

II.

NOTES ON THE GRAVE SLABS AND CROSS AT KEILLS, KNAPDALE, ARGYLL. BY W. C. CRAWFORD, F.S.A.Scot.

The ruined church at Keills, Knapdale, Argyllshire, dedicated to St Charmaig, is situated on the slope above the north shore of Loch Keills, about 12 miles south-west of Crinan. Inside the ruins and in the churchyard are many interesting and very beautiful sculptured grave slabs. These stones were brought to the notice of archæologists by Captain T. P. White, R.E., who in 1875 published his *Archæological Sketches in Scotland: Knapdale and Gigha*, which gives illustrations of sixteen of the slabs, and also of a fine, free-standing cross which is placed about 100 yards north-east of the graveyard.

Loch Keills is an excellent anchorage, and much more sheltered than one would expect owing to the strength of the tide across the mouth. The road past the church leads to a ferry pier, Keills Port, on the Sound of Jura. This would be the direct road to the mainland from Oronsay and Colonsay *via* East and West Tarbert or Jura. The extreme beauty of the sculptured slabs attracted my attention when I visited the loch in a yacht in the summer of 1912, and made the twelve rubbings on cotton which are exhibited.

The first rubbing shows the cross, the following description and illustration (fig. 1) of which are taken from the *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, p. 390, fig. 408:—

“The cross stands on a low mound paved with rough stones, about 100 yards to the north-east of the church, higher up the hill-side.



Fig. 1. Cross at Keills.

"It is a free standing cross, with curved hollows at the intersection of the arms, of blue slate, 7 feet 4 inches high, 1 foot 9 inches across the arms, by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, sculptured in relief on one face thus:—

"*Front.*—(In the centre of the head) a large raised boss covered with spiral ornament, and having a central depression containing three small bosses; (on the top arm) an angel treading on a serpent, and two small animals on a background of interlaced work; (on the bottom arm) an ecclesiastic or saint (perhaps intended for Daniel in the Den of Lions) giving the benediction with the right hand, and holding a book in his left; (on each of the side arms), two beasts, the two lower ones licking the face of the saint; (on the shaft at the top) a diagonal

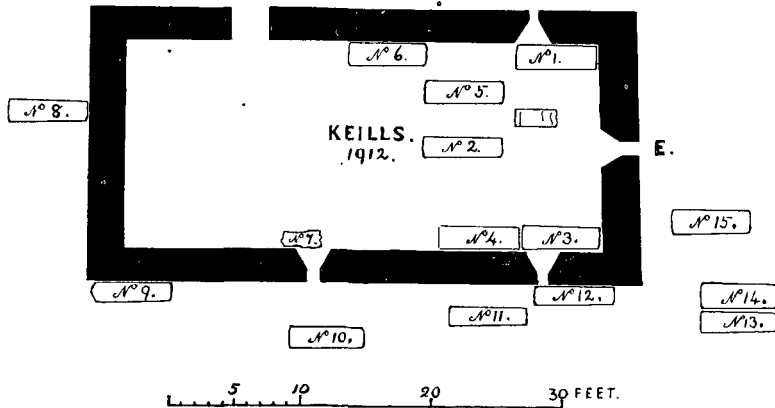


Fig. 2. Plan of Church and Sculptured Slabs at Keills.

key pattern; (on the shaft in the middle) four hearts on a background of interlaced work; (on the shaft at the bottom) spiral work."

The relative positions of fifteen slabs are shown in the sketch plan (fig. 2), and rubbings of all except Nos. 5, 6, 11, and 12, are exhibited. Captain White has described and figured the most of these, but he has omitted Nos. 7, 13, and 14, which may be described as follows:—

The first slab (fig. 3), No. 13 on plan, is 5 feet 8 inches long by 18 inches broad at the top, which is the widest part. Occupying the centre of the slab is a sword with spiked pommel and slightly depressed guard with pear-shaped terminals. In front of the middle of the blade is a targe, decorated with a star of seven points springing from a central ring. On the left of the hilt is a Lochaber axe, the handle of which terminates in scrolls, while on the same side of the sword, below the targe, is a scroll of foliaceous ornament. On the right of the hilt is a monster, its tail and snout running into a design of leafage and scrolls. Opposite

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the lower part of the blade to the right is a panel of interlaced design; between the scrolls is a hanging sword belt, the broad end of which is wound round the sword above the targe, the narrow end of the belt



Figs. 3 and 4. Sculptured Grave Slabs at Keills.

being inserted in the loop at the broad end. The whole is bordered by a narrow inner moulding with trefoils pointing inwards. At the bottom of the slab is a pair of shears with a panel of interlacing below, both placed transversely.

The second stone, No. 7 on plan, is part of another sword-slab, the top and bottom being broken off and missing. The upper half of the sword remains, showing a fan-shaped pommel and depressed guard with oval extremities. To the left of the hilt is the lower part of the figure of a man dressed in a surcoat and wearing a sword, while below him is an animal. Part of an inscription shows below the sword guard on the edge of stone on the same side. On the opposite side of the blade is a foliaceous scroll.

The third slab (fig. 4), No. 14 on plan, represents a stone of smaller dimensions than the sword-slabs. It is broken through the middle, and a fragment of this part is missing. On it is a cross with the arms connected by a ring. The shaft is flanked on both sides by a plait of two strands simply twisted to form long oval loops. Under the cross are a comb and pair of shears aligned transversely on the stone, with a large triquetra below and towards the right-hand side.

The first of these slabs is of particular interest owing to the occurrence of a targe in conjunction with a sword with depress guard. It shows that this article of defence was in contemporary use with the sword that preceded the basket-hilted broad-sword. The ornamentation depicted on the targe is quite suggestive of some of the designs worked out in brass bosses and studs on some of the more recent Highland examples. Another of the sword-slabs, of which there is a rubbing and which is illustrated by Captain White, also shows a targe and belt along with a very similar sword.

Eleven of the recumbent stones figured by Captain White have swords carved on them; three are cross-slabs; and one seems to be a mutilated free-standing cross. One of the sword-slabs shows four crosses on it, three of them enclosed by a circle; another has a finely cut Highland harp; another a galley, and another a hunting-scene. Besides these designs, foliaceous, zoomorphic, and interlaced patterns occur, and four bear inscriptions much defaced.

A comparison of the rubbings with Captain White's illustrations shows that the latter have been carefully made and do not call for further reproduction.

I noticed that the east wall was not quite at right angles to the north and south walls of the church, the inside of the north wall measuring about 36 feet, and the inside of south wall measuring about 36 feet 8 inches. The width inside is 16 feet 2 inches.