

## VI.

### NOTES ON SCOTTISH INCISED SLABS (II).

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*Read October 27, 1945.*

KINKELL (ABERDEENSHIRE).

*Gilbert Grenlau, Esq. (1411).*

Two sketches of this slab have already appeared: one, by Andrew Gibb, F.S.A.Scot., in the *Proceedings* for 1876-77,<sup>1</sup> the other, by James Logan, in the second volume of his *Collectanea Ecclesiastica in Provincia Abredonensi* (1819), which are included in the volume (*Logan's Collections*) issued in 1941 by the Third Spalding Club.<sup>2</sup> My apology for devoting part of this communication to it lies in the fact that neither of these sketches is satisfactory. Both omit certain details and delineate others inaccurately, while Logan, by greatly exaggerating the width, produces a figure of almost Falstaffian proportions, and in neither case was any attempt made to supplement the drawing by an adequate description. The only accurate reproduction I have yet seen is a small photograph at page xxviii of the introduction to the Third Spalding Club volume just referred to, but it was evidently taken in an unsuitable light, for the stone is in shadow, and the incisions do not stand out with the requisite sharpness.

The slab (fig. 1), of brownish sandstone, is placed upright on a low pedestal within the pre-Reformation church of Kinkell, now in ruins, which stands near the left bank of the Don about two miles below Inverurie. The lower portion is lost, and what is now left measures 4 feet 10½ inches by 2 feet

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xii., Part 1, pl. viii.

<sup>2</sup> P. 88.



Fig. 1. Gilbert Grenlau, Esq. (1411)  
(obverse).  
Kinkell, Aberdeenshire.

6½ inches. It bears the boldly though somewhat crudely engraved effigy of an armed man, with a marginal inscription and two shields.

This figure is of exceptional interest as an all too rare example of Scottish armour in the opening years of the fifteenth century. Only two other slabs showing Scottish armour of this period are known to me; the first is in the churchyard of Foveran, near Newburgh, Aberdeenshire, and is illustrated and described in the 1908-9 volume of the *Proceedings*;<sup>1</sup> it has, unfortunately, been somewhat marred by recutting. The second lies in a mausoleum in the policies of Duff House, Banff; here the original figure is obscured, and partially obliterated, by a barbarously cut effigy, the work of an ignoramus, which has been superimposed upon it.

The armour portrayed on the Kinkell slab is of mixed mail and plate. On the head is an acutely pointed bascinet, on the front of which are two curious objects which I have not found on any

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 309-11.

other military monument of the period; from their position, they seem designed for the attachment of a visor. Mr Charles ffoulkes, F.S.A., the eminent authority on armour, suggests that they may have been for a removable visor which could be hooked on and off, as distinct from the more normal hinged or pivoted types which were fixed to the helmet. Covering the sides of the face and coming well down over the shoulders is the mail cape or camail, with invecked lower edge. There is no sign of its attachment to the bascinet, to the rim of which it was usually laced by cords passed through a series of staples.

Over the body is the jupon, a tight-fitting sleeveless coat of some stout material faced with silk or velvet, on which are embroidered the wearer's arms. It is shown somewhat shorter than usual, its lower edge being hidden under the bawdric. From beneath it appears the bottom portion of the mail shirt or hawberk, with invecked lower edge. The outline of the body seems to suggest that a cuirass of plate may have been worn over the hawberk beneath the jupon.

Except for the insides of the upper arms, where the hawberk sleeves appear, the arms are wholly encased in plate, with rerebraces (or demi-brassarts) covering the outer sides of the upper arms, articulated coudes at the elbows, and vambraces enclosing the forearms. It may be noted that while the securing straps of the vambraces are shown, those of the rerebraces are left out. The hands, which are bare, are placed one behind the other in an attitude of devotion.

Chaussons of mail are worn on the thighs, and over them, covering the front portion, cuisses of plate, the straps holding them in place being well shown. Of the genouillères only the upper part remains, but they appear to have been pointed in profile, like those worn by the two figures on the Foveran slab. The posture of the thighs seems to indicate that the feet were turned out at an angle of 180 degrees, and the effect must have been most ungainly.

The bawdric, passing around the loins and buckled in front, is divided into narrow vertical sections, probably to denote alternate bands of different coloured material, but the engraver has omitted to complete this ornament on the left-hand side. A plain and much narrower belt, also buckled in front, crosses diagonally from the right hip under the bawdric to the left thigh, where it supports the sword, a ponderous weapon having a pear-shaped pommel, long grip ornamented in a lozenge pattern, and guard with drooping quillons broadening into leaf-like terminations. Attached to the bawdric on the right-hand side by a small strap is the misericorde, with bound grip and trefoil-shaped pommel.

On either side of the head is a large shield, the dexter one now blank (perhaps originally painted); the sinister bears A chevron between 2 water-bougets in chief and a hunting-horn in base. These charges are

repeated on the jupon, the chevron being concealed by the hands and forearms.

Round the edge is a marginal strip containing a black-letter inscription, with roundels, now blank, at the corners; these may possibly have been painted with symbols of the evangelists or contracted words of prayer. The surviving portion of the inscription reads:

“Hic iacet nobilis armiger gilbertus de gre- ----- anno  
d(omi)ni M.CCCC.XI.”

The portion of a fourth letter of the surname is almost certainly the first stroke of an “n”, for the surname, fortunately, is not in doubt, the arms on the slab being identical with those of Gilbert Grenlau, the contemporary bishop of Aberdeen (1390-1422), as given on his counter-seal.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the squire had the same Christian name as the bishop would suggest that he was probably a nephew of that dignitary.

Although the day and month of death are no longer on record, owing to the mutilation of the stone, they can be inferred with practical certainty, for on 24th July 1411 the bloody battle of Harlaw was fought within a few miles of Kinkell, and many of the slain are said to have been brought thither for burial. The casualty lists given in the old ballad and in Boece's *History* are confined to a very few of the outstanding leaders, but we may be certain that no Lowland gentleman in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, least of all a near kinsman of the bishop, could have been backward in answering the call to arms, and had he not fallen in the battle, one might expect that Gilbert Grenlau the squire would have found his last resting-place in St Machar's Cathedral. The fact that he lies at Kinkell seems to imply that he fell early in the action and that his body, when recovered (probably several days afterwards), was in a condition that would effectually preclude its removal for interment in Aberdeen.

The armour worn by Grenlau shows the penultimate stage in the transition from full mail to complete plate, which seems to have been finally achieved over most of the Lowlands by about 1420, as the slabs of David Berclay of Luthrie (1421) at Creich, Fife, and of John Galychtly (of about the same date, and possibly by the same engraver) at Longforgan, Perthshire, both show figures completely armed in plate, save for a few very minor accessories of mail. In the Highlands and Isles mail survived for another couple of centuries, the only example of complete plate I have seen in that area being the early sixteenth-century effigy of Iain MacIain of Ardnamurchan on a slab in Iona Cathedral.

<sup>1</sup> A somewhat imperfect impression of this seal, of date 1398, is illustrated in *Reg. Ep. Aberdon.* (Maitland Club, 1845, vol. ii., pl. ii., fig. 4); the cast of a better one, dated 1422, is preserved in H.M. General Register House; this is the one mentioned in Laing's *Scottish Seals* (Maitland Club, 1850, p. 174), where the arms are erroneously given as A chevron between 3 water-bougets; they are, however, accurately described in Stevenson and Wood (*Scottish Heraldic Seals*, vol. i. p. 122) and the B.M. *Catalogue Seals*, vol. iv. p. 67).

It might have been hoped that so long as the church stood entire, a monument such as this would have been safe from the spoiler, but in 1592 the slab was turned over, engraved on the back, and laid down again over the tomb of a local laird, John Forbes of Ardmurdo, a scion of one of the greatest houses of the North-East. Whether it was cut down in this process or had previously been cracked across and the lower portion re-used or thrown away, we have no means of knowing, but the purloining of the slab to form another man's monument in a land where stone is plentiful was a mean act of vandalism and common theft for which it is difficult to find adequate words of reprobation.

The reverse (or Ardmurdo) side (fig. 2) bears a marginal inscription in black-letter with a few Roman capitals:

"Hic iacet honore illustris & sancta morum pietate ornat(us) Joan(n)es forbes de ardmurdi" (error for 'ardmurdo') "ei(us) cognominis hæres 4 qui anno ætatis suæ. 66. 8 Julii. A.D. 1592. obiit."

Within the margin is a large shield of the some-

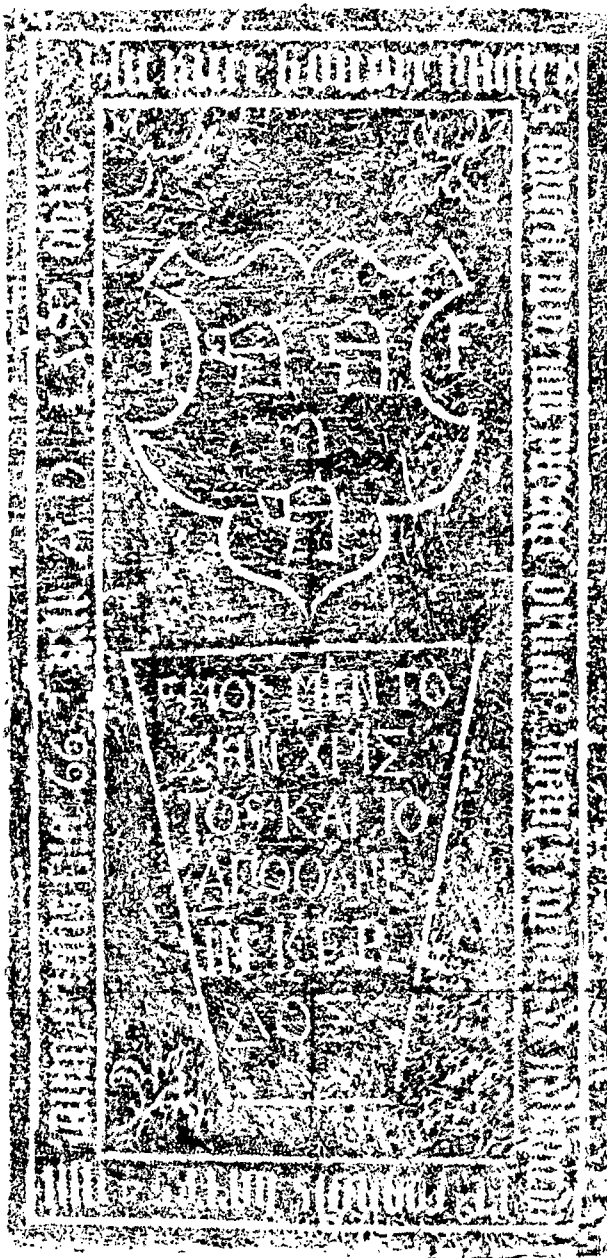


Fig. 2. John Forbes of Ardmurdo (1592)  
(reverse).

Kinkell, Aberdeenshire.

what fantastic shape in general use at the time, charged with 3 bear's heads coupé and muzzled (Forbes) with a bird's (? hawk's) head coupé for difference. There is no other record of these arms, but the full blazon would probably have been Azure, 3 bear's heads coupé argent, muzzled gules, a ? hawk's head coupé . . . at the fesse point for difference. The initials "I. F." in capitals are placed one on each side of the shield, and beneath it, within a quadrilateral tapering from top to base, is the Greek text of Philippians i. 21:

"EMOI MEN TO ZHN XPICTOS KAI TO AΠOΘANEIN KEPAOΣ."

Four small springs of foliage in the corners complete the design.

The family of Ardmurdo may have hoped that in laying down their new memorial all knowledge of their sacrilege would be hidden for ever. Such hopes, if entertained, were doomed to disappointment, for by 1732 the Grenlau side was uppermost again. The "View of the Diocese" of that year has this interesting and very curious note:

"Here (in the church) is a large gravestone, supposed to be one of the chaplains (*sic*) slain at the battle of Harlaw, because in the inscription the year agrees, being A.D. M.CCC.XI. (*sic*). But this inscription cannot be read completely, standing thus: 'Hic jacet Robertus (*sic*) Armiger- - - dominus (*sic*) de Stri - - -' (*sic*). The arms are, between a cheveron (*sic*), two water budgets, in chef, and a hunting horn, in base. On the stone there is farther carved (*sic*) at large, in a rude Gothic way, the figure of a man partly (*sic*) in armour, praying in a very devout manner." <sup>1</sup>

This passage, for its length, must surely contain almost a record number of blunders. It is difficult to account for such a gross misreading of the inscription. But we may turn an indulgent eye on the writer for the sake of the information he has given on the state of the slab at that time. Not a word of Ardmurdo, who had evidently gone underground, the very existence of his monument unsuspected!—a rare and most gratifying instance of poetic justice.

Our next information comes from Logan, who visited Kinkell about 1818. During the interval, the church had been unroofed and dismantled <sup>2</sup> and presented a scene of utter desolation. In Logan's vivid words: "Since that time it has gone rapidly to ruin, more perhaps from the ravages of man, than the effects of the weather; the polished quoins, and even sepulchral tablets, offering a temptation so strong as to overcome the dread of sacrilege . . . silence now reigns amid the desolate ruins—the rose bush, and the ash grow in the once hallowed precinct, and entwine

<sup>1</sup> *Coll. Shires Aberdeen and Banff*, pp. 573-4.

<sup>2</sup> Logan gives the date of this as 1771 (*Logan's Collections*, p. 89); Mr Cruickshank, his editor, 1774 (*ibid.*, Introduction, p. xxxi.).

themselves around those mouldering walls, which so long re-echoed to the prayers of the devout." <sup>1</sup>

He found the slab with the Grenlau side still uppermost, and as his notes are silent on Forbes of Ardmurdo, it is evident that he, like the writer of 1732, suspected nothing of what was on the other side. The slab was then, apparently, lying "before the high altar and opposite one of the entrances". He proceeds: "Part of the lower end has been broken off, but it is otherwise in good preservation, for the mass of rubbish with which it is covered effectually protects it from the injury which it would sustain from being trod upon." <sup>1</sup>

While reproducing the inscription in his sketch with some approach to accuracy, Logan failed to decipher it correctly, and his note on the slab is a singular piece of confusion, for he contradicts himself by first attributing it to Sir *James* Scrimgeour, constable of Dundee, who led the van of Mar's army at Harlaw, after which he proceeds to give the inscription thus:

"Hic iacet nobilis armiger *Robertus* (*sic*) de Scri- - - (*sic*) - - - - - anno domini MCCCC II" (*sic*),

and under his sketch is the title "Sir *Robert* Scrimgeour of Dudhope". One wonders whether he ever read over his own notes!

To have obtained such a reading of the name must surely have puzzled even the eye of faith, and one is tempted to wonder whether it did not originate in wishful thinking. But all else apart, the word "armiger" should alone have sufficed to secure him from the errors into which he has fallen, not to mention the heraldic evidence, which he does not seem to have thought of investigating. <sup>1</sup>

It remains something of a mystery how, during this period of neglect, the slab escaped being carried off and converted to more mundane uses, for Logan records that "the farmer of Ardmurdo" had at one time carried off a mural tablet to the wife of a former parish minister, dated so recently as 1712, "but he was very properly caused bring it back". <sup>2</sup> Sacrilege seems to have been an endemic disease at Ardmurdo!

At some time before September 1871, when Jervise contributed to the *Montrose Standard* the article on Kinkell subsequently included in vol. i. of the *Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, <sup>3</sup> the slab had been erected in its present position, exhibiting both sides. Jervise gives a good brief description of it, which I need not dwell upon, as the only errors are very slight ones in the rendering of the inscriptions. He notes that the ruins and burial-ground were still in the most deplorable state, from which they have since been rescued and put into excellent condition by the Ancient Monuments Section of H.M. Office of Works.

<sup>1</sup> *Logan's Collections*, pp. 89-90.  
VOL. LXXX.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> 1875, pp. 304-307.

I visited the place in August 1935, when these rubbings were taken, and although the slab had then been in the open for more than a century and a half, it was still in good preservation—a tribute, if such were needed, to the durability of Scottish sandstone.

I am indebted to Mr Charles ffoulkes, F.S.A.; the Lord Lyon; Dr W. Douglas Simpson; Mr H. M. Paton, Curator of Historical Documents, H.M. General Register House; and Miss Mary Smith, interim County Librarian, Montrose, for their kind and much appreciated help.

#### THE CROSS KIRK, PEEBLES.

*Fragments of a bishop (? from the restored shrine of St Nicholas)  
(? c. 1550).*

During the course of excavations in the Cross Kirk in May 1923 a grave-like cavity aligned roughly south-west and north-east was discovered in the south wall below the basement level. In it were found six fragments of a brown sandstone slab engraved with part of the effigy of an ecclesiastic and a few words of a marginal inscription. These were removed to the Chambers Institute Museum, where I found and rubbed them in September 1936. A cast of them has been set up in the church, adjoining the spot where they were found, accompanied by the description, "Shrine of St Nicholas, 1260".

Of these fragments the first, which appears to be a bit of the top dexter corner, bears part of the crocketed head of a crosier, and above it the hand that is often placed at the beginning of marginal inscriptions on sixteenth-century slabs. Of the remainder, three fit together to form part of a figure in a rich cope, and a few words of marginal inscription in quaint capitals:

"M°. CC°. LX . OCTAVO".

The other two bear small portions of the marginal inscription, reading "ANO . D(?)N" and "DVS" respectively. The letters are in flat relief on a recessed background, with quatrefoil stops separating the words.

Taking the figure first, the piece of the cope we have is a fine fragment, and gives some idea of the handsome appearance it must have made when the slab was intact. It is embroidered lozengy, each lozenge containing a quatrefoil, and has an orphrey of zigzag pattern. The vestment worn beneath it may be a cassock, or perhaps the alb. The staff of the crosier lies transversely across the body. Mr Richardson's drawing (Pl. XIII) gives what is probably a pretty accurate reconstruction of the figure as it originally appeared.

Copes occur but rarely on incised slabs of priests—I have found no





Shrine of St Nicholas, Cross Kirk, Peebles.

(Drawing showing relative positions and fragments of sculptured slab.)

(By courtesy of James S. Richardson, LL.D., Inspector of Ancient Monuments in Scotland.)

F. A. GREENHILL.

NOTES ON SCOTTISH INCISED SLABS (II).

[To face p. 50.

examples in England, and only two others in Scotland: Abbot Schanwel's at Coupar-Angus, Perthshire, with which I have already dealt,<sup>1</sup> and Prior Donald MacDuffie's (c. 1550) at Oronsay Priory, Argyllshire, which I hope to describe in a later communication. In contrast to the Peebles cope, Abbot Schanwel's is plain, save for the orphrey; Prior MacDuffie's is ornamented with a series of diagonal bands (probably to denote strips of different coloured material) and some embroidery, in addition to the orphrey.

Coming now to the inscription, there seems little doubt that, despite the date given, this is mid-sixteenth-century work, for the queer lettering used is of a type found on monuments of c. 1550, and the hand placed at the commencement does not, so far as I am aware, occur on monuments of the thirteenth century. I have not found it earlier than 1480, and it does not become common until the second half of the sixteenth century.

But what is a thirteenth-century date doing on a slab seemingly engraved nearly three hundred years later? To attempt an answer, we must pass in brief review the history of the Cross Kirk.

The church was founded by Alexander III, apparently in the seventh decade of the thirteenth century. Although it did not become conventual till about 1473, when domestic buildings were added for a community of Trinitarians,<sup>2</sup> it seems to have been served by members of that Order from the beginning.

According to Fordun, the founding of the church arose out of the discovery at Peebles of "a stately and venerable cross" lying in a stone on which was inscribed "*Locus Sancti Nicholai Episcopi*"; a little later another find was made at a few paces' distance—an urn containing human ashes and bones. Miracles were reputed to be performed at the spot, and the place rapidly began to attract pilgrims. On account of this the King, after consulting the diocesan, had a handsome church erected there to the honour of God and the Holy Cross.

Of "Saint Nicholas the Bishop" nothing appears to be known: quite apart from the conclusions induced by a study of the cavity, the opinion current in Fordun's time that the human remains were those of a martyr put to death during the persecutions under Maximian at the close of the third century A.D. would be open to serious doubt, in default of evidence that these persecutions ever extended to the province of Britain. But the existence of such an opinion in mediæval times is of some importance, for it entailed the acceptance of St Nicholas as the protomartyr of Scotland, whose grave would be regarded as a place of peculiar sanctity. It seems

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxviii, pp. 81-5.

<sup>2</sup> Though sometimes referred to as "Trinity Friars" or "Red Friars", the Trinitarians were, strictly speaking, neither friars nor monks, but canons regular who followed the rule of St Augustine. One-third of their revenues was by their constitution devoted to the ransoming of Christians held in captivity among the heathen.

that this hallowed spot was the cavity in the south wall in which these fragments were discovered, and over which the shrine of the saint was erected.

When Grose visited the Cross Kirk in May 1790, only six years after it had ceased to be used as the parish church, there was clear evidence of an arch having been made in the south wall at the first building of the church, over the spot where the cavity was brought to light in 1923. Of this feature nothing now remains, but during the excavations a portion of the wall on the inside was removed to a height of 1 foot 7 inches from ground-level, leaving most of the cavity exposed to view. Mr Richardson gives a detailed description of the arch and cavity, and a conjectural restoration of the shrine (fig. 4), in the Note he has kindly contributed to this paper.

Although the urn and its contents were somehow associated with the cross in the mediæval mind, the fact that they were not buried with it seems to afford strong presumption that the two discoveries were quite unconnected and their juxtaposition purely fortuitous. It is worth noting that Fordun, writing in the fourteenth century, seems to have had his doubts about the bones, for in speaking of them he cautiously remarks: "Whose relics these are, no man knows as yet. Some, however, think that they are the relics of him whose name was found written in the very stone wherein that holy cross was lying." From Mr Richardson's description of the grave, it seems probable that these bones, supposed in mediæval times to be those of a Christian martyr, and no doubt venerated as such, were actually those of a heathen of the Bronze Age!

The architectural treatment adopted at the erection of the shrine (see fig. 4) was designed to enable pilgrims to approach it from outside and touch the grave of the saint, and although the cross found in King Alexander's day and known as the Holy Cross of Peebles seems, at least in later pre-Reformation times, to have been the principal object of devotion, the protomartyr's tomb would at least provide an added attraction, and its accessibility at any hour must have given it a great advantage over others less conveniently placed, such as St Waltheof's at Melrose, which stood in the chapter-house, to which pilgrims could only be admitted at certain times.

It is hard to repress a suspicion that the existence of St Waltheof's shrine at Melrose may have had something to do with the erection of the Cross Kirk at Peebles. Waltheof, second abbot of Melrose, died in 1159, having in his lifetime acquired a high reputation for holiness, and pilgrims seem almost at once to have been attracted to his tomb. In 1171, twelve years after Waltheof's death, Jocelin, the fourth abbot, had the grave opened, when the body, with all its vestments, was found to be still intact, thus establishing his saintliness according to contemporary standards. Three years later Jocelin became bishop of Glasgow, and is said to have encouraged pilgrimages to Waltheof's tomb. Now Peebles lay right in the path of persons journeying

from Clydesdale to Melrose; in the later Middle Ages there was a hostility of Melrose Abbey in the Old Town, though at what time it was erected seems to be unknown, but it may well have been there by the middle of the thirteenth century, when the St Waltheof cult was probably reaching its height. The existence of a regular pilgrim route through the town would offer the Trinitarians (some of whom must have been at hand when the cross and bones were unearthed) a heaven-sent opportunity of exploiting a ready-made source of income for the benefit of their own meritorious work, and we need not wonder that miracles were at once imputed to the new find, which doubtless succeeded in absorbing some of the offerings that would otherwise have found their way to the tomb of St Waltheof.<sup>1</sup> It is somewhat remarkable that the Chronicle of Melrose, which records the foundation of a number of churches and houses of religion in Scotland and England, and even of a few abroad, says not a word about the discovery of the relics and founding of the Cross Kirk at Peebles, only twenty-one miles distant: the omission may be due to jealousy.

But the prosperity of the new foundation did not rest on what might be diverted from St Waltheof, for in course of time the pilgrimage to the Holy Cross of Peebles grew to be one of the most popular in Scotland. At least two hostels for the accommodation of pilgrims were in existence in the fifteenth century before the addition of the conventual buildings, one in the town at the west end of the North Row, the other at Eshiels, near the ford of Tweed at Cardrona. While it was not until 1530 that a festival was established specifically to commemorate the finding of the Cross at Peebles, the sacred relic was doubtless exhibited for adoration in earlier years on the anniversary of its finding, as well as on feast days or other special occasions, and the most appropriate point for its display would be at the tomb of the reputed saint near whose remains it was found.

The pilgrimage outlasted the fall of the pre-Reformation Church by a good forty years. An Act of the General Assembly in 1580 provided (Article 5) "that ane punishment may be made for sick as passes in pilgrimage to kirk or wells; and that ordour may be tane with them that past latelie to the Halie Rud of Peebles and sic uther places"; but the old custom died hard, witness the following extracts from the Presbytery records:—

"1599, May 10. Anent the ordinance that was given to William Sanderson (Innerleithen) minister, and some of the brethren, to await with certain gentlemen and bailies of Peebles, to apprehend them that come in pilgrimages to the Croce Kirk, together with our brother, John Fausyde (Newlands), according to a commission given him direct from the provincial assembly of

<sup>1</sup> The case of St William of Perth, the erection of whose shrine in Rochester Cathedral was no doubt designed to divert offerings from St Thomas of Canterbury, affords an interesting parallel. See "Saint William of Perth and His Memorials in England", by Mr James S. Richardson, in *Scot. Eccles. Soc. Trans.*, vol. ii. p. 122.

Lothian, halden at Prestoun Kirk, of date the first day of May 1599, they reported that they apprehended certain men and women, whose names they gave up in writing as follows: William Douglas in Hawick; James Wauche and Janet Diksoun, his spouse, there; Cuthbert Gledstaines and Marioun Greiff, servants to the laird of Gledstaines; Walter Johnstone and Adam Hopkirk, in Mynto; and James Kar, dwelling in the Auldward, in the parish of Selkirk. The Presbytery ordain the clerk to direct a letter to the Presbytery in whose bounds these persons reside to take order with them.<sup>1</sup>

"1601, April 30. The Presbytery appoint that every brother desire some gentlemen of their parish to be present on Saturday at even, and on the Lord's day thereafter, to prevent and stay the superstition of the people coming to the Cross Kirk of Peebles."<sup>2</sup>

"1601, May 14. It is reported by the minister and bailies of Peebles that at this Beltane there was no resorting of people into the Croce Kirk to commit any sign of superstition there. Wherefore in the Lord the Presbytery rejoiced, exhorting them in like manner in time coming to use the like diligence, that all abuse of the place may be avoided."<sup>2</sup>

"1602, April 29. It is descended that the parsoun of Peebles shall wait on such persons as superstitiously repair to the Croce Kirk at this Beltane, and endeavour to have them apprehended, and punished by the magistrate."<sup>3</sup>

The available evidence, though scanty and somewhat confused, would suggest that the only relic *shown* at the Cross Kirk in pre-Reformation times was the Holy Cross of Peebles, and this is no doubt the "relyk" mentioned in connection with the installation of John Jameson as Master (or Minister) in 1456. There is nothing to show that the bones of St Nicholas were exhibited; presumably they had been buried in the shrine made in the south wall at the building of the church.

A letter of James V dated 1st July 1529 would at first sight imply the existence of another relic at the Cross Kirk, for it refers to the church and conventual buildings as the "place of Peblis . . . quhair ane pairt of the verray Croce that our Salvatour was crucifyit on is honorit and keptit".<sup>4</sup> The only other mention I have found of such a relic is in Boece's *History*, published 1526, and here the author is clearly confusing the Holy Cross of Peebles with a fragment of the True Cross. It is worthy of special note that the document of 18th April 1530 (less than a year after the King's letter), which records the establishing of a yearly feast on 15th May to celebrate the discovery of the cross at Peebles, gives not the faintest hint that it was then regarded as part of the True Cross, while the dedication

<sup>1</sup> Dr C. B. Gunn, *Book of the Cross Kirk of Peebles* (A.D. 1560-1690) (Peebles, 1912), pp. 58-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Renwick, *A Peebles Aisle and Monastery* (Glasgow, 1897), p. 81.

of the church in honour of the Holy Cross of Peebles (as distinct from the Holy Rood) seems to prove that it was certainly not considered to be part of the True Cross in the thirteenth century, and Fordun would surely have mentioned such a belief, had it existed in his day, for he faithfully records the opinion then current that the bones were those of St Nicholas. Seeing that the Holy Cross of Peebles was in mediæval times supposed to have been buried there about the year 296, thirty years before the True Cross was discovered in Palestine, it is difficult to conceive of any grounds for regarding the one as part of the other. Yet some such idea may well have begun to take shape in the popular mind towards the end of the pre-Reformation period. The evidence of the Presbytery records goes to show that the principal pilgrimage to the Holy Cross of Peebles was made at Beltane, which was also the festival of the finding of the True Cross, and the coincidence may easily have led to confusion; indeed, the wording of Article 5 of the Act of the General Assembly of 1580 would suggest that this was just what occurred, the Holy Cross of Peebles becoming finally identified in the minds of the multitude with the Holy Rood of our Saviour.

Boece may possibly have been responsible for giving birth to this belief, but it is on the whole more likely that he was only giving expression to an idea already prevalent in the early sixteenth century. Be this as it may, it appears probable that the reference in the King's letter is to the Holy Cross of Peebles, which he, in common with many of his subjects, erroneously believed to be a fragment of the Holy Rood, although it seems clear from the instrument of April 1530 that the local clergy did not share this belief, but were well aware of the true position.

It is, of course, just possible that the King was right, and that in addition to the Holy Cross of Peebles, a reputed piece of the Holy Rood was preserved at the Cross Kirk in later pre-Reformation days. If so, it presumably found its way there at some time subsequent to 1456.

During the excavations of 1923, certain foundations abutting the cavity were exposed, which appear to indicate the site of an altar. It is curious that no reference to any altar dedicated to St Nicholas has come down to us, but this may be due to the extensive loss of records which is believed to have occurred in the conflagration of 1549. The only altars mentioned in the surviving records are those of the Holy Cross (High Altar), the Holy Blood, and St Sebastian.

The first half of the sixteenth century found the Cross Kirk and its little community in the enjoyment of considerable prosperity. But towards the end of 1549 the scene changed abruptly. English invaders set fire to Peebles and much of it was destroyed, including most of the town church of St Andrew. The Cross Kirk, though relatively fortunate, did not escape unscathed, and it may confidently be inferred that while the cross would doubtless have been removed in time to a place of safety, the shrine must

have suffered rough treatment at the hands of the Protestant enemy, including almost certainly the smashing of the sculptured effigy or other portrayal of the saint.

There is evidence that the Cross Kirk was afterwards restored, for in 1558 Gilbert Broun, the Minister of the convent, granted two charters; the first, in consideration of 600 merks paid "for reparation of the place burned by the English in the time of the last war", and an annual feu duty of 30 merks, grants to James Home in Dunbar certain properties in that town; the second, in consideration of 300 merks contributed for the same purpose, grants to James Small, the former rentaller, the manse and church lands of Kettins in Angus in feu farm for payment of £8 of old duty and 40 pence of augmentation.

The fragments of this slab appear to establish that some restoration of the shrine was also attempted, the coped bishop being presumably a representation of the saint. This restoration cannot have endured for more than a decade, for in 1560 the burgesses petitioned the Privy Council that the Cross Kirk might be granted to them as their parish church in place of the destroyed town kirk, which had not been rebuilt, promising to "exclude furth of the samin all maner of idolatry". The request was granted, and on 11th December Broun, who was still Minister, handed over to the bailies the key of the outer door of the church, and the tomb of the saint was probably broken up almost at once, if it had not already perished at the visitation which John, Master of Maxwell, had made on behalf of the Lords of the Congregation on the previous 30th of March. It is somewhat remarkable that even such slight remains as these have been preserved to the present day.

The fact that this slab, apparently engraved *c.* 1550, bears a thirteenth-century date seems to put it beyond reasonable doubt that it formed part of the restored shrine. Two further questions now arise: is this date 1260 or 1268, and what is its significance?

The only interpretation so far given seems to be that of the late Dr Clement Bryce Gunn, the historian of the Cross Kirk. In his fine series of books on the church, all written before the excavations of 1923, he adopted 1261 as the date of foundation, following Fordun's narrative of the finding of the cross on 9th May in that year. But a study of the inscription on the slab must have induced a change of opinion, for in a paper on "The Church of Peebles" contributed in 1932 to the *Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society*<sup>1</sup> he states: "The Cross Church was founded on the 8th day of May in the year 1260." Presumably he arrived at this date in one of two ways:

- (a) by assuming that the words following "octavo" were "die mensis Maii", or

<sup>1</sup> Vol. x. p. 89. Dr Gunn does not mention the slab, but it appears to be the only piece of evidence that has come to light since the publication of his books which could have caused him to alter his mind.

- (b) by treating the fragment "DVS" as forming part of the word "idus" and following immediately after "octavo", thus getting the reading "ano. dn(i). M<sup>o</sup>. CC<sup>o</sup>. lx. octavo. (i) dus. (Maii)".

There is, however, no certainty that any month was named in the inscription, and the fragment "DVS" might not have formed part of "idus", but of some other word, *e.g.* "reverendus": even if it did form part of "idus", there is still nothing to show that it came *after*, and not *before* the year, for while there was no fixed practice, it is far commoner to find the day and month placed *before* the year on pre-Reformation inscriptions. If "idus" *did* come after "octavo" and the next word was "Maii", it is not quite certain even then that the date would be 8th May 1260—it *could* (though with much less probability) be read as 15th May 1268, while if "idus" *preceded* "ano. dn(i)", the year would be 1268.

Other modern writers have assigned dates varying from 1257 to 1262 for the founding of the church. Of these, I have relegated to a footnote all but two,<sup>1</sup> who as the most important merit quotation.

Thomas Dempster, whose *Ecclesiastical History of the Scottish People*, written in Latin, was first published at Bologna in 1627, gives this account:

"St Nicholas, a Culdee, and one of the first bishops of the Church of Scotland, suffering martyrdom while Maximian's persecution was raging through Britain, the most holy remains of his body, cut in pieces and mutilated, laid up in a stone urn, and buried in the earth together with a certain venerable cross, and afterwards dug up, deserved veneration by this inscription: 'Of St Nicholas, bishop', for which thereafter King Alexander III, at the request of the Bishop of Glasgow, built a magnificent church at Plebes (or rather Peebles): which, while piety endured among our countrymen, was illustrious by the glory of its miracles, and was frequented by a wonderful concourse of people. This bishop suffered martyrdom in the year 296. His sacred body, known by the inscription, was found, and with the cross exalted, on the 7th of the Ides of May, in the year 1262; which was the thirteenth of King Alexander III, as appears in the Scotichronicon, book 14, chapter 16."<sup>2</sup>

Grose cites a variety of dates and authorities. "This," he says, "is part of the Conventual Church built, according to Boecius, Major and others by King Alexander III A.D. 1257. Some say it was erected on the spot

<sup>1</sup> See J. Laing, *Supplemental Catalogue of Ancient Scottish Seals*, p. 246 (1257); *New Statistical Account*, No. III, p. 6 (1260); *Old Statistical Account*, XII, p. 13 (c. 1260); Chambers, *History of Peeblesshire*, p. 293, *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, i. 229, and Renwick, *A Peebles Aisle and Monastery*, p. 24 (1261); Williams, *Glimpses of Selkirk and Peebles*, p. 10 (c. 1261); Buchan, *History of Peeblesshire*, ii. p. 2 (1261-2); Glenriddell MS. Collections (quoted by Renwick, *A Peebles Aisle and Monastery*, p. 19, n.) (1262). Renwick, *Peebles in Early History*, gives 1262 at p. 11 and 1261 at p. 29. Sir George Douglas, *Roaxburgh, Selkirk, and Peebles*, pp. 136-7, mentions Fordun's account of the discovery of the cross in May 1261, but gives no date for the founding of the church.

<sup>2</sup> My translation.



where the reliques of St Nicholas, a martyr, were discovered; but from the account of this discovery preserved at Peebles, it appears that this event did not happen till May 7th 1262. . . . Fordun says 1261, and the Chronicle of Melrose places this discovery in 1260. . . . Fordun thus relates the circumstances of finding these reliques. In the same year, *i.e.* 1261, 7th Id. May," etc.<sup>1</sup>

The account preserved at Peebles to which Grose refers was compiled in December 1640 by Andrew Watson, "Vicar of Peebles", from records preserved in the library of St John's College, Cambridge. It consists of the passage from Dempster which I have just quoted, followed by another from a MS. of the *Scotichronicon* then at St John's, of which more later. The whole, together with a translation made for the magistrates by John Frank, is printed in Alexander Pennecuik's *Description of Tweeddale* (1715).<sup>2</sup>

Let us now hear what the early writers have to say.

The founding of the Cross Kirk is not mentioned in the records of the diocese of Glasgow, neither (*pace* Grose) does the contemporary Chronicle of Melrose refer to it. The earliest account we possess is that of John of Fordun, composed about a century after the event. Twenty-one MSS. of his writings are known, of which five only appear to consist of his original work, comprising the "*Chronica Gentis Scotorum*" (down to 1153) and "*Gesta Annalia*" (covering the period 1153-1383), and these were the ones used by Skene in preparing his edition for the *Historians of Scotland* series. The other sixteen, containing Fordun's text as amended and added to by Bower, together with his continuation down to 1447, are known as the "*Scotichronicon*".

Fordun's description is in Chapter LIV of the "*Gesta Annalia*"<sup>3</sup>:

"On the 9th of May 1261, in the thirteenth year of King Alexander, a stately and venerable cross was found at Peebles in the presence of good men, priests, clerics, and burgesses. But it is quite unknown in what year, and by what persons, it was hidden there. It is, however, believed that it was hidden by some of the faithful about the year of our Lord 296, while Maximian's persecution was raging in Britain. Not long after this, a stone urn was discovered there, about three or four paces from the spot where that glorious cross had been found. It contained the ashes and bones of a man's body, torn limb from limb as it were. Whose relics these are, no man knows as yet. Some, however, think they are the relics of him whose name was found written in the very stone wherein that holy cross was lying. Now there was carved in that stone, outside, 'Tomb of the Bishop, Saint Nicholas'. Moreover, in the very spot where the cross was found, many a miracle was and is wrought by that cross; and the people poured and still

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquities of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> See *Works of Alexander Pennecuik*, 1815 edition (Leith), pp. 275-9.

<sup>3</sup> *The Historians of Scotland*, ed. W. F. Skene (Edin., 1872), vol. iv. pp. 294-5.

pour thither in crowds, devoutly bringing their offerings and vows to God. Wherefore the king, by the advice of the bishop of Glasgow, had a handsome church made there, to the honour of God and the Holy Cross.”<sup>1</sup>

The date, as given in the Latin text of Skene's edition is “Septimo idus Maii mensis anno Domini MCCLXI et regni regis Alexandri (X)III”, *i.e.* 9th May 1261, 13 Alex. III.

We now come to the MS. of the *Scotichronicon* at St John's College, Cambridge, from which Watson made his extract in 1640. The relative passage—the one cited by Dempster—corresponds almost exactly with that in Skene's edition, except for the date “Septimo Iduum mensis Maii anno domini 1262, et Regni regis Alexandri 3<sup>iii</sup> 13”, *i.e.* 9th May 1262, 13 Alex. III.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no doubt that this MS. was in St John's College library in 1640—for the correctness of the transcript was certified by three of the Fellows—it has since disappeared, and its present whereabouts are unknown. It does not figure among the twenty-one MSS. enumerated by Skene.

The difference in date between the two versions is easily accounted for. Alexander II died on 8th July 1249, and 9th May 1261 would therefore fall in the twelfth and not the thirteenth year of his successor. The copyist of the St John's College MS. evidently spotted the inconsistency and altered the year to 1262. Fordun's error may, however, have been in the calculation of the year of Alexander's reign, so that it remains uncertain whether he intended 1261 or 1262.

The next account comes from *The Book of Pluscarden*, compiled shortly after the middle of the fifteenth century (Book VII, Chapter XXII):

“In the year 1260 Pope Urban instituted the solemn feast of Corpus Christi. . . . The following year” (*i.e.* 1261) “a valuable cross was found at Peebles buried underground, which had been buried about a thousand years before; and, with the consent of the bishop of Glasgow, the king built there the famous church of Peebles in its honour.”<sup>3</sup>

While the writer is in error regarding the feast of Corpus Christi—for Urban IV was not elected Pope until 29th August 1261, and did not publish the bull “*Transiturus*” till 8th September 1264—this does not necessarily invalidate his account of the finding of the cross, for the other Scottish events of the period are assigned by him to their proper dates. The year

<sup>1</sup> A comparison of this passage with Dempster's account, which purports to be derived from it, provides a somewhat ironic commentary on the seventeenth-century historian. Fordun, while faithfully recording the opinions current in his own (fourteenth) century, preserves towards them a most praiseworthy caution. Dempster, writing in a more scientific age, swallows them whole, and boldly narrates them as facts.

<sup>2</sup> Both Frank and Grose incorrectly render “Septimo Iduum mensis Maii” as “7th May”. It is a little surprising to find men of education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries so imperfectly acquainted with the Roman calendar.

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Pluscarden*, ed. W. F. Skene (*The Historians of Scotland*, Edin., 1880), vol. ii. p. 67.

intended for the Peebles incident seems undoubtedly to be 1261, following Fordun, whom he appears to have used as one of his authorities.

John Major's *History of Greater Britain*, published 1521, has this passage at Chapter XII of Book IV: <sup>1</sup>

"In the year of the Lord twelve hundred and fifty-seven, and in the thirteenth year of Alexander's reign, there was born to him a daughter, Margaret by name. And in the same year there was discovered at Peebles a very beautiful and ancient cross, for which Alexander showed his pious feeling by ordering that a church should there be built."

This passage contains two errors; the thirteenth year of Alexander III was not 1257, but 1261-2, and the Princess Margaret was born in February 1261, in the twelfth year of his reign. Major's date must therefore be taken as either 1261 or 1262.

Lastly we have Hector Boece's version in chapter 16 of Book XIII of his *History of Scotland*, published in 1526. I quote from the translation into Scots made by John Bellenden, Archdean of Moray: <sup>2</sup>

"About this time Paip Urbane, the fourt of that name, institute the feist of Corpus Cristi, to be ilk Thurisday efter Trinite Sondag. . . . It is said that ane monke of Melros was admonist in the samin time, be ane vision in his sleip; and fand ane part of the haly croce, nocht far fra Peblis in Louthiane, within ane cace: and nocht far fra the samin, they fand ane pig craftely ingrain, in quhilk was found certane bonis wound in silk, bot it was not knawin quhais bonis thay war. Als sone as the cace was opnit quhare the haly croce was inclusit, mony miraclis apperit. King Alexander, movit be devotioun thairof, biggit ane abbay in the honour of the haly croce: in the quhilk are now monkis efter the ordour of the Trinite."

This account cannot be accepted as of much value; the silence of the Melrose Chronicle would alone suffice to discredit it. Boece does not, however, as Grose alleges, give the date of founding of the Cross Kirk as 1257, but implies that the relics were found during the pontificate of Urban IV (1261-64).

It can thus be asserted that none of the pre-Reformation writers places the finding of the relics earlier than 1261, and unless they all erred on this point, it seems unlikely that the year recorded on the slab could have been 1260, except by an engraver's error, and it is presumably 1268. To what does it refer?

It will be noted that none of the early authorities gives a date for the *founding* of the church, but only for the discovery of the cross and bones, and Fordun's language might well imply a fair interval between these two events. In any case, some considerable time would elapse before the church

<sup>1</sup> *Scot. Hist. Soc.*, 1892, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> *Bellenden's Works* (Edin., 1822), vol. ii. p. 346.

was completed. It was not a large one, but the whole, apart from a western tower added in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, appears to have been in the First Pointed style, and was probably built in one continuous operation. The shrine, no doubt, was erected concurrently with the church, or immediately on its completion.

Having regard to the position occupied by the date, it seems that the inscription on the slab was probably a record of the entombment of the saint's bones in the shrine, which event presumably occurred at some time during the year 1268.

It is, of course, impossible to restore the missing words with any approach to certainty, but the inscription *may* have run somewhat as follows:—

- (a) (If "DVS" formed part of "idus") "Sepultae sunt (?) - - - idus - - -  
Ano Dni M° CC° LX octavo in hoc loco reliquiae S̄ci Nicholai  
ēpi et martyris", or
- (b) (If "DVS" was *not* part of "idus") "In hoc loco sepultus est Ano  
Dni M° CC° LX octavo red̄v̄us pat' Nichus ep̄s et martyr occisus  
Ano Dni CC° XC sexto".

I cannot conclude without a tribute to the researches of the late Robert Renwick and Dr C. B. Gunn, of which I have largely availed myself in preparing these notes.

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