

## 5. A NICHE-HEAD AT SHERIFFHALL, MIDLOTHIAN.

All that remains of the Jacobean mansion of the Giffords of Sheriffhall is the stair-wing, now put to use as a dovecot.<sup>1</sup> Some 30 yards south-west of the fragment stands a range of farm buildings. In 1934 this range was due for repair. On stripping the walls it was seen that the lower part of the two-storied western structure had been an outbuilding roughly contemporary with the mansion; and the byre at the eastern end, while of no great age, proved to have been built partly out of re-used material. Among the stones in secondary use as rubble were two pieces of fifteenth-century ecclesiastical work. One, which has since disappeared, was a section of a moulded cornice enriched with floral *paternæ*; the other was the canopy of a niche; both had obviously been removed from a church of some importance.

The niche-head, which now stands upside down in the rose-garden of the modern Sheriffhall (Pl. L, 2), measures 1 foot 10 inches in breadth, 1 foot 3 inches in height, and has a thickness of about 10 inches. The front of the canopy is carved with the usual tabernacle work, while the soffit or ceiling is wrought to represent a tierceron-vault. At the junction of the tierceron- and ridge-ribs are little bosses carved with roses. The junction of the diagonal- and ridge-ribs is covered by a shield of arms with an abbot's staff erected in pale behind it. Although the lower part of the shield has been broken off, so that the principal charge is defective, the arms may be read as: A chevron, on a chief three cushions lozengy with a tassel at each corner. These are not the arms of the Giffords of Sheriffhall, but those of some abbot as yet unidentified.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the little vaulting bosses on either side of the shield bear roses suggests that this abbot ruled over a Cistercian house, and with Newbattle only a mile and a half away that abbey seems the most likely source for the stones. The nave of the abbey church was rebuilt after its destruction in 1385, and there, as at Melrose, the rebuilding would extend over several generations. Since all that remains of the nave now lies below ground, it may be that these relics are the only evidence we shall ever have for the appearance of that church.

The list of the abbots of Newbattle is by no means complete, and several are known only by their Christian names. Of the latter, Thomas and Andrew flourished respectively at the middle and at the end of the fifteenth century, and if the niche-head came from Newbattle, as here suggested, one or other of the two may be credited with some part of the reconstruction of the nave—the arms are unlikely to be those of Abbot John, on record in 1512, who apparently let the place down.

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