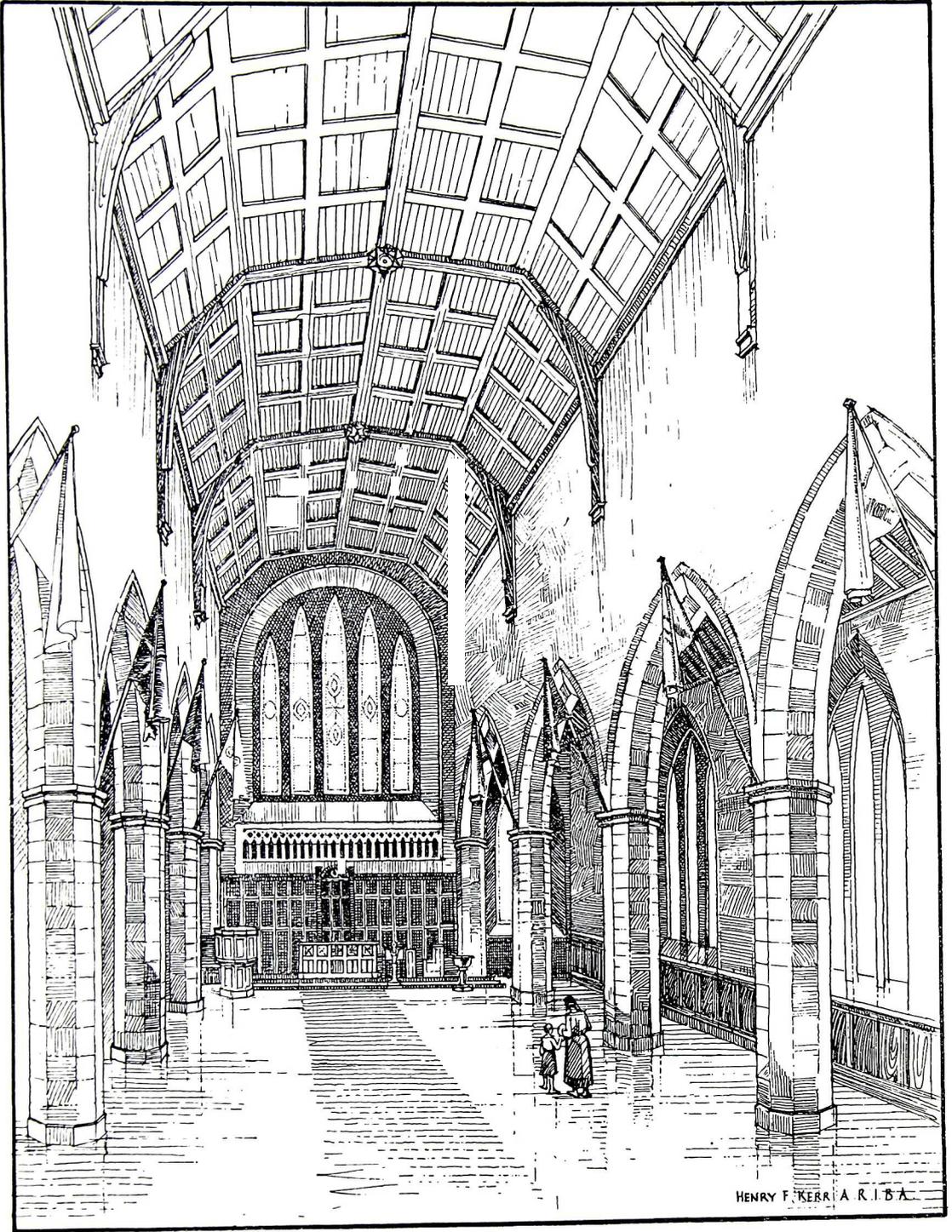


## Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh.

At the reopening of Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, on 16th January last, it was made evident that a building, always of unique interest on account of its historical associations, had originally possessed, and had now restored to it, an architectural stateliness which had been obscured for two hundred years. This was the earliest post-Reformation church to be erected in Edinburgh, a foundation of the first Episcopal period when innovations in ecclesiastical forms were being perseveringly introduced by one party and as critically watched by the other. Restoration was accordingly a delicate task requiring more than ordinarily careful antiquarian research and also the conscientious submission of modern feeling to the peculiar blend of ideas which found favour in the seventeenth century. Moreover the building has had a long and chequered history of which it would have been a pity to obliterate every trace. Mr H. F. Kerr, the architect, and the Restoration Committee are to be congratulated on the conservatism and fidelity of their work.

So early as 1601 the Greyfriars upper yard was chosen as the site for a new church. The Franciscan Monastery and its beautiful chapel had been completely demolished in 1560. Their ruins probably still encumbered the ground, and were used as material for the new building. In addition it was ordered that the "hewin work of the butrages and dures in the place of the Seynes in the mure" were to be conveyed thither. It is probable therefore that the round stone doorways which still survive (two of them surmounted by angel-heads) came from the convent of St. Catherine in the Sciennes.

The cost of construction was chiefly paid out of rent received by the Town Council from the King's Cunyie House or Mint. Those contributions seem to have come in remarkably slowly, and the work suffered innumerable delays. The north-east pillar bore the date 1612, and on the outside of the east gable can be read the inscription 1614, but it was not till 1619 that the Church was consecrated by Archbishop Spottiswoode. It was opened as

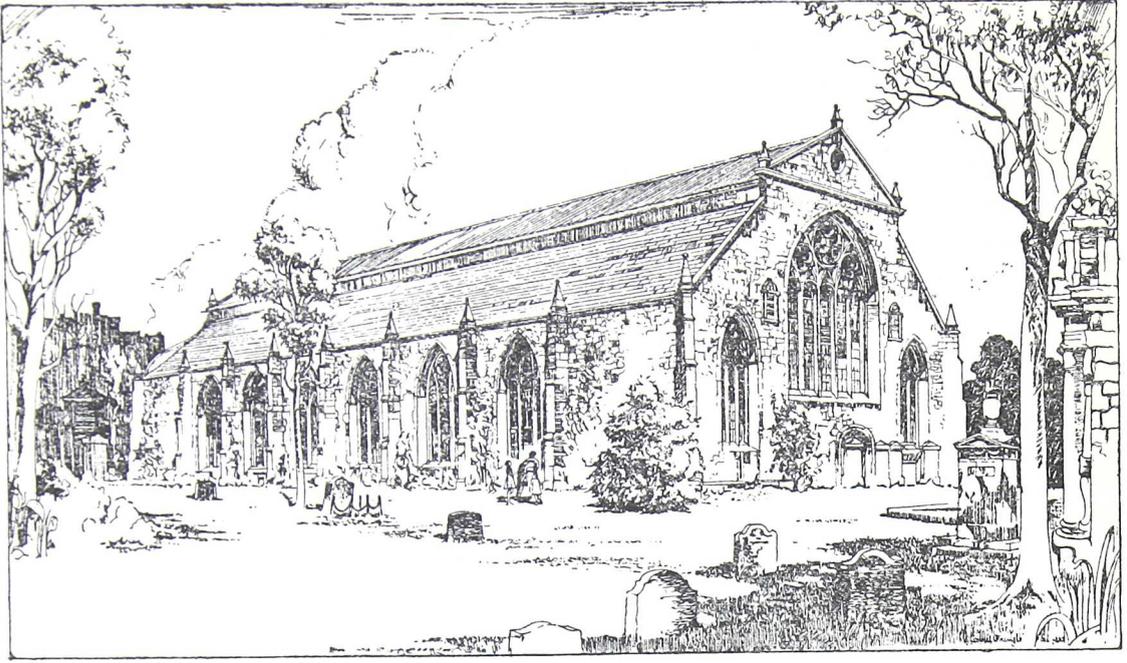


GREYFRIARS CHURCH (INTERIOR).

the parish church of the south-west quarter of Edinburgh on Christmas Day, 1620, the selection of such a date causing some scandal in puritanical circles. A Communion Table and porch were added in 1626, and Communion vessels, apparently by the personal command of Charles the First, in 1633. A pulpit from the High School was erected at the central pillar on the south side but, so far as one can judge, the canon, requiring the Table to be at the east end and covered with a decent white cloth, was observed at Greyfriars. It is also to be noticed that flowers were regularly furnished for the Table.

The building was 120 feet in length and 60 feet wide. It was furnished with a double row of five pillars but had no clerestory over the aisle arcades. Since there exist accounts for interior painting it is a fair assumption that the walls were finished in plaster. The rough nature of the rubble leaves indeed little doubt upon this point. It is impossible to discover accurately what kind of tracery, if any, existed in the windows, but an old print of the east window shows mullions of a type reminiscent of Haddington Church. The general design of the church was late Gothic with such quaint intrusions of the Neo-Classical as the pediment, now restored, above the east gable. A squat, square tower at the west end was an inconsequent appendage to the whole structure.

The signing of the National Covenant in 1638 is the most important historical event connected with the church. It does not seem to have been selected by Henderson and Warriston for this purpose on account of any marked anti-episcopalian bias either of the ministers or congregation. Both the clerics knelt at celebrations and one of them had attempted to read the Service Book. We are told that he was "stoppit," but whether by flying "fauld-stools," like Dean Hannah, or in some more decorous way, is not divulged. Nevertheless it was to Greyfriars that the Covenanting lords repaired to hear read the momentous document which was to put a period to the recent innovations. It is also very clear that it was within the church, not in the churchyard, that the subsequent signing of the Covenant took place. The detailed contemporary accounts give absolute certainty on this point, and it is a known fact that there were no flat stones in the churchyard at this time. The stone (Boswell's) so long shown as the place of signature is of a much later date. Accordingly the Restoration Committee have inscribed on the pillar where the pulpit formerly stood:



GREYFRIARS CHURCH—FROM THE NORTH-WEST.



GREYFRIARS CHURCH IN 1637.

“ Here was signed the National Covenant on 28th February, 1638.”

The first damage to the building was the work of Cromwell's soldiers, who used it as a barracks. They are said to have “ dung doon the decorements ” of many churches and it may be the marks of their bullets which are still visible in the old doors. More serious havoc was caused, however, by the fact that the Town Council requisitioned the tower as a store for gunpowder in 1718. Large quantities of ammunition had been prepared against a possible invasion of the Pretender, and this was deemed to be a safe repository. A violent explosion took place, however, in May of the same year, which laid the tower in ruins, severely damaged the west end of the church, and blew out all the windows. On reviewing the results of the disaster it was found that two-thirds of the building could be easily repaired. The Town Council accordingly neglecting the ruinous portion, built a gable across at the second pillars, which they actually enclosed in the wall which they built. The Session was given to understand that “ the kirk thus bounded would be better proportioned than formerly, contain a greater number of hearers, and accommodate them much better.” In point of fact the building was deformed in proportions with evil effects both architecturally and acoustically. Furthermore the Council was forced soon after to make more room for the congregation by building another church out of the ruins formerly neglected. They then repaired the two damaged arches and built on an additional two of exactly the same pattern. So New Greyfriars came into existence. The two divisions of the congregation thenceforward worshipped side by side.

In 1845 a disastrous fire injured Old Greyfriars Church in so serious a manner that it was considered unwise to restore it as it had formerly been. The pillars which had stood from 1614 were removed and the roof heightened to a sharp peak quite inconsistent with the style of New Greyfriars which stood beside it. Stained glass with designs copied from ancient models was introduced into the windows and an ambitious timber roof erected overhead. The general result was, however, far from satisfactory, the effect being dark and vault-like, while the large empty space, bare of arcading, accentuated still further the ill proportions of height and length.

The first effort towards a restoration was made in Old Greyfriars in 1912 on the occasion of the ter-centenary of

the founding of the church. There was then introduced a fine Communion Table with bronze panels and handsome oak screening behind. A bronze Lectern and marble Font were gifted at the same time and a chancel floor of marble and granite was tastefully laid out. The credit for this work is chiefly due to the Rev. A. B. Grant, B.D., then minister of the church, and to Mr W. Moir Bryce, the historian of Greyfriars. In the recent restoration the principal features of all this improvement were most carefully conserved.

The union of the two congregations in 1929 gave the desired opportunity to effect a fuller restoration. A public meeting in the City Chambers set on foot an appeal on a national basis for funds to remove the dividing wall, rebuild the arcades removed from the east portion, and restore the likeness of the seventeenth century church. It was agreed that the addition made to form New Greyfriars Church should not be removed but be used for vestry and hall accommodation for the congregation. The support of the Pilgrim Trust and of the Baird Trust, together with the subscriptions of interested persons from all parts of the world, enabled the work to proceed. The Restoration Committee, presided over by Lord Sands, and afterwards by Lord Wark, were enabled to complete their task in two portions at a total cost of about £16,000. In this reconstruction the two interesting porches of eighteenth century date were left untouched. The memorial windows to former ministers of Old Greyfriars (including Robertson and Erskine, the incumbents in Walter Scott's time) are not in a very satisfactory state and would have merited treatment. These also had to be left out of the present works. In all other respects, however, the essentials of a full restoration of the original church were accomplished. A striking arch was erected to mark the place where the west gable formerly stood and to separate the seventeenth century building from the additions made to form the Church of New Greyfriars.

To have visible once again the proper form of the church in which the Covenant was signed and which is so deeply associated with some of the most stirring times in Scottish history is a gain for which many will be grateful. It was a particularly fortunate thing that the completion of the work should precede the time of the ter-centenary of the National Covenant. The large congregation which completely filled the restored Church of Greyfriars on 27th February, deeply appreciated the experience of celebrating

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that event in surroundings which suggested, not the makeshifts and expedients of later days, but the lofty ideals and dignity of an older piety.

W. W. D. GARDINER.