

PRESTONGRANGE AND ITS PAINTED CEILING

by GEORGE MURRAY, M.R. APTE AND IAN HODKINSON

Summary

The recorded history of Prestongrange begins in the 12th century when the lands were granted to the monks of Newbattle by Robert de Quincy. At the time of the Reformation they passed to Mark Ker, abbot and later commendator, who died in 1584, and thereafter to Mark Ker younger who was created Earl of Lothian in 1606 and died in 1609. At the latter's death Prestongrange was sold to John Morison whose heirs held the lands until 1746, to be succeeded by the Grant (later Grant Suttie) family, who retained possession until 1958.

The existing house was built in the second half of the sixteenth century but may incorporate earlier work. It was extended by Sir James Grant Suttie in 1830 and 1850. A painted ceiling was discovered in the hall at Prestongrange in 1962 and has since been moved to Napier College, Edinburgh. This ceiling is dated 1581 and is the earliest dated ceiling known. There are also traces of a second painted ceiling in the room to the east of the hall, and substantial remains of a painted mural, including the monogram of Mark Ker, on the walls of one of the bedrooms on the floor above.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks are due to the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, the Royal Musselburgh Golf Club and the Corporation of Edinburgh for permission to record and publish this account of Prestongrange and its painted decoration. The plans are based on Playfair's drawings in the library of Edinburgh University and Playfair's letters are copied from two letter books, one in the Scottish Record Office, the other in the possession of Messrs Brodie, Cuthbertson and Watson. Plate 1a is reproduced by permission of the University; the remainder are Crown Copyright and are reproduced by courtesy of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. We are also indebted to the Ministry for a grant towards the cost of publication.

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PART I — HISTORY

by George Murray

The name, Prestongrange, appears to be associated with a grange of the monks of Newbattle to whom these lands were granted by Robert de Quincy some time before 1189¹. But some doubt is thrown upon this derivation or at least upon the late 12th Century date of it by the fact that the Charter itself grants the "grange of Preston" to the monks, suggesting that the name Prestongrange preceded the grant by Robert de Quincy. The boundaries, as set forth in the charter, stretched from the Whytrig Burn on the East, to the marches of the Abbot of Dunfermline's lands of Inveresk and Pinkie on the West. On the south side, ditches were dug to mark the boundary between the monks' lands and the De Quincy territory of Tranent. In addition, the monks had the privilege of grazing 600 sheep and the oxen necessary to work their land on the Tranent Common. They had, as well, six acres of Tranent meadow and the right to 20 cartloads of peats and fuel for the grange.

Some years later, Seyer de Quincy, the son of Robert, confirmed his father's charter without alteration² but, afterwards, increased the grant to include half of the march on the Whytrig burn side and the rights to the coal and quarry workings within their lands down to low-water mark on the sea boundary to the North³.

According to the Rev. John Struthers, the parish minister of Prestonpans in the middle of the 19th Century⁴, "the lands belonging to the monastery of Newbattle were early cultivated by the monks and a mansion and grange erected by them shortly after the twelfth Century." No evidence has been found to support this claim but it is

reasonable to suppose that buildings were erected by the monks about this time. Certainly they continued to work the coal down the centuries and in 1531 were making arrangements with their neighbours, the monks of Dunfermline in the lands of Inveresk and Pinkie, for the draining of water from their pits.⁵ In 1526 they added to the existing facilities of their estate the harbour later known as Acheson's Haven or Morrison's Haven where they had authority to charge all the customary dues "as in the port of Leith."⁶

At the Reformation, Preston Grange, as part of the extensive lands of Newbattle, passed into the hands of Mark Ker, Commendator of the Abbey, "a wyse honest man."⁷ Mark Ker was the second son of Sir Andrew Ker of Cessford and his wife, Agnes, daughter of Robert, second Lord Crichton of Sanquhar. Sir Andrew fought at Flodden under Lord Home and two years later was appointed warden of the Middle Marches in spite of being "a young man without wisdom and substance."⁸ By 1517 the same authority, an Englishman, concedes that he could find no fault in him except that "he is some deal forgitfyll and rakles."⁹ Probably it was his recklessness that finished him: he was killed in a feud with Scott of Buccleuch in 1526. He was succeeded in Cessford by his eldest son, Walter, who in 1552 avenged his father's death by heading an affray in the High Street of Edinburgh in which Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch was killed.

By this time, Mark, the second son of Sir Andrew, was Abbot of the Monastery of Newbattle to which he had been appointed in 1547.¹⁰ The "Preface" to the Chartulary of Newbattle argues that the date of this appointment cannot be accurately determined but agrees that it was before 1555.¹¹ Certainly from about 1555 and more especially after 1560 Mark Ker, Commendator of Newbattle, played a busy and important part in the life of the nation.

The first mention of him at this time¹² records that he was involved along with the laird of Coldingknowis in the "slaughter" of a French officer and in "hurting and wounding (a corporal) in sundry parts of his body, and other Frenchmen; committit at Newbottill in April last. Comperit Maister Mark Ker in the presence of the . . . Justice-deputis and desyrit to be replegit, as he that wes ane Kirkman, to his Juge Ordinare." A long dispute followed as to whether the Commendator came under the jurisdiction of the diocese of St. Andrews or that of Glasgow. In the course of this argument, Mark Ker "producit ane testimoniale of his ordour of Crownebonnet berand that he wes scolare in the dyocy of Sanctandros" and alleged further that "he wes born within the said dyocy, in the castell of Edinburgh, and maid residence continwalie within the samin dyocy, viz. within the place and toun of Newbottill or Edinburgh." In addition, he "demittit the Benefice of Massindew in Jedbruch" and consequently could claim that he had "na benefice within the dyocy of Glasgow." So Mark Ker escaped trial by Archbishop Beaton of Glasgow. Unfortunately no more is heard of the case.

By 1560 Mark Ker's name appears among the 49 signatories of the document drawn up at Edinburgh on 27th April, 1560 . . . "Ane contract (The Last Band of Leyth) of the Lords and Barons to defend the Liberty of The Evangell of Christ." "This contract and band came not only to the eiris, bot alsua to the sycht of the Queen Dowager; quhairat sche stormit nott a little." And little wonder that she stormed for, with the help of an English army, these lords and barons "quhais namis ar underwrittin haif promittit effectualle (to) concur and joyne togidder . . . for expulsion of the said strangeris (the French) oppressouris of oure libertie, furth of this realme, and recovery of our ancient fredomis and liberteis."¹³ Three months later, Mark Ker was present at the Parliament of 1st August, 1560 which approved "the confessioun of faith professed and believed be the protestants within the realm of Scotland, publischeit be thame in parliament and by the estaitis thair of ratifeit and appreivit as hailsome and sound doctrine groundit upoun the infallibill trewth of God's word."¹⁴ Of this meeting John

Knox¹⁵ writes bitterly that many lords both spiritual and temporal "contemptuouslie did absent thame selffis; and yit the chief pillaris of the Papisticall Kirk gave their presence, sick as the Bischoppis of Sanctandrois . . . the abbotis of Lendorse . . . Newbottill . . . and dyverse otheris quham we observit not."

Meanwhile, in his more private life, Mark Ker had apparently acted with some ruthlessness in evicting four of his tenants and was summoned before the Privy Council to answer their charges.¹⁶ He was ordered to pay "ilkane of thame yeirlye in tyme cuming . . . the soum of tuentie pundis for thair sustentation, leving and furnessing." Five years later, in November 1567, he was again before the Privy Council to answer the complaint of James Giffert younger of Sherefhall that he had been dispossessed of "the eist and west mylnis of Newbottill with the mylne landis, multures, suckin, and thair pertinentis" which he and his predecessors had held "thir mony yeris begane" for "Mark now commendature of Newbottill, on his maner, hes gevin and set in fewferme to his spouse and bairnis . . . the said mylnis ower the heid of the said James . . . without ony just caus or occasioun." The decision of "my Lord Regent and the Lords of Secrete Counsell" is not recorded.¹⁷

In spite of these events, Mark Ker continued among those who directed the nation's affairs. He was regularly present at meetings both of the Parliament and of the Privy Council of which he became a member in 1569 as well as an Extraordinary Lord of Session. He was a man of wide experience who had, in 1563, been one of those charged with administering the Act of Oblivion¹⁸ and, in 1567 a member of ' 'Ane commissioun . . . to consider sic articklis as is committit to thame and to report the samin again in the nixt Parliament."¹⁹ He was present, too, at the Privy Council which decided to hold "justice aires ower all this realme" so that "justice mycht be execute upon (offenders) for thair demerits in exempill of utheris."²⁰ He was at the council which met at Kelso to consider various matters relative to the peace of the Borders,²¹ and at the meeting on 15th April 1569 which "concludit that James, Duke of Chestellarault salbe committit to ward within the castell of Edinburgh in default of fulfilling of his part of the pacification of Glasgow."²²

In the years of the "troubles" that followed the battles of Carberry Hill and Langside, Mark Ker played a significant though not a major part in national politics. When the Pacification of Perth, in February 1572, made a serious effort to remove "the publict troubles and civile weare within this realme sa lang continewing thairin,"²³ Robert, Lord Boyd, Sir John Bellenden of Auchnowle and "Mark, Commendatere of Newbottill" were appointed commissioners to try "all attempts against the abstinence besowth the watter of Tay."²⁴ Throughout the regency of Morton (1572-1578) the Commendator was in frequent attendance at meetings of the Privy Council and, on the fall of Morton, continued as one of the extraordinary council appointed to carry on the government in the King's name,²⁵ and, when Morton had seized Stirling Castle, Mark Ker was one of the four delegates sent to arrange terms of reconciliation between Morton and his enemies, Athole, Glamis, Argyle and Montrose.²⁶ In April 1580 Mark Ker was among those appointed to hear trial of the "haill quarrellis, deidlie feidis and caussis debaitabill" between "his Hienes subjectis of the surnames of Gordoun and Forbes"²⁷ and a year later was one of the six privy councillors appointed to hear the application for full pardon and restoration of Sir James Balfour of Pittendreich ("Blasphemous Balfour" according to Knox) who had been implicated in the murder of Darnley.²⁸

When the Lennox-Arran administration replaced that of Morton in December 1580, Mark Ker continued his attendance at the meetings of the Privy Council with great punctuality up to November 1581 and constantly enough afterwards²⁹ but the Ruthven Raid in August 1582, for a time, put an end to his attendances for he was a loyal supporter of Lennox and did not approve of the Earl of Cowrie's government. Indeed, when the Ruthven Raid government ordered Lennox to leave the country, the

Commendator was one of those who supported him in a desperate but unsuccessful attempt "to seaze upon the palace of Halyrudhous and the toun of Edinburgh unawars."³⁰ Yet, two months earlier, when the Gowrie government was attempting to widen its basis of support, Mark Ker was invited to join the Privy Council again and was in regular attendance after October 1582.³¹ On the other hand, when the Gowrie administration fell (July 1583) Mark Ker must have found considerable pleasure in his attendance at the Privy Council held in Holyrood on 7th December, 1583, which declared that the Ruthven Raid was "a crime of lese-majesty" and ordered the justification of it (19 October 1582) "to be deleted from the books of the Council."³²

Such were the activities of the man who was the owner of Preston Grange in 1581, the date of the painted ceiling recently discovered there. His wife, Lady Helen Leslie, second daughter of George, fourth Earl of Rothes, bore him four sons and a daughter, of whom the eldest, Mark, succeeded both as Commendator and as privy councillor when his father died in August, 1584.³³

The new owner of Preston Grange was already well known in both court and government circles before his father's death. In 1580 he is listed as "Mr Mark Ker of Prestongrange" among thirty people appointed "to attend on the king's person"³⁴ and in the same year Parliament ratified to him the grant of the office of Commendator of Newbattle with all the "fructis, proffitis and emolumentis thair of during his lyf tyme"³⁵ in succession to his father who retained a liferent. A further act of 1584³⁶ "for annulling of the successiouns of prelatiis purchast of his Hienes in the troublous tymis bypast of his young aige" provided that "Mr Mark Ker . . . mr. of his hienes requeistis . . . sail not be comprehendit under this present act." His possession of Preston Grange with all its arable lands, the mill and the mill lands, and the port of Acheson's Haven was confirmed by the king in 1587³⁷ and the grant ratified in 1591³⁸ when the lands of Preston Grange along with many other lands belonging to the Commendator were erected into the barony of Preston Grange and incorporated in the one lordship of Newbattle. In 1606 Mark Ker was created Earl of Lothian³⁹ and died in 1609, the victim, it is said of witchcraft exercised by his wife, Margaret Maxwell, daughter of Lord Herries.

The origin of this tale of the first Earl of Lothian's death by witchcraft is the account given by Sir John Scot of Scotstarvet, which is quoted in full at a later stage in this study.⁴⁰ This is a most remarkable story rendered the more apt in this context by the apparent connection between it and the symbolism of the ceiling which the first Mark Ker had commissioned for his house at Preston Grange.

When Robert Ker, the second Earl of Lothian, succeeded to his father's estates, he apparently sold Prestongrange in the year of his father's death to one John Morison, a merchant of Edinburgh who was treasurer of the city in 1588 and three times a bailie.⁴¹ No confirmation of the reputed date of purchase (1609) has been found. This John Morison married Katherine Preston, daughter of John Preston, Lord President of the Court of Session, and became the ancestor of a succession of Morisons who owned Prestongrange down to 1746. Yet, as early as 1644 they were selling 64 acres of their lands to John Joyce, a merchant burgher of Edinburgh⁴² and in 1647 part of the Dolphingstoun lands was disposed of to David Wilkie and his son Archibald⁴³ who held them until 1654 when "the Protector grants to Capt. Benjamin Bryssie, merchant in Leith . . . the lands and barony of Dolphingstoun, sometime called Cowthrople, with the tower, manorplace, coalheughs etc, thereof."⁴⁴

The most notable of the Morisons of Prestongrange were Alexander, the son, and William, the great-grandson of the original John who bought the estate. Alexander was appointed a lord of session in 1626 and took the title of Lord Prestongrange. The following year, he was elected Rector of the University of Edinburgh and had the reputation of great learning.⁴⁵ William the great-grandson of John, succeeded his father in the lands of Prestongrange in

1684 and sat for Haddingtonshire and later, Peeblesshire for nearly 25 years prior to the Union of Parliaments. He was one of the commissioners for the Treaty of Union and continued to represent Peeblesshire in the British Parliament almost continuously until 1715.⁴⁶

"Jupiter" Carlyle in his *Autobiography* (p.5) reports that William Morison "was elected Member of Parliament for East Lothian in the first parliament of Great Britain, although the celebrated Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun was the other candidate. But Government took part with Morison, and Fletcher had only nine votes. Morison had been very rich, but had suffered himself to be stripped by the famous gambler of these times, Colonel Charteris, whom I once saw with him in church, when I was five or six years of age; and being fully impressed with the popular opinion that he was a wizard, who had a fascinating power, I never once took my eyes off him during the whole service, believing that I should be a dead man the moment I did. . . . This simple gentleman's estate (Morison's) soon went under sequestration for the payment of his debts. He was so imaginary and credulous as to believe that close by his creek of Morison's Haven was the place where St. John wrote the Apocalypse, because some old vaults had been discovered in digging a mill-race for a mill that went by sea-water. This had probably been put into his head by the annual meeting of the oldest lodge of operative masons in Scotland at that place on St. John's Day."

William Morison died in 1739 and was succeeded by his son Alexander who sold Prestongrange in 1746 to an Edinburgh advocate, William Grant, 2nd son of Sir Francis Grant, Lord Cullen who had been created a baronet of Nova Scotia in 1705. In the same year *as* he purchased Prestongrange, Grant was appointed Lord Advocate, a position which he held until his promotion to the bench in 1754 when he took, like his Morison predecessor, the title of Lord Prestongrange. As Lord Advocate in 1746 he was intimately involved in the trials of the Jacobites and carried out his duties with a justice and impartiality that greatly enhanced his reputation. He prosecuted at the trial of Archibald Stewart, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, whose behaviour had aroused much suspicion when the Prince's army was marching on Edinburgh before the Battle of Prestonpans.

Lord Prestongrange died at Bath in 1764 and was buried in Prestonpans Church. He left three daughters all of whom were married some years before their father's death. The eldest, Janet, married the 4th Earl of Hyndford in 1749. Agnes, the second daughter, married Sir George Suttie of Balgone in 1757, the year after her younger sister, Jane, became the wife of Robert Dundas of Arniston, Lord President of the Court of Session. John Carmichael of Castlecraig, 4th Earl of Hyndford, was served heir to his father-in-law in July 1767.⁴⁷ He died in 1787 and his wife, the Dowager Countess of Hyndford, continued to live in Prestongrange until her death in 1818 when her heir was her nephew Sir James Suttie of Balgone, the son of her sister Agnes⁴⁸. Sir James Suttie, who assumed the name of Grant Suttie, inherited from his aunt along with the estate "all the carriages and carriage horses, . . . the whole stocking of cattle and sheep, implements of husbandry, horses, crops on the grounds in my natural possession, and in the barnyard, all the furniture in the house of Prestongrange belonging to me, wine in the cellars and provisions of every kind that shall be in the house."⁴⁹ The will of Janet Grant, Countess of Hyndford, also directs her executor "to deliver to the heir who shall succeed me in the estate of Prestongrange . . . the whole vouchers of the improvements made by my husband and me."

What these improvements were is not revealed, but fairly soon Sir James Grant Suttie set about a major reconstruction of the mansion house which now bears above its front door the date 1830, the arms of the family and the motto "Nothing hazard nothing have." From 1830 to 1958 Prestongrange remained in the possession of the Grant-Suttie family, but from 1922 onwards it was

leased to Royal Musselburgh Golf Club who use the mansion house as their clubhouse and claim that it is the most impressive one in Scotland. The course itself was opened in 1924.

The last stage in the story of Prestongrange, so far, was reached in 1958 when the Coal Industrial Social Welfare Organisation bought the estate. Royal Musselburgh Golf Club continues to use both the course and the clubhouse.

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LIST OF PLATES

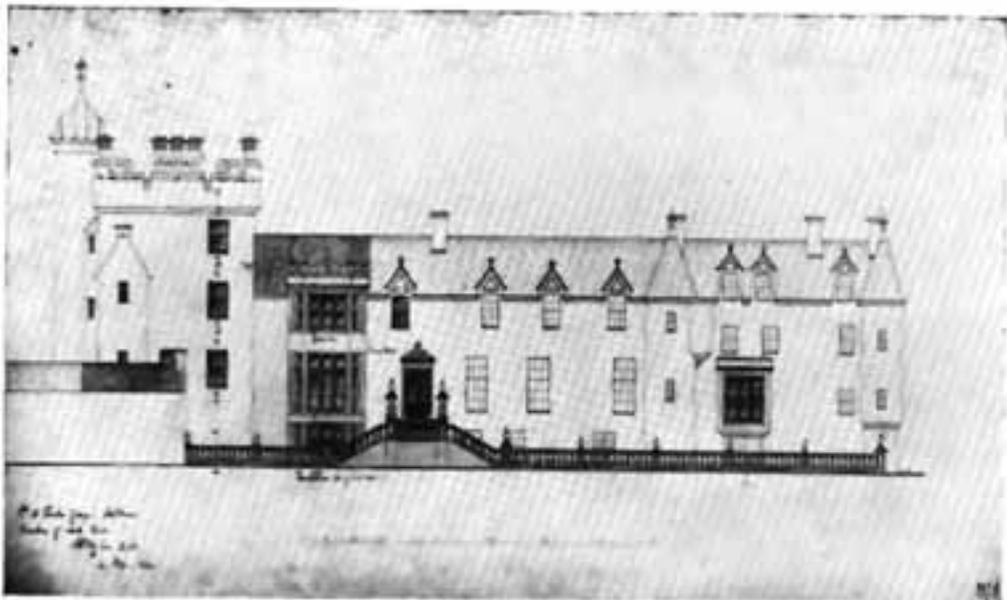
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By courtesy of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.
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PLATE II



(a)

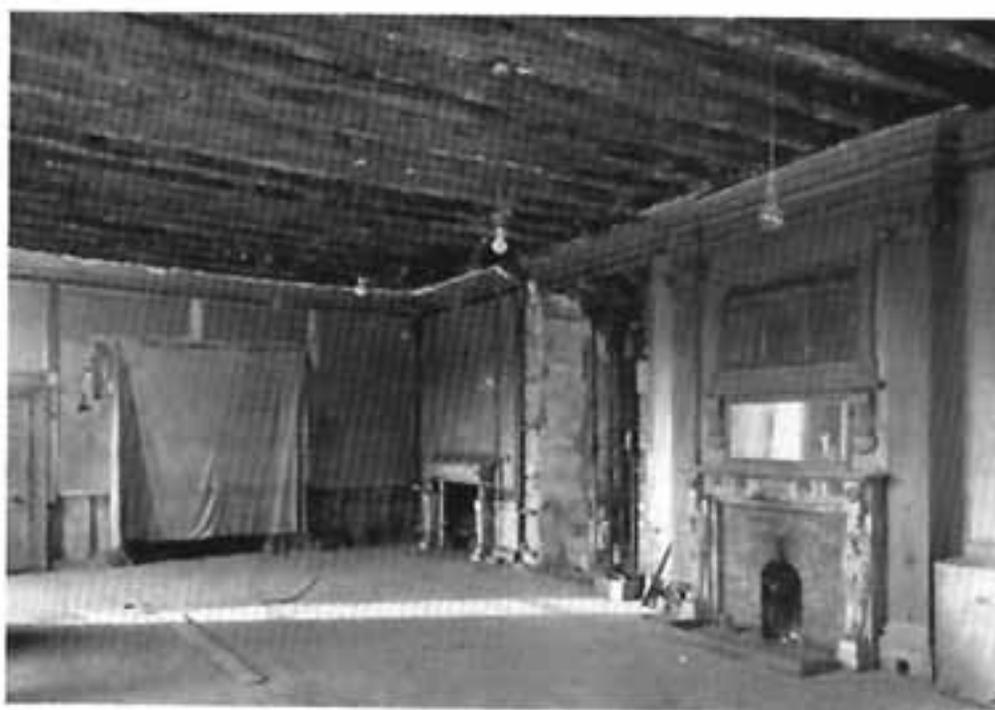


(b)

PLATE III



(a)



(b)

PLATE IV.



(a)



(b)
PLATE V



(a)



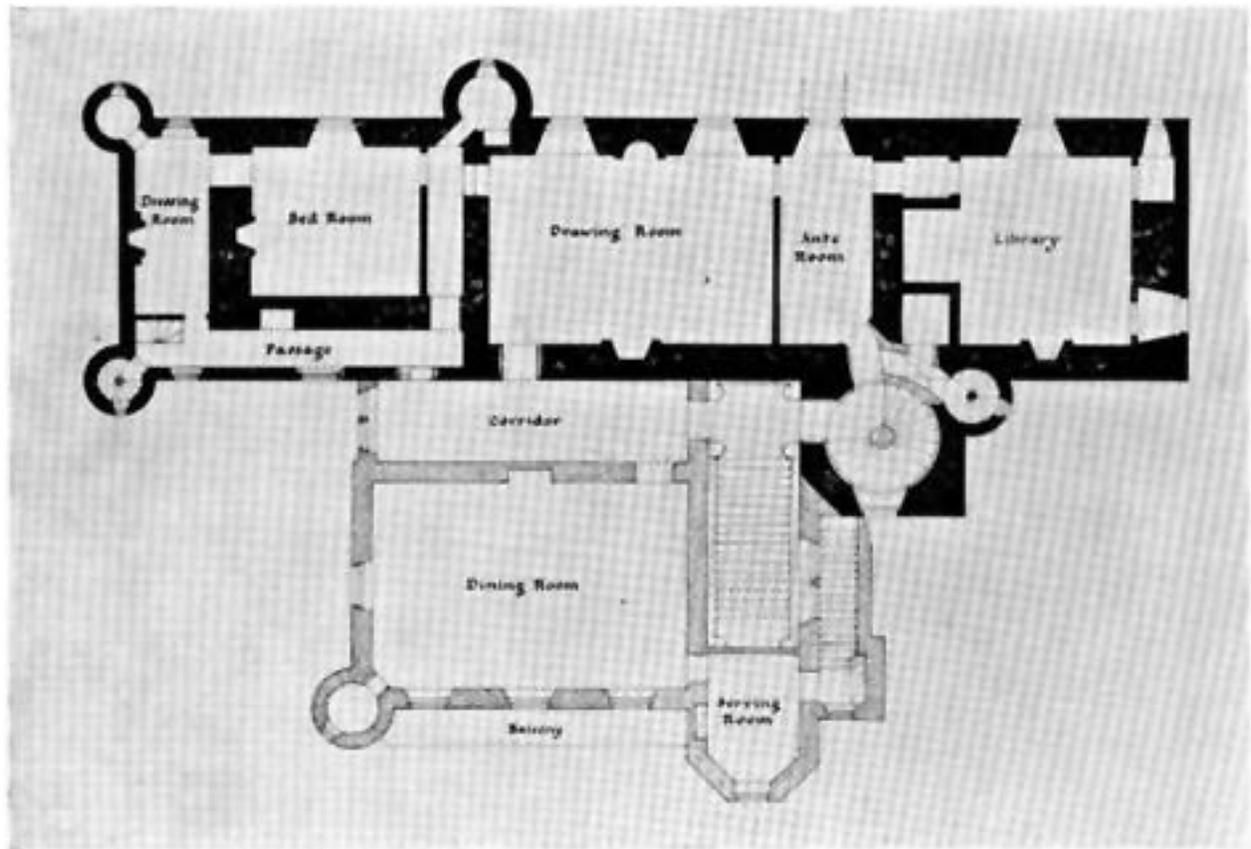
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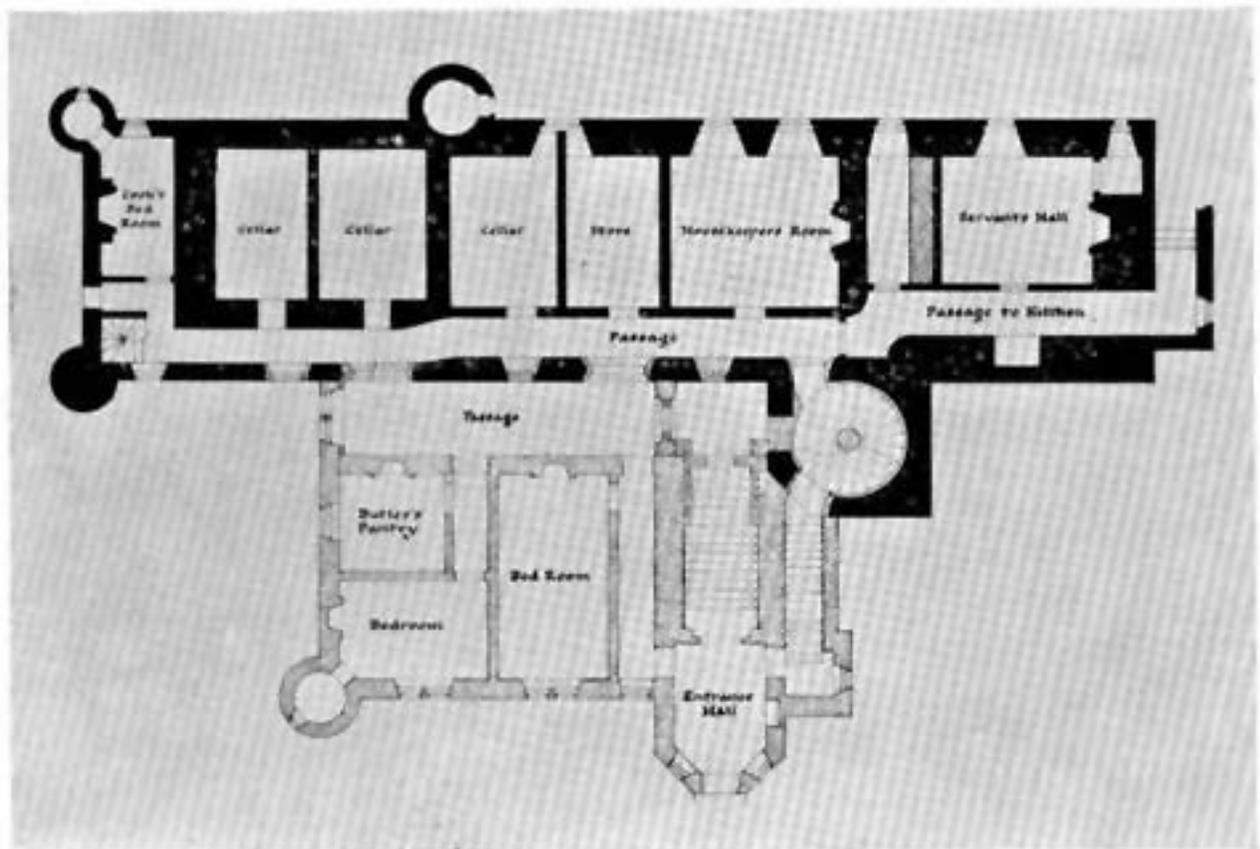
(c)



(d)

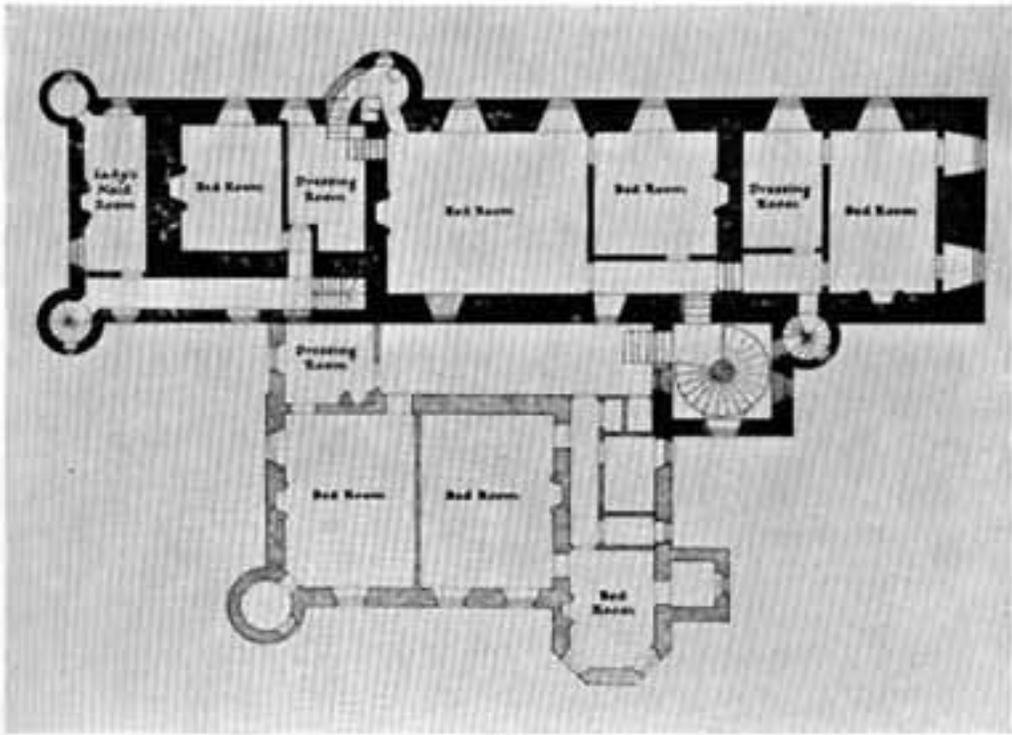


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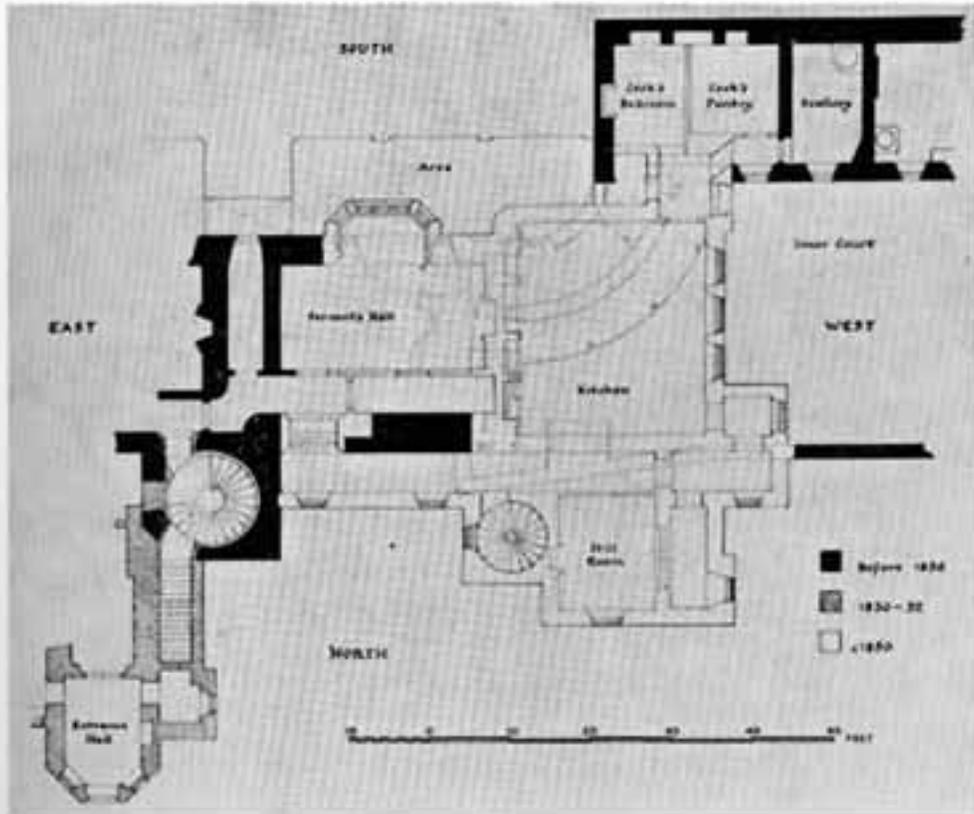


(b)

FIG 1



(c)



(d)
FIG. 2

Scale ft.

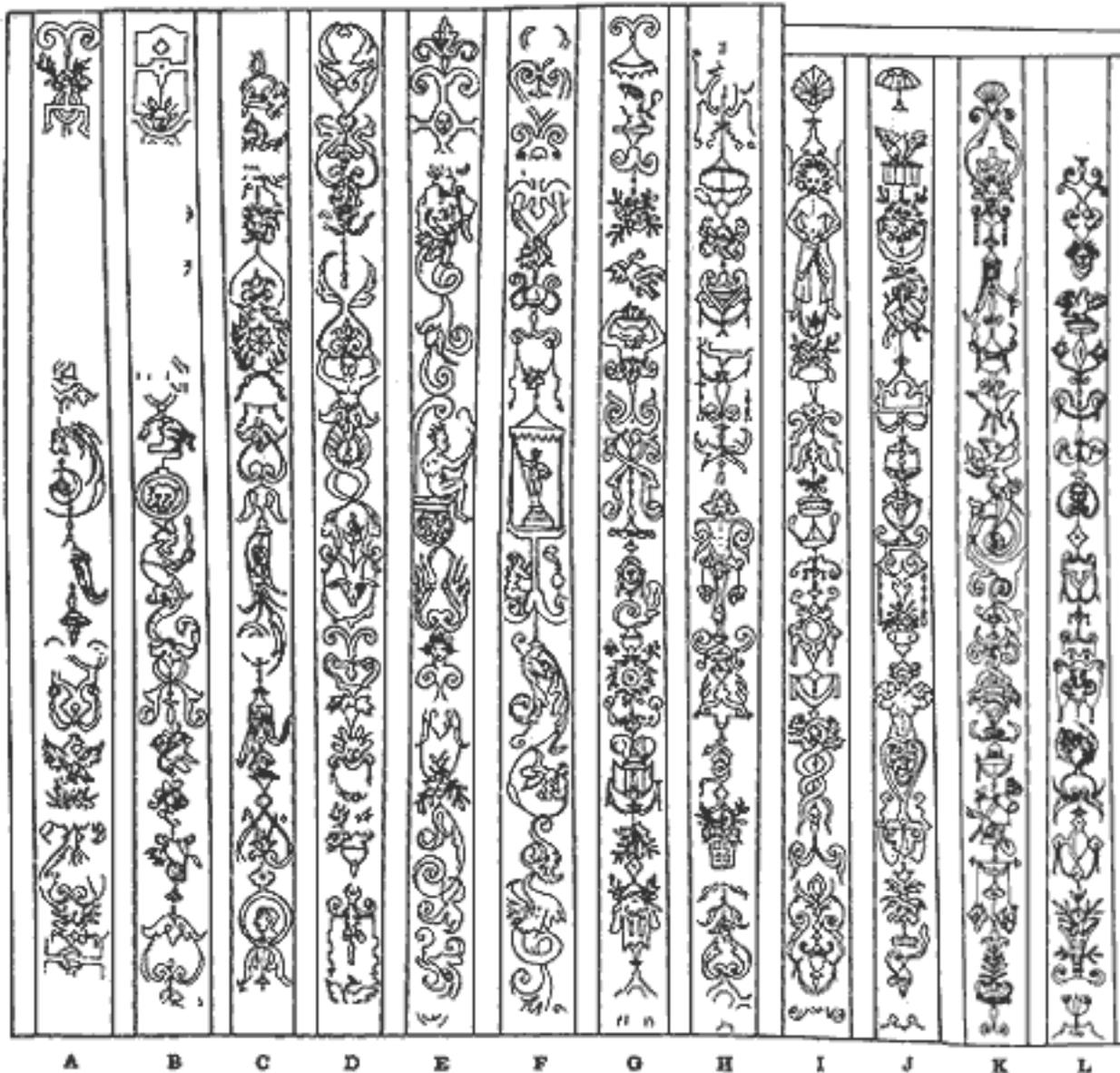


FIG. 3

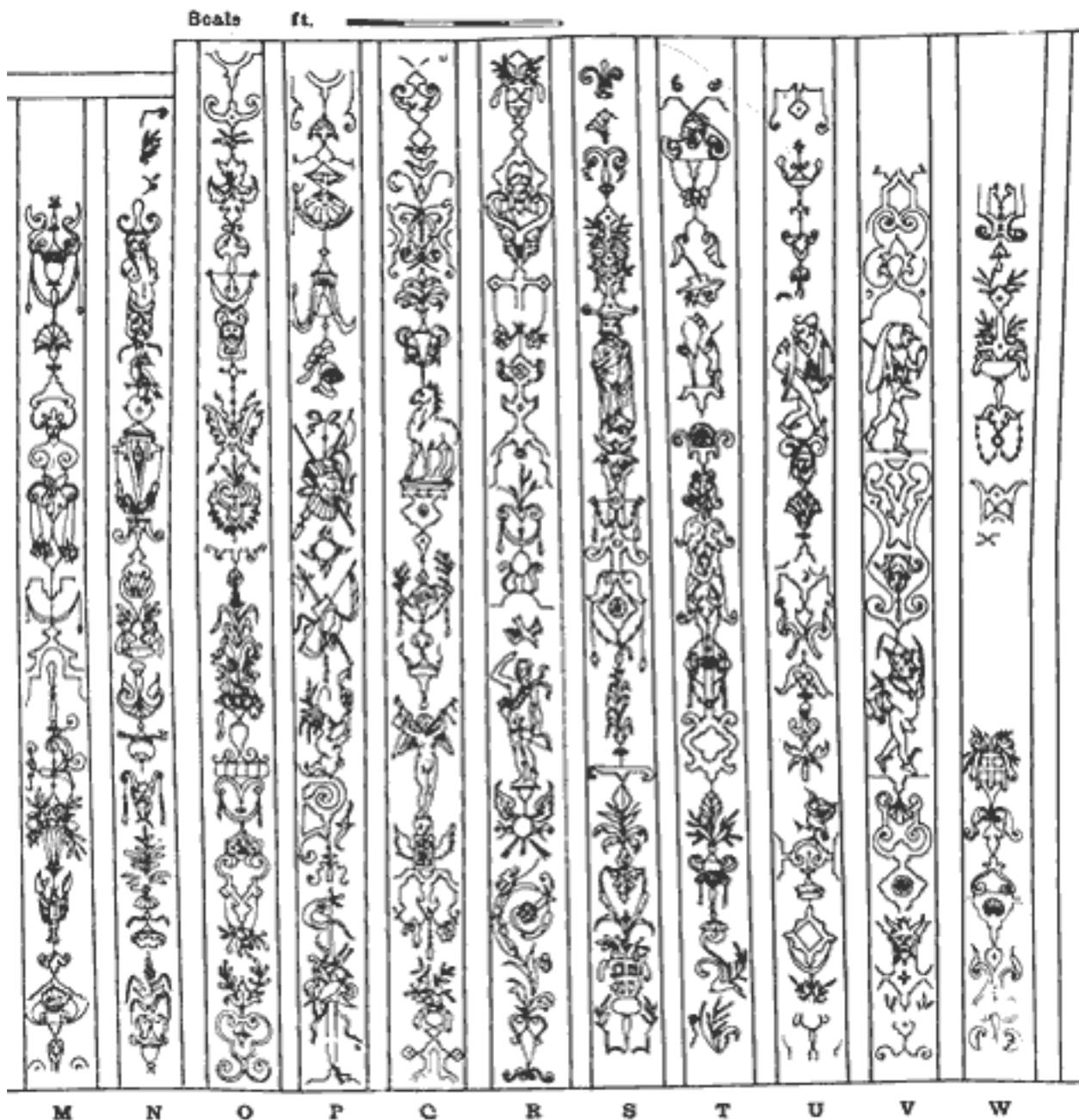


FIG. 3 (cont)

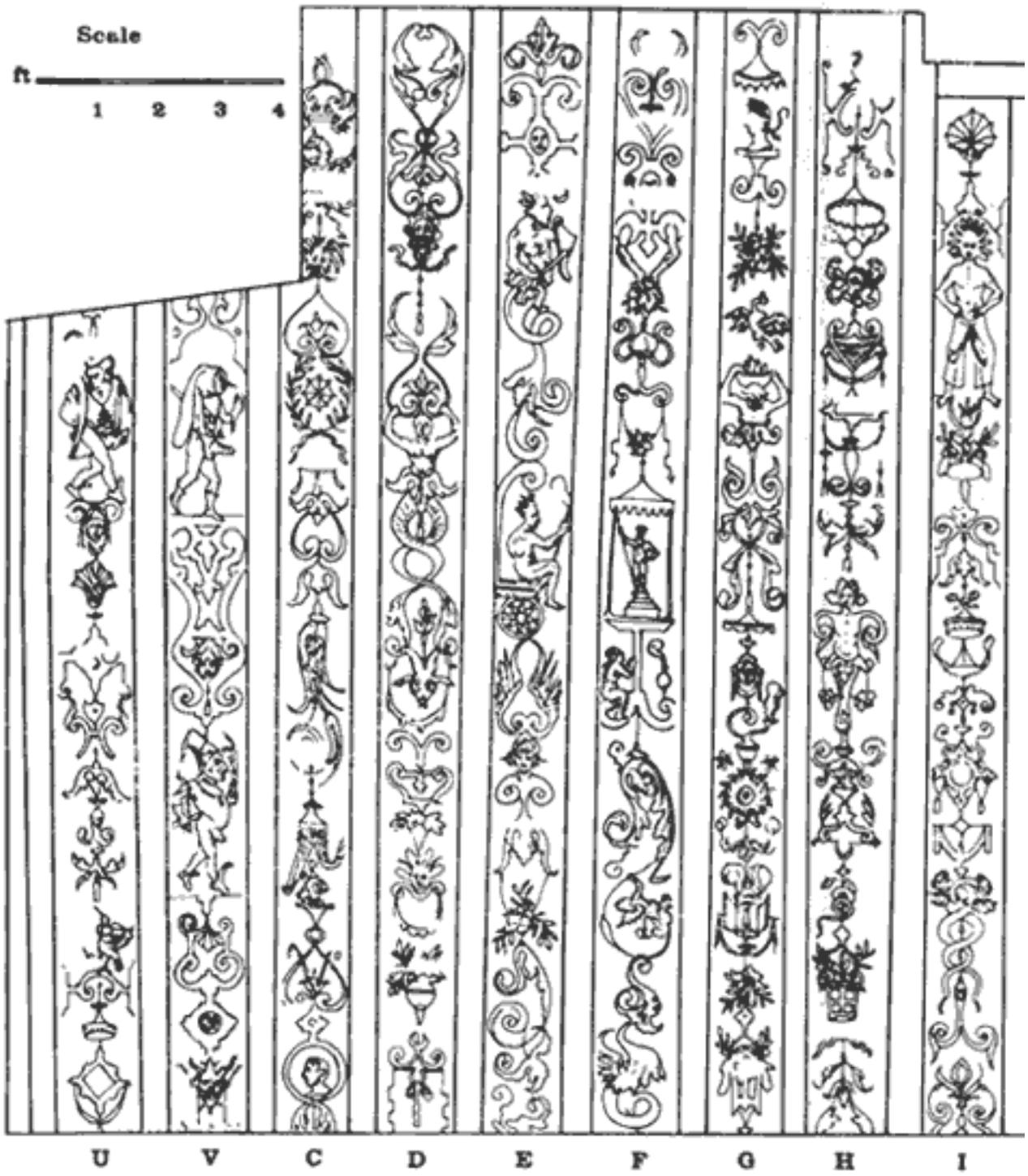


FIG. 4

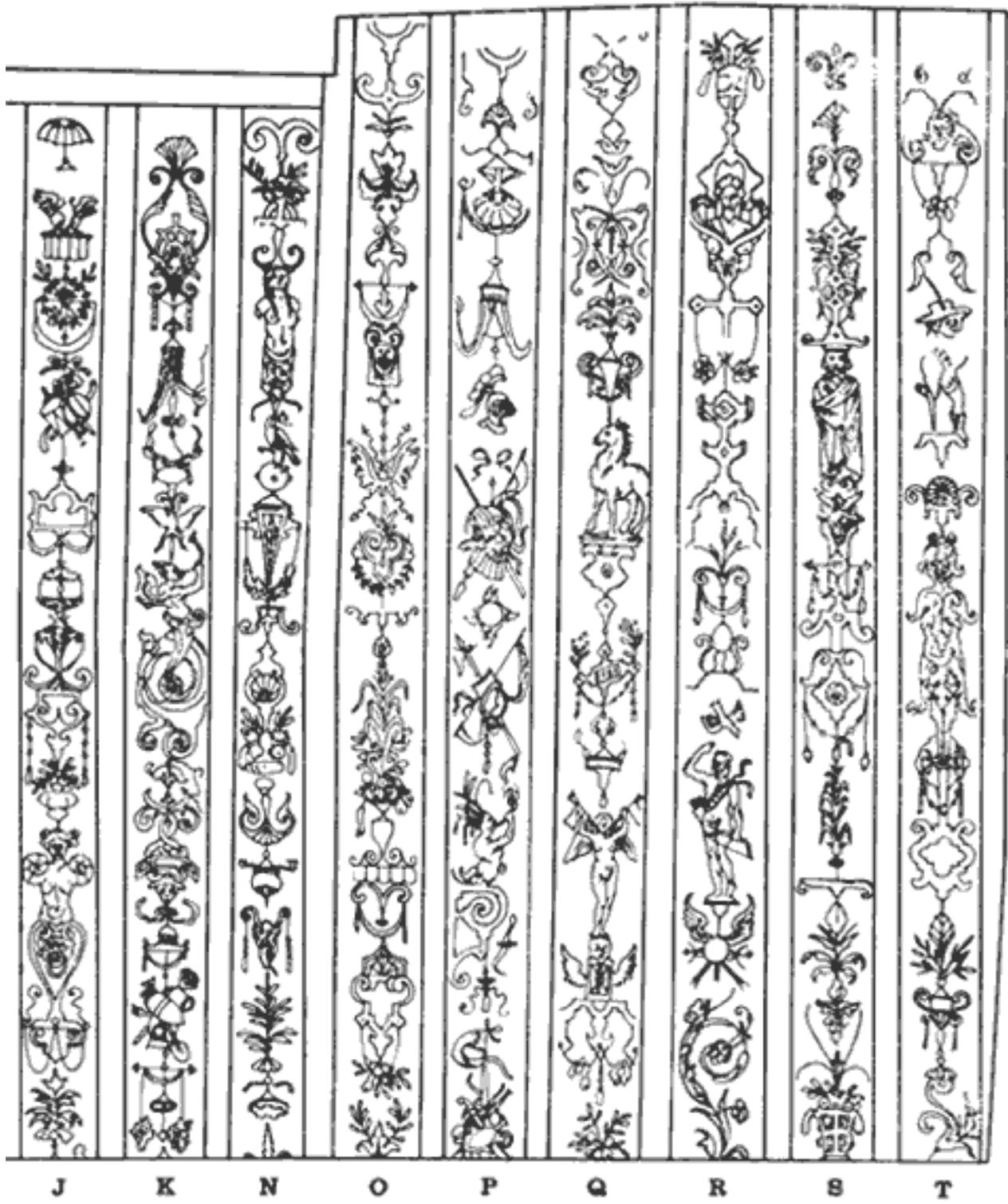


FIG. 4 (cont)

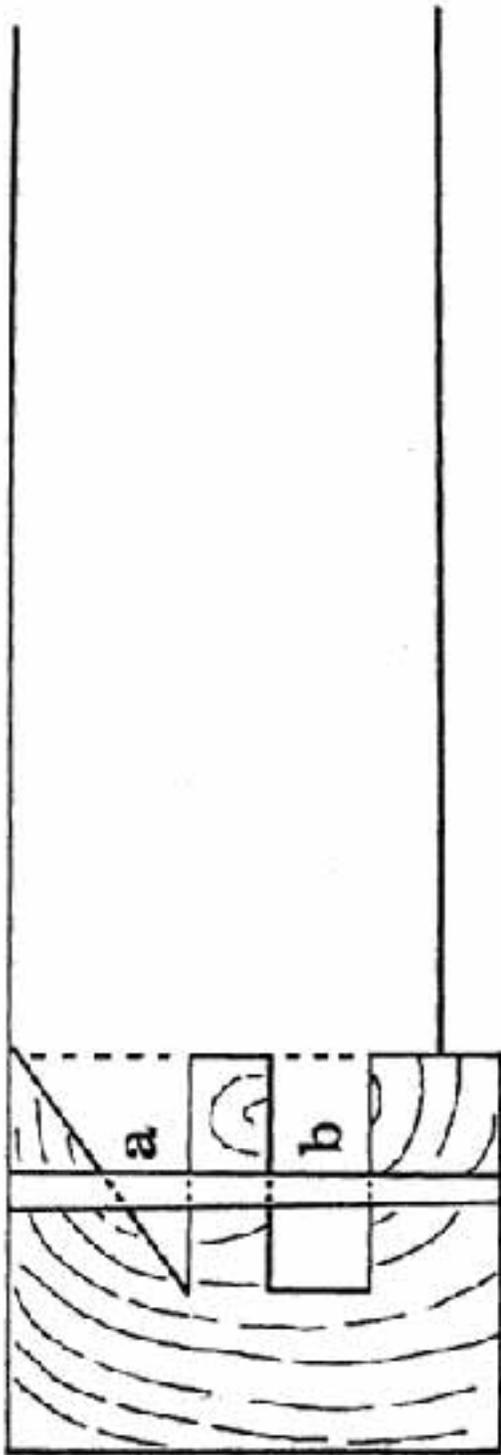


FIG. 5

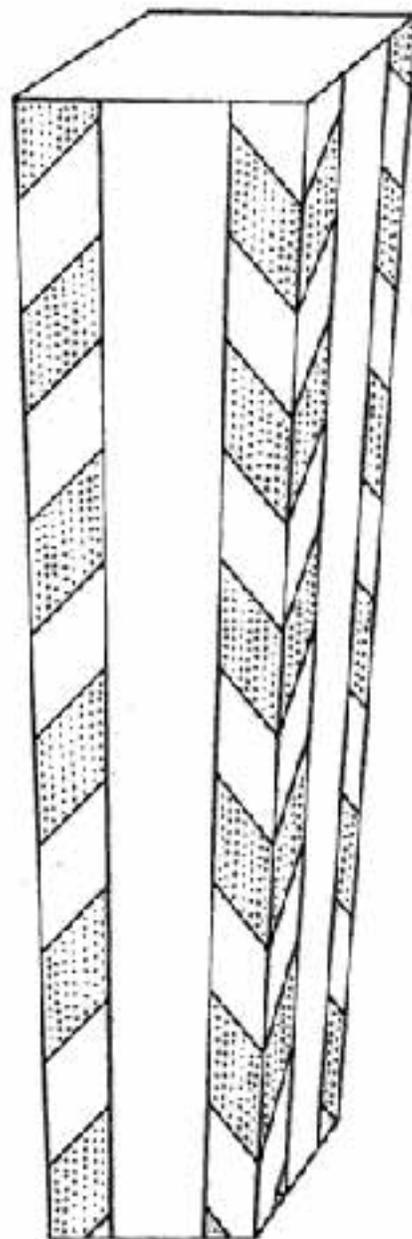


FIG. 6



FIG. 7

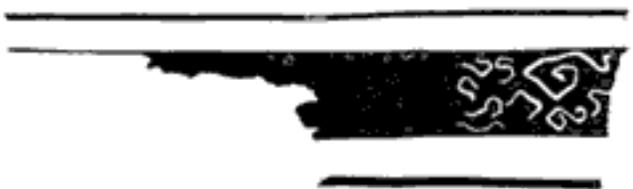


FIG. 8