

II.

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PEW-BACK FROM THE CHURCH OF
DIPPLE, MORAY. BY JOHN GEDDIE.

There has lately been bequeathed, by will, to the Parish Church of Speymouth, in Moray, by the deceased Miss Isabella Shand, niece of the late Alexander Shand, in the neighbouring village of Mosstodloch, what

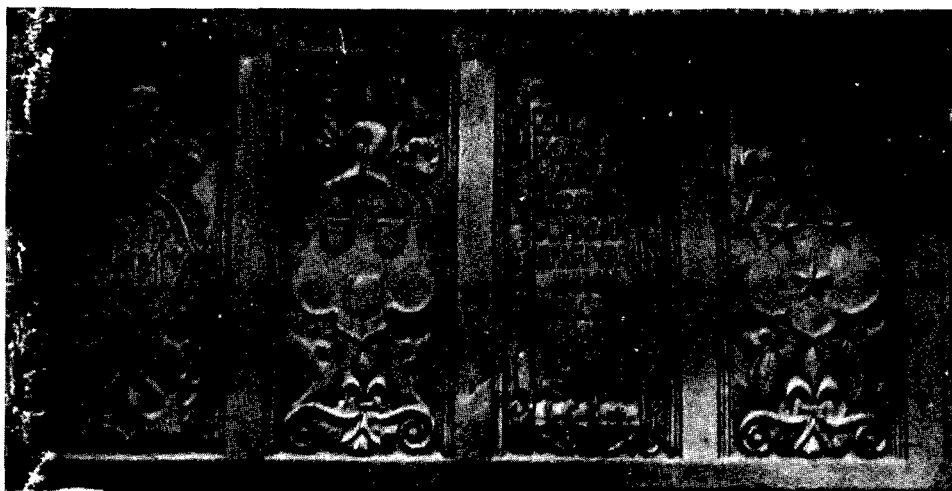


Fig. 1. Old Pew-back from Dipple Church.

appears to have been the back of a pew, carved in black oak and bearing the date "1634." The Shands, as shown by the grave-slabs and through stones in the churchyards of Essil and Dipple—which were conjoined in 1731 to form the parish of Speymouth—are a family with an old residential and territorial connection with the district; but they do not seem to have had any other personal association with this interesting relic of the art and annals of the first half of the seventeenth century. The only record of it appears to be contained in "the (manuscript) *Speymouth Parish Magazine*" for 1901, a local literary and historical chronicle begun in that year, of which my brother, Mr Alexander Geddie, M.A., Fochabers, lately schoolmaster and still session-clerk of Speymouth, has been and continues to be the "Editor." It is in the

form of a pen-and-ink sketch by the then, and present, minister of Speymouth, the Rev. George Birnie, who has attached to it a note which states that the panel was "taken from the old Kirk of Essil," and was "supposed to be the carved back of a pew belonging to Walter Hay." It is added that "there is only the half of the original back of the pew shown in the drawing"; but there is given, in addition, "a sketch of what seems to be one of the missing panels, obviously carved by the same hand and exactly of the same dimensions as the rest. This belonged to Mr Todd, late of Trochelhill (in the parish). He found it in a dunghill, fifty or sixty years ago '(from 1901),' in Fochabers." The whereabouts of this fragment is at present unknown.

As will be seen from the photograph (fig. 1), the four panels that have been preserved, and that have found so appropriate a housing, are deeply carved, and bear heraldic, floral, and zoomorphic ornament, including—

(1) A shield, bearing three escutcheons (for Hay) surmounted by a helmet.

(2) A monogram, with the initials "V.H., L.I.," below the demi-figure of a man wearing a ruff.

(3) The inscription—

"Creat in
me a clean
heart O God
and renue
a right
spirit with
in me.
Erecit be
Valter Hay
and L. Innes
His Spous.
1634."

(4) A shield with the three mullets, or stars, of Innes, and above it what looks like a lady's head-dress.

The missing panel, as drawn by Mr Birnie, was inscribed:

"Blissed
is ye man
yt feare
th ye Lord
and delyght
eth in his
command
ements.
CXII
Psalme."

The traditional ascription of the fragment to the old Church of St Peter at Essil is certainly erroneous, and it may with some confidence

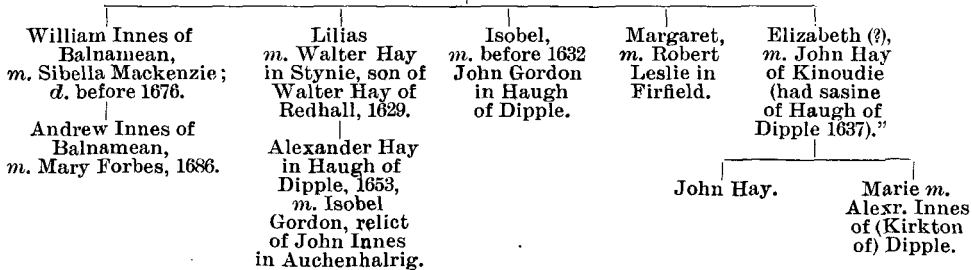
be assigned to the former Church of the Holy Ghost at Dipple, united to Essil some two centuries ago to form the Church of Speymouth, locally known as the "Red Kirk," where service was first held on 25th February 1733. For identification of the "spouses" by whom the pew was "erecit," I am indebted to Mr Thomas Innes of Learney, Carrick Pursuivant, who has been at much trouble in examining the relative records of the period, and who writes:

"Alexander Innes of Haugh of Dipple had three, or more likely five, daughters, amongst whom was Liliass Innes, who married, before 1629, Walter Hay in Stynie, son of Walter Hay of Redhall (*Moray Sasines*, iii. 235). Another daughter, Elizabeth, married, before 1637, John Hay of Kinoudie, and they had sasine of Haugh of Dipple, but whether wholly or a part of tocher is not clear. I do not think the Hays had Redhall long, and probably only in wadsett. Inneses usually held it. I think the pew-back had been considerably larger, and probably the other half showed the arms of the Inneses of Dipple."

He gives the following descent:

"ALEXANDER INNES, burgess in Elgin, had sasine of Balnamean in 1604. *m.* Marjorie Thomson. He seems to have been still alive in 1631, when he was witness of a sasine to his granddaughter (?) Liliass. He was presumably followed by

ALEXANDER INNES, of Haugh of Dipple, which he acquired in 1631, and who *m.* Margaret Gordon. He acquired Balnamean from Walter Ogilvie of Redhythe (Fordyce) 1636 (likely a recovery from a wadsett by the previous Alexander). *d.* before 1647, when his widow was sued for his "lair stane" by Alexander Anderson, mason burgess in Elgin (it cost 50/).



It may be noted that, along with a sprinkling of Hays, there were a host of Inneses, proprietors of lands in this corner of Moray in the seventeenth century, including, in addition to those already mentioned, the Lairds of Coxtou, Orton, Cottis, Leuchars, and Dunkinty, and that "Walter" and "Liliass" were not infrequent baptismal names. The minister of Essil in 1651, Colin Falconer, who in 1680 became (Episcopal) Bishop of Moray and died 1686, married Liliass Rose, daughter of the Laird of Clava, and through his daughter, who married the Rev. Berowald Innes of Inchstellie, became grandfather of a Liliass Innes. In the generation immediately succeeding 1634 a Janet Innes, daughter of Sir James Innes

of Redhall, married Thomas Pitt, the first Governor of Madras and owner of the "Pitt Diamond," and thus became grandmother of that famous statesman the first Earl of Chatham and great-grandmother of William Pitt. Dipple was one of the earliest Innes acquisitions in Moray of William Duff, father of the first Earl of Fife, whose house, with his arms and initials, still stands on the north side of the High Street of Elgin, opposite the "Little Cross"; while Innes, the chief heritage of the family, represented by that of Innes-Ker, Duke of Roxburghe, was purchased a little later, and is now owned by Mr F. J. Tennant. Fragments of the churches of both Essil and Dipple remain as supports of tombstones. The custom, recorded by the Rev. Lachlan Shaw, the "Historian of Moray," and by others, of carrying the dead "sun-ways" around the circular walls of the churchyard of Dipple survived almost to within living memory. Speymouth Church (there is no graveyard) with the manse, which was headquarters successively of the Jacobite and of the Hanoverian armies in the '45, is within the bounds of the old Dipple Parish. "St Leonard's Well," described as adjacent to the site of the conjoined church, is yet extant, although covered from view, within a stone-throw of the "Red Kirk"; while the farm-house of Stynie is close at hand, and Redhall, of whose manor-house, however, no trace is left, is only a field or two away. It was a small clay-walled "ha' hoose," commanding the ford of Spey opposite Gordon Castle (Shaw's *History of Moray*, vol. i. p. 309).

As to the history of the relic in the intervening couple of centuries no information has been found obtainable. Mr Alexander Geddie writes that "Miss Shand's cousin, who lived next door to her all her life, never saw the panels until after the old lady's death last summer, and had no idea as to how they had got into her uncle's possession. I imagine that when the old church of Dipple ceased to function and began to fall in pieces some of the old parishioners did a bit of salvaging on their own account, and this piece of carved work had the good luck to fall into careful hands, and was preserved for the Red Kirk."

Carved ecclesiastical woodwork, of the period and of heraldic design, is comparatively rare in Scotland, and has in large part been gathered into museums and private repositories. One recalls, as examples *in situ*, the Sandilands pew in the Parish Church of Midcalder (1595), and the Melville pew in that of Burntisland (1606), figured in the *Reports on Ancient Monuments* for Midlothian and for Fife. But more pregnant comparison may perhaps be made, on grounds of local and family associations, with the twelve panels previously adorning the Gardeners' Loft, in the South Aisle, or St Anne's Chapel, of the old Church of Cullen, which were removed for preservation when the church was reno-

vated in 1842, and are now placed in the pillars of the Seafield Gallery, as described by Dr William Cramond in his *Church and Churchyard of Cullen* (p. 82). Of these panels, four have among their prominent decorations the *fleurs-de-lys* which appear on the Dipple pew-back, and on one of them is the date "1608," with arms—a crescent between three mullets—which Cramond, following Jervise, is disposed to identify as those of Innes, "the crescent being mark for descent from a second son. The letter 'I' on each side strengthens this opinion," as may also the monogram "TAI" on another panel. St Anne's Chapel was founded in 1536 by "Elene Hay," descendant of John Hay, Lord of the Forest of Boyne and of Tullibole, whose arms, three escutcheons, are on the walls. She was mother of John Duff of Muldavit, an ancestor of the Earls of Fife, who, in 1626, sold the lands, which had in a previous century belonged to the Inneses of Innes, to Hay of Rannes.

As indication of the survival to a later date of carved work executed by local craftsmen in this part of the Moray Firth area, Cramond quotes from a contract entered into by Thomas Gordon, carpenter in Fordyce, in 1685, by which he undertook "to erect for Wm. Dunbar in the Ile of Durn and Church of Fordyce, ane dask of six pews and ane round seatt, covered with ane cumbe above, handsonlye mullered, with four supporting pillars of the same in good fashione," with a porch, and "bearing his own and his vyfe's armes," for which he was to be paid "40 merks Scots money and two bolls sufficient oatmeal." That this and other forms of Scottish Church art had even by the time of the erection of the Dipple pew-back fallen into dire disrepute with a section of the Presbyterian clergy and laity of the North is, on the other hand, pitifully illustrated by an extract from the same author's *Records of the Kirk Session of Elgin*, in which it is noted that the Rev. Gilbert Ross, from Colmonnell in Carrick, having been translated to the charge of Elgin on 24th September 1640, on 28th December following, in company with Robert Innes, yr. of that Ilk, "he tore down the fine partition screen of the Cathedral, which had remained since the Reformation. This Mr Ross carried home for kitchen fuel, but each night the fire got extinguished, and could not be kept in till morning."