

THE PARISH CHURCH.

BY EX-BAILIE JAMES RONALD.

THIS church dates from 1129-30, at which time David I., by Charter, granted and gave it to Dunfermline Abbey. Between 1371 and 1390, Robert II. founded within it an altar to the Holy Cross, probably at the same time dedicating the church itself to the Holy Cross. From this date down to the Reformation it was known as "the Parish Church of the Holy Cross of the Burgh of Stirling." The West portion is the oldest, and when erected was a complete church in itself, containing the bell tower, nave, north and south aisles, and a small choir or chancel. The nave is five bays in length, with buttresses, of which only two on the north side and two on the south are original. The east and west bays of the north aisle, also the east bay of the south aisle, were subsequently extended, and formed into chapels. The chapel at the north-west corner is traditionally known as Queen Margaret's Chapel. This arises from the carvings of the rose and thistle which appear on the arch at the entrance to the chapel, symbolizing the union of the two kingdoms, by the marriage of Queen Margaret and James IV. The chapel at the north-east, which is still entire, has been known for centuries as the "Garden Aisle," it having come into possession of the Forresters of Garden at the Reformation. The ancient door to this chapel is now built up, but on the lintel over it, the raised letters "D. F." are still to be seen. The chapel on the south side, adjoining the present entrance, anciently known as the "Bowey's Ile," was acquired in 1618 by Spittal's Hospital. It was then in a ruinous condition, but the Hospital rebuilt it, and in 1632 sold it to the Earl of Stirling as a burying place. The Earl died at London in 1640, and his body having been embalmed, was conveyed by sea to Stirling, and interred in this chapel. From this date it is known as the Earl of Stirling's Aisle. The ancient church had three doors—the great west door or main entrance entered at the tower, the south door was in the second west bay of the south aisle, and the north door was in the second west bay of the north aisle. During certain alterations in 1820, these doors were built up, but the formation of their lower parts can still be seen. A great difference of opinion exists as to the age of the present building. The town of Stirling was burnt, and the church along with it, in 1406. In the Chamberlain's accounts for 1414 appears the following item:—"He (the Chamberlain) does not charge himself for the issues of an ayre (an itinerant court) held at Stirling because it was granted to the work of the burned parish church." There can be no doubt it was restored at this time, but we think there are good grounds for believing that portions of an earlier church exist within this building.

With the dawn of the sixteenth century, the necessity arose for increased accommodation in the church. Consequently, in 1507, an agreement was entered into between James Beaton, Abbot of Dunfermline, and the Town Council of Stirling, to enlarge the church by building at the east end "ane gude and sufficient quier." This included what is known as the East Church. About the same period the upper half of the tower was built. When this was completed, the church would be open from tower to apse, and a magnificent building it must have been, extending in length about 208 feet, and in breadth over walls about 62 feet. The church, thus enlarged and completed, was well fitted to be the place of coronation of Mary, Queen of Scots. The ceremony was performed here on Sunday, 9th September, 1543, the occasion being celebrated with great rejoicings. Again, on 29th July, 1567, it was the scene of the coronation of James VI. After the ceremony, the Earl of Mar lifted the infant King from the throne, and carried him back to his nursery in the Castle. While destruction reigned at the time of the Reformation among the other ecclesiastical buildings within the burgh, it is pleasing to know that no structural damage was done to the Parish Church. When matters settled down, and the new order of things was introduced, the congregation used only the choir or east portion as their church. It was called the "inner kirk," and the nave or west portion was called the "outer kirk." With the exception of a few years during the Commonwealth, when the church was divided into two and a partition wall erected, the nave or West Church remained unoccupied for 170 years. In 1731, the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine was appointed third minister, and he occupied the west portion for some nine or ten years. During his incumbency the church was put in order, the area was occupied with seats, and lofts and galleries were erected. After Mr Erskine's secession it was again unoccupied, unless at intervals for very short periods, until 1817. In that year Mr. Gillespie Graham, architect, was employed to put the West Church in order for worship, which he did at a cost of £1400. The transept was erected by Mr. Rothead, architect, in 1867. The East Church was altered and restored to its present form by Mr. James Collie, architect, in 1869. For many centuries the church was used as a place of burial. In 1586, Margaret Stewart, grand-daughter of James V., was buried in the apse or chancel. The Cowane family burying ground was in the north aisle of the West Church, where in all probability rest the remains of John Cowane, the benefactor of the Merchant Guild, and the founder of the Hospital which bears his name. If space permitted, many other notable names might be mentioned. Enough has been said to prove that this fine old building, which has for more than five centuries been mixed up with the burgh's history, is surely worth being carefully preserved.