PENCAITLAND PARISH CHURCH

EAST LOTHIAN

The story of Pencaitland Church is the story of the Church in Scotland as a whole, since the setting up of the parochial system. The foundation is old, and the various changes in the form of worship through the centuries are reflected in the building itself. Here we have a church building, none too common in Scotland, in which the various parts are of different ages, reflecting different architectural trends and religious needs, and which are still in regular use.

One might say that the history of the building itself is uneventful. There are no bullet marks on the walls where martyrs were shot; no cannon balls are lodged in the belfry and it must be one of the few old churches which Cromwell neglected to use as a stable for his horses. Before the Reformation the church belonged to the monks of Dryburgh. A photostat copy of an old charter testifying to this is to be seen in the Winton Aisle. That it was a valuable possession of the monastery (which claimed the teinds or tithes and provided a vicar or vicars to minister to the people) is obvious from the reference made to it in old records. The hill above the river and behind the manse is still called The Vicar's Brae. However, we have little record of those distant times pertaining to Pencaitland in particular, and not until after the Reformation, and the regular keeping of Session records does the picture become less clouded. One of the best-known post-Reformation ministers was the famous David Calderwood (1641-1651).

The building itself consists of a nave, with a gallery at the west end and with two Aisles on the north side; one, the older, called the Winton Aisle and the other the Saltoun Aisle. In pre-Reformation times there was a Sanctuary at the east end of the nave and the construction of the building indicates that there was also a chancel arch.

First let us look at the outside of the building, starting at the west door, in the tower, and proceeding in a clockwise direction. On the first buttress is a chain to which the jougs were attached. When the collar was lost is not known, but an illustration of the complete instrument of punishment was printed in a book published in 1898.

Near/

Near the jougs there is a round-headed window and it is obvious there was once a door-way here. There was a corresponding one, now also converted to a window, on the opposite side of the church. These door-ways pre-date the tower and it is probable that they were separate entrances for men and women who in some places in Scotland, as elsewhere, were segregated during worship, the custom persisting in a few churches up to the 19th century. If these were doorways used by the different sexes, the men's door would have been on the south of the nave and the women's on the north. It is not likely, however, that the custom existed here after the building of the tower when the new west doorway was constructed.

At this part of the church we can note the medieval foundations, which are found most of the way round the building, but which disappear at the late 17th century Saltoun Aisle, which we now come to, projecting at right angles to the nave. The west side of the Saltoun Aisle contains a late Renaissance doorway, now blocked up. The initials over the pediment are those of Sir John (?) Sinclair. Pencaitland was created a Burgh of Barony in 1695 in favour of Sir Robert Sinclair of Stevenson. There is also an ogee-headed window, likewise built up. Note the much weathered face on the north-west corbel. This was probably a piece of an earlier building incorporated in the new work either when it was built, or at a later date. At the top of the north-east corner of the east wall of the Saltoun Aisle is the date 1864 when a so-called restoration was carried out. There is a fine mason's mark on the north wall of the Aisle.

Adjoining the Saltoun Aisle is the Winton Aisle, a venerable structure dating from the 13th century at latest, which was originally roofed with stone slabs. The carved faces of devils, animals, men and angels on the corbels are worthy of notice. Two large windows have been filled in, although the doorway is obviously of earlier date than the stone used for blocking the windows, and is probably 17th century work. It will be noticed that the original buttresses have been strengthened by later additions, possibly to counteract the thrust when the nave was built against it. The north wall of the Aisle is very much out of the perpendicular.

Proceeding/

Proceeding to the east end of the nave, we can see that the east door has been clumsily knocked through the wall, obviously in post-Reformation times.

The south wall of the nave, where the early foundations again reappear, has five buttresses. Of these, the ones at each end are probably contemporary with the rest of the structure, the remaining ones being added later to prevent a bulging of the wall, probably as late as the 19th century. At the east end of the south wall is a blocked-up priest's door which led into the chancel - an indication that the nave, although of later date than the foundations, certainly pre-dates the Reformation. Features which can be observed from the south of the church are the three sundials, and the windows of the nave.

Returning to the tower we see that it bears the date 1631 and the initials of John Oswald, the incumbent at that time. The tower houses a bell in the upper octagonal portion. The bell is dated 16~~3~~6 and bears the legend "Pencaitland", "Fear ye the Lord". The tower at one time served as a doo-cot, and is lined with nesting boxes for the pigeons, a cause of much chagrin to the present Kirk Session, who are apt to forget the ancient law of Sanctuary and wage a constant war, albeit largely a non-violent one, against the birds which still attempt to populate it.

Inside the church the pulpit is worth a little attention. It is a fine example of 17th century work, although the base is modern. The carving is stylised. It is not certain whether a canopy (see Gifford church, among others) was provided, but there may well have been one which was removed at a later date. The baptismal bracket, although not an outstanding piece of workmanship is interesting, as comparatively few of these now remain. Originally the minister baptised from the pulpit, and sprinkled the water, with varying degrees of accuracy, on to the baby held below. The bracket is still in use, although now, of course, the minister descends from the pulpit during the ceremony.

The old oak pew fronts and pews at the front of the transept known as/

as the Saltoun Aisle are 16th or 17th century and repay examination. Some old oak is also built into the front of the gallery, which dates from 1635.

The fine stained glass window in the Winton Aisle was erected by parishioners to the memory of Mary, Lady Ruthven (1789-1885) and the one over the east door commemorates the Rev. James Coullie, minister of the parish from 1872 to 1924.

The Winton Aisle itself, which was "restored" at the end of last century probably served at one time as a Sacristy, and later housed a Laird's loft. It is probable that the present single arch separating the Aisle from the former chancel was at one time arcaded.

There are records of burials in the church, notably under the gallery; in the Winton Aisle; and in the erstwhile chancel, where there is a memorial to the Rev. William Denune (1685-1704) who was buried there.

---ooOoo---