

Subject: Roche Abbey: The South Transept (afternoon, late summer)
Original painting for Mr & Mrs Parker.

Medium: Acrylic

Size: 435 mm x 273 mm

Working Time: Research, design, and painting: **180 hours**

Completed:

Comments: For this image although a number of views were considered; the question was, what signified to the Cistercian monks their choice for the Abbey's location? The answer lies in the quiet natural seclusion, complete with running water (*Maltby Beck*). To this end it was considered important that the image of the Abbey did not dominate, but rather compliments the surrounding natural landscape. Both transepts were painted in their entirety with the north transept then overpainted by the Ash tree (*The north transept from this angle in reality would still be partially hidden by the limestone cliff*). To the artist, the south transept has a castle like presence, rising majestically out of the ground, illuminated from below by the ruins of the abbey. Location sketches and extensive photographs were taken before the design was finalised: this scene exists although this image is a composite of the various sections. The various flora was arranged to best enhance the abbey, in particular the Silver Birch was enlarged and various plants were introduced in the immediate foreground (*The Bulrushes at this viewpoint were overwhelmed by the invading Indian Balsam*). Moreover, paint was applied more boldly to make various elements of the painting stand out; literally, hopefully giving more depth and body to the plants, in particular the leaves on the trees and foliage on the river bank. Acrylic varnish was applied to the stream again to improve depth. One feature added later was a small image of a sparrow looking towards the abbey.

Notes: Roche Abbey 'St. Mary of Roche' *Sancta Maria de Rupe*:
Roche Abbey was founded initially as a wooden structure under the patronage of **Richard de Buili**, Lord of Tickhill in 1147 for the order of **Cistercian** or white monks, so named due to the colour of their habit; the stone structure would mainly be completed by the 1180's. This self sufficient community of Cistercian 'Choir' monks and the more numerous *conversi* or **Lay Brothers** whose role was the manual and daily upkeep of the abbey, dictated the format for this and other Cistercian abbeys. Each abbey was an offshoot of a parental abbey with Roche derived from Newminster near Morpeth, Northumberland. All Cistercian abbeys however, were subject to the mother abbey at Cîteaux in Burgundy, France. By 1538 the monks were pensioned off and the abbey itself was pillaged by the local populace during **Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries**. Although time and neglect took further toll, ironically it was during the 18th Century where further damage was inflicted in making a romanticised 'designer ruin' by the landscape gardener **Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783)**. It is now maintained and protected by **English Heritage**.

Common Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*:
A deciduous tree with leaves having 9 - 13 long toothed leaflets growing to around 130 feet (40m). The bark is a smooth grey with good hard wearing timber.

Silver Birch *Betula pendula*:
A deciduous tree with pale green diamond shaped toothed leaves turning yellow in Autumn. Its most noted feature is the silver / white peeling bark. Although not long lived it is an early coloniser of waste ground.

Bulrush *Typha latifolia* (Reed mace):
Grows in wet lands with long leaves and long sausage shaped female florets

Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*:
Common plant with broad lobed leaves and flat topped multi flowered head

Indian Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*:
Although not a native species this plant has spread widely after being introduced in 1839. Noted for its exploding seed pods when touched.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*:
A Gregarious bird, familiar in town and gardens



Illustration
Stephen P Smith

Bibliography

- Thomson, A. Hamilton Roche Abbey
Her Majesty's Stationary Office
1975
ISBN 0-11-670047-3
- Ferguson, Peter. Roche Abbey
English Heritage
1996
ISBN 185074-296-0
- Sutton, David. Larousse Pocket Guide
Wild Flowers
Kingfisher Publishing
1995
ISBN 07523-00180
- Readers Digest. Britain's Wildlife, Plants &
Flowers
Readers Digest
2005
ISBN 0276-440404