

VI.

THE PAINTED CEILING IN THE CHURCH OF ST MARY,
GRANDTULLY. BY A. GRAHAM, F.S.A.Scot., F.S.A.*(Read February 27, 1943.)*

Some notes on the painted ceiling of the old church of Grandtully, near Aberfeldy, have already appeared in a paper on "Tempera-Painting in Scotland," by A. W. Lyons,¹ and the work has also received a passing mention from W. Fraser in *The Red Book of Grandtully*.² As, however, the roof of the church, which has not been used for worship for many years, is not now being maintained in a weatherproof state, it is to be feared that the paintings, which are already much wasted, will be finally destroyed in the course of a few more years by percolating rainwater and other climatic agencies. Consequently a fuller account than those already published seems to be called for as a record of this interesting example of seventeenth-century painting.

The couples of which the roof is constructed have collar-beams, and the rafters have struts at the beam-filling; the roof is thus stilted above the actual wall-head. The ceiling is made of planks nailed longitudinally to the under side of the timbers, and at a point where one of the planks is loose bracketing can be observed. There are three sets of these planks, each of a different length, measuring respectively about 9 feet 3 inches, 10 feet 1 inch, and 5 feet 8 inches from E. to W. The ends of the planks, where they abut on one another, are simply nailed to the roof-timbers; but at the E. and W. ends of the ceiling they are held in place by fillets, the one at the E. end being modern. The ceiling takes the form of a somewhat stilted and flattened waggon-tilt vault, and rises to a greatest height above the wall-head of about 5 feet 6 inches. It does not cover the whole of the church, but only a length of about 25 feet from the E. end. The total breadth of the decorated surface is rather over 20 feet,³ and the artist thus had to deal with a broadly oblong area extending to some 500 square feet. Fraser suggests,⁴ on the strength of two dated lintels, that the church, which was already standing in 1533,⁵ may have been repaired in 1636 and that the ceiling was constructed at the same time. This suggestion is fully borne out by the facts to be given below.

The scheme of the decoration is built upon one large central panel and twenty-eight smaller ones of different sizes and shapes. The panels are set on highly ornate cartouches and are connected with one another

¹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxviii. pp. 164 ff.

² Pp. xxi ff.

³ Lyons's figure of 23 feet is too large. ⁴ *The Red Book of Grandtully*, p. xxiii. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

by parti-coloured bands; some contain heraldic achievements, monograms, etc., four depict the Evangelists, and the remainder are devoted to what seem to be biblical subjects, with texts in their margins. Such of these texts as are legible seem, with one exception, to be free adaptations of scriptural passages rather than exact reproductions—a fact which may well be explained by the exigencies of spacing. The intervening surfaces are filled with swags of fruit, vases of flowers, birds, and nude winged figures

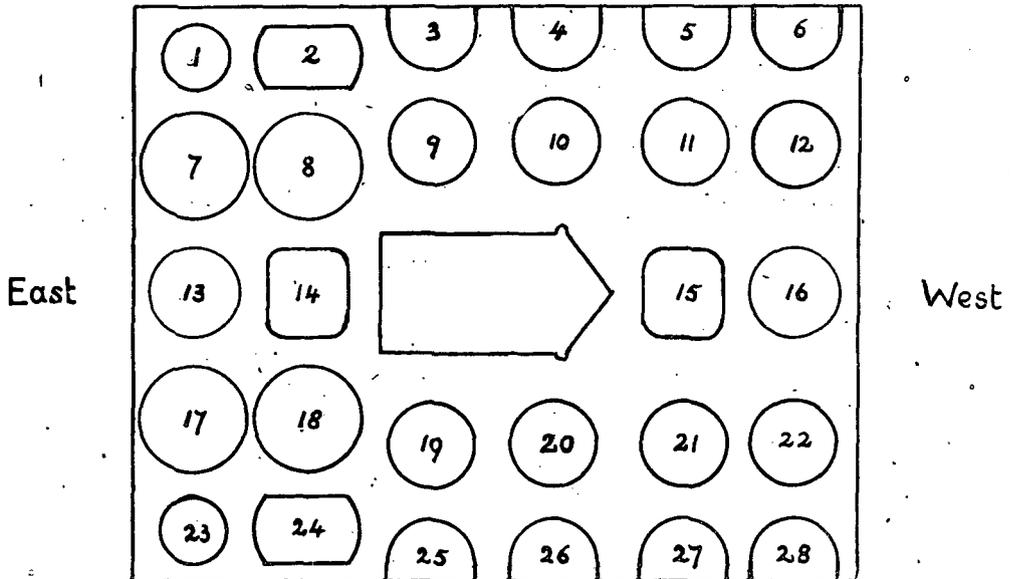


Fig. 1. Diagram showing the arrangement of the panels in the ceiling.

holding trumpets and palm-fronds (Pl. XIII). All these devices are very common in Renaissance decoration, and the scheme is evidently derived from the Italian coffered ceiling of this period. The balance of the composition, as shown by the diagram in fig. 1, makes it clear that the E. end of the ceiling represents the bottom of the decorated "page," as an observer standing with his back to the E. gable sees the large central panel as founded on a kind of pedestal formed by the four largest of the others (7, 8, 17, 18), with two smaller ones (13, 14) between them on the axial line. But while the ceiling as a whole, and likewise the central panel as an isolated unit, is intended to be looked at from the E., the other panels, being set either just above the wall-heads or on the haunches of the vault, lend themselves more readily to inspection from the N. or the S., and the artist has accordingly set their vertical axes at right angles to the major axis of the general design; while the four westernmost panels on each of the wall-heads (3, 4, 5, 6, 25, 26, 27, 28) have been given the

shape of round-headed niches. Of the original colours, black, white, red, pink, yellow and pale yellow, green with lighter and darker olive-green, and a greyish brown can be identified in different parts of the ceiling; blue must also have been used, *e.g.* for the field on which the saltire appears in outline, but none of it now remains. Outlines are traced in black and red, and white is used for backgrounds.

Much of the work, including the large central panel, is now in a deplorable state, but here and there some details can still be made out, and these are worth putting on record. A good deal more, particularly of the inscriptions, could probably be made out if a close examination were made from scaffolding. The present observations were all made from the ground.

The Central Panel.—This panel takes the form of a niche or doorway of classical design, having at either side a column wreathed with leafy tendrils and, above, a moulded pediment with finials and enriched tympanum. The scene depicted is the Last Judgment, but the painting has suffered so much in the last forty years that a better idea of its original contents can be obtained from Lyons's illustration¹ than from what is visible to-day. It is, however, still possible to make out the band of clouds rather above the centre; an angel, one holding a trumpet, in each of the upper corners; in the lower right-hand corner the dead rising from their graves or descending to the nether regions; and in the lower left-hand corner Death with his Sting and, below him, a block of the Stewart chequering.

Panels 14 and 15.—These panels are situated respectively below and above the large central one. Each contains a monogram of the initials S W S and D A M for Sir William Steuart and his wife Dame Agnes Moncrieff. Sir William was the eleventh laird of Grandtully, was born in 1566 or 1567, and died about 1646²; the date suggested above for the construction of the ceiling is thus borne out in a general way by the occurrence of his initials and arms in the design. Dame Agnes was the daughter of Sir John Moncrieff of that ilk. In Panel 14 (Pl. XIV, 1) the A lacks its crosspiece, and the scroll-work that accompanies the monogram is rather richer than in Panel 15 (Pl. XIII), but otherwise the two are similar.

Panels 13 and 16.—The central line of the design is completed by Panels 13 and 16, the former at the bottom and the latter at the top. Panel 13 contains the sun in splendour, now very much wasted, and Panel 16 the crescent moon enclosed within an inner belt of stars and an outer one of clouds. Panel 16 can be seen in the upper left-hand corner of Pl. XIII.

Panel 7.—This panel forms the left-hand bottom corner of the "pedestal" on which the central part of the design has been built up, and is balanced

¹ *Op. cit.*, fig. 8.

² Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxix ff.

by Panel 17 on the right-hand side. It is poorly preserved, the upper part in particular being largely blank. The following details, however, can still be made out—the Royal Arms of Great Britain, enclosed within the Garter and another order, presumably the Thistle, as in the case of the Royal Arms of the period of Charles I at Murthly Castle¹; the dexter supporter, a unicorn; part of a lion's tail, which identifies the sinister supporter; and, above the blank, part of the English crest. The shield is charged: 1st and 4th grand quarters, Scotland; 2nd grand quarter, charges illegible but presumably 1st and 4th France, 2nd and 3rd England; 3rd grand quarter, Ireland. The panel at Murthly shows a similar arrangement, except that the charges in the 2nd grand quarter are reversed. The border of the panel shows bands of black, white, red, and yellow colour.

Panel 17.—This panel is set opposite to, and generally resembles, Panel 7; it is fortunately best preserved at the top, where the other is largely blank. Here we can see a helm, mantling, traces of what is doubtless a crown, the Scottish crest, part of a label bearing the words NEM[O] ME, the standards, and between the standards and the crest two obscure devices which may be the rose and thistle mentioned by Lyons.² The dexter supporter, a unicorn, apparently crowned, and some traces of a lion on the sinister side also appear. Of the charges on the shield, only that in the first grand quarter (Scotland) can now be identified; but the fact that the second grand quarter was quartered as in Panel 7 appears very clearly from the difference in the colours of the fields. A fleur-de-lys can just be made out below the unicorn, and the dark object seen below the lion's paw on the sinister side is doubtless the Westminster portcullis recorded by Lyons. Rose, thistle, fleur-de-lys, and portcullis all occur in corresponding positions on the Murthly panel.

Panel 8.—This is another of the four large panels, and forms the upper left-hand corner of the "pedestal." No part of it is well preserved, and in particular one of the five boards that it spans is completely denuded of painting. Below this blank space can be seen a shield bearing two coats impaled, namely: Dexter, three fleurs-de-lys, two and one, presumably for Bourbon; sinister, a charge resembling the chains of Navarre, or possibly an escarbuncle. The supporters are two monsters with upturned snouts, sharply pointed teeth, and scaly bodies intertwining below the shield. Some marks on the neck of the dexter one may indicate either a collar or a mane. Above the blank board appear parts of the crest, apparently a griffon's head and a long waving tail. The tinctures of the shield have faded, but the border of the cartouche shows bands of black, white, red, and yellow.

Panel 18.—This panel corresponds with Panel 8 on the opposite side of the ceiling, and resembles it in a general way. Again we have a shield

¹ Sir William Steuart acquired Murthly in 1615 (Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii).

² *Loc. cit.*

enclosed within a decorative band, which has been Gules, and supporters represented by monsters with long lizard-like bodies. In this case, however, the monsters have barbed and pointed tongues and webbed feet; their tails have disappeared through the wasting of the paint on the board below the shield. Above the shield, where Panel 8 was blank, there is a helm surmounted by a ducal coronet, with leafy branches taking the place of mantling. The poor preservation of the painting makes identification of the charges on the shield impossible, though the Lord Lyon King of Arms suggests that this coat, like the one on Panel 8, is foreign. The only details that can be made out are, about the centre of the sinister side, a lion passant gardant, originally Gules, on a field semée with indications of a barry in one corner; in sinister chief a small lion rampant; and on the dexter side, slightly higher than the head of the lion passant gardant, two lioncels.

Panel 9.—This is the easternmost of the medium-sized panels on the S. haunch of the vault (Pl. XIV, 2). The shield is set in a frame which had finials at its upper corners consisting of square capitals supporting balls; above is a coronet apparently of sixteen points, and below the legend EARLE OF ATHOIL identifies the owner of the arms. The shield is charged: Quarterly, 1st and 4th, a fess chequy; 2nd and 3rd, within a double tressure flory-counter-flory, a lion rampant. It is to be remarked that the chequers are Gules and Argent, not Azure and Argent as they should have been in a Stewart coat.

Panel 19.—This panel balances Panel 9 on the N. haunch of the vault. The painting is completely wasted, and one of the boards of the ceiling is loose at this point; but that Lyons was right in his identification of the arms is proved by the inscription THE [D]VIK O[F] LENNO[X], which can still be made out on the board below the loosened one.

Panel 10.—This panel (Pl. XV, 1) adjoins Panel 9 on the W. and resembles it in a general way. The shield is set in a similar frame with finials; a coronet bearing, presumably, twenty pellets, of which eleven are shown in profile, appears in a corresponding position; and the owner's name is again inscribed below—DAM AGNEIS MONCRIEF, wife of Sir William Steuart (*supra*). The shield is charged: A chief ermine, a lion rampant.

Panel 20.—Dame Agnes's panel is balanced by that of her husband, on the N. haunch of the vault (Pl. XV, 2). The shield bearing Sir William Steuart's arms is set in a frame similar to those already described, above which there is a coronet of sixteen points. The shield is charged: Quarterly, 1st and 4th, a fess checky; 2nd and 3rd, a ship in full sail. The ships now appear in outline only, and the chequers are Gules and Argent, as in Panel 9. Below the shield is a partly wasted inscription THE LAI[RD] OF GRAINTV[?E]LIE. The eighth letter of the last word appears to

be an E, but it is very indistinct and may have been I or L. In the border of the cartouche, at the nine, twelve, and three o'clock points, appear the initials S(ir) W(illiam) S(teuart).

Panel 11.—With this panel we pass from heraldry to the Scriptures, as Panels 11, 12, 21, and 22, which flank the monogram and moon on the central line, depict the four evangelists. Panel 11 (Pl. XVI, 1), which adjoins Dame Agnes Moncrieff, is devoted to SANT [M]ATHOV, as is shown by the inscription in the upper margin of the cartouche. The evangelist is shown as a robed, bare-headed, and bearded figure, seated on the left of the picture holding a book, with his emblem the Angel behind him in the centre. In the right background can be seen some traces of what may have been a distant building.

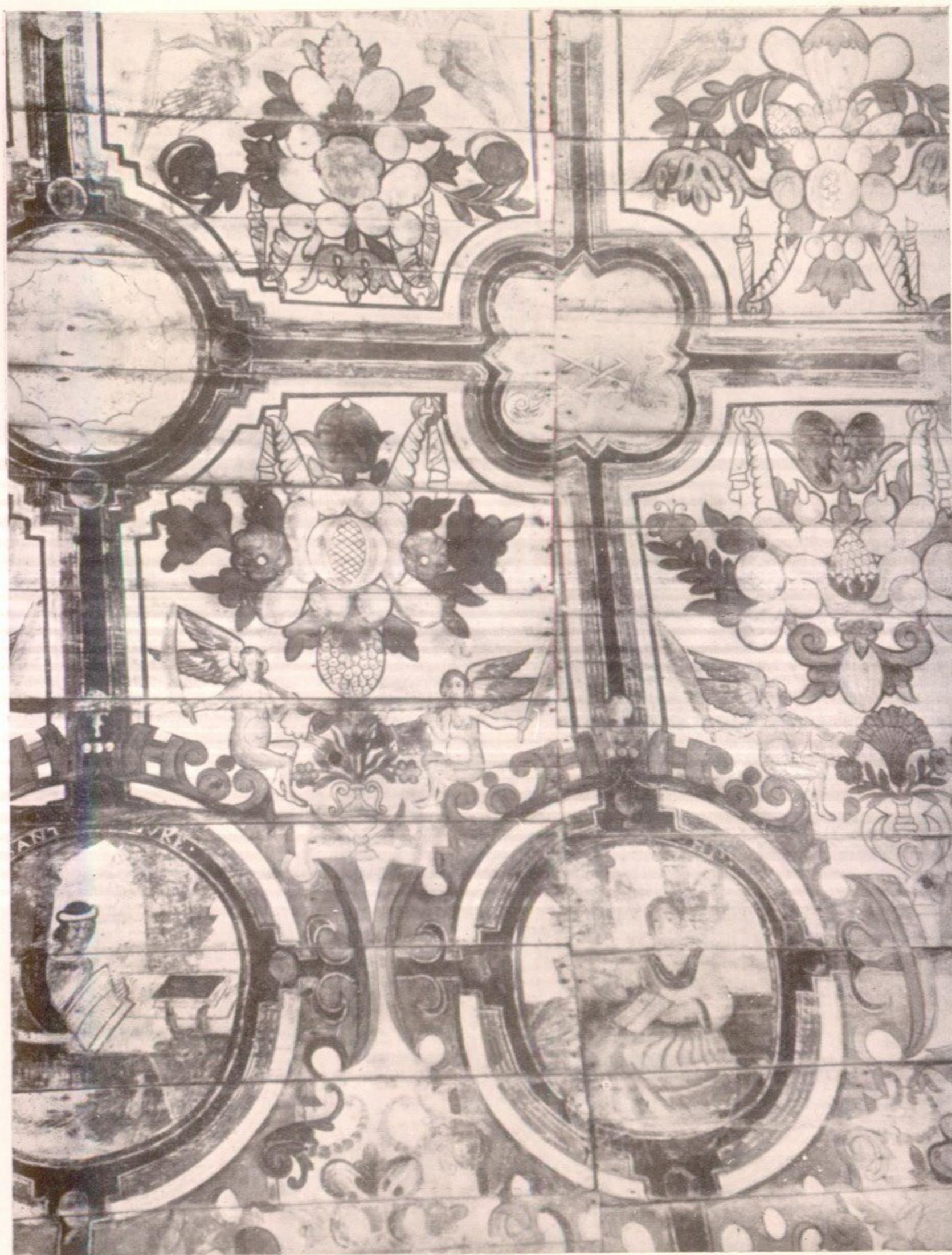
Panel 12.—This panel (Pl. XVI, 2), which similarly bears the words SANT [M]ARK in the upper margin, is the westernmost of the row on the S. haunch of the vault. It is considerably stained, and the painting is consequently obscured. The saint can, however, be seen sitting or reclining, with a book, on the right-hand side of the picture; ashlar masonry, with a window and a pillar, is represented in the background, and in the foreground more ashlar or tiling. No vestige of the Lion can be made out, and it was probably not included in the design.

Panel 22.—This panel (Pl. XVI, 3) balances Panel 12, being the westernmost of the row on the N. haunch of the vault. It contains a picture of SANT LVKE, dressed in a collarless tunic having a fastening at the neck and a right sleeve of a darker colour than the rest, and wearing a cap with its edge rolled up to show the lighter-coloured lining. He is seated to the left of the picture in front of a background of columns, with a large book open in his hands and another lying on a desk. Below the desk appears the head of the Ox.

Panel 21.—This panel (Pl. XIII, lower right-hand corner) is immediately E. of the last, and balances Panel 11 on the opposite side. The subject is SANT IOHN, who is shown seated in the centre with two columns in the background. He is dressed in a flowing, low-necked robe with belt, cuffs, and rolled-over portion at the neck, all of a darker colour. In his hands there is a small open book. The Eagle is not depicted.

Panel 1.—This is the easternmost of the row of panels that are set above the S. wall-head. It is of small size and round, and contains a robed figure shown against a background of columns and arches. It is considerably wasted, and all that can now be seen of the inscription is BY[?F] in the right-hand, or W., margin of the cartouche.

Panel 2.—This panel, which adjoins Panel 1, is larger than it and is oblong with rounded ends. It is also considerably wasted, but on one of the less damaged boards appears the lower part of a robed figure standing under a roof supported on four pillars. Between the feet is a heart-shaped



Part of the north-western quarter of the ceiling, showing Panels 15, 16, 21, and 22.

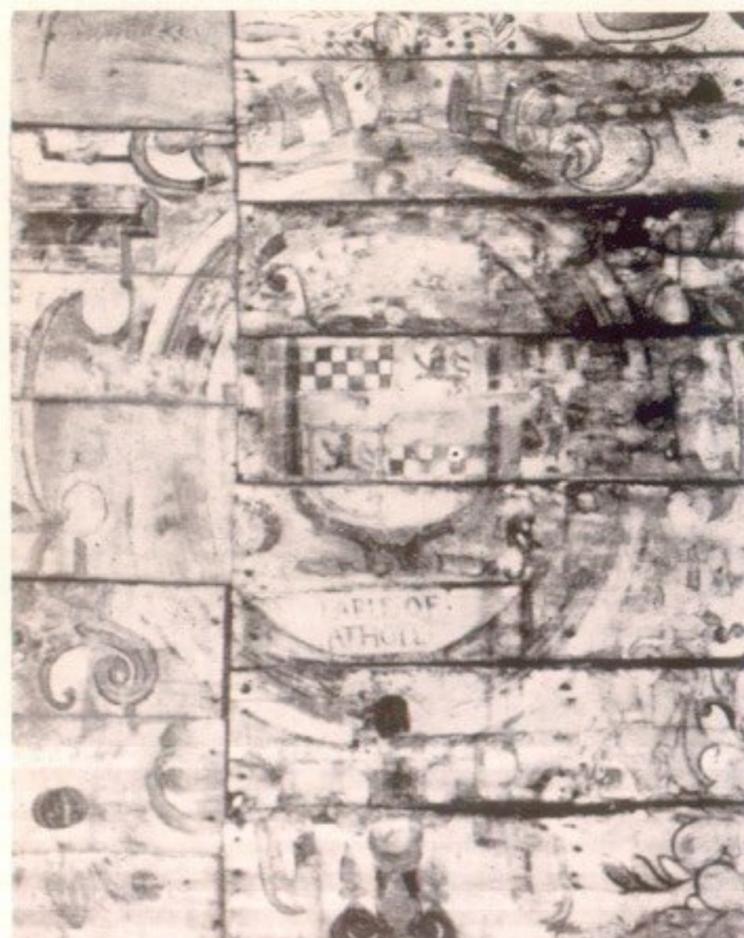
A. GRAHAM.

CEILING AT GRANDTULLY.

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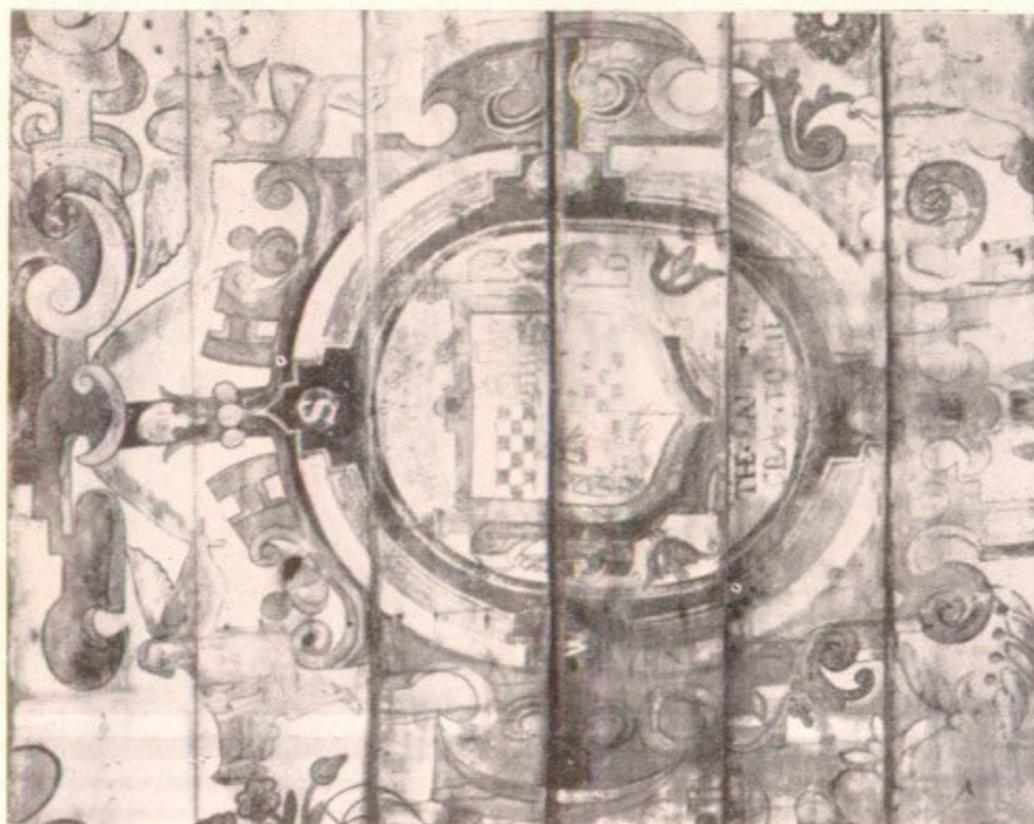
1. Panel 14: monogram of SWS and DAM.



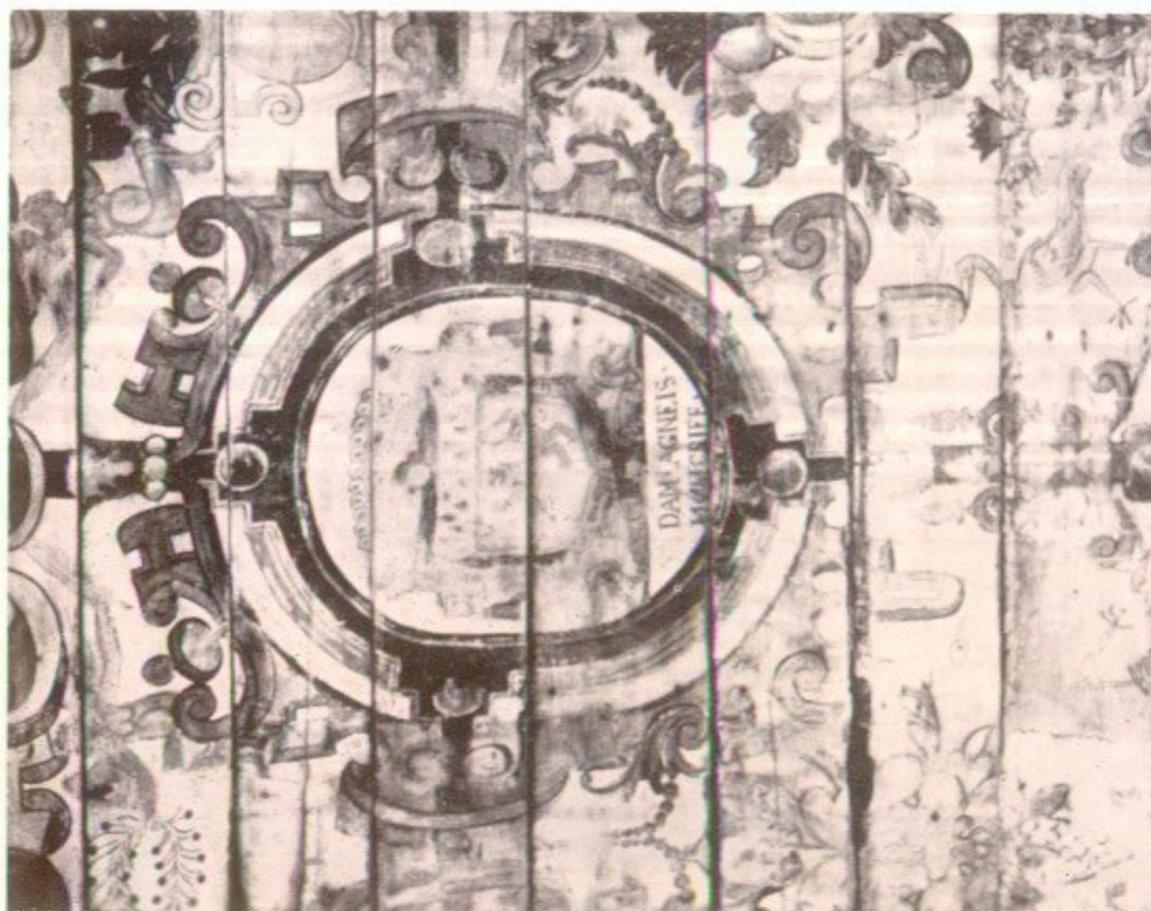
2. Panel 9: the arms of the Earl of Atholl.



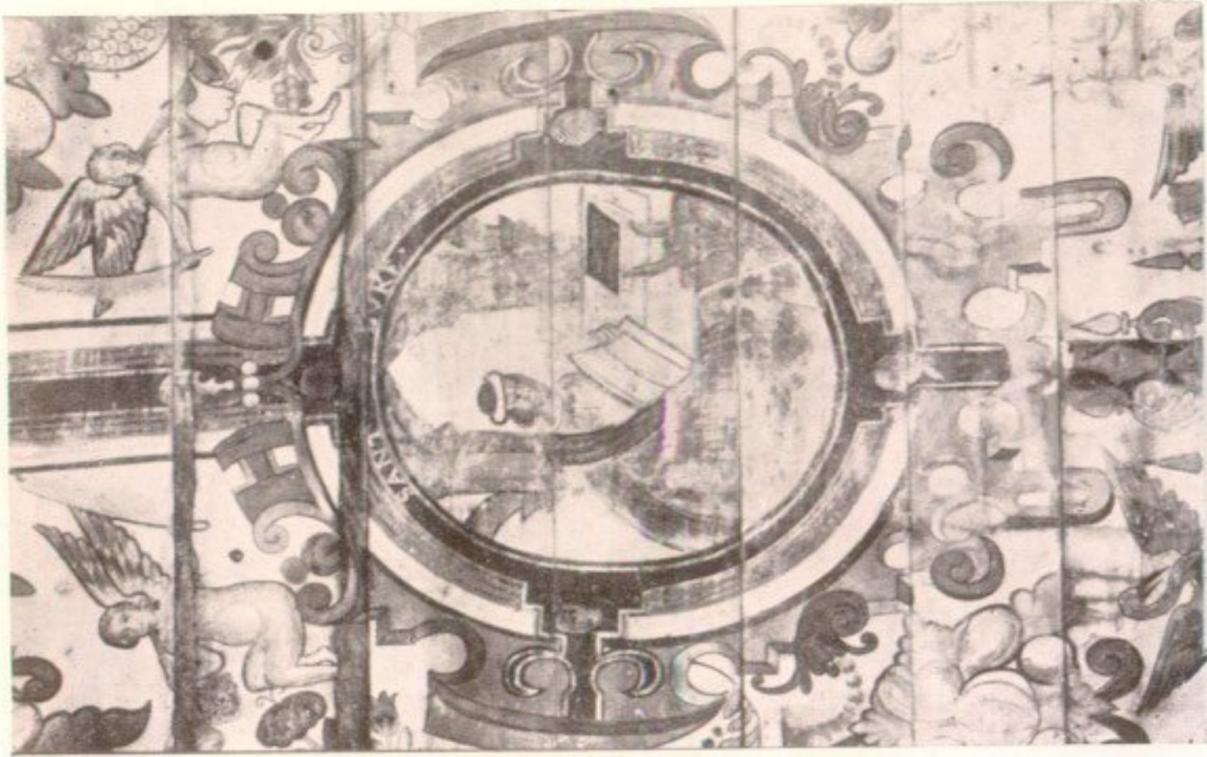
3. Panel 27.



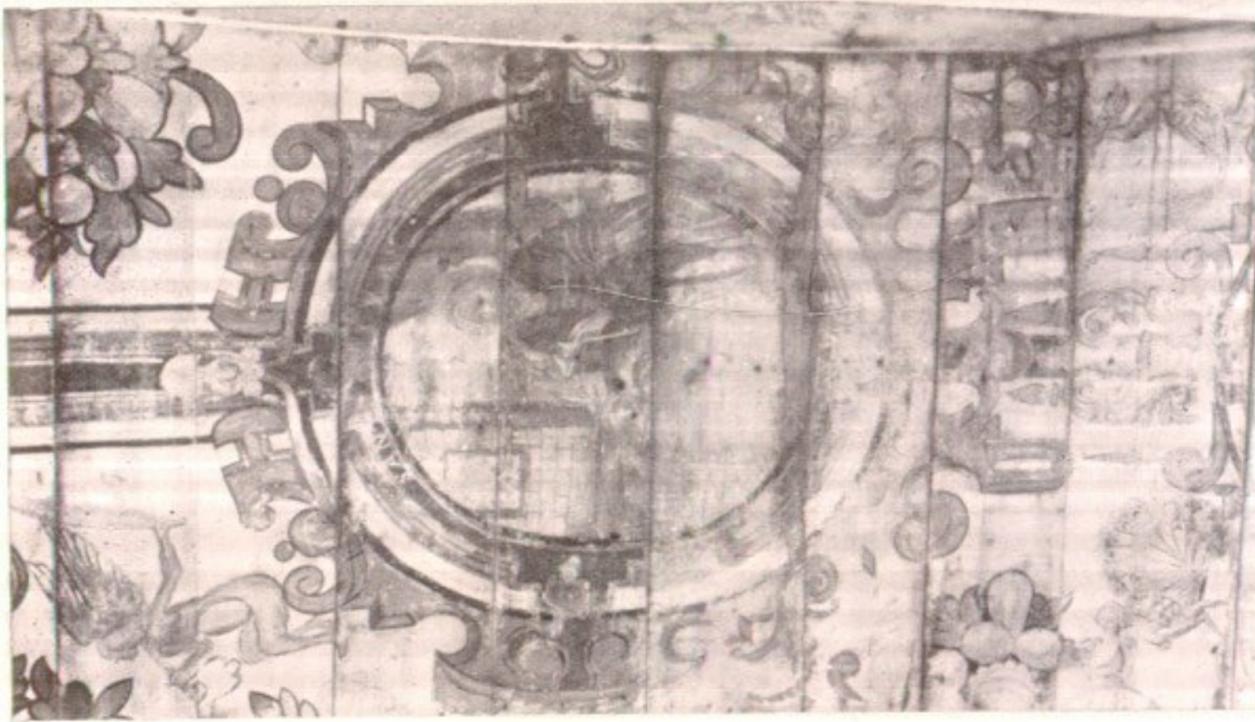
2. Panel 20: the arms of Sir William Steuart of Grandtully.



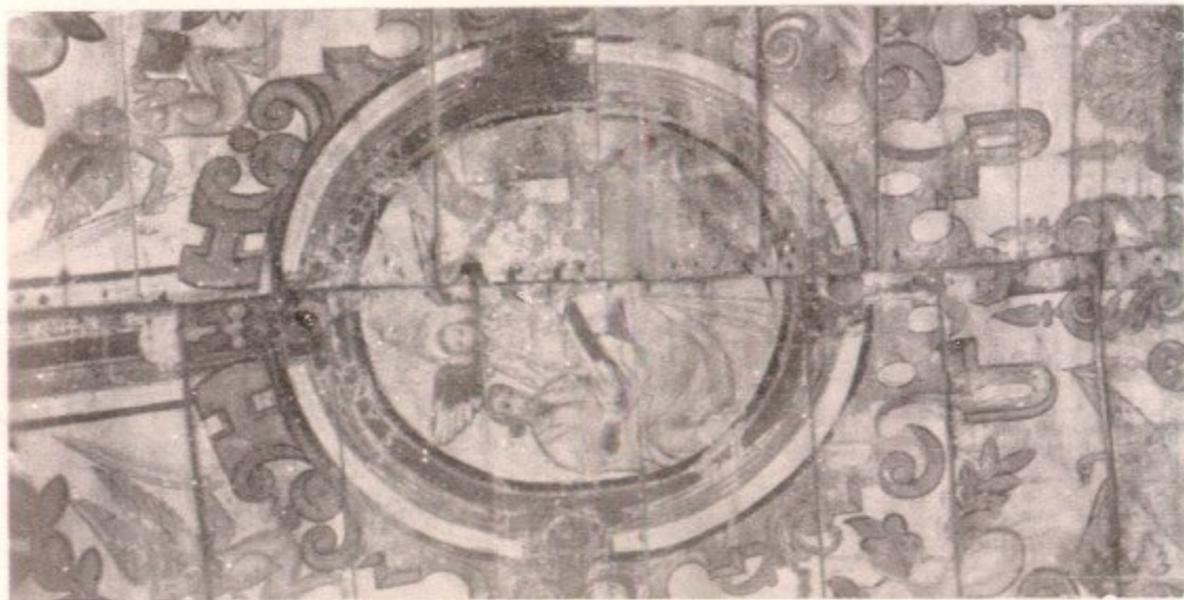
1. Panel 10: the arms of Dame Agnes Moncrieff.



3. Panel 22: St Luke.



2. Panel 12: St Mark.



1. Panel 11: St Matthew.

red object, to which a kind of wand extends downwards from the left hand. The right hand is invisible, but from where it should be something resembling a palm-leaf also descends to the object. In the upper border of the cartouche there is a small human face, and below it the legend [?]NOVN[?E], possibly a proper name.

Panel 3.—This is the easternmost of the four niche-like panels that comprise the rest of this row. It contains a wasted figure, and the wordsTRVES VNTQ can be made out in the margin.

Panel 4.—It is only the uppermost part of this panel that is reasonably well preserved, and here can be seen a human head, with a short beard and flat cap, framed by curtains or set in the doorway of a tent. The words [LEARN] OF M[E F]OR I AM LOVLIE [?G]O.[?]S appear in the arched border that forms the head of the niche. The first part of this inscription corresponds closely with Matt. xi, 29—“Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart”; but the fragmentary second part does not agree with the following words of the verse as they appear in any version of the Gospel, and it may well be part of some completely different text.

Panel 5.—Little of the contents of this panel can be seen apart from some scrolls at the top. Enough of the inscription can, however, be read, on the W. half of the niche, to permit of its identification as part of 1 Peter i, 16—BE YE HOLIE FOR I AM HOLIE. On the W. half of the niche-head appears [?LIN]ES BECO.

Panel 6.—This is the westernmost panel of this row on the S. side. It is much wasted, and nothing can be said about the figure that appears dimly on it. Of the inscription, R[?I]EN[?O] [?I] REMEMBER THE TYM.AS. can be read; these words are reminiscent of Psalm xlii, 4 (“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me”), but the correspondence is not exact.

Panel 23.—This panel is the easternmost of the row above the N. wall-head, and corresponds with Panel 1. The picture is wasted, but of the inscription we can read FEARE WA[LK C]IRCUMSPECTLIE THEY AR. The opening words may be derived from Eph. v, 15 and 16—“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil,” although the correspondence is far from exact. The position and spacing of the fragmentary later words make it possible that they formed part of a separate text.

Panel 24.—This panel corresponds with Panel 2 on the opposite side. It portrays a female figure wearing a dark-coloured bodice and a skirt with a pleated or lined apron over it. Of the inscription, HOP. FORE AND BE W[?]S[??]RO[?][?G] can be made out. Above the cartouche is a cherub head.

Panel 25.—As the easternmost of the niche-like panels, this one corre-

sponds with Panel 3. The picture is wasted except for some vague appearance of drapery, and all that can be read of the inscription is THE[?S]CRVE[?H].....A..... TO THE END. This is reminiscent of Jer. iii, 5—"Will he reserve his anger for ever, even unto the end?", but the correspondence is not at all close.

Panel 26.—Nothing can be made of either painting or inscription.

Panel 27.—This is the best-preserved of the niche-like panels (Pl. XIV, 3). It shows a robed and hooded figure framed in a canopy, with the right hand raised towards the face. The legible remains of the inscription read AS TH..... [OK or CK or OR] OF GOD PVT..... 1 Peter v, 2 contains the words "Feed the flock of God which is among you," but although "flock of God" is a possible reading here, the comparison does not help us to a reconstruction of the whole text.

Panel 28.—Nothing can be made of either painting or inscription.

I desire to express my indebtedness to the Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland and to Captain Ian G. Lindsay, F.S.A.Scot., for permission to make use of their photographs, and to the Lord Lyon King of Arms, Dr H. Meikle, Mr T. Innes of Learney and Kinnairdy, F.S.A.Scot., Mr G. P. H. Watson, F.S.A.Scot., and Mrs S. Scarlett Smith for valuable help and advice.