

# THE WILLOW CATHEDRAL

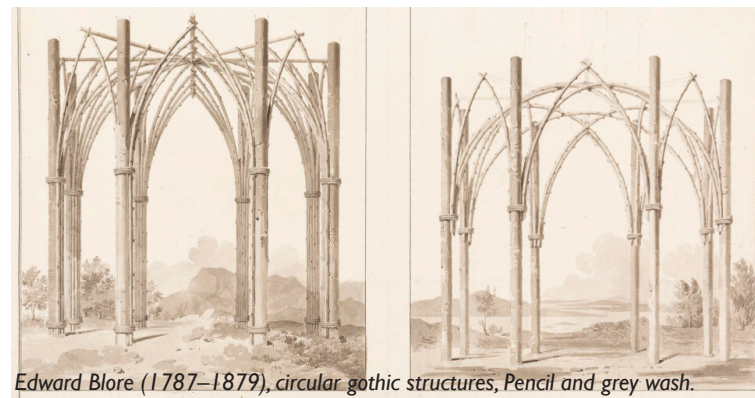
'The Origin and Principles of Gothic Architecture' and the lost model Sir James Hall of Dunglass built on his estate in 1792, to illustrate them.



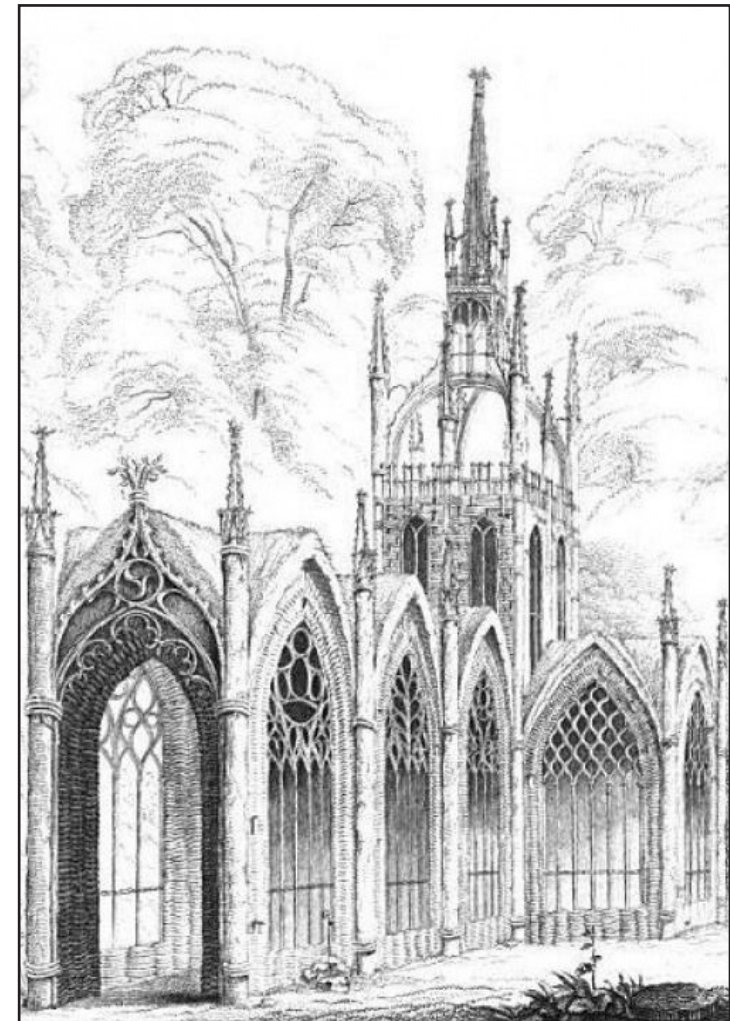
The Willow Cathedral, by Alexander Carse, 1792, RIBA



Dunglass Policies Map Detail, 1801



Edward Blore (1787-1879), circular gothic structures, Pencil and grey wash.



The Willow Cathedral, Frontispiece, 1813, engraved by W&D Lizars.

## SIR JAMES HALL OF DUNGLASS

The Willow Cathedral at Dunglass was one of the wonders of its age, by-product of Sir James Hall's extraordinary intellectual curiosity and the Grand Tour he made as a young man with the improving of his estate in mind. He inherited his estate aged 15 and spent the next 7 years at the universities of Cambridge & Edinburgh and then at the Military College of Brienne, France, learning French and mathematics, alongside Napoleon.



Sir James Hall of Dunglass, (1761 - 1832) painted in Rome, aged 24, by Angelica Kauffmann, 1785. Scottish National Portrait Gallery

The final two years of his education were spent on a Grand Tour. In Rome he was imbued with an enthusiasm for the architects of ancient and how classical architecture was based on the imitation of nature and vernacular buildings.

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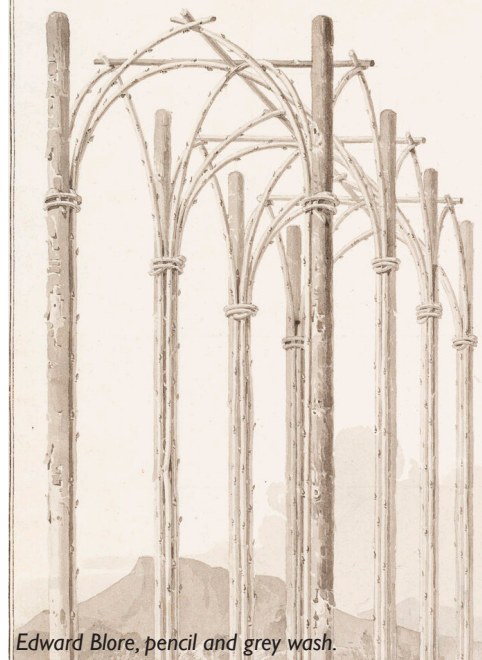
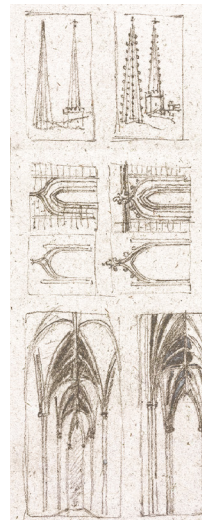
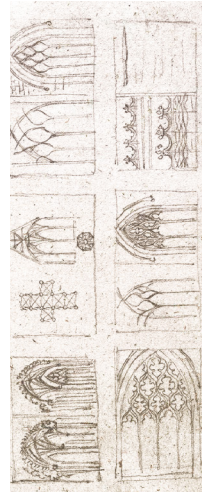
October 2022

## HALL'S ESSAY AND BOOK

On 6th April 1797 Hall read his Essay 'On the Origin and Principles of Gothic Architecture' to the Royal Society of Edinburgh and extolled the "airy lightness and in bold grandeur of effect those of the Gothic style have not been surpassed, if ever equalled, by the most celebrated of modern productions". He said that his essay was "to restore to Gothic architecture its due share of public esteem, chiefly by showing, that all its forms may be traced to the imitation of one very simple original; and, consequently, that they are connected together by a regular system: thus proving, that its authors have been guided by principle, and not, as many have alleged, by mere fancy and caprice."

The essay included a set of his drawings "sufficient to render it intelligible" which were "a work of much labour and time". These drawings show the construction sequence of poles spaced apart, the poles wrapped with 'rods' which are tied at the bottom and near the top, which are bent to form pointed arches and the ribs of vaulting. Views of built examples are contrasted to their supposed willow origins, including the tracery of windows, with wicker or basketwork walls and masonry. Sketches showing the origin of crockets, finials and spires based on willow shoots and cusping based on the decay of willow bark are included.

In his essay Hall said that he hoped to produce a more fully illustrated work at a later date. This he did in 1813, as a book titled 'Essay on the Origin, History and Principles of Gothic Architecture'. The text was completely re-written and expanded from 24 to 150 pages, and included a history of Gothic Architecture presumably in answer to sixteen years of discussion, correspondence and observations engendered by the 1797 Transactions essay. It also had an entirely new set of Plates, increased from 6 to 69, "chiefly executed by Mr Blore a young artist of great merit, who has been induced, during several years, to devote himself to this work".



Edward Blore, pencil and grey wash.

## SKETCHES AND ETCHED PLATES

Edward Blore (1787 –1879), was son of antiquarian and a friend of Sir Walter Scott sharing an enthusiasm for Gothic architecture, becoming Surveyor of Westminster Abbey, one of Hall's favourite buildings. His first commission as an architect was from Count Vorontsov, an admirer of Scott's, for a palace in Odessa. Later he carried out several commissions in Scotland for friends of Scott. In England Blore was most famous for re-fronting Nash's Buckingham Palace though this was subsequently re-fronted again by Aston Webb.

The frontispiece, etched by 'W & D Lizars, Edinburgh', gives a different view of the completed willow cathedral compared with the Carse watercolour, with an elaborate crown steeple modelled on St Nicholas, Newcastle and with very much more substantial posts.

Sheet of sketches, Edward Blore, pre-1813, V&A

It seems possible that the frontispiece drawing may be more of a summary of Hall's theories rather than an illustration of the actual structure in the garden; the text does not mention its construction.

## "A MAN NOT ACTUALLY CRAZY"

In 1816 Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus mentions Sir James and Lady Helen Hall and his book in her 'Memoirs of a Highland Lady'. She and her sister Jane greatly enjoyed meeting Capt. Basil Hall in Edinburgh and recorded "... Sir James Hall, a man not actually crazy, but not far from it; so given up to scientific pursuits as to be incapable of attending to his private affairs. They were in consequence much disordered, and they would have been entirely deranged but for the care of his wife, Lady Helen. Sir James had lately published a truly ingenious work, an attempt to deduce Gothic architecture from the original wigwams made of reeds ... a fanciful theory maybe, yet with some show of reason in it."

Hall's essay concluded with a suggestion that the Eddystone Lighthouse was Gothic, being in imitation of the stem of an oak tree and thought such imitation would restore architecture to its ancient dignity in theory and splendour in practice. Hall's advice to a young practitioner was study the works of genius and adhere to imitation of nature, to produce works that will "excite the admiration of successive ages and stand like a rock amidst the waves of fashion".

Edward Blore, pointed arch, clustered columns