

THE TOLQUHON AISLE, AND OTHER MONUMENTS IN TARVES
KIRKYARD; WITH SOME FURTHER NOTES ON
TOLQUHON. By W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT.,
F.S.A.Scot., F.S.A.

In my paper on "Tolquhon Castle and its Builder" contributed to our *Proceedings* in 1938,¹ an illustration (reproduced herewith, Pl. XX, 1) and a short account were given of the tomb which the seventh laird of Tolquhon, William Forbes, built for himself in 1589 in the parish church of Tarves. As this monument is one of the most remarkable things of its kind in the north of Scotland, it seems worthy of a fuller description and investigation, particularly in view of its importance for the history of the spread of Renaissance influence in Scottish architecture during the reign of James VI.

The present kirk of Tarves was erected in 1798, and is a plain but dignified specimen of a Presbyterian preaching-house of its time. The building, which lies east and west, measures 75 feet in length by 39 feet 7 inches in breadth. The masonry is large, squared pink granite rubble, and on the south front and west gable the cherry-cocking remains; on the other sides it is obscured by harl. Except the north window, which is lintelled, the doors and windows have plain round arches. On the west gable is a belfry of good simple design. An organ chamber on the south side, a heating-

house on the north, and a porch and vestry at the west end are subsequent additions. The interior of the church was rearranged in 1825.¹ The church occupies a striking position on a high knoll, and before the village houses obscured the view, it and its medieval predecessor must have commanded an extensive outlook. The church of Tarves was granted by William the Lion to the Abbey of Arbroath,² and most of the early documents illustrating the history of the parish are therefore to be found in the Register of that monastery.

The old church is said to have been dedicated to St Englatius, a fictitious person whose name, according to Professor Watson, has been compounded from the Gaelic word *oenglais*, "choice brook." Tanglan's Well is still shown near the church, and on the River Ythan is Tanglandford. According to the *Martyrology of Oengus*, the Celtic founder of the church was St Murdebur or Muirdebar, a missionary from Leinster who flourished about the year 600.³ The dedication is thus an interesting proof of the early influence of the Irish Church in north-eastern Pictland.⁴

In the *View of the Diocese of Aberdeen*, written in 1732, the following description is given of the former church⁵:—

"The church has a choir and two isles: one for the Gordons of Haddo, now ruinous; another for the Forbeses of Tolquhon, also ruinous. Sir Thomas de Longovile (otherwise called the Red Reaver), the French pyrate, whom Wallace is said to have taken at sea, and recovered to a regular life, is reported to have dyed at Ythsie, and to lye at the east end of this church. It is added that the two blew stones, now on the stair-head of Tolquhon's loft, whereon now nothing can be discovered graven but a cross, were taken from his grave."

Quite possibly these two cross-marked stones were memorials of the Celtic Church. The Tolquhon monument lies 48 feet south of the eastern half of the present church, hence it seems that the latter must be situated somewhat to the north of its medieval predecessor. On either side of the monument the original rubble masonry of the aisle wall remains, though obscured by modern pointing. When the aisle was dismantled this wall was crowned by a massive pediment of pink granite stones, similar to those used in the new church. The back of the wall is entirely hidden in ivy.

The total height of the monument, to the crest of the heavy embattled cornice, is 7 feet 6 inches, and its over-all breadth is 8 feet 10 inches. The depth of the tomb recess is 1 foot 11 inches; the span of its arch, 5 feet 10 inches; height of the arch, 3 feet 4 inches.

¹ *New Statistical Account*, vol. xii. p. 675.

² *Registrum Vetus de Aberbrothoc*, p. 5.

³ *Martyrology of Oengus*, ed. W. Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Soc.), p. 240.

⁴ See W. J. Watson, *Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 318-20.

⁵ *Coll. Shires Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 329

The arch is framed within elaborate Renaissance baluster shafts. Each has a central medallion. The dexter medallion displays a bear's head muzzled coupé for Forbes, and the sinister one shows the boar's head coupé of the Gordons.

The arch-mould is a quirked and filleted edge-roll flanked by hollows, of which the outer one is wider and carries a series of Tudor roses. Outside this is a quirked quarter-round.

The hood-mould has a sloping upper surface, at the apex of which is a royal crown, with two unicorns facing it, one on either side, after the manner of supporters. I take it that this is intended to portray the Laird of Tolquhon's status as a tenant-in-chief of the Crown, in the same way as he put the royal arms over his own castle gate. On either side of the arch, and facing in towards the crown, are the following subjects: dexter, a hound collared pursuing a fox, which is escaping with a goose in its mouth; sinister, a hound collared pursuing a hare. These animal figures are executed with the utmost verve. In so far as they have any special significance, I suppose they may be taken to portray the old laird's love of field sports. The underside of the hood-mould has a remarkable composite ornament on its rounded surface. The upper part of this ornament takes the form of a draped curtain or frill, looped up in a series of folds; the lower part is the classical egg-and-dart.

In the dexter spandrel is a shield of florid Renaissance design, displaying arms: quarterly, first and fourth, a bear's head coupé, muzzled and collared, for Forbes; second and third, a unicorn's head coupé for Preston—the family through whose heiress the estate of Tolquhon came to the Forbeses. The shield is surmounted by an esquire's helmet, against a foliaceous background, perhaps intended for plumes, and is flanked by the laird's initials, W. F. Below is a scroll dated 1589. Extending up into the apex of the spandrel is another scroll with the Forbes motto, SALVS PER CHRISTVM. The reversed tail of the scroll bears an arrow pointing to the beginning of the inscription.

In the sinister spandrel is a shield of plain heater form. It shows the laird's arms impaled with those of his wife—three boar's heads coupé for Gordon. The shield is surmounted by a plumed hat. From the point of the shield springs a large conventional grape-like fruit. This shield is flanked by the lady's initials, E. G. for Elizabeth Gordon, and a scroll in the apex sets forth her genealogy: DOCHTER · TO LESMOR.

The tracery of the tomb-arch is cusped quite in the traditional manner, but the points end in scrolled triangles of a very un-Gothic aspect.

The dexter supporter of the arch is a portrait statuette of the laird. He wears a flat cap, a ruff, a puffed and slashed doublet buttoned up the middle, and full puffed and slashed knee-breeches. He has large curled moustaches and a forked beard, and his expression is a pleasing one. The sinister

supporter is his lady. She wears a long embroidered gown with full sleeves, and a ruff. Her hair is braided. Like her husband, she looks in good humour, though she has a most determined chin. These figures in three-quarter relief carry semi-octagonal corbel-caps of good Late Gothic design. The over-all height of the figures, including the corbel-caps, is 1 foot 2½ inches.

In the back of the tomb-recess is a sunk panel, evidently intended for an inscribed stone. It measures 2 feet 4½ inches broad and 2 feet 7 inches high, the depth being 4 inches.

The front of the tomb-chest displays an arcade of seven bays of Renaissance balusters bearing round arches, enriched with the egg-and-dart, and cusped below; in their spandrels is a foliaceous ornament, and in the half spandrel at each end a flower. In the centre bay of this arcade are a skull and cross-bones, with the adage *MEMENTO MORI*. The projecting under edge of the tomb-slab has a twined-ribbon and staff moulding, the staff being raguly, and the ribbon enriched with a sunk pattern.

The whole monument is crested with a miniature corbelled and embattled parapet, having three console-like projections, forming caps respectively to the side-shafts and to the central crown.

The material is a warm red sandstone, which has weathered exceedingly well. Indeed the carving, save in one or two places, is almost as sharp as when it was cut.¹ The stone appears to have come from Cammalown in Fyvie. All the carving is executed with perfect mastery, and the entire monument is pervaded by distinction. In my former account I described it as "a remarkable example of the bastard Gothic of the period. Its general design remains thoroughly medieval, but much of the detail is pseudo-classical in character. This is particularly seen on the arcade in front of the tomb-chest, and in the balusters on either side. The grotesque animals on the extrados of the tomb-arch are quite in the whimsical and vigorous style so often found in sculptured work of this period in the north-east of Scotland; while the 'mort's head' on the tomb-chest represents the incoming of a degraded taste that reached its climax in the two following centuries."

Another example, more or less contemporary, of the "mort's head" may be seen on a corbel in the oratory of Towie Barclay Castle, Auchterless.² It may be regarded as the first emergence of that gruesome funerary symbolism which may be studied, in all its vigorous and fascinating crudity, upon so many of the older monuments in our parish graveyards.

Built into the pediment above the tomb is a keystone boss. It has a Renaissance shield displaying the laird's arms, surmounted by an esquire's helmet. The shield is flanked by the initials V. F. Round the edge of the

Some trifling but necessary repairs were effected on the monument, a year or two before the war, by the late Mr J. Duthie Webster, of Tarves.

² *Proceedings*, vol. lxiv. pp. 84-5.



1. The Tolquhon Monument in Tarves Kirkyard.

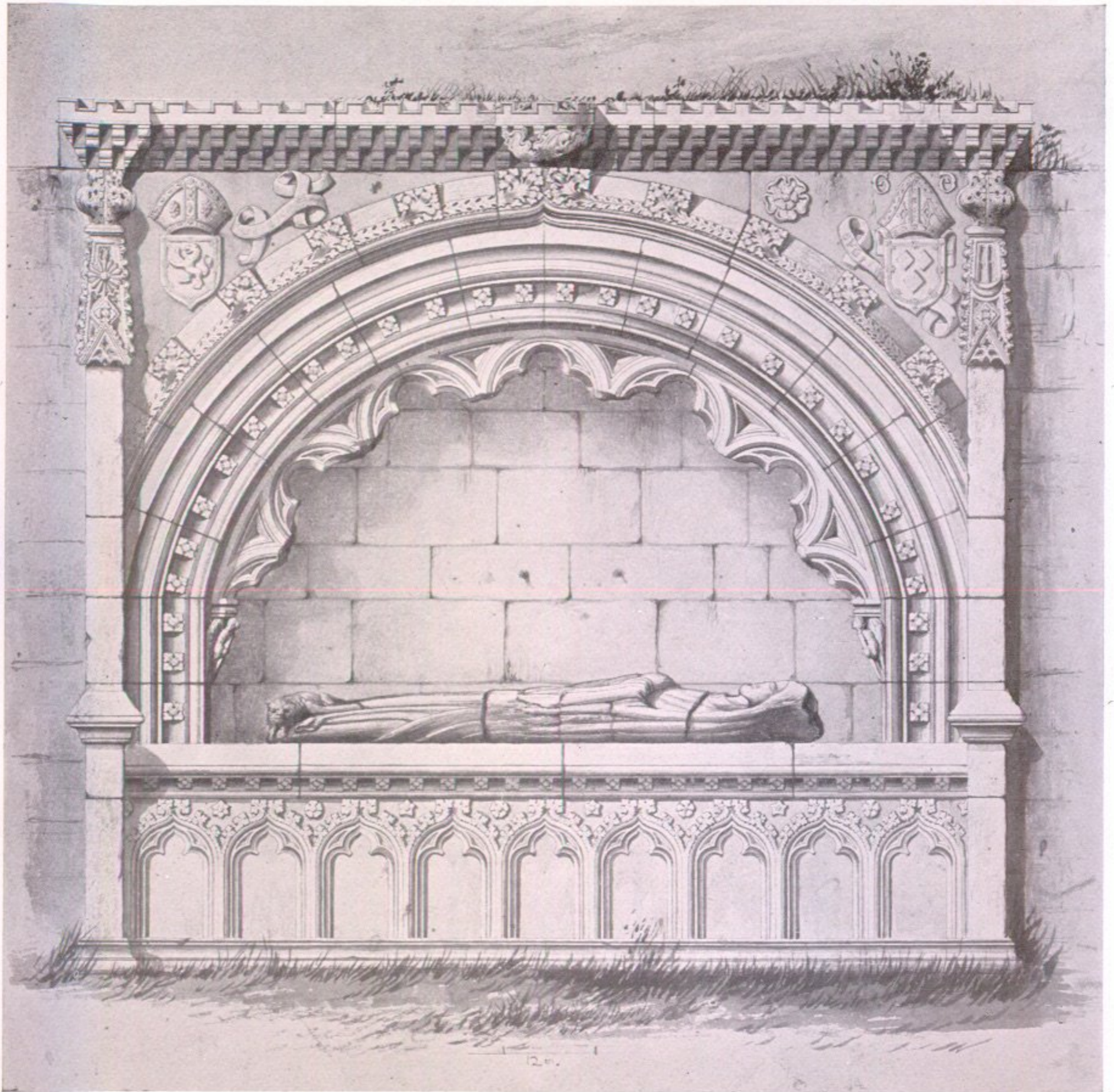


2. Heraldic Stone found among ruins of the "Auld Tour."

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON.

MONUMENTS IN TARVES KIRKYARD.

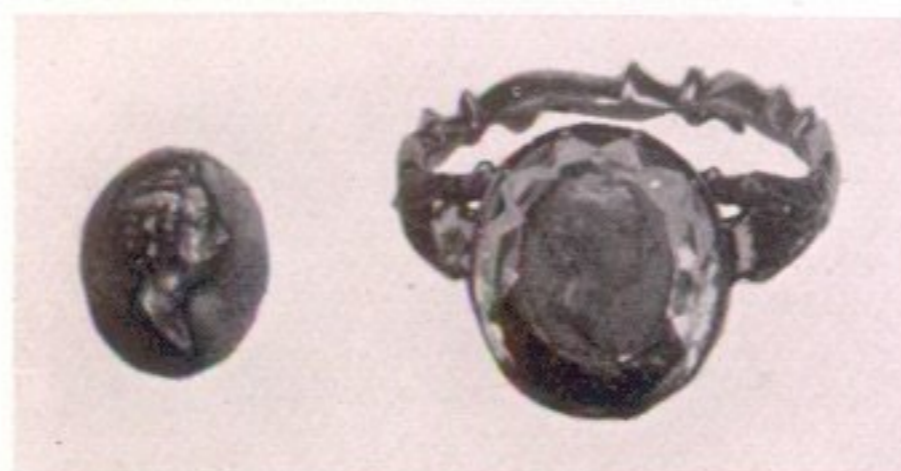
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Tomb of Bishop Gavin Dunbar, in St Machar's Cathedral.

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON.

MONUMENTS IN TARVES KIRKYARD.



Portrait medallion of Prince Charles Edward, and Seton enamelled finger-ring. ($\frac{3}{4}$).

R. B. K. STEVENSON.

JACOBITE RINGS.

boss is a vine scroll, extremely well done. This boss may perhaps be accepted as proof that the Tolquhon Aisle was vaulted.

It is obvious that our Tarves monument has been inspired by Bishop Gavin Dunbar's beautiful tomb (Pl. XXI) in St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen.¹ The corbel-figures supporting the tracery, the Tudor roses in the cavetto round the arch, the armorial bearings and the lettered scrolls in either spandrel, and the corbelled and embattled cornice with its three console-like projections engaged respectively with the pinnacle-finials and the ornament at the apex of the arch—all these, and other features, prove the close kinship between the two works.

We can hardly doubt that the master-mason or architect of the Tolquhon Aisle will have been the same man whom the laird at that very time was employing to make such an imposing addition to his "auld tour" two miles away. The style of the lettering of the inscriptions on the tomb and on the castle corresponds, the twined-ribbon enrichment on the edge of the tomb-slab reappears on the castle front, and the two statuettes of the laird and his dame on the monument have their counterparts in the quaint figurines that adorn his gatehouse. Also the sandstone used for the carved work in both buildings is the same. It is therefore the more remarkable that, while the castle is a purely native or Gothic building practically in all its features, the tomb, while remaining Gothic in its general conception and main lines, should display so much Renaissance influence in its details. We thus obtain a glimpse of a designer-craftsman at once vigorous and supple, capable of expressing himself both in the vernacular and in the new quasi-classical idiom which during the reign of James VI was beginning to make itself felt alike in ecclesiastical and in domestic building.

A fortunate chance has preserved our master-mason's name. On 21st May 1600 the Presbytery of Ellon visited Udney, where a new church was being erected. The reverend visitors found themselves confronted with a situation of some perplexity. Funds had run out, and the mason, Thomas Leper, was refusing to proceed unless he were paid in full. Udney of Udney and Forbes of Woodland came to the rescue, and agreed to advance the money provided the parishioners repaid them by Martinmas, and on the understanding that the mason finished the job *quam celerrime*. The Laird of Tolquhon, it appears, had some building to do, and was bargaining with Thomas Leper thereanent. So the minister of Tarves, Mr Thomas Gardyne, was appointed to interview the laird and to obtain his consent not to fee the mason until the kirk was completed. The following is the full text of the relevant entries in the Minute Book of the Presbytery of Ellon²:—

¹ See Dr William Kelly's discussion of this monument in *Logan's Collections* (Third Spalding Club), pp. 155-8.

² I am indebted to the courtesy of the Rev. Dr John Campbell, Curator of the Church of Scotland Records, for most kindly depositing the original volume in the Library of Aberdeen University, so as to enable me to transcribe this entry. Cf. T. Mair, *Ellon Presbytery Records*, p. 14.

“*The visitation of ye kirk of Udny At Udny 21 Maij 1600.*”

* * * *

Building of ye kirk of Udny. The same day touching the ending of the mason wark of the kirk quhairas Thomas Leper wil not entir to the wark until he be completly payit It is agreit upon be the Laird of Udny and Mr. James Forbes that be their moyan thay sal find out the sum being fourscoir merkis And pay the profiet upon it until Martinmes nixt that the same be collectit out of the heddes of the parochinaris provyding the said Thomas get sufficientlie cautioners not to leave the wark until the ending of the same. And to the effecting heiroy Mr. James Forbes and Mr. Thomas Gardin sal conveyin with the Laird of Udny upon Monnenday nixt at Udny to the quhilk dyet the said Thomas to be convenit.

Commissioun til Tolquhone. The quhilk day for als mekil as it is reportit that Th. Leper is in hand with the Laird of Tolquhone for entering to his wark a commissioun is gevin be the Laird of Udny, Mr. James Forbes hail parochinaris and presbiteri till Mr. Thomas Gardin to desyre Tolquhon not to entir in conditionis with the said Thomas Leper until he accomplisises the kirk wark according to his contract.”

The laird of this date was not William Forbes, builder of the castle, who had died in 1596, but his son, also William. The castle was erected, as its inscription informs us, between 1584 and 1589; but this extract from the Presbytery record tells us that work was still going on. Perhaps the fore-court was now a-building. That Thomas Leper had been the architect of the main castle is proved by his initials, T. L., still to be seen on the skew-putt of the turret gablet in the inner court.

As I have formerly pointed out, the close resemblance in plan between the main building of Tolquhon Castle and the neighbouring House of Schivas,¹ and the presence in both of the characteristic ornate and sometimes triplet gunloops, make it certain that Schivas also is a work of Thomas Leper. Even the nasty trick of the gunloop in the stair turret, plunged so as to command the main door, is common to the two buildings. It is probable that we may recognise Leper's work also in a third building nearby—the vanished castle of Dumbreck: for among the carved fragments built into the farm buildings at the Mains there is the left-hand orifice of a triplet gunloop of the characteristic Tolquhon pattern.² By contrast, a different

¹ See J. Fenton Wyness in *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii. pp. 384-91; also *The Book of Buchan*, 1943, pp. 213-40.

² Similar triplet gunloops, but very crudely wrought, are found in the round tower of Ellon Castle. These are certainly not by Thomas Leper, but may have been imitated from his work.

hand, we must surely think, will have wrought the crudely designed gablet skew-finial, in the form of a head-mask, with a fleur-de-lis in the gablet, built into the steading at Nethermill of Tillyhilt, which is one of the few surviving fragments of Tillyhilt Castle. At Uppermill, a short distance to the west, two more stones from Tillyhilt Castle are built into the steading. One appears to have been the projecting lintel of a dormer window, and displays in fanciful raised lettering with flourished serifs, the inscription I G . 1583 . R G. The other, a door lintel, is now much worn, but appears to bear the inscription, also in raised but plainer lettering, A N . W G . 16—: the date being no longer legible. These three stones from Tillyhilt Castle are all in the local pink granite. None of them has the least resemblance to any carved work at Tolquhon. Further afield, the site of Lesmoir Castle, near Rhynie,¹ has yielded two red sandstone figurines, one a half-length portrait of a gentleman putting a weight, now at Craig Castle, and the other, also a half-length gentleman, now at Crathes Castle, whose kinship with the Tolquhon sculptures leaps to the eye. Bearing in mind that the builder of Tolquhon took his wife from Lesmoir, we cannot be amiss in believing that Leper did work at that castle also.

So far as I am meantime aware, Thomas Leper has left no other trace in written record. Whence he came we do not know: but the two buildings which are certainly his work are so highly individual and distinctive in their style, that I cannot but feel convinced he was an Aberdeenshire man. At all events, he is not unworthy to take his place beside his contemporaries, the Bells, that great family of master-masons to whom we owe some of the most glorious of our latest Aberdeenshire castles.

Before leaving Tolquhon Castle, one or two further notes may be set down in amplification or correction of my former account. Mr Medd's plan of the first floor of Preston's Tower was unfortunately incorrect, and a revised version is reproduced herewith (fig. 1). The fine heraldic stone (Pl. XX, 2) found amid the ruins of this tower bears the coat of arms of Sir John Forbes, the first laird of his line—the cross-crosslet being added to the Forbes bearings as a maternal difference, a charge taken from the arms of his mother, Margaret Kennedy of Dunure.² The large mason's mark on this stone recurs on the aumbry in the tower hall. It may therefore be accepted as reasonably certain that the tower was built by Sir John Forbes after he succeeded to the property in or later than 1420, and not in the time of the Prestons.

Although smaller, this "Auld Tour" at Tolquhon has a considerable resemblance to the tower at Pitsligo Castle, which is stated to have been built soon after 1424 by Sir William Forbes, first of Pitsligo, and elder brother of the first Forbes laird of Tolquhon. At Pitsligo the tower hall

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. lxvi. 86-101.

² This was pointed out in an unsigned contribution to *Bon Accord*, 13th July 1939.

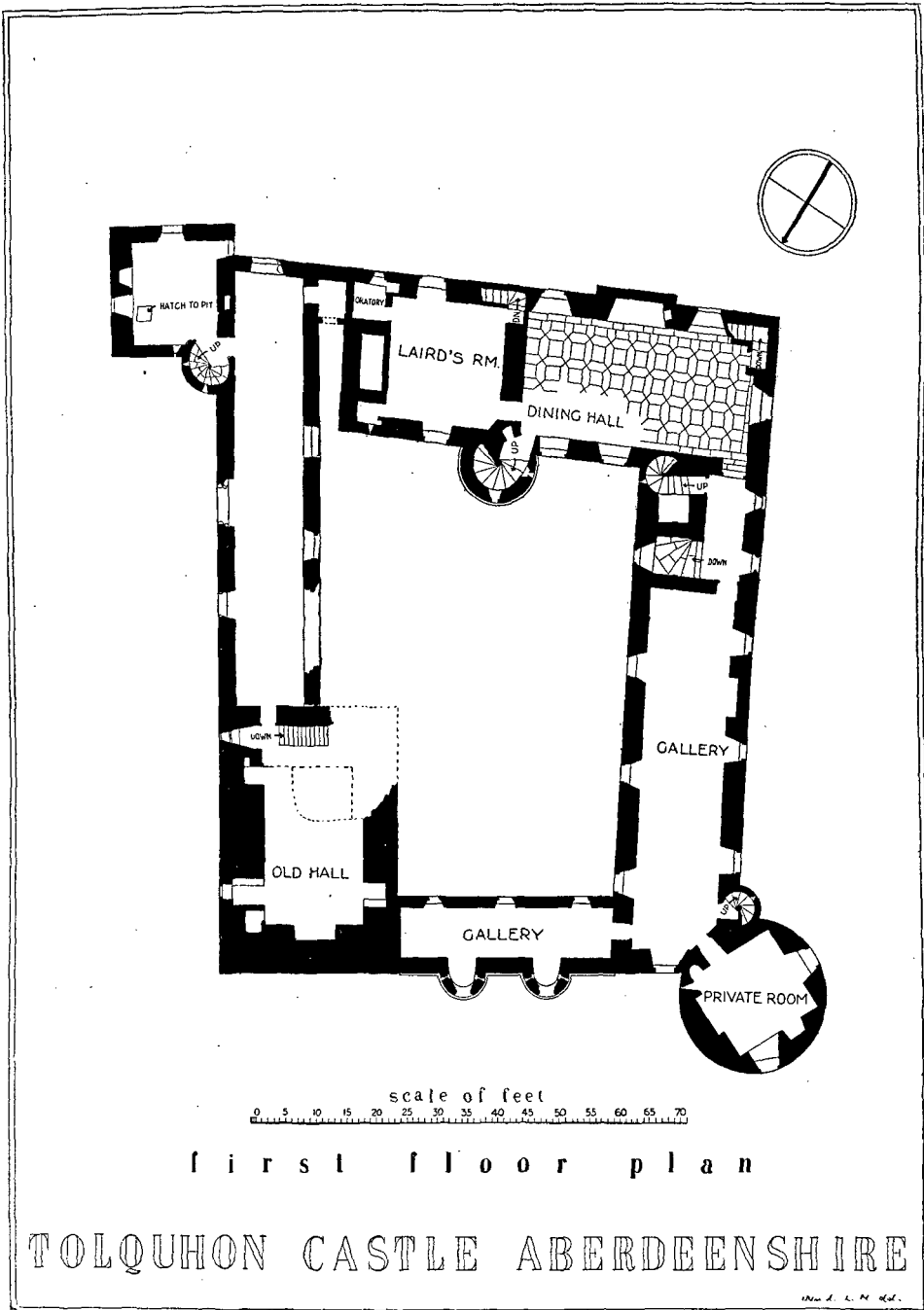


Fig. 1. Corrected Plan of Tolquhon Castle.
(See *Proceedings*, vol. lxxii. p. 271.)

is vaulted. I suspect that this was the case also at Tolquhon, and that the collapse of the vault led to the downfall of the tower.

Against the south wall of Tarves kirk are set up four seventeenth-century monumental slabs of much interest. The first of these, in the same perdurable red sandstone used for the Tolquhon Aisle, measures 5 feet 5 inches long and 1 foot 11½ inches broad. In the centre of the upper part is a shield of florid design, bearing arms: ermine, on a fess a boar's head between two crescents. On either side are the initials T. C. and M. R. In the lower half of the stone are a skull and a single bone. A band running round the stone bears the inscription: HEIR . LYIS . THOMAS . CRAIG . PVRSENANT . QVHA . DEPAIRTIT . YE . 19 . OF . MAII . 1⁵84 . AND . MARIORIE . RIDELL . HIS . SPOVS . QVHA . DEPAIRTIT . YE . XV . APRILL . 1583. The lettering is incised, and the shield is sunk, the charges being left flush with the surface of the slab, so as to give the effect of low relief. In the same way, the skull and bone are set in a sunk circular panel. On the inscription, the "N" in PVRSENANT is of course a mason's mistake for "V"; and the "5" in the first year has been destroyed by damage to the stone.

On the left of this monument is another slab, also in the same freestone, and of closely similar design. It measures 5 feet 5 inches long and 1 foot 8½ inches broad. The florid shield again bears the Craig arms, flanked by the initials W. C. and M. R., and below are a skull and bone incised, but not in a panel. The inscription incised round the edge reads thus: VLTIMA . DOM' . GVL . CRAIG . ROSÆI . HERALDI . ET MARIORIÆ . REITH . EI' . SPÖSAE . QVĀ . SIBI . ET . SVIS . IN . DIĒ . RESV^RECTIONIS HIC . REQVIETVRIS: PROVIDERVT . 1617. The two middle letters in the word "RESVRECTIONIS" are lost through the breaking out of a fragment of the stone. The lettering is much ligatured.

As to these early members of the College of Heralds, the Lord Lyon has been good enough to write the note which is printed at the end of the present paper.

Next to these two stones are a couple more slabs, similar in general form but made out of a coarse granitoid rock with abundant black mica. These stones have weathered badly, and the inscriptions can be fully read only in a bright slanting sunlight, early or late in the day—though then indeed they are almost quite clear.

The first of these stones measures 5 feet 9½ inches by 1 foot 10 inches, and displays two heater-shaped shields, one above the other, in good relief, each terminating below in a peculiar elongated ogee point. The inscription, is incised on a band running round the slab, and carried in a second line across the upper shield. Its tenor is as follows: HEIR LYIS . MAISTER .

THOMAS . GARDYNE MINISTER AT TARVES . QVHA . DEPARTIT .
THE . . . DAY OF . . . 163 . . . The missing portions of the date cannot
now be made out. Thomas Gardyne was minister at Tarves from 1593
until 1633. It was he who was deputed to wait upon the Laird of Tolquhon
in the affair of Thomas Leper. The upper shield bears the arms, a boar's
head erased, for Garden. The lower shield is now illegible.¹ On either side
are incised, in a different style of lettering from that of the main inscription,
the initials W. L. Below the second shield are a skull and a single bone, set
in an arched recess.

The second slab measures 5 feet 6 inches by 1 foot 10 inches, and has a
shallow edge-roll. Before the stone was carved, the lower dexter corner
had been broken away, and the moulding is carried round the canted angle.
The incised inscription is arranged in the same way as on the Gardyne stone.
On the face are displayed a shield and a skull and bone, both within sunk
rectangular panels, of which the lower has rounded edges. The shield is
of the same peculiar form as that on the companion stone. It bears the
Chalmers arms, a demi-lion rampant issuant from a fess. The inscription
reads: HEIR LYIS AG . NES . CHALMER . AND ISBEL . CHAL . MER,
SPOS . TO . M . T . G . QVHA DEPERTIT . THE 20 NO . VEMBR. No room
was left for the date, which was never carved. Isobel Chalmer was Mr
Thomas Gardyne's wife, and Agnes no doubt was her sister.

Beside this group of upright monuments is a fourth, built longwise into
the foundation of the church. It measures 3 feet 3 inches long; the breadth
cannot be ascertained. On the slab, which is of granite, and quite plain,
are incised, in bold, well-formed letters and figures, M. R. 1613.

This paper, which has dealt with ancient monuments in the village of
Tarves, may conclude by recording an inscribed granite lintel, showing a
2½-inch chamfer, which has been reused on a door (now converted into
a window) in the Aberdeen Arms Hotel. It bears the incised legend:
16 . I 4 R . 77.

NOTE BY SIR THOMAS INNES OF LEARNEY,
LYON KING OF ARMS.

Practically nothing is known about these Craigs, but the arms suggest there
was a material connection with Gordon—or Garden.

William Craig was Rothesay Herald by 1607, and is noticed in Aberdeen
Sasines 1st November 1602, and referred to 5th March 1623 and 8th October 1626.

¹ According to Andrew Jervise (*Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, vol. ii. p. 352), the arms were: Keith
and Young, quarterly. The Keith pales can still be seen in a good light.