

Uphall Old Parish Church. The Church of St. Nicholas, Strathbrock.

THE restoration of the Old Parish Church of Uphall, which was begun in 1937, was carried on until 1940, when owing to war conditions the work was suspended. A company of voluntary workers gave devoted service in preparing the way for the skilled craftsmen, by removing plaster, cleaning stones, erecting scaffolding, and fashioning special tools for their own use, thus effecting a considerable saving in expense. The restoration is not yet complete, but sufficient has been accomplished to reveal the main features of this ancient church as it existed before the Reformation, and to make evident that the building in its restored condition is of increased value in ministering to the spiritual needs of the parish.

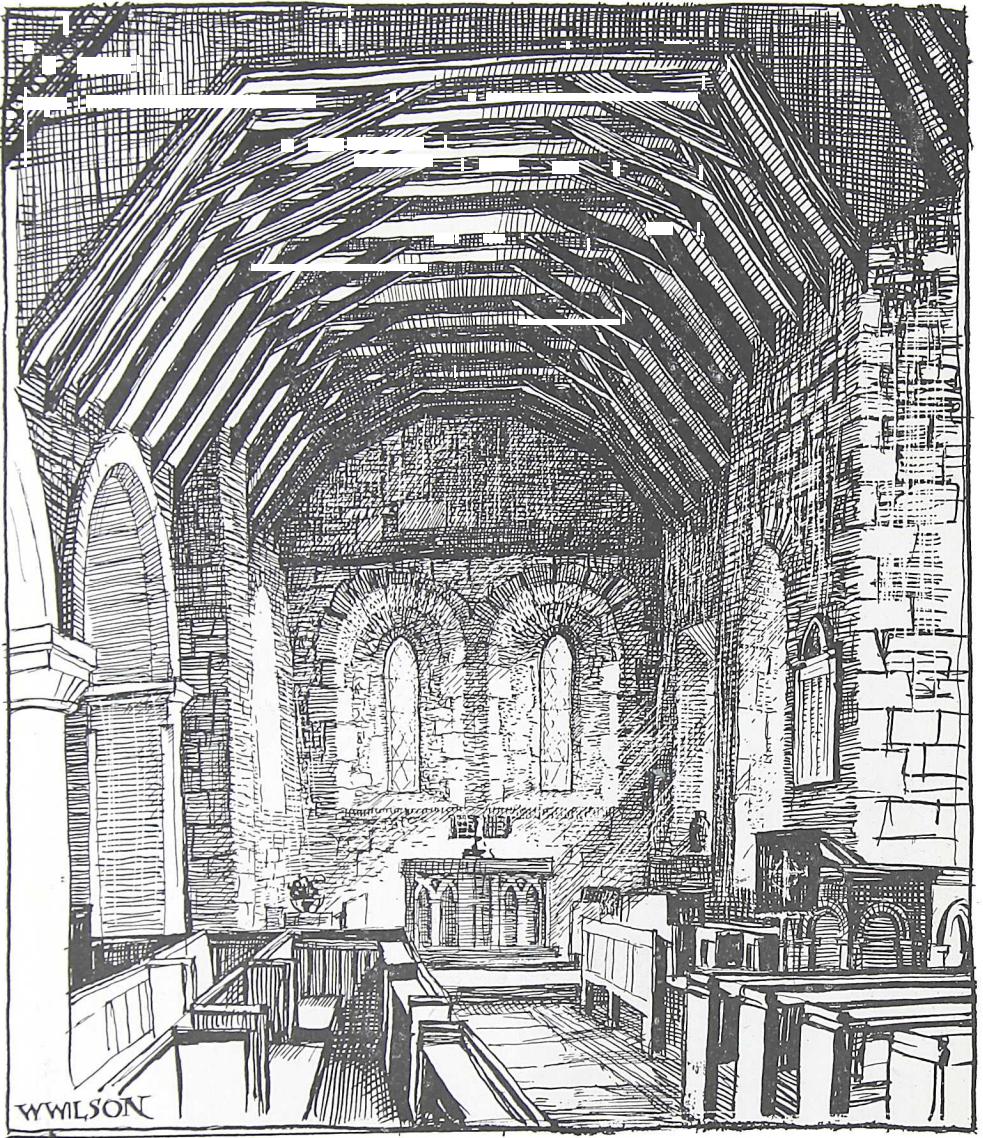
Anciently the Church was known as the Church of Strabrok, and was dedicated to St. Nicholas. The date of its foundation is unknown, but obviously the building belongs to the early Norman period. There is no reference to its dedication among the 140 churches dedicated by Bishop David de Bernham. It is mentioned in the earliest known Taxation Roll in Scotland, in the early 13th century, being valued at 40 merks; and again in 1274 it is recorded in Bagimont's Roll as being valued at 32½ shillings.

Although the building has been subjected to various alterations and extensions, it is possible to obtain a very good idea of the original church, consisting of Chancel, Nave, and Western Tower. About a hundred years later an extension eastward was made to the chancel, thus enlarging it to about twice its former size. The first addition after the Reformation was the Shairp Aisle, built about 1620 by John Shairp of Houston, who purchased the lands of Houston towards the end of the 15th century. The most serious interference with the building took place in 1878, when an extensive portion of the north wall was removed and a large transept formed, separated from the nave by a three-bay arcade. In carrying out this addition, the purpose of which was to increase the seating accommodation for a growing population, an endeavour was made to maintain the Norman style of the original church. Unfortunately, at the same time the windows on the south wall were enlarged, thus destroying their original distinctive Norman character, and others were added for the purpose of giving more light. Later, about 1890, a simple, unadorned west door in the tower was removed and there was substituted a very poor imitation of a Norman doorway.

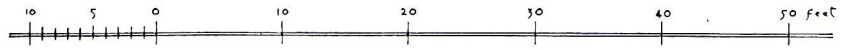
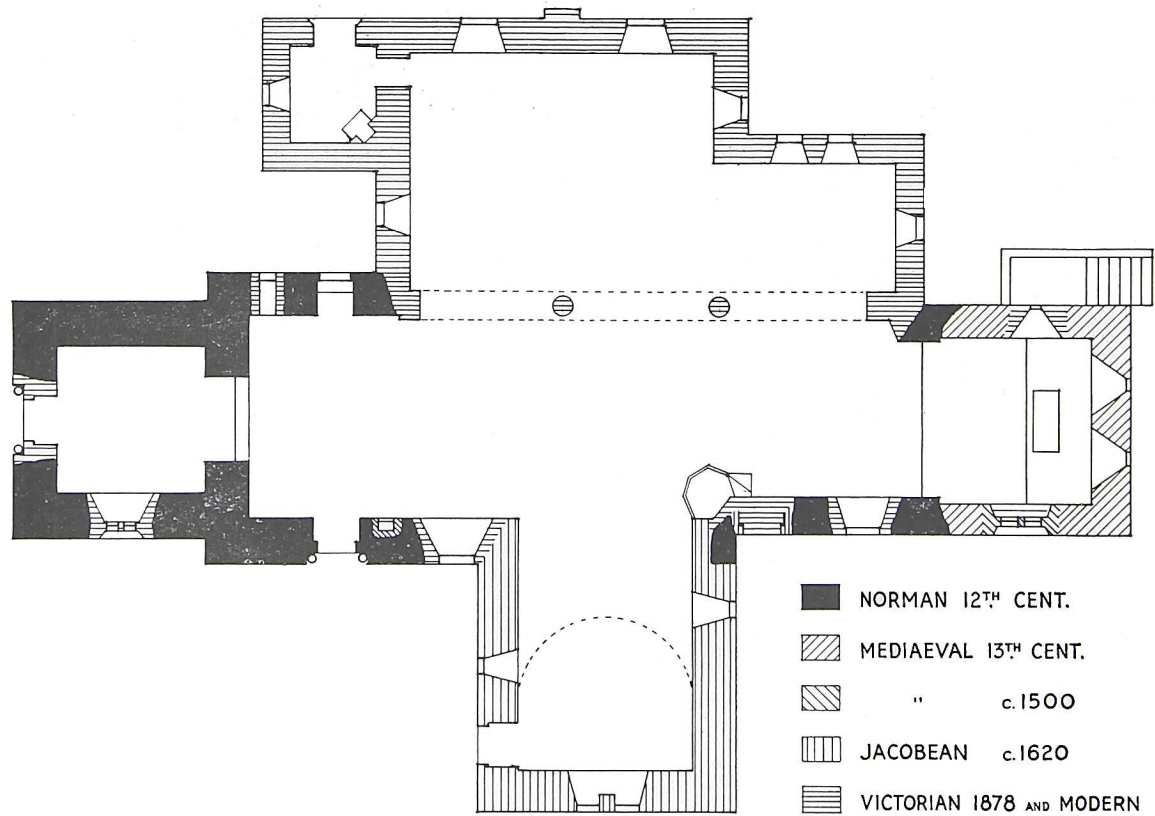
In 1781 an Earl of Buchan, in *An Account of the Parish of Uphall*, stated that the old Church of Strathbrock stood originally one mile further east than the site of the present church, and that it was "deserted for the present church at Uphall in the beginning of the 16th century". It is unfortunate that this theory, for which the evidence is scanty, should have been quoted and handed on by succeeding authorities. That there may have been a Capella or Chapel at Pyot Hall Knowes in early days is very probable, as the place name points to the fact; yet there can be little doubt that Uphall Church is the Church of St. Nicholas, the Church of Strathbrock. The name is inscribed on the bell in the belfry, and on the font which was discovered beneath the floor of the Church in 1784. The church stands near the site of the old Castle of Strathbrock, around which the population centred in these older times.

There are two doorways approximately opposite one another, one in the south wall and the other in the north wall. The doorway in the north wall was revealed in the restoration. Viewed from the inside it is arched, having eleven voussiors, three thin ones forming a sort of keystone. The supports are composed of long stones and short stones lying laterally. Externally this doorway has no arch.

The south door is very much higher and broader. As seen from the inside it has an arch of ten voussiors and no keystone or capitals. To some extent it resembles the south doorway of Dalmeny Church, seen from the inside. Like that doorway the external aspect of the entrance is quite different and has Norman features. It is



UPHALL KIRK.
(As restored.)



W. S. Lindsay
1 April 1945

UPHALL, KIRK.
(Ground Plan.)

square-headed and is surmounted by a round arch supported by shafts. The shafts are a restoration, but the cushioned caps and bases are old.

The original walls of the nave can be seen only at the west end and for a short space to the east of the Shairp Aisle. This latter, the Shairp Aisle, is very interesting 17th century stone work. It is barrel vaulted, the semi-circular roof being of considerable breadth, and makes a pleasing addition to the ancient church.

The walls of the nave and chancel are composed of large stones towards the foot, and these are not in regular courses internally. The upper parts of the walls are composed of very good rubble. There are layers of thinner stones towards the roof and the joints are very deep.

Before the restoration the tower itself was cut off from the interior of the church and was considered to form no part of the church in use for public worship. It appears to have been appropriated by the Buchan family and was used as a burial place. When the plaster and wood-lining in the church were taken down the arch of the tower was discovered. It was found to be three feet two inches in depth, about ten feet in height, and seven feet in height to the capitals. These latter are very deep and roughly hewn. The arches forming the entrance from tower to nave are not symmetrical, the west side having 18 voussoirs, and the east side 19. A very thin infill of small stones and mortar between the arches is irregular in its run.

The windows in the tower are not original, being obviously of a comparatively recent date. There are remains of a window over the west door, and probably this was the only window in the tower originally. At the time of the restoration it was not possible to renew this west window. Here is a piece of work which remains for a future generation to attempt. If it were done it would bring an added glory to the interior.

The chancel is square-ended. There may have been a chancel arch but, if so, all trace of it has disappeared. On the east wall there are two windows formed with deep splays at the open end. The stone work of these is, with a small exception, original. The light of these windows is about nine inches.

The remains of windows on the north wall and on the south wall of the chancel were revealed. That on the north wall had been converted into a doorway giving access to a small gallery which had been built across the chancel, and which was approached by an outside stone stairway. This north window has been almost entirely remade, and little of what is now there is original.

The window on the south wall received different treatment. It appears to have been almost completely removed and another put in its place, which is described by McGibbon and Ross⁽¹⁾ as "having a horizontal arched lintel with radiating joints, and probably dates from late in the 15th century."

In the east wall there is a stone aumbry or press, and in the south wall to the right of the south door there is a 15th century stoup.

Towards the end of the 18th century there was discovered the basin of an ancient font, octagonal in shape. It was removed to the residence of the Buchan family and later seems to have been forgotten. Later still it was re-discovered, given a new pedestal and presented to the Roman Catholic Church in Broxburn, where it is once again used for its original purpose. On the sides are inscriptions and initials in Gothic lettering: I.H.S.; M. (Maria); the words STA ECCLESIA NICHOLAI (Holy Church of St. Nicholas). It is believed to be of 16th century origin.

There are two fine Communion cups, presented by a former minister of the church, George Barclay, who came to Uphall in 1690. One is inscribed "Given by Mr George Barclay to the Kirk of Uphall 1704", the inscription on the other being similar except that the name is "Julian Campbell, his wife". They bear the mark of Edinburgh Carolean silver.

A full description of the church bell is to be found in *The Church Bells of Linlithgowshire*, by F. C. Eeles, published in 1913, and shows the bell to be of exceptional interest. It bears the inscription INONORE SANCTE NICHOLAE CAMPANA ECCLEGIE DE STRABORK ANNO DOM MDVCIII ("In honour of St. Nicholas bell of the church of Strathbrock Year of our Lord 1503"). The founder's

⁽¹⁾ *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland.*

mark is the same as on the bell at Dundonald and on the great bell at Linlithgow. There is also a shield bearing the quartered arms of Seton and Hay of Tullibody. It is thus probable that the bell was given by a descendant of Sir Alexander Seton, first Earl of Huntly (died 1427) and his wife, Egidea Hay.

At the restoration many gifts were received for the furnishing of the church, amongst them being the Holy Table, the Pulpit, the Lectern, and Chancel Stalls. All were designed by A. Lorne Campbell, F.R.I.B.A., the Consulting Architect to the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland, who also guided and directed the whole work of restoration. The material of all is oak and they were executed by Messrs Scott Morton, Edinburgh. The most valuable gift of all is a fine black-letter Bible, printed by Robert Barker of London; the New Testament in 1611, the Old Testament in 1613. This Bible was long at Houston House in the parish, and is noted in a list of books in the house in 1739. It was presented to the church in 1940 by John Shairp of Houston.

The work of restoration is not yet complete. The years of war have broken rudely into a fine fellowship of service in which all enthusiastically co-operated. The condition of the walls and the roof timbers required considerable repair and this has been most thoroughly effected.

Restoring an ancient church is much more than repair and renewal. It is also creative. As one enters this church to-day one feels that the ideal set before the workers has in large measure been fulfilled, namely, to bring to light the simple, dignified beauty of the original workmanship; to reveal as far as possible the history of the building by making each part tell its own story from its form, its stone, its timber; and so to fashion all the work that whosoever entereth in feels that this is none other than the House of God, and is constrained to worship within the holy place.

WILLIAM CRAWFORD.

Review.

A FIRST COMMUNION MANUAL. By the Rev. Ninian Hill, D.D. (Edinburgh: J. M. Anderson, 68 Haymarket Terrace, 1s net).

It ought not to be forgotten that this *Annual*, now the chief publication of the Church Service Society, owed its origin to Dr Ninian Hill. There is therefore peculiar satisfaction in calling attention in its pages to a booklet by him, prepared under the stress of serious disability, and now, in seemly form, issued from the press.

The title shows that the ground covered in it is necessarily extensive. For that reason alone, brief and pointed treatment would have been necessary, but present-day publishing difficulties have made severe compression more imperative still. At many points slightly fuller treatment would have been advantageous: the brief sketch of the history of the Church of Scotland, for instance, on page 26, leaves a good deal to be desired. But as a whole the booklet gains rather than loses by its enforced succinctness: there is no waste of words; each subject is presented with careful, if summary, clearness—a virtue in a booklet intended for young people, many of whom a lengthier treatment would undoubtedly have discouraged.

The headings of the sections exhibit the comprehensiveness of the scheme of study: The Invitation, The Difficulties, The Command, The Sacraments, The Christian Heritage, The Confirmation Service, The Communion Service, The Christian Way of Life. A group of Memorabilia come next, for those who use the booklet, committing to memory: the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the New Commandment. Then follow simple instructions as to how, in modern times, worshippers should act upon St Paul's instruction to Timothy as to how he ought to behave himself in the House of God; and the booklet ends with a short Calendar of the Church Year, useful, and indeed necessary, for Scots folk who have inherited no tradition of observance of the chief occasions of the Christian year that call for commemoration.

Ministers who use this booklet will require to provide orally expansions and supplements of the instruction here given, but for an excellent summary of the teaching the occasion calls for, they, as well as the first communicants for whom it is primarily intended, will own a debt to Dr Hill.

MILLAR PATRICK.