

The late medieval development of the High Kirk of St Giles, Edinburgh

by George Hay

INTRODUCTION

When on 16 August 1773 Dr Samuel Johnson visited St Giles accompanied by Boswell and Principal Robertson, he entered with the quip 'Come, let me see what was once a church'. He was probably unaware of the fact that despite its neglected state, its arbitrary subdivision and the loss of its SW chapel, the fabric of the historic medieval church of Edinburgh was then virtually intact – and remained so until 1829. How different and difficult are circumstances for the 20th-century pilgrim, for the modern St Giles is a perplexing structure incorporating numerous authentic medieval features along with almost as many of 19th-century devising, including a suave exterior of intractable sandstone ashlar (pl 17a). Considering the harsh 'restoration' treatment to which it was subjected, it is hardly surprising that its building development is difficult to apprehend visually. It is certainly not a subject a charitably disposed teacher of architectural history would willingly set for examination purposes. It is not our present aim to ponder the vogues and fashions imposed by latter-day architects and clerics upon the High Kirk of Edinburgh but rather to trace through and beyond what they did the form of the fully developed medieval church – its architectural character and as far as possible something of its liturgical arrangement and plinishings.

Despite gaps, the history of St Giles during the late medieval and subsequent periods is fairly well documented. Most of its extant charters have been published in Dr Laing's *Registrum Cartarum Ecclesie Sancti Egidii de Edinburgh* (Bannatyne Club 1859), there is a wealth of material in the Burgh Records and Dean of Guild accounts and innumerable fugitive references occur in sources like the Register of the Great Seal, the accounts of the trade incorporations and the protocol books of various notaries. There are also many indispensable reference works like the Edinburgh histories of Arnot (1788), Maitland (1753) and Wilson (1891), Dr Cameron Lees' *History of St Giles* (1889) and, of course, the Royal Commission's account (RCAMS 1951, no. 2, 25–34). Much of the 19th-century building work is reported in the contemporary columns of the popular press and in professional periodicals like *The Architect*, *The British Architect*, *The Builder*, *Building Chronicle* and *Building News*. Graphical records are available in prints and pictures mainly of 18th- and 19th-century date including the deft drawings of James Skene. The 1821 survey drawings of John Chalmers are deposited in the Public Record Office and William Burn's drawings of the work done in 1829–33 are in the custody of the National Monuments Record. Again, there is the internal architectural evidence of the building itself, but this has to be viewed with caution for some of the late 19th-century restoration work is invested with so authentic a character as to be positively misleading.

To appreciate the place and status of St Giles in the medieval church, it is necessary to remember that Scottish towns constituted single parishes which often comprehended extensive landward areas beyond the burgh boundaries. So, unlike English cities such as Bristol, London or York, where numerous churches served parishes of minute area, Scottish burghs had each a single parish church. By the mid-15th century many of these churches were large and imposing structures, their enlargement, rebuilding and adornment having been stimulated by improved economic conditions and the chantry benefactions of rich burghers, guilds and confraternities. As we shall see, the quaint asymmetrical bulk of St Giles was largely the result of such chantry expansions, combined with topographical circumstances and urban planning factors. After an unsuccessful petition of 1419, St Giles in 1466 attained collegiate status like several of its sister churches, certain of its perpetual chaplains being formally incorporated as canons and prebendaries of the college. It is thus in its status as a large medieval burgh church of collegiate rank that the architectural and ecclesiological interest of St Giles lies. Its elevation as a cathedral church during the two brief periods of 17th-century Caroline episcopacy was marked by nothing of architectural significance.

The earliest architectural evidences of St Giles are a single 12th-century cushion cap of Romanesque type, still extant, and John Armour's drawing of a former N doorway which was destroyed about 1798 but had clearly belonged to a Romanesque structure of some consequence. A service of consecration carried out in 1243 by David de Bernham, Bishop of St Andrews, could be taken to mark some early 13th-century enlargement or reconstruction of the Romanesque building. There are records of damage during an attack of Edward II in 1322 and of considerable devastation at the so-called 'burnt Candlemas' perpetrated in 1335 by Edward III. The earliest parts of the present fabric are generally regarded as belonging to a rebuilding carried out in the reign of David II (1329–71) subsequent to the above events and the architectural character of the earlier parts of the choir and of the crossing would seem to support this. Probably the most catastrophic of the English attacks upon Scotland was Richard II's invasion of 1385 during which Edinburgh was occupied for five days and town and kirk suffered extensive destruction. Bower, continuator of the *Scotichronicon*, wrote 'Ac nobilem villam de Edinburgh, cum Ecclesia Sancti Egidii ejusdem voraci flamma incineravit'. It is the reconstruction of St Giles following this event which may be said to initiate the full development and completion of the church – the subject of our present study. A contract of 1387 for the erection of five chapels on the S side of the nave ushered in a long period of almost continuous construction which ceased only on the eve of the Reformation. On the other hand there was a pause just before 1419 when the unsuccessful petition for collegiate status was made. By the time this status was achieved in 1466 with confirming acts of 1467 and 1470, the choir had been heightened and lengthened by a bay and the three-bay Preston aisle embarked upon but as we shall see that was not the end of construction.

During the years 1559–1560 the Town Council in anticipation of the coming religious revolution had the 'altar grayth' weighed and valued and dispersed for safe keeping among several dependable citizens. The Dean of Guild was likewise instructed to have the choir stalls removed to the nether tolbooth. A partial inventory of 'kirk geir' dated 27 June 1559 and headed 'Deliverance of the jowallis and vestiamentis afoir the coming of the congregatioun' gives some idea of the nature and extent of the valuables concerned. However, with the ascendancy of the Lords of the Congregation the valuables were recalled – recovered with some tardiness – and thereafter sold ostensibly at least for 'the reparatioun and decoring of the kirk'. The altars and fittings were then destroyed and the church was subdivided in crude utilitarian fashion into several places of worship, town offices and the like. The Dean of Guild accounts record various

works of repair and maintenance carried out by the burgh council in subsequent times. They include in 1561 the rebuilding of the W gable and in 1648 extensive repairs to the steeple under the direction of John Mylne. In 1758, though not fully documented, the two-bay SW chapel was removed to widen access to Parliament Close and in 1797 or 1798 the Romanesque N doorway was demolished. In 1817 the removal of the Luckenbooths on the N side of the church and of the Krames, those merchants' premises which clung to the exterior of the building, was the prelude to an extensive and most drastic restoration scheme which was carried out between 1829 and 1833 under the architectural direction of William Burn. The later scheme carried out between 1872 and 1883 under the auspices of William Chambers with William Hay, of Hay and Henderson, as architect restored the building to a single church and undid some of the enormities perpetrated by Burn. Between then and the end of the century some minor works were carried out and in 1910-11 the Thistle Chapel was added to the SE corner.

From this brief outline it will be seen that the salient dates for our study are 1387 which initiated the full medieval development, 1829-33 which brought about a complete transformation and 1872-83 which saw something of a partial recovery.

Looking at the St Giles of the late 20th century, we see an exterior which is largely the creation of William Burn between 1829 and 1833 and the interior remaining very much as it was left by William Hay when he completed the restoration of 1872-83 which was financed by Dr William Chambers. The building now consists of nave and choir both aisled and each of five bays, an asymmetrical transept with flanking chapels at both ends and a tower over the crossing, chapels of three bays S of both nave and choir, a two-bay chapel at the NW corner and the almost detached Thistle Chapel to the SE, as well as sundry rooms and vestries etc (fig 1). Original medieval stone vaults span the choir and choir aisles, the nave aisles, the crossing and part of the S transept, the Albany aisle, the Preston aisle and the Chepman aisle. All the other ceilings are of 19th-century date and of these only the N transept chapels are of stone.

SITE AND ENVIRONS

As has been indicated earlier the site of St Giles relative to the town plan dictated very largely the form of its late medieval development. The High Street, the principal thoroughfare of medieval Edinburgh, passed down the ridge of the crag-and-tail formation upon which the town was built, with the parish church immediately on its S side. The N declivities fell steeply towards the Nor' Loch while the easier slopes to the S between the High Street and the Cowgate were traversed by the early 15th-century *murus regius* running east and west. The area S of the church was partly occupied by the manse and garden of the vicar and partly by the parish kirkyard. After the foundation of the collegiate establishment the manse and garden of the Provost appear to have stood towards the E boundary of the kirkyard and the manses of prebendaries on the W side while in the lower yard from the early 16th century stood the chapel of the Holy Rood. On 14 January 1477/8 William Forbes, first provost of St Giles, granted a portion of his garden to enlarge the parish cemetery and this was followed by a further portion in July 1496 (Laing 1859, 122-4, 179-80). By the disposition of High Street, kirk and kirkyard and the configuration of the area is explained why most of the additions and extensions to the church took place on the S rather than the N side.

By the time of the Reformation the St Giles kirkyard had become quite congested and in August 1562 in response to the supplication of the Town Council, Mary, Queen of Scots granted the gardens of the former Franciscan Friary - 'to mak ane burial place' for the town. As seen in Gordon of Rothiemay's town view of 1647 the first extensive development over the then

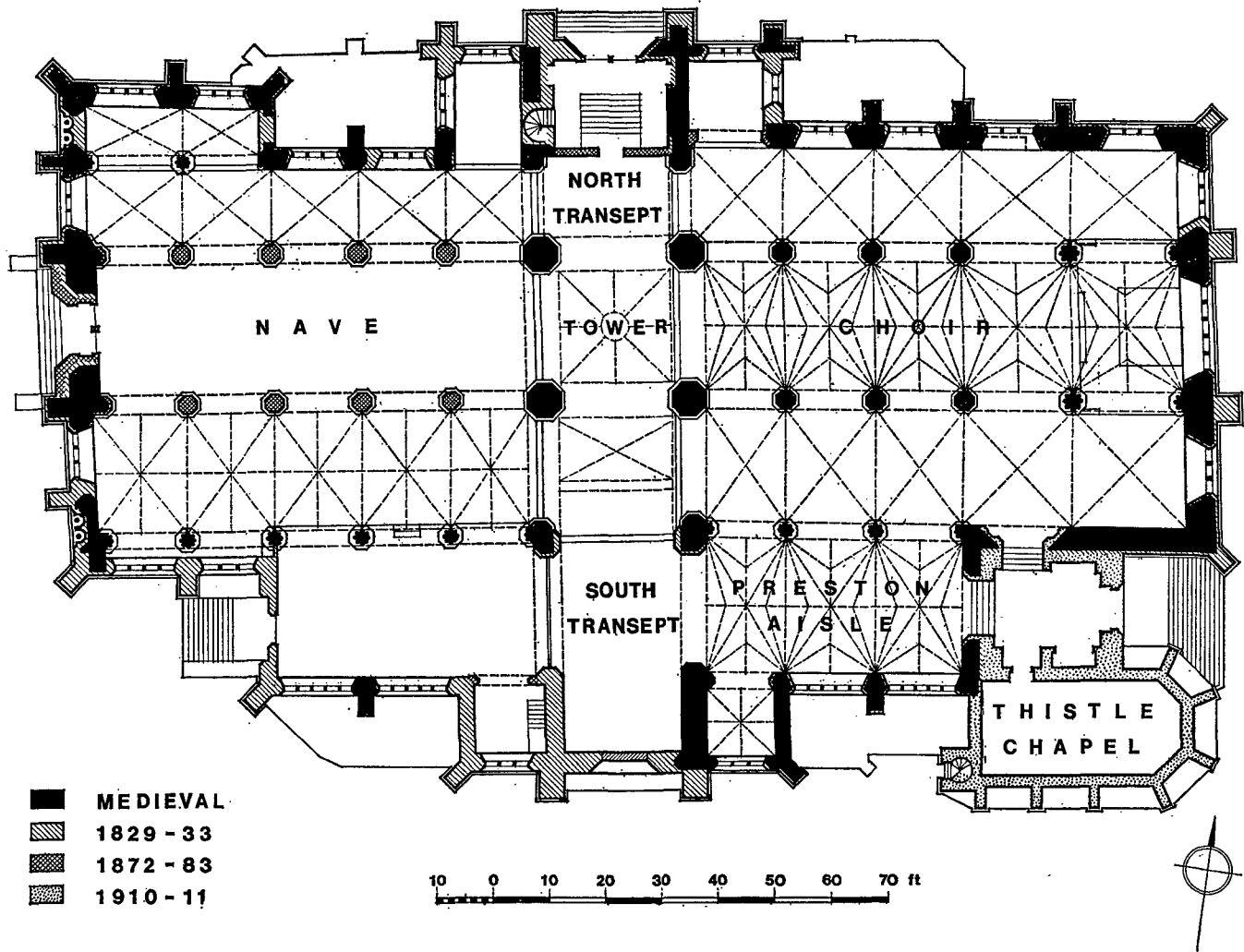


FIG 1 St Giles, Edinburgh: plan of existing church

disused kirkyard of St Giles was the building of the Parliament House between 1632 and 1641. The same view illustrates small houses down the E and W sides of the yard, the remains of the *murus regius* and the chapel of the Holy Rood and a massive enclosing wall along the N side of the Cowgate pierced by two arched gateways.

By the early 19th century the Parliament Close was enclosed by buildings. The Tolbooth stood NW of the church, while along the N side was the tall row of the Luckenbooths terminating in Creech's Land at the E end. Between 1807 and 1810 the W and S sides of Parliament Close had been rebuilt to the designs of Robert Reid and the Parliament House submerged within the genteel classical façades of the new law courts, while to the W a long wing accommodated the Advocates' and Signet libraries. In 1817 the Tolbooth and Luckenbooths were demolished, as were the Krames. The disastrous fire of 1824 which destroyed the S side of the High Street between Parliament Close and the Tron facilitated the redevelopment of the area E of Reid's scheme and this was accomplished about 1834, a year after the completion of Burn's work on St Giles.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ALTERATIONS

Though Burn's scheme of 1829-33 is referred to in all the records as a 'restoration', his drawings are more candidly entitled 'alterations'. The internal rearrangement of the building provided for a galleried church in the choir, another in the nave, and on the S side centred on the transept a T-plan church which would serve as General Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland which had previously met in the Preston Aisle. The crossing and N transept formed a vestibule to all three. On 20 May 1829 the Town Council considered the tenders for the scheme which were reported upon by Burn who says, 'in consequence of the Barons of Exchequer having ordered the east end of the church to be improved and made similar to the west end, and it having also been agreed on between your Lordship, the Barons, and the Lord Advocate, to make extensive alterations on the south west angle of the building, an additional expense to the extent of £1575 was incurred by these matters . . .'. He suggested in view of 'the very precarious and imperfect state of some portions of the upper part of the tower and spire' that, in addition to the tender cost of £12,355, a provisional sum not exceeding £200 be allowed for renewing 'several portions of it' and also that an allowance of £100 be made for enclosing the building from the street. On 24 June, the Town Council bound themselves to complete the whole works, the Treasury agreeing to make their grant 'to be applied to the embellishment and restoration of the exterior walls . . .', and so the job commenced.

Following the removal of the Krames the exterior, according to William Chambers 'had a very ragged appearance' contrasting greatly with the polished ashlar and ordered symmetry of the new law courts. With the connivance of his clients Burn proceeded with frantic energy and clothed the exterior with a veneer of polished ashlar akin to that of the law courts, at the same time imposing upon the structure a quite irrelevant symmetry which was achieved by arbitrary demolition and reconstruction and the sacrifice of every earlier feature save the tower. The result is that, apart from the tower and the old S doorway which was reconstituted as the Thistle Chapel entrance in 1910, there is now no external feature of earlier date than 1829.

The W bay of the Holy Blood aisle was demolished and the other recast to balance the Chepman aisle about a new and heightened S transept gable. The S porch and the two westmost of the Five Chapels of 1387 were likewise cast down and the remaining three retained to balance the three bays of the Preston aisle and together with them and the S transept devised as the General Assembly aisle. On the N side, St John's aisle and the stair turret were removed and the

revestry and St Nicholas aisle altered to give a superficial illusion of chapels flanking symmetrically an extended N transept, which was heightened like the S one by the addition of a clerestory. What remained of the N porch and the chapel E of it was also demolished and some 16 ft of height added to the nave to form a clerestory matching the reconstructed transepts and uniform in height with them and the choir. A central W doorway was again formed and the W end recast in a strained symmetrical manner about it, with little reference to plan or internal arrangements.

On 2 June 1830 Burn reported 'From the extremely delapidated state, more particularly the difficulty that will attend the repair, and bringing to similar colour, the stone mullions and tracery of the large east window on the end of the High Church, I am induced to recommend the complete renewal of that part of the work and have therefore obtained an estimate for this which amounts to £42'. He likewise stated 'For the same reasons it is impossible to make a satisfactory finish to the old oriel window which was situated in the old record room and was to have been placed above the west door of the Assembly aisle'. He therefore ordered it to be wholly reproduced in new stone. Both these courses of action were approved by the Town Council.

One of the most significant reports of Burn to the Town Council is dated 22 December 1830. It concerns the state of the nave piers. We have seen it was his intention, which was carried out, to raise the nave walls some 16 ft and form a clerestory, and he remarks 'As it does not appear to me that it would be prudent to increase the weight on these pillars in their present state, I have to request you will bring the matter before the Magistrates and Council, that proper measures may be adopted for remedying the evil complained of'. He refers to 'the low and inconvenient state of the arches which spring from them, and which must operate seriously against the comfort of the church' and recommends that 'eight of the pillars should be renewed and eight (sic) arches raised to the height of the groined arches of the aisles, and by the enclosed offer from Mr. Ramsay, he offers to complete each pillar, and to mould it similar to the one in the north west aisle (i.e. Albany aisle), for the sum of twenty pounds, and to raise and complete each arch for the sum of thirty eight pounds, both of which estimates appear to me exceedingly moderate'. The city superintendent of works, Thomas Brown, examined the piers and arches, recommended approval of the proposals and Burn was instructed accordingly. Thus is explained the heightened nave arcades, which were subsequently recast in their present form by William Hay in the 1880s, Burn's slender shafts being encased within the present octagonal ones. Significantly enough no mention is made of a nave vault, the removal of which is generally credited to Burn. Despite some uncertain and inconclusive indications in John Chalmers' plans of 1821 over the three W bays, there seems every likelihood that at this date at least no vault existed over the nave. The present lath and plaster one was Burn's work.

LATE MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT 1387-1560

William Burn's plans, done as working drawings for the 1829-33 operation, provide a basis for a reconstruction of the medieval church. On the other hand, we have the benefit of John Chalmers' 1821 survey drawings which are deposited in the Scottish Record Office. They are referred to by Laing as follows - 'Previous to the remodelling of the church, begun in 1829 and ended in 1833, careful plans and elevations had been executed by direction of the Barons of Exchequer. These plans, drawn by the late Mr John Chalmers, are deposited in the office of H.M. Board of Works, and by the kindness of Robert Matheson, Esq., accurate copies on a reduced scale have been made for the present volume, in order to preserve some record of the

original edifice' (Laing 1859, lxi). Chalmers' work consists of the plan and four elevations finely drawn in ink on cartridge sheets to a scale of something like 1/100. Unfortunately, there are no sections and the draughtmanship is so fine that photographic reproduction is not entirely satisfactory; 'accurate copies on a reduced scale' were therefore made for the Bannatyne Club volume. For these, some adjustments and additions were made to Chalmers' work. For example, features which were missing like respond shafts and the N doorway are shown restored and some parts of the roof vaulting, omitted by Chalmers, are drawn in, not always with full accuracy. However, they show the building in its pre-1829 state and also the full form and extent of the medieval church, apart from the two-bay SW chapel which was demolished in 1758.

From internal evidence and the contract terms of 1387, St Giles, at the time of Richard II's destruction in 1385, appears to have consisted of at least a five-bay nave with aisles, a four-bay choir with aisles, a transept, or 'croce kirk' as it was commonly called, extending at least as far as the aisles and a tower over the crossing. The character of the arches between the N transept and the aisles as well as the rather primitive vaulting of the three W bays of the choir aisles are suggestive of a 14th-century date. A fair amount of the structure must have survived the English attack, for in 1387 a contract was entered into by the Provost and Community of Edinburgh on the one part and John Prymros, John of Scone and John Skuyer, masons, on the other to build five vaulted chapels 'on the south syde of the paryce kirk of Edinburgh . . . voutyt on the maner and the masonry as the voute abouyn Sant Stevynys auter standand on the north syde of the parys auter of the Abbay of the Halyrudehous, the qwhylyk patronne they haf sene. Alsua that ylk men sal mak in ylk Chapel of the four a wyndow with thre lychtys in fourme masonnylyke, the qwhilk patrone thai haf sene, and the fyfte chapel woutyt with a durre als gude maner as the durre standand in the west gavyl of the forsaid kyrk . . .' (Laing 1859, ix-x). This contract, which is of interest in its own right as one of the earliest in the Scots vernacular, confirms that a nave of five bays, a tower and a W door were then extant. Its wording further suggests the intention to cover the new chapels by five gabled roofs, but in later times at least and as shown in Chalmers' drawings a pitched roof running E and W covered the chapels. Unfortunately, nothing of St Stephen's aisle vault at Holyrood survives, nor indeed much of the 1387 chapels at St Giles since Burn's work of 1829-33. All that remains is the elegant five-bay arcade, the wall ribs and springers of three of the stellar vaults and part of the S doorway, translated to the Thistle Chapel. The present plaster vaulting is the work of Burn but the corbels and short supporting respond shafts were inserted by William Hay during the operations of 1872-83.

At first sight the surviving work seems much too advanced in style for 1387 (pl 17b). On the other hand, the Albany aisle, which is not dissimilar, is dated by internal heraldic evidence between 1401 and 1410, and it is recorded that payments were still being made to John Prymros in 1399 and 1402 (Laing 1859, x). The piers have eight keeled shafts, moulded bases and foliated octagonal caps, one displaying a king playing a cithern, another an ape amid foliage and a third a shield charged with a flaming heart which is thought to allude to the Augustinians of Holyrood. The great width of the nave S aisle and its fine quadripartite vaulting is usually explained by the fact that the chapel arcade was probably built outside the earlier aisle which was then demolished and reconstructed wider and higher than formerly. By reason of this the S clerestory windows had to be built up and at the same time the nave arcade was heightened. The SW crossing pier illustrates the level of the springing of the pre-1387 arcade (pl 17c), that assumed after 1387 as well as that of the crossing arrived at about 1400. In the two eastmost bays of the nave S arcade it is clear that initially at least the arches were built at the present springing level but to a steeper profile than at present. This for some reason seems to have been abandoned. The S aisle vaulting

has moulded ribs and the bosses are mainly foliaceous but two bear the triple-towered castle of the burgh arms.

The next expansion appears to have been the two-bay chapel at the NW corner built in much the same idiom as the Five Chapels and known on heraldic grounds as the Albany aisle (pl 18a). Its foundation, erection and dedication do not appear to be documented but the cap of its central pier bears on its S face the arms of Robert, Duke of Albany, second son of Robert II and governor of the kingdom between 1388 and 1420. The shield on the N side displays those of Archibald, 4th Earl of Douglas and Duke of Touraine and as earlier mentioned this armorial evidence suggests a date between 1401 and 1410. The aisle masonry was much altered during the 19th century but it retains its original pier, arches and vaulting. Of the bosses, one is plain and bears in paint a modern charge, and the other is carved with the monogram of the Virgin Mary. The arched recess in the N wall is almost entirely a 19th-century reconstruction. The fine quadripartite vaulting of the N aisle dates probably from the period of the Albany aisle but unlike the S aisle this has retained its earlier width. The apex bosses are alternately circular and shield shaped, the westmost carved with an 'M', presumably for the Virgin Mary. A respond pier in the SW corner seems suggestive of an intended archway into what might have been a NW tower (it is otherwise unexplained).

East of the Albany aisle stood until 1798 the N porch with its fine Romanesque doorway, but whether this represented its original site we do not know. A turnpike stair, whose low pointed doorway survives built up, led to a room over the porch. Further E beyond the N door site a wall recess indicates the position of a holy water stoup, and there followed two chapels of now unknown date. The wester of the two was demolished by Burn and the other was drastically altered by him and then reconstructed in the 1880s. This popularly but wrongly called St Eloi's aisle was in fact St Nicholas' aisle, a dedication which dates from the reign of David II. A lancet window in the W wall of its undercroft indicates that this chapel antedated that to the W of it.

The transept extended no further than the width of the N aisles but beyond it was the narrower and lower St John's aisle whose existence is recorded in 1395 (Laing 1859, 32). Apart from its vault springers and the 15th-century type E window and flanking niches, discovered in 1889 by David McGibbon when converting the adjoining revestry into the Chambers aisle, all else of this chapel dates from the Burn reconstruction. The present enclosing stone screen was the work of William Hay in the 1880s, although at the W abutment of this some thin wall arcading of 15th-century date survives.

In contrast to that of the nave aisles, the vaulting of the three W bays of the choir aisles is of a primitive ungroined type with a suggestion of domical form not unlike the mid-15th-century brick vaults of Denmark. The fourth bay was doubtless similar before the E extension and reconstruction of the choir was commenced about 1453. This early vaulting is dated by RCAMS (1951, 27) as of the first half of the 15th century – a date which seems difficult to sustain alongside the more advanced work of the Five Chapels and Albany aisle, all reputedly completed by 1410. However that may be, the reconstruction of the choir involved its heightening and the addition of a clerestory and the fine stellar vault as well as the E extension by one bay (pl 18b). The new piers, responds and arches are not unlike those of the Five Chapels and the Albany aisle. The N pier cap bears the royal arms for James II, the impaled arms of James and his queen Mary of Gueldres, the kingdom of France and the differenced royal arms for Prince James the heir. The S pier displays the arms of Edinburgh, Halkerston (treasurer or master of works), James Kennedy, bishop of St Andrews and those of Preston of Gorton. The responds bear the arms of provosts of the burgh – on the N those of Cranstoun and on the S Napier of Merchistoun. The finely carved roof-bosses are mainly of leaf-work but there also occur the burgh arms, the

sacred monogram IHS and the inscription AVE M(A)R(I)A GRA(TIA) PL(EN)A D(OMI)N(U)S TECV(M). On the E face of the tower the earlier roof and vaulting profiles can be traced as well as the stepped string course and walling which was formerly visible outside above the choir roof.

Mention of the name of Preston of Gorton recalls another benefaction and another expansion of the church. On 11 January 1454/5, while the choir reconstruction was in hand, the burgh authorities entered into a bond to commemorate Sir William Preston of Gorton by building 'ane ile furth fra our Lady ile quhare the said Williame lys the said ile to be beginnyn within a yhere in the quhilk ile thare salbe made a brase for his lair in bosit werk and abone the brase a table of brase with a writt specifiand the bringing of that rillyk be him in Scotland with his armis. and his armis to be putt in hewyn werk in uther thre partis of the ile . . .' (Laing 1859, 106-7). The relic referred to was the enshrined arm-bone of its patron saint which Sir William had presented to the treasury of St Giles 'withoutyn ony condicion'. Though the work fell to be completed within seven years of the agreement, the presence of the arms of Patrick Hepburn, Lord Hailes, who was provost of Edinburgh in 1487, in one of the roof bosses, suggests that the construction took considerably longer than was intended. The foundation of the altar of the Visitation and of St Roche in it in 1502 also refers to it as the 'new aisle' of St Thomas (Laing 1859, 185). The aisle consists of three bays roofed with a stellar form vault like that of the choir (pl 18c) supported on short corbelled respond shafts and separated from the Lady aisle by an ornate arcade. In addition to the arms of Hepburn as mentioned, the caps and bosses bear the arms of Edinburgh and of Preston. Unlike the construction of the Five Chapels, the survival of the primitive vault over the Lady aisle indicates that this was neither widened nor reconstructed, its present generous width being justified from the beginning by the importance of its dedication.

In sequence the next expansion appears to have been the extension of the S transept to about double its former length. This was done about 1500, the addition being known as St Anthony's aisle. The extension continued the vaulting and roof profiles of the earlier work and it was cited as the pattern in the 1541/2 contract for the choir roof of Midcalder church, where it is specified that '... the said queir to be compleitlie pendit with croce brace and rin-ruif, conforme to Sanct Anthonis Yle in Sanct Gelis Kirk.' The N transept was formerly covered by a single bay of this type of vaulting like that which survives on the S side of the tower and which probably owes its preservation to fears for the structural stability of the tower during 1829-33 when the nave and transept wall heads were raised. The side walls of the S transept show clear evidence of a second bay of this vaulting. The surviving bay supports a quite functionless cross-wall of 19th-century date in which an apparently medieval window is built, and it terminates against a 19th-century cross arch on corbels, the upper parts of which are of the same date. The lower parts of the corbels are medieval features translated from their original positions. All this is confirmed by James Skene's attractive interior view of the Old Kirk (pl 19a) where two bays of vaulting are evident with the corbels in their original positions supporting a heavier cross arch or rib marking the S end of the transept ere it was extended as St Anthony's aisle.

Adjacent to St Anthony's aisle and entering from the W bay of the Preston aisle is the single-bay Chepman aisle built between 1507 and 1513 and dedicated to St John the Evangelist (Laing 1859, 203-7). It is covered by a pointed barrel vault with surface ribs, and the central roof boss is in the form of an angel bearing a shield charged with the arms of Walter Chepman, merchant and printer, impaled with those of his wife Mariota Kerketill. The W corbel from which the transverse rib springs is a visual confirmation of the chapel's dedication - the eagle of St John bearing a scroll inscribed with the first words of his gospel IN PRINCIPIO. The aisle was restored under the direction of Sir R Rowand Anderson in 1888, who designed the present monu-

ment to the Marquis of Montrose, the sculptors being J & W B Rhind and the glass within the tracery of the Burn window being the work of Ballantine of Edinburgh.

The now vanished 2-bay chapel at the SW corner of the church was of somewhat similar date to the Chepman aisle. It contained two altars, the eastern founded by Richard Lawson in 1509 and dedicated to All Saints and to St Thomas the Apostle and St Apollonia (Laing 1859, lxxiv–lxxix) and the other founded in 1513 by Sir Alexander Lauder of Blyth ‘in the New Chapel, near the south-west corner of the church, in honour of God, the Virgin Mary and Gabriel the Archangel’ (Laing 1859, 199–203).

On 10 December 1518 there was granted a petition from the merchants and guild brothers of the burgh to ‘ws the Ile now laityly biggit within our parochie kirk of Sanct Geill on the south side of the samyn, in the honour of the Haly Blude to be assignit and geven to thame . . .’. It was agreed ‘the Haly Blude to be thair patrone, and to haif the Octavis of Corpus Christi to be thair procurationn dais . . .’. The devotion of the Holy Blood was a late medieval cultus which spread through W Europe, and many Scottish town churches had their Holy Blood altars and their confraternities of the Holy Blood. In Edinburgh, Dundee, Perth and St Andrews at least the guild of merchants looked after this interest and organised the annual processions and other ceremonial, those of Bruges being taken as the model. The Holy Blood was in St Giles first attached to an altar on the N side of the choir, but this dedication was applied in 1518 to an altar in the 2-bay chapel built between the S porch and St Anthony’s aisle. James Skene illustrates the aisle (pl 19b), as it was before it was reduced to one bay by Burn in 1829–33, and shows the fine wall tomb which still survives moved into the E bay and generally regarded as that of William Sinclair, Earl of Orkney and after 1455 Earl of Caithness. The label stops and finials bear appropriately enough the Emblems of the Passion. The doorway in the picture is of post-Reformation date formed after the S door had been closed up. The Fetternear Banner, which Mgr David McRoberts (1956) has shown to be the Banner of the Holy Blood formerly belonging to that important confraternity in St Giles, is now in the custody of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

There remains to be mentioned the revestry on the N side of the church E of St John’s aisle, which after much reconstruction by Burn was transformed into the Chambers aisle in 1899 under the direction of David McGibbon. It is possible that in earlier times the rooms over the N and S porches were used as sacristies. Until its demolition in 1829 the latter appears to have been a sort of charter house or muniments room. As the church developed, neither of them nor even both together would be adequate. The first revestry here was probably a low structure rising no higher than the sill of the E window of St John’s aisle but by the 1550s it had clearly developed into the multi-storey tower-like structure normal to such large churches which did duty as sacristy and treasury. There are significant items in the Dean of Guild accounts for 1554–55 – ‘for hewing of thre thak stanis to the rufe aboun the revestrie dur’ . . . ‘for mending of the loke to the loft dure in the revestrie’ . . . ‘to ane masoun thre dayis and ane half to big up Sanct Johnis windois, and the dur cheikis of it’. At any rate the resultant structure, three or four floors high with a gable chimney and a stone-flagged roof, served as vestry, jewelhouse or treasury and perhaps charterhouse. In 1558–9 in presence of the Town Council, the various treasures were weighed in the ‘ravestre’, while in 1563 the Dean of Guild was instructed to adapt ‘the auld revestrie’ as Town Clerk’s chambers, ‘to caus repair the said revestrye bayth laych and heich in maist honest and sure maner’. In 1554–5 mention is made of a new inner door to the charterhouse which is clearly an upper chamber but whether as part of the revestry or the N or S porches is not clear. However, it was during the 1899 operations that the 15th-century window of St John’s aisle was discovered and its 16th-century filling removed. From

the latter the Romanesque cap was recovered which is now built into the walls of the St Nicholas aisle. At the same time two wall-head corbels were found *in situ* on the E face of St John's aisle, and were later built into the jambs of the archway formed by McGibbon into the Chambers aisle.

The elevations as drawn by Chalmers contrast greatly with the pedestrian character of the present-day church, probably the most remarkable feature being the soaring quality of the tower in contrast to the modest height of nave, aisles and transepts ere these were raised in 1829. This is most conspicuous in the N and S elevations. The crown steeple of St Giles which has dominated the old town ridge since about 1500, to which period its erection is ascribed, was one of a Scottish group of four, the others being those of Haddington, Linlithgow and King's College, Aberdeen. Of these three only the last survives. It was built about the first decade of the 16th century but was reconstructed in 1634 after destruction by storm the previous year.

The 1387 contract for the Five Chapels confirms the existence then of a crossing tower at St Giles, but we know nothing of its height and external form at that time. Its N, E and W faces within the church display traces of the early roof-raggles and above them the stepped string-courses which were visible externally before the raising of the roof levels. Like the Aberdeen example, the St Giles crown was found to be in need of extensive repair during the 17th century. There is a reference to 'the dangerous and ruinous estait of the stanewark of the Crowne of the great steiple' and Dean of Guild George Suttie in 1648 gave instruction 'with all convenient speed to goe about the said work, and to call into him Johne Mylne maister massoun and John Scott wright' who together had just finished the Tron Kirk. It was specified that there should be 'ane sufficient scaffold maid on the heid of the Kirk in sick faschione as the ruif of the Kirk be in no way burthened thairwith bot lye on the walls allenairlie and that the stones may be hewed on the said scaffold'.

The extent of this repair work is not detailed but its cost of 2,700 merks indicates a job of some magnitude. Accompanying a drawing of the tower by J Hutton, an article in *The Architect* of 16 September 1888 quotes - 'In 1648 the structure was found to be ruinous. At this time the main pinnacle or spirelet would seem to have been rebuilt and also the greater portion of the crocketed pinnacles and cusped cresting on the back of the vaulting ribs, the openings in the buttresses being filled with masonry.' My own site observations generally confirm that statement. I would further suggest that the buttresses, arches and stair turret are all original work of c 1500, that the crocketed pinnacles on the buttresses are accurate reproductions of the medieval originals, done under John Mylne's direction in 1648 and that the traceried parapet was similarly rebuilt at that time, again as reproduction work. The same is probably true of the cusped cresting of the flying buttresses. On the other hand, the central spirelet and the intermediate pinnacles on stylistic grounds and by reason of their sharpness of detail I would attribute almost wholly to John Mylne's design. During Burn's work of 1829-33 about half of the traceried parapet was renewed. The droved dressing of the 19th-century stones is unmistakable and whereas the 17th-century stones were held together on the back by a series of dovetailed lead cramps, these are wholly lacking in the 19th-century work.

The Burn work is confirmed by the Town Council records. In June 1831, following some expressions of disquiet regarding the structural state of the tower, Burn, Ramsay the builder, Thomas Brown, city superintendent of works, and two members of the Dean of Guild Court met to carry out an inspection and to consider 'a complete renewal of the Tower' estimated to cost more than £3,000 and a lesser scheme of repair costing 'little more than as many hundreds'. Following this, Burn laid before the Town Council a proposal that provisions be made 'to tie both the angular and intermediate buttresses by strong bars of iron, carried diagonally from

side to side, to be attached to iron straps carried completely round each buttress, and by casing the Tower with new stone these fixtures would be effectively secured against the weather . . .'. He further stated 'In doing this it will be necessary to prepare a new cornice, and in addition, I would recommend the renewal of the parapet and decorative rail . . .'. The proposal was referred back to the Dean of Guild Court members who had attended the inspection and, on their recommending approval, Burn was instructed to proceed. In the event, however, the tie bars were provided but no new stone casing, no new cornice and no new parapet. As already mentioned, some of the parapet stones were renewed but the remainder dating from Mylne's repair of 1648 were retained. All the buttresses save that attached to the stair turret were originally pierced by doorways which allowed of a clear walkway around the tower within the parapets. The existence of low walls within these walkways on the N and S sides suggests at least the intention to have a roofed caphouse over the central area under the crown. The buttress openings were built up during Mylne's operations, doubtless as a structural expedient, as had earlier been done in 1634 at King's College, Aberdeen, where it is known there was a pyramidal roof.

Chalmers' S elevation shows forth the rich varied character arising from the piecemeal development of the building. In their respective planes we have the choir, choir aisle, Preston and Chepman aisles and then, on the W side of St Anthony's aisle, the Holy Blood aisle with its flagged roof, the S porch and its upper room and oriel and behind it the two westmost of the Five Chapels. In places some of the window tracery survives. There are two dormers shown lighting the roof space towards the W end of the Five Chapels. Some of the roof voids above the vaulting appear to have been made use of for various purposes. Over the Preston aisle there was a doocot, the key of which was held by the sacristan, while for some time at least there was a bellringer's lodging within the nave roof. In 1554-5 the Consistory aisle was re-roofed and mention is made of slates 'coft to theik the hous aboune the Consistorie ile' but whether this referred to a formal dwelling or merely a chamber within the roof void is not clear.

Apart from the tower, the only surviving external feature from the S side of the church, albeit modified and divorced from its original setting, is the round-headed doorway which gave access to the central of the Five Chapels contracted for in 1387. During the Burn alterations of 1829-33 the doorway was removed and re-erected as an entrance to the S transept which formed the central area of the General Assembly aisle. Later in the works of 1872-83 it was moved to the E end of the Preston aisle, where it remained until 1910 when it suffered yet another translation and came to rest as the entrance of the Thistle Chapel. In general design and detail it resembles the W doorway of St Mary's, Haddington, and also conforms with the early 15th-century work at St Giles rather than that of a late 14th-century date. Its present unsatisfactory squat proportions are due to its having lost at least two courses of its rybats during its several translations.

The N elevation is no less varied and interesting than the S one. From left to right we have the choir and Consistory aisle, the additional mid-15th-century bay being clearly distinguished and against the westmost bay the tower-like structure of the revestry and treasury or jewelhouse. In front of the N transept gable there is the stair turret head which was finished in 1555-6 and the lower and narrower St John's aisle. The next three bays show in succession the nave roof, the wall and roof of the N aisle and the three gabled cross-roofs of the two chapels and N porch, while in unselfconscious utilitarian manner a long lean-to covers two bays of the N aisle and the Albany aisle. Again the tower soaring above unifies the whole group. As can be seen some of the tracery work in the windows survives but in other cases it has gone and slappings of late date and sundry alterations have been carried out. There is in 1556 mention of a round window above the Consistory aisle but now no sign of it here. By this date too the N doorway and Our Lady's Steps which were in the east-most bay of the Consistory aisle have gone.

The unbuttressed treatment of the E end of the choir was quite unlike anything else in Scottish medieval work. On a first encounter one might almost expect it to be an early essay in revival Gothick. The main E window was repaired by John Mylne but one assumes the tracery to be basically 15th-century work. Near the NE corner and doggedly unrelated to its architectural setting was Our Lady's niche which contained a statue of the Virgin Mary.

In the elevation the almost equal gables of nave, S aisle and Five Chapels were suggestive of a Germanic *hallenkirche* while in artless manner on the N side a single lean-to spans the W bays of the N aisle and the Albany aisle. The absence of a W doorway since the rebuilding of the W gable in 1561 will be noted, also the somewhat ragged appearance of the SW corner following the demolition of the SW chapel in 1758. The simple vernacular character of this façade differed greatly from the studied architect's Gothic imposed by Burn and the highly-mannered if scholarly doorway added by William Hay in 1883.

LAYOUT, FITTINGS AND FURNISHINGS

There is still an unfortunate tendency to study a medieval church *in vacuo* either as an artefact or as an essay in structural mechanics without reference to its liturgical functions or to the disposition and nature of its equipment and fittings. The larger medieval church like St Giles was less a place of congregational worship – although it was that – than an aggregation of diverse liturgical centres and elements, separated from one another by a system of screens and partitions, a veritable 'house of many mansions'. At the time of the unsuccessful supplication for collegiate status in 1419, there were thirteen 'perpetual chaplains' serving various altars ready to be reconstituted as prebendaries. By the Reformation there was a collegiate establishment of a provost with a curate deputy, fourteen prebendaries, a sacristan with a secular clerk, a minister of the choir with a lay beadle and four singing boys. There were also numerous chaplains serving at various of the more than forty altars.

As far as the altars are concerned many were prebends of the establishment. From the charters of foundation and mortification we know most of the dedications, the exact sites of some and the approximate positions of others. The whole matter, however, is confused and complicated by the fact that in many cases chaplainries of new dedication came to be attached to earlier altars. We find, for example, a chaplainry of St Peter at St Andrew's altar (Laing 1859, 125), of St Columba at the altar of SS Martin and Thomas (Laing 1859, 121-2), while what became the goldsmiths' altar attracted no less than five dedications. Many which were founded by individual donors were later assigned to trade or craft guilds or other confraternities. On the other hand, some of the altars held by such bodies are recorded as 'foundit and uphalden be thame'. Such were the altars of St Christopher of the skinnners, tanners and furriers, SS Mark, Philip and James (walkers, shearers and bonnet-makers), St Severiane (websters) and St Hubert (fleshers). Those assigned to various confraternities under their respective seals of cause were St Anne (tailors), St Anthony (taverners and vintners), SS Crispin and Crispinian (cordiners), St Cuthbert (baxters), St Eloi (hammermen), SS John B and E (masons, wrights and coopers), Our Lady of Loreto (goldsmiths), Our Lady of Pity (candlemakers), St Mungo (barbers and surgeons) and the Holy Blood (merchants and guild brothers). These confraternities were finally dispersed by an act of the Town Council of 25 April 1561 'discharging the confrarie of Sanct Anthonis, the Hally Blude, and all uther confrareis quhatsumevir.' Finality in determining the various altar sites and other liturgical centres is difficult to achieve but from the information available a provisional plan of at least reasonable plausibility can be constructed (fig 2).

The main focus of the plan was the enclosed choir containing the stalls and the high altar,

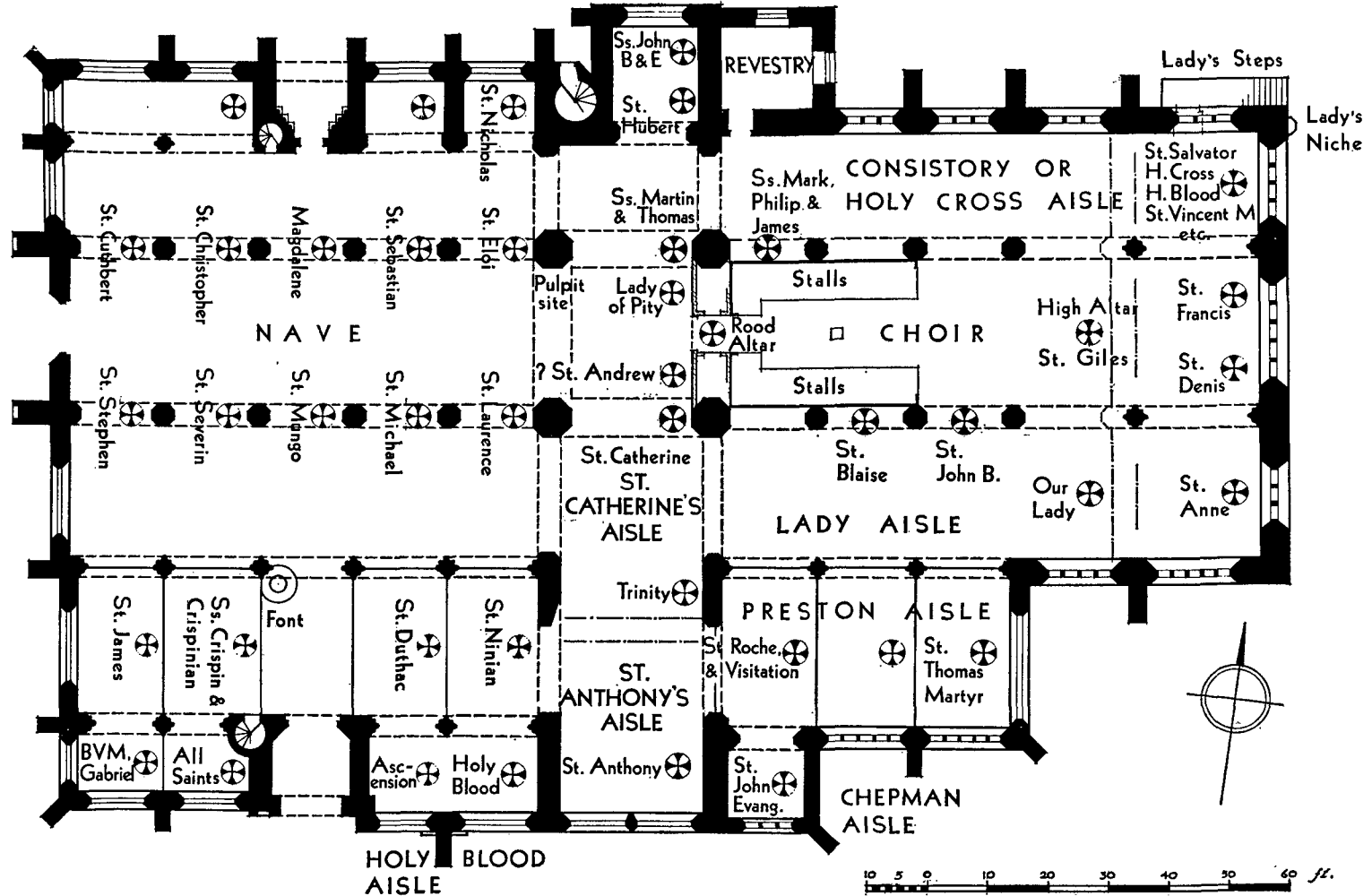


FIG 2 St Giles, Edinburgh: plan showing pre-Reformation liturgical arrangements

which stood on or near the site it occupied before the E extension of the church. The stalls would be sufficient in number to accommodate not only the canons but also something like an equal number of chaplains whose appointments required them to attend the choir offices and the prescribed daily masses there. In the usual manner, a solid screen enclosed the W end of the choir and provided a base for the rood loft which bore the rood altar and the rood itself, a large carved and painted representation of the Crucifixion flanked normally by the attendant figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. The St Giles accounts contain payments made for tuning and playing an organ which stood on an organ loft. As at King's College, Aberdeen, the latter was probably one with the rood loft and the organ itself a modest instrument by modern standards within a painted case like the Aberdeen one.

Nothing of screen or stalls survives but it is minuted in the burgh records of 3 November 1552 'haiffand respect to the grete expens maid upon the bigging of the north syde of thair stallis of the queir' the Town Council commissioned Andro Mansioun, wright, to make up the S range. It is thought that the costly N range may have been imported, perhaps from the Low Countries or North Germany. Having satisfactorily completed his task, Mansioun was awarded an annual pension of ten merks to be paid for a period of ten years. The Dean of Guild accounts of 1553-4 contain a payment of XXVIIJs made to Walter Binning, painter, for decorating the stalls. However, in 1559 on the eve of the Reformation the stalls were removed to the nether tolbooth as a safety measure after which they pass beyond our ken. One is puzzled by their late date and it is tempting to attribute this to traditional municipal tardiness. It is probable, however, that the increasing number of chaplainries founded about this time necessitated greater stall-accommodation and some reconstituting of choir arrangements. We know nothing of the design of these stalls but those of King's College, Aberdeen, which date from the early years of the 16th century, give at least some notion of the general form.

It was usual to have in the middle of the choir a lectern around which the singing boys grouped themselves, and the Dean of Guild accounts of 1553-4 contain a sum 'for half ane eistland burd for making of ane lettrown to the queir'. The accounts of 1555-6 contain an item, 'for skowring of the brass laterne aganes Yuill, XIJd'. It is possible that this lectern stood in the nave and may have resembled the Holyrood Abbey example which was looted by English troops in 1544 and is now in St Stephen's Church, St Albans. The pulpit stood, as did St Eloi's altar, against the NW crossing pier, probably against the S face, but of its design we know nothing (Smith 1906, xxii). The site of the font is mentioned in the Dean of Guild accounts for 1554-5 which refer to the 'south kirk dur quhair the bairnis ar baptist', and the same accounts contain a sum 'for the making of ane geirth to the funt and making of ane prike of irne with thre flours to beir candillis about the funt'. From such accounts many details of the church furnishings can be derived. In 1553-4, for example, we find John Banks, smith, paid xijs 'for twa quhit plait lokks, with thair bands, ryngs, roisses, and quhit nellis to the buke almores of the queir' which were probably incorporated in the backs of the stalls. There is mention also of 'irne boltis to the stallis', the mending 'of the loke to Sanct Thomas ile', and 'ane bar loke with thre keyis to the south dure of the queir, and mending of the lok of the organe loft', all of which confirm the existence of enclosing screens to the Preston aisle and the choir.

When we come to the altars and their forms we can safely assume that the medieval ecclesiastics and town council were as fashion-prone as their present-day counterparts and that new altars would conform to the latest ideas. The high altar was dedicated to St Giles. We know little of its design but a Latin poem written by James Foulis in 1509-10 recalling events in 1498 records that about Easter of that year while a plague was raging in parts of Scotland a fire in the choir of St Giles destroyed the reredos or retable of the high altar.¹ According to the poem

this *tabella* or retable was adorned with carvings or pictures of such sacred subjects as the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity and events from the Life of Christ. The official records make no reference to the fire nor to the remedial works which must have ensued.

On the nave side of the choir screen there were two altars flanking the central doorway. The N one was that of Our Lady of Pity (to which was attached St Paul), the site being confirmed by the reference *ex parte boreali ostei chori* (Laing 1859, 146, 238). The dedication of the S one is in doubt. It may have been either to the Name of Jesus or to St Andrew (to which was attached St Peter). The altars of St Francis (with St Patrick attached) and St Denis (or Dionysius) are referred to respectively in 1477 and 1488 as being behind the high altar (Laing 1859, 132, 152), and a further note in 1555 mentions that the then dilapidated E window was about to fall on the St Denis altar. The choir N aisle, known as the Consistory aisle and also the Holy Cross or Black Rood aisle, contained at least three altars. That at the E end sustained the dedications of Holy Cross of Lucca, St Salvator, St Vincent Martyr, Our Lady of Loreto and also the Holy Blood, which is referred to as *prope ostium boreali* (Laing 1859, 91²) and also as being at the altar of Our Lady of Loreto. This altar was a prebend. In 1525–6 its upkeep was assigned to the goldsmiths. Their minute book refers to an enclosing timber screen and to brass pillars (or riddel posts), an image of Our Lady of Loreto (their patroness) and a frontal of arras, all of which were imported from Flanders. At the W end of the aisle a chaplainry of St Columba was founded at the altar of SS Martin and Thomas which is referred to as *in insula Sanct Crucis ad columpnam occidentalem* (Laing 1859, 121–2). Somewhere near by was the altar of SS Mark, Philip and James, belonging to the walkers, shearers and bonnet-makers and founded by them about 1500. The choir S aisle, or Lady aisle, contained the Lady altar situated S of the high altar, St Anne's altar at the E end which was assigned to the tailors and further W that of St John the Baptist which in 1350 is referred to as 'in the choir of St. Mary the Virgin' (Laing 1859, 4). Near by was the altar of St Blaise to which was attached the Name of Jesus and also St Augustine. It is clearly referred to in 1486 as *ex parte australi chori* (Laing 1859, 266) although its second dedication seems to be more commonly attached to an altar on the W face of the screen. St Andrew's altar (to which was attached St Peter) is referred to as being on the S side of the church and as earlier mentioned could have been here. The altars in the E bays of the choir and its aisles would stand against the E gable, but those within the intermediate bays of the aisles must have been set either against the back screens of the stalls or against short screens at right angles to these.

The Preston aisle's main altar was that of St Thomas the Martyr and in the same aisle the altar of the Visitation and St Roche was founded in 1502 in what was then termed the 'new aisle of St. Thomas'. There are two points of interest here. First this reference seems to confirm a belated completion of the Preston aisle far beyond the six or seven years envisaged in the Town Council bond of 1554–5. Secondly, the Visitation was one of the subjects destroyed with the high altar retable during the plague of 1498, while it is apposite to recall that St Roche was regarded as the protector against plague and pestilence. St Triduana was added as a later dedication. In 1556 there was initiated a refurbishing of the Lady aisle. It was decided to 'reperall our Lady altar and mak ane ile thairof', by which is presumably meant an enclosed chapel, and gifts including brass pillars, or riddel posts, were invited. It is possible that as part of this project the altar of St John the Baptist and the tomb of Sir William Preston were moved into the Preston aisle.

The Chepman aisle dedication is clearly given as St John the Evangelist (Laing 1859, 203–7), and this is visually confirmed by the eagle of St John and the first words of his gospel *IN PRINCIPIO* carved on one of the vault corbels.

The S end of the transept, or St Anthony's aisle, contained the altar of that dedication

which was maintained by a confraternity of taverners and vintners and by import duties levied on wines at the port of Leith. The altar of St Catherine (c 1358) is said to have been in the S part of the church with the Trinity altar (1439) by it in St Catherine's aisle (Laing 1859, 165). This was probably the inner part of the S transept. Beyond the N transept projected the lower and narrower St John's aisle containing the altar of SS John, Baptist and Evangelist (fd 1395) which was assigned in 1475 to the masons and wrights. It stood behind the altar of St Hubert (fd 1456) which belonged to the fleshers. The sites are confirmed by a charter reference – *ad altare Sanctorum Johannis baptiste et evangeliste situatem in ecclesia collegiate Beati Egidii predictae burgi ex parte boreali et immediate post altare Sancti Coberti versus boream eiusdem ecclesie* (Laing 1859, lxxii). The Dean of Guild accounts of 1553-4 further refer to 'ane greit windo on the north side of the croce kirk, about the heid of Sanct Johne's ile'.

The chapel W of St John's aisle is fairly well authenticated as that of St Nicholas, whose altar was founded by Roger Hog, as are also the sites of the altars of St Eloi (1477), St Sebastian (1419?), and Magdalene (1468) (Smith 1906, xxv). St Eloi was in 1496 assigned to the hammermen whose records make mention of the adjacent pulpit. Further W near the N porch was the probable site of St Christopher's altar, where it is usual to find the picture or image of that saint. St Cuthbert is shown further W though this is rather less certain.

As far as the S side of the nave is concerned we have a number of guide references. St Laurence's altar is described as *ex parte australi prope medium* (Laing 1859, 104), while St Ninian's is said to be nearby on the S side of the church. The Dean of Guild accounts of 1553-4 refer to pointing done 'in the myde ile betwix Sanct Katherine's and Sanct Stevin's ile' which places the latter at the W end, and also 'from Sanct Ninianis to Sanct James ile' which would indicate the E and W of the Five Chapels. It is also known that St James altar site was at the W end within what later came to be the Tolbooth church. The sites of other dedications in the nave and the Five Chapels are merely reasonable conjectures having due regard to their foundation dates. The charters confirm in the Holy Blood aisle the sites of the new altar of that dedication (fd 1513) and also that of the Ascension (fd 1529) to which was attached St Erasmus the patron of sufferers from seasickness and intestinal troubles. We have similar confirmation for the two altars in the SW chapel. The E one founded by Richard Lawson in 1509 to All Saints also duplicates St Thomas the Apostle and attaches Apollonia, the patroness of toothache sufferers. The other founded by Sir Alexander Lauder of Blyth about the same time was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel which recalls the Annunciation panel in the destroyed high altar retable, and attached was the secondary dedication of St Jerome.

Having considered the liturgical arrangements of the church let us turn to its decoration and plenishings. The pervading greyness, which now characterises medieval churches like St Giles, is of modern origin and quite at variance with the original colourfulness of structure and fittings. It was normal to find walls, piers and vaults lime-washed white with details picked out in bright colours and the plainer surfaces used as fields for decorative and didactic subjects and a wealth of symbolism. The town church of Stege in the Danish island of Møn, though of brick construction and of simpler detailing than St Giles, nevertheless gives a fair idea of late medieval interior decoration. Tombs and monuments were also highly decorated, their armorial bearings correctly tintured and their effigies as lifelike as art could make them. The tomb recess found in the 1880s in the Consistory aisle is recorded as having had mouldings of 15th-century type and fresco decoration on a plaster ground (*The Scotsman*, 22 May 1883). We also have the recorded intention to mark Sir William Preston's grave by a brass with repoussé work and also an epitaph plate of the same material. In recent times, the post-Reformation brass in the Regent Moray monument at St Giles was found to be part of a late 15th-century one commemorating

a man and wife, reused on the reverse face by some frugal-minded authority (RCAMS 1951, 34).

The altars and their retables would vary according to date and current ecclesiastical fashion. According to the poem by James Foulis, already mentioned, the high altar at that time seems to have had a great retable or reredos carved with subjects such as the Virgin and Child and the various events of the Gospel story to the Crucifixion, coloured and gilded in the usual manner. There is also the suggestion of a tester or celure above it which caught alight, and the fact that the reserved sacrament was also destroyed by fire seems to indicate that this was probably in a hanging pyx suspended from the tester.

The well-known picture of the Mass of St Giles (c 1495), painted on a wing from a French altarpiece, illustrates a properly vested altar with a flat *tabella* or retable, which could be of any size and of wood, stone or alabaster, always brightly coloured (pl 20). There are riddel posts and curtains, the tops of the posts rising above the retable and the curtains suspended in the usual manner from iron rods. The front posts are omitted from the view and there is a shrine and reliquary rising behind the altar. Several references in the St Giles records to brass pillars almost certainly indicate altar riddel-posts. Some altars might have had riddel curtains alone without a flat retable or alternatively a flat retable without riddels, a type which became more common in Renaissance times. A type of altarpiece known as a *tabernaculum*, which was frequently imported into Scotland from the Low Countries and the Baltic, consisted of a carved centrepiece and one or more pairs of hinged wings having carved or painted subjects. A typical 15th-century example is that dedicated to St Andrew at Keldby in Denmark, probably a product of one of the workshops of Hamburg or Lübeck.

Associated with many of the altars were images of the saints to which they were dedicated. The St Giles records make reference to images of the Trinity, Our Lady of Loreto, St Francis, St Lucy and St Giles, and there were doubtless others (Lees 1889, 101–3). The figure of Our Lady of Loreto which was imported from Flanders in the early 16th century was probably like the example now in the Sacred Heart Church in Edinburgh. Reputed to have belonged to Holyrood Abbey and for long in the possession of the Earls of Aberdeen, this was sold in 1860 to an antique dealer in Peterborough. It was purchased five years later by Mr Edmund Waterton, author of *Pietas Mariana Britannica*, who presented it to the Church of the Sacred Heart. It is probably of 15th-century date and of Low Country origin. Such images were brightly coloured and life-like. There are references to the repainting of St Giles and to the repair of his cloak or coat, indicating that rich apparel and vestments were also a characteristic feature. The image of St Giles was destroyed during the Reformation riots.

We earlier referred to the brass lectern of St Giles and to that of Holyrood Abbey which it possibly resembled. The latter which was looted by English troops in 1544 is now in St Stephen's Church, St Albans. A brass font was also taken with the lectern from Holyrood but it was destroyed in Cromwellian Commonwealth times. Both were probably of Low Country origin. Whether the St Giles font was of brass or stone does not seem to be recorded, but a very good stone example of 16th-century date is preserved at Inverkeithing.

As earlier mentioned, the choir stalls probably resembled those at King's College, Aberdeen, the only reasonably complete set of medieval date in Scotland. A few good examples of slightly earlier date are preserved at Dunblane Cathedral, and there are two from Lincluden in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. Although most of the screen structure survives at Aberdeen, the altars and rood do not. A modern example at Greyfriars, Elgin, gives a fair idea of the general arrangement. It is the work of John Kinross whose restoration dates from 1896.

The medieval confraternities had not only their altars and images of their patron saints

but also held among their 'kirk geir' a distinctive banner which was carried on such festival occasions as the Corpus Christi processions. Considering how much has been lost it is fortunate that there is preserved in the National Museum the Fetternear banner which has been identified by Mgr David McRoberts as that of the Holy Blood belonging to St Giles (1956). The guild of Hammermen likewise possessed a banner of the Holy Ghost, popularly known by reason of its main colour as the Blue Blanket.

The partial inventory of jewels and vestments earlier mentioned as well as other references indicate that the Kirk of St Giles was fittingly equipped with 'altar grayth', stands of vestments and all other necessaries. Probably the most venerated object held in the treasury would be the enshrined arm-bone of its patron saint which was presented by Sir William Preston. Such arm reliquaries followed a fairly standard pattern and a typical example roughly contemporary with the St Giles one is that made for the cathedral church of Fiesole in Italy about 1430.

Despite many gaps in our knowledge and deficiencies in this brief study of St Giles, the information assembled should serve to give a reasonable picture of a typical Scottish town kirk of collegiate rank and one which was the object of public pride and piety to the citizens of medieval Edinburgh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTE

- 1 Jacobi Follisii Edinburgensis: *Calamitose pestis. Elegia deploratio . . .*, apud G. de Gourmont (Paris, 1510?). I am indebted to Dr John Durkan for drawing my attention to this interesting reference.
- 2 This refers to the choir door, not that of the nave.

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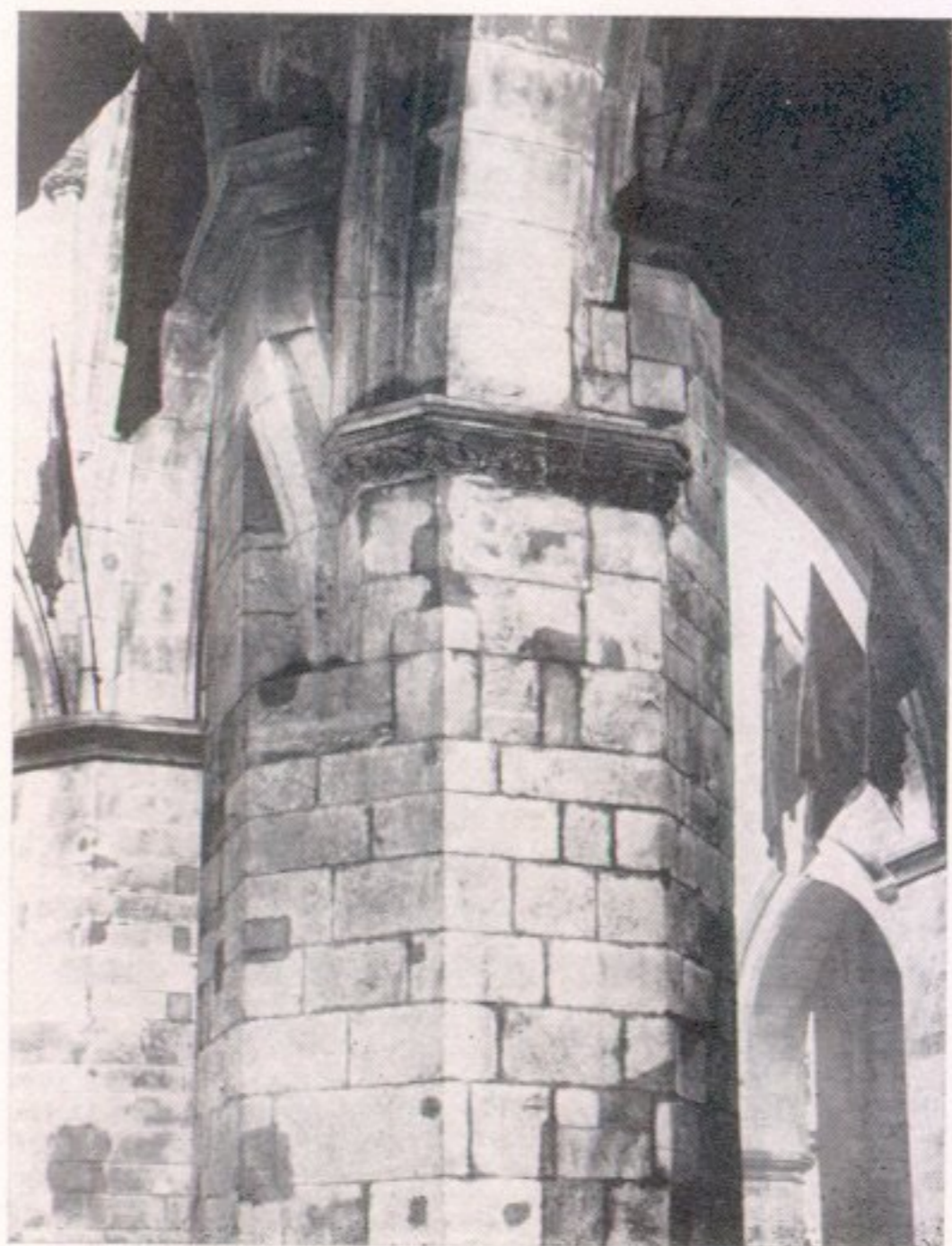
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a Exterior from the NW



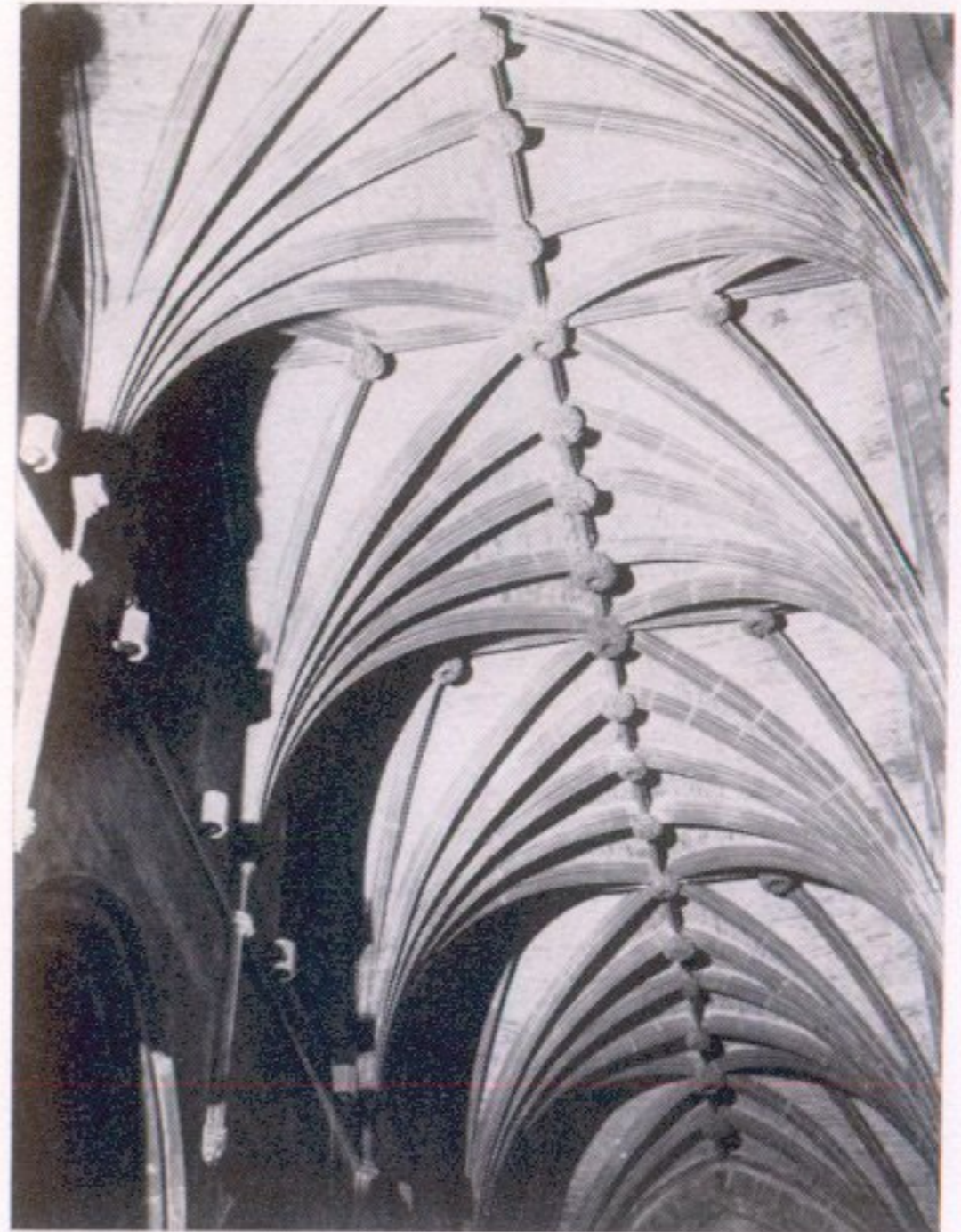
b Nave S aisle and arcade of the Five Chapels



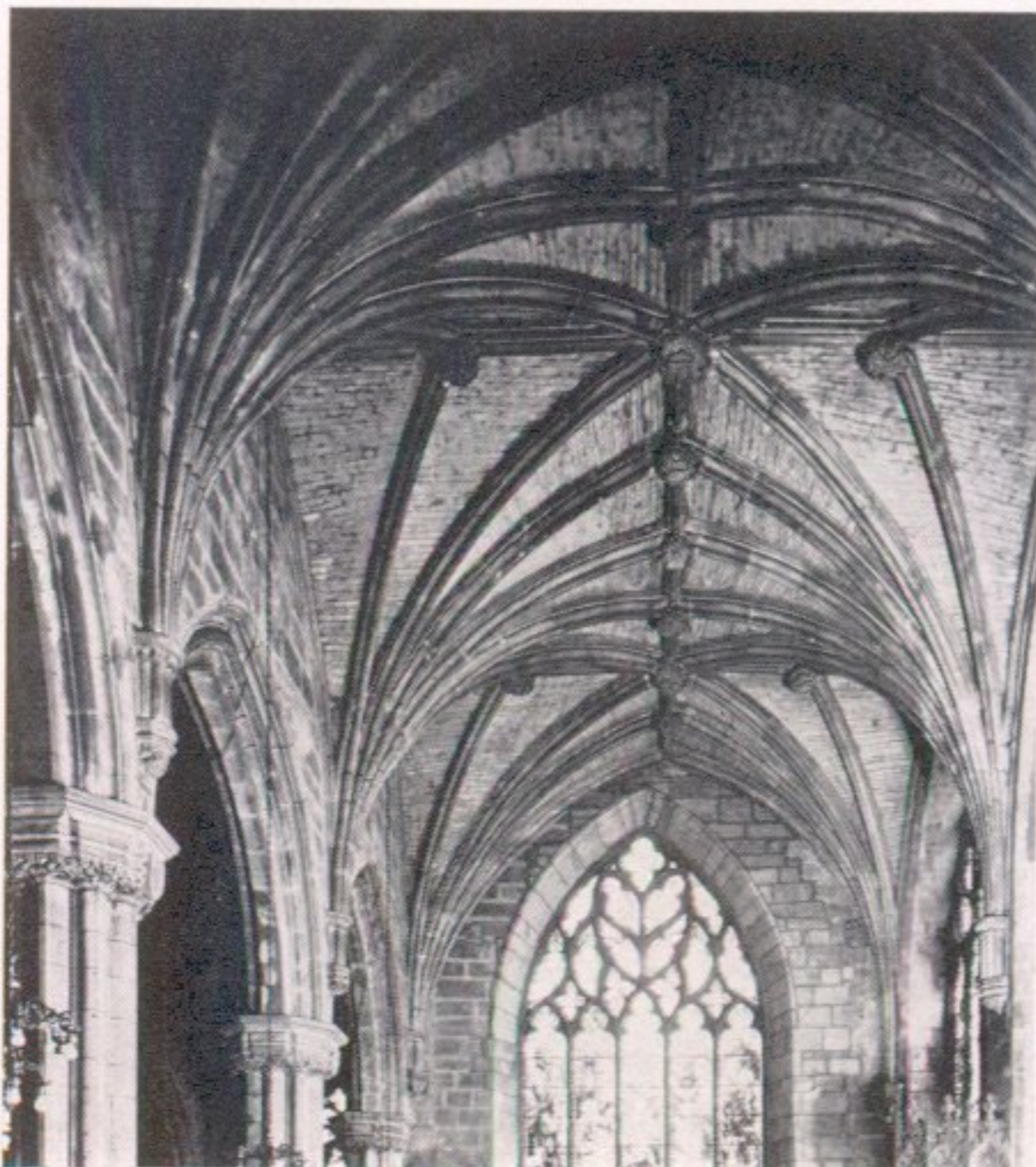
c SW crossing pier showing alterations



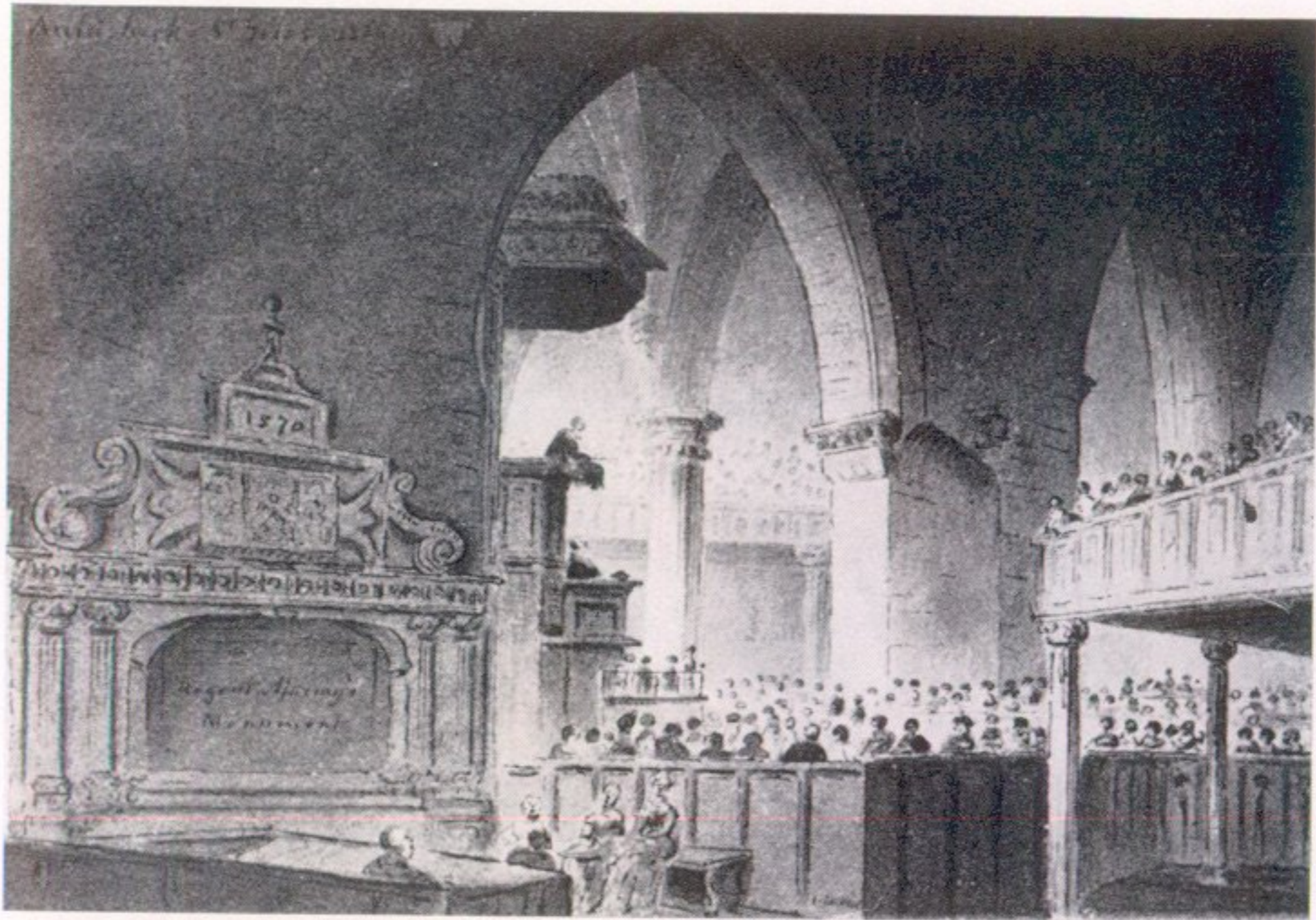
a The Albany Aisle



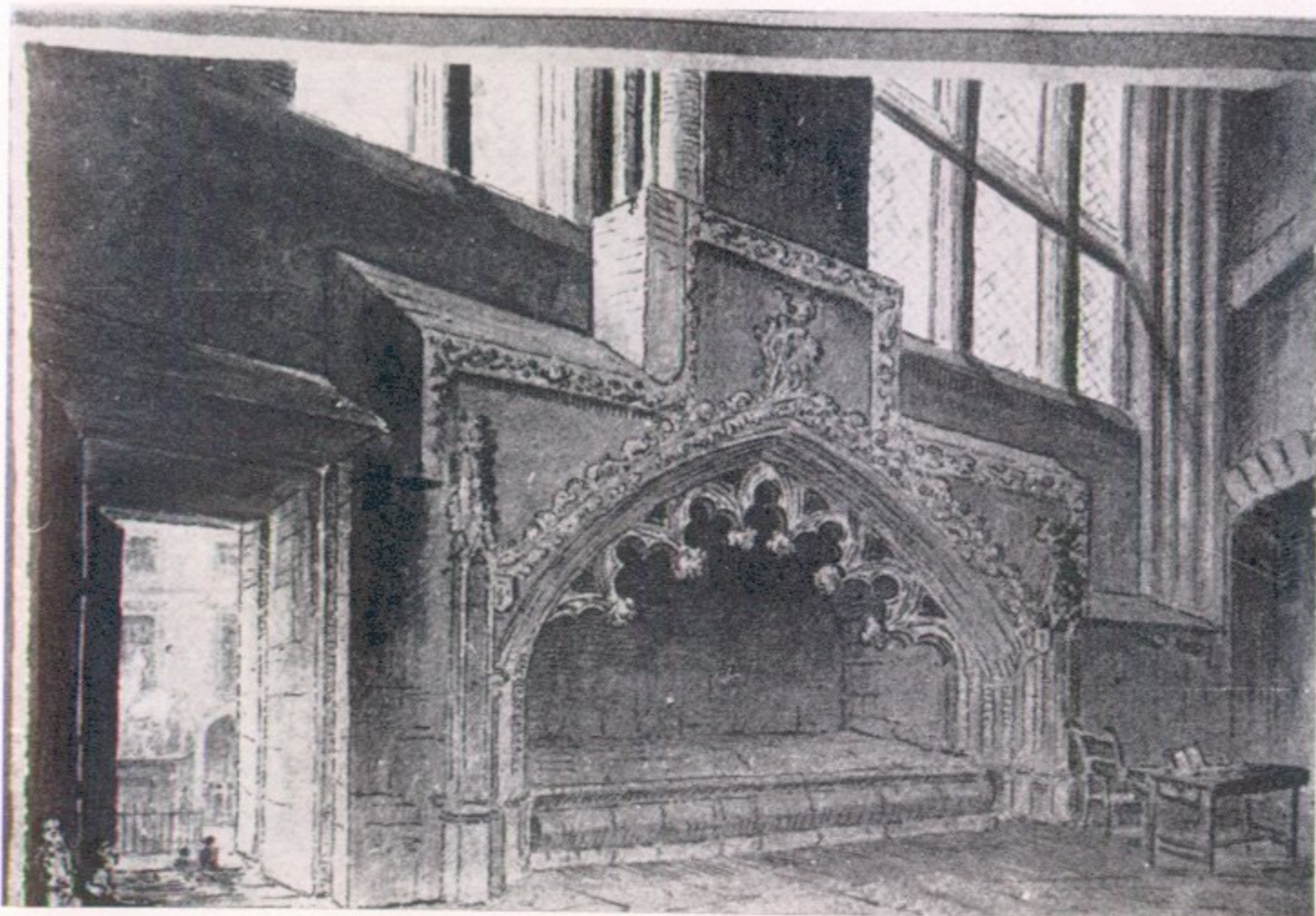
b Choir vaulting from the W



c Preston Aisle vaulting from the W



a S transept after James Skene



b Holy Blood Aisle after James Skene



Mass of St Giles (c 1495)