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VIII.

ARBROATH ABBEY.

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In the description of the ruins of Arbroath Abbey, which is published in the official guide book,[1] attention is drawn to certain features of unusual interest.

They are:

    (a) The tribune over the great west doorway.
    (b) The external wall-arcading at the base of the two western towers.
    (c) The triforium.

Further discussion and illustration of these features might be welcomed by students of Scottish mediæval architecture.

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THE WEST DOORWAY AND ITS TRIBUNE.

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The deeply recessed great west doorway is the most distinctively romanesque part of the abbey church. It is given enhanced architectural prominence by an unusual barrel-vaulted projection which supported an external gallery (Pls. XVI, 2).

The gallery commanded the entrance, and was open both to the inside and to the outside of the church. Externally it was covered by 3 gablets, and the whole exterior elevation would have been a single architectural unit, a two-storeyed porch.

Impressive porches either recessed into or advancing from the west wall are frequent in mediæval churches, both secular and conventual. The great late 11th-century cathedral of Lincoln, built by Bishop Remigius between 1074 and 1092, confronted the world with an array of no less than 5 deep barrel-vaulted recesses in its west façade. These survive, embedded in 13th-century additions. They are arranged in increasing size towards the central and highest, which contains the great west doorway. Those on either side of it admit to the nave aisles; the lesser and outer recesses are lofty rounded niches without doorways. There is no upper tribune or gallery. At Jedburgh Abbey the great romanesque west doorway of c. 1180 distinguishes one of our finest surviving Transitional west fronts. It is set

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[1] Mackie, R. L., and Cruden, Stewart, *Arbroath Abbey; Official Guide Book*, H.M.S.O., 1954.

within a projecting porchway which is surmounted by 3 gablets. These are not open, but contain statue niches; nor is there a gallery. At Kelso Abbey there is an upper chamber in the porch of the north transept, which is one of our outstanding romanesque compositions. The porch is crowned by a single pediment, which covers the chamber over the doorway. It is lit by narrow lancet windows between the columns of an interlaced wall-arcade. These windows were for light and viewing only, not for ceremony.

Upper chambers over porches were not infrequently provided with altars and served as chapels, and the porchway and its immediate vicinity served as shelter and auditorium for pilgrims or penitents assembled below.
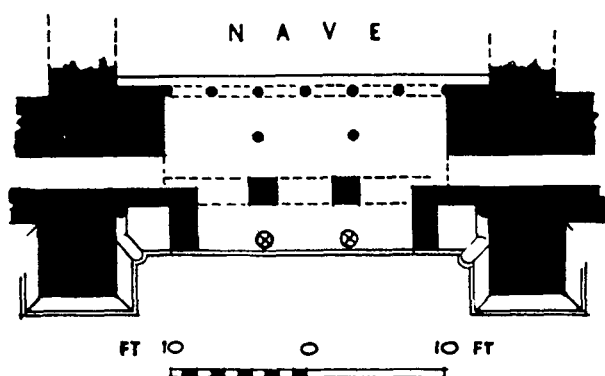

Fig. 1. Plan of the tribune; missing columns indicated by crosses.

The tribune at Arbroath must have been for ceremonial and liturgical use, although there is no evidence of an altar or chapel furnishings. In point of fact it is highly improbable that it ever could have functioned as a chapel, because it is not a chamber but an outward extension of a passage across the west gable (fig. 1). And although there is no record of it having been a Galilee porch, there is the architectural evidence before us to suggest that it might well have been one, such as Walcott refers to.[1] On the exterior of the west front of Lisieux, over a porch, there is a gallery where on Palm Sunday the Glory, Laud and Honour is sung when the procession returns with the sacrament from the cemetery. The procession symbolises the Apostles' journey to meet our Lord in Galilee after His resurrection, as He had commanded them to do. After an appropriate exchange of verses and chanting between the procession and a choir stationed in the Galilee porch the great door was opened and the procession re-entered the church and returned through the nave to the choir.

The tribune at Arbroath is reached by means of the wheel stair in the corner of the south tower, and thence by an open gallery across the cills of

[1] Walcott, M. E. C., *Sacred Archæology* (1868), 291.

the lower pair of tower windows.   The passage penetrates the thickness of. the tower wall and when over the west doorway opens by a series of arches both to the inside and to the outside of the church (see plan, fig. 1).   It opens to the inside, *i.e.* to the nave, through six narrow pointed arches (Pl. XVI, 1).   These spring from octagonal shafts with moulded capitals and annulets enriched with nail-head ornament of late 12th- or early 13th-century type.   To the outside it originally opened through three separate gablets advancing some four feet from three arches in the exterior wall.   The gablets were supported by two intermediate columns set between a solid stone haffit at each end.   The haffits remain but the three gablets and the columns supporting them have now vanished, leaving exposed what was never meant to be seen.   Midway between the interior arcade and the present exterior arches, plain round columns with moulded capitals and bases support the lintels of the passage, which continues to the north tower. On the plan the missing piers are shown, thus, $\bigotimes$.

The present writer considers this tribune to be original work, but its originality has been questioned.[1]   It has been argued that the unusual and not entirely pleasing barrel-vault advancing beyond the doorway must be an addition to it to carry a later tribune gallery overhead.   On the face of it, it does appear to be so, and to support the supposition, the pointed wall-arches on the splayed jambs flanking the entrance at ground-level are referred to as evidence of a date subsequent to the doorway proper, which is round-arched and romanesque.   But the romanesque is more apparent than real.   The aforesaid pointed arches are similar to those of the presbytery, the earliest part of the church, which was completed before 1214.   The arch-mouldings over the door are deeply undercut and multiple, and they rise from moulded bell-capitals each with a round abacus, all Gothic characteristics.   The early attribution is suggested by the semicircular arch-form and the survival of two characteristically romanesque details, viz. the undercut chevron and the "collar" or projecting rings motif which occurs at Kelso Abbey and Lamington Parish Church, first half of 12th century, and at Kilwinning Abbey, where it adorns a pointed arch of transitional or late 12th-century type.   The doorway in fact, like the round-arched gallery in the south transept, exemplifies *the survival of a style that was on the wane,* and in default of structural evidence of alteration and addition, which a close examination does not produce, the tribune must be accepted with it.

The east end was completed by 1214, when the royal founder was buried before the high altar, in accordance with his wishes.   It may have been completed before that date, for the abbey was founded in 1178 and colonised by monks from Kelso in that year.   Presumably mason-work began then. In 1233 the church was dedicated.   In considering the probable date of this

[1] M. and R., *Eccl. Arch.,* II (1896), 38.

porch in relation to a presumed steady building progress, it would seem that the outside limits are *c.* 1200 and 1233, and it is very probable that between *c.* 1210 and 1233 is the period. Exactly when does not much matter for our present purpose. It is sufficient to note the probability. The reversion to an outmoded style is remarkable, especially in comparison with the pure lancet Gothic of the earlier east end. Now William the Lion took more than a passing interest in the progress of the work,[1] and stayed at Red Castle during the building operations.[2] He seems to have pestered those who were overseers and masters of the works. Is it due to his life that the east end is remarkably advanced in style, and to his death that the west door is not?

Nothing like this tribune occurs anywhere else in Scotland. In England Galilee porches are not uncommon, but they are not like this. At Durham (*c.* 1180) and Ely (*c.* 1200–15) they are separate buildings projecting far in advance of the west front; at Lincoln the Galilee of *c.* 1230 is a separate building attached to the south transept. In Scotland, evidence for two tribunes which may have been Galilee porches exists in the shattered west front of St Andrews Cathedral and in ruined Holyrood Abbey. They also were not like this, but were seemingly open arcaded screens over the west doorway.[3] The Augustinian church at Dunstable has an open arcaded screen of *c.* 1230 extending across the west gable, but this does not project from it as a two-storeyed porch. At Elgin Cathedral a passage crosses the west gable from tower to tower. It is open to the nave only and is unsuspected from the outside.

THE WALL-ARCADING OF THE WESTERN TOWERS.

One of the most interesting minor features is a fanciful and effective variation of the blind or wall-arcading so popular with the Arbroath master masons. On the exterior walls of the towers above the splayed basement it was developed a step further than the orthodox treatment. It is no longer a continuous row of arches, or a row of arches intersecting in the same plane, but an arrangement of two, one overlapping, arcades with the arches staggered or alternately disposed (Pl. XVII). The upper range projects beyond the lower, and each of its shafts passed across the apex of the arch below and behind it. The bases of the shafts are not on the same level, those of the upper arcade being one course below those of the lower or inner arcade. Consequently there is an effect of movement, of projection and recession, and rise and fall. On the west wall of the north tower the arches remain but the shafts are missing; on the west wall of the south tower both arches and shafts remain, obscured by and doubtless saved by the later

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[1] *Official Guide*, p. 19.
[2] Wardlaw MSS., *Fraser Chronicles*, p. 49.
[3] Kelso, f. 1128, the parent of Arbroath, had a Galilee porch entirely projecting from the west front.

range, which was built against the west wall of the tower in the late 13th to early 14th century. Fragmentary but corroborative evidence of this overlapping arcading exists on the south wall of the south tower.

This arrangement of wall-arcading *en quinconce* occurs in different forms —in Ely, Lincoln, Beverley, and in Lisieux and other French churches— but at no time or place did it form part of the common stock-in-trade of the mediæval architect. It occurs nowhere else in Scotland as far as the present writer is aware.

In the Galilee porch of Ely Cathedral, to which reference has already been made, and in the restored west portals of St Albans, the outer arcade is pulled well forward of the other; so much so that at Ely there is a miniature ribbed vault spanning the space between them (Pl. XVIII, 1). At Lisieux (Pl. XVIII, 2) the forward shafts rise to support a capital and a straight entablature, not an upper arcade. The closest parallels are to be found in St Hugh's choir, Lincoln (Pl. XIX, 1), erected between 1192 and 1200, and in the triforium of Beverley Minster (Pl. XX, 1). In the overlapping arcading of Hugh's choir the outer range is not built with the inner but overlaid upon it, and the mouldings of the inner continue in all completeness behind the outer. It seems, as has been suggested,[1] that the outer range was added. But original intent to enrich this choir and its transepts with this unusual and beautiful double-arcading is probable. There is nothing awkward about it, which there would be were the outer range removed. At Beverley we have the closest resemblance to Arbroath. Here the effect of movement is quickened by the use of Purbeck marble.

THE TRIFORIUM.

The western towers do not descend as solid walls to the ground, but are supported upon arches opening to the nave and aisles. This opens up the towers as a bay in each aisle (Pls. XVI, 1, and XIX, 2).

The towers were not floored and their windows were served by timber galleries, an expedient also adopted for access to the great transeptal lights. Now the triforium galleries over the nave aisles terminated abruptly against the blank east walls of the towers. Had the towers been floored at this level there would surely have been communication from the triforium gallery to the floor of the tower. Even so, without a tower floor, this blank wall is hardly to be expected. The usual termination of a triforium gallery against a transept, or against a tower with an open well, is an open arcade, usually similar to a bay of the triforium. Furthermore, had the tower arch which opens to the nave been raised to clerestory level a western transept would have been achieved, as at Kelso. The opportunity of achieving this striking and unusual feature was overlooked, or probably deliberately

[1] Cook, G. H., *Portrait of Lincoln Cathedral* (Phœnix Press, 1950), 26.

rejected. On the contrary, the continuation of the nave and triforium arcading across the tower to the west gable has obviously been the main consideration of the designers.

It would be more logical to have a floor inside and behind the triforium opening, but there is none. The west bay of the triforium arcading is in fact but a screen, a piercing in the south wall of the tower, contrived to continue to appearance of a triforium gallery where no such thing existed.

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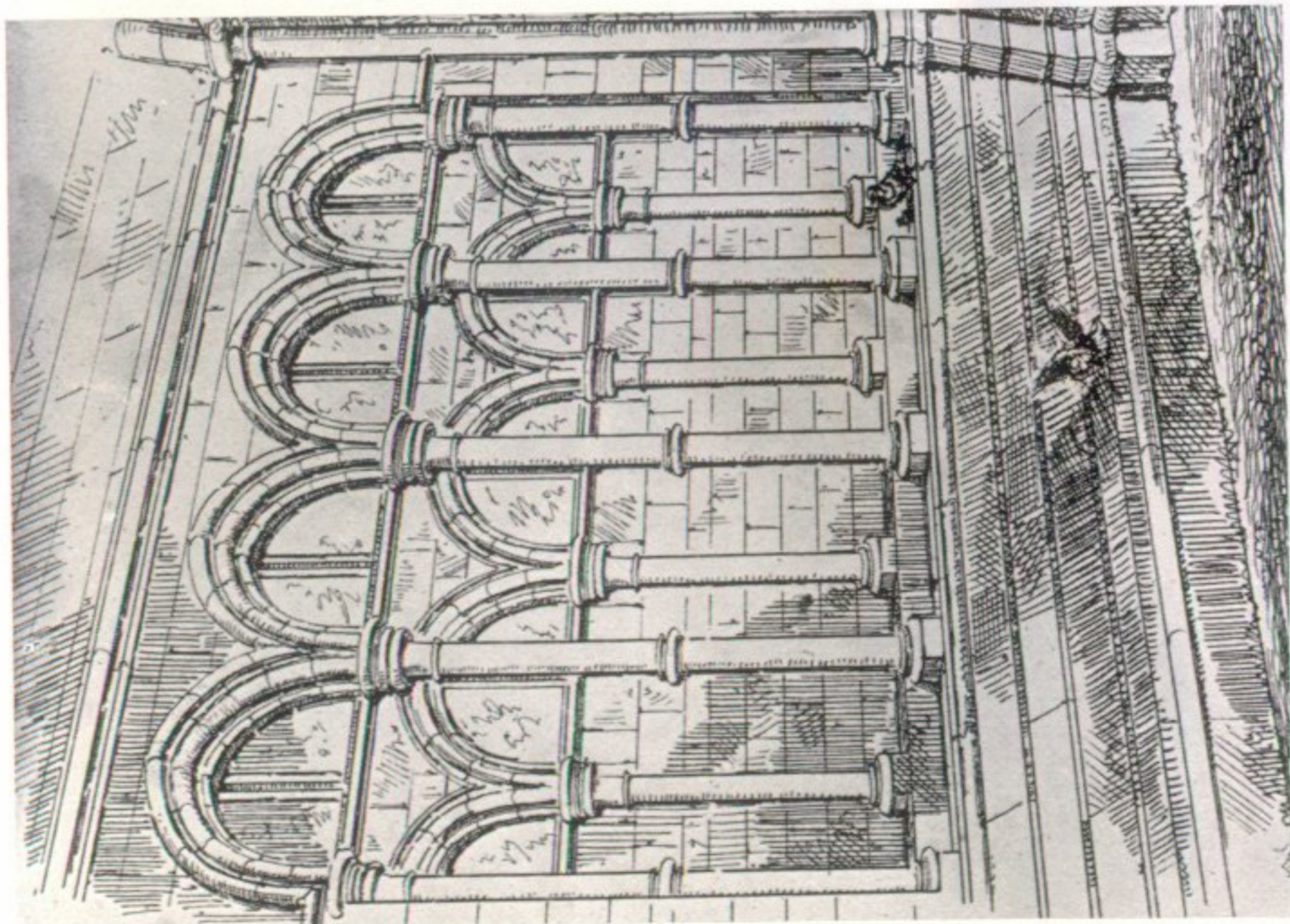
1. The interior, looking west.
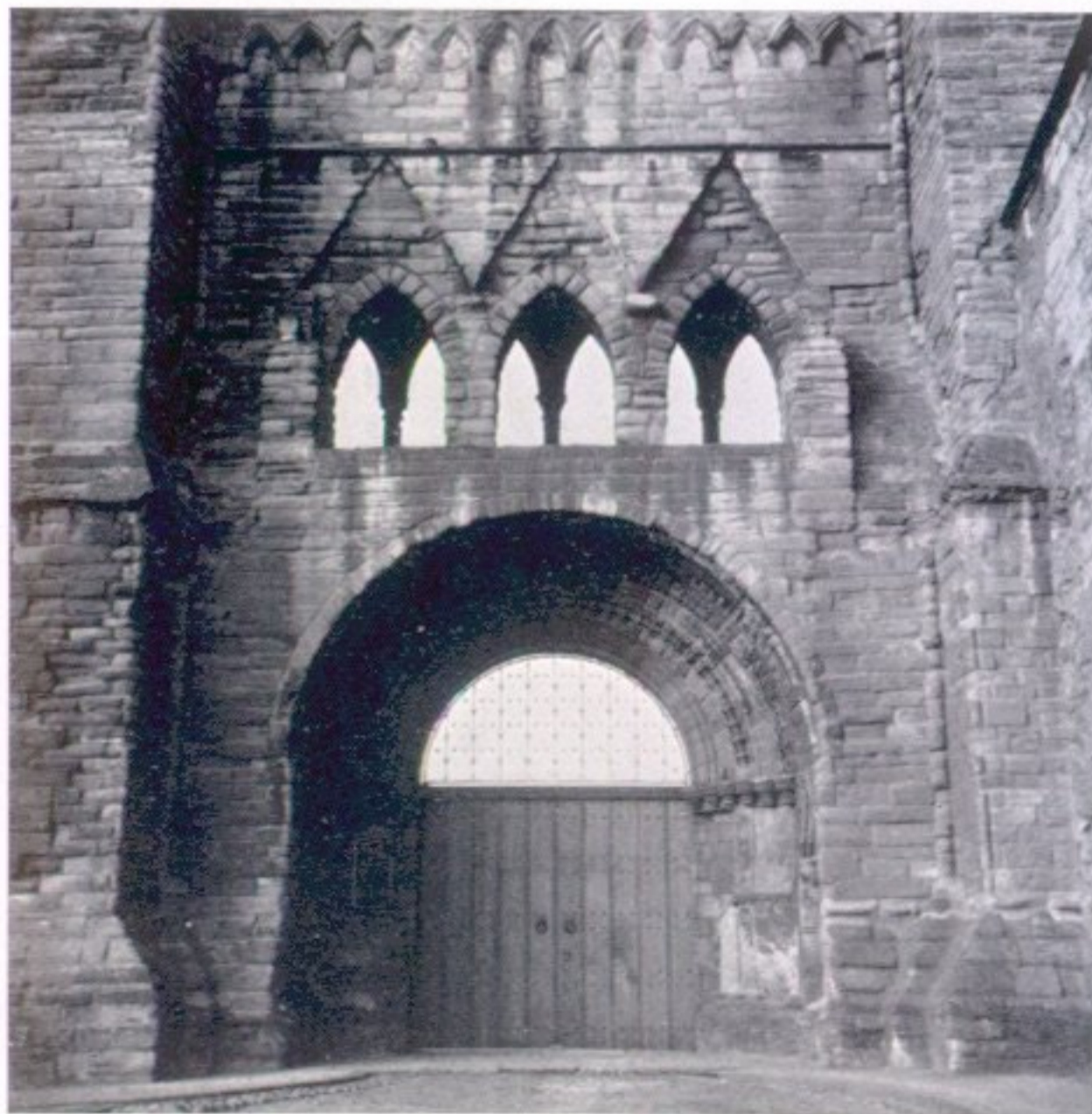
2. The west doorway and tribune.

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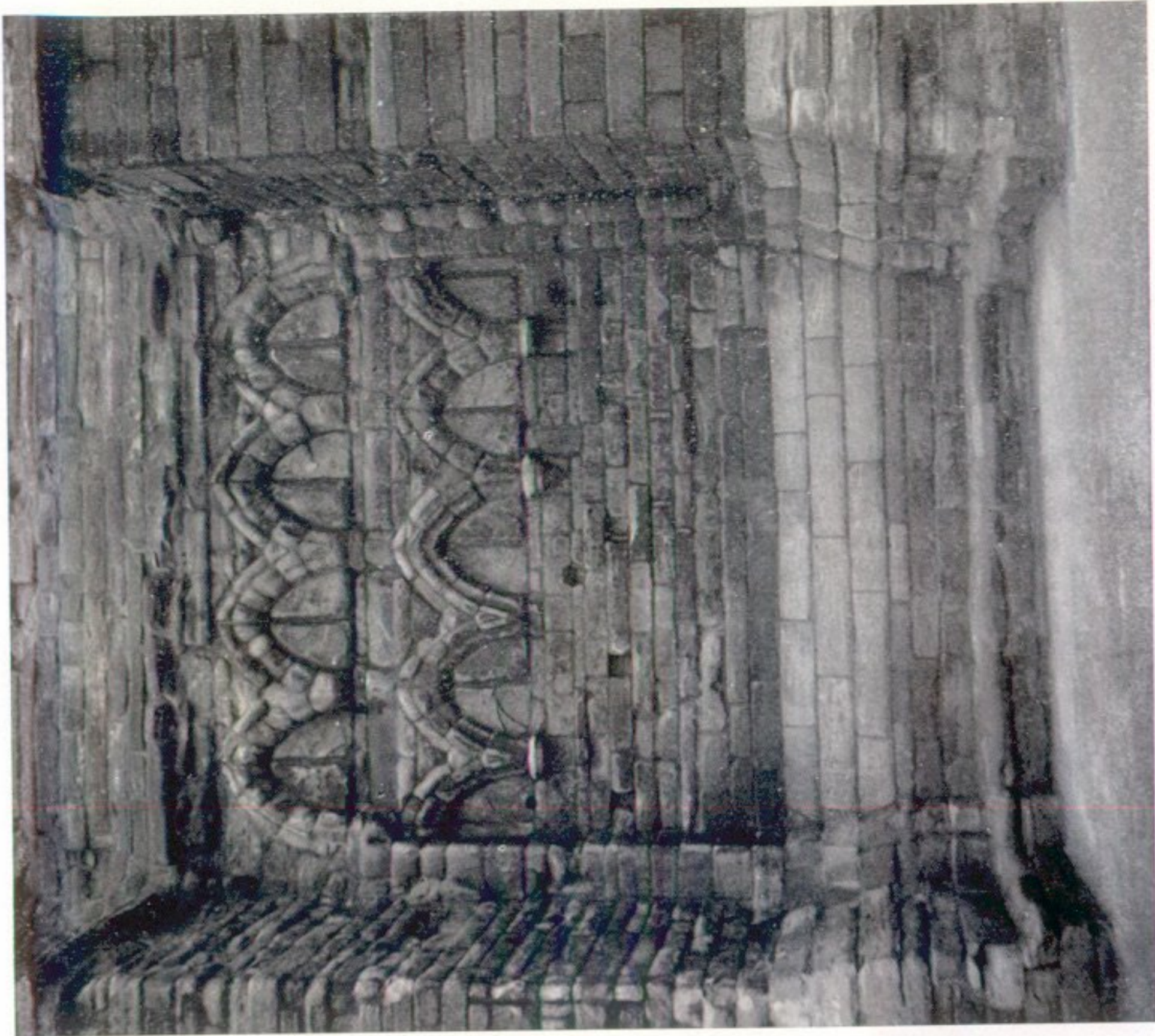
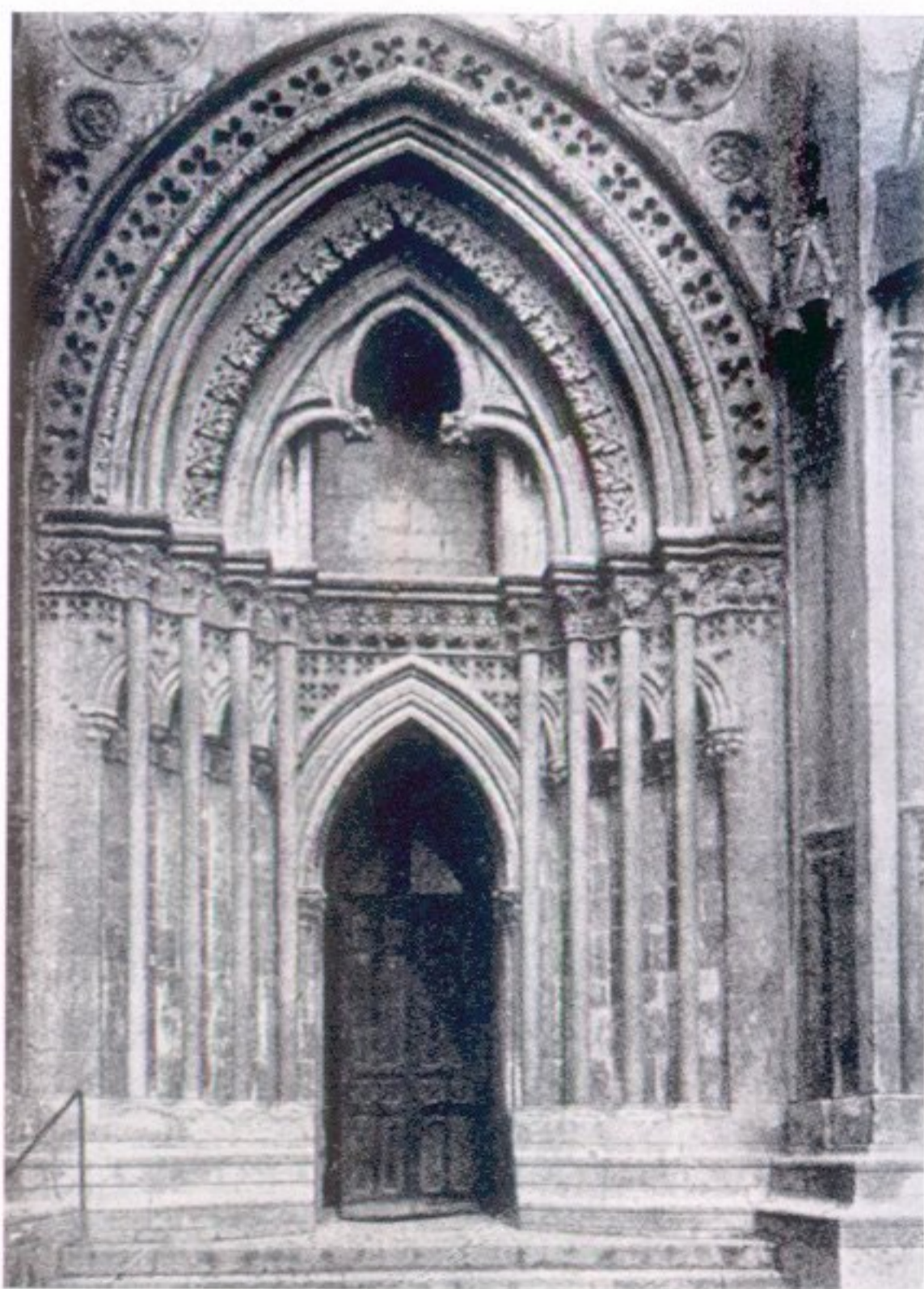2. Arbroath: overlapping arcading on the north tower.

1. Arbroath: conjectural restoration of overlapping arcading.
(*After Aitken.*)

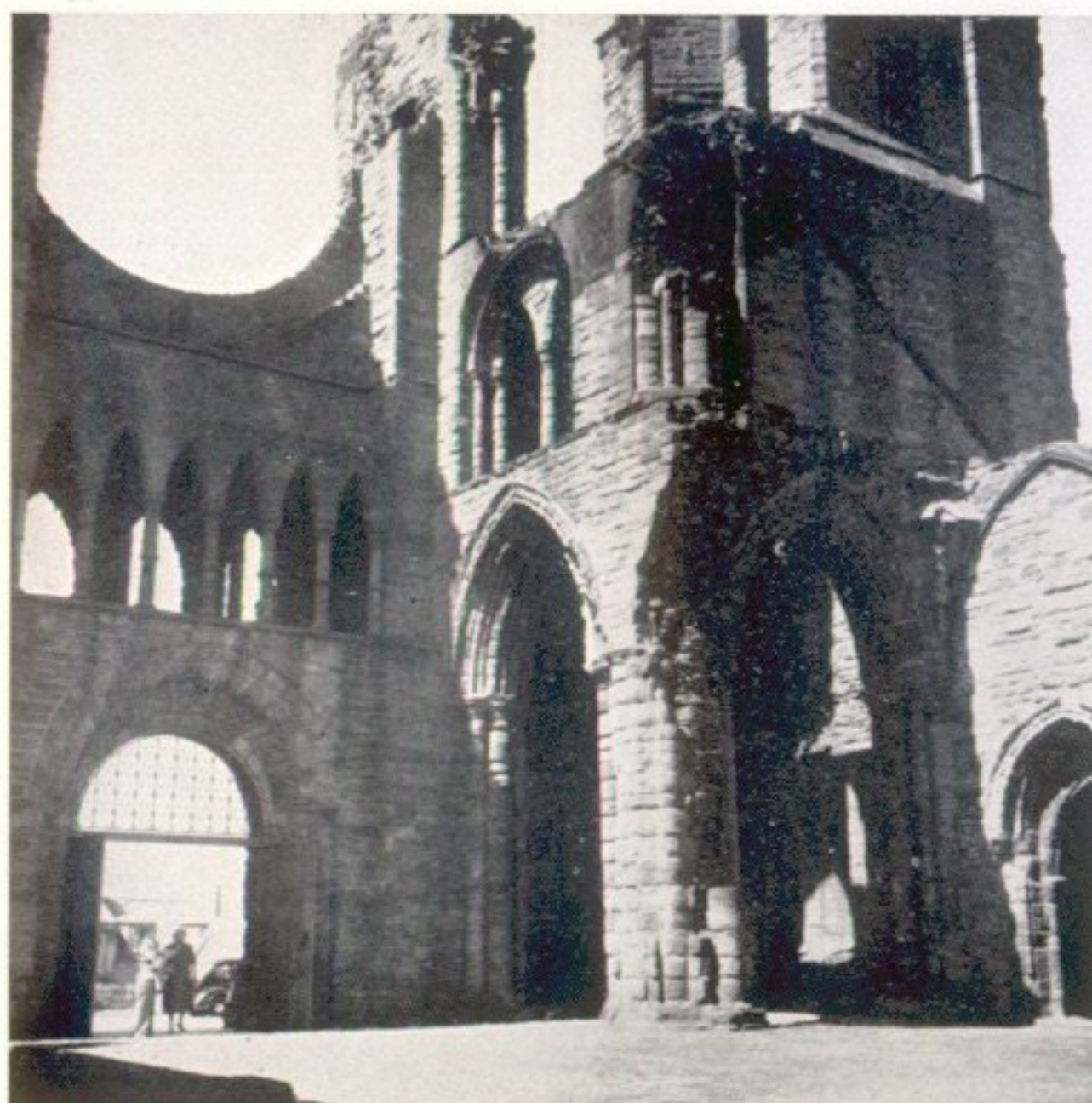1 Ely Cathedral: arcading in the Galilee Porch.

(*Reproduced from* "Lisieux," by H. Serbat, Laurens, Paris.)

2. Lisieux: overlapping arcading.

Stewart Cruden.

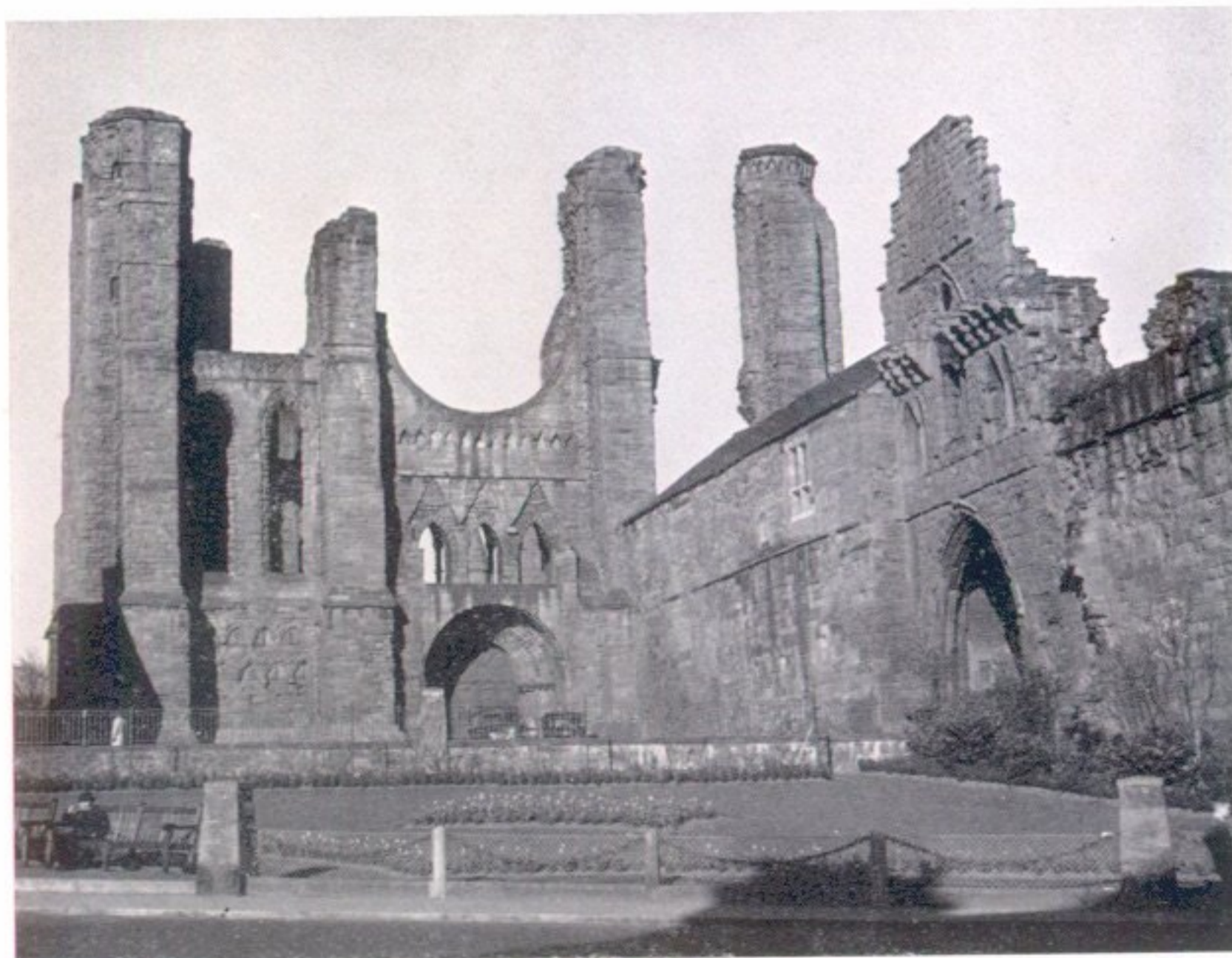1. Lincoln Cathedral: overlapping arcading in south transept of St Hugh's choir.

2. The north tower inside the church.

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1. Beverley Minster: overlapping arcading on triforium.

2. The west front and gatehouse.

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