

Prof Dunn, 'Jottings in Mid-Lochaber', *RSAS* 16 (1881-82), 49-56

The other and more important rubbings now shown to the Society were made from tombstones in Kilmale churchyard. The first to be noticed

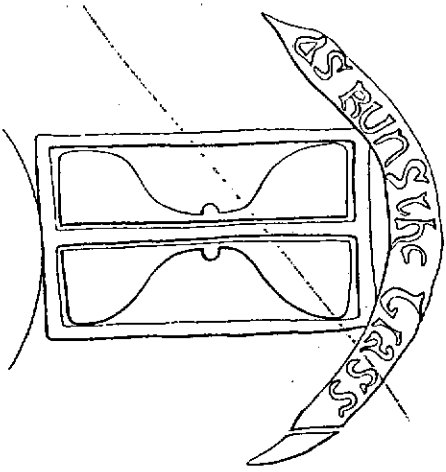


Fig. 1.

is an imperfect slab of argaceous mica schist, 4 feet 6 inches by 1 foot 6 inches (fig. 3). It is surrounded by a double roll moulding with a single

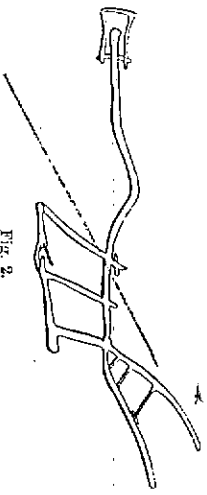


Fig. 2.

narrow ribbon ornament, and has on the centre of the surface a sword, on which is inscribed in rude letters "HEN EYES DONALD MAIKINEN." As

the slab has been broken across just where the guard of the sword begins to appear, we lose the style of the handle.¹ The ornamentation is a somewhat hard, intricate interlaced work. This foliaceous work springs, on one side, from the feet and the horns of a deer, carved with much spirit, and, on the other side, it is connected with what on the stone better than in the rubbing seemed to be the feet, tail, and ears of a wolf-like animal, as if in pursuit of the deer. But, looking at this part of the ornamentation in the light of several rubbings, I have once or twice asked, "Can what at first appeared so clearly to be the form of an animal be no more than an effect produced by the disposal of the plant ornament?" The inscription may be, most likely is, more recent than the sword, the blade being utilised to commemorate "Donald Maikinen." The next slab is also of mica schist, and is 4 feet 3 inches in length and 1 foot 4 inches in breadth, a little narrower at the bottom than the top. It is surrounded by a triple roll moulding, so managed as to give a not ungraceful appearance to the whole stone. On the upper surface is a sword, guard very slightly recurved, with small bulbous knobs at the ends;ommel distinctly bulbous oval, or pear-shaped. The folia-

¹This, as well as the feeling of its accompanying foliaceous work, have been exceedingly well indicated in the dotted parts above the break, by Mr. Thomson Shields, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., to whom I am indebted for the admirable rendering of the rubbing, represented in fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Inlaid Slab, 6 feet in length.

geous work, which is much defaced, lies on one side of the surface, and, on the other side, the representation of an axe and of other articles too much defaced to be identified. The sword lies in the centre, and on the blade are traces of lettering.

A rubbing taken from the fragment of a slab of dark Ballachulish slate shows traces of an intricate and pretty foliaceous ornament. Part of a sword is also seen, also with hints of lettering. "The Shears" is well marked, their point being at right angles to the sword. Does the significance of the shears vary with their position on the stone? Their positions might be arranged in groups, but whether or no the groups give data for inferences must be left with a query. This fragment has been long almost hid in the soil, from which I partially pulled it, but it kept the moisture to such an extent that only a very blurred rubbing could be got.

The next slab examined has had a piece broken off right across the centre, leaving only the two ends. Each piece is 1 foot 9 inches long and 1 foot 7 inches broad. The missing part may have had two figure-filled niches, corresponding to those shown in the rubbing. If so, the whole length would have been only a little more than 5 feet. On what remains we have a canopy in decorated Gothic, with basal niches, in which are two figures, one of which seems to represent a female, bearing in her hand what may be a mirror. The other also holds something, too much defaced to be made out. The whole slab has been surrounded by a broad band with an inscription now illegible. Traces of a good deal of painstaking tasteful work occur on this slab. This is seen both in the ornaments of the pointed arches and also on other parts of the stone, as, for example, in the tassels which depend from rosettes at the sides of the Corbel. On looking, at a curious feature appeared. It will be seen was shining brightly on it, a curious feature appeared. It will be seen that the straight lines are off the plumb. Now, when looked at as indicated, the effect of this was to give an appearance of perspective to the carvings, and to bring out a pictorial effect. Was this intentional? If so, then it is not likely that the present position of the slab was its original one.

I refer only to another slab which is of arenaceous mica schist, and is more than 5 feet in length. On its upper surface is a recumbent figure wearing a pointed basinet much defaced.

When notice was given of these "Notings" it was my intention to say something about the present state of the ruins of Tor and Inverlochly old castles, and to refer to the huge boulder in Glen Nevis, known as "The Stone of Council"—a gathering place of the Cameronians at critical times in the history of the clan—and to "Clagan," or the skulls, all famous in the district in connection with feuds between Cameronians and Campbells and Macdonalds. But I soon found that a knowledge of Gaelic is indispensable to one who would gather up the threads of tradition and weave them into an historical narrative, with the help of Gaelic names for natural objects and the Gaelic names of places. Enough, however, was ascertained to show that in this, as in other out-of-the-way districts of our land, there are fields of rich promise in this department waiting for investigation by capable workers. The aged, in whose memory local traditions are as clear and definite as the facts of written history, are passing away, and, even in these remote localities, a new generation is rising far too busy with positive knowledge to care much for traditional lore.

I was frequently informed that charred trunks of trees, charred bits of wood, and the horns of deer and oxen, had been found at the bottom of, or deep down in, Corrach Moss, and was directed to one place where some water-soaked burnt wood was seen, but there was nothing to warrant the assumption that it had been charred before the moss began to grow. There is a local tradition that the whole area of this moss was once forest, which had been burnt down to burnish or to destroy the wolves. A like tradition used to be met with in Annandale with reference to Locher Moss. The horns were sought for in vain. The only information elicited was, that they had been bought by the tinkers and taken out of the district. The remains of trees are not uncommon, covered with peat to the depth of several, in one case 6, feet. The growth of the peat must at some spots have been comparatively rapid.