



St John the Baptist

The Scots had a particular affection for the saints, Thomas Beckett and John the Baptist. In the latter case, proof can be found in the arms of Ayr and that the oldest building in the town is St John's tower. At Crossraguel the master mason seems to have modelled a triple-faced head in the sacristy on a pilgrim's badge from Amiens Cathedral.

On 8th April, 1530 King James V issued a safe conduct for William Kennedy, Abbot of Crossraguel to lead a large group of Carrick lairds on pilgrimage to France, almost certainly to Amiens. Twelve years later, William's nephew (and later successor at Crossraguel) Quintin, became a student at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

Above, left:: Seal of the Burgh of Ayr incorporates the Paschal Lamb and the head of St John the Baptist. The remains of the Mediæval castle shown on the seal were used to build a Cromwellian fort, some traces of which still exist.

Above, right: St John's tower is all that survives of Ayr's oldest church dating from around 1300. It was here in 1315 that King Robert the Bruce held his first parliament after the Battle of Bannockburn, which had been fought on the feast day of St John the Baptist, the previous year. Some believe that Bruce was supported by Knights Templar who had fled persecution in France.

Below, left: Triple-faced head in Crossraguel's sacristy, copied from the pilgrim's badge?

Below right: Pilgrim's badge from the shrine of John the Baptist in Amiens Cathedral, with four rings to allow it to be sewn onto clothing.



From a Roman perspective, Scots pilgrims were particularly admired as Scotland was considered to be the uttermost end of the Earth. Travelling to Rome on Church business in 1160, an Abbot of Bury St Edmunds disguised himself as a Scot and has left us this insight. He dressed in a ragged outfit, walking barefoot with his shoes over his shoulder 'after the fashion of the Scots'. When approached, he shook his staff and used 'threatening language after the manner of the Scots'. Plus ça change

