

The Kirk of the Greyfriars, Edinburgh

THE recent moving and enhancement of the pulpit in Greyfriars' represents a further step in the 'restoration' of this historic church. When the main 'restoration' of the church was completed in 1938 in time to celebrate the Tercentenary of the signing of the National Covenant, many people felt that the furnishing and lay-out were not worthy of the beautiful seventeenth century church interior which the work of the late Mr Henry Kerr, the architect, had revealed. In particular, the pulpit, sited at the far end of a very long building on the north side of the chancel steps, lacked the dignity and impressiveness looked for in a church which stands in the tradition of special honour for the Word of God.

The pulpit has now been moved to where the original one stood when the National Covenant was signed in the Kirk in 1638. It occupies an impressive central position, while with the removal of the pulpit a greater spaciousness and restfulness have been given to the sanctuary at the east end. The width of the central passage in the church has also been increased to afford an uninterrupted view of the Holy Table between the pews, and a wider open space has been left between the front pews and the chancel steps.

The Pulpit

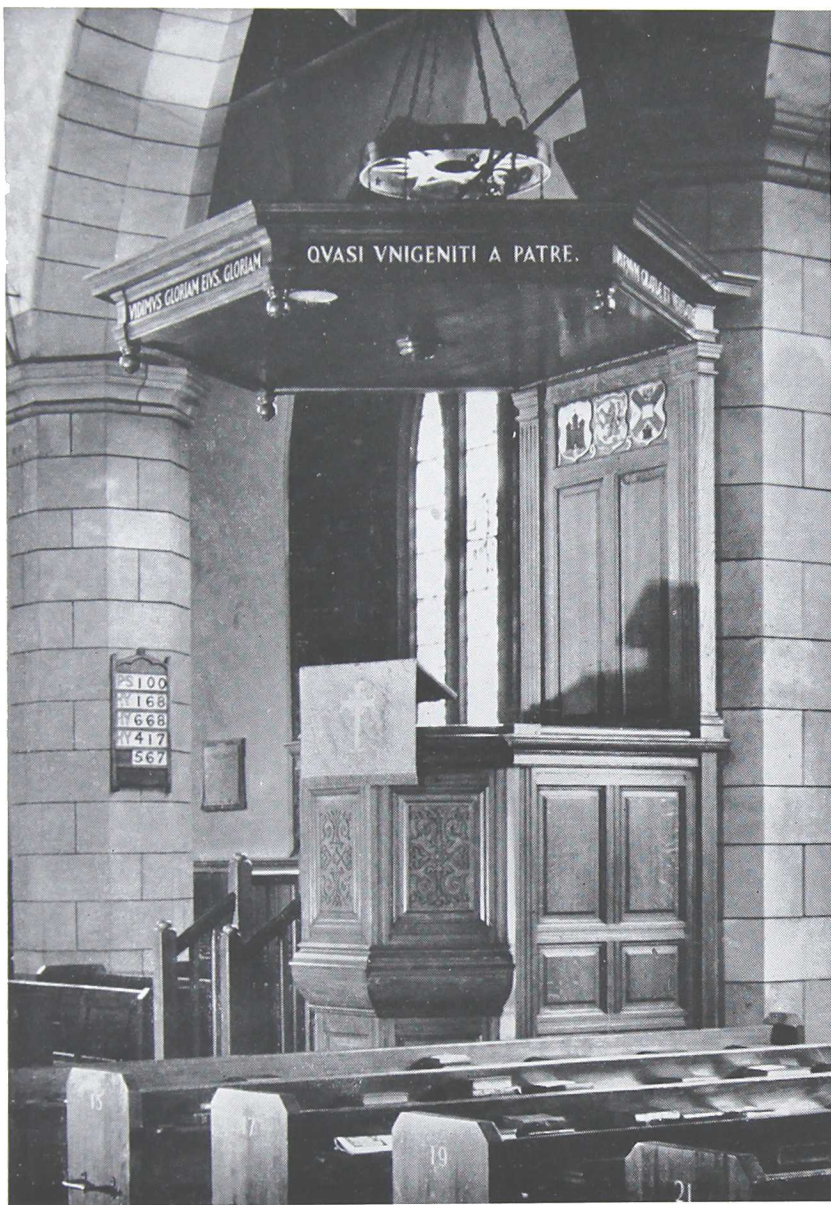
The sacrifices of the men in the congregation who fell in the Second World War have been commemorated in the reconstructed oak pulpit, now placed against the third pillar from the east on the south side of the nave, which is a central point in the original six-arcaded church dedicated on Christmas Day, 1620. . . It will be readily noticed that the nave of a medieval Cathedral was the model taken by the original designers of Greyfriars', and in such a nave the pulpit was centrally placed where the largest number of worshippers could see and hear the preacher when a sermon was delivered.

The lower part of the pulpit was designed and executed for an improvement scheme in Old Greyfriars' in 1912 under the ministry of the Rev. A. B. Grant. This has been



W. D. Leask

GREYFRIARS' CHURCH—THE NAVE (LOOKING EASTWARD)



W. Schomberg Scott

GREYFRIARS' CHURCH—THE PULPIT

remodelled and to it have been added a panelled back and a canopy of traditional form according to the architectural direction and design of Mr George Hay, A.R.I.B.A.

The back is enriched with the carved and coloured Royal Arms, flanked by the shields of the City and University of Edinburgh, with both of which this church has long and close links. The frieze of the impressive canopy and sounding-board, which is fixed to the upper wall by a wrought iron stay, displays the full Latin text of St. John I, verse 14.

Furthermore, a wooden desk has been constructed to the east of the pier against which the pulpit stands and on it rests the Kirk's Book of Remembrance, containing the names of the fallen, 1939-45, and of others of blessed and pious memory. This Book in vellum has been artistically illuminated by Mr John Cridland of Southampton.

Greyfriars' Today

The striking feature of this beautiful and historic church is the emergence in its lay-out of two focal points; the Pulpit in the centre of the church, and the Holy Table and Chancel at the east end. This arrangement is both doctrinally and aesthetically more satisfying than what is more usually found in a 'restored' or 'dignified' church, where the Holy Table affords the sole focal point and the side Pulpit has become just one element in the chancel furnished according to the Victorian Anglican pattern. The widespread predilection for a 'side pulpit' regardless of whether due honour is done to the preaching of the Word of God and whether such a 'side pulpit' is natural to the building, has tended to obliterate our Reformed witness in regard to church arrangement and furnishing.

Where does the remedy lie? First of all, we must reassess the Catholic and Evangelical elements in Reformed Worship. A dignified, restful chancel like that in Greyfriars' with a central Holy Table, and due place for the Font, the Lectern and the Ministers' and Elders' Stalls, but without the cramping and disturbing intrusion of a choir and organ, gives a rightful emphasis to the ministry of sacrament, prayer and adoration.

A massive pulpit in the midst of the worshippers restores preaching to its living place in the church's worship. This reconstructed pulpit has a dominating air that reminds us of our evangelical inheritance in the Church of Scotland and our emphasis on the prophetic ministry of the Word.

The whole church would be enriched if such living doctrine were enunciated by our church lay-out and furnishing and if architects, artists and builders in the service of our church were given a clear lead about what Presbyterian worship aims at setting forth. Then the well informed architect should also be given more right to determine the arrangement and design of the furnishings in the church he has built or restored.

It is our hope that the recent work done in Greyfriars' may encourage a fresh approach to church 'restoration' and may provide a useful focus for creative discussion of this matter so vital to the seemly worship of Almighty God.

The Kirk Museum

The Session House at the south-west corner of Greyfriars' has recently been redecorated and furnished as a museum with the Rev. Dr. Robert Lee's Sanctuary Chair, dated 1857, in the place of honour for the use of the Moderator of Kirk Session.

An interesting collection of prints and photographs has been gathered and hung on the walls to illustrate the development and vicissitudes of the kirk during the past three centuries of its stormy history. Interesting pictures of past ministers, mostly of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have also been appropriately arranged and hung.

The large showcase at the western end of the room contains old Communion flagons and plates in pewter—some inscribed 'for the Waster-Gray-Friers Kirk', 1722, and others 1723. Some historic silver Communion plate is on loan to the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities on the understanding that it may be used by the congregation at Communion services. This plate consists of four cups on mazer feet and stalks, two dated 1633 and two dated 1644, and a beautiful baptismal basin and laver or jug dated 1649, all Edinburgh hallmarked.

The show case at the other end of the Session House contains Bibles and other books and manuscripts relating to the history of Greyfriars' and of the four former congregations of Old Greyfriars', New Greyfriars', Lady Yester's and New North Churches. Above this case hang two fine, embossed alms basins in brass, probably of Netherlands or German manufacture, dated 1703 and 1711 respectively.

The outstanding exhibit in the Session House is an original copy of the National Covenant presented to the

Kirk Session on loan for an indefinite period by Lt.-Col. J. F. C. Hislop and his aunt, Miss Alice Hislop. This particular copy, which has been in the Hislop family's possession for many years, was in all probability signed in Edinburgh after the General Assembly of 1639. It bears only 61 signatures, in contrast to the average copy with 300 or so, but they are mostly those of people of standing. Among them is a prominent Merchant Burgess and Bailie of Edinburgh, Archibald Sydserfe (died 1670). The scribe was John Laurie, who wrote the copy preserved in New College, Edinburgh, the Newbattle copy preserved in the Register House, Edinburgh, and several others. It is singularly appropriate that an original copy of this great and historic document should rest in the Kirk within whose hallowed walls the National Covenant was first adopted on 28th February, 1638.

The Friends of Greyfriars'

The museum in particular and the general care of this beautiful fabric of such intrinsic and historic value have become the special concern of the recently formed 'Society of Friends of the Kirk of the Greyfriars'.

This body has as its objects 'the care of the church and its preservation for posterity' and 'the adornment and furnishing of the church' as well as all other helpful activities, including the publication of booklets and post cards for visitors to Greyfriars'.

The 'Friends' have already presented the new pulpit light to the church and also an antique brass circular chandelier wired for electric light to hang over the Holy Table in Lady Yester's Aisle, which is used as a side-chapel. This is of the same character as a very handsome larger chandelier which now hangs over the Holy Table of the church. This antique ten-light chandelier was presented by his widow in memory of the late William M. McLachlan, M.A., W.S., who served for sixty-three years in the Eldership of the Church of Scotland and was General Secretary of the Church's Foreign Missionary enterprise from 1908 to 1934. This pendant chandelier type of lighting is appropriate to a seventeenth century church and is commonly found in the Reformed and Lutheran churches of the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

Writing about forty years ago when he foresaw the many changes that would overtake the Church of Scotland con-

gregations in central Edinburgh, the late Very Rev. Dr J. N. Ogilvie of New Greyfriars' believed that 'Whatever other city churches may suffer transplantation it is unthinkable that in the spot so hallowed by national and religious memories of the noblest kind a church should ever cease to exist. The Kirk of Greyfriars will abide, its candlestick will not be removed. Amid an environment so rich and stimulating it is easier than in many places for the soul of the worshipper to find emancipation from the fleeting interests of time and to feed on the things that are eternal'.

R. STUART LOUDEN.

The Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends of Greyfriars' is Mr Francis J. Stewart, W.S., 43 Castle Street, Edinburgh 2. Membership is open to all interested in Greyfriars' Kirk at the subscription rates of—Life membership: a minimum of 5 guineas. Annual membership: a minimum of 5/-.