

I.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT CAMBUSKENNETH ABBEY
IN MAY 1864. BY COLONEL SIR JAMES E. ALEXANDER, K.C.L.S.,
F.S.A. SCOT., &c. (PLATE IV.)

The Abbey of Cambuskenneth, founded in 1147 by David I. of Scotland, stood on a peninsula of the river Forth, and little more than a mile in a direct line from the town of Stirling. A ferry requires to be crossed to reach the remains of the venerable pile.

So complete has been the destruction of the Church of St Mary of Cambuskenneth by the disciples of John Knox in 1559, that its site was now found to be quite covered with greensward, where cows grazed. A white-washed cottage and some old elms were on the south side, and behind them the walls of an extensive orchard. On the east was the winding river. In the centre of the field appeared a mound slightly raised, and on it some thorn bushes: here, it was conjectured, stood the high altar, for west of it was a broken arch, forming now the entrance to a small enclosed cemetery in which are the tombstones of a few of the people of the district. This arch, pointed, enriched with deeply cut mouldings, the capitals of broken shafts and trellis carving, was evidently the principal or western door of the church. The width is six feet between the jambs.

Near the arch, but quite detached from the church, there yet stands the campanile or belfry tower, a remarkable object in the landscape. It is square, thirty-seven feet each face, substantially built of hewn stone; is seventy feet in height, strengthened with Anglo-Norman pilaster but-

tresses, and provided with pointed Gothic windows, some of them built up. A handsome blank arcade of six pointed arches and slender shafts faces the town; above this, and projecting from the battlements, are the remains of a stone figure, now decapitated. "The oldest inhabitant," a fisherman, James Mathie, said he remembered when the head fell to the ground, and the name the figure went by was "Maggie Teuch" (tough?). It was evidently a gurgyle or waterspout. The rows of corbels under the parapet seemed to have been ornamented with rude masks.

On the north-west angle of the tower is an elegant octagonal turret, containing a stair which conducts to the top of the building. The turret is capped and provided with gablettes, like those seen on the Glasgow cathedral, of the same date. The low and flat arch of the entrance is surmounted by a triangular projection. On the apex is a *fleur de lis*. A canopied niche is over the door, on opening which a well-preserved groined roof is observed. In the centre of the roof is a large circular aperture, up which the bells were passed. The square openings for ringing the bells are at the sides of the groined roof, and the marks of the ropes are still upon them.

The view from the top of the tower is extensive and varied. "Grey Stirling," with its castellated rock, the favourite residence of many of the Scottish kings; the fields of Bannockburn, Sauchieburn, and Falkirk; the Abbey Craig, beneath which the heroic Wallace fought for the liberties of his country the battle of Stirling; the grand solemn Ochil range; the majestic Grampians, and the sinuous course of the noble Forth, afford a rich treat to the admirers of one of the richest scenes in Scottish landscape. Now also an additional interest arises from being able to trace from the parapet of the abbey tower the foundations of the cruciform edifice beneath.

The Wallace monument on the summit of the Abbey Craig, when completed with its lantern or diadem top, keeper's house, and courtyard, will reflect great credit on the architect, Mr Rothead.

To the north-east, and near the river's bank, are the remains of a building with lofty ruined walls, called the "Dovecot" or pigeon-house, and where probably was the *Hospicium* for the reception and entertainment of strangers.

After the accession of James VI. to the English throne, the tempo-

ralities of Cambuskenneth were bestowed on John, Earl of Mar, by whom the barony of the abbey was conferred on his brother, Alexander Erskine of Alva, and in whose family it remained till 1709, when it was purchased by the Town Council of Stirling for the benefit of Cowan's Hospital. It is highly desirable, then, that means be taken by the trustees of the Hospital to repair and point what yet remains of the ancient edifice, to cut out the trees which are destroying the belfry tower, and remove the unseemly stones and bricks which block up some of the pointed windows; to clear the foundations inside and outside, and repair the floors of the different stories.¹

In the Chartulary of the Abbey the orchards are particularly referred to, and appear to have been bequeathed to the monastery by several of the monks; and one garden is termed "Paradise." The orchards still remain on two sides of the abbey, and have been long celebrated for their delicious pears, apples, and "geans."

The Chartulary of Cambuskenneth, substantially bound and embellished with various illuminations, and provided also with a great seal, is in the possession of the Advocates Library, Edinburgh. It was transcribed on vellum in the year 1535, at the instance of the Abbot, Alexander Myln, from original documents which were decaying from the damp situation of the Abbey. Water appears on its site at the depth of four or five feet.

Due west from the abbey was the original ferry: it is now some distance higher up the Forth. In carrying off the large bell, it was said a mysterious figure appeared at the stern of the boat, which suddenly upset, and the bell has ever since remained in the bed of the river. It could be easily dredged for during the summer months. Its recovery would be highly interesting. In an old print of the abbey a chapel appears near the ferry, and provided with a Norman arch, whilst the other arches that now appear are the Anglo-Norman of the twelfth century.

In visiting lately the valuable collection of Scottish antiquities at Dunfermline, collected by Mr Paton, father of the eminent painters of that name, I saw, among clocks from the palaces of Linlithgow, Falkland, and Stirling, beautifully carved and inlaid cabinets from the same,

¹ This is now being executed under the intelligent direction of Mr W. Mackison, C.E., F.S.A. Scot., 1865.

antique chairs, original paintings, &c. (all which should be catalogued and minutely described), there was the alms-box of the monastery of Cambuskenneth, found some years ago among the ruins. It is a square box of iron with Gothic ornaments, and is well preserved. Keys were found near it. I have in my possession a singular stone, said to be from Cambuskenneth. It was for some years at Alloa, then at Menstrie House, probably when possessed by the Alexanders, Barons of Menstrie. I obtained it after much negotiation from an old woman of the name of Moir, whose husband had built it into the front of his cottage at Menstrie. It is a foot square, and from the ingeniously entwined letters on its face the word "Cambuskenneth" can be made out.

It was conjectured by Mrs Coulson of Timsbury Hall, Bath (who carefully copied the stone), that the letters are an imitation, not of an entire brass monogram, but of letters cut in brass and fastened to a cross of hide, of which the centre is supported by a square of wood below, to form a further relief for the deeply square cut letters.

It will be remembered that the unfortunate James III. of Scotland married an amiable and beautiful Danish princess, Margaret of Oldenburg, by whom were the Duke of Rothesay, afterwards James IV., and the Princes Alexander and John. After the revolt of the nobles, Queen Margaret sickened and died, and was buried before the high altar at Cambuskenneth. King James, after his fatal flight from Sauchieburn, his fall from his noble grey charger presented to him by Lord Lindsay of the Byres—which, alarmed at the noise made by a pitcher dropped from the hand of a frightened woman, swerved, and threw the king heavily—and after his cruel assassination by a pretended priest at Milton or Beaton's Mill, was also buried next his queen, and with due ceremony, at Cambuskenneth. "Ane sweete youth," a royal prince, was also buried there, according to the M'Farlane manuscript in the Advocates' Library. Yet another remarkable royal personage, no other than Richard II. of England, is believed by many to have found a final resting-place at Cambuskenneth, and that after his deposition he was not murdered by steel or poison at Pontefract Castle, but made his escape from it, wandered to the Hebrides, where he was entertained by Macdonald, Lord of the Isles; from thence he was transferred to Stirling Castle, in which he resided eighteen years, and was buried at the Abbey.

The accomplished author, James Grant, says in one of his works:—
“ Now none may say where James III. of Scotland and the Isles, or his queen, Margaret of Oldenburg, are lying, for the noble Abbey of St Mary has been swept from its foundations (a great part of the stones were used by an Earl of Mar to construct the strange ‘wark’ at the head of the Broad Street of Stirling); one remnant alone survives, a lofty tower, and though the country people still pretend to remember the royal grave, and point it out to visitors, not a stone remains to mark the tomb of the murdered monarch, for the place is now a bare greensward.”

The author of a Journey through Scotland in 1723 says he saw the grave of King James III. under a hawthorn tree at Cambuskenneth.¹

It had been suggested to the Trustees of Cowan’s Hospital that it would be desirable to ascertain where the body of James III. lay, and his Queen, so as to treat the royal remains with proper respect, and enclose the tombs, also to trace out the extent of the Abbey Church and explore generally among the foundations. The magistrates of Stirling, entering into this design, and the sanction of the Crown having also been secured, on the 2d May 1864, twelve workmen were placed under the charge of Bailie Ranken, treasurer of the Town Council of Stirling, a gentleman of good taste and ability, who had for years been most usefully employed in superintending public works in and about Stirling.

The following gentlemen were on the ground at the Abbey at the beginning of the excavations:—Provost Murie, Bailies Monteath and Yellowlees; Treasurer Ranken; Councillors Davidson and Christie; Rev. Dr Beith, Rev. Paul Maclauchlan; Dr Duncanson, Alloa; Mr Wallace, Alloa; Colonels Nugent, Boldero, and Sir J. E. Alexander; and Mr Rothead, architect. Among those from Edinburgh were Mr Matheson, of H.M. Board of Works; and, as representing the Society of Antiquaries, Mr David Laing, Mr John M. Mitchell, Belgian Consul, and Mr Andrew Kerr.

The excavators were divided into two parties, and what is singular,

¹ Mr David Laing mentioned to me that the late Mr Adam G. Ellis, W.S., told him an old inhabitant at the Abbey had pointed out, many years ago, the mound near such a tree, under which the King was buried. Mr Ellis, who imagined he might still recognise the spot, had long expressed a desire that the place should be explored; but at this time he was altogether unable to accompany the deputation from Edinburgh.

though there was not a stone of the church and the adjacent buildings to be seen when the work commenced, but merely undulations on the surface of the ground, owing to some judicious directions, the men had not dug more than half-an-hour before one of the parties came upon the site of the high altar—a square enclosure of masonry—and the other on the transepts.

In the earth, above which had stood the high altar, was found the body of a youth lying across the enclosure, the head in a recess. Beneath this, and longitudinally, lay a fine skeleton of a yellowish colour, probably that of an ecclesiastic. The bones were carefully put aside for re-interment, and I had them photographed by Mr Crowe of Stirling. (These photographs were exhibited to the meeting.)

The church and chapter-house, with the base of a central pier to support an arched roof, were now traced out; the scalloped capital of the pier or pillar was found. The bases of some of the piers of the church were in good order, and the clayey soil had so well preserved the foundation stones that they appeared sharply cut as if recently laid.

The length of the church, from the high altar inclusive to the western door, was ascertained to be 178 feet, breadth 37 feet.

On the south are the foundations of a long building, near one of the orchards. This may possibly have been the Parliament House. At Cambuskenneth, in 1326, the nobility, barons, and clergy assembled in solemn Parliament along with a great number of persons of inferior rank, and swore fealty to David Bruce as heir apparent to the throne. "This," says Tytler, "was the first Scottish Parliament, as far as can be ascertained, into which the representatives of cities and burghs were admitted as members." Here various of the Scottish monarchs granted charters and the Scottish Parliament repeatedly assembled.

In the course of the excavations, coins of the Jameses and Charleses were found; three keys—one large enough to have been the key of the west door; knives, razors, pieces of pottery (Dutch, probably)—one piece with a curious dog's head on it; tobacco pipes (similar to some I had seen at the Bass Rock, supposed to have been used by the soldiers of the guard there); portions of stained glass from the eastern window; broken stone shafts and capitals of pillars of the twelfth century; a brass shoe-buckle; a brass chess-knight (the horse's head well defined); stone

whorls for the distaff; a small glass bottle; a curious iron instrument, 14 inches long, of unknown use, with prongs, though certainly not a fork. (Sketches of these various articles were exhibited.) It will interest the curious in these matters, when all the *reliquiae* are laid out for inspection in a chamber of the belfry tower.

At one of the angles of the chapter-house, in which the *sedilia* or bench tables are well preserved, is the figure of a mediæval sword. This is in a strange position, as if the stone on which it is carved had been over the tomb of a warrior in some other part of the grounds, and the slab removed and made use of as a corner-stone of the chapter-house.

A fine stone coffin was found near the south transept (might this have been that of Richard II.?), and over it three massive blocks of stone. On lifting these a skull was seen, but at the foot of the stone coffin, showing that the dead had been previously disturbed. There was a large beam of black oak under the stone coffin, and others squared and resting on piles, to prevent the foundations falling in, for at no great depth water is found here, and the clay had well preserved the timber. Some of the logs have been raised and can be turned to good account, as the proceeds of their sale for souvenirs of the ancient edifice may help to enclose the foundations. It is proposed to make chairs for the Provost and Dean of Guild of Stirling of this oak.

Between the high altar and the thorn tree a slab of coarse blue marble or mountain limestone lay under the soil, it was in a slanting position as if disturbed formerly; one corner of it was broken off, and it was also cracked across. What remained of the slab measured about five feet square and seven inches thick. It had a hewn margin, and was hewn as a panel across its rough face. This was the usual royal tablet stone seen at Dunfermline, Dunblane, &c.¹ On close inspection bat-holes were seen with lead in them, these had held the monumental brass of which two portions were found, the one with the figure of a flower on it, the other marked with cross lines; the larger portion with the inscription had been torn off and removed.

It was resolved to look for a vault under the slab. It was accordingly

¹ Lately blue mountain limestone has been found at the Abbey Craig; and this may be the quarry which produced the royal slabs, and the freestone there built the old churches, which also is now employed for the Wallace Monument.

raised, and on digging down a few feet a large oak coffin was found, the feet touching the enclosure of the high altar, the head to the west. Inside the coffin was a skeleton, doubtless of King James III. On being exposed to the air most of the bones crumbled to dust, some remained, fragments of the skull and of the lower jaw, two molar teeth, thigh bones, &c. Moist clay surrounded the coffin, which had preserved it so long. The pieces of the coffin which remained showed the grain of the wood—oak, and probably from the neighbouring Torwood. On the left of the male bones were those of a female, also the bones of a child. The three bodies had been disturbed before, perhaps for the sake of any ornaments which had been buried with them. A small coffin ornament of metal was found, in shape like a flower. The bones were carefully placed aside for re-interment, and the tombs are to be enclosed.

In clearing out the foundations of the church great quantities of bones were discovered, also on the south side of it, and about the chapter-house. I took with me one day Colonel Monro, Bombay Army, and Dr Alex. Paterson of the Bridge of Allan, to examine some of these remains previous to their being again committed to the earth. The remarks of the latter gentleman are as follows:—

“I examined many of the relics found during the recent excavations. A number of human skeletons were discovered, most of them in a state of great decay. The bones in the meantime had been carefully put into boxes and deposited in the tower of the Abbey. By far the most interesting set of bones are those of King James III. Unfortunately the only bone of the king found entire is the lower jaw, which is remarkable on account of its large size,—only two molar teeth remain in the jaw. The frontal part of the cranium is well preserved, and from the appearance of this part of the skull it shows that the king must have had a very low receding forehead.¹ The only other circumstance worthy of

¹ Historians say of James III. that in rude and warlike times he was unable to control his turbulent nobles, whom he also vexed by secluding himself from them and passing his time with architects, musicians, and astrologers, on whom he conferred rank and distinctions. The highly interesting and valuable description by Mr David Laing of the altar screen now at Holyrood Palace may be referred to for the general appearance of the King and of Queen Margaret. (See Proceedings, vol. iii. p. 8.)

notice in regard to the bones of the king is, that they differed in colour from all the other bones found, those of the king being of a dark brown tawny colour; this colour may have been produced by the decay of the oak coffin. A number of entire skulls were found; a curious fact connected with them is that in all of them the cranial cavity is filled with clay in a solid condition; the clay must have got into the skulls through the action of the water."

I have had casts taken of the cranium and lower jaw of the king by Mr Barclay, the sculptor in Stirling; and also had an oaken chest made to contain the royal remains, that they might be re-interred with every respect.

Mr William Mackison, C.E., the town architect, Stirling, was in attendance at the commencement of the excavations, and thus remarks on the discoveries:—"When the walls of the north transept, part of the chancel, and of the nave were exposed, the stone dressings, facings, and cuttings were found in wonderful preservation, and the outlines very decided. Two distinct base courses are particularly traceable in the transept. The angle buttress is built over the remaining portion of the original square one, and that part of the wall which is in the continuation of the transept gable, and which forms the northern wall of what is supposed to be the chapter-house of the last structure, is neither in the proper line nor the original base over which it is built, nor with the building of which it forms a part. Angle buttresses have been always troublesome. . . . In connection with the transept a small door is noticed in the west side-wall, facing the belfry tower, built up closely with dressed masonry.

"The walls have all been grouted most effectually, some places so much so that it is with difficulty one can say whether he is not looking on solid stone rather than a conglomerate mass. Many oyster shells were dug up and river sand, and these shells seem to have been freely used in the mortar and grouting."

Mr Mackison took accurate measurements of the buildings (and a reduced copy of his plan is given in Plate IV.)

"Part of the nave wall exposed, towards the small cemetery, is of good design; the stone seats and bases of four of the side piers are to be seen,

giving a good idea of what the appearance of the interior must have been. The mouldings, trefoil in outline, of the shaft column bases are in fair preservation. The south wall of the nave has been traced west to the wall which surrounds the burial enclosure, and from what the gravedigger stated the bases of pillars (or piers) are also to be seen in the grave-yard. The enclosure at the high altar is formed by dressed stones, having a check for covers much decayed."

A casual observer may not remark a massive pinnacle with a finial like a human head which no doubt belonged to the old church; it is now placed on its end on the south wall of the grave-yard; it has a very weather-beaten appearance, still, however, retaining its original form.

Mr Rothead, the architect of the Wallace Monument, &c., in a communication to Mr J. M. Mitchell, F.S.A. Scot., Belgian Consul-General, thus writes:—"The area of the building at Cambuskenneth, as far as disclosed to our view on the first day of the excavations, is of the most interesting description, and exhibits the splayed base lines of the north side of the abbey, being perfectly sharp and fresh as when built, and of an early though somewhat curious character. By the insertion of the ovolo, a curved character of the upper member (A) of the splay base, the roll moulding (B) just above is a very conclusive evidence, along with the other parts below, of early pointed work, having quite a different character, so to speak, from that known as early English pointed Gothic. The Cambuskenneth Abbey ruins, as indeed I will venture to say from my intimate acquaintance with Continental pointed architecture, partake of the French model largely, as indeed does the whole ecclesiastical architecture of our country; hence the blending of the baronial character in our abbeys and churches; and in illustration of this fact I would point to Stirling High Church, parts of Dunfermline Abbey, Inchcolme Abbey and Monastery (Firth of Forth), and the deeply interesting remains of Inchmahome Priory or Monastery, founded 1328, at Port of Monteth; and let me add one other instance, the old church of Linlithgow, as strongly corroborative examples of homogeneity of style of French example and extraction.

"The base lines of Cambuskenneth Abbey are from three to three feet six inches high, and so fresh are the surfaces of the stone splayed faces,

that they carry the incised masonic marks of the artisan who cut and fashioned the stone, as perfectly as if done but yesterday.

“At our first visit portions of the great stools of the piers that carried or may have carried an imposing tower and spire were uncovered, exhibiting a very peculiar formation and character of base moulding, in most excellent preservation, section and plan thus (see Plate IV., No. 2); the base moulding above is all that is left, that is, so far as was uncovered at the first visit.

“The pavement of the area of the nave was partially laid bare, and near it we discovered the section line of some four or five steps, leading from the nave of the western portion of the abbey into the choir, close to the entrance of which stands what seems to have been a magnificent sepulchral vault, the cell of which, roughly speaking, may be about from seven to eight feet long, by four feet broad or thereby, having thick walls all round, carefully built, and throwing projections out from these lines of walls as if light buttresses had formed a portion of the design of the elaborate shrine that undoubtedly must have surmounted the whole tomb; if we are to judge from the large mass of fragmentary and smashed-up heaps of foliated capitals, and six-inch diameter shafting, moulded bases and mid-shaft clasps that were dug up all around the fine tomb, out of which, and at about three or four feet deep (from base lines of tomb), was excavated the remains of at least one male skeleton having a finely developed skull, thigh bones, &c., all in a high state of preservation. Near to or around this tomb were found some four or five elongated encaustic tiles, red and blue, and yellow glazed, say about eight or nine inches long, five inches broad, by one and three quarters of an inch thick.

“A specimen of fragmentary stained glass, bearing marks as if partially fused by fire, was found, likewise a silver sixpence of the time of Edward II., on the morning of our visit. I hope still further to see the progress and to witness the finish of this most interesting work of research and discovery.”

Finally, it is gratifying to know that Her Majesty's Government and the Trustees of Cowan's Hospital will cause these most interesting foundations to be enclosed, and the royal tombs preserved from desecration. It might be useful also to run asphalt over the remains of the walls, and

paint with oil the delicate carved work to prevent injury from the weather. After more trenching, but without disturbing the bones, the area of the building might be covered with sand or gravel to keep down the grass.

Mr JOSEPH ROBERTSON suggested a doubt whether there was any evidence to show that either the Abbey or most of our ecclesiastical buildings had been ruined by Knox and his followers, as stated in the paper.

In this view he was supported by Professor STEVENSON and other Members.



View of Beaton's Mill, where King James III. was slain.¹

Mr LAING said, that having prepared some notices connected with the interment of King James III. and his Queen at Cambuskenneth, he would submit them to the present meeting, as a suitable addition to Sir James Alexander's very interesting communication.

¹ See notice of the house on the following page.