

#### 4. CARVED OAK PANELS FORMERLY AT GREENLAW, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE.

The recently acquired panels,<sup>1</sup> illustrated in Pl. LII, are of a fine-grained oak. They are said to have been part of a bed, but were made into a bookcase about 1830, by the well-known antiquary and friend of Scott, Joseph Train, who recounted their history in two notes, one in Mackenzie's *History of Galloway*,<sup>2</sup> the other in the *New Statistical Account*.<sup>3</sup> The tradition was that they had been successively at Threave, Lochinvar, Kenmure and Greenlaw. They were recently referred to in an article in the *Scots Magazine* <sup>4</sup> by a descendant of Train, Miss Marjory T. Dunn, in whose possession they latterly were. As will be shown, the earliest part of the story, to the effect that the bed came from Threave Castle and was the property of the "Black Earl" of Douglas, who died in 1452, must be dismissed as legendary.

The case, as it stands, is in two sections, with a cornice on three sides, and measures 9 feet 5 inches × 4 feet 3 inches × 1 foot 1.5 inch. The old panels and their moulded frames form the two sets of doors and the sides of the upper section. The carvings on the sides of the lower section and on the front of the cornice have been inset in new wood at the reconstruction, when new material was used as unobtrusively as possible. Parts of the woodwork have been scorched by contact with something hot, perhaps in the blacksmith's shop where they were found in the eighteenth century.

The lower door panels, two to a door with mouldings between and round them, have five interlacing ribbon patterns in low relief, one above the other and all different. The upper door panels, similarly placed, each have three human figures in low relief, one above the other: acrobats, musicians and soldiers, in late sixteenth-century costume. Each side of the upper section has two panels, both with a head in a roundel over a three-quarter-length figure. The cornice has three armed horsemen in low relief, inset in panels of new wood and surrounded by guilloche mouldings. The interlaced designs average 6 × 6.5 inches, the horsemen 10 × 7.75 inches, and the figures vary from 9 to 13.5 inches, the tallest being the Fiddler.

Inset in the lower of the two new panels forming the sides of the lower section of the case are two oak panels, 21.25 × 4.05 inches, of coarser grain than the others, and much worm-eaten. They are done in a kind of chip carving with free use of a gouge; on one side thistles on a stalk, on the other, roses. There seems to be no good reason to connect these with the other panels of the case.

The interlaced designs are well drawn if rather crowded, but the figures are child-like. With the exception of the Piper, all the heads are in profile, and in every case the carver has emphasised the cheek-bone and has had considerable difficulty in placing the eye, which appears in the middle of the temple as well as in its right place. It looks as if he had failed to understand that in the design

<sup>1</sup> P. 321.

<sup>2</sup> *Kirkcudbrightshire*, note, pp. 183-4.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. ii. (*infra*, 184). Appendix, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> July 1938, p. 255.

given to him the small nick at the top of the nose was all that was necessary to indicate so important a feature as the eye. Two of the soldiers, one on each side, carry muskets, and another has two pistols. These, and the Fiddler, were overlooked by Train when he dated the bed to the fifteenth century.

There are six different types of mouldings, with slight variations, among those which outline the panels, and each occurs on at least two of the separate parts of the case. This is not, however, sufficient evidence that the rude figure carvings of the upper doors, sides and cornice are by the same craftsman who carved the geometric designs of the lower section: a stronger link is the fact that the small crosses (+) stamped on parts of the clothing of eleven of the figures occur also on two of the interlaced patterns (second and third from the top, inner panel of the right door), and on the guilloche mouldings of the cornice. The arms of the crosses are 0·2 inch long, some are placed upright, some diagonally, and the stamping is blurred at the intersection of the arms. That these are contemporary with the figure carvings is proved by the fact that similar stamps of the same size occur on the door from Amisfield Tower, Dumfriesshire,<sup>1</sup> also in the Museum, which is dated 1600. There is no blurring in those stamps—each one has been most carefully done, and all are upright. They have been used to decorate the edges of Samson's garments, his collar, and the band of his hat—the bell-like object above the lion. There seems no reason to doubt, therefore, that all the carving on the case, with the exception of the thistles and roses, was done by the same craftsman.

Another oak door, originally in Terregles House, Dumfriesshire, now at Traquair House, and identified as by the same hand as the door from Amisfield, was described in the *Proceedings* a few years ago.<sup>2</sup> Permission to inspect the Terregles door was kindly given by Captain F. J. Maxwell-Stuart of Traquair, and it was found that the same crosses had also been stamped on it. There is no human figure this time, but the crosses decorate the unicorn's collar, the lion's mane, the howdah, and the roundel containing the initials and date (1601). It may be noted that the roundels on the sides of the bookcase are similarly stamped. The Terregles door is of a fine-grained oak, much more like, in its present condition at least, the panels than the coarse-weathered oak of the door in the Museum. Grose<sup>3</sup> says that the Amisfield door was "most barbarously painted" and small patches of the paint remain. The Greenlaw panels showed traces of red lead in cleaning, on the background, not on the figures, suggesting it also had been painted at some stage. It is most improbable that the figures were ever painted, for surely paint would have obscured the stamped crosses completely, and nullified their decorative purpose.

Quite apart from the stamps, the figures on the Greenlaw panels are of the same type as that of Samson on the Amisfield door. Their hair is treated in exactly the same manner, and the Amisfield carver was not at all happy in his treatment of the eye, though more successful than in the Greenlaw case. Warrack suggested in his Rhind Lectures for 1919-20<sup>4</sup> that the similarity between the Amisfield door and the Greenlaw panels "points to the existence of an untrained native artist in Dumfries and Galloway in the sixteenth century," and Mr Ian Finlay in his recent book, *Scottish Crafts*, links all three pieces together.<sup>5</sup> Dr J. S. Richardson tells me that the stamping is a leather-worker's device, and would

<sup>1</sup> *Inventory of Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions in the County of Dumfries*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxvi. p. 7, and Pl. III.

<sup>3</sup> *Antiquities of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> *Domestic Life in Scotland*, 1488-1688, pp. 78-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

not be found in better quality carving. Again this supports the theory that we have the work of "some rural worker, perhaps a carpenter by trade,"<sup>1</sup> copying better work, for decorative cutting, not stamping, is often found on sixteenth-century carving, especially on the clothes of figures in relief. The Amisfield door crosses however seem too sharp for leather, which would be cut by them, but it is possible that the coarse grain of the wood is responsible for their present sharpness.

The very fine oak pulpit from Parton Church, Kirkcudbrightshire, dated 1598, also in the Museum, has certain features which suggest that, if not the work of the same school, it has influenced the Dumfriesshire carver(s). The upper part of the pulpit has panels decorated mainly with floral designs, but also by two interlacing ribbon patterns, each forming two entwined hearts, one upside down. This occurs once on the bookcase (top, inner panel of left door). The pulpit carvings measure 6.5 × 7.5 inches, the case 6.25 inches square. The order in which the ribbon passes over and under itself, the same on both the pulpit designs, is reversed on the bookcase, but in the manner of carving they are alike. Similar mouldings also are repeated on both, notably rope-work and guilloche.

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