. The clouds from which the figure emerges are a somewhat knotty problem, but there they are, and all in good and orthodox relationship to the emblems of our frail humanity—the hour-glass, crossbones and skull, which occupy the lower plane. Very quaint also is the inscription incised on the reverse, with a somewhat later date than might be expected from the cut and character of the symbols:—

HERE · LYIS · MARGRET
 WHITIT · SPOWS · TO
 IOHN · ROBERTSON
 WHO · DEPARTED · TH^S
 LIFE · THE · 18 · DAY · OF
 IWNE · 1724 · AND
 OF · HIR · AGED · 61
 YEARS

To Mr W. D. Lowe, of Messrs Tods, Murray, & Jamieson, W.S., who gave permission to examine the ground at St Helens; to Mr Johnstone, head gardener at Dunglass, and to Mr Sanderson of Old Cambus West Mains, both of whom gave valuable assistance in connection with the search, the thanks of the Society are most cordially tendered. Very gratefully also are acknowledged the services of Mr James Moffat, Edinburgh, who supplied the excellent photographs numbered 4 to 8, 10 and 11; of Mr J. U. Reid, Edinburgh, who photographed those numbered 1 and 3; of Mr F. Inglis, Edinburgh, who photographed figs. 2 and 9; and of Mr John Watson, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A. Scot., who furnished the careful drawing of the arch mouldings shown in fig. 2, and supplied the valuable notes therewith connected.