

I.

AN INTERPRETATION OF A DRAWING ENTITLED "OUR LADY
KIRK OF FIELD, EDINBURGH," IN H.M. STATE PAPER OFFICE.
By HENRY F. KERR, A.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.Scot.

It may appear strange that a drawing generally supposed to have been prepared to make plain an historical scene should require interpretation; nevertheless the drawing as it stands, without manuscript or letterpress, is not readily understandable.

A facsimile of it is to be found in one of the scrap-books of Sir Daniel Wilson entitled *Memorials of Auld Reekie* in our Library. It is in colour, but the colouring, although suggesting what are walls, what are trees, and so forth, is of secondary importance, and a line tracing of it is all that is necessary to base an argument upon for an interpretation (Pl. I.).

The drawing was probably meant to illustrate the scene of Lord Darnley's murder on 9th February 1567. In the centre is a space where roof trusses and other building materials are lying about, indicating the ruins of the Prebendaries' Lodging, which was blown up. Some interested spectators are looking on. This space is called "Ye place of ye murther."

On the adjoining wall is the Postern door mentioned in the story of the crime. It led into "Ye Thieves Raw," and just opposite, on the south side of the road, is the doorway to the enclosure in which the bodies of Darnley and his servant were found. Lying near the bodies are sundry articles of clothing, a chair, and a dagger.

To complete the representation of the locality we see below the scene of the explosion the Provost's House, and the carrying of Darnley's body through "Ye Kirk of Field Back yard" into the house where it is noted "Ye king was kept after his murther." Spectators and guards are to be seen looking on.

Behind the Provost's House is a quadrangle with a well in the centre, and "Ye priests Chambers" beyond. Farther east behind the Priests' Chambers is the garden in which Queen Mary was said to enjoy the sunshine on her visits to her consort. Adjoining this was the property of the Blackfriars.

On the left hand is "Ye mylk Raw," leading from Blackfriars Wynd and the Cowgate, to "Our Lady's Stepis," and thence into the yard of Kirk of Field.

On the lower part of the drawing is the church, in the graveyard of which is seen "Ye burying of body of Ye king's servant."

The Flodden Wall at the back of the kirkyard shows the entrance gateway to the Kirk of Field precincts, with a coat-of-arms over. The Flodden Wall goes westwards until it joins the Potter Row. There it turns north, and a few yards on again turns westwards at the Kirk of Field Port, and thence onwards to Greyfriars Port.

One point of interest is the position of four horsemen. They appear to be near the Potter Row on this drawing; but was this so? We shall see later.

The drawing as it stands does not represent the locality, hence its obscurity. If we examine a plan of this portion of the city we can see all the details in their proper proportion and position (Pl. II.)—the Provost's House, the Priests' Chambers, the Prebendaries' Lodging, the Postern, and the large enclosure in which the bodies were found, on the opposite side of the road.

General Mahon, in his interesting book *The Tragedy of Kirk of Field*, contributes some ideas, that the Prebendaries' Lodging was originally the Provost's House, and that to the west of it was built a Salle, or Reception Gallery; when the later Provost's House was built to the west, the Salle could be used in connection with either. Further, to buttress his argument he thinks that the gunpowder was secreted under the floor of the Salle, and not in the basement of the Prebendaries' Lodging. In support of that he points out that the east wall or gable of the Prebendaries' Lodging was not cast down by the explosion, although all trace of the Salle is gone. I am inclined to accept these details; but they in no way affect the interpretation of the drawing.

The keynote to the whole solution is the fact, shown on the plan, that the Flodden Wall proceeds along the Kirk of Field property from west to east practically in a straight line, later to slightly incline northwards. Also that at no part was there a right-angled turn on this wall to the southwards.

Another link in the process is that the Provost's House is not in line with the Flodden Wall, but at right angles to it, and is connected with the Flodden Wall by an unembattled wall dividing the property there.

If we turn again to the original drawing we note an embattled wall from the Kirk of Field Port, along the Thieves' Row, enclosing the college property. Embattling indicates defence, and thus we may safely assume it to be the Flodden Wall, the defensive wall of the city.

When we follow this wall to "Ye Provost's Place," we observe the large entrance gateway, with embattlements over it—evidently to show

that it was an opening in the Flodden Wall. But at this place the embattled wall fades out. Just here is seen another embattled wall at right angles to this part of the Flodden Wall. We know from the plan of the locality that there was no such return of the Flodden Wall. And, moreover, we see that these embattled walls do not join, they simply fade out at about this place. Beyond the tree, where the first part of the Flodden Wall fades out, we note a plain wall which evidently is the division wall already noted which separates two parts of the property. This wall we know ran from the Flodden Wall at right angles to it northwards, and united with the Provost's House.

Now it is plain that what is shown on one sheet is really two drawings. The draughtsman was not able to show the locality in perspective, so he took this crude method of representing the scene.

On the margin of the drawing I show north points. If these are considered they will solve the problem. The two drawings are: From A to B is the base of one drawing, showing the Kirk and servant's grave. This drawing extends upwards to D, and includes the smaller enclosures to the south of the Thieves' Row, until the two cottages are reached. The second drawing, an L-shaped one, must be turned round until the line of the Flodden Wall in both drawings is continuous, and the north points coincide with the first drawing.

To unite these two drawings as suggested makes a rather ridiculous diagram, with some buildings standing on their ends. Yet it is undoubtedly a true conception of what the unknown artist meant to convey (Pl. III.).

In order to lessen confusion only the important details are shown. In this is portrayed the Provost's House, the scene of the murder, and the large-scale field where the body of Darnley lay.

There is probably one point cleared up, viz., the position of the four horsemen. We see that by this drawing the horsemen may be near the Potter Row; or otherwise may be to the south of the field where the bodies were. Two of the horsemen are looking in one direction, and the others in a different direction. May this not be that these were employed to watch, two at the Potter Row, and two to the south of the field, where the bodies were found?

It was in 1924 that I first seriously took up this investigation. In the summer of that year Professor Karl Pearson of London wrote to me asking if I could explain his difficulty in reconciling this strange drawing with my "Plan of Edinburgh in Mid-Eighteenth Century." In reply I sent him an explanation founded on the actual plan of the locality, and I enclosed rough drawings showing my solution of the difficulty. The drawings which I now show are merely revisions, and in some cases

enlargements, of what I sent him. Professor Pearson accepted the interpretation with two reservations: one was that he did not understand the position of the four horsemen, and the other was that he did not believe that the large gateway into the Kirk of Field opened from the Thieves' Row, because it did not appear on any plan or print, nor on Gordon of Rothimay's "view." He asked for my historical evidence. My reply was that there was no plan or print that showed the Flodden Wall at this part previous to the removal of the Kirk of Field buildings; Gordon's, the earliest, was in 1647, nearly a century later, when the university buildings occupied the site of the Kirk of Field. The only drawing, and the only evidence forthcoming, was this strange drawing of 1567 in H.M. State Paper Office, and this drawing shows the gateway under an embattled wall, presumably the Flodden Wall.

Four years later Professor Karl Pearson published in *Biometrika*, Vol. 20 B, a drawing by himself, or to his order, of the solution I gave him, and which is shown here.

I sent him also a small preliminary sketch in bird's-eye form showing the solution in a modern manner. The sketch I now show is a fresh drawing of the same to a larger scale, and including some of General Mahon's details (Pl. IV.). This drawing in perspective represents the scene and actions which the sixteenth-century artist desired to convey. All his details are there:

The Ruins—the place of the explosion.

The Postern, and the field where the bodies were found.

The Quadrangle with its central well.

The Provost's House, and the bearing in of the King's body.

The Church, and the burying of the King's servant.

Together with other incidental matters, such as the Milk Row, Our Lady's Steps, and other less important details.

The key to the solution is, of course, the position on plan of the Flodden Wall. This wall is to be seen at the south of the church and Provost's House, and the site where the Prebendaries' Lodging was blown up. In this sketch the details shown in the State Paper Office drawing all fall into their proper positions. The pious Invocation of the Child may add interest, although not any accuracy to the representation.

The question as to the position of the four horsemen is further elucidated in this sketch. The probability that two of them were watching at the Potter Row, and the other two at the back of the orchard where the bodies were found is, perhaps, more suggestive than even in the plan.

In connection with the interpretation of this drawing I do not seek

any particular credit, as it seems to me that anyone who had the local knowledge, and carefully studied the drawing, must surely see the only possible solution is that of two drawings on one sheet, one of them at right angles to the other. But, so far as I am aware, this is the first time that the solution has been put on black and white, and all doubt of its interpretation removed.

I would like to take this opportunity of saying a few words on the architectural history of the Church of St Mary in the Fields.

This church, ordinarily called the Kirk o' Field, has not to-day one stone standing on another. Its stones were evidently removed when "Oor Toon's College" was established on the site late in the sixteenth century. Some of its buildings were used as college premises.

Very little is known of its history, or of its appearance. In the map or view of 1544, it is a large cross church with a central tower. In the view of 1567 before us, it seems to be more like a church of nave and transepts of one date, and the addition of a larger choir at a later time. These two are the only drawings seemingly extant.

At a subsequent time James Skene of Rubislaw made a sketch of the church. This must have been about 1800 at the earliest, and as the church was removed some two hundred years before that time, his drawing must have been founded on some earlier drawings, or be more or less imaginative.

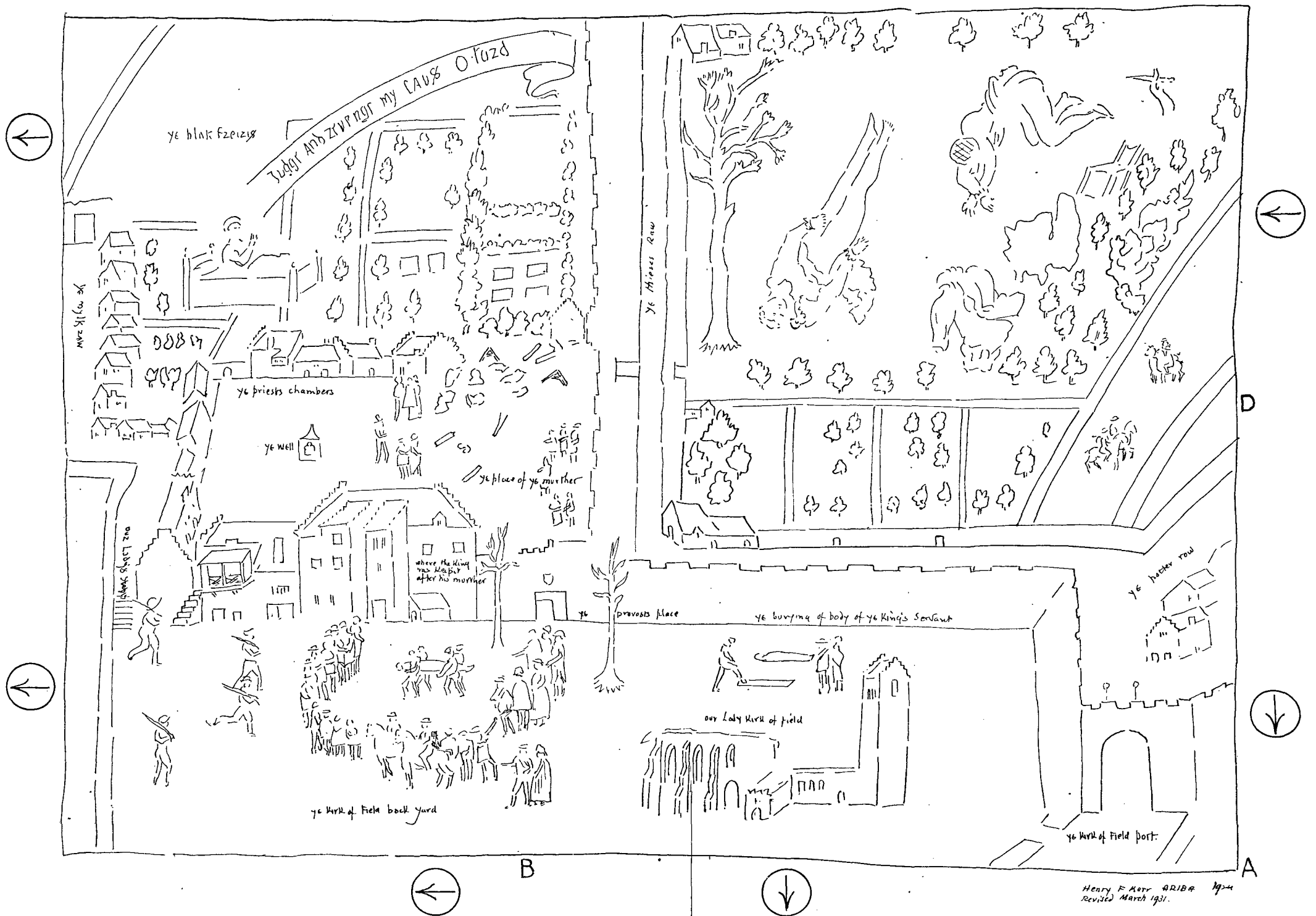
As to its history, Sir Daniel Wilson in *Memorials of Edinburgh* (vol. ii. p. 177) writes: "Its age and founder are alike unknown . . . it is probable that its foundation dated no earlier than the fifteenth century, as all the augmentations of it . . . belong to the sixteenth century." But in James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh* (vol. iii. p. 1), he says: "In the taxation of the ecclesiastical benefices in the archdeaconry of Lothian, found in the treasury of Durham, and written in the time of Edward I. of England, there appears among the churches belonging to the abbey of Holyrood, *Ecclesia Sanctae Mariae in Campis*." This record brings us back to the thirteenth century. Judging from the drawings before us it seems not only possible, but very probable, notwithstanding Sir Daniel Wilson's negative view, that Grant's date is the correct one. Wilson tells us that as a collegiate foundation it was governed by a provost, and housed eight prebendaries, two choristers, with a hospital for bedesmen. This was in the fifteenth century.

The hospital was, Wilson informs us, destroyed in the Hertford raid of 1544, and the church was taken down when the early Town's College was founded in 1582 or thereby.

In endeavouring to fix the date of the buildings from the drawings

OUR LADY KIRK OF FIELD FROM H. M. STATE PAPER OFFICE

ROUGH UNCOLOURED TRACING FROM SCOT. SOC. ANTIQ. LIBRARY. NORTH POINTS ADDED.

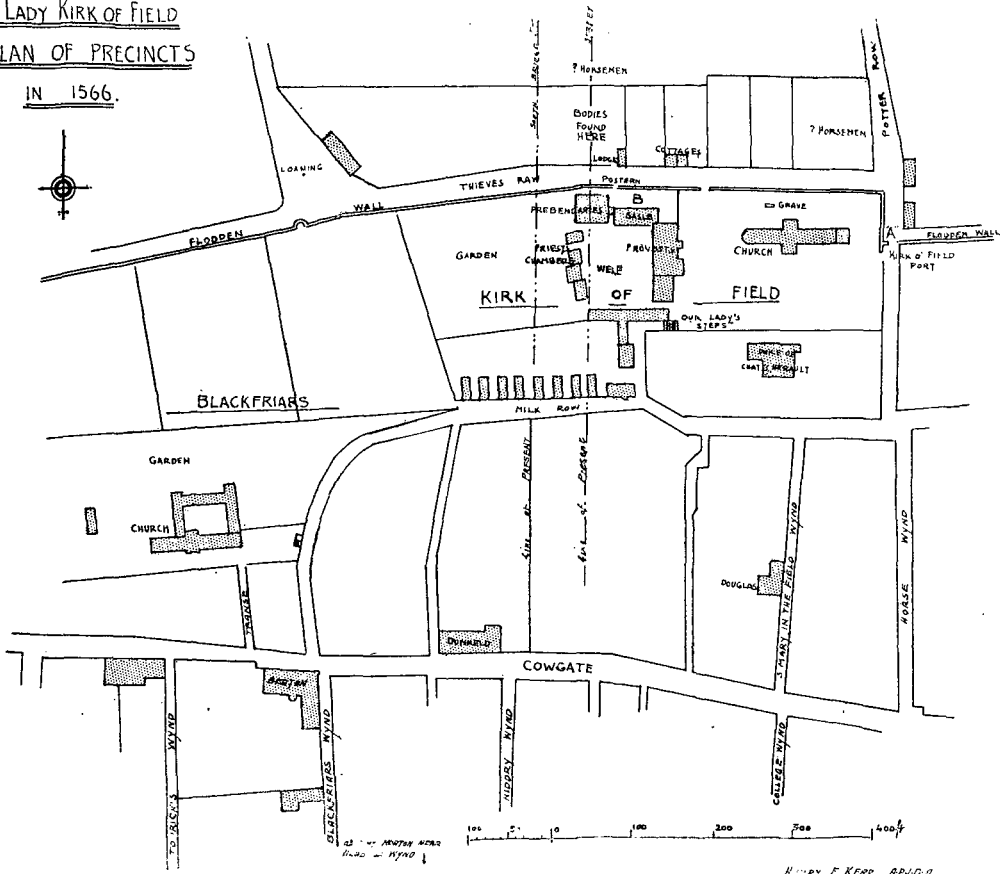


HENRY F. KERR.

PLATE I.

[To face page 144.

OUR LADY KIRK OF FIELD
PLAN OF PRECINCTS
IN 1566.



HENRY F. KERR ARCHT.
MARCH 1931

HENRY F. KERR.

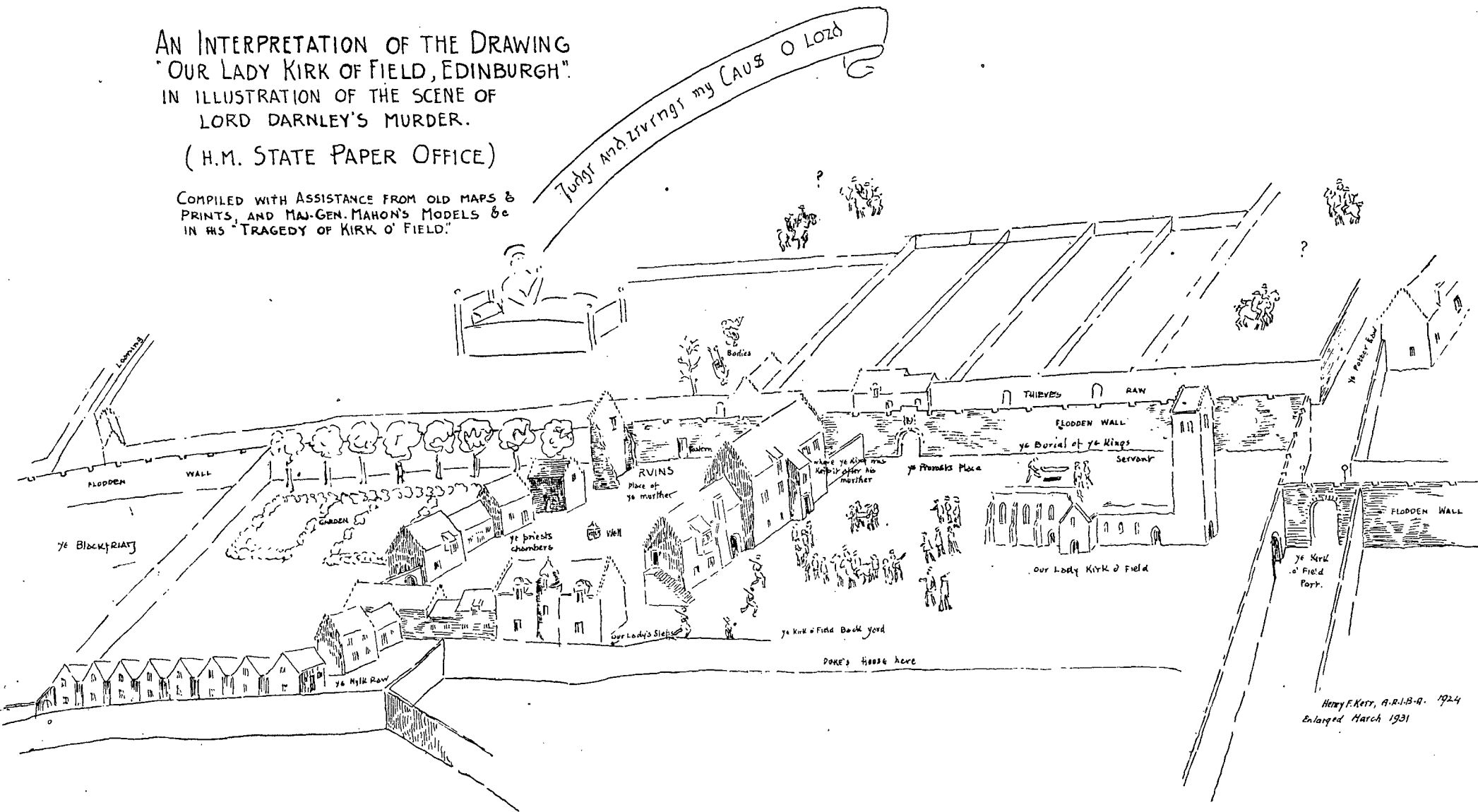
PLATE II.

[To face page 144.]

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE DRAWING
"OUR LADY KIRK OF FIELD, EDINBURGH"
IN ILLUSTRATION OF THE SCENE OF
LORD DARNLEY'S MURDER.

(H.M. STATE PAPER OFFICE)

COMPILED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM OLD MAPS &
PRINTS, AND MAJ-GEN. MAHON'S MODELS &c
IN HIS "TRAGEDY OF KIRK O' FIELD."



Henry F. Kerr, A.R.S.B. 1924
Enlarged March 1931

HENRY F. KERR.

PLATE IV.

[To face page 144.]

at our disposal there is some difficulty, as in important points they do not agree. The 1544 sketch shows a central tower; the 1567 drawing shows a western tower. If the position of the tower is correct in the later drawing, then there would not be room for a nave to the west of it. The only value of Skene's sketch is that the western tower is repeated.

If we had no other drawing than the small-scale sketch of 1544 we would be grateful for it, but too much faith must not be placed in such general views, and so the later and larger view of the unknown artist of the Darnley drawing seems to be much more reliable. Indeed, the 1544 map may merely suggest the existence of a church there, whereas the 1567 sketch shows the appearance of the church, just as the other buildings in the precincts of Kirk of Field which are found to be fairly accurate, and it is certainly more dependable for detail than the general sketch of 1544.

Both, however, agree as to a saddleback to the tower, and with gables to the east and west. This is the usual orientation in Scotland of these features, and it is remarkable that Skene in his drawing shows the gables to the north and south, contrary to general usage. As Skene never saw the church we need not trouble more.

When we proceed to balance the probabilities we may assume with some confidence that the church was built about 1230, and as shown in the 1567 drawing, had nave and transepts of that date, and a western tower with later crowssteps; and that, when the church was raised to collegiate status, a large new choir was added in the fifteenth century.