

## VII.

SOUTHDEAN CHURCH, ROXBURGHSHIRE: SOME ACCOUNT OF THE EXCAVATIONS CARRIED OUT THERE BY THE OTTERBURN MEMORIAL COMMITTEE. BY F. C. EELES, F.S.A. Scot., F.R.Hist.S.

The parish of Southdean occupies about the middle of the English border of Roxburghshire, and lies upon the north-western slopes of Carter Fell, in Jed forest. The old church is situated near the river Jed, and close to the west side of the road that leads from Hawick over the border into Northumberland. The modern church is situated about a mile lower down.<sup>1</sup> The parish was in the diocese of Glasgow and the archdeaconry of Teviotdale. Nothing seems to be known of the early history of the church, and the dedication is at present unknown. The church is of considerable historic interest for its association with the victory over the English at Otterburn in the summer of 1388, for it was within its walls that the leaders of the Scottish army met on the eve of the battle. "Here were assembled in council all the chivalry of Scotland, including the hero of Otterburn, the second Earl of Douglas; Archibald the Grim, afterwards the third Earl of Douglas; the Earl of Fife, better known as the Duke of Albany; Sir John Swinton, who died gallantly leading a forlorn hope at Homildon; Sir Alexander Ramsay, and many other famous Scottish knights. An English squire, greatly daring, ventured into the church unnoticed, in their midst, discovered their plans, and, leaving the church, had nearly escaped the Scottish lines but for his horse having been stolen in the interval. He was observed, captured, and brought back to the church, to be 'handled in such wise' that he revealed the disposition of the English forces. This valuable information decided the Scottish leaders to invade England on both

<sup>1</sup> There was a church of intermediate date, now in ruins, built in 1690, at the village of Chesters; this was built to take the place of the old church of Southdean, which was deserted after the roof collapsed in 1688.

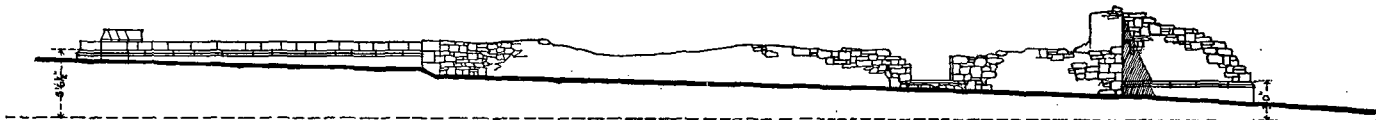
east and west, and thus puzzle the enemy. The larger division went by Carlisle, and a smaller army of picked men, under the Earl of Douglas, swiftly invaded the country on the east, and to them fell the glory of Otterburn."<sup>1</sup>

The Committee appointed on the initiative of the Hawick Archæological Society have carefully excavated the remains of the church, and have done what is necessary to preserve them as a memorial of the battle. No better memorial could be found, and the way in which the work has been carried out is altogether admirable, and reflects the greatest possible credit on Mr Tancred of Weens, the chairman, and the other members of the Committee, who have devoted so much care and time to the work. This systematic and scientific excavation of an ecclesiastical site will, let us hope, begin a new era in Scottish archæology, and lead to more work of the kind being undertaken. Up to the present, with very few exceptions, excavation work has been confined to prehistoric and Roman sites, and has not been used to throw light on the many problems of Scottish Christian archæology.

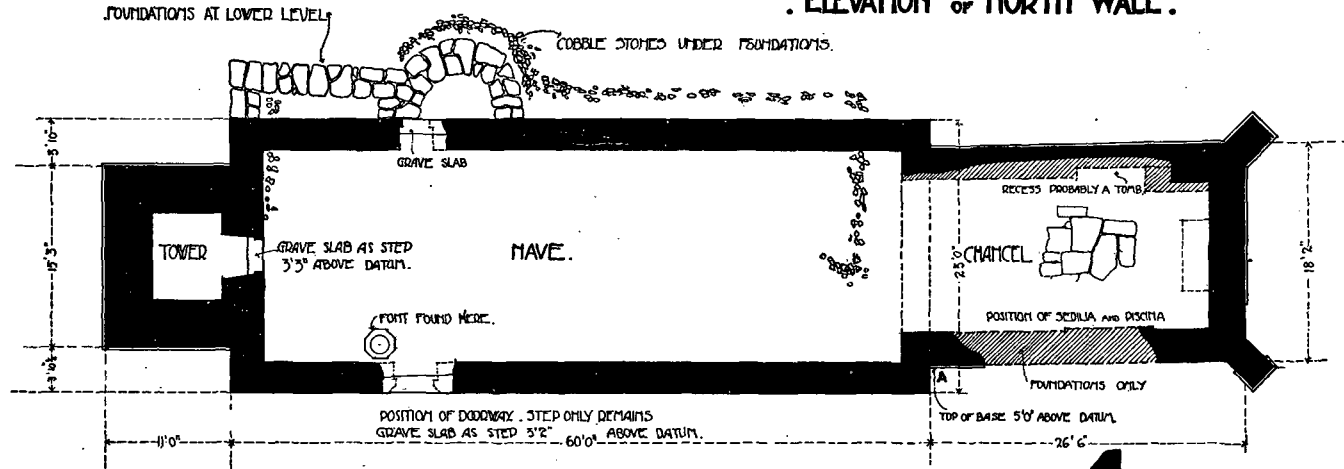
The Society is indebted to the courtesy of the Hawick Archæological Society, and especially to Mr Alexander Inglis, architect, for the following description of the work done at Southdean, which is in great part abridged from an able and exhaustive paper communicated by him to the Hawick Archæological Society, by whom it was subsequently printed.<sup>2</sup> Further details will be found in that paper, together with a summary of what little is known about the ecclesiastical history of the parish. Here, all that has been done is to place on record a sufficient account of the structural and other remains found during the work of excavation.

<sup>1</sup> *The Hawick Advertiser*, 26th August 1910.

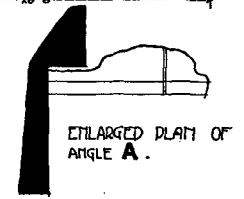
<sup>2</sup> *The Pre-Reformation Church at Southdean. A Paper read to the Members of Hawick Archæological Society, on 21st February, 1911.* By Alexander Inglis, Licentiate R.I.B.A.; n.p., n.d. [Hawick, 1911].



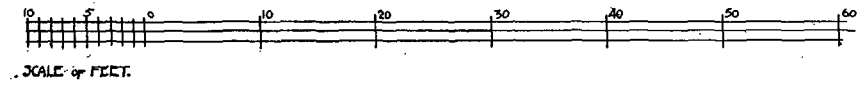
**. ELEVATION OF NORTH WALL .**



**. PLAN OF CHURCH AT LEVEL OF BASECOURSE .**



ENLARGED PLAN OF ANGLE A.



SCALE OF FEET.

ALEX INGLIS, ARCHITECT.  
HAWICK:

Fig. 1. Plan of Southdean Church.

The church, as will be seen from the plan (fig. 1), consisted of nave without aisles; western tower, and chancel. The tower walls were found intact to a height of 6 feet on the inner face towards the nave, and in the inside, but the outer face was gone almost down to the level of the base.

The ash trees growing on the ruins had spread their roots into and around the tower walls and displaced many stones.

The nave walls were standing from 2 feet 6 inches to 3 feet high, but the chancel was in a much more dilapidated condition; of the south wall practically nothing but the foundation being left, while on the north and east sides the wall showed not more than two courses at the highest point.

The walls of the tower are thick, viz.—3 feet 11 inches and 4 feet on the three outer sides, and 3 feet 7 inches next the nave. There is a doorway from the nave into the tower, of which one of the lower jamb stones was found in position, and showed a daylight width of 2 feet 9 inches. Surrounding the tower on the three outer sides is a splayed base course, butting on and stopped by the west wall of the nave.

On the south side of the nave, towards the west end, was found an opening without jambs, only the sill being left, indicating the main entrance door of the church in the usual position. Directly opposite, in the north wall, there is another and smaller door. Of the former nothing remains to fix the width of the opening, but in the latter several checked and chamfered rybats found in position indicate a width of 2 feet 6 inches. The nave walls, averaging 2 feet 6 inches in thickness, otherwise showed no traces of any other feature, and are perfectly plain, there being no base course.

The chancel has two angle buttresses at the outer or east end, with a splayed base course carried round the whole exterior and butting, as in the case of the tower, against the return wall of the nave. At the north-east corner some stones of an upper and larger member of the base were found in position, and the thickness of the walls shows that these also ran round the whole exterior of the chancel.

On the south wall, where the inner face stones, one course high, were found, a slight projection wrought on one of them, at a point 4 feet 10 inches from the east wall, indicated the presence of some large feature, evidently the seat of the sedilia. The corresponding stone for the other end was found among the débris at this point.

Opposite this, in the north wall, were distinct traces of a large recess measuring roughly about 6 feet across. The east wall was plain, with no projection of any kind.

It will be seen from the plan (fig. 1) that the axial line of its chancel does not coincide with that of the nave and tower, but inclines a little to the north. Other architectural details are shown in fig. 2.

At the return wall of the nave to the chancel, 4 inches within and beneath the lower member of the base course, a stone was found on each side, bonded into the nave wall. That on the south side shows how the base has been cut to fit round it, thus indicating that the base course had been set at a later date.

The base course of the tower is 2 feet 6 inches lower than the under member of the chancel base. There are no traces of any floor in the nave and tower, and these would be of earth or clay. The neighbouring parish church of Hobkirk had an earthen floor down to 1836 at least. The sanctuary floor,

# SOUDEN KIRK. DETAILS.

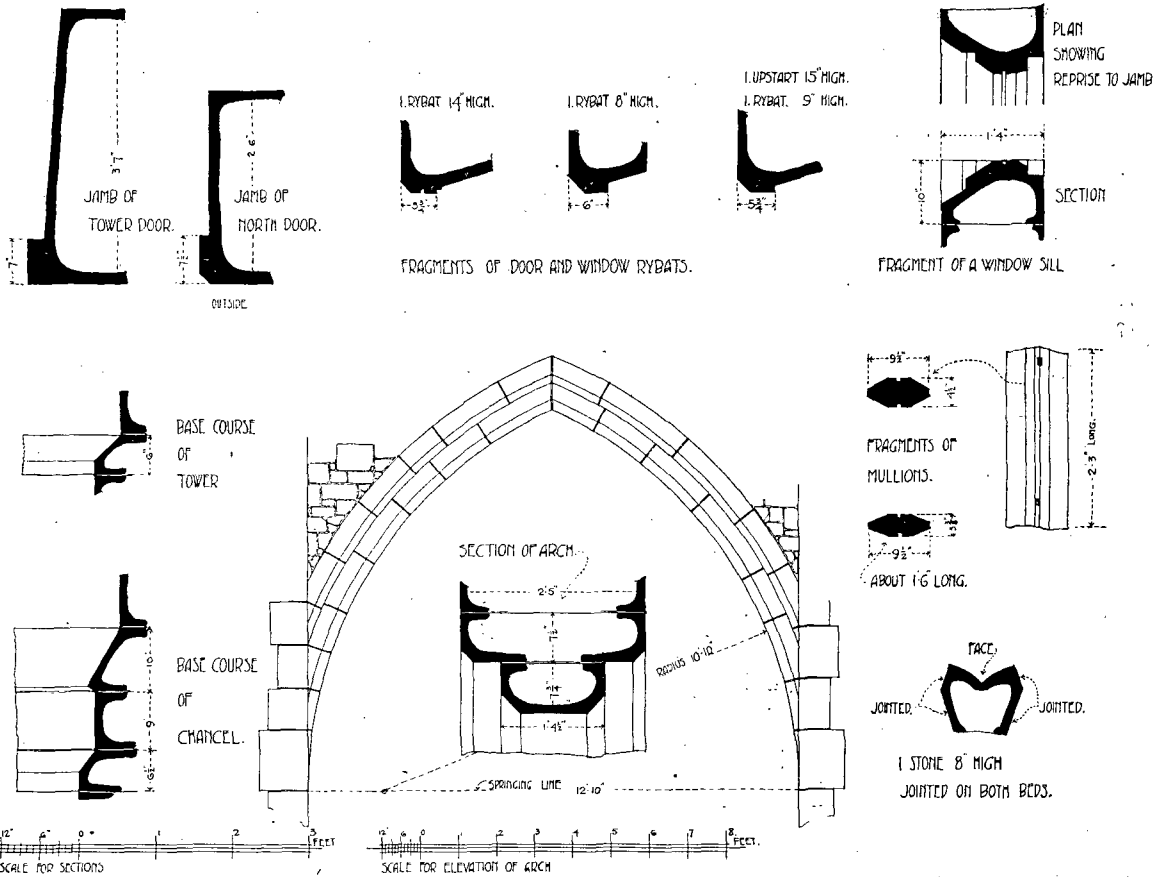


Fig. 2. Architectural details of Southdean Church.

taking the level from the foundation of the walls, appears to have been raised about 18 inches above that of the nave, indication of a floor at this level being found in the south-east corner. The chancel floor would thus have been 9 inches above the nave floor, that is to say, there would have been a single step at the chancel arch. The stone flags shown on the plan, several of which of various sizes and shapes were found, are at a lower level.

The sills of nave and tower doors are practically at the same level.

On the north side of the nave towards the west end foundations composed of large-sized flat stones were exposed at a lower level than the foundations of the nave. Commencing at the west end of the nave, and projecting a distance of 5 feet to the north, these foundations would, if continued in a straight line, run into the nave wall at a point to the west of its junction with the chancel. Opposite the north door they are laid in the form of a rough semicircle, and underneath and partly outside at this point is a layer of rough cobble stones. These stones were traced along the north and west walls, and, when removing the roots of the large ash trees growing at the junction with the chancel, some indication was found of their having been returned across the nave. We have thus three sides of the plan of their foundations, which form an extremely interesting relic of a structure of earlier date than the one we are now considering.

The walling of the tower and nave is of a similar character, being comparatively rough, with large stones in many cases roughly squared and built in random courses. The joints are large and open. The outer corners are squared and built in irregular heights. The chancel walls, or rather what is left of them, are faced with ashlar, squared and built in regular courses, on both sides. The freestone for the building of the chancel is stated to have been quarried in the Meadowcleugh, lying some miles away on the slopes of the Carter Fell. The stones in the nave and tower walls are mixed, freestone being freely interspersed with a stone of coarse nature, in some places not unlike a millstone grit.

Many interesting and important fragments of details were found in and around the church. These comprised the ogee arched and cusped top to a piscina, a piece of a window sill, with reprimed end, a small grave slab with a floriated cross, several fragments of terminations to skews, etc., pieces of a crocketed pediment to what must have been the sedilia, and a floriated finial belonging to the same.

The chancel arch, judging from the stones found, was a pointed arch of the later period, built at the same time as the chancel, and composed of two rings of splayed stones, the inner ring being thicker and having a larger splay than the outer, and both dying out on the cross wall without any respond or pier. The width of these arch stones corresponds with the width of the walls now standing.

Fragments of window tracery were found, one piece of which indicates a square-headed window; elaborately moulded and splayed window rybats, with mullions to correspond, and stringcourse or labels, with terminations. Curved pieces showing a continuation of the moulded window rybats to a fairly large radius were found; and as several pieces of the tracery correspond in size and detail to this, there is little doubt that these fragments formed part of the east window of the chancel.

Among the fragments found were crocketed pediment stones, similar to, but larger in size than those of the sedilia, and a floriated finial, corresponding with these and fitting exactly into its proper position, was built into the wall of the farmstead, and has now been removed; portions of stone skews, with apex and terminations, and various sections of jamb mouldings of the same features as the crocketed pediments were also found.

Numerous other fragments, all more or less mutilated and weatherworn, were unearthed which would show that the chancel was of a somewhat ornate character.

Probably the most interesting discoveries were the massive font, found lying just within the south doorway, alongside a large whinstone boulder, on which it may have stood, and the small stone super-altar, to both of which reference will be made later.

The stones found bonded into the west wall of the nave would suggest that the church had an earlier chancel, and we have further confirmation of this from the fact that two distinct floor levels were brought to light.

The stone flags illustrated on the plan are at a lower level than the bottom bed of the dressed stone facing of the walls, while the marks of another floor found in the ashlar in the south-east corner, were at a point about 18 inches above the bottom bed of the dressed stones forming the chancel arch jambs, indicating a rise of three steps between nave and altar.

It should be noted that the bonded stones are, on their outer faces, in exactly the same line as the outer face of the chancel walls above the double base course, the lower members of the base being cut to fit round about them. From this it would seem as if the newer chancel had been built on the same foundations as the old, these stones being left as in no way interfering with the new work, and likely to disturb the nave walls unnecessarily if removed.

The remains of this chancel are clearly of a much later date than the remainder of the church, and are probably of about the end of the fifteenth century. The reason for the alteration or addition to the church is not apparent, and we are hampered by the absence of contemporary evidence. Possibly the church had suffered during the raids from over the Border, and a lull in warlike operations may have provided the opportunity to repair past damage and modernise the building.

The nave and tower at some period subsequent to their erection have undergone changes, probably in post-Reformation times, for we find that the sills of the three doorways are formed of sculptured grave slabs, inserted at a later date.

The church in its complete state consisted of an aisleless nave, with a tower at the west end; south and north doorways; and a chancel, containing sedilia and piscina in the south wall, and in the north wall another feature, which might either be the tomb of the rebuilder of the chancel, an Easter sepulchre, or both combined.

Not a vestige of the altar now remains, but it must have been in the usual position in the centre of the east wall. A difference in the soil at this part shows that it had been covered in some way, the surrounding soil having been disturbed by interments.

The font (fig. 3) is of massive proportions. Cut from one block of stone, it is divided into two distinct sections, the upper part being octagonal in shape,

and measuring 13 inches in height,  $24\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter at its upper surface, and  $26\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the lower, tapering 1 inch towards the top on every side. The basin is circular, 19 inches in diameter and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep. There is no water drain. The thick shaft, which is cut out of the same block of stone as the basin, is circular in shape, 10 inches in height, with a diameter of  $24\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the top and  $22\frac{1}{4}$  inches at the foot, slightly bulged and tapered in section. On the surface of the rim surrounding the basin, and at the angles between the faces, on opposite sides, are two small

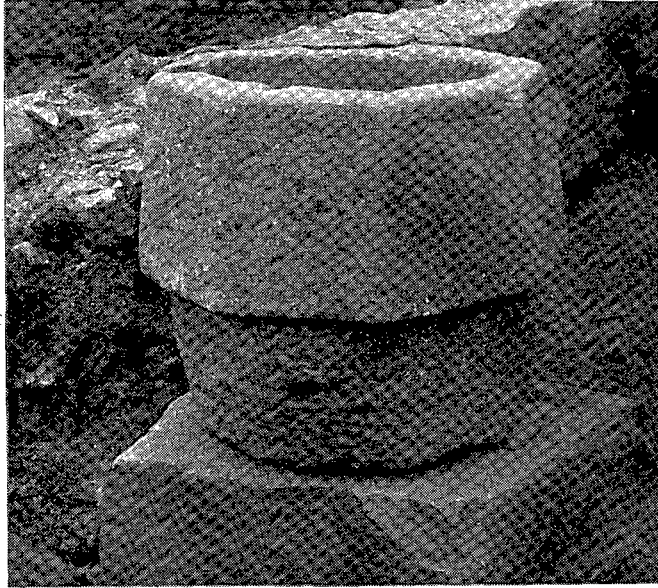


Fig. 3. The Font of Southdean Church. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)

sinkings about 1 inch by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch by 1 inch deep, at one time containing the fastenings of the font cover. The upper part shows traces of the cutting of a panel having been commenced on two faces, but the other six are perfectly plain. The appearance suggests the intention to surround each face with a flat roll moulding, a feature not uncommon in Scottish fonts. There is no indication of sculptured work, and the font is in good preservation except the upper surface or rim, which is much weathered. It was found close to the south wall of the nave, immediately to the west of the doorway, and beside a huge undressed boulder, which no doubt served as a base; it had been overturned, but there is every reason to believe that this was its original position.



The absence of a drain in the font is a feature never found in England, so far as the writer is aware, but it occurs occasionally in Scotland, *e.g.* in the font now in St Ternan's Episcopal Church, Muchalls, Kincardineshire, which was found in a farmyard near Garvock, having probably come from one of the chapels which were formerly in that district. The massive early font at Tullich, Aberdeenshire, has at the side of the basin a drain which seems to have been made at some later period than the font itself.

Mr Inglis considers that the tower has been used for purposes of defence, and says that this "is evidenced by the fact that the only door opens into the nave, and there are still to be seen within the check of the door jambs the holes in which the door bars were placed on the inside."

Several writers state that the original south doorway was taken to Chesters and rebuilt there in the 1690 church, but Mr Inglis gives reasons for the belief that although the doorway now at Chesters has been altered from its original form, it most probably belonged to the same period as the chancel, and replaced an earlier one at Southdean.

Mr Inglis has drawn an elevation of the sedilia as they must have existed (fig. 4), showing that there were three seats, divided by solid stone piers, each covered by an ogee arched canopy, having over it a crocketed pediment finial. He compares the detail with that at Dunglass, Berwickshire, and also points out that the piscina head is almost identical with that at Crichton, Midlothian, *c.* 1449.

#### THE SUPER-ALTAR.

The super-altar (fig. 5) is of the same close-grained sandstone that was used for the dressed work in the chancel, and is probably of the latter part of the fifteenth century. It is  $9\frac{1}{4}$  inches long,  $7\frac{1}{4}$  inches broad, and  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches thick. The surface of the upper side is, of course, quite smooth, and bears five incised consecration crosses. The lower

side is rough, showing that it was sunk in the altar slab so as to be flush with it at the top, and did not merely rest upon it. The con-

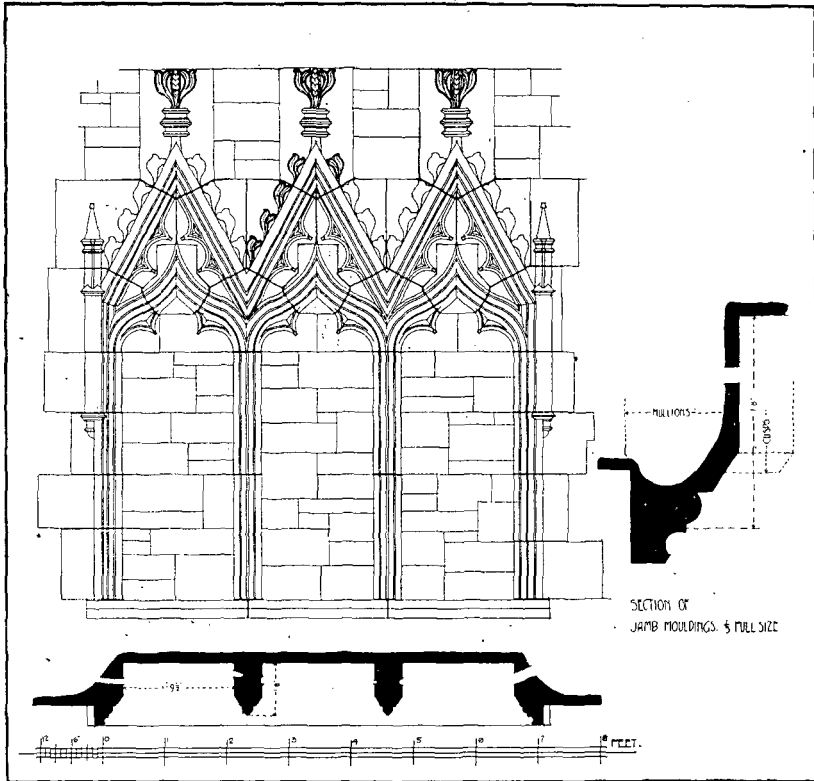


Fig. 4. The Sedilia (restored).

secration crosses are roughly made and somewhat irregularly placed. There are traces of feathering at the ends of some of the arms. The crosses at one end are placed diagonally with respect to the sides of the stone, those at the other end being placed unevenly, and slightly

nearer together. It is suggested that the slab was prepared locally and sent to Glasgow for consecration.

Only one other ancient super-altar (fig. 6) is known to be in existence in Scotland. It was found at Coldingham Priory Church in 1876, and is now in the National Museum. Each of the consecration crosses

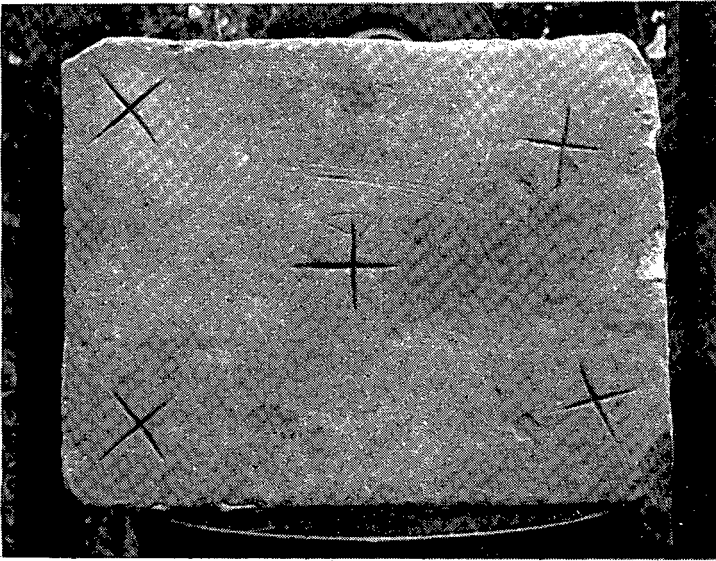


Fig. 5. The Southdean Super-Altar.

is enclosed in a circle, and that in the centre is terminated with four crosslets. It is 11 inches long,  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches broad,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick, and is of considerably earlier date, probably of the thirteenth century.

The mediæval super-altar originated in the small portable altar slab of earlier days, which was generally of wood. Bede writes that the two Hewalds, English missionaries to the continental Saxons, A.D. 692, took with them *tabulam altaris vice dedicatam*.<sup>1</sup> Wulfram,

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Eccles.*, v. 10.

the apostle of Friesland, had one before A.D. 740, and St Boniface also carried one. In Durham Cathedral is preserved the portable altar which was found in the tomb of St Cuthbert, who died A.D. 687; it measures 6 inches by  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches, and is of wood covered with a thin plate of silver which is inscribed and ornamented. As stone altars became more and more the rule in Latin Christendom, so these *altaria portatilia* also began to be made of stone, perhaps from

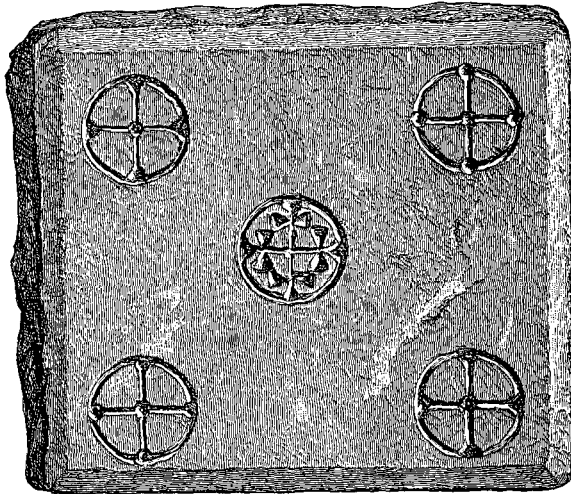


Fig. 6. The Coldingham Super-Altar.

the eighth century onwards. Where for any reason it was inconvenient to consecrate a fixed altar in a church, as was often the case in the huge unwieldy dioceses of the Middle Ages, when travelling was difficult and often dangerous, these portable consecrated altar slabs were set upon the unconsecrated altars. This practice came to be of obligation. In the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, when side altars, or low altars, as they were called, multiplied, it became customary to dispense with the presence of

the bishop, except in the more important cases, and to sink one of these slabs, consecrated by him, in a shallow cavity provided in the middle of the great slab of the fixed altar. This having become the more frequent use of the portable altar slab, the term *super-altare* naturally came to be used for it,<sup>1</sup> especially in this connection. In the later Middle Ages there was a curious honorific use of super-altars in the great churches, when one of precious material was sometimes placed on a *consecrated* altar with the idea of adding special dignity to a festival service. This usage probably arose from the portable altars belonging to saintly men of old being decked with precious stones and treated as relics. In 1500 York Minster possessed one of jasper, set in copper gilt, and two of red marble adorned with silver. At Jarrow was preserved the portable altar which the Venerable Bede is said to have used.

Very few mediæval super-altars seem to have survived anywhere in Great Britain. Scotland is rich in possessing two, for even in England and Wales it would seem that only five are known to exist, besides that of St Cuthbert.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore very difficult to get enough evidence as to the varying mediæval types to enable us to

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to allude here to a wrong use of the term "super-altar" sometimes found in English ecclesiastical writers of the nineteenth century. Misled partly by the word itself, but perhaps more by the structure of modern Roman Catholic altars, they believed that a kind of step or shelf to hold the cross and candlesticks existed just above or behind the table of a Gothic altar. Shelves of this kind, chiefly derived from modern Continental practice (and properly called *gradines*), were added to numberless modern English altars (they were also imported into Scotland by nineteenth-century Scottish Episcopalians), and the mid-Victorian ecclesiologists used to call them "super-altars." Such things never existed in Gothic times, the cross and lights standing directly upon the *mensa* of the altar.

<sup>2</sup> At St David's Cathedral an altar slab, 6 feet 8 inches by 2 feet 3½ inches by 8 inches thick, was found in 1869, in the middle of which is sunk a super-altar with the five crosses, the ends of the small slab being towards the sides of the altar slab and the sides towards the ends. The small slab is 2½ inches thick. (I am obliged to Mr C. R. Baker King, F.R.I.B.A., for these details.) At

form a trustworthy opinion as to the dates of our Scottish examples. The Coldingham super-altar in the National Museum has been attributed to the thirteenth century. This is probably as near a guess as can be made. Its crosses are large, well formed, and ornate, and they suggest that period. The crosses on the Southdean super-altar are small, irregularly cut, and plain. Comparing them with those on the Coldingham slab and on the English slabs that are known, it seems most reasonable to suggest that it dates from the late fifteenth century rebuilding of the chancel.

There is no trace in either the Coldingham or the Southdean super-altar of any *sepulchrum* or place for the inclusion of relics. Relics of saints were not universally enclosed even in fixed altars in the Middle Ages, although the practice of enclosing them was early and widespread. The second Council of Nicæa, A.D. 787, indeed declared that altars must not be consecrated without relics. This is the rule of the Roman Church at the present day. But the Irish "Spotted Book" makes no mention of them, and mediæval pontificals frequently provide for their absence. This is especially noteworthy in English manuscripts. There was even greater freedom in regard to portable altars. Durandus speaks of relics as necessary for fixed but not for portable altars, and even as late as the sixteenth century the absence of relics in a super-altar is allowed, though not considered "safe." A good number of pontificals, English, German,

Beckermet in Cumberland is preserved a red sandstone super-altar with the five crosses, 10 inches by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick. A portable altar of Purbeck marble,  $8\frac{3}{8}$  inches by  $5\frac{1}{8}$  inches by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick, found in a chest at Abbey Dore, Herefordshire, is now in South Kensington Museum. In Old St Pancras Church, Middlesex, is a super-altar of fine white stone,  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches, with five crosses, the arms of which are flat sunk channels with large circular terminations, the central cross being  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, the smaller ones  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches. There is good reason to think that this is the super-altar mentioned in inventories of this church in the thirteenth century. The remaining English example is at Addington, in Buckinghamshire; it is said to be of slate and about 15 inches by 12 inches (*Church Times*, vol. lxvi. p. 613).

French, and Italian, as late as the fifteenth century, do not appear to contemplate the inclusion of relics in portable altars. That this was also the custom in Scotland such evidence as we possess goes to show. The whole question of the inclusion of relics in altars will be found fully dealt with in the light of the most modern knowledge by Dr J. Wickham Legg in *Three Chapters in Recent Liturgical Research*, Church Historical Society, No. 73, London, 1903, pp. 53-68.

On p. 54 of this treatise Dr Legg draws attention to the Irish practice referred to in the *Leabhar Breac* of the bishop making crosses upon the altar with a knife, a practice prescribed by the present Roman pontifical for the foundation stone of a new church. Is it too much to suggest that the extraordinary irregularity of the crosses upon the Southdean super-altar may be due to their having been made by the bishop? It is not impossible that this had remained the custom at Glasgow, although not part of the ceremonial of mediæval pontificals. Dr Legg also refers to the use of a knife in the pontifical of David de Bernham, bishop of St Andrews 1239-1252, where the laird offers the endowment of the new church on the altar with a knife or staff *per cultellum vel per baculum*. There is no such irregularity in the form and position of the crosses on the Coldingham super-altar.

Two cross-bearing monumental slabs were found, the larger (fig. 7) having been used as the sill of the south doorway. It is 6 feet long, 19 inches wide at the head, and 17 inches at the foot. The head of the cross, and faint traces of the steps and the point of a sword represented beside it, are all that is now visible, the rest being worn off. The cross shaft, steps, and sword were incised; the head of the cross is carved in low relief in a sunk circular panel. The design is remarkable. The four incomplete circles which are so commonly found as a development of the floriation of the arms of the cross, as in fig. 8, are here separate and thicker, the cross itself being formed by

thin lines running between the broken circles, and terminating in pear-shaped flowers.

The smaller slab (fig. 8) is 1 foot 10 inches long by  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. Upon it is carved in low relief a cross with floriated ends, which are so arranged as to form four almost complete circles within the arms of the cross—a very usual thirteenth-century design. Beside the cross is carved a pair of shears. On the opposite side of the shaft

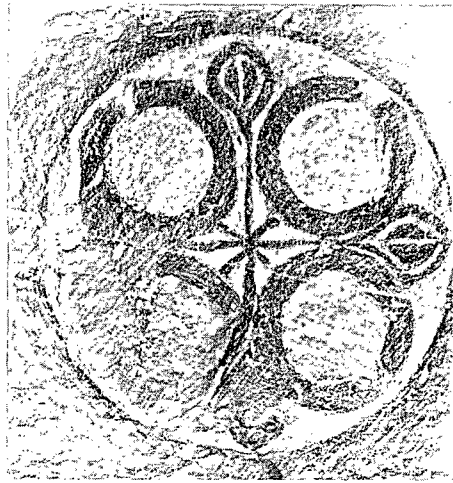


Fig. 7. Head of the Cross on the larger Slab at Southdean Church.

of the cross an oblong patch of stone has been left in the same low relief as the cross: it is difficult to say whether this is merely unfinished work, or left for the carving of an inscription.

The remains of the church, as shown in fig. 9, have been treated with great care. The walls have been carefully pointed and covered with cement, so as to prevent the rain sinking into them from above. This cement cover has been hidden with stones for the sake of appearance. The tower has been built up with the original stones just far



enough to enable a low fall-to roof to be placed upon it, so that it can be used to protect the carved stones found in the course of the work. These have been collected and placed within it, and an iron



Fig. 8. The smaller Slab at Southdean Church.

gate with a lock has been fitted up in the doorway. Over the doorway has been placed a tablet with the inscription :—

“ Here, in the year 1388, James, Earl of Douglas, and the Scottish leaders, assembled their forces, matured their plans, and began the

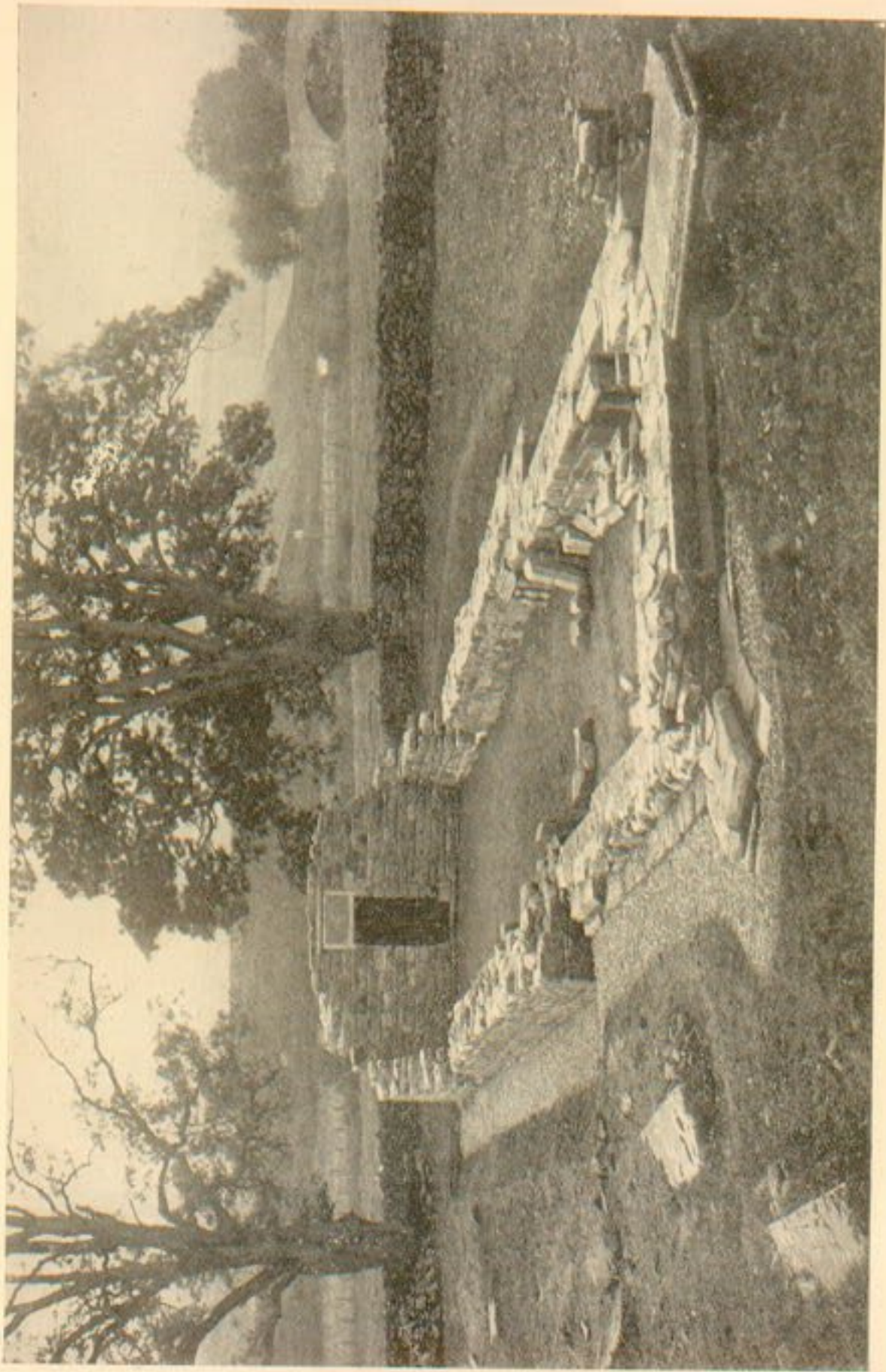


Fig. 9. Remains of Southdean Church after excavation.

invasion of England, which culminated in the Battle of Otterburne.”

“ When the dead Douglas won the field.”

“ These walls repaired and this stone inserted, 1910.”

The Society is indebted to Mr John M'Nairn, Hawick, for the use of the blocks of figs. 3, 5, and 9.

The writer wishes to express his indebtedness to Mr Adam Laing and Mr Alexander Inglis for their valuable help.