



SCOTLAND'S CHURCHES TRUST

HISTORIC SCOTTISH CHURCHES THE EUROPEAN CONNECTION

Prof Adam Cumming FSA Scot

“It is often assumed that Scotland took its architectural lead from England, but this is not completely true, Scotland had its own links across Europe, and these developed and changed with time.”

Scotland has many medieval churches though not all are well known. They deserve greater awareness. Many are ruined but many are not, and others often survive in some form in adapted buildings.

It is often assumed that Scotland took its architectural lead from England, but this is not completely true, Scotland had its own links across Europe, and these developed and changed with time. The changes were usually a response to politics and trade. This is of course reflected in the buildings across Scotland. It can be argued that these form a distinctive part of European culture with regional variations. Right is



Rila Monastery in Bulgaria

Glasgow Cathedral which can be shown to have architectural links across Europe.

The early Scottish church, that of Ninian and Columba (as well as many others), was part of the early church before the great schism 1054. It was organised a little like the Orthodox Churches now. The church below is that of Rila Monastery in Bulgaria, an Orthodox community and similar in plan to early Scottish ones with the church in the centre of the complex.

It is often described as Celtic which is a later description but does emphasise a common base with Ireland and Wales etc. There was a great deal of movement across northern Europe and it retained close links with Ireland and elsewhere via ‘Schottenkloster’ and other mission centres.

There was an 11th century reformation with closer links with Rome under the ‘Margaretsons’ but the existing round towers illustrate one continuing ‘Celtic link’. This may well have been political given that the two are in the former Pictish kingdoms and at Abernethy and



Glasgow Cathedral



Left to right: Brechin Cathedral, Abernethy and Kilkenny and Kildare in Ireland.

Brechin. It suggests a complex and changing political scene. Below are Brechin Cathedral, Abernethy and Kilkenny and Kildare in Ireland.

However, slightly later Scottish towers were often detached, rectangular and had later churches added, as at Dunblane Cathedral and Muthill Parish Church. Overleaf are Muthill Parish Church and Restenneth Priory where a tower is incorporated in a later church as at Dunblane, which is on the right.

These were influenced from England and elsewhere including Scandinavia – and those influences developed and changed with time. See also the Rhineland connections, possibly via Ely and Bury St Edmonds in East Anglia. The examples overleaf are Kelso Abbey and Mainz Cathedral.

Influences were mainly English/Norman French in 12th century but this reduced with time with a different balance appearing. There



L to R: Muthill Parish Church, Restenneth Priory and Dunblane Cathedral



L to R: St Chapelle, Paris, External; Upper Church and Lower Church



L to R: Glasgow Cathedral and the nave of Holyrood Abbey



L to R: Kelso Abbey and Mainz Cathedral

were always links with rest of Europe and this included supporting different monastic orders from England, e.g. Tiron; it appears in church music such as the St Andrew's Choirbook which contains music from Notre Dame de Paris – the source of the most modern music in the west at the time, and there were Political links and connections through trade reinforced by European marriages, Finally there the dispute over church primacy with the separation from the English superiority which formed part of the Scottish insistence on separation from England.

This rebalancing continued into

the 13th century where all church architecture was heavily influenced by Ile de France, (St Denis, Chartres, Notre Dame, Amiens, etc) though the proportions tended to be English. Scottish students worked in Paris while, as mentioned above, School of Notre Dame music was used in St Andrews.

One of the most important architectural influences was Sainte Chapelle in Paris. Designed as a reliquary for the Crown of Thorns. On two stories with a lower church it could be linked to the design of the east end of Glasgow Cathedral via Bourges Cathedral.

“Influences flowed across Europe with connections that travelled freely in all directions.”

Above right are the choir of Glasgow Cathedral and the nave of Holyrood Abbey both influenced by both England and France.

There were therefore many routes for influences to reach Scotland directly. It can be added that influences flowed across Europe with connections that travelled freely in all directions. For example, the West fronts of Wells, Holyrood and the reconstructed one at Trondheim have similarities in the development of a screen front.

Plans were also influenced by England (no apses at the East End) and by France with striking West



L to R: Holyrood, Wells and Trondheim below.



Top: Elgin Cathedral, Arbroath Abbey
Bottom: Bayonne Cathedral and Soissons Abbey

Towers, though there are several English versions for example York and elsewhere in the north. In general, the Greater Churches fit the European mould, mainly but not exclusively English. Right are Elgin Cathedral, Arbroath Abbey, Bayonne Cathedral and Soissons Abbey whose west fronts are good examples.

There are also similarities to Ireland in plans and arrangements. This is possibly due to resource constraints and similarities in needs. See Sweetheart and Jerpoint Abbeys below. Scotland was wealthier and this is reflected in the ornamentation and detail.

In the Fourteenth Century and after, the variations increased, due to the impact of the Wars of Independence. There was less influence from England, and more from the rest of the continent. The Guardians of Scotland wrote to the Hanseatic League seeking to reopen trade; there was an Alliance with France from 1296 and increasing trade with Low Countries and Scandinavia. Good contact did continue from time to time with England but there was much more continental influence. This is seen in music and education with the foundation of Scottish universities and students in Paris etc and the Carver Choirbook which contains not just Scottish music



Sweetheart Abbey and Jerpoint Abbey

but also English and Continental works at a time when England was culturally isolated. Glass, woodwork and paintings were also brought from the Low Countries.

A good illustration is Melrose Abbey which is a mixture of styles with a Perpendicular Presbytery, built with English support, as reparations for their damage. The style is obviously Yorkshire. However, there are French style Transepts and Nave, with a master mason of French origin, John Morrow, (Jean Moreau of Paris certainly).

The main design features are Curvilinear Tracery with little Perpendicular influence (Perpendicular is an almost completely local English style); Barrel vaults with or without applied ribs though Tiercon multiribbed vaults were used where they were affordable, maybe only over the choir. Those to the right, is in Trinity Collegiate church and St Giles. The Trinity vault is very similar to that in St Giles choir.

There were very few complex vaults settling for simple solutions such as ribs applied to barrel vaults if vaults at all. Scottish window tracery



Melrose Abbey



Trinity Collegiate church and St Giles



L to R: St Michael's, Linlithgow and the others are in Seton Collegiate Church.



Top, left and bottom right: Kosice.
 Top right: Ettlingen.
 Bottom left: Badherrenalb.

followed the Northern European style. The more complex window above is in St Michael's, Linlithgow and the others are in Seton Collegiate Church. All are similar to Northern European patterns.

Three sided apses are common in Scotland, but rare in England – those to the left are in Slovakia (Kosice) and Germany (Ettlingen and Badherrenalb). They probably derive from St Chapelle and have the advantage of providing lighting over the altar and a sense of focus.

Some Scottish Examples are given to the right – King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, Seton Collegiate Church, St Salvatore's College Chapel, St Andrews, Calder Kirk, Midcalder, Trinity Collegiate Church, Edinburgh. There are many others.

Note that the proportions remain British, but the German example suggests that many of the rubble finished walls were harled which may also have been the case in Scotland, just as in castles.



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Top to bottom: King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, Seton Collegiate Church, Calder Kirk, Midcalder, St Salvatore's College Chapel, St Andrews, Trinity Collegiate Church, Edinburgh.



Top from L to R: St Mary's Haddington (1 and 2) Holyrude Stirling.
Lower from L to R: St John's Perth; Dundee St Mary's and St John's Perth

There are other features that are closer to European models. The development of large burghal churches – St John's, Perth, Holyrude, Stirling, St Giles, Edinburgh, St Mary's, Haddington, St Mary's Dundee are examples.

Finally, Scotland is rich in historic churches, both complete and in use, as well as ruined. These are part of European culture – having given to and received from many places – and are a shared heritage. While much has been lost much remains and should be celebrated!

Late last year I was invited to give a talk to the Edinburgh NTS Members Centre on Historic Church Architecture. I linked this to SCT and the Centre made a donation to the Trust as a result. This is a precis of that talk illustrated with my photographs and thus my copyright.

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