



HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT.

A long talked of project to mark the resting-place of King Robert the Bruce in a suitable manner was revived in the columns of the local papers nearly three years ago by letters from the pen of Dr Charles Rogers; and in August 1887 a public meeting was held in Dunfermline, at which a committee was appointed to take the necessary steps for the erection of the monument. The committee included the Earl of Elgin, Sir Arthur Halkett, Bart., of Pittarans, Lord Tweeddale, Right Hon. H. Campbell-Bannerman, Hon. R. F. Bruce, Sheriff Gillespie, and a large number of the representative gentlemen of Dunfermline and district. Rev. Robert Stevenson of the Abbey was appointed secretary, and Mr John Landale, treasurer. Subscriptions came in freely, and the question arose as to what form the monument should take. Difficulties, it seems, were encountered in the way of erecting a sarcophagus in the church, and ultimately the committee, after much thought and consultation with the best authorities in the country, accepted the designs of Mr W. S. Black, 5 Queen Street, Edinburgh, for an inlaid monumental brass with figure of the King let into the floor of the church over the vault. The style of work belongs to the beginning of the thirteenth century, and in character resembles the memorial of the Saxon Edwared in Wimborne Minster, and that to the Royal Dames of Gloucester in Westminster Abbey. The figure of the King is life-size; over his suit of chain-mail armour he wears a kingly robes; his hands are placed in an attitude of prayer, and his feet rest on the recumbent figure of a conventionalised lion. His great two-handed sword lies by his side. On the left is his coat of arms as King of Scotland, and on the right that which he was entitled to assume as Earl of Carrick. The effigy is kingly in every line. The brass is of a massive and substantial character. Most monumental brasses are engraved. In this case the whole of the work has been done by hammer and chisel, each line cut deep down into the brass slab, and the result is a production which it will take ages to efface. The whole of the details have been studied by the designer from actualities of the period—the sword, for example, being an exact reproduction of the Bruce's own weapon. The work connected with the brass was executed at the art metal works of Messrs Langden & Co., Sheffield, and is a piece of most excellent craftsmanship. The brass is set into a splendid slab, 9 feet by 4 feet, of old Egyptian porphyry—presented by the Earl of Elgin—which has been cut from an ancient sarcophagus brought to this country by the grandfather of the present Earl of Elgin, marble fame. The cutting, polishing, and preparing of this material, which is about four times as hard as granite, has been done in a workmanlike way by Messrs Stewart McGlashen & Son, Canonmills Bridge, Edinburgh. The combination of brass and porphyry, the latter of which has a peculiarly rich dark red tone, gives to the memorial a worthy regal aspect. On the four sides of the figure, cut in a brass border in the same substantial manner, is the following Latin inscription, written by Professor Campbell, St Andrews:—"Robertus Rex, Boscarnensis Regis, repulcherrimus, A.D. MDCCLXVIII. inter ruinas forte relictum hoc loco deinde consepelitus est anno post spatium obitus DLIX." At the four corners of the brass border are circles in which appears the heart of the Bruce, interwoven with the crown and other suitable ornamentation. The memorial is the most important brass of the kind which has been produced in this country for many a day, and on the success of this, his first important work, Mr Black is to be congratulated.

Page 2 of The Dunfermline Press of Saturday 21 December 1889 carried a large report on the unveiling ceremony of the Bruce Memorial, performed by Lady Louisa Bruce, sister of Victor Bruce, the 9th Earl of Elgin, which had taken place on Wednesday of that week in Dunfermline Abbey.

The report contained an address by Provost Donald, who paid tribute to Lady Louisa (described as a collateral descendant of the Great King) and said about the memorial:

"The brass design was very beautiful but it was the least costly rare and costly material in the memorial. The porphyry in which the brass design was set, was the richer and rarer material, and was very much more costly. It was not out of a common marble slab as they saw in other abbeys. It was taken out of one of the Elgin trophies brought from Athens by Thomas, the sixth <sic> Earl of Elgin about the beginning of this century. He (the Provost) had seen the block from which it was taken at Broomhall, and a finer stone he never saw. (Applause) He ventured to say, and he did so with some authority, that it was worth a thousand pounds. It was said to have been the tomb of Constantine the Great."

The report went on to include a response to the Provost from the 9th Earl of Elgin which endorsed his comments and added :

"Regarding the marble he would only add that it was well known that Oriental porphyry is famed for its richness and beauty, and he was able to state to them that even in the skilled hands of Mr McGlashen, with all the modern appliances, it had been found to be four times harder than granite."

There were reports of other speeches plus the adjacent article which includes the following:

"The brass is set into a splendid slab, 9 feet by 4 feet, of old Egyptian porphyry – presented by the Earl of Elgin – which had been cut from an ancient sarcophagus brought to this country by the grandfather of the present Earl, of Elgin marble fame. The cutting, polishing, and preparing of this material, which is about four times as hard as granite, has been done in a workmanlike way by Messrs Stewart McGlashen & Son, Canonmills Bridge, Edinburgh. The combination of brass and porphyry, that latter of which has a peculiarly rich dark red tone, gives to the memorial a worthy regal aspect.... "

