

NOTE ON THE CROSS KIRK AT PEEBLES.

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According to the chroniclers, the discoveries made at Peebles (c. 1260) were (1) an object which appeared to them to be a cross of artistic importance and of antique form, and (2) a grave containing an urn and skeleton remains. There appears to have been a slight interval between the finding of the one and the finding of the other, but in the minds of those who were concerned with the discoveries the one find was connected in some way with the other. A clue to the possible nature of the cross is indicated in the *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*. There are entries recording

the amount of money given at various times by King James IV as offerings to "the Haly Cors of Peblis", and others indicating that this relic was subject to a certain amount of repair towards which four ounces of gold amounting in value to £25, 15s. 3d. was contributed in 1505 by the King. Three years later James IV commissioned Matthew Auchlek his goldsmith to remake a fourth part (*i.e.* the lower arm of the cross) out of $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of gold, and also a stand or base for it of silver weighing 4 ounces. The whole expenditure for goldsmith's time and the precious metals required for the work amounted to £43, 7s. 7d. It is thus clear that the cross venerated at Peebles was of no great size, and that two hundred and fifty years after its discovery it required repair and a certain amount of restoration. Whether the cross found was of metal or of wood encased in metal remains a mystery, but it must have had sufficient appearance to warrant the early "antiquaries" stating that it was "magnificent and venerable".

The nature of the second discovery is more easily appreciated. The description given of the grave suggests a short-cist burial of the Bronze Age, and this is to some extent confirmed by the existing remains which are represented by the cover slab and the two side slabs. The composition of the floor is also in accord with such burials. At the time of the erection of the south wall of the church which now spans the cavity, the end slabs were removed and the grave lengthened in rough rubble. This lair is below the basement level of the wall, and its long axis points in a north-easterly direction with the ends of the grave protruding beyond the width of the wall. The cavity is over 6 feet in length, approximately 2 feet wide, and about 2 feet deep.

It is quite possible that the site of the grave was marked by a cairn which would be known as a landmark to those resident in the locality, and that the cross may have been purposely hidden in the cairn some few hundreds of years before it was discovered. There is, however, little doubt that the Holy Cross of Peebles was the main object of veneration and that the grave of the supposed saint took second place. This at least appears to have been so in the later history of these objects of veneration, for we find no reference made to the feretory of the local saint in the *Lord High Treasurer's Accounts*; whereas in these folios there are entries referable to the King's offerings at the shrines of St Margaret at Dunfermline, St Duthac at Tain, St Mirren at Paisley, and St Ninian at Whithorn.

It was to the advantage of the Church to stimulate the cult of pilgrimages, and this form of worship was particularly marked in the thirteenth century. For this reason the bishop of Glasgow, in whose diocese the discovery was made, caused a church to be built by King Alexander III. The church founded by the King was designed to meet the needs of pilgrims, and its plan was so arranged that the feretory of St Nicholas the bishop was conveniently located in the south wall, so as to be accessible to devotees con-

gregating on that side of the building. The plan (fig. 3) was oblong and not of cross-form, as one would have expected from the name of the church. The dedication was in honour of the Holy Cross of Peebles and not to the Holy Rood or Cross of our Saviour. The building was 113 feet long by 33 feet wide, and had a projecting revestry on the north side entered from the quire. It was constructed of local whinstone, but the facings of the doorways, windows, skews, basement course, string course, and that at the wall-head were of dressed sandstone. The architectural detail, still evident, conforms in character with that in vogue in the second half of the thirteenth century.

The roof was of timber and steep pitched. In the revestry were kept the

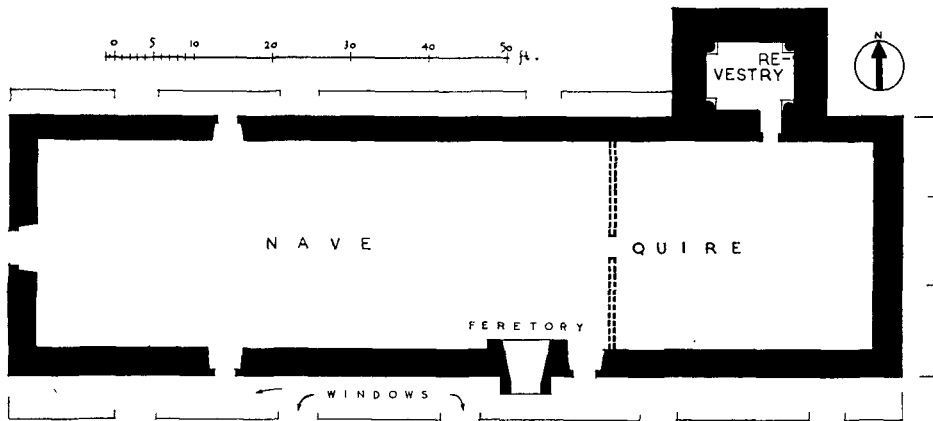


Fig. 3. Plan of Cross Kirk, Peebles, as originally built.

(By courtesy of Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, Ministry of Works.)

Holy Cross of Peebles and the altar vessels, and this was the only part of the structure vaulted in stone—a necessary precaution against fire; the walls were also thicker than those of the kirk, as they had to contain the wall presses in which these treasures were placed for safe-keeping.

The kirk had four entrance doorways, the principal one being in the west wall, two in the south, the one 27 feet from the west end and the other 40 feet from the east—the distance between these doorways being 46 feet, and the former had a counterpart directly opposite to it in the north wall. All the windows were large and mullioned, the upper parts being of simple tracery. Their dispositions were as follows: one over the west portal, five in the south wall, one in the east, and three in the north.

In the Hutton Collection of MSS., preserved in the National Library, there is a letter dated 1790 written by the Rev. William Dalgleish, the parish minister; in it he gives a full description of the Cross Kirk as it was in his time when it was less ruinous than it is to-day. The letter is accompanied

by a plan apparently drawn by the reverend gentleman; on it he shows the outline of the aperture in the wall at the feretory which he rightly assumes to cover the grave of the local saint. In his description of the feretory he states: "In the fore wall of the church between the third window from the west and the door on the east of that window there has plainly been an aperture and arch made at the first erection of the church, of a particular construction, four feet wide and two and a half feet high on the outside, but increasing into between six and seven feet in width and eight feet in height in the inside, with decorations of freestone projecting beyond the line of the wall, not done in any other part of the church." Further on in his account he remarks on this feature "projecting without the wall on the outside". Apparently this author provided Captain Francis Grose with a similar description as he did for General Hutton, for the former printed it verbatim in *The Antiquities of Scotland*, vol. ii., published in 1791.

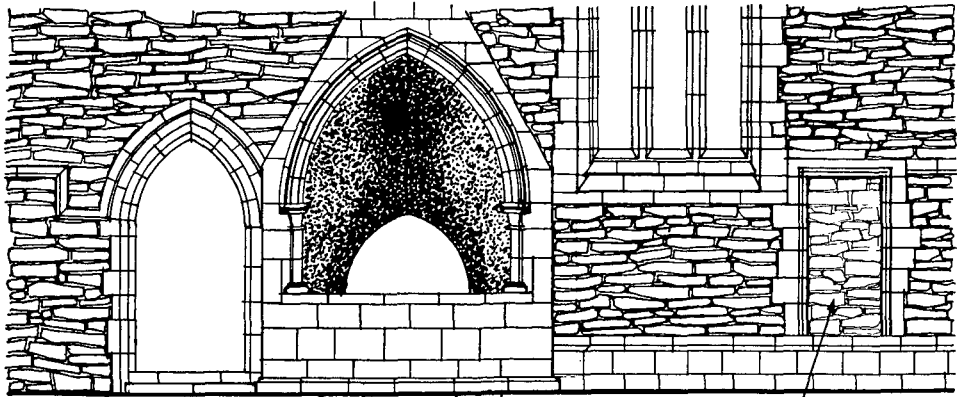
In order to appreciate the description given of the feretory an aid is provided by the guidance drawing (fig. 4). It will be noticed that it bears a resemblance to a low side-window, making it possible for those outside the building to touch the shrine and to see the Holy Cross when it was exposed for veneration at the saint's tomb. It is uncertain whether the portrait slab was set directly over the grave and angle-wise to the aperture, or set with its long axis at right angles to the line of the kirk wall or alternatively parallel to it. Whatever way it lay, part of it came within reach of the pilgrim's hand. It is possible that previous to the sculptured slab, the grave top took the form of a monumental brass—certainly the style of sculpture on the existing fragments is suggestive of an engraved brass. Within the kirk an altar stood in close association to the feretory, and westward from it there has been mural benching extending along the wall for some distance.

Within the nave, and in close proximity to the window to the west of the feretory, there is evidence of a small doorway slightly more than 5 feet in height, the threshold being at the bench level. This intrusion may possibly be of pre-Reformation date and, if so, it may have been connected with an ambo or outside pulpit from which a priest could address the people assembled in front of the feretory.

In the seventeenth century two roofed-in burial lairs were built against the section of the wall which contained the shrine, and no doubt the removal of the buttress-like projection at the feretory was due to the needs of interment within this special area.

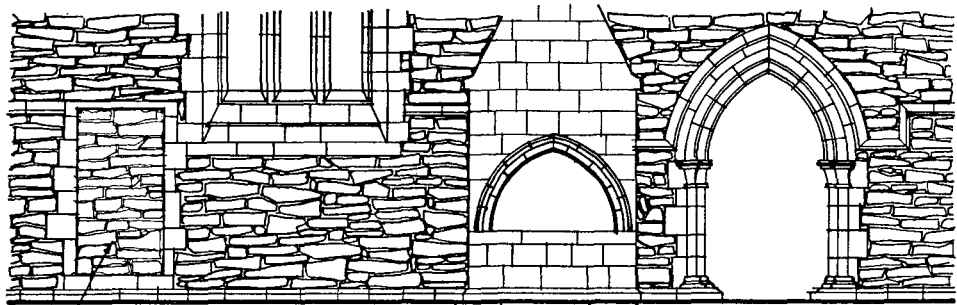
Considering the history and requirements of the building, it is thus clear why the Trinitarians built their domestic buildings on the north side of the kirk when they came to establish their house at Peebles. The structural wedding of the later with the earlier masonry of the north wall of the kirk is easily discernible.

In 1784 the Town Council, at the general desire of the community,



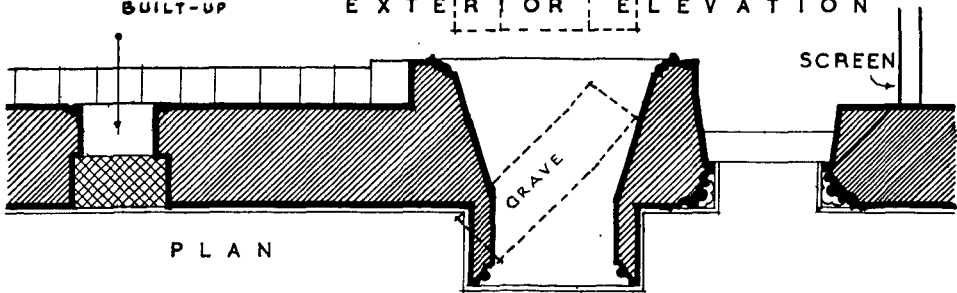
INTERIOR ELEVATION

LATER DOORWAY
BUILT-UP



LATER DOORWAY
BUILT-UP

EXTERIOR ELEVATION



PLAN

CONJECTURAL RESTORATION
OF FERETORY

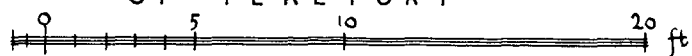


Fig. 4. Elevation and Plan, Cross Kirk, Peebles.
(By courtesy of Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, Ministry of Works.)

introduced an Act whereby "the walls of the Holy Cross Kirk should continue to be kept as a venerable monument of Antiquity". Unfortunately, like many good intentions where ancient monuments are concerned, this laudable desire amounted to nothing, for within a few years much of the fabric, including the feretory, was allowed to fall, and thus what might have been preserved has gone, and what has taken its place in later years provides no clue. The evidence of burning by the English is clearly visible at the doorway next to the feretory. Here the freestone masonry has been split and defaced through heat, therefore we can assume that the shrine suffered similarly, and that it was subsequently repaired to some extent.

The Cross Kirk of Peebles is now under the guardianship of the Ministry of Works, and therefore this communication has been submitted with the approval of the Ministry.