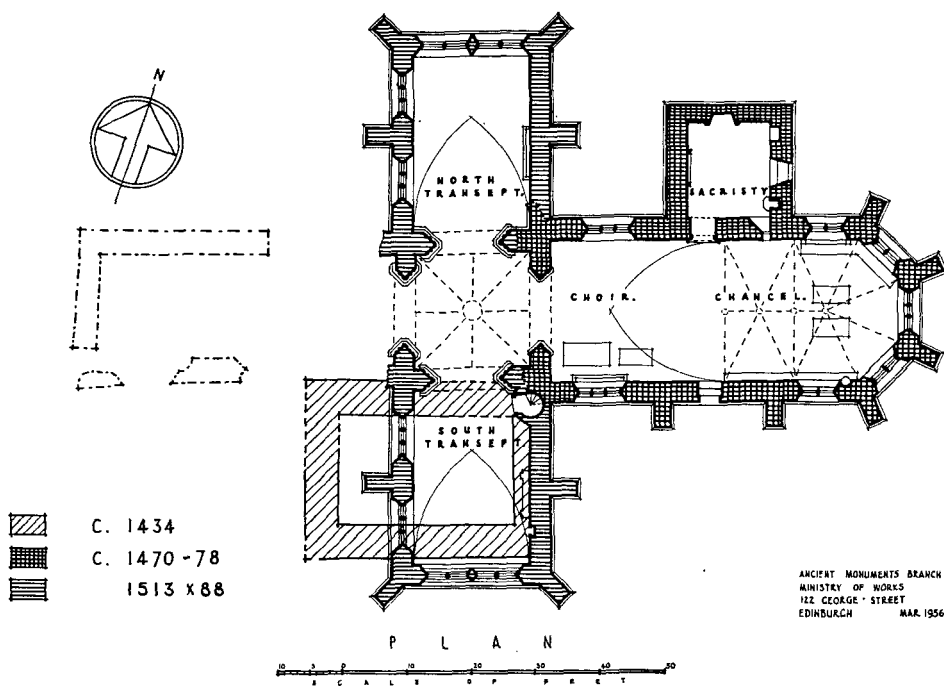


XVI.

SETON COLLEGIATE CHURCH.

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This paper is primarily an account of work done by the Ministry of Works, and particularly a discussion of problems raised by that work.



SETON COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Fig. 1.

Advantage is taken of the occasion to illustrate the building more fully than has been done before and to advance some interpretations of the building's history which differ from the authoritative account of the Royal Commission.<sup>1</sup> A new plan is published, with sections (figs. 1 and 2a and b).

<sup>1</sup> The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland: Inventory for East Lothian (1924), pp. 115-20.

## DESCRIPTION.

A parish church of Seton was dedicated by Bishop David Birnam of St Andrews on the 6th October 1242.<sup>1</sup> The site of it cannot now be determined with certainty; but it can be inferred, from the existence of the



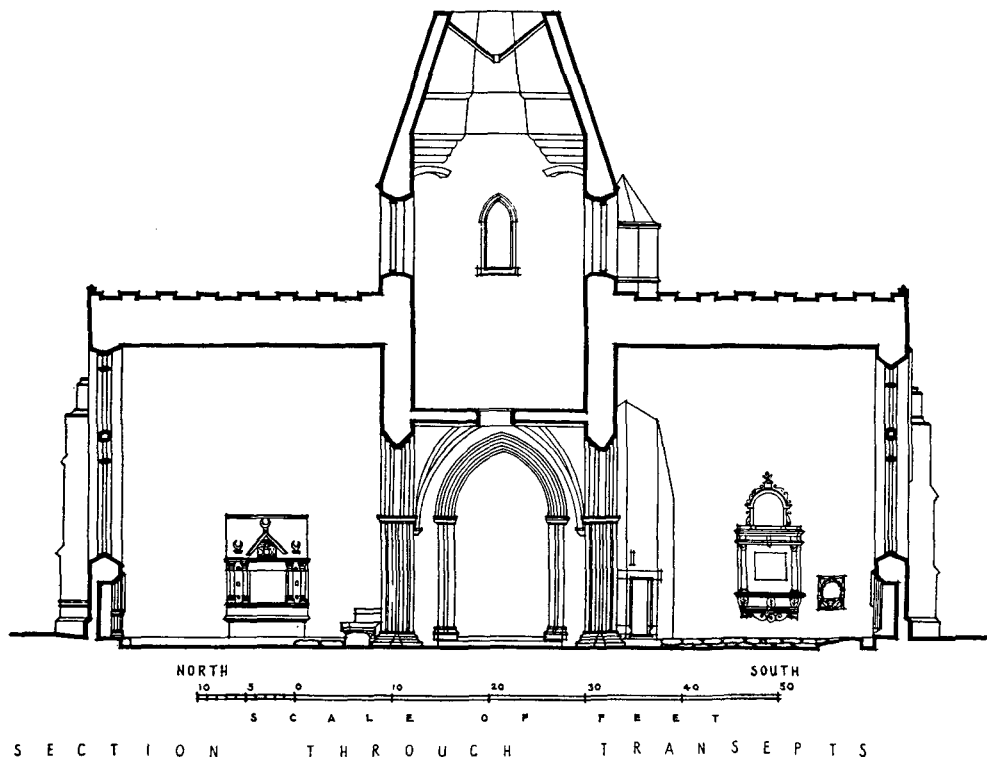
Fig. 2a.

Collegiate Church, ample documentary reference to preceding structures on the site, the absence of another candidate in the neighbourhood, and recently revealed foundations. The existing structure must stand upon or be very near to the ancient site.

It was never completed; it lacks a nave—not an unusual deficiency of such churches in Scotland—but what was built has survived well, and is a

<sup>1</sup> A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (1922), p. 522.

remarkably sound late mediæval building, one of the finest surviving collegiate churches in Scotland, now an Ancient Monument in the custody of the Ministry of Works (Pls. XLIX and L). It has unusually extensive descriptive documentation, a rare enough occurrence in Scottish architectural history of any period, and that with precision moreover, so that the main



SETON COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Fig. 2b.

ANCIENT MONUMENTS BRANCH  
 MINISTRY OF WORKS  
 122 GEORGE STREET  
 EDINBURGH MAR 1956

lines of its development can be placed within secure limiting dates. The knowledge gained thereby is doubly valuable; it presents a general and accurate picture of characteristic good quality ecclesiastical work over a period of about a hundred years, and to students of mediæval architecture it affords reliable dating periods for component parts such as mouldings, corbels, buttresses, and the like, which we might call datable features occurring in other buildings.

The structure consists of the complete eastern limb and the two transepts of a cruciform church, the crossing-tower as high as it was built, and the

dubious foundations of the nave, which was not built. The walls of the choir and chancel were up by 1478, and roofed by 1508.<sup>1</sup> The transepts were erected sometime between 1513 and 1588. That is to say, the eastern limb stood without them for thirty-five years at the very least, probably longer: such was the church which was raised to collegiate status in 1492.

The choir (Pls. LI-LIV) is unusually long and its height is suitable to its length. It has a three-sided apse or chevet, a not uncommon eastern termination in Scottish late mediæval work, not occurring before then, rare in England, and seemingly a Continental borrowing. The high pointed barrel-vault is a truly typical Scottish archaism, and equally characteristic of the country and the period is the crossing (Pls. LIII and LIV), which is formed by the intersection, or abutment, at right angles, of the four unaisled chambers—choir, transepts, and nave—so that the crossing-tower is carried by the angles of the cross, not by free-standing piers, as is the case with aisles. The walls of the tower continue visibly down to the ground, the crossing-arches are openings through them and the lofty spatial quality of a crossing upon piers is absent. The shafts which carry the crossing-arches partake more of the nature of responds than of piers and each serves one arch only. The choir is a noble chamber, but it is a chamber and never does one forget it. It lacks the subtlety of an aisled east end with its arcades, distant vistas, and suggestions of more to be seen than is immediately apparent. The walls dominate, and the pointed barrel-vault is but an inward inclination of the walls. No shafts stress the side walls in vertical bays, but over the chancel false ribs are applied to the surface of the vault to denote decoratively that part of the east end otherwise defined by distinctions such as chancel arch and chancel steps and a narrowing of the choir in the chancel area. The ribs do not descend far and they do not detract from the basic single-chamber conception. They enrich the vault of the choir over the chancel only. They give an impression of incompleteness which is misleading. The system is complete.<sup>2</sup> Ribs are structurally unnecessary in a barrel-vault, particularly in one of high pointed section and no great length. They are structurally justified, although not essential, in the chevet, where the vault panels resemble the severies of orthodox rib-and-panel vaulting. Otherwise the ribs are false, decorative, and intended only to enhance the glory of the chancel and High Altar. This treatment consciously hearkens back to an earlier age. It is a deliberate archaism, applying for purely decorative ends what was once a strictly functional feature. It is not surprising, therefore, that the execution of the idea is unconvincing. The bosses have some merit where the popular heraldry is featured, but the

<sup>1</sup> The terms choir and chancel are here used in a general sense, to correspond with the plan. The architectural divisions of the ritual choir, presbytery, and sanctuary cannot be precisely defined (see p. 432).

<sup>2</sup> The west end of the ridge-rib is not provided with the stump of a ridge-rib, which it would have had, had continuation been intended.

foliage of corbels and bosses evidently relied much on paint to convey an impression of fine modelling which the carvers made no attempt, or were unable, to achieve (Pl. LV).

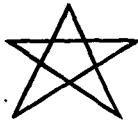
Although the window tracery (restored) and the external buttresses are uniform throughout and the pointed barrel-vault is common to choir and transepts there are differences in detail which distinguish the two principle building periods. Most significant is the choir arch (Pls. LVI and LVII). The mouldings of the arch, and of its shafts and capitals and bases are noticeably different from those of the other three arches of the crossing which are later (but coeval with one another). There is a family resemblance common to all, of late mediæval characteristics such as the straight abacus of the capital which sweeps across the clustered shafts, and the rotundity of the shafts which lack the precision and bold independence of similar members in 13th-century work. But more of the earlier gothic feeling remains in the choir arch; its mouldings are finer, the shafts are brought to a sharp keel, and, most conclusively, it bears masons' marks which occur in the choir but not in the transepts (fig. 3).

The choir arch was blocked when the choir stood alone and at each of the western angles of the choir there were two boldly projecting buttresses similar to those which survive round the exterior of the choir and chancel to-day. These buttresses projected outwards from the corners, at right angles to one another, one pair to the N. and W., the other to the S. and W. When the transepts and crossing tower were added the buttresses were mutilated. The face-stones were drawn out and the shafts of the crossing arches were spliced into the body of the west buttresses. The buttresses projecting to N. and S. were more comprehensively dismantled when the east walls of the transepts were built against them. The evidence of the southern is lost in the stair turret in the north-east corner of the south transept, but the massive plinth of the northern is evident in the south-east corner of the north transept. The ragged junction of the buttresses and arch shafts is clearly to be seen (Pl. LVIII).

The foundations on the site of the nave are early 15th century, if of the nave. They may be 13th century. They have been revealed by the Ministry in the course of an extensive programme of excavation and consolidation which has been undertaken since the Earl of Wemyss constituted the Minister of Works the guardian of the monument in October 1948.

#### BUILDING HISTORY.

The most authoritative description of the church is in the Royal Commission's Inventory for East Lothian. But much has come to light since the recent work began which has reference to the building's history and which was unknown and even unsuspected when that account was published



Tomb-recess.  
Sedilia.  
Apse window.  
Sacristy doorway.  
Choir window.  
Roslin Chapel frequently.



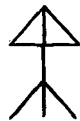
Piscina.  
Sedilia.  
Apse window.  
Sacristy doorway and piscina.  
Choir arch.



Sedilia.  
Apse window.  
Sacristy doorway.  
Squint.  
Roslin Chapel frequently.



Sedilia.  
Sacristy doorway.  
Tomb-recess.  
Apse window.  
Roslin Chapel frequently.



Choir arch, each on both piers.

MASON'S MARKS IN THE CHOIR, c. 1470-8.



Nave arch.



(a)



(b)

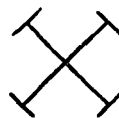


(c)

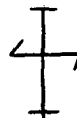


(d)

(a) and (b), south transept tomb-recess; (c) piscina; (d) holy water stoup in crossing, and Roslin Chapel.



(a)



(b)



South transept arch: (a) and (b) also in Roslin Chapel frequently.

MASON'S MARKS IN TRANSEPTS AND CROSSING. 1513 x 88.

Fig. 3.

in 1924. Furthermore, a typescript history of the family of Seton, posthumously produced in 1939<sup>1</sup> also provides documentary material for the correction and enlargement of some points of detail in published descriptions, which, in varying degree, accept and reproduce the 16th-century history of the family by Maitland of Lethington. Unhappily, even the most circumstantial description of a historical building, such as that is, can mislead if accepted without reference to the evidence of the architecture itself. For instance, to the fourth Lord Seton, who "pendit the queir from the rymbraces but," Maitland attributes the sacristy, as an addition to the north side of the choir which was erected by his father.<sup>2</sup> The architectural evidence proves that the sacristy and the choir were certainly planned and probably built together.<sup>3</sup>

The documentary evidence is thus misleading. Of the sacristy only the vault is by the fourth lord. This is quite acceptable, as he is credited with the final vaulting of the choir also (he "pendit the queir from the rymbraces but")<sup>4</sup> after the completion of its walls and vaulting of the chancel by his father who "biggit the queir of Seytoun and pendit it sa far as it is with rymbraces."

The early history of the building seems to be as follows. The third Lord Seton raised the walls of the choir and chancel and vaulted the chancel. He died in 1478 "in the place of the Blak freiris of Edinburgh quhair he lvis in the queir of the samin."<sup>5</sup> Between 1478 and 1508 the vaulting of the choir and the sacristy was completed by his son the fourth lord

<sup>1</sup> Sir Bruce Gordon Seton, *The House of Seton* (1939); typescript, edit. Lady Seton: copies in National Library, R. 272a, and Edin. Central Public Library, Reference Room XDA 758.3. S.49.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Richard Maitland, *History of the House of Seytoun* (1561), Maitland Club edition (1829), pp. 34-40. See also George Seton's *The Family of Seton* (1896), 2 vols., especially vol. ii, p. 771 ff. and Maitland's *Genealogy of the House of Setoun* (1830), with preface by Charles Kilpatrick Sharpe.

<sup>3</sup> The splayed plinth, and the string-courses above it, continue round the sacristy and along the choir walls on both sides of it, and the corner stones of plinth and strings are common to both choir and sacristy walls, thus tying the one chamber securely to the other. The upper string of the choir walls does not return round the sacristy wall in relief, just as it does not return round the buttresses, but its corner stone returns into the sacristy wall, flush with the masonry. The coursing of the masonry moreover runs through from chancel wall to sacristy wall to a height of ten courses on the east side of the sacristy (Pl. LIX). Furthermore, choir and sacristy have each a similar cornice of separate paterae upon a cavetto moulding, in contrast to the cornices of the transepts, which are embellished with grotesque visages and block foliage (Pl. LV). Inside, the evidence is no less conclusive of the contemporaneity of these two chambers: there is no evidence that the south wall of the sacristy, *i.e.*, the mutual wall between the sacristy and the choir, was ever an exterior wall, which it would have been were the sacristy an addition: there is no evidence of the aforesaid plinth and string-courses having been cloured away, nor of the squint window nor the doorway into the sacristy from the choir having been inserted. There is no suggestion of disturbance. Indeed we are confronted, when we seek it here, with the most impressive extent of homogeneous masonry in the building. The most dubious work is in the south-east corner of the interior of the sacristy, where its east wall encroaches slightly upon the embrasure of a squint window but this is probably due to late alterations of the window (see p. 430). The sacristy is further identified with the first building of the choir in the detailing of its doorway from the choir. The jambs have a false or spare base—a base lacking a shaft—which occurs upon the outside of the doorway in the south wall of the choir.

<sup>4</sup> The word "but" is here used in the sense of but and ben; the eastern completed part was "ben."

<sup>5</sup> Maitland (1829), p. 34.

(1459-1508), a man cunning in astrology, theology, music and given to letters; a student of Paris and St Andrews and a "necromanticus" withal.<sup>1</sup> He raised the establishment to collegiate status in 1492, a distinction usually dated 1493, when the foundation was consolidated.<sup>2</sup> Final papal sanction for collegiate status was not obtained without, one supposes, some persistence on his part: in a papal Bull dated 13th April 1470, Pope Pius II granted conditional sanction for the establishment of a collegiate church at Seton, but final sanction was not granted until the 22nd December 1492. The foundation was dedicated to St Mary and the Holy Cross, with an establishment of a provost, six prebendaries, one clerk and two singing boys.

The fifth lord, killed at Flodden in 1513, roofed the vault with stone slabs, glazed the windows, paved the floors and provided furniture. Maitland says he was buried in the choir beside his father. His widow, Lady Janet Hepburn, who died in 1558, continued the work by erecting the north transept, the never-completed spire, and the south transept, "to mak it ane perfyt and proportonat croce kirk."<sup>3</sup>

Before raising the south transept she demolished an existing south aisle which was in the way. This had been added to a parish church by another widow, Catherine St Clair, the widow of a Lord John Seton who died in 1434.

Now Maitland says that this Lord John was buried in Seton Church "in the aisle founded by his mother." This is wrong. The aisle was founded by his wife, the aforesaid Catherine, daughter of William St Clair of Hermandston. She is wrongfully attached to Sir William Seton, who died in 1409<sup>4</sup>. That is, the precursor of the south transept was erected during a widowhood beginning in 1434, not 1409. This correction does not affect the dating of the south transept, which was erected in a widowhood beginning 1513 and ending 1558, but it affects the dating of the recently revealed foundations.

They are visible outside the west wall of the transept; they run under it and reappear inside it (Pls. XLIX and LX). Only the rubble core-work of footings survives; there is no ashlar to assist identification and dating. But there can be little doubt that these foundations emerging from beneath the south transept represent the mid-15th-century aisle which was demolished by Lady Janet to make way for it.

This aisle was itself added to an older parish church,<sup>5</sup> probably one referred

<sup>1</sup> Maitland, *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Keith's *Catalogue of Scottish Bishops*, p. 472.

<sup>3</sup> This suggests a cruciform church, *i.e.* one with a nave. But transepts were sometimes called "the cross-church" (one which runs across the east-west axis), and the suggestion cannot be taken very far to prove a nave, in default of corroborative evidence of one. Maitland (*ibid.*, p. 39) calls the transepts "cross aisles."

<sup>4</sup> Sir Bruce Gordon Seton, I, 109.

<sup>5</sup> R.C.A.M.S. (1924), p. 115.



to in a list of 1319<sup>1</sup> and probably the very building dedicated by Bishop Birnam in 1242. The reason given by Maitland for the demolition of the aisle is that it lay in the way, because the side of it lay parallel to the side of the church. Which church, the ancient parish or the new collegiate, he does not say. It might have been the former, and recently revealed foundations on the site of the nave of the collegiate church may be of this ancient church, and not of the collegiate church, which at first thought they would seem to be (Pl. XLIX).

These foundations as though of a nave have on either side a short stretch of ashlar stopping at approximately equal distances from the west crossing arch: W. of the ashlar the foundations are of rubble work. They are separated from the crossing arch and transepts, doubtless by "drainage operations in the immediate vicinity of the church" when "unmistakable foundations of a nave were brought to light."<sup>2</sup> There is no stratigraphical connection between them and the crossing.

The nave of the collegiate church was never built, although provision was made for it in the tower and transept walls. Had it been, presumably something more substantial than these foundations would remain of it, especially when so much of the east end and transepts survives. It is suggested, therefore, that these foundations represent the 13th-century parish church alongside of which Catherine's south aisle of c. 1434 was built. Lady Janet determined to make a clean sweep of this aisle, which stood upon the site of her proposed south transept, and there is no reason to suppose, because its demolition has gone unnoticed, that the adjacent parish church escaped: it would be pulled down also, to make way for the intended collegiate nave.

Inside the west crossing arch a holy water stoup indicates entrance to the church through a blocking wall across the arch. Now stoups are associated with doorways, and placed on the right hand side of entry as this one is (Pl. LIV). It suggests that, when the crossing arches and tower were erected, the only western entrance to the church was one through the closing wall in the west crossing arch.<sup>3</sup>

This continuous and remarkable history of sustained family endeavour, shared by men and women alike, without interruption, over a period of a

<sup>1</sup> Bain, *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, III, No. 653.

<sup>2</sup> George Seton, *Family of Seton*, p. 784.

<sup>3</sup> Mediaeval building procedure began by the laying-out of the whole plan upon the ground, in foundation. Building in height then began at the extreme east end and was concentrated upon the eastern limb. When it, and sometimes the transepts, was complete, the crossing arch was closed by a temporary stone wall—substantial enough in all conscience—and the part completed was dedicated and forthwith put to use. Building in height was then begun in the nave. When all was done the blocking was removed and there was a second dedication. Initial inspiration and impulse, and money in hand, ensured the completion of the choir and probably the transepts also. The future of the nave was more uncertain, especially in the smaller churches dependent upon private enterprise. Such was the case at Seton.

100 years, carries the architectural history of the building down to the Reformation. After this event the church was treated as an independent charge, but was united with Tranent in 1580.

The family interest in the enterprise appears not to have been diminished, although altered circumstances prohibited the completion of the tower and of the nave. The fine bell in the uncompleted steeple is Dutch. It was made for the church in 1577, and brought from Holland in that year by the seventh lord. It hung in Tranent, was removed to Gosford and eventually restored to Seton.<sup>1</sup> It is a fine piece, with low relief Renaissance decorations and embossed circular medallions of classical mythology (Pl. LXI). Mural monuments and stone heraldic panels dated to the late 16th century and first half of the 17th century attest continuing use of the building, probably as a family sepulchre and more of a burial vault than a house of worship. Hill Burton, writing for Billing's *Antiquities* (1852) says that the gloom of the chancel is enhanced by the multitude of tombs of various ages of which it is the repository. The services of religion have long ceased, he says, and it is a burial vault rather than a church: every slab on the pavement has some monumental purpose, the earth is in some places disturbed, showing the shape and dimensions of the graves by laying bare portions of the flagstones by which their sides are cased.

#### DESECRATION.

In 1544, during the Hertford invasion, the English entered and damaged the church and "did Lord Seton the more despyte because he was the chief labourer to help their Cardinal out of prison, the only auctor (author) of their calamytie."<sup>2</sup> They removed the bells, organ and many other furnishings as well as burning the timber-work.<sup>3</sup> Whether this episode took place before or after the work of 1513-1558, of the widow of the fifth lord, is not known. Probably her benefactions suffered; presumably she made them soon after her husband's death at Flodden in 1513. But in all likelihood the spoilation would be of accessories, not the structure. The sequence of building phases is undisturbed, at least by this occurrence.

In 1650 the Commissioners for the Plantation of Kirks ordered Seton to be parochial, but Lord Winton deferred, and eventually erected another church. In 1715, the last Earl of Winton being a Jacobite, the mediæval church was desecrated by the Lothian militia. The rabble and common soldiers defaced the monuments, raised the pavements, and broke into the coffins in search of treasure and lead which covered the bodies.<sup>4</sup> In his reply

<sup>1</sup> R.C.A.M.S., *East Lothian Inventory* (1924), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Dalryett, *Fragments of Scottish History*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Maitland, *History of Seytoun*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> Maitland, (1830), p. vi.

to articles of impeachment he alludes to an attack upon Seton Palace,<sup>1</sup> and says the most sacred places did not escape their fury and resentment; they broke into his chapel, defaced the monuments of his ancestors, took up the stones of their sepulchres, thrust iron through their bodies and treated them in a most barbarous, inhuman and unchristian like manner.<sup>2</sup>

Even allowing for understandable exaggeration these accounts remain serious enough, and are much to the point in their unequivocal allusions to disturbances of the floor levels and the graves therein. They recall a familiar pattern of violence and subsequent lamentation: "Lord, what work was here! Lord, what work was here! What clattering of glasses! What beating down of walls! What tearing up of monuments! What pulling down of seats! What wresting out of irons and brass from the windows and graves! What defacing of arms! What demolishing of curious stonework! What tooting and piping upon the destroyed organ pipes!"

Thus spoke the Bishop Hall of Norwich describing events in 1643.<sup>3</sup> And among the correctors of error in the mid-17th century none was a more zealous deacon in his craft than the astounding William Dowsing, described in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as "iconoclast" and nothing else. The *Querela Cantabrigiensis* of 1646, in describing his comprehensive operations, refers to him as one who goes about the country breaking glass windows, not only in chapels but in schools and colleges (mistaking perhaps the Liberal Arts for Saints), and having defaced and dug up the floors of our Chapels, many of which had lien so for two or three hundred years together, not regarding the dust of our founders and predecessors who likely were buried there, and compelled us by armed soldiers to pay forty shillings a College for not mending what he had spoiled or defaced, or forthwith to go to prison.<sup>4</sup>

His own sensational journal records specific instructions given. It is relevant to mention one, oft repeated: at Sproughton, "we gave orders for the Steps to be levelled, in a fortnight's time."<sup>5</sup>

These religious activities in England and Scotland, although different in time were strikingly alike in procedure. The references to the levelling of chancel steps, the digging up of floors and the desecration of burials afford feasible explanations of recently discovered evidence of disturbances in the choir of Seton which are otherwise impossible to account for.

When the Ministry assumed custody of the monument the floors of all parts were of trodden earth, and the level of the floor of the eastern limb was approximately what it is to-day after excavation and paving. The earthen floor being manifestly non-mediæval, trial-trenching to establish

<sup>1</sup> A late 16th-century house, demolished at the end of the 18th century. The site is to-day occupied by the Seton House of Robert Adam.

<sup>2</sup> George Seton, *P.S.A.S.*, XXII (1887-8), 175.

<sup>3</sup> M. S. Briggs, *Goths and Vandals* (1952), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. But see F. T. Varley, *Cambridge during the Civil War, 1642-6* (1935), pp. 29-45, for a defence of Dowsing.

the mediæval level was undertaken as a matter of course and in expectation of quick results. The floor level of the choir and steps to the presbytery and the sanctuary floor were expected, in evidence if not in actuality. None was forthcoming. Instead there came to light the actuality of another floor level, some two feet below the earthen one (Pl. LX). It also was of trodden earth, and it contained recumbent tombstones of 15th and 17th century date, broken, defective, weatherworn and cracked, and carefully laid upon the floor. Some were surrounded by a kerb of small stones and all were covered by a layer of sand upon which the upper trodden earth made a top-dressing throughout. Upon the lower floor, round the sides, there ran a stone "bench," whose rough upper surface was approximately flush with the upper floor level of trodden earth. This "bench" was of exceedingly crude rubble work, and it was built against the footings of the main ashlar walls. It corresponded with the footings in height, save below the "sedilia." Here it was faced with three-inch slabs of ashlar, with a similar thickness on top, as at seat, with a chamfered projecting edge. In front of this superior benching and hard up against it, one foot six inches below the top, were two empty graves, made of stone slabs and covered by broken pieces of 17th- and 18th-century tombstones (Pl. LXII). Empty of interments, that is; one yielded the female head of a 17th-century weeper still with traces of colour, probably from one of the fine mural monuments which are now in the transepts. At the south-east corner of the apse or chevet the two broken halves of a splendid late 16th-century heraldic panel of the armorial bearings figured upon the Dutch bell served as a facing to the rubble bench (Pl. LXII). At the north-east corner the benching stopped for here the seating of a 15th-century tomb-recess turned the corner as though laid to accommodate a second tomb. The tomb-recess has a vault beneath it, which it has not been possible to investigate thoroughly: such peerings and probings as could safely be done indicated an emptiness 6 ft. 6 ins. long, 2 ft. wide, 2 ft. 3 ins. deep, lined with slabstones on edge. The tomb-recess is flanked by a buttress on each side, a heavily moulded segmental arch springs from one to the other, and surmounts two shelves, one low down, the other at the usual waist height. The detailing of the buttresses is paralleled in the structural buttresses outside. The tomb is contemporary with the walling, the crocketed finials being hewn on the stone which forms the lower rybats of the window jambs. On the right-hand or eastern buttress there is a painted face of a nobleman with rounded nose and curling nostril in the manner of late 16th-century and early 17th-century painted wood and plasterwork. On the left-hand buttress are working drawings of buttress mouldings, in black paint or charcoal.

A broken cross-slab bearing a stepped cross with trefoil terminations to its arms lay partly beneath the plinth, inserted there to support it against collapse into the vault beneath. An identical twin lay on the floor nearby,

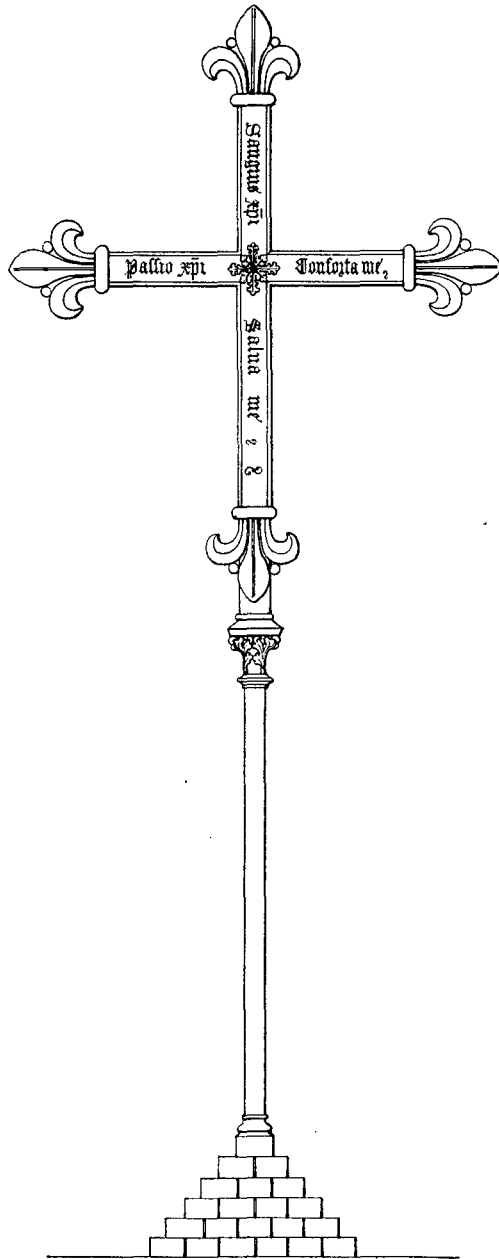


Fig. 4. Cross fleury, Broadwater Church, Sussex (p. 430).

also inserted under the plinth. These memorials have been relaid in the new floor of the east end. They are simplified crosses "fleury," a 15th-century type, closely paralleled in Broadwater Church, Sussex, on an example dated to 1445<sup>1</sup> (fig. 4).

#### EASTER SEPULCHRE.

Between the tomb-recess and the sacristy door there is no benching, nor has there ever been and it may be that here there was placed the Easter Sepulchre which was always on the north side of the sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> In large churches of cathedral or monastic wealth these might be permanent structures designed and erected for the sole purpose of the Easter liturgy, but in smaller foundations (and frequently in the larger ones also) the Easter Sepulchre was contrived at a tomb-recess conveniently placed. Mediæval wills frequently directed that a benefactor's tomb should serve, and the custom is illustrated by a painting of the Resurrection at East Bergholt in Suffolk, and by a carving of the same subject at South Pool in Devon, each at the back of an ordinary tomb-recess,<sup>3</sup> while at Stanwell, Middlesex, Thomas Windsor (*d.* 1486) directed that his body be buried in the north side of the choir and a "plain tomb of marble and of a competent height" be erected "to the intent that it may bear the Blessed Body of our Lord and the sepulture at the time of Easter to stand upon the same," before which tapers were to be burned.<sup>4</sup> In all likelihood the splendid tomb-recess in Seton is that of its founder. It is where a founder's tomb is to be expected, and the detail of the armour, etc. of the male effigy accords with the necessary date.<sup>5</sup> The effigy inhabiting the tomb would be inconvenient for the Easter drama, however, and so, it is reasonable to argue, a table "of competent height" might well have been placed against the adjacent blank wall to serve as an Easter Sepulchre in close proximity to the founder's tomb.

The squint would afford to those within the sacristy a view of the chancel and the progress of the office at the High Altar. It is shown as an oblique aumbry in a plan of 1816 by one Morton, in the Hutton MSS.<sup>6</sup> In a sketch of 1821 it is not shown at all. If the drawings are accurate it is probably an original squint, blocked to make an aumbry, unblocked, and refaced with a wider opening after 1821.

#### TWO EFFIGIES.

Two recumbent effigies (Pl. LXIII), one male the other female, lay together upon the upper shelf of the buttressed 15th-century tomb structure. The 1830 sketch shows them lying separately upon both shelves and to those

<sup>1</sup> Charles Boutell, *Monumental Brasses and Slabs* (1847), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> For Easter Sepulchres see Heales, *Archæologia*, XLII, 2; Dowden, *Edinburgh Architectural Assoc. Trans.*, vi, 41-53.

<sup>3</sup> M. D. Anderson, *The Imagery of British Churches* (1955), p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> G. H. Cook, *Mediæval Chantries and Chantry Chapels*, p. 172, footnote.

<sup>5</sup> But see below, p. 432.

<sup>6</sup> In the National Library of Scotland.

situations they have been returned after examination. The female figure is sadly mutilated; nothing of the face remains: evidently she has suffered grievous blows. Sufficient of her apparel remains to distinguish and to date it however. She wears a high-necked undergarment. It is embroidered round the throat, and has embroidered wrist-bands. A mantle falls in heavy folds to conceal the feet. It is held at the waist by a decorated cincture with a long pendant end tied in a loose and heavy knot, and by loose folds tucked underneath the arms, which is a representation of real-life habit more appropriate to a standing effigy. The hands are together as in prayer, clasping a small object attached to a necklace, probably a reliquary. The feet, concealed, rest upon a little crouching lap-dog. The head-dress, sensitive indicator of date, is of the reticulated sort. The hair is confined within an enriched crespine or jewelled net, and bunched over the ears in pearled cauls. These were joined together by a straight band across the forehead. The cauls and the band which joined them were placed upon a loose hanging coiffe which descends to the shoulders and would have been visible upon the top of the head. A brass dated 1413 of Lady Felbrigg in the church of that name in Norfolk illustrates this style very well.<sup>1</sup> A date in the first quarter of the 15th century will do for this effigy.

The male figure is more evidently of a man of rank and pretension. He is clad from head to foot in full plate armour with laminated epaulieres, brassarts, sollerets, and coudieres, whose straps, rivets and other attachments are clearly to be seen. Above the breast-plate is the hausse-col or standard of mail round the neck. Round the hips are six rows of taces, and below, the fringe of his mail shirt; (this mail and the hausse-col may only be a fringe attached to the plate, and not a whole shirt). The legs are encased in keeled jambards of plate metal. The genouillières of the knee joints are liminated: the outer membrane has a roundel to cover the joint, as the elbow pieces have. The enriched sword-belt is girded about the hips. A misericorde hangs from the dexter side, a long-sword from the sinister. The pommels are richly engraved. The feet repose upon a crouching lion from whose mane an angel-head emerges. The hands rest upon the breast and clasp an object, probably a reliquary, which is hung by a chain round the neck. The head reclines upon a tilting helm whose neck mail is tucked inside it. As with the female figure the head and hair-do are not without importance for dating. The head is uncovered, the close cropped hair is treated with conventional waves. Over the forehead is an enriched orle.

This effigy is interesting and valuable for the information it yields about knightly accoutrements and the details of their attachments. Before

<sup>1</sup> Charles Boutell, *Monumental Brasses and Slabs*, (1847), p. 90; cf. also Arthur Gardner *English Medieval Sculpture* (1951), p. 330.

1440 the bare-headed warrior is practically unknown, but after 1455 the helmeted knight is almost equally rare.<sup>1</sup> The distinction is probably due to the wearing of the salet, a helmet which had a long curving tail-piece, like a sou'wester, which a knight could not even be imagined as wearing while lying flat upon his back. The date of this work is c. 1440-85. It falls within the so-called Yorkist period of monumental effigies, and may well be that of the founder of the College and builder of the choir in which it lies, the third Lord Seton, who died in 1478. This is an agreeable thought, and we would like to have it so, not forgetting, however, that Maitland (whom we have found to be not without fault) states that he died in the church of the Blackfriars in Edinburgh where he lies buried in its choir.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE SEDILIA.

Opposite the tomb-recess, in the south wall of the chancel, is another recess which must be called a sedilia (Pl. LVIII), for it is where a sedilia ought to be, save in altitude. The unusual and apparently inconvenient height above floor level casts doubt on this identification. The only plausible alternative for this sort of recess, so high up, is an Easter Sepulchre, but to this possibility there is the unanswerable objection that the Easter Sepulchre was always on the north side, so much so that where none existed an ordinary tomb recess in the correct position was used, as has been described. With an original tomb-recess in the correct position, and that a position of special sanctity, abreast the High Altar, such as would be accorded the founder or eminent benefactor, the likelihood of this "sedilia" being an Easter Sepulchre is remote. It must perforce be accepted for what it seems to be, whatever inconveniences attend its use. Probably they were overcome by the use of timber steps. Indeed, the use of timber steps and flooring in the choir, sanctuary, and transeptal altars, is a very probable explanation of the lack of evidence of their steps and floor levels. The High Altar platform would then advance towards the presbytery upon two or three steps probably carried round three sides of it, in the manner of an apron stage. The stalls of the ritual choir were probably backed against the blank side walls between the windows at the west end of the eastern limb and its north and south doors. These doors would serve as the *ostia presbyterii* of aisled choirs. But of the presbytery steps, the *gradus presbyterii*, and the choir screen, there is alike no evidence. All has vanished, it is reasonable to suppose, in the destruction of furniture and the upheaval of floor levels referred to above. The choir screen and stalls might have been further west, nearer the choir arch, with a longer presbytery. Their exact positions cannot be determined.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Gardner, *English Medieval Sculpture* (1951), p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> The present writer is grateful to the Rev. James Bulloch for a suggestion that these effigies commemorate the parents of the founder. He suggests that the founder would have his parents particularly in mind, and that the workmanship would approximate not to that of their time, but of its execution.



No satisfactory explanation can be advanced to account for the encroachment of the sedilia into the window space. It seems to be a later insertion, but there is no evidence to support the possibility; on the contrary, the jambs of the sedilia are well and truly bounded into the walling on either side. On the face of the left-hand jamb remains a trace of painted decoration, a small human face, probably one of a group.

Next to the sedilia is an ornate piscina of tabernacle-work similar in workmanship to the buttress niche-canopies outside, and to the piscinas in the south aisle chapels in Melrose. On it is a mason's mark, one of a group of six which are distributed throughout the east end, on the rybats of the windows, on the label mould of the sacristy door, on the tomb-recess, the sedilia, the original jamb of the squint, and the base of the south pier of the choir arch. Their distribution and concurrence is such that, whatever may be their significance, contemporaneity of these features which bear them is well-nigh conclusively proved. None occurs in the transepts, nor on the other crossing piers. The groups are mutually exclusive (fig. 3).

#### PROBLEMS OF THE LOWER FLOOR.

In the south-west corner of the choir the moulded base of a mural monument is engaged to the wall and stands upon the lower floor level. Originally the monument was erected against the 15th-century window which was blocked to receive it, as is shown in a measured drawing of 1878.<sup>1</sup> In that year the upper part of the monument was removed to the north transept and erected on its east wall where it remains. Near the base lay the matrix stone of a fine brass and a gravestone dated 1608. These were all revealed in the recent clearance (Pl. LX).

The lower floor is associated with the "benching," the relaid grave-stones, and the south-west mural monument; the upper level with the thresholds of the south door of the choir and the sacristy door, the piscina and sedilia, the plinth of the tomb-recess, and feasibly with the bases of the choir arch; in fact, with the structure, and at this level it has been reinstated, as it was found. But how, why and when did the lower level happen?

In consideration of this a paper on the Seton monuments<sup>2</sup> by George Seton has interesting comment. He relates that he thoroughly explored the church and its contents in 1851 when all the windows were blocked and the south transept was a carpenter's shop. (In point of fact the windows were all blocked when Hooper made an engraving for Grose's *Antiquities* in 1789, and may all have been blocked in the early 17th century, when the two with the mural monuments were.) He drew many interesting stones which he saw in 1851, including the brass matrix, the 1608 stone and the

<sup>1</sup> *Edinburgh Architectural Association Sketch Book*, vol. II, 1878-9.

<sup>2</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, XXII (1888), 174-87.

15th-century floriated crosses with stepped bases. He grieves to record their disappearance on the occasion of a recent visit (*i.e.* recent to 1888). Since George Seton saw them in 1851, the then Earl of Wemyss, in 1878, had begun an extensive restoration of the ruined church. This included the removal of the window-blocking, the transference of the two large mural monuments from their position in the choir to new positions in the transepts, the restoration of the window tracery (for which these removals were a necessary preliminary), the sinking of a burial vault in the chancel, and the covering of the entire floor with sea-gravel as a preparation for concrete tiles, which were never laid.<sup>1</sup>

This deposit of sea-gravel was found during the recent work. It covered the grave-stones, one of which, the brass matrix, was further protected by a kerb of small stones all round it. Evidently the stones which George Seton missed in *c.* 1888 were carefully laid, however broken they were. Evidently also the "benching" is a late construction and perhaps not meant to be seen, containing as it did broken parts of 16th- and 17th-century stone heraldic panels. Perhaps it was structural, for the support of floor joists. These panels and the mural monument, which is precisely dated 1618, date the lower floor to the first quarter of the 17th century, because, while the detached grave-stones could have been deposited at any date after their making (even in 1878, as part of the tidying-up, repair and restoration programme), the engaged base of the 1618 monument in the south-west corner of the choir argues a precise date at which the lower floor was in use and suggests it might be the mediæval floor. The footings of the main walls argue against this: they would then rise above the mediæval floor and be exposed, unless covered by choir stalls, and it is not by any means certain that they went so far west. These footings are original. The base of the transplanted mural monument is inserted into them. They are not built round it.

It can be argued that in 1878, as part of the general improvement scheme it would be natural not to make good the desecrated burials but to make a clean sweep of them, lower the floor, respectfully lay the stones of the upper level upon the arbitrary lower level and cover them with sea-sand in preparation for the paving on the upper mediæval level which it was the Earl's declared intention to lay. Clearly in this operation of 1878 the Earl had only mediæval thoughts in mind; witness the removal of the fine mural monuments to restore the 15th-century window tracery: (the removal of the monument in the south-west corner was forcible, even to the extent of hacking it from its base, which it was not necessary to remove as it would be obscured by the restored floor). The deposition of the broken 15th- and 17th-century tombstones is consistent with this programme of restoring the choir to a mediæval condition. We have observed what

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, xxii (1888), 176.

happened in England in the 1640's; graves were rifled, pavements lifted. This happened at Seton in 1715, as the Earl of Winton's testament asserts. We can imagine that, after the desecration of that year, the place was left derelict, for no stones, broken or whole, date from after this misfortune.

In point of fact none need be later than c. 1620, for the highly accomplished work of the two dated mural monuments is closely paralleled in conception, detail, and execution in the broken parts of others, including one which might well be from a window pediment of the great Seton Palace which was completed in 1585 or thereby. These memorials are of first-rate workmanship and design and comprise an impressive assemblage to prove the excellence of early 17th-century sculpture here. This is characteristic of Scotland as a whole, and marches consistently in step with the remarkable achievements in Scottish architecture during this period. The Seton carvings make much of Renaissance motifs, especially strap-work and scrolls cleverly worked round formal and incidental heraldry. In contrast to the sculptural richness and relief of these works the flat tombstone of James Stewart of Cardonald, dated 1608, presents another type of common occurrence throughout the 17th century.

The monuments which George Seton saw were presumably upon the upper floor, as this is the level shown in a sketch of 1821 (fig. 5), drawn by "a lady of high rank," the Duchess-Countess of Sutherland when Marchioness of Stafford. In writing to the editor of the Maitland *History* on February 18 1821, she refers to this sketch of hers, which she has just finished, and promises to send it to him. She also suggests other sketches of an architectural kind which could profitably be made.<sup>1</sup> Her drawing is competently handled, and with some reassuring attention to detail. There is little doubt that it presents a reliable picture of the north side of the presbytery in 1821. It has a three-fold interest: it shows the tomb-recess below a blocked window: it shows the mural monument to the First Earl of Perth (which is now in the south transept) against the adjacent window also blocked, and it gives the floor of the presbytery at the upper level.<sup>2</sup>

#### OTHER RECENT WORK.

The Ministry has also, with the Earl of Wemyss' most generous and helpful co-operation, reduced the height of the family burial vault, whose brick walls and surface slabs would have protruded some 9 ins. above the new floor: suitably inscribed recumbent stones replace those removed: the crude "benching" which rose some inches higher than the restored and new-paved floor has been removed save beneath the sedilia: the engaged base of the mural monument in the south-west corner of the choir is left

<sup>1</sup> Geo. Seton, *ibid.*, p. 772.

<sup>2</sup> This sketch is a frontispiece in the 1829 edition of Maitland's *History*.

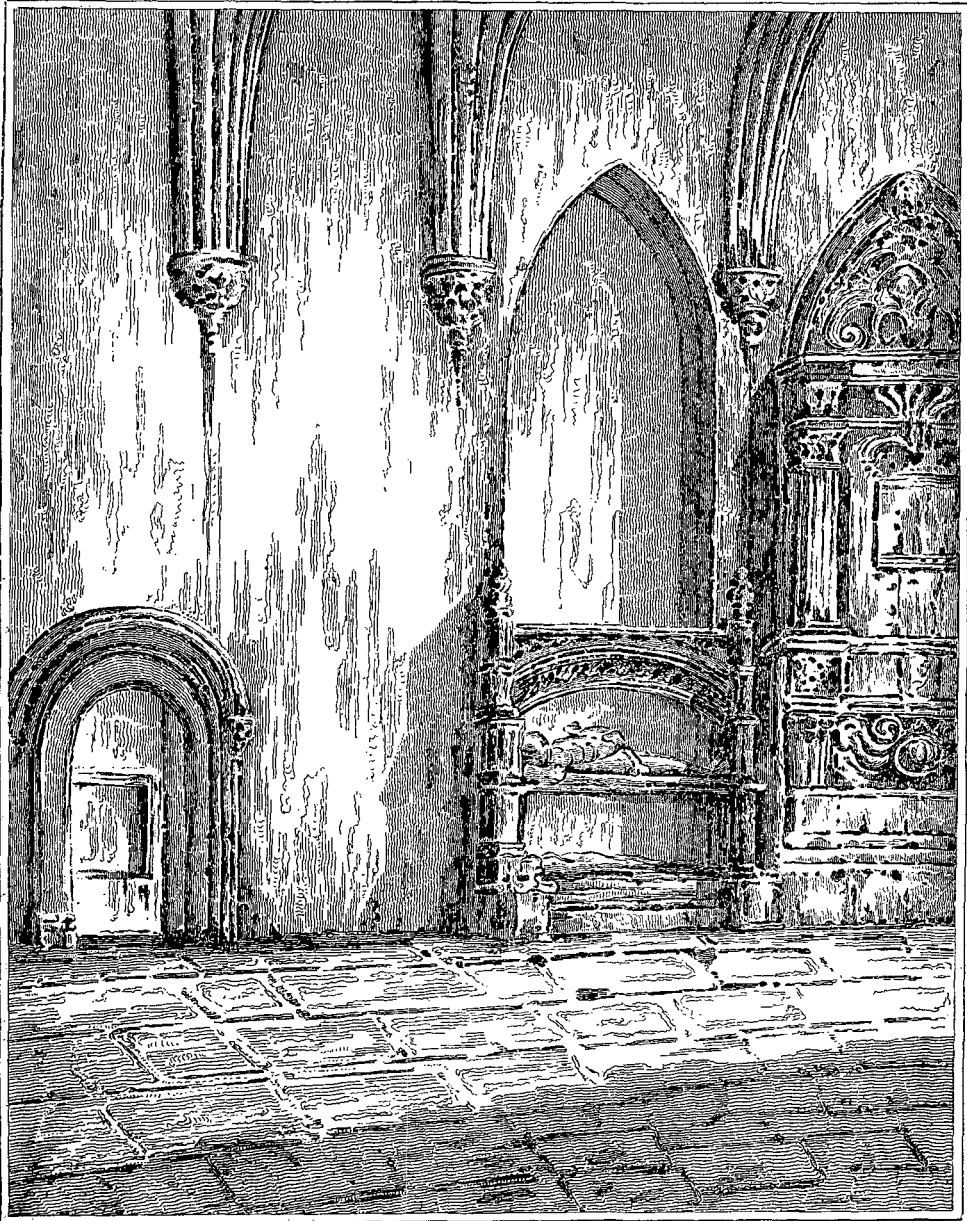
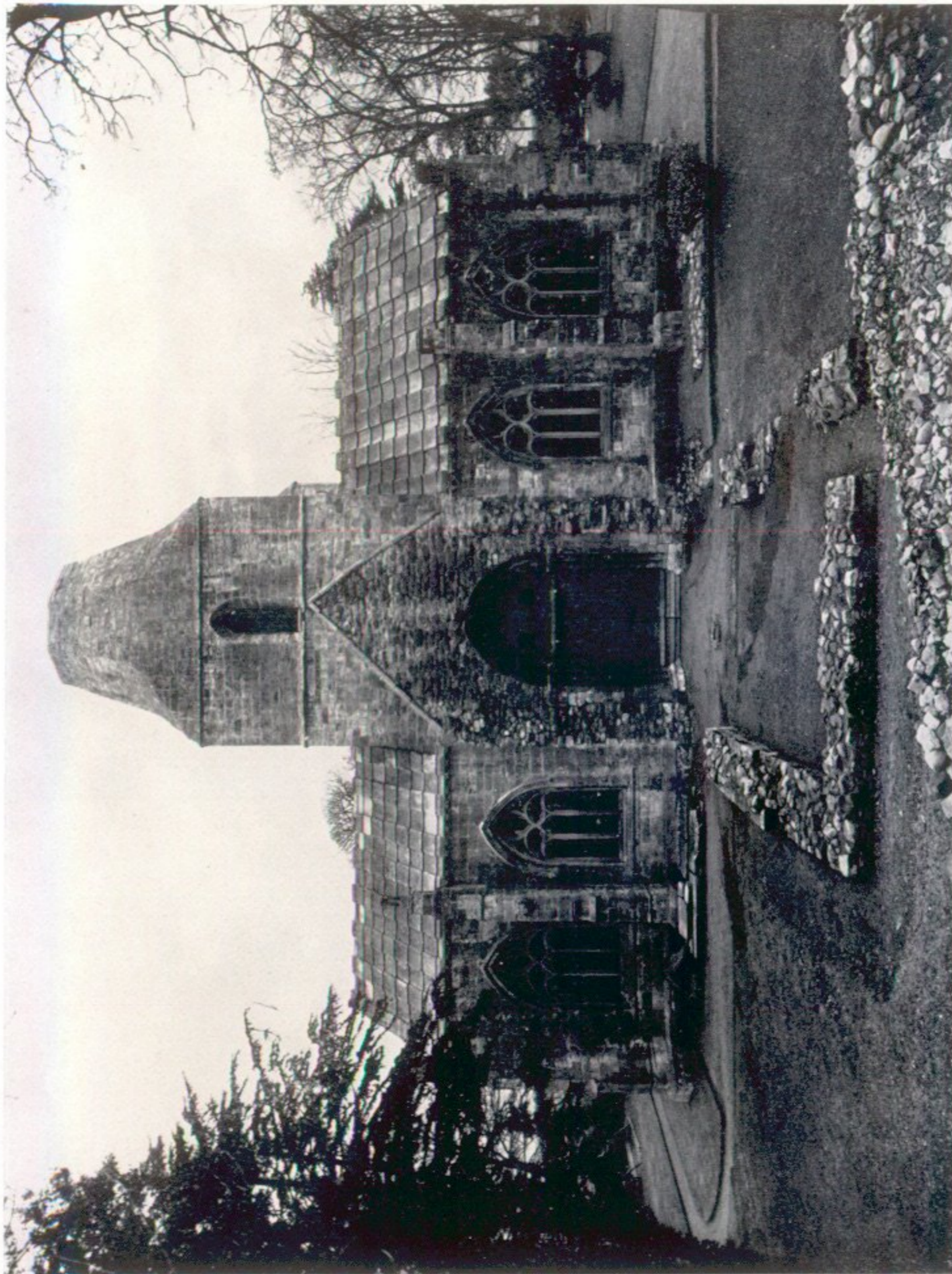


Fig. 5. Seton Collegiate Church: sketch of north side of choir, 1821 (p. 435).

exposed, and the brass matrix stone and 1608 recumbent tombstone have been lifted and relaid as they were found, but on the higher level: the 15th-century cross slabs been relaid in the chancel, and the two fine mural monuments in the transepts, which were excessively damp and decaying, have been treated against these dangers: the massive stone slabs which cover the barrel-vaults have been lifted, the walls grouted and pointed, and the slabs replaced: the grounds outside have been gardened, some trees felled and the precincts laid out with the minimum disturbance to the existing topography: new paths have been made, and kept away from the walls, so that they may rise from a platform of green: a car park has been constructed at the side of the main road, and from this a public access path through a plantation has been formed to lead the visitor to the east gateway, a 17th-century round-arched opening in the precinct wall, recently fitted with a wrought-iron gate.

During clearance work in the grounds the ruins of a complex of rooms came to light. They were probably associated with Seton Palace in their later history, but show evidence of alteration and may embody the remains of the domestic residences of the 15th-century college. They include a large kitchen fireplace once contained within a low arch of wide span; an oven: a domestic fireplace with a 16th-century roll-and-hollow moulding to jambs and lintel; a well; a trough, pond, or dam, whose water supply was controlled by a sluice; the lay-out of a mill-wheel, and an expanse of cobbling which extends up the slope and under the grass. These ruins have been consolidated and remain uncovered as part of the monument.

*The Council is greatly indebted to the Ministry of Works for meeting the cost of the illustrations for this paper. All photographs and illustrations are Crown copyright.*



Seton Collegiate Church: transepts and crossing tower, between 1513 and 1588; looking east.



Seton Collegiate Church: east end, 1470-8; looking west.



Seton Collegiate Church: the east end, 1470-8; vaulting 1478-1508.

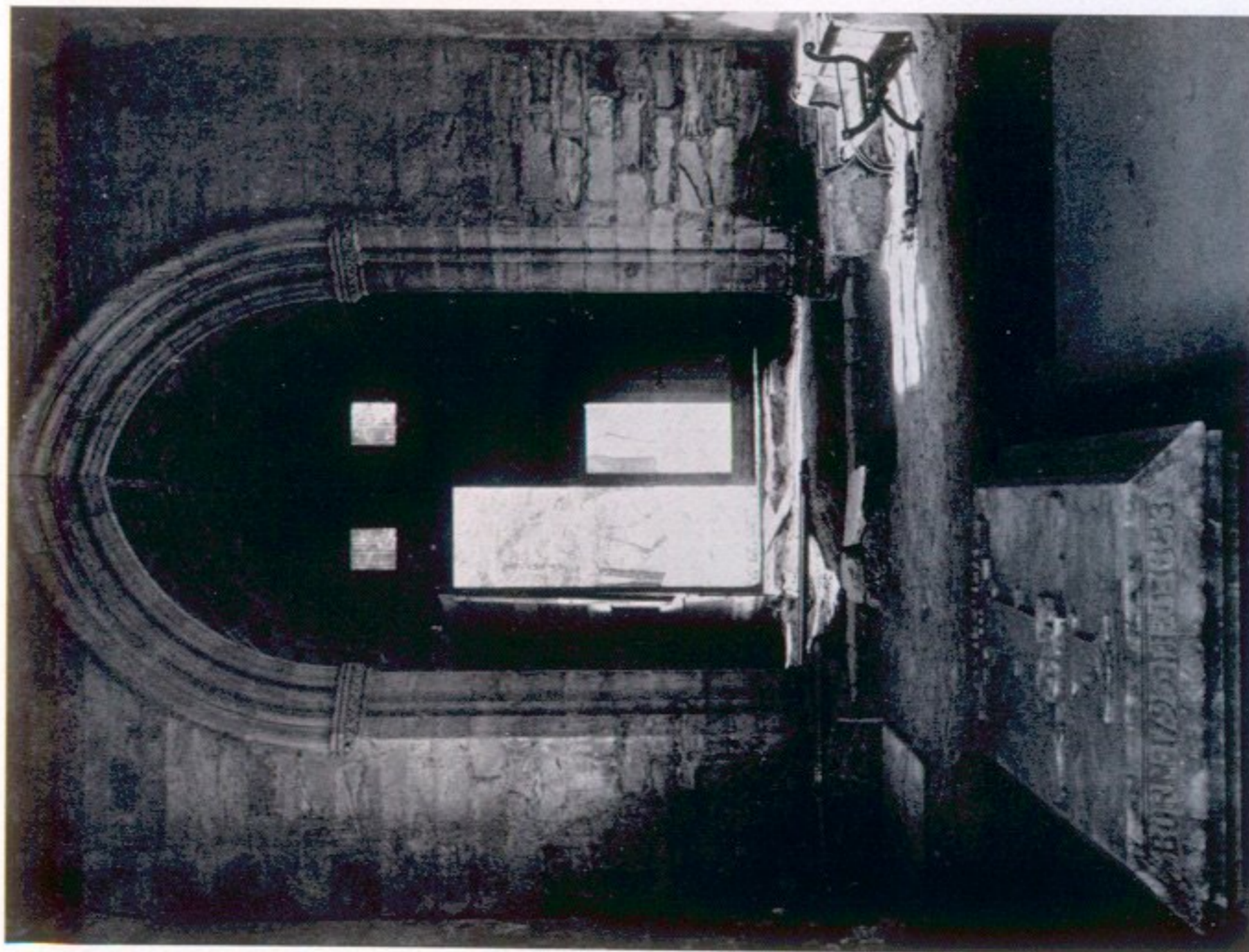
STEWART CRUDEN.





The choir and choir arch, looking west, floor relaid.

Seton Collegiate Church.



The choir arch, looking west, during clearance.

STEWART CRUDEN.



Seton Collegiate Church: the crossing from the south transept, 1513 x 1588; choir arch on right, 1470-8.



Seton Collegiate Church: the crossing from the choir; choir arch, 1470-8.

STEWART CRUDEN.



West crossing arch. 1513 × 1588.



South transept arch. 1513 × 1588.



Cornice: east wall of north transept.  
1513 × 1588.



Cornice: east wall of north transept.  
1513 × 1588.



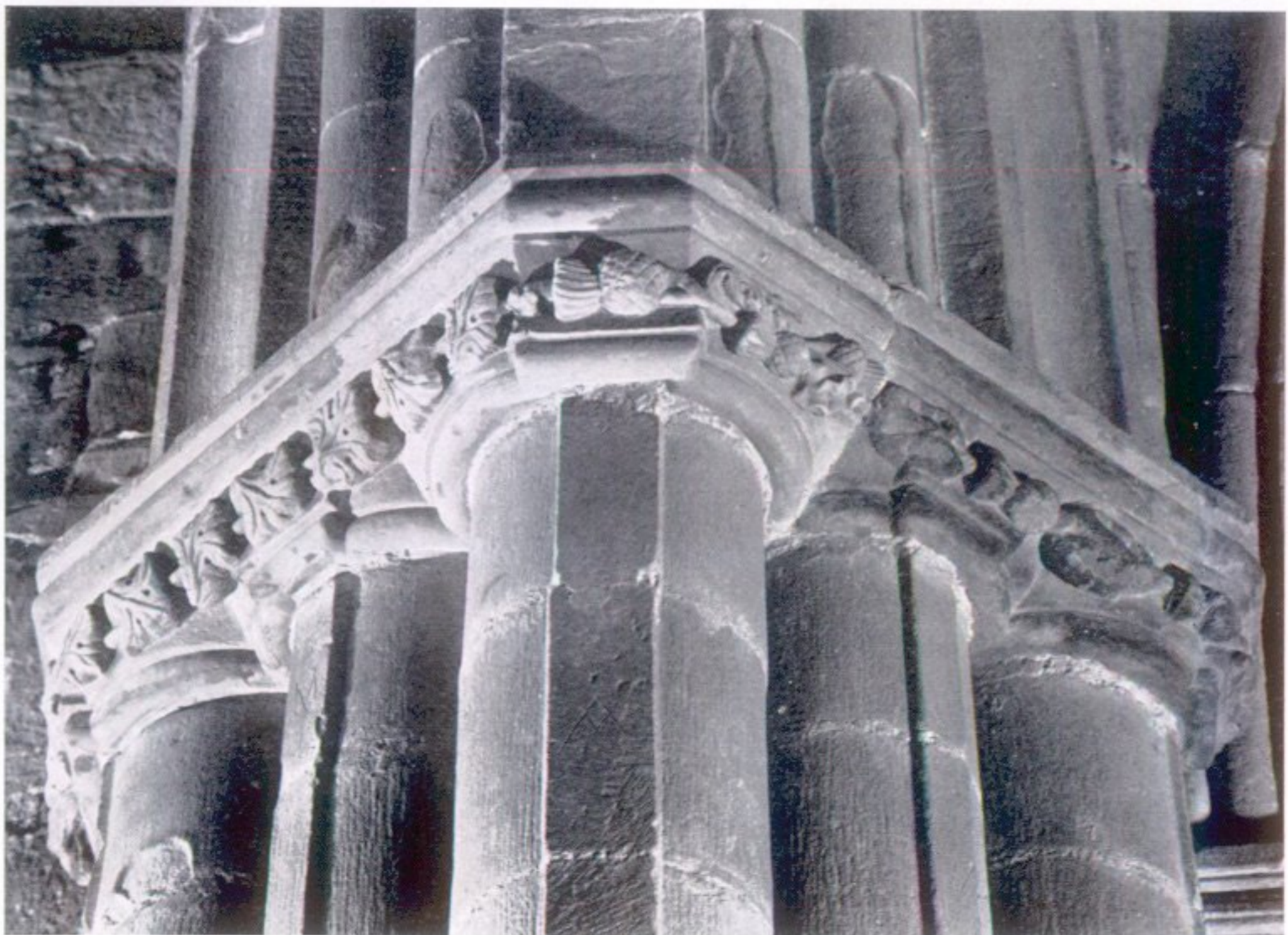
Chancel vault. 1478 × 1508.



Vault of crossing. 1513 × 1588.



Choir arch: c. 1470-8.



South transept arch. 1513 x 1588.

STEWART CRUDEN.



Choir arch: 1470-8.



South transept arch. 1513 x 1588.

STEWART CRUDEN.



The sedilia: 1470-8.



North transept: splicing of transept arch to older buttress  
Seton Collegiate Church.

STEWART CRUDEN.



Seton Collegiate Church: the sacristy, 1470-8.

STEWART CRUDEN.





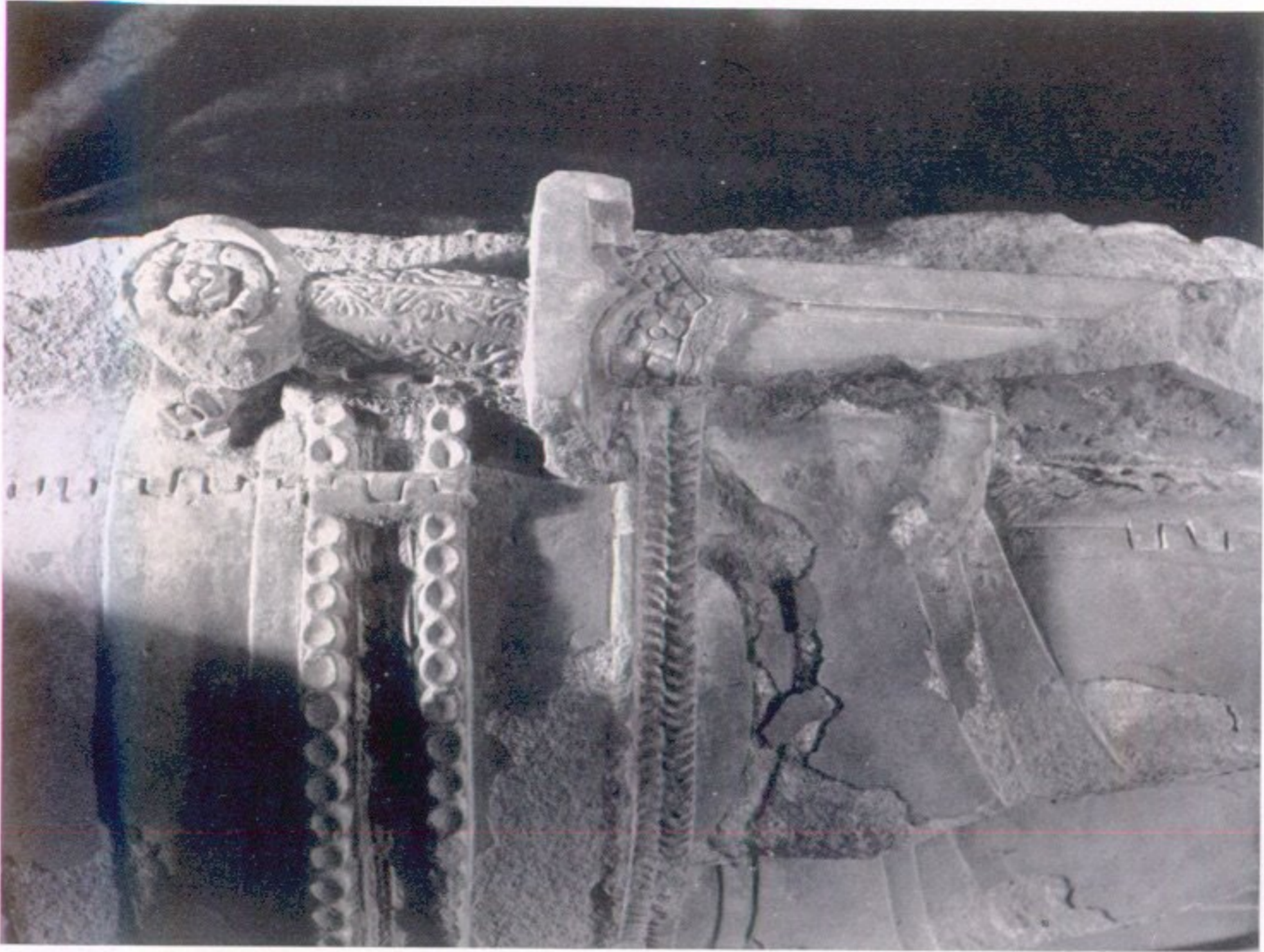
The south transept from the crossing tower showing older foundations.  
(See plan.)



South-west corner of choir: showing lower floor, "benching," base of mural monument, rebuilt wall beneath window and gravestones.

Seton Collegiate Church.

STEWART CRUDEN.



Male effigy: Sword pommel.

Seton Collegiate Church.



Dutch bell: 1577.



The chevet: lower floor and "benching".



The chevet: lower floor and tomb, continuing illustration above (p. 428).

Seton Collegiate.

STEWART CRUDEN.



Seton Collegiate Church: the two effigies.