

5. MEDIEVAL POT UNDER CRAIL CHURCH TOWER

DURING 1962 and 1963 extensive restoration at the parish church of Crail, Fife, included the removal of galleries and the reopening of a high pointed arch between the nave and the interior of the tower. It is now evident that much of the church, including this arch, is of fine thirteenth-century masonry, and not early sixteenth-century imitation as suggested by Macgibbon and Ross (*Ecclesiastical Architecture*, III, 265-6): founded before 1177, the church was made collegiate in 1509.

When the interior of the 15 ft. square tower was being made level with that of the nave, the ground gave way in the NE. quarter owing to the breaking of a large empty pottery jar buried just below floor-level. When the pieces were later put together it was seen that before being sunk in the ground the jar had had its handle and neck removed, and must have thereafter been closed by an inverted broken-off base (from a smaller pot or jug) which was found among the pieces of the jar. The jar has a hard white fabric with biscuit-coloured slip and a pale yellow glaze over part of the shoulder. Under the glaze, opposite the site of the handle, are three linear patterns boldly painted in thick ferruginous slip to give a Bovril-coloured design – in the middle two vertical interlaced zig-zags and at either side a saltire with curved lines at the sides joining its outer ends like a Roman milliary cohort sign (Pl. XXVI). The base of the jar is of the characteristic 'sagging' variety, and is $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. across. The jar remains to a height of 22 in., with a maximum diameter of 14 in. The piece of base presumed used as lid also sags slightly but the angle between wall and base, where in some vessels the clay is pinched, has been squared off both above and below; diam. $6\frac{3}{4}$ in. The fabric is similar to the other and there is a trace of ferruginous slip and yellow glaze just above where the shoulder begins at a height of 8 in.

This find confirms the early date of the tower arch, and also raises the question whether a number of jars were buried there (or perhaps still are, for new paving was laid before it was realised that further exploration was desirable). A single jar might have been sunk as a container or keeping-place for something, but rows of empty pots have in other countries been found laid in church floors, as at Xanten in Germany (*Bonner Jahrbücher*, 1962, 201) and Nantes, France (*Bull. Soc. Arch. Nantes*, 1888, 60). More often pots or horse skulls have been built into the walls of churches (Sturlas, *Le Moyen Age* (1957)). It is supposed that they had or were thought to have some acoustic property. None seem to

have been recorded in towers. I am indebted to Mr J. G. Hurst, F.S.A., for these and other references.

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Pottery jar found under Crail Church tower