

ART. XXX.—*St. Ninian's Church, Brougham.* By REV. THOMAS LEES, M.A.

*Read at that place, July 10th. 1879.*

WE know the time of the erection of the present fabric from an inscription on the east wall of the chancel (inside), the initials, "A. P.," with date 1660, surrounded by a wreath; and also from Anne Countess of Pembroke's Memoirs of the Family, which contains the following entry:—

"At the beginning of this summer, a little before my coming out of Westmorland, did I cause the church of Nine Kirks to be pulled down and new built up again in the same place larger and bigger than it was before, which was finished the latter end of this summer, though myself and my family were then at my Castle of Skipton-in-Craven, and this church of Nine Kirk would in all likelihood have fallen down it was so ruinous, if it had not been repaired by me. Psa. 116."

The Countess tells us in the same volume, that the bowels of her mother, the Lady Margaret Clifford, were deposited here in 1616, but her body was buried at Appleby. Bishop Nicolson visited this church on August 20th, 1703, and thus describes its state at that time:—

"Brougham, Aug. 20.—The Late Countess of *Pembroke* (amongst her many other public Works of Piety and Charity, for which this Diocese is obliged to have Her in Everlasting Remembrance), rebuilt the parish Church here, *pro* the ground or such Ruins as threatened to lay it there. This is attested by an Inscription (of A. P., 1660) over the Communion Table, and visible enough in every part of it w<sup>th</sup>in and without. The Quire is decent and Separated from the Body of the Church by a fair Skreen of Wainscot. The Communion Table is well Railed; the pavement good; the Windows Lightsome, &c. The Body is answerable to y<sup>e</sup> Quire; very well Timber'd, floor'd, and seated, with Wainscot pews throughout. The Slates want repairs, y<sup>e</sup> Roof being full of Holes. A little will mend it. Here's a neat Font, and one good Bell. The Churchyard lies miserably open. Noe Monuments."

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Almost the sole relics of the former church are the incised slabs now so carefully covered with trap-doors in the chancel floor. Engravings of two of them are given in *Cutt's Manual of Sepulchral Slabs*. An article on them appeared formerly, I am informed, in a volume of the *Archæological Journal*; but this I have not seen. The figure on the sinister side of the cross on what is called the "Crusader's Tomb," represents a circular shield called a "rondache." Illuminations in MSS. of the ninth, tenth, and in the Bayeux tapestry of the eleventh century, shew the rondache, with its boss and curved lines radiating therefrom; but it is only represented as borne by men-at-arms, and not by knights. In the Bayeux tapestry, the round buckler is carried by Anglo-Saxon warriors; and the pear-shaped buckler, slightly tapering towards the base, and sometimes as high as a man, seems to have been the shield of the Norman.

By far the most interesting point connected with this church is its very unusual dedication. That Christianity existed in Britain in the fourth century we know. St. Alban was martyred at Verulamium, A.D. 303. At the Council of Arles, (A.D., 314,) summoned to consider the question of the Donatist Schism, in Africa, three British bishops were present, Eborius of York, Restitutus of London, and Adelphius of Colonia Legionensium, or Colonia Lindensium. At Sardica, A.D., 347, and Ariminum, A.D., 360, we read of British bishops being present. Therefore, there were some *British* Christians here during the Roman occupation. Like St. Patrick, St. Ninian was born of Christian parents. Dedications to St. Ninian, and his memorials in various shapes, are very plentiful in the south of Scotland, for he was the Apostle of the Southern Picts. The church of Cury, near Gunwalloe, in the extreme south of Cornwall, and Nine Kirks, here, are the only ones I know of in South Britain, except a place named St. Ninian's, or Trynnians, near Richmond, in Yorkshire. We have another memorial  
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of the Saint here in Cumberland, viz., his well at Brisco near Carlisle; for the preservation of which, some forty years back, that good lady, Miss Sarah Losh, of Woodside, took pious care; protecting it by a characteristic arch, with an appropriate inscription. St. Ninian was son of a British Chieftain, under the Roman jurisdiction, and born on the shores of the Solway. That this was the *south* shore, *i.e.*, the coast of Cumberland, we may reasonably conclude; for had he been born, as some have supposed, at Whithern, where he afterwards established his monastery, St. Ælred, his biographer, (writing as he did for the Monks of Whithern) would have been sure to have mentioned a fact conducting so much to the glory of that monastery. Ælred's life of Ninian is valuable for certain facts, for it was compiled from more ancient documents. St. Ninian, like other young Britons of noble birth at that period, visited Rome for the purpose of instruction. He would pass along the great Roman road here on his way by Bowes and Catterick to York, whence he went by the Cottian Alps to Rome. His journey lay through Milan, where St. Ambrose was then bishop. At Rome he would be thrown into contact with St. Jerome, and St. Augustine. After dwelling there fifteen years, Pope Syricius sent him to Britain to spread Christianity among the people of his native Cumbria. His station as a chief's son, and his skill in the native language, would be great helps to him in his work. On his way back to Britain he made the acquaintance of St. Martin at Tours, who had just instituted the monastic life in Western Europe. St. Martin instructed him in the ascetic discipline, and gave him workmen for the purpose of building a church in his own country. After preaching on the coast of Cumberland, he crossed to Whithern, in Wigtonshire, and there built the "Candida Casa," which then became the Mother Church of this district, and the *Cathedra* of its earliest Bishops. As the news of St. Martin's death reached him at the time the church was

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was nearly complete, he named it after his saintly friend. This was in 397, just two hundred years before St. Augustine preached the gospel to the Saxons in Kent. At Canterbury St. Augustine found an old British church dedicated to St. Martin. There was probably a church at Brougham of as early, if not an earlier, date.

It is a startling thought that the Gospel was probably preached here two hundred years before St. Augustine's Mission; but such I believe to be the fact, for it seems highly probable that here, on his return from Rome, circa 396, St. Ninian, for a short time, dwelt among his own friends and adherents, and addressed them in their native tongue. Several circumstances favour this idea: 1. The proximity to the great Roman road, along which we cannot doubt the Saint would travel. 2. The neighbourhood of his *compatriots*, whose burials have recently been found up the "Slack," towards Whinfall. 3. The Roman station at Brougham, in which must have been *some* Roman Christians, for Christianity had then been, with a slight interruption, the religion of the empire for three-quarters of a century. 4. The great improbability of a church here being dedicated to a British Saint after the conversion of the English by the missions of Augustine and Paulinus. We know that great controversies existed between the British and English Christians on the subjects of the Tonsure and observance of Easter; and after these differences were removed, Celtic Saints seem not to have been in favour among the English; Dedications in their honour being mostly confined to Wales, Cornwall, and Cumberland, the last refuges of the Britons. For these reasons, I do not think that I am wrong in conjecturing that Christianity was preached on this spot, nearly 1500 years ago.

The caves (Isis Parlis) in the rocks on the other side of the river Eamont, which are now fast disappearing, but which formerly showed distinct marks of having been used as habitations, probably afforded a congenial shelter to the

Saint himself, who, during his intercourse with St. Martin, had contracted an earnest love for the ascetic life; and after his settlement at Whithern, frequently retired for solitude and devotion to the cave of Physgill near Glasserton.

Not only did Ninian himself work as a missionary, but we are told that he ordained priests, consecrated bishops, and divided the whole land "per certas parrochias." One of these priests would be sent to take charge of the mission here, and in later times, became transformed into Sir Ewan Cæsario, the giant who inhabited the caves. It is not the only case in which popular tradition has changed a hermit into a giant. A cross would be put up when Ninian preached; the river would be used for baptisms; and when the hermit missionary settled here, a wooden or wattle church would be erected. The hermit would guide the people across the dangerous ford here. The caves are much resorted to, says Clarke, by the Penrith people on the third Sunday in May every year. They are well worth the careful examination of this Society. The words used by the Bishop of Truro, in his eloquent sermon, preached last August, on the re-opening of the church of Peiranzabuloe, are strangely applicable, if we only change the word "Cornwall" to "Cumbria," to this ancient sanctuary of St. Ninian:—

"There is no older sanctuary in the land, except, perhaps, St. Martin's Church, at Canturbury; but if St. Augustine had come there, in Cornwall, he would not have had to have made his way among crowds of heathen people, who wondered what he was come for. But there, in Cornwall, he would have found people to meet him with the full knowledge of the Gospel. Worshipping there day after day, as well as from Sunday to Sunday, in that little church, St. Augustine would have found himself among people who knew and loved the Gospel which he taught. This was a strange thought, and they would do wrong to meet there without dwelling a little upon it that day."

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