

## III.

## THE PENETRATION INTO SCOTLAND OF ENGLISH LATE GOTHIC FORMS. BY IAN C. HANNAH, F.S.A.Scot., F.S.A.

Throughout the mediæval period—until towards the end of the fourteenth century—Gothic architecture had maintained a uniformity of character in western Europe that, considering the great distances and difficulty of communication, was certainly extremely remarkable. Then each country began to develop a style of its own; England evolved the Perpendicular, France the Flamboyant, Germany and Spain took to forms that were distinctly individual; northern Italy was soon discarding Gothic altogether in favour of the new features of the Renaissance.

In all these countries the general tendency was towards churches of great size, and proportionately still greater elevation, above all exceedingly well lighted, almost every foot of wall-space between the necessary supports being sometimes pierced for windows, to be filled with magnificent stained or painted glass.

Scotland possesses several parish churches that conform in great degree to these latest Gothic ideals, whether cruciform with middle towers as at Edinburgh, Haddington, and Perth, or with simple western steeples as at Linlithgow and Stirling, the former a later addition. Nevertheless our own country now developed a style that was truly her own, different in important respects from prevailing fashions elsewhere; except for slight penetration over the border (as at Bolton in Cumberland) it is confined to Scotland and seems peculiarly to blend with her landscapes. A peculiarly favourable example is to be seen at Crichton, Midlothian. Churches are for the most part kept low and only moderately well lighted, their most distinguishing features being roofs wholly of masonry without any timber coverings above their stone vaults.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, as at Rosslyn, the barrel vault is the only roof there is; much more frequently the outer slabs of stone rest upon a relatively thick mass of rubble laid directly on the vault. This was in itself no novelty. Such roofing is exceedingly common in the ancient churches and cells of Ireland, culminating in Cormac's Chapel at Cashel, and on a far vaster scale it may be studied in the huge Romanesque church of St Sernin at Toulouse. But the fashion had been almost universally discarded elsewhere when Scotland adopted

<sup>1</sup> Macgibbon and Ross, *Eccles. Arch.*, III., 4, claim this form of roof to be rather an independent invention than the revival of earlier forms. I agree.

it as the most usual form of roofing for churches of moderate size. For details, and particularly window tracery, recourse was had largely to France, a country with which Scotland's political relations were of the closest throughout the fifteenth century and the greater part of the next. France and Burgundy in fact possess many churches which approximate to Scottish late Gothic forms (without the exclusively stone roofs). A very good example is the recently restored Madeleine at Geneva, a fifteenth-century fabric with low, ribbed vault in four unequal bays, five-sided apse and quasi-aisle formed by a series of chapels opening by independent arches on the south.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact about the English Perpendicular style, which seems to have originated at Gloucester before the Black Death, and was hardly superseded altogether by Renaissance forms until well into the seventeenth century, is that while in England and Wales it is far more common than any other form of Gothic, and has left its mark in one form or another on nearly every church, it hardly spread at all across the waters or beyond the Cheviots. Ireland had by the fifteenth century worked out forms of her own, and only now and then (as in the much-reconstructed nave of Armagh cathedral) is the English style to be found there in anything like its original form.

The long political connection between England and different portions of what is France to-day resulted in the mainland exerting an enormous architectural influence upon the island without receiving any English building traditions of real importance in return. In Calais, the Porte de Guise with its flanking octagonal turrets, flat four-centered arch, carved spandrels and elaborate lierne vault, would fairly closely resemble a Tudor gateway if it were finished with English battlements instead of a high, tiled French roof. The large cruciform church of Notre Dame, also at Calais, was almost entirely rebuilt during the fifteenth century, with most of the windows, particularly the great seven-light one of the northern transept, closely following the lines of English Perpendicular work, while the arches from the transepts to the chancel aisles and outer chapels, without any capitals, are very English indeed, as also the omission of a blind-story; the flat lierne vaults are at least not very French, but the walls of yellow brick, with their large turrets and the triple two-light windows of the central tower with the arcading below them, give a general impression that is certainly predominantly Flemish. Despite the undoubted influence exerted by the Perpendicular style, the building is exceedingly unlike any English church.

It is thus in no way surprising that we may search Scotland in vain for any real example of English Perpendicular buildings; while

they were exactly to the taste of their own inventors they did not find favour with others. It is true, none the less, that the influence of this style made many Scottish buildings of the fifteenth century quite different from what they would otherwise be, though not to any extent that suggests comparison with the extremely strong English influence apparent in our earlier churches, extending far into the fourteenth century—not in any great measure checked by the battle of Bannockburn. Scotland had at last worked out a building tradition of her own, and any outside influences were now more likely to be French than English, particularly in domestic and military work.

This was of course natural enough considering the long continuance of the French alliance, but that political considerations were not always predominant is certainly suggested by the fact that the best known, perhaps also the most interesting, example of late English Gothic influence in Scotland came from the necessity for extensive reparations to Melrose Abbey after its partial destruction by fire during Richard II's raid of 1385. The incident can hardly have done much to prejudice the monks in favour of the architecture of their oppressors! The fourteenth century nave and centre of Melrose (as MacGibbon and Ross point out) have rather striking resemblances in detail to the contemporary nave of York Minster, but the spirit of the Scottish church with its outer chapels and double flying buttresses suggests also the influence of France. The date 1505 appears on one of the eastern buttresses, and it seems that the restoration of the transepts and quire was going on, doubtless with intermissions, after 1385 till that period.

The different portions blend exceedingly well; the transition from the earlier to the later work is skilfully managed without any obvious change in the style or character of the building. The transepts mainly follow the style of the fourteenth century, especially in the splendid south window, but in their clerestories are three-light Perpendicular windows of quite an English type, though the lights are septifoiled instead of cinquefoiled, as would be far more usual farther south. The remains of the low stone sanctuary screen are entirely in keeping, and so are the large four-light transomed windows north and south of the quire. The great five-light east window is unlike anything else in Europe, but its tradition is mainly Perpendicular; its mullions extend right up to the soffit of the arch; its lights above the transoms have alternate triangular and horizontal headings in both cases cusped beneath; while the tracery in the top has some curious diamond forms.<sup>1</sup> The canopied niches in the gable above, with the buttresses and square pinnacles, are also

<sup>1</sup> Much of the tracery is now broken away, but its original form is clearly shown in the plates of E. W. Billings' *Baronial and Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland*, Blackwood, 1852, vol. iv.

exceedingly English; yet how little the southern style is really reproduced is clear from the extremely Scottish character of what remains of the vault of the quire. A barrel roof supports the outer slabs of stone without any intermediate timbering; the elaborate ribs with the famous central crucifixion boss are in truth but panelling on the tunnel vault. The English appearance of the fabric is rather increased by the character of the sanctuary piscina and aumbry as well as that of the altar tombs, but in truth the southern details are purely superficial; in its actual structure this work is one of the boldest and most interesting examples of the purely Scottish tradition.

Though but little known, one the most English of all Scotland's fifteenth-century fabrics is the desolate chancel of the ruined church at St Ninian's near Stirling. Its walls still retain large, three-light, square-headed windows of purely Perpendicular type, and it is clear that the roof was of wood, but so little now remains that its original character must be a matter of the greatest doubt. In all probability, in its complete form, it was far less English than is the appearance of the ruin to-day.

In the splendid ruined chancel of the great cruciform church at Haddington, a work of the fifteenth century, Scottish in its general character, a slightly English quality is given by the two-light windows both of clerestory and aisles; these follow a form that is by no means uncommon south of the border, combining the lines of Decorated and Perpendicular tracery and, in fact, forming a transition between them. Quite similar windows and on about the same scale may be seen at the neighbouring Seton chapel, a small cruciform fabric which otherwise is a most characteristic example of the Scottish fifteenth-century style, with pointed barrel vaults. The same form of English tracery on a much larger scale is to be seen in the six-light east window of the apse of the parish church at Stirling, another characteristically Scottish fabric with a tower resembling that of Dundee, strangely different from anything to be found beyond the limits of Scotland.

The parish church of Linlithgow displays in its arcades and clerestory windows such slight English influence that its very presence is rather a matter of opinion; the existence of a blind-story and of vaulting, besides the general character of the building, makes its whole atmosphere native Scots, but the tower and apse, both very late additions not long before the Reformation, were obviously influenced by English forms without any trace of pure English design. The low tower is Scottish on the whole, but its west window is rather ordinary three-light Perpendicular under a pointed arch. Equally English in character are the tall, transomed, four-light side windows of the apse,

which in themselves are favourable examples of the style, but the curiously different tracery of the great central window, and the large round arch that separates the apse from the chancel, make the general impression of the composition as un-English as it could well be.

How entirely differently Scottish builders solved their problems from English ones is well seen in the three-light square-headed west window of the north aisle of the nave at Dunkeld; instead of the common English trefoil or cinquefoil headings, the top of each light is made quatrefoil

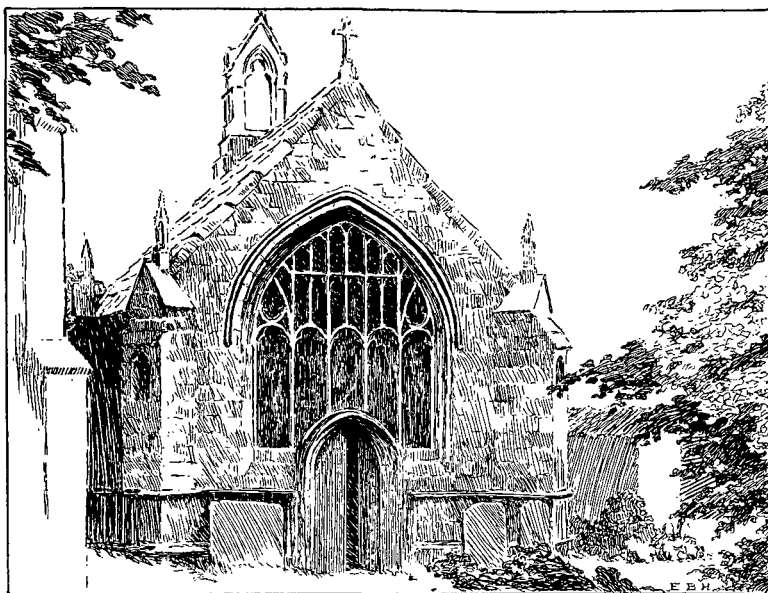


Fig. 1. St Mary's aisle, Carnwath.

by large cusps projecting from either side and from the centre of the top. The appearance is bold and effective, but certainly far less beautiful than the chaster English forms.

Sometimes churches whose general character is of the purest Scottish style present in their windows or other details evidence of the strongest and most unmistakable English influence. This is a particularly striking feature of St Mary's aisle at Carnwath, being the north transept (and only surviving portion) of the collegiate church built by Sir Thomas Sommerville in 1424 (fig. 1). The fabric is of bold and rather wide-jointed ashlar, its gable-topped buttresses support little pinnacles and have trefoil-headed niches, being set diagonally at the corners; the pointed barrel vault supports without a wooden covering the outer ridged

stone slabs; the atmosphere is wholly Scottish, but the windows are the purest Perpendicular. The side ones are square-headed, each having double lights trefoiled, with piercing above; the end one under a pointed arch is of five lights, and except that in the head a horizontal bar is a little unduly emphasised the tracery is of a common English form. Perhaps in no other building is the contrast between the two traditions quite so sharply shown.<sup>1</sup>

At Corstorphine, another most characteristically Scottish fabric, whose squat stone spire with its two heavy string-courses could be paralleled in no other land, and whose barrel roofs give the peculiarly effective vault-like atmosphere to the interior that is one of the great charms of the style, the square-headed windows are almost purely English; the details of the Forrester tombs and the chancel sedilia, while by no means identical with the forms south of the border, are possibly influenced by them. The same is true of the sedilia at Dunglass with their pinnacles, ogee arches, trefoiled gables and angel corbels, though the dark little cruciform building with its severely plain barrel vaults is a most characteristic example of a purely Scottish village church.

At the equally native Carmelite church at South Queensferry it is interesting to see in the south transept a three-light square-headed English Perpendicular window surmounted by purely Scottish step battlements and a very un-English tower containing domestic chambers resting on piers and arches of rather ordinary southern type. At the collegiate church of Restalrig the three-light windows of the hexagonal structure over the well have from a distance a very English Perpendicular look, especially in the general appearance of the depressed arches. Closer inspection discloses the fact that the central lights are cinquefoiled, the side ones trefoiled, and the details are Scottish, quite unlike any contemporary southern work.

At the ruined monastic church at Kilwinning there is a tantalising fragment which suggests that the nave may have been reconstructed during the fifteenth century under very English influences. The side shafts of the western respond of the south arcade (against the tower) have been altered to an octagonal form with moulded capitals of unmistakably Perpendicular form. But so very little has survived that it is impossible to draw any safe conclusions.

On the whole it seems that the survival of English influence in the latest period of Scottish mediæval work is less than might have been expected. The southern kingdom had worked out forms that were

<sup>1</sup> Mr Jas. S. Richardson suggests that the reason for the English tracery was the importation of stained glass of set design from York.

neither suited to Scottish conditions nor congenial to Scottish taste. The lofty clerestories and carved timber roofs, the enormous window spaces and painted screens, the great pinnacled towers, the fondness for lavish and sometimes rather monotonous decoration, the general spirit in fact of the last English mediæval style had no real meaning in any area north of the Cheviots.

Scotland had at length found a style of her own that far better suited her conditions and met her needs. One of its most interesting examples is actually but a few yards from the border, overlooking the Tweed at Upsettlington or Ladykirk, within less than a mile of the purely English church at Norham.

A splendid revival of the old Scottish tradition of vaulting is to be studied in the shrine or apse of Sir Robert Lorimer's War Memorial.

The English influence displayed by Scottish churches during the later middle ages is thus of very considerable importance, if rather less than might have been expected. It affects very materially the whole impression made by such important works as Melrose quire and Linlithgow apse, though without greatly influencing their structural forms. When we turn to military and domestic buildings in Scotland we find on a still more impressive scale the same strong native, wood-discarding tendencies as in the churches. The massive, solemn, deeply impressive, barrel-vaulted halls of late Scottish castles, whether on a vast scale as at Borthwick, or on an almost miniature one as at Elphinstone, please for exactly the same reasons as do the churches, with which indeed they have much in common. Here indeed the discarding of English influence is virtually complete. It does not appear that any echo of the glories of such noble fabrics as Herstmonceux or Tattershall is to be found on our own side of the Cheviots. The materials are not the same, the ideals are as different as they well could be, the spirit is entirely diverse; the architectural atmosphere of each country has become extremely distinctive.

Late Scottish mediæval work has qualities far more attractive than could possibly have been imported from the south. The style undoubtedly merits more attention than it has yet received. At Rosslyn it is exceedingly ornate, at Crichton most severe; yet it always possesses qualities of its own that Scotland would not barter for the best contemporary work of any other land.

(The English Jacobean Gothic revival exercised a noteworthy influence in Scotland: there are examples at South Queensferry, Galashiels, Lyne, etc.)