

V.

SCOTTISH POST-REFORMATION CHURCH FURNITURE.

BY GEORGE HAY, A.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.Scot.

GENERAL.

The rather meagre remains of Scotland's pre-Reformation church furniture are fairly well known, but the same cannot be said of that of the Reformed period. As Scottish churches do not enjoy the protection of Ancient Monuments legislation or of effective ecclesiastical measures, a considerable destruction of post-Reformation fittings and furniture has taken place, and what survives bids fair to become as scanty as the work of the preceding period. The present situation would appear to call for something in the nature of systematic study and protective attention. This paper, which makes no pretence to finality or exhaustiveness, is presented as a brief introduction to the subject, and covers the period between the Reformation of 1560 and the Disruption of 1843.

Though it is not our purpose to ponder the many diverse elements which contributed to the religious revolution of 1560, it is useful to recall some facts of the situation. With the adoption of the Reformed theology, ecclesiastical system and mode of worship, many items of church furnishing characteristic of medieval Christendom ceased to be relevant. Again, leaving aside the changed though not altogether new attitude to religious art, it has to be remembered that the Reformed Kirk inherited neither the economic power nor the administrative organisation which had enabled its predecessor to become a chief patron of the arts and to embellish its principal buildings with sumptuous fittings and decoration. In short, post-Reformation church furniture has to be studied against the greatly altered circumstances of the religious, economic and social background.

COMMUNION TABLES.

The liturgical altar of the Roman mass gave way to the long communion tables of the Reformed rite flanked by benches upon which the communicants sat. At first, such tables were temporary structures, consisting of boards and trestles which were erected for the administration of the Sacrament and were thereafter dismantled, as is still normal practice in the Netherlands.

Frequently the tables were enclosed by a temporary rail or fence, and in

addition to the main table (or tables) there was often a small "head table," at which minister and assistants communicated. Later, as fixed seating became more general, long table pews were devised, so constructed that, by the use of movable haffits fitting between fillets, they could be converted into a series of short box pews at times other than communion services. The *Statistical Accounts* and other records note that such table pews were often given rent-free for the use of the poor. Though now less obvious than hitherto, it will be apparent that the disposition of the long communion tables and their pews was a prime factor in church planning and, save for brief interruptions, this was true under both episcopalian and presbyterian establishments (Pl. X, 2).

Good examples of long communion tables exist at Ceres, Durisdeer, Lochbroom, Newburn (Pl. X, 1) and North Bute. Others, some of which have been considerably altered, survive at Ardchattan, Bracadale, Carsphairn, Kilmodan, Newlands and Reay, and in the parliamentary kirks of Plockton and Quarff.

An early 19th century expedient sometimes adopted for the administration of the Lord's Supper was to have a block of seating with hinged backs and movable benches in each alternate row, so designed that by adjusting a few bolts a number of long tables and flanking benches was quickly achieved. Examples of this arrangement still exist at Dunfermline North Kirk, Tingwall and Torphichen, and did until recently in the 1844 Free Kirk of Livingston.

PULPITS.

With communion tables, baptismal basin and bell, a pulpit was deemed by the first *Book of Discipline* (1560) to be indispensable to every parish kirk. Apart from developments in architectural style, early post-Reformation pulpits followed the general form of those of the preceding period and, like them, they were invariably provided with a panelled backboard and a sounding board or canopy. The only surviving examples of 16th century date appear to be those of Parton and of the Chapel Royal, Stirling, the former of which is preserved in the National Museum and the latter in Stirling Castle. Both are of oak. The Parton pulpit, dated 1598, is fairly complete, and illustrates that tardy transition from Gothic to Renaissance forms which was characteristic of north-west Europe. The Stirling pulpit is of the same general form without carved enrichments, but it is now much dilapidated and lacks its sounding board. It formed part of the original plenishings of the 1594 Chapel Royal.

An almost invariable adjunct to the Scottish pulpit down to at least the middle of the 19th century was the reader's "lattron" or desk. Situated in front of the pulpit proper, this was used by the lay readers, who were

prominent during early Reformed times when the number of ordained ministers was limited, and by the precentors who led the singing. These offices were usually, though not invariably, held by one person, normally the parish schoolmaster. The characteristic feature of many late 16th and early 17th century pulpits was a panelled enclosure with the reader's desk in the centre flanked by elders' seats. Pulpits of this type are still common in the Netherlands, where the enclosure is known as the *doophek*, it being the place of baptism as it also was in Scotland. The baptismal basin was held in an iron bracket on the pulpit side. The only surviving Scottish example of such a pulpit is that at Ayr (Pl. XI, 1), which has been restored after being dismantled and partially destroyed in 1887. It was built in 1655 by John Hunter, who was paid 600 pounds Scots, and who probably built a very similar specimen formerly extant at Fenwick and recorded in a drawing by Messrs Macgibbon and Ross.¹

The Ayr pulpit with its straight sides, bowed front and low relief enrichments is typical of the greater part of the 17th century work, though a few examples like that at Pencaitland were of polygonal plan. The rather fragmentary Bo'ness pulpit has its panel enrichments in inlays of various woods. Other 17th century pulpits, most of which have suffered modification, exist at Culross Abbey (Pl. XI, 4), Dun (dated 1615), Falkland Palace (from the former parish kirk), Glasgow Cathedral, Lyne (c. 1645), Newbattle, Stirling (Holy Rude), St Andrews (St Salvator's) and Yester. In addition, there are detached fragments at Abercorn (1637), Abbotsford² and Kirkwall Cathedral, the last of which is unlike the others, being of pine and bearing the painted date 1689. At St Mary's Gaelic Kirk, Inverness, there is a curious but much altered pulpit, dated 1668 and enriched with profuse carved detail of Flemish type, and in Elgin there is a fine example, dated 1684 and of more advanced Renaissance design than any of those above mentioned.

This Renaissance character is most marked in 18th century pulpits, which are usually of polygonal plan—most commonly hexagonal—with backboards flanked by pilasters or columns and sounding boards either flat on top, or ogival with a carved dove finial or a turned urn. The "three-decker" pulpit, so characteristic a feature of England, was less common in Scotland, but interesting examples survive at Dyke (1781), Fort George Garrison Chapel (1767),³ and in the 1848 Free Kirk of Ardgay in Ross-shire. Others formerly existed at Fintray, Inverkeithny, Sanquhar and Yarrow. As previously, oak was often employed, and was used in such examples as the pulpits of Spott, Golspie (1738), Aberdeen (St Nicholas West, 1755) (Pl. XI, 3), Kilmany (1786), Mochrum (1795), St Quivox (Pl. XI, 2), Fort

¹ *Cast. Arch.*, v, 161.

² This example, built in 1634 for Dunfermline Abbey, was presented by the heritors to Sir Walter Scott in 1822, after the completion of the new Abbey Kirk.

³ This pulpit has been moved from its original central site and its domical canopy detached.

George, Hamilton (1732), and Dumfries (St Michael's, c. 1745), the last two of which are reconstructions incorporating only the original backboards and sounding boards. On the other hand pine was the timber most commonly used, intended for painting or graining, but at St Andrew's, Glasgow (1756), the prosperous "tobacco lords" imported fine Spanish mahogany for the pulpit, which has carved details of rococo type and touches of gold leaf.

The pulpits at Kilmany, Fife, and Kildonan, Sutherland (both 1786), have sounding boards with Roman Doric entablatures, while those at Reay (1739) and Farr (1774) distinctly resemble one another. Other good examples exist at Spynie (1735), Glenbuchat, Cromarty Gaelic Chapel, (1783), Lochgoilhead (from Kiltearn, 1791), Strathmiglo (1787) and Monimail (1796); the last has refined details but now lacks its sounding board.

Most early 19th century pulpits were designed in the simple classical tradition, though an increasing number were given double stairs, apparently in the interests of symmetry. Typical examples exist at Torphichen (c. 1805), Bourtie (1806), Newburn (1815), Fogo (1817), Lauder (1820), Ettrick (1824), Kirkden (1825), Newlands (1838), and the parliamentary kirks of Strathy and Iona, the last of which is now banished to a museum.¹ Other examples include Towie (1803), Auchendoir (1811), Maryton (c. 1815), Channelkirk (1817), Tarves (c. 1825), Bracadale (1831), Portmoak (1832), New Cumnock (1833), Ardchattan (1836), Kingoldrum (1840) and Logie Pert (1840). Those of Rosskeen (1832) and Edderton (1842) are very similar, with delicate details of Adam type, and there are good Greek Revival pulpits in Edinburgh at Newington (1823) and St Mary's (1824). The Gothic Revival is represented by the pulpits of Rosemarkie (1822), Duirinish (1832), Kilmarnock (St Marnock's, 1836), Livingston (1837) and St Martins (1843), and in more restrained form at Stevenston (1832), Collessie (1839), Carrington (c. 1840) and Dalkeith West (1840).

LOFTS AND GALLERIES.

Though not unknown previously, lofts and galleries became quite a feature in post-Reformation times. They were installed in existing medieval buildings, often with a charming disregard for symmetry, and became an integral part of the design of new churches. An interesting water-colour drawing in Elgin Museum, depicting the interior of the medieval parish kirk of that town about 1770, gives a good impression of the normal arrangement. Many lofts were erected by wealthy families or corporate bodies like town councils and merchant or trade guilds for their own use and were usually "decored" with appropriate arms and emblems.

In some cases lofts were of quite elementary construction, as in the smaller parish kirks like Kilmany, where simple beams comfortably span

¹ The Highland folk museum *Am Fasgadh* at Kingussie.

the modest width of the building. More often, however, additional support was provided by means of timber posts, which were chamfered, fluted or turned, as at Ayr, Burntisland and Pencaitland. Like the Burntisland examples, such posts often stood on moulded stone plinths and were usually provided with bracket caps, a sound structural device. During the 18th and early 19th centuries a continuous loft of rectangular or semi-octagonal plan usually encircled the end walls and one long side of the kirk, supported on sturdy timber columns of classical design and later by cast-iron ones. In some cases, like St Cuthbert's (Edinburgh), Inveresk and Montrose, there were double galleries of this type, and of this arrangement Montrose is now the sole surviving example. In the hall-churches of the 19th century a horseshoe gallery round the sides and one end wall was normal, the columns and breasts being of either classical or Gothic design.

During the 17th century, loft fronts were treated in the vernacular classical manner of the period and enriched with vigorously carved details as well as painted armorial bearings, craft emblems and appropriate texts. Typical examples survive at Ayr, Burntisland (Pl. XII, 1), Pencaitland (Pl. XII, 3) and at Inverkeilor, where the Northesk loft displays in inlays of various woods the arms of that noble family. Other examples of this period formerly at Whitekirk¹ and Fenwick were lost by fire, but at Dunfermline there is preserved part of the magistrates' loft front, dated 1610 and bearing the royal arms encircled by the collar of the Thistle.² Another magistrates' loft, of quite imposing design, spans the east end of James Gibbs' kirk of St Nicholas West at Aberdeen (1755). Over the provost's seat it has a baldachino borne by four Corinthian columns with the burgh arms displayed on a pediment (Pl. XIV, 1).

Of the great wealth of 17th and 18th century work formerly extant, what has survived the combined onslaught of vandals and "restorers" is now represented by the few examples above mentioned, and by detached pieces of panelling and carving mainly in the possession of museums and collectors. In Aberdeenshire alone John Logan was able in the early 19th century to record a great deal of this charming vernacular work. Moreover, contrary to erroneous notions all too commonly held, Logan's drawings indicate how large a part colour decoration played in such work, not only in the realm of heraldic tinctures but also as a general treatment. Among surviving fragments from lofts the following may be mentioned as typical. In the National Museum are two carved cartouches of 18th century date displaying respectively the emblems of the Incorporated Trades of Dalkeith and of South Leith. The former has a fretted background of scrolled leaf-work, while the latter is of rich Baroque character competently carved. At

¹ Dr James S. Richardson's drawing of this is illustrated in R.C.A.M. *Inventory (East Lothian)* (1924).

² This example, given in R.C.A.M. *Inventory (Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan)* as a magistrates' loft, I have since found to be part of the royal loft erected in the nave in 1610.

Tain is the panelled breast of a former trades loft. It is of pine coloured green, and painted upon it are various craft emblems and the text:

FOR GOD IS KING/OF ALL THE EARTH/SING YE PRAISES/
WITH/UNDERSTANDING/PSALM XLVI : VER. 7 and the legend
GOD SAVE THE KING AND CRAFT AMEN 1776.

None of the royal lofts which once adorned such buildings as St Michael's, Linlithgow, or the High Kirk of Edinburgh now exists,¹ but there is still a number of the laird's lofts which were for long a characteristic and often highly decorative feature of the Scots parish kirk. They should not, of course, be regarded as an exclusively Scottish eccentricity, for they are paralleled by similar structures elsewhere, notably in Germany, while a particularly good Norwegian example is the royal loft in Vor Frelsers Kirke, Oslo, reconstructed during the renovation of 1948-50.

Some laird's lofts were little more than elevated pews like those at Cullen and Tongue, the former bearing on the carved panels of its pillars the date 1608,² and the latter having four Corinthianesque columns supporting a square tester with a carved entablature³ and dating from about the end of the 17th century. The more usual arrangement was to have the loft backed by one or more retiring rooms and approached by an independent entrance and forestairs, the family burial vault being on the ground-level below. This complex was sometimes situated at the east or the west end of the kirk, but most frequently it formed the north aisle of a T-plan building—a classic form of Scottish post-Reformation kirk.

Taken from the abandoned kirk of Pitsligo, the front of the 1634 Forbes loft is preserved in the present late 19th century building. Its profuse details of Netherlands type are characteristic of the period. Somewhat simpler is the 1661 Cavers loft at Bowden. It no longer fronts its aisle, which now houses an organ and singers' loft. At Kilbirnie we encounter a *tour de force* in laird's lofts. It was erected about 1705 by the 1st Viscount Garnock in front of the 1642 family aisle. In an elaborate setting of Renaissance details the arms and genealogy of the family are depicted by a wealth of armorial devices. Slightly earlier but more advanced in character is the Hopetoun loft at Abercorn, which with the adjoining retiring rooms finely panelled in Memel pine was designed by Sir William Bruce about 1700 (Pl. XIII, 1). Unfortunately, this example is in a greatly neglected condition.

At Golspie, a kirk unusually complete in its essential fittings, the Sutherland loft of 1739 has a fine enriched entablature, Corinthian columns and oak panelling (Pl. XIII, 2); but at Careston, a carved entablature and twisted Baroque columns of early 18th century type are the sole mementoes of

¹ See footnote 2 on p. 51.

² These panels are said to have come from old pews and been fixed to the Seafield loft in 1842.

³ This canopy and its columns, said to have been dangerous, were taken down in 1951 but have not yet been repaired.

another loft. At the east end of Cromarty Kirk is the Cromartie House loft, which is of 18th century date, with a panelled breast over a Roman Doric entablature and timber posts, and above, a segmental ceiling, freestanding columns and panelled side walls. The west loft of the kirk is a simplified edition of the east one, while the north or "poor's loft" is more rudimentary.

Other 18th century lofts occur at Kirkoswald (1777), Kirkmichael (1787) and Kilwinning (1775), all in Ayrshire; at the Lanarkshire kirks of Carmichael (1750), Carstairs (1794) and Carluke (1799); at Eckford (1724) in Roxburghshire and at Reay (1739) in Caithness, and Newbattle (1727), Midlothian. At the charming kirk of Alness, abandoned for some reason during the Second World War, the Novar loft in the north aisle has Adam type detail of great delicacy in white against background tints of red and blue. In the same county, the Munro of Fowlis loft at Kiltearn (1791) has a simple panelled breast continuous with those of the adjoining east and west lofts, and behind it two retiring rooms; the whole is approached by a double forestair and an elegant doorway with lugged architraves and a fanlight.

The Gothic Revival is represented by the Stirling of Keir loft at Lecropt (1826), a very fine period piece and one of the latest to have a burial vault below it, but at Craig (1799), near Montrose, a considerable decline in lairdly exclusiveness is manifested. The eastmost bays of the side galleries are enclosed as spacious box pews, each with an aumbry and fireplace in the east wall, the flues terminating in an unobtrusive chimney head on the gable.

PEWS AND SEATING.

In early Reformed times the floors of Scottish parish kirks remained as devoid of seating as they had been earlier. Up to at least the middle of the 17th century, such pews and desks as did appear were set up by private individuals or corporate bodies for their own use. Later it became the legal obligation of heritors and town councils to provide seating for two-thirds of the "examinable persons" of the parish—*i.e.* those of twelve years of age and over—as well as the usual communion tables, pulpit and reader's desk, elders' pew and manse pew. In addition there were sometimes a baptismal pew and a marriage pew, and nearly always, unpleasantly elevated, a "cutty stool" or place of public repentance. During the late 18th century, the choir movement which spread from the north-east meant the provision of seating for the singers or "band" as they were then known. This was sited either in a box pew or in a loft.

As with the items already considered, early pews are now meagrely represented by a few examples and by fragments long dissociated from their original setting. At Midcalder there is a pine pew-back dated 1595 having reeded panels, the arms of Sandilands of Torphichen and the legend THE

LORD IS MY SHEPHERD I SHALL NOT WANT. PSAL XXIII. I. I LEVE IN CHRIST (Pl. XII, 2). Part of a pew-back from the former kirk of Dipple is preserved at Speymouth. Its panels are effectively carved, and display among other things the arms of Hay and Innes and a text.¹ At Crail a considerable number of fragments exist, some now incorporated in wall linings. Bearing various dates between 1594 and 1605, they have panels of foliaceous and strapwork designs, reedings and armorial bearings. One of the finest, dated 1595, is a rendering of the arms of James Lumsden of Airdrie (d. 1598) (Pl. XIV, 3). Many pieces of woodwork of similar date lie detached and apparently uncatalogued and uncared for at Kirkwall Cathedral. They display the arms of local families, and of two pew-back fragments, one has panels of vigorously carved geometrical designs, and the other well-disposed foliaceous work reminiscent of, though cruder than, that of the later medieval period.

In the north aisle at Pencaitland there is some seating of early 17th century date, and at the East Kirk of St Nicholas, Aberdeen, there are many pieces of the same period. They incorporate designs of foliage and strapwork distinctive of the north-east, representations of virtues such as Fortitude and Prudence, and a wealth of heraldry and trade devices some of which bear traces of colour decoration (Pl. XIV, 4). They are detached from their original places, but some are tastefully set into the modern furnishings of the church. Aberdeen and the surrounding area were once considerably richer in such work than now; and here again a great wealth of information has been preserved in the meticulous coloured drawings of John Logan. An interesting feature of these valuable records are the details of canopied pews formerly extant at Udney, Newhills and Kintore. Reminiscent of the grand patrician pews of the Netherlands, such canopied seats were once common in Scottish kirks but are now represented by only four examples—those at Burntisland, Scone, Lyne and Kilbirnie. The first, dated 1606 and erected by Sir Robert Melville whose arms it bears, is now used by the magistrates, and like many Dutch examples it is set against two sides of a pier (Pl. XIV, 2). It has turned columns and balusters and inlays of exotic woods in the panels. The 1616 Stormont pew at Scone has profuse carved details of Netherlands type but has been much restored, and the Lyne example dated 1644 is a quite modest structure with turned columns and a flat canopy. The Ladylands pew at Kilbirnie is rather a hybrid piece, part oak and part pine—a synthesis of late 17th and early 18th century fragments.

An unusual piece of furniture is the 1627 canopied seat and desk of Bishop Forbes, which was erected with other furniture in King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, when it was used as a synod house. The panels have characteristic strapwork designs, and the canopy a coved soffit surmounted by carved cresting and finials.

¹ See complete description by John Geddie, *P.S.A.S.*, LXVIII (1933-4), 367-371.

During the 18th century it became usual to have the seating of a church based upon a more or less uniform design throughout. This normally comprised a number of box pews and the remainder of straight benches, the whole being provided with doors—a feature still normal in Scandinavia and, to a lesser extent, in the Netherlands. In addition to the gain in appearance, the doors were a sound expedient when heating of churches was either totally lacking or rudimentary at best. Because of the niggardliness of heritors such seating was often straitened in spacing, and much of it has since been replaced by more commodious benches. Where original seating survives, its appearance has often been marred by the removal of the doors. Good examples of box pews capped by light balustrades exist at Aberdeen in St Nicholas West, and at Burntisland, Echt and Maryculter, and other kirks having original seating fitted with doors, all of 19th century date, include Kirkealdy Old Kirk, Newburn, Crail, Spott, Ettrick and North Bute.

MISCELLANEOUS.

To conclude this brief sketch, mention should probably be made of some lesser items in church furnishing. It was customary to record on painted boards mortifications made for pious and charitable purposes. It is a pity that the destruction of such boards has deprived many kirks of much local history and pleasant decoration. Examples survive, however, at Brechin Cathedral, Canongate, Culross Abbey, St Nicholas in Aberdeen, Ayr and Elgin. Painted scripture texts on rather similar boards were also a feature of the post-Reformation kirk interior, but it is doubtful whether any existing specimens belong to the period under consideration.

The "cutty stool," or place of public repentance, has already been mentioned, but this has passed with the discipline which demanded it and few examples appear to have survived. In the National Museum there is a stool from Greyfriars, Edinburgh. It has a foot-rest and turned legs, and is probably of 18th century date. At the Town Kirk of St Andrews is another in the form of a rather rudimentary bench. Both doubtless stood on elevated platforms originally.

Until comparatively recent times, it was customary in most parishes to collect the alms of the people at the kirk door or at the kirkyard "yett," and the alms basins, often of fine Nuremburg ware, were generally set on stools of pleasant design. These had usually stretchers and turned legs. Examples are preserved in a number of parishes, including Anstruther Wester, St Andrews, Culross, Liff, Livingston, Pencaitland, and at Dalmeny, where there are three known to have been made in 1709 (Pl. X, 3 and 4).

As communion tended to be infrequently celebrated and became rather a momentous occasion attended by large numbers, the preaching often took

place in the kirkyard. Preachers used a temporary pulpit rather like an elevated sentry box, known as the "tent," in which they could have some measure of protection from the weather. The "tent" is a feature in Alexander Carse's well-known picture "Holy Fair," but apparently only one example is now extant. It is an unusually elegant one of 18th-century date, of pine painted white and having an enriched door with an opening like a window in it. It belongs to the Ayrshire parish of Kirkmichael.¹

Though much of our post-Reformation church furniture has been lost and continues to be destroyed, the above notes will serve to indicate at least how much we still have worthy of preservation and study, and perhaps even of emulation.

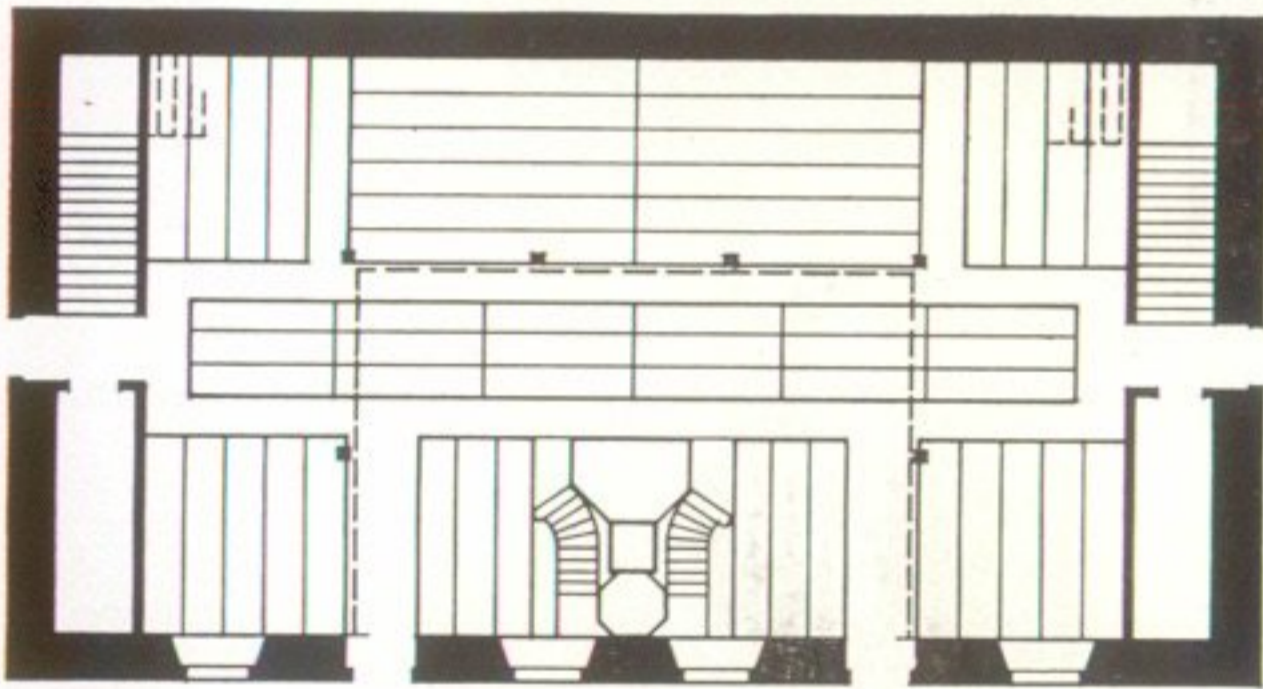
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The writer has to thank the following for kindly allowing him to make use of their photographs: the Rev. A. L. Drummond, B.D., Ph.D., for Pl. XI, 3; Mr Ian G. Lindsay, O.B.E., A.R.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.Scot., for Pls. XII, 2 and XIII, 2; and the Rev. Archibald Mackenzie, B.D., F.S.A.Scot., for Pl. XI, 1.

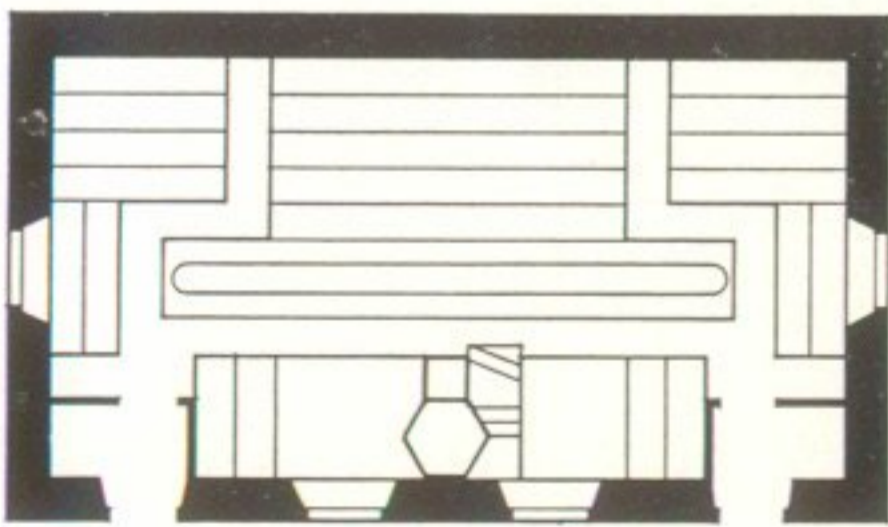
¹ Since writing the above, another example from the parish of Carnock, Fife, has been acquired by the National Museum.



1. Newburn, Fife (1815). Communion table pew. Note fillets forming slots for movable hassits.



LITTLE DUNKELD 1798



IONA c.1830



2. Plans showing the typical lay-out in two post-Reformation rural churches.

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3. Dalmeny, West Lothian. Offertory stool (1709).



1. Ayr. Pulpit (1655).



2. St Quivox, Ayrshire. 18th century pulpit.



3. Aberdeen, St Nicholas West (1755).
Pulpit (James Gibbs).

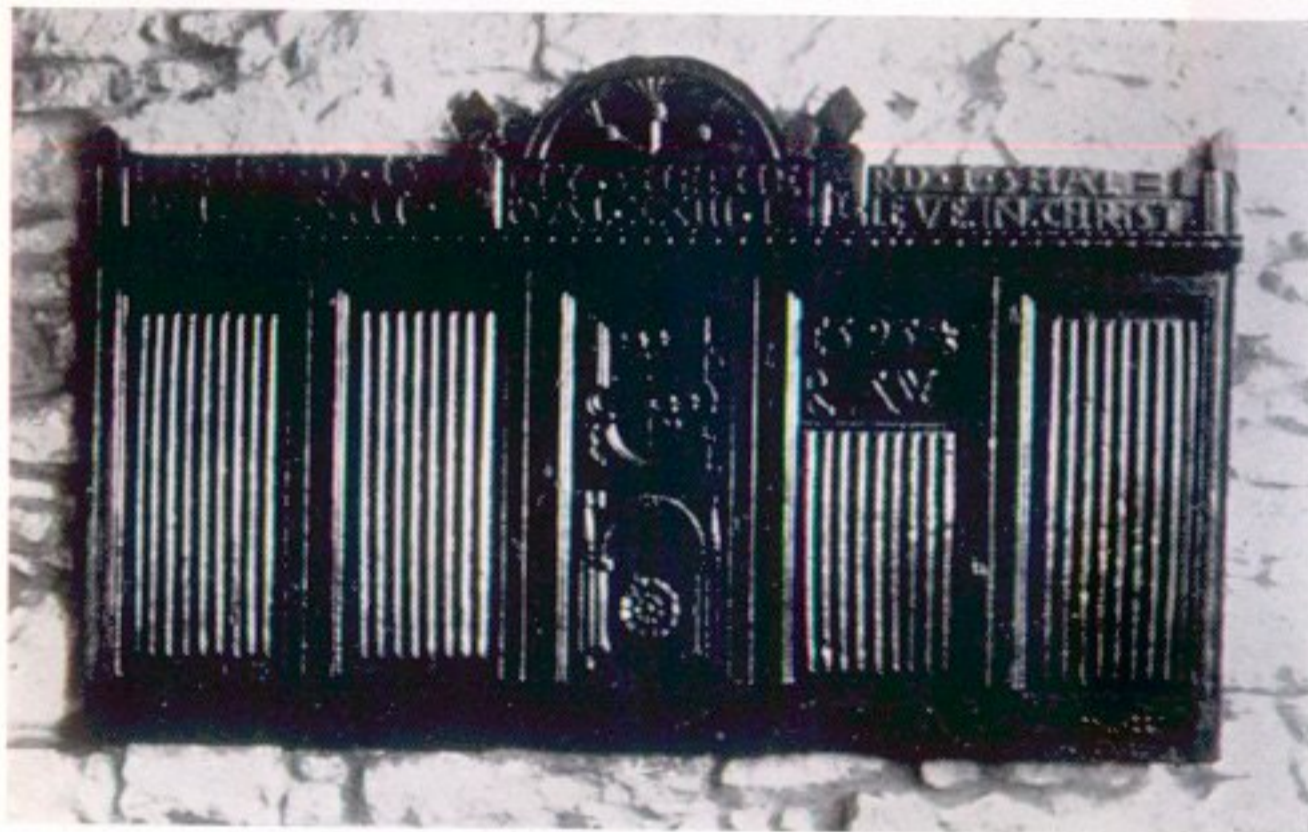


4. Culross, Fife. Detail of 17th century pulpit.

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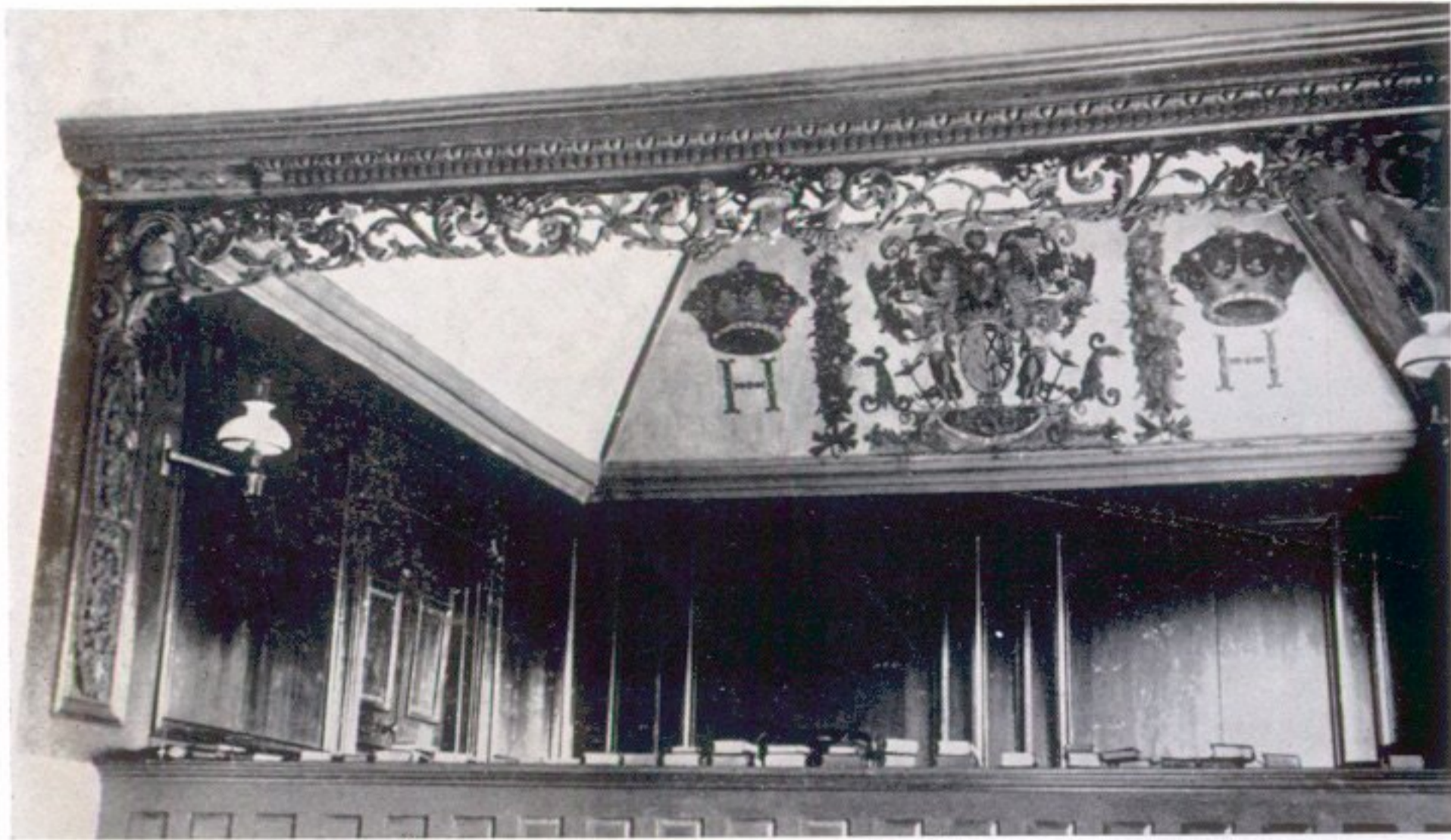
1. Burntisland, Fife. 17th century loft front.



2. Midcalder, Midlothian. Pew-back (1595).



3. Pencaitland, East Lothian. 17th century loft front.



1. Abercorn, West Lothian. Hopetoun loft (c. 1700), designed by Sir William Bruce.



2. Golspie, Sutherland. Earl's loft (1739).



1. Aberdeen, St Nicholas West (1755). Magistrates' loft (James Gibbs).



2. Burntisland, Fife. Magistrates' pew (1606).



3. Crail, Fife. Pew-back panel (1595).



4. Aberdeen, St Nicholas East. Pew-back panel (1627).

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