

## CRICHTON KIRK

(See also Plates 1-4)

Coming from Edinburgh, take the A68 (Lauder) road through Dalkeith and after about four miles (until the controversial new bypass is constructed) cross Telford's graceful (1832) bridge high over the River Tyne and enter the village of Pathhead, Ford. Down below on your right the tiny hamlet of Ford, with Ford House (1680), marks the historic crossing-place of the ancient route taken by kings, lords and commoners – still the road for heavy traffic. Ignoring no less than three other roads, turn at right angles towards the sign-post 'Crichton Castle 2½ mls.' Two miles of charming landscape bring you to the partly reconstructed farm cottages of Crichton Mains, where sign-posts direct you sharp right and then left. The road ends at Crichton Kirk and former Manse, and a field track runs on for a quarter of a mile to the still splendid ruins of Crichton Castle. A vestry key is kept by the present owner of the Manse (built 1758, enlarged and improved, with an old wall sun-dial). Mr. Lamotte has also installed floodlighting in the garden, making the old Kirk the lighted glory of the countryside at night, a symbol of over five hundred years during which the light of Christ has shone here in Roman Catholic, Episcopalian and Presbyterian reflections. No wonder that it is a much-loved sanctuary, and many visitors include university classes, ecclesiological, historical, and other groups. It is still a centre of parish life; services take place at 11.30 a.m. on the second and fourth Sundays of every month and at special festivals. It has particular charm for sacramental and wedding services: the atmosphere of worship is exceptional: the air is full of the prayers of centuries and in conducting worship one feels spiritually uplifted. This could become a place of pilgrimage.

### The Crichtons

The earliest known reference occurs in the *Registrum de Dunfermelyn* (1176), where the value of the Creytun living was 30 marks; in *Bagimond's Roll* (1275), Crecon was '1½ marc'. When King David I granted a charter for the building of Holyrood Abbey (1128) Turstan de Creichtoun was one of the witnesses. It also appears that the family provided some of the clergy: according to the Charter of Newbattle (1338) William de Creichton was rector then and he supported certain monks in neighbouring New Cranston. In 1427 an appeal to Rome asks 'that Papal dispensation might be granted for

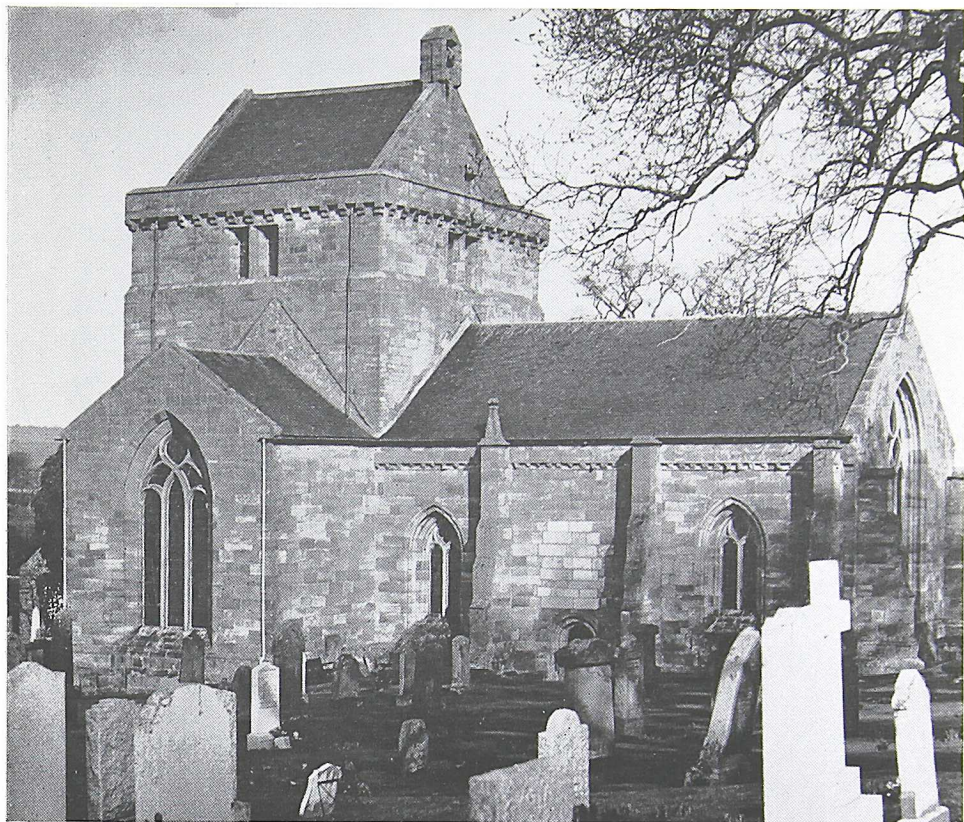


PLATE 1 Crichton Church Exterior – From South

*(By courtesy of Church of Scotland Visual Aids)*

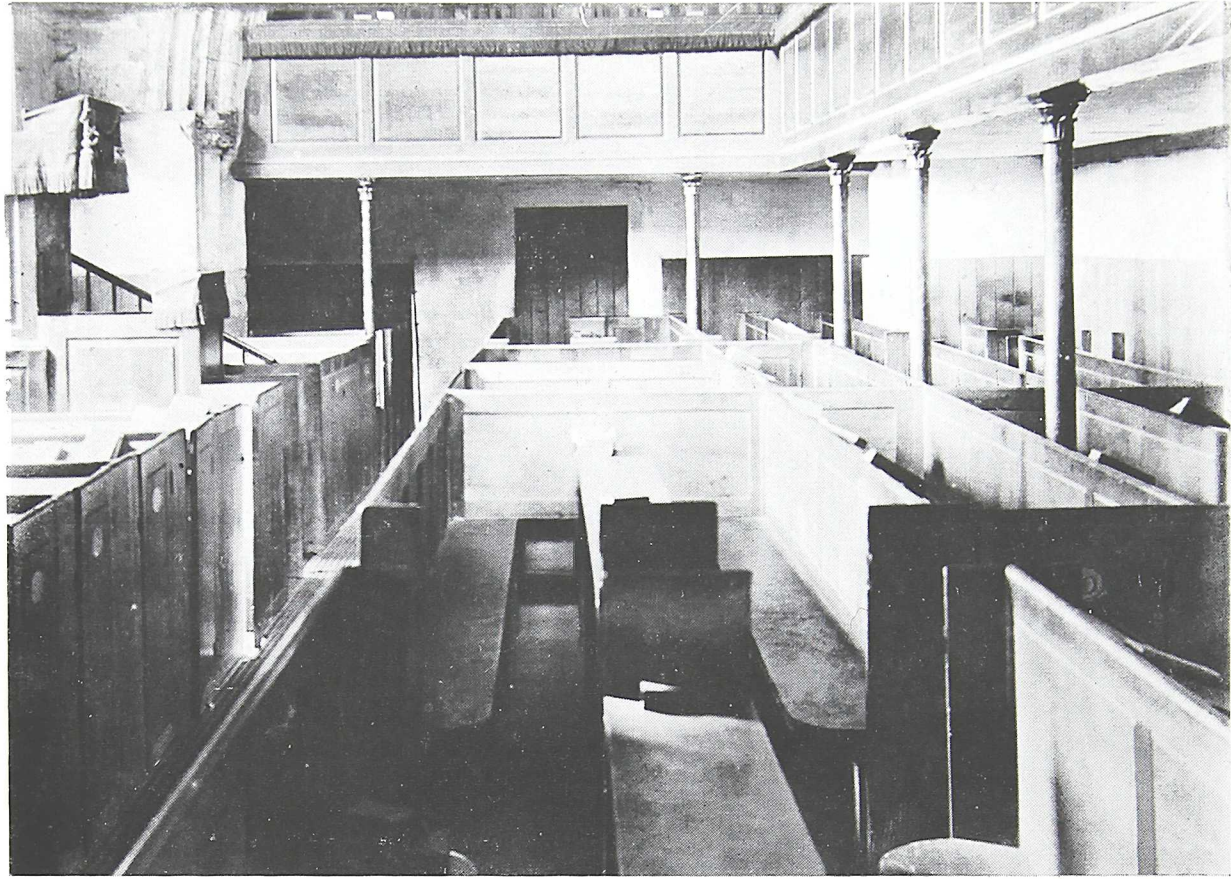


PLATE 2 Crichton Church Interior - Before 1898

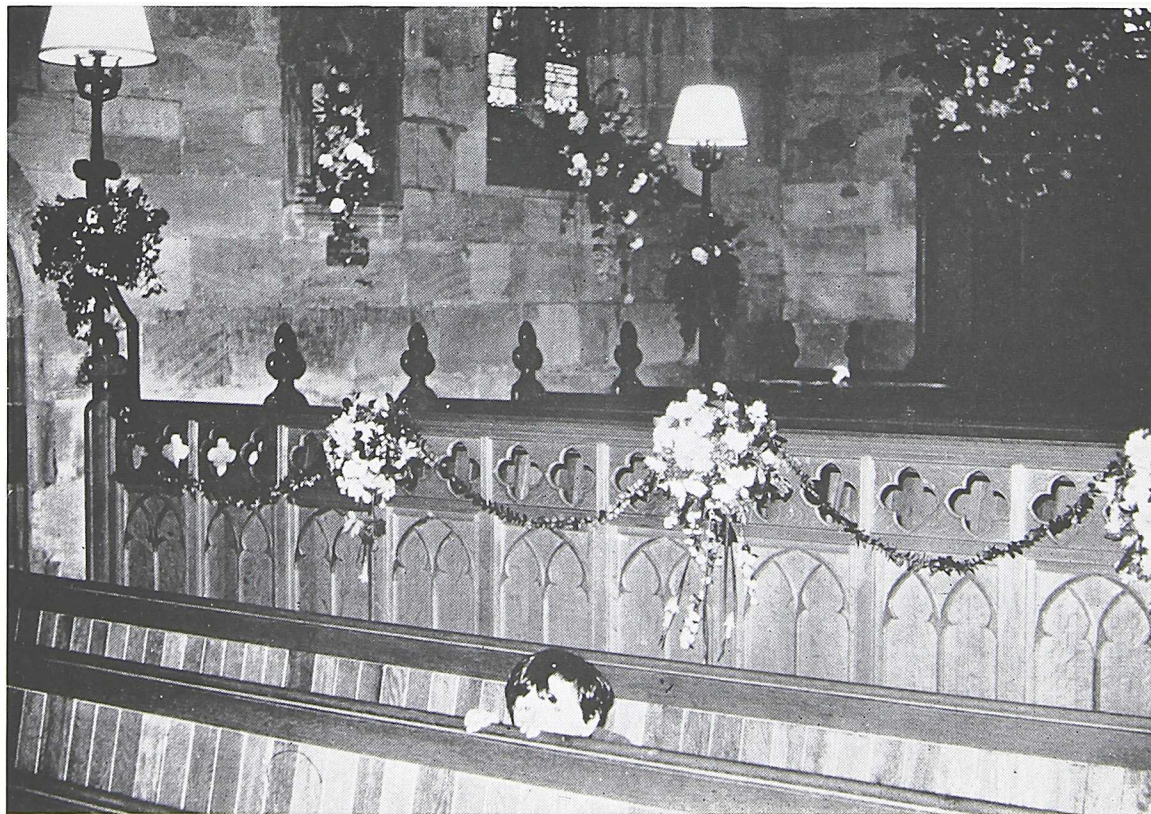
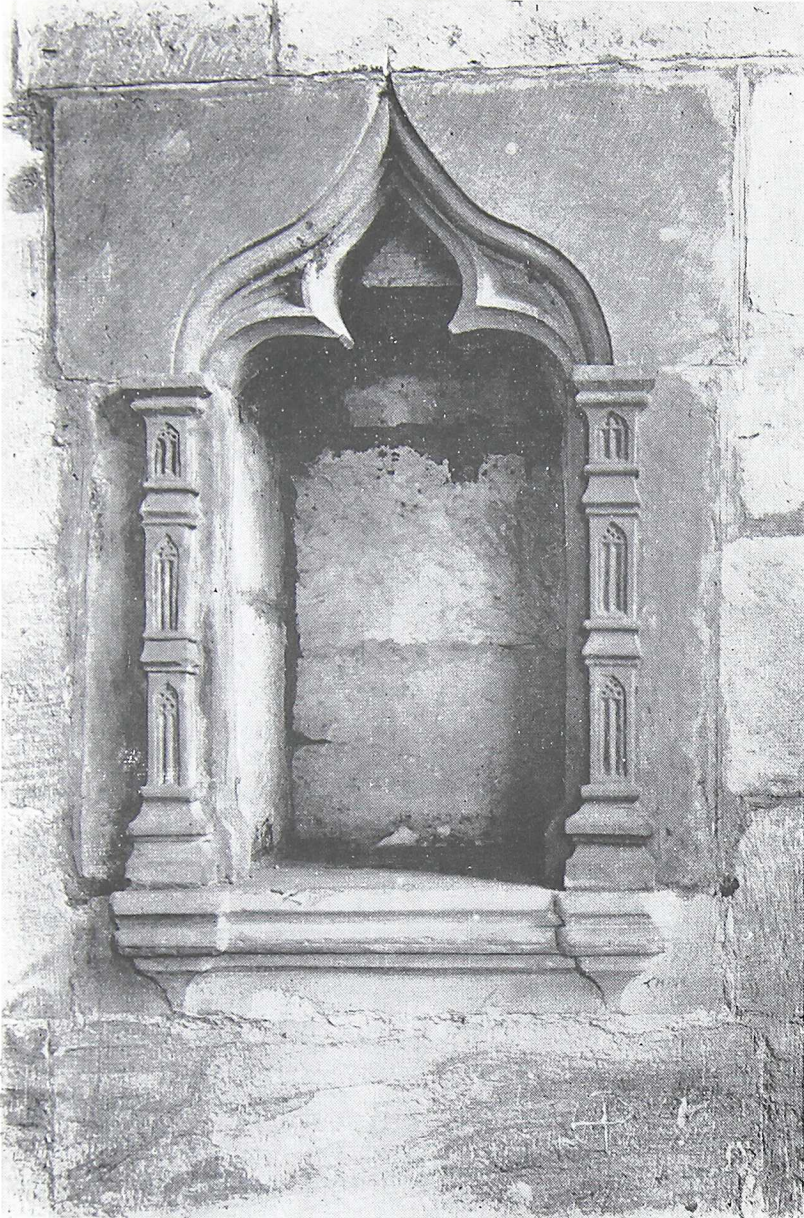


PLATE 3 Crichton Church Interior - June 1974

*(By courtesy of J. G. Lanotte)*



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PLATE 4 Crichton Church - Sacrament House

George de Creighton to hold the benefice of Crichton even though under age'.

The family took a leading place in Scottish history when Sir William Crichton became Lord High Chancellor in 1437 and virtual ruler of Scotland during the minority of James II. He was a gifted, patriotic, but ambitious and unscrupulous politician. He enlarged the ancient keep of Crichton Castle, adding the western and northern sides.

### **The Kirk**

As you round a bend on the narrow road from Crichton Mains cottages, you come in sight of the squat, solid, T-shaped kirk and kirkyard amongst some trees, nestling on the slope that drops steeply to the glen of the young Tyne. The pink sandstone building seems to grow out of the brae-side, the focal point of vision. It has been suggested that the masons who had just finished enlarging the Castle might have been responsible for the kirk, with little architectural supervision – the choir, tower, and transepts do not fit exactly and the transepts are of unequal size. Again there is the suggestion of a living growth, and the life continues: the Castle is a ruin, however magnificent; the kirk is alive, in a neighbourhood where houses are being restored.

The Chancellor had just returned from France after successfully arranging a marriage between James III and Mary of Gueldres. He had the kirk dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St. Mungo on 26 December 1449 'out of thankfulness and gratitude to Almighty God for all the manifold deliverances He had vouchsafed to him', to be his own collegiate sanctuary where votive masses would be said daily for him and his family. For this purpose he appointed a provost, eight prebends or chaplains, two singing boys, and a sacristan.

About forty *collegia* (*collegium* – 'chapter'), 'the counterpart of political feudalism . . . were introduced with it from England' (*The Collegiate Churches of Scotland, Part Two – Their Significance*, by D. E. Easson, p. 4).<sup>1</sup> Many had been parish churches. Arising from belief in purgatory, prayers and especially masses for the dead, they were used by those in power to increase their status with God and man, and supported by revenues from parochial charges with the result that certain hard-worked parish clergy were underpaid. Crichton was supported by the parish revenues of Crichton and Locherworth (later called Borthwick which was detached in 1596), and by Edinburgh rents so that it became a wealthy living: its provosts had a town house in Cant's Close beside Blackfriars St., among leading Scottish churchmen.

The nave and aisles were never built: various reasons have been

suggested. Easson (*ibid.*, p. 2) says because it was not meant to serve the parishioners, but since there was a vicar for parish duties there would be a worshipping flock, though records of a 'kirk aisle' may indicate the original church. The ambitious character of Lord Crichton, reflected also in his enlarged castle, suggests that he intended to increase the ecclesiastical status by an imposing establishment, but he died in 1454 and five turbulent years with failing vitality may have interrupted his plans. There exists a projecting fragment of a north wall, sixteen feet long, containing a door leading to the staircase to the tower – surely indicating further plans.

The architecture is of native simplicity, of the third or late pointed style. Coming down the brae, the choir faces you, with a finely-restored east window (21' by 10'); the south side has three buttresses to support the original roof of stone slabs. Only one small window on the NE. side retains the original tracery; the rest are of restored perpendicular type. The walls above have a false parapet adorned with square-shaped flowers and grotesque mask-like faces. The roof meets the parapet, the upper cornice under the eaves representing the normal cope – adapted from domestic building practice. Near the top of the fragment of nave wall a man's figure is carved, and a shield with the emblems of the Passion, as at Seton. Raggles higher up the tower wall indicate that the level was lowered when the stone slabs were replaced by heavy slates.

The tower, twenty-four feet square, is upheld by pointed arches rising from four responds of simple section, the capitals finely adorned by late carving of foliage design. The west wall built across the nave archway contains the main door now. Above it a coat of arms, probably those of Agnes Nicolson of Cockburnspath, wife of Patrick Murray, Lord Elibank, whose father, Gideon Murray, the last of the fourteen provosts, attached the church lands to his estate. The walls of the tower go up one storey above the roof water-table, each face having a small square window of two lights, above which is a corbel course with a parapet from inside which a gabled roof rises, topped by a small bell-cot at the east end. A small door below gives access to the roof.

The choir (44' E. to W., 24' 10" wide) still contains – a rarity – a restored aumbry beside the entrance from the vestry (which was built over the foundations of the old sacristy). Below it can be traced the incised consecration cross. Opposite, in the south wall, are three sedilia. Nearby, the original chancel or priest's door has been restored. The magnificent barrel vaulting of the choir, as at Dun-glass (1403), Seton (1493) etc. gives a wonderful sense of space and strength. The altar canopy hooks remain. The choir piscina has gone, but there is a piscina in the east corner of the south transept. The total width of the transepts is seventy feet.

### **The Kirk through the Years**

The third Lord Crichton was attainted for rebellion against James III and bereft of rank and property in 1483. Thereafter the building suffered from a succession of careless patrons, indifferent clergy, and lay spoliation of funds and possessions. It was probably damaged by Hertford's English troops in 1544. We have no record of what happened at the Reformation; but in 1573 the kirk was ruinous. The congregation worshipped for years in a building along the Pathhead road, the 'Kirkaisle'. When this building fell into decay, on 17 November 1641 the Scottish Parliament prophetically re-instated Crichton as 'the parish Kirk for all time coming'. But the ancient patrimony was gone, and the Presbytery in 1706 found the building 'neither wind nor water-tight'. The hallowed sanctuary was clumsily converted into a cluttered preaching station in 1729. The chancel arch was filled, the north transept walled up to five feet and used as a burial vault for Lord Rosebery's family, the south as a lumber room for grave-digger's tools etc. A window in the south choir was blocked up as background for the pulpit – the ring used to anchor the sounding board stay remains. Some windows were filled with rubble; a door was cut through the east end opposite the west door to allow the flow of communicants at the Lord's Supper.

Once again the kirk was allowed to decay: its condition is described and deplored in MacGibbon and Ross, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland* (1897). The story is too common: heritors enjoying church lands minuted good resolutions on repair but could be parsimonious in provision. In the 1890s the floors and seats of Crichton were rotten, the walls green with mould, the burial transept insanitary.

In 1898, the sixteenth minister since the Reformation, the Rev. Adam W. Fergusson, with the support of the laird and main inheritor, Henry Callander of Prestonhall who donated £500, embarked on a complete restoration. The congregation and friends, and the Baird Trust, made up the required cost of £1484 including a two-manual pipe organ. The Order of Service for re-dedication on 11 May 1899, conducted by the Very Rev. Dr. Wm. Mair, author of *The Digest of Church Laws*, stated the aim to re-create the kirk 'to its original condition, so far as that was possible'. Local masons, joiners and tradesmen worked under the architects, Hardy and Wight, Edinburgh.

Only one internal rearrangement was feasible, and it happens to anticipate modern ecumenical and ecclesiastical principles. The Holy Table was centred under the tower, the pulpit behind it, the worshipping Family seated on fine native oak benches on three sides in chancel and transepts. Unfortunately, but then almost inevitably, the organ (by Joseph Brook, Glasgow), was built against the west

wall over an entrance vestibule behind the pulpit. A fine tapestry curtain in front of the pipes would be the simplest improvement: the organist and most of the console is screened by the pulpit. Mrs. Callander provided a handsome oak carved reredos screen under the great east window which itself is a reasonable example of the stained glass of the period, like five others by Ballantyne and Gardner – one commemorates the late David Ainslie of Costerton, buried nearby, who was responsible for the founding of the Astley-Ainslie Hospital in Edinburgh. The remaining two windows, one a War Memorial, are of pleasing modern design.

### **Crichton Today**

In 1948 Crichton parish, based on the Callander estate, was united as one charge with Cranstoun, based on Lord Stair's Oxenford estate, and Ford, a secession charge originating in a 1784 Relief congregation. After much controversy, the three congregations gave a remarkable example of determined unity, and the first minister, the Rev. Roderick Murchison (1949–58), my predecessor, gifted with unusual charm and devotion, was enabled to build a strong united congregation, the real centre of spiritual and community life. The local G.P., a keen elder, Dr. George W. Ireland, gathered a Bible study group which resulted in the formation of one of the first Community Associations in Scotland, co-ordinating all local activities in a pattern Christian democracy.

In the year following my induction, it was decided to proceed with certain improvements. The only artificial light came from four Aladdin lamps; heating was insufficient, fittings worn, appearance dingy. An electric cable had to be led right across the Tyne valley from Hagbrae farm, and tubular heating plus radiators installed. The four iron lampstands made by the Crichton blacksmith (who also made the finely-wrought churchyard gates gifted by the Callanders) were copied and six new stands erected with shades retaining the effect of lamplight. Floodlighting was fitted at the apex of the tower and a memorial spotlight set over the chancel arch. The organ was completely renovated and the old hand pump replaced by an electric motor. New curtains and passage runners were fitted. Mrs. MacNab, widow of the last minister, designed and gifted an oak table lectern, an embroidered cloth for Holy Communion, and presented an oriental rug for the vestry. Other gifts included a memorial elder's chair and the return of the tiny, rough table formerly used for communion vessels, now standing in the entrance porch. A detective operation traced a former pewter chalice engraved 'Crichton Kirk 1730', now used as a baptismal ewer.

The six silver communion cups are still used on all occasions, and

are found to be the simplest and most practical for extra festival celebrations. Four bear the mark of James Tait, Edinburgh, the date letter of 1731 – but material from older cups was incorporated. Two were gifted in the same century by Sir James Justice of East Crichton House, principal clerk of the Court of Session.

Session records going back to 1696 reflect continuing concern for community service, local and national. The church was responsible for parish roads; in 1698 the elders took a house-to-house collection for the building of a bridge over the river Cart (Glasgow). Entire Sunday collections sometimes went as follows: 30 April 1699 – Ancrum bridge repair; 6 Dec. 1696 and 5 June 1709 – aid for Canongate families, Edinburgh, dispossessed by fire. Special collections were taken for shipwrecked sailors, returned emigrants, prisoners rescued from the Turks and Algerians, suffering folk in Temple, Edinburgh, and Leith; even for a Protestant church in Königsberg, Kant's city.

1974 was the 525th anniversary of the original dedication and the 75th of the restoration. A week-end of celebrations culminated on Sunday 9 June, when crowded congregations gathered to praise God for centuries of blessing, with Holy Communion in the forenoon and the Minister and Choir of St. Giles', Edinburgh, conducting an evening service of praise. The interior glowed with superb floral decorations, a Festival of Flowers arranged by ladies of the congregation. A continuous stream of visitors flowed through, passing across the road to the former stables, newly restored as a cottage, and housing a temporary exhibition 'Crichton – Past and Present', displaying a collection of old plenishings, pictures and records, and a Scots kitchen of past days. Dr. Colin F. Hogg, a member of the congregation who has spent much leisure time in historical research on the subject, had completed his short history, *Crichton Collegiate Church*, in time for the celebrations. I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to him, to the late Rev. John Dickson, author of *Crichton: Past and Present* (Elliot, Edinburgh, 1911), and to many other sources.

#### NOTE

1. See *Scottish Church History Society Records* Vol. VII (1941), pp. 30-47. Quotation from p. 33.

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