

REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER OF MARY OF GUELDRES, CONSORT
OF KING JAMES THE SECOND OF SCOTLAND; IN CONNEXION WITH
AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE THE PLACE OF HER INTERMENT IN
TRINITY COLLEGE CHURCH, EDINBURGH. BY DAVID LAING, Esq.,
TREASURER F.S.A. SCOT.

(Read before the Society of Antiquaries 18th December 1848.)

It is with considerable reluctance that I have engaged in the present inquiry, tending to disturb the pleasing conceptions usually entertained regarding Queen Mary of Gueldres, the foundress of the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity, Edinburgh. I beg, therefore, to mention briefly the circumstances which have led me to pursue this investigation.

When overtures were made to the Magistrates and Presbytery of Edinburgh by the North British Railway Directors for the removal of that Church, for the purpose of converting the site into warehouses, to suit the convenience of extra traffic, it seemed to be a fitting occasion for the Society of Antiquaries to step forward, and endeavour, if possible, to prevent such a desecration. Having prepared a brief Memorial on the subject, I obtained, in the course of a few days, the signatures of nearly all the resident members of the Society, and it was presented at a meeting of the Town Council on the 12th of November 1844.

In this Memorial the Provost and Magistrates were solicited to withhold their consent to the destruction of almost the only ancient edifice in the city which remained in anything approaching to its original state, and reference was made to the successful exertions of the citizens of Glasgow for the restoration of their grand Cathedral, and to the example of various places in England and foreign countries for the preservation of early Ecclesiastical edifices.¹

¹ This Memorial in 1844 is printed in the *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iv. p. 448.

A similar memorial, in the name of the Society, addressed to the Lords of H. M. Treasury, was obligingly transmitted by the Duke of Buccleuch, who took a lively interest in the matter.

The attention of their Lordships was especially called to the fact, that the Church had been employed as a place of Royal interment; evidence of which in other cases had proved sufficient to induce the Crown to interfere both for preservation, and in some instances for restoration, of the building. I will not detail the correspondence that ensued, some of which was marked "private;" but there can be no impropriety in stating, that an elaborate opinion was prepared by the legal advisers of the Crown, to the effect, that as the property of Trinity College Church had been conveyed to the Provost of Edinburgh in the year 1567, and by him to the Town, to serve as a parish church, for which purpose it has since been employed; and that the Magistrates, as patrons, and the Presbytery of Edinburgh, having given their sanction to the proposed arrangements, no interference on the part of the Crown to prevent the removal of the Church to another site could be recommended. It is at least satisfactory to think that some endeavours were made by the Society to prevent the demolition of the church; and also, from what has since transpired, that these endeavours, through the great zeal and decision of the ex-Lord Provost Black, will at least secure the means for the reconstruction of the church.¹

In May 1848, when the final arrangements between the Magistrates and the Railway Company were completed, and the day fixed for commencing the demolition of the edifice, the Officers of the Board of Works, in pursuance of an order from the Lords of the Treasury, commenced their search to discover the remains of the Royal foundress. The several parts of the church assigned by tradition, or specially mentioned by later writers as the spot where the Queen had been interred, were successively explored, but all in vain, excepting that near the level of the old floor of what may have been the Sacristy or Mortuary chapel; there was discovered the remains of an oak coffin, which contained a female

¹ Fifteen years have elapsed since this was written; but the old stones which were taken down, and numbered for the purpose of reconstruction, still remain exposed to the weather. We may surely hope that sooner or later some arrangements will be made for the restoration of this church in a suitable locality.

skeleton. There seemed to be no alternative than to pronounce that the Queen's mortal remains had been discovered.

In prosecuting this investigation, the Society of Antiquaries had been requested by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests to nominate a committee to overlook these operations. This was accordingly done, and a detailed report on the subject was drawn up, which, being sanctioned by the Society, was transmitted to the Lords of the Treasury. I am confident that I express the sentiments of the other members of the Committee, in bearing testimony to the unremitting care and vigilance displayed by Mr Matheson and Mr Andrew Kerr in conducting the search.

In due time official instructions were received for placing, as it was then imagined, the Queen's remains in a new coffin, to be deposited in the royal vault at Holyrood. This accordingly took place on the morning of the 15th of July last.

The proposed plan of removing the building of the Trinity College Church, with the view of reconstructing it with the old materials, and on the same model, in a more eligible site, occasioned a considerable time to elapse before any steps were taken for its actual demolition. As no further discoveries were anticipated, unless it might be the foundation-stone, comparatively little interest was excited by the actual removal of the church.

It was therefore a thing altogether unexpected, when the workman employed by Mr Bryce, architect, in taking down and removing the stones, having reached that part of the building in the chancel where the high altar must have stood, discovered on Wednesday the 20th September, a coffin about five feet under the level of the old floor, protected by a thick and solid mass of concrete, which had evidently never been disturbed.

Here I may quote the minute and accurate statement which appeared the following day in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* :—

“ The workmen having, in the course of their excavations on the site of the choir of the church, approached the chancel, where the high altar had once stood, Mr Bryce architect, under whose superintendence the operations are going on, gave orders that the utmost vigilance should be employed to discover any remains that might be buried within those sacred limits; and accordingly, as the workmen were

engaged yesterday morning in digging beneath the site of the altar, the end of a wooden coffin was seen, at the depth of about five feet from the floor, and intimation given to Mr Bryce, under whose directions the surrounding place was then cleared. The first step was to remove the thick and solid mass of concrete in which the coffin was embedded, which having been accomplished with some difficulty, a strong outside frame, formed of fir, was found, the use of which evidently was to protect the coffins enclosed. A coffin, made of oak or elm, was then seen, and within it was a leaden coffin, formed in the shape of the body, containing the skeleton of a female, the skull of which, upon examination, was found to have been sawed off across the top, but lying close to the other parts of the head, as if it had undergone some surgical examination. The other bones were lying in the usual position, but the back bone had a strong lateral curve immediately below the shoulder, which must have occasioned some deformity of the person. The wood of which the coffins were composed was considerably decayed, but the lead, though to some extent corroded by damp, was in a good state of preservation. The smell which escaped from the leaden coffin, when it was first opened, was extremely offensive, and the solder at the feet having yielded a little, the water had found its way into the coffin to the depth of one or two inches. There was no inscription upon the coffin, and, in the absence of the necessary authority, no search was made in it for anything that might indicate the rank of its occupant. Around the bed of the tomb were several rows of stone, wedged together like the causeway of a street, while at the distance of about eighteen inches around was the original earth, which had not apparently been disturbed. The feet of the skeleton lay towards the east, and the head to the west; and it is somewhat remarkable that its position was exactly in the centre of the building."¹

According to Mr Bryce's measurements on the 21st September 1848, the bed in which the coffin rested was 3 ft. 11 in. under the original floor of the church, or about 5 ft. 9 in. under the recent floor. It lay in the centre of the apse, with a space between the walls and the head of the coffin measuring 10 ft. 10 in. on the south side, and 10 ft. 9 in. on the north; the foot of the coffin being 3 ft. 2 in. from the wall of the eastern window.²

The coffin having again been placed within a wooden box or case, and properly secured, was carried to the Exchequer Chambers until an official and scientific examination of the skeleton should be made.

This unlooked for discovery showed but too clearly that the former

¹ Edinburgh Evening Courant, 21st September 1848.

² The position here indicated may easily be traced in the ground-plan of the church, given in the Bannatync Club volume above mentioned, p. xiii.

search had unfortunately been much less complete than had been imagined, owing to some erroneous impression as to the utter inexpediency of excavating in this particular part of the church; and it tended, of course, to unsettle the convictions of many persons regarding the identity of the former discovery.

In a matter like this it is by no means agreeable for persons to admit their mistake; but, instead of persisting in the former conclusion, as one of the committee alluded to, who had signed the report, I felt no hesitation in expressing my belief that we had been misled, even at the risk of the Society and others being exposed to ridicule. Had the two coffins been found simultaneously, there would, in all probability, have existed but little diversity of opinion as to their respective claims.

The special grounds on which I now maintain that the leaden coffin discovered near to the supposed site of the high altar contained the body of the foundress, are—

- I. The very early period to which the interment must be assigned.
- II. That no other female than the Royal foundress would have obtained burial in that spot, at such an early period. And,
- III. The care that evidently had been bestowed in the mode of interment.

Leaving for the present the last of these particulars, I would remark, First, It was impossible, as I conceive, for any one to have seen the coffin in its original site, where it had remained secluded from human observation for a period of nearly four centuries, to entertain any doubt of its having remained undisturbed; and that the interment must have taken place, to all appearance, nearly coeval with the building of that part of the church. Secondly, No rule was recognised for the interment of a foundress in any precise spot; but it is undoubted that only persons of royal descent, or exercising the highest ecclesiastical functions, were buried within the church close to the high altar; and it would not be difficult to show that no other Queen of Scotland found a resting-place within the walls of this church.

The eastern portion of large churches was always first commenced. In the present instance, from the unfinished state of the church, there

can be no question that this was the fact; and the Provost and other officials would thus be enabled, upon the consecration of the building, to translate the Queen's body to its appointed resting-place.

In all probability it had been an altar-tomb standing to the east-of the high altar. That the Queen was actually interred inside of the church is plain from the circumstance that each Prebendary, when he said Mass, should, *at the tomb of the foundress*, devoutly read the prayer, *De profundis*, with an exhortation *to excite the people* to devotion.

The following report of two distinguished medical professors, Dr Simpson and Mr Goodsir, after a careful inspection of the skeleton in the Exchequer Chambers, in regard to the apparent age, and to the supposed weakness or imbecility of the individual, were, however, deemed to be totally at variance both as to the age and to the personal character of Mary of Gueldres. I shall presume to offer a few remarks on both these points, not by calling their opinion in question, but by endeavouring to ascertain in how far such an opinion is opposed to, or confirmed by, historical evidence.

The Report is in the following terms:—

“ EDINBURGH, 2d Nov. 1848.

“ We have examined the skeleton found in a leaden coffin under the high altar of Trinity College Church; and we are of opinion that the female to which it belonged was of a feeble frame; and, more particularly, from the weak and delicate condition of the skeleton generally, but especially of the spine, the long bones of the limbs, and of the skull.

We are also of opinion that, from the small, perpendicular, and antero-posterior extent of the frontal region of the head, the very small cerebellar space, the unsymmetrical, contracted, and undeveloped state of the base; the retarded condition of the wisdom teeth (and the skull having been opened, for examination), this female, who certainly was above twenty, but below thirty, years of age, was of feeble or deficient intellect.

(Signed) “ J. Y. SIMPSON.
“ JOHN GOODSIR.

“ To the Secretary of the
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.”

I mentioned, as the Third ground on which I maintain the *skeleton* last discovered to be that of the Queen Dowager, the great care bestowed

in her interment. The very unusual appearance of the skull, having been sawn across, for the purpose of embalming, suggests, amongst other things, that some considerable time must have elapsed between her death and her burial. The state of medical science at that time, it may be remarked, precludes any notion of a mere surgical examination to ascertain the immediate cause of death. The dissection of the human body during the fifteenth century was nearly unknown—as it was not until the days of Vesalius, in 1542, that there existed any comprehensive or systematic view of human anatomy.

There are two things which may have occasioned a considerable delay in the Queen's funeral,—the one, to afford an opportunity to communicate with her relatives in Flanders; the other, the unfinished state of the building in which her interment was appointed to take place. Both these causes may have been combined.

That a delay of some months actually took place is confirmed by a payment which is entered in the Chamberlain's Accounts for June 1464, which shows that the Queen's exequies were celebrated in the Cathedral Church of Brechin.¹

That an intercourse with her family in Flanders was kept up might be easily proved. It is sufficient to notice that her second son, Alexander, Duke of Albany, obtained a passport, dated 20th April 1464, for himself and 200 of a retinue to pass through England, on a visit to his grandfather, in Gueldreland. This was about six months after the Queen's death. Whether it was in going or returning that he was captured at sea by an English vessel is unimportant; but he was set at liberty upon a remonstrance by the Bishop of St Andrews.

It is most unlikely that any records exist which might establish

¹ *Compotum domini Willelmi Rynde capellani redditum apud Perth, 13 mensis Junii 1464.*

Expense Et eidem pro Exequiis dicte domine Regine celebratis in ecclesia Cathedrali Brechinensi in luminaribus picturis scutorum et stipendio servientium . . . xxvii^s. iiii^d.

Compotum Michaelis de Balfoure redditum apud Perth, 20 Junii 1464.

Expense Et eidem per solucionem factam Dno. Henrico Kinghorn, senescallo Dnc. Regine bone memorie ad expensas Domicilii Dnc. Regine, et post ejus obitum ad Exequias et funeralia ejusdem J^oxj li xv^s. viij^d.

beyond all doubt who was the lady interred in the Mortuary Chapel. That she was a person of distinction, and nearly related to the Royal family, may be fairly assumed. In this case she might either be one of the Queen's daughters, or the first wife of her second son Alexander, Duke of Albany, Lady Katherine Sinclair, daughter of William, Earl of Caithness and Orkney, who died before 1482. This is most probable, if we attach any importance to the shield with the Albany arms on the outside wall of this part of the building. But I might ask, Who was the lady upon whose interment such extraordinary care had been taken, if not the Royal Foundress? If she were one of the three individuals who have been named, no very serious mistake was made when these remains were committed to the Royal vault in Holyrood.

The plate of inscription on the coffin ought undoubtedly to be changed. In the meanwhile the leaden coffin, containing, as I believe, the mortal remains of Mary of Gueldres, the Queen of James II., is also there deposited, waiting for a more worthy receptacle to be prepared than the so misnamed Royal vault in the Abbey Church of Holyrood.

I. I now return to the Report, in which it is said,—“*This female certainly was above twenty, but below thirty years of age.*” There is no portrait or description of the Queen's person to settle this matter, as her precise age is not known. A near approximation however to this may be made.

Her husband, James II., was born in October 1430. In 1448 ambassadors from Scotland were sent to France to renew the ancient alliance between the two kingdoms, and, at the same time, to discover a suitable match for the young king. As the Court of France did not present any eligible person, they proceeded to that of the Duke of Burgundy, who recommended to them his kinswoman, Mary, daughter of Arnold, Duke of Gueldres. In the treaty of marriage, dated 1st April 1449, it is mentioned that the envoys found Mary “*jam nubilem et formosam.*”¹ By this phrase, we may understand that her age would be about sixteen. Mathieu de Coussy mentions her, in the year 1445, as *agée de quinze ans ou environ*; but undoubtedly she was younger than her proposed husband, then in his nineteenth year. The early period of life at which Royal

¹ MS. Harl., vol. iii. f. v. 6; quoted by Pinkerton, vol. i. p. 206.

marriages were contracted may be instanced in the case of her son, James III., who was married to Margaret of Denmark in 1470, he aged eighteen, his bride under sixteen. James IV., in 1502, at the more mature age of thirty, was contracted to Margaret, sister of Henry VIII., when it was stipulated the marriage ceremony should be delayed till the following year, when the youthful bride should have attained the age of thirteen.

According to this computation, Mary of Gueldres, who survived her husband three years, could scarcely have exceeded his own age, which was under thirty at the time of death. Here, therefore, there is no material discrepancy between the conjecture—"above twenty, but below thirty, years of age."

II. But secondly,—"*This female, who certainly was above twenty, but below thirty years of age, was of feeble or deficient intellect.*"

In reply to this, I feel no kind of satisfaction in having to state that, after a careful comparison of all our old historical writers, the prevailing sentiments so constantly reiterated in regard to the Queen's endowments and mental capacity have in reality no foundation; and that this conclusion, deduced from the appearance of the skeleton, is not so much opposed to historical truth as might appear, if we should merely refer to the pages of our modern writers.

King James the Second, it is well known, was killed by the bursting of a cannon at the siege of Roxburghe Castle, near Kelso, on Sunday the 3d of August 1460.

During the eleven years that intervened between the arrival in June, and the marriage of Mary of Gueldres in Scotland with James II. in July 1449, and her husband's death, her name is not so much as once mentioned in connexion with any public event. On the 19th May 1450, it is recorded that she "parted with barne in Striviling, twelve oulkis (weeks) before her tyme, and the barne liffit bot the space of sex houris." She had also two children who died in infancy, besides three sons and two daughters who survived her.

According to the current statements of all modern historians, the Queen must have been present when her husband met with his tragical fate; as they vie with each other in the glowing descriptions of the mode in which "she controlled her feelings," and, by exhibiting her

youthful son, animated the troops to assault and demolish Roxburghe Castle. No doubt, if the orations which Hector Boyce, Drummond of Hawthornden, and other writers, have put into her mouth had been genuine, no suspicion could arise in regard to the Queen's decision of character, her piety, and wisdom.

In tracing, however, from one writer to another the history of this period, a simple statement of a contemporary chronicler at once dispels to the winds all these glowing descriptions and eloquent harangues, by showing that the Queen did not arrive till eight days after her husband's death; and that the Castle had been surrendered BEFORE THE LORDS AND OTHERS WHO CONDUCTED THE SIEGE HAD SENT TO EDINBURGH FOR THE YOUNG PRINCE AND HIS MOTHER THE QUEEN. The words of the chronicler, after noticing the "gret dolour" for the King's death, are: "And never the les all the Lordis that war thair (at the siege) remainit still with the oist (host), and on the Fryday efter, rycht wysly and manfully wan the foirsaid Castell, and tynt (lost) nocht a man may (more) in the wynnyng of it.

"*And than* (it is added) *thai Lordis incontinent (immediately) send till Edinburgh for the Prince. And the said Prince, with his Moder the Queen, and Bischopis, and uther Nobillis, come to Kelso on the Fryday efter the deid of the King, and remanit thar quhill he was crownit, and quhill the foirsaid Castell was wastit and destroyit; And on the Sondag efter, he was crounit in to Kelso.*"²

The education of her children was left to the Queen Dowager, but the management of public affairs was still entrusted to Bishop Kennedy, a prelate of great political skill, discretion, and judgment. In the Parliament held at Scone in February 1461, where the King's coronation was

¹ In the old Statistical Account of the parish of Stitchell there is this notice of a tradition respecting the Queen: "There is a tradition generally believed in the country, that when King James II. went to besiege the Castle of Roxburgh, he left his Queen in Hume Castle; that one day, when she was upon the road to visit her royal husband, she was met about half a mile east of Stitchell House by a messenger with the melancholy account of His Majesty's being killed by the bursting of a cannon. This sad news brought on her labour pains, and she was immediately delivered of a child, upon a hill, ever since called Queen's Cairn." (See Statistical Account of Scotland vol. iii. pp. 292-3, Edinb. 1792.)

² A Short Chronicle of the Reign of James the Second. (Edinb. 1819), 4to, p. 57.

solemnised, we learn that the Queen excited great discontent by changing several of the Officers of State, taking Mr James Lyndsay for her Chief Councillor, who was advanced to be Keeper of the Privy Seal, although he had but recently been banished from Court, and narrowly escaped with his life. Imputations also against her moral conduct appear to have been but too well founded. Lord Hailes has attempted a vindication of this "Heroic Princess," as he terms her, from the imputations against her chastity recorded by John Major in his History of Scotland, printed at Paris in 1521, who openly accuses her of adultery with Adam Hepburn of Hailes. As Major's words are copied by Ferrerius, the continuator of Hector Boyce, and translated by Lindesay of Pit-scottie, these give no additional authority to the charge. The same may perhaps be alleged as to the MS. Chronicle compiled by John Law, a canon of St Andrews, in 1528, in which a similar statement is repeated.

It may also be remarked that Major, who flourished within half a century of her time, could have had no object in inventing or retailing such a charge. Nor is he the only authority for such an accusation. William Wyrcestre, a contemporary English Chronicler, also charges the Queen Dowager with an amour with Henry, Duke of Somerset. Somerset, he says, arrived from Flanders in a Scots vessel, in March 1462, and the Queen of Scotland had him in great detestation on account of his having discovered his carnal intercourse with her to the King of France, and she instigated the Lord of Hailes to murder him. His words are:—"Mense Marcii (1461-2) Dux Somereseciæ reversus est de Flandria in una carvella in Scotia. Et Regina Scociæ habuit ipsum in summo odio, eo quod discooperuit carnalem copulam cum ea Regi Franciæ, et fecit Dominum de Haylys sibi insidiari ad interficiendum."¹

This reference to Hepburn of Hailes seems also to countenance Major's allusion; as we find from the Chamberlain Rolls of the period, that he had been appointed Keeper of Edinburgh Castle, a frequent place of residence for the Royal Family. Pinkerton has likewise remarked,

¹ *Wilhelmi Wyrcester Annales Rerum Anglican.*, a Tho. Hearne, vol. ii. p. 492, edit. 1771.

“ Could Alexander, Duke of Albany, have branded his brother James the Third as a bastard, if their mother’s reputation had been holy ?”¹

Mary of Gueldres died at Edinburgh, on the 16th of November 1463. The cause of her death, in the flower of her age, is no where stated. In examining the skull last discovered, Professor Simpson pointed out what has recently been recognised as an indication of epileptic disease. The short period she survived her husband was scarcely sufficient for exhibiting her character in any marked degree. That she was much attached to her husband may be inferred from the foundation of Trinity College; but that she displayed any unwonted energy, or in Bishop Lesley’s words, that she was “ *ane Princess of heich corage,*” or was possessed either of great prudence or discretion, would require more satisfactory evidence.

In the treaty of marriage in 1449, it was expressly stipulated that in the event of her father’s death without male issue, King James should relinquish any claim to the Duchy of Gueldres in virtue of his wife. But Mary was not the sole heiress. Her father, Arnold of Egmont, who became Duke of Gueldres in 1423, married Catherine, daughter of Adolphus, Duke of Cleves. He survived till 1466. His eldest son John, on account of his imbecility (*mentis haud satis firmæ*), was passed over in the succession, and died without issue.

The second son, Adolphus Egmond, who married Catherine of Bourbon, having rebelled against his father, was disinherited, and his territories left to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy.

The Duke of Gueldres had another daughter, Catherine, who was betrothed to the Duke of Brunswick, but died unmarried; although, like her sister, the Consort of James II., not free from the imputation of scandal. If Mary of Gueldres, therefore, inherited the dispositions and weakness, in other words the insanity, of her nearest relatives, this would so far corroborate the Medical Report, without, however, resorting to the supposition of absolute imbecility.

Besides all this, if the character and conduct of her own children were scrutinised, some very strange coincidences might be pointed out; but this, as being no pleasing task, I do not feel myself called upon at present to undertake.

¹ History of Scotland, vol. i. p. 252, note.