

Two armorial panels at Rossend Castle, Burntisland, Fife

by W Norman Robertson

The present lack of information about two armorial stones at Rossend Castle, Burntisland, stresses the need for a better record of these sculptures. Interest lies not only in the heraldic arms but in the fact that they are noteworthy examples of early Scottish Renaissance stone-carving. It is unfortunate that both panels are so badly weathered; nevertheless it is still possible to interpret the details.

In effect the sculptural arrangement of the two panels is the same though the sculptor has cleverly diversified the details. Both carvings are similarly devised to represent a niche, each with an ornamental canopy and two flanking baluster shafts which serve as a frame to contain a coat of arms. These canopies have triple hoods which are elaborately decorated with crockets and miniature tracery-work in typical Gothic style.

The first armorial stone is on the north wall of the Castle above the main entrance, partly hidden by a modern vestibule. The shield bears a chevron between three crescents, the armorial bearings of George Durie, Abbot and later Commendator of Dunfermline Abbey from 1527 until 1560. Below the shield, which is supported by two nondescript human figures, there is an eroded scroll and behind it the lower end of the staff of an abbot's crosier. The lettering on the scroll is probably 'CONFIDO' as this motto appears with the arms of Abbot George Durie on a sculptured panel depicting the 'Annunciation' from Dunfermline Palace. On the sill of the niche there is a carved inscription in raised letters which reads XXII MAII 1554 (pl 35a).

The second carved panel is built into the east wall of the Castle about twenty feet up from ground level. On this stone the charge is a cross flory between five martlets; the shield, surmounted by a Royal crown, is supported by two angels in flowing draperies with wings erect (pl 35b). This second coat of arms is of special interest as it was assigned primarily to Edward the Confessor, builder of Westminster Abbey, long after his death. Apparently Henry III suggested the design for this ecclesiastical emblem which was probably based on a coin minted in the Confessor's reign. Whatever the origin of the design these arms cannot be earlier than the thirteenth century (Boutell 1904). However, it seems that this same charge was adopted in Scotland to represent the saintly Queen Margaret, founder of Dunfermline Abbey. These arms, attributed to St Margaret of Scotland, are included in the heraldic display on the timber ceiling in St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, which was erected in the early sixteenth century by Bishop Dunbar (Geddes and Duguid 1888). They are also present on the Cocket seal of Dunfermline in association with the Royal Arms of Scotland; the matrix for this seal was probably made about 1320 (Laing 1850). It is quite evident that the two armorial stones are of similar date and are indeed the work of the same craftsman. They appear to have been commissioned to commemorate an important event which took place on the 22nd May 1554 concerning Abbot

George Durie, the inclusion of the arms of St Margaret indicating his connection with the Abbey of Dunfermline.¹

NOTE

1. In 1554, George Durie was chosen as Keeper of the Privy Seal of Scotland (Henderson 1879).

REFERENCES

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