

III.

NOTES, WITH SKETCHES OF MASON MARKS ON THE CATHEDRAL
OF ST MACHAR, OLD ABERDEEN. BY A. GIBB, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.
(PLATE LVIII.)

During the repairs and restorations of Old Aberdeen Cathedral, presently going on, the old roof had to be removed, the accumulations of earth from the outside, and the lining of lath and plaster which covered the whole of the interior. Thus a great part of the walls had to be laid bare, which afforded a favourable opportunity for obtaining a very complete collection of the mason marks existing on the walls. These were found to be very numerous where the old surface of the stone had been in any way protected from decay. The accompanying plate shows

all the different varieties observed ; but of most of the varieties there are a great many repetitions, amounting in all perhaps to several hundreds.

The first seven marks given in the plate are those that are on the freestone part of the cathedral, and it will be observed that, except in two cases, these are not repeated on the granite. Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 6 are from the walls of St John's Aisle, which Orem, a local historian who wrote about 1725, says was built by Bishop Leighton about 1430, but which Mr Gilbert Scott, with greater probability, attributes to the period of the Kininmunds, 1340 to 1380, judging by the "character and great beauty of the mouldings and foliated capitals of the columns which supported the great tower,"¹ and which forms a part of it, as compared with the like features of the nave, the undoubted work of Leighton, as his epitaph, still preserved in the cathedral, states that "he built the fabric of the church from the choir as high as the summit of the walls." Very little, only a few feet, of the walls of this aisle now remains. A good part of the materials of it was taken away by Cromwell for the purpose of building a fort at Aberdeen, and its destruction was completed by a tempest of wind in November 1719, and the debris have been used for building purposes. The same marks, however, occur on several loose stones of the same freestone lying about. No. 4 is one of these stones which has been built into the wall of the nave, in the inside near the east end, probably during the work of reparation in 1808 or 1823, when the north aisle was restored to its present unseemly state. No. 5 is on one of the great freestone pillars formerly mentioned ; it is the only example of the mark observed. No. 7 is on the south wall of St Machar's aisle, at the east end, which was rebuilt with old materials in 1800.

All the other marks are on granite, and it may be remarked that they are in contrast to those on freestone, which were sharp and well defined, very indistinct, except where the wall has been protected from the weather and damp. For although the outside of the wall had evidently been covered with them, it now requires very careful observation to trace them, except on sheltered spots about doorways and buttresses.

Marks Nos. 8 to 19 were on the walls of the western towers, erected between 1430 and 1460, on the outside, but protected by the roof of the nave from the weather. On the other sides of the towers, near the top,

¹ See Gilbert Scott's Report on the Cathedral. London. June 1867.

traces of others could be discovered, but so much was the outer surface of the stone decayed that they could not be identified. Nos. 20 to 40 were in the middle of the western towers, principally on the steps and newels of the winding stairs and doorways. Nos. 41 to 49 and 52 to 58 were on the outside of the western towers, near the ground, and north or consistory aisle wall, and about the western doorway, No. 50 is on a corbel in north tower inside, and No. 51, which only occurs once on the building, is at the lower entrance to stair in interior of north-west tower. Nos. 59 to 68 were on the outside of the south or St Machar's aisle, and about the door of the south or marriage porch.

Besides the above there are several marks, undoubtedly old, but which have been partly recut and added to by ignorant persons employed about the cathedral, which it may be well to note. Two of these are on the freestone part of the parapet of the north-west tower, access to which can only be got by climbing from the roof of the nave, as the top part of the stair has long been built up. This part of the tower was erected by



1

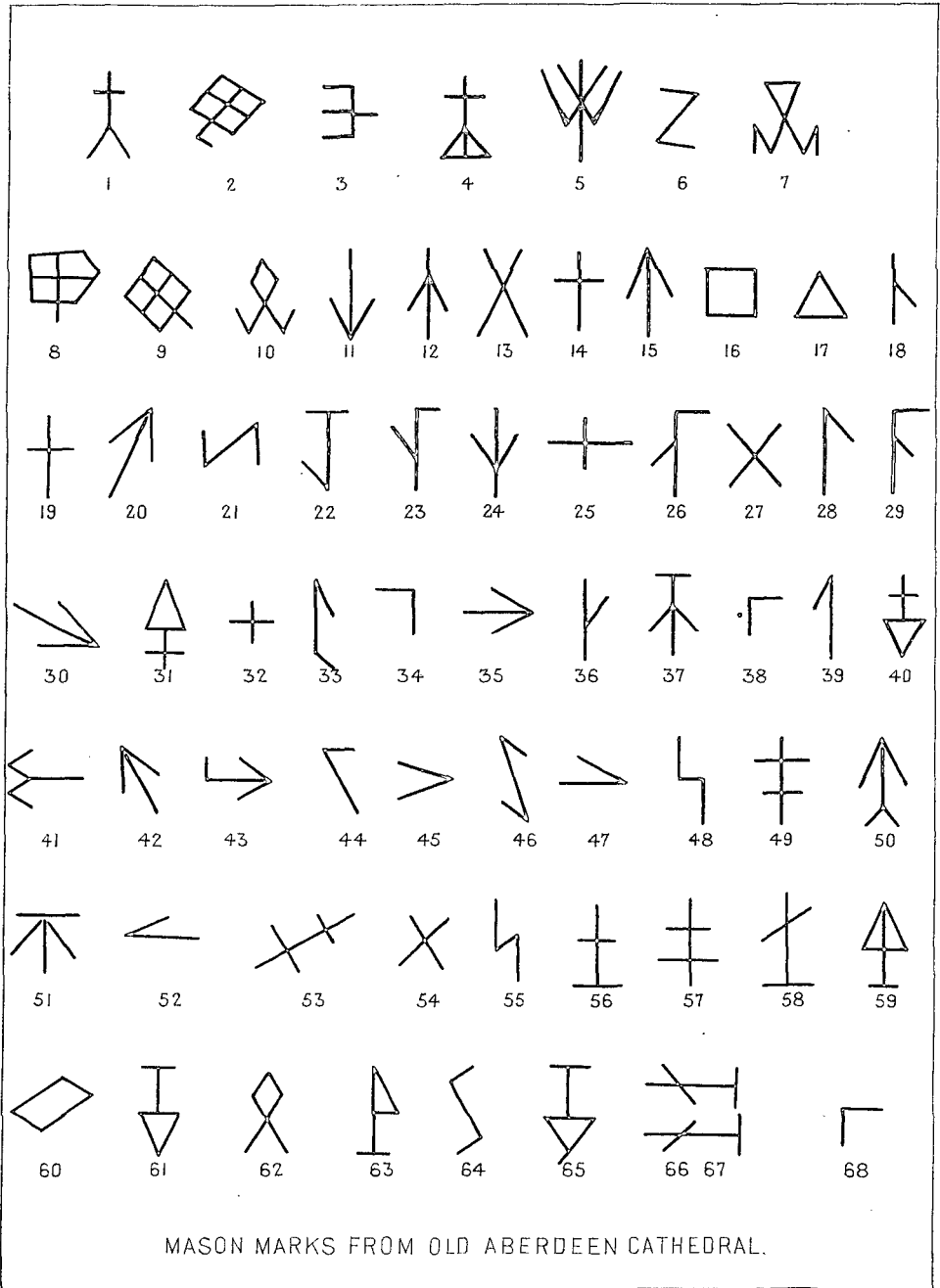


2



3

Gavin Dunbar about 1522. The third was observed when the plaster was taken from the inside walls of the south porch.



MASON MARKS FROM OLD ABERDEEN CATHEDRAL.

Printed and Published by James Macmillan & Co., Edinburgh.