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NEW PARISH CHURCH AT AYTON

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONE

On Thursday, the ceremony of laying the foundation of a new parish church for Ayton took place in the presence of a large concourse of spectators from Ayton and surrounding neighbourhood. The age and decayed condition of the present church rendered the erection of a new one very necessary. The following account, taken from Carr’s “History of Coldingham Priory” will give some idea of the great age of the present building :-

“The Church was a cell or dependency attached to our monastery, and its advowson was vested in the Prior and a chapter of the monks. It was probably founded soon after the institution of the Priory, (1098) though the first notice of it made in the chartulary is in a deed granted upwards of a hundred years later. The names of its chaplains occasionally occur, but as little or nothing is known of their history, their insertion appears unnecessary. The first of them whom we have met with was *Robertus Persona capellae de Ayton*, who must have held office between the years 1166 and 1232, being the period during which the individual, whose charter he attests, flourished. The last of its chaplains under the old system, seems to have been John Home, who, on the 6th May 1564, subscribed a contract entered into by Sir Patrick Home of Ayton, and his kinsman, William Home of Prendergues. Like the greater part of our old ecclesiastic edifices, the chapel was built in the form of a St. John’s cross. The present church stands upon the foundation of that part of its walls which constituted its nave. The eastern wall of the chancel, which is now demolished, and the south wing, still standing, of the transept, constructed of square hewn sand-stone, and clothed with a beautiful mantle of ivy, are its sole remains. The interior of the transept has, in more recent years, been employed as a burial vault by the family of the late proprietor. Its window, represented here, with its circular arch and massive mullions, affords a fine specimen of the intermixture between the Saxon and Norman styles of architecture, introduced into Scotland during the twelfth century. After the arrangement of parishes, the present parishes of Ayton, Eyemouth, and Coldingham, formed the then parish of Coldingham. At the Reformation, Ayton was disjoined from Coldingham, and united with Lamberton.”

In the early part of the present year, Mr Maitland Wardrop, architect, Edinburgh, was employed to survey the old building. In his report he condemned it *in toto*; and accordingly it was determined to erect a new one. The majority of the heritors were non-resident, and consequently they had no great personal interest in providing a place of worship which should embrace ample accommodation and neat architecture, suitable to the ideas of the present day, and they accordingly limited their assessment against the providing of an expensive building. Alexander Mitchell Innes Esq., however, came forward and generously offered to defray all extra expense that might be incurred on the new building in making it not only a substantial, but a beautiful erection. This generous offer was at once accepted, and, judging from the plans we have seen, we can say that it will be the finest and most beautiful parish church in Berwickshire. A collection was then set on foot in the village, and the sum collected from all classes amounted to £30. With this money were bought a silver mallet, a silver trowel gilt, and a very handsome Bible for presentation to Miss Mary Innes.

The ceremony took place precisely at one o'clock and was performed by Mrs and Miss Mary Innes of Ayton Castle. At half past twelve o'clock a procession started from the parish schoolhouse, consisting of the 3d Berwickshire Rifle Volunteers under the command of Captain David Popplewell of East Reston; next came the Presbytery of Chirnside, composed of the Rev. Daniel Cameron, Ayton; Wilson, Chirnside; Christison, Foulden; Wilson, Edrom, &c.: then came the members of the kirk-session of Ayton; then followed seven young ladies, representing the Sunday school and the ladies of the congregation, all dressed in pure white; next came C.D. Colville Esq., carrying the trowel; David Sinclair Esq., carrying the mallet; and Miss Catherine Patterson carrying the Bible; and the scholars attending the parish school, under the superintendence of Mr Tod, schoolmaster; followed by the general public.

On arriving at the field, on which the church is to be erected, the volunteers were placed so as to line the entrances; after which the members of the procession proceeded to occupy the places allotted to them. But it was then discovered that the general public had appropriated the ground to themselves which had been set apart for the various bodies comprising the procession, thereby creating much confusion, and many were hindered from having a view of the ceremony at all; while, owing to the frequent gusts of wind, nothing could be heard at a few yards' distance.

Amongst the company present were – Alexander Mitchell Innes Esq., Mrs Innes, and Miss Mary Innes, Ayton Castle, and party; Major L'Amy, Netherbyres; Professor Campbell Swinton, Kimmerghame; George Murray,

Esq., C.A., Edinburgh, Factor for Chesterbank and Gunsgreen; Colonel Morrison and party, Peelwalls; Maitland Wardrop, Esq., architect, Edinburgh &c.

At one o'clock, all being in readiness, a portion of scripture was read, and an appropriate prayer offered up by the Rev. D. Cameron, after which the foundation stone was laid by Mrs and Miss Innes with the usual formalities, when prayer was again engaged in by Mr Cameron.

Miss Catherine Patterson then stepped forward and presented the Bible to Miss Mary Innes in the name of the Sunday school and congregation. The Bible bore an inscription to the following effect: - "Presented to Miss Mary Innes of Ayton, by the Sunday school scholars and families of the congregation, on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the new parish church."

The Rev. DAVID CAMERON then addressed the assemblage and referring to the length of time the old church had stood, hoped that the building in course of erection would be opened under as happy auspices. He commented on the unanimity of feeling which the heritors had exhibited in relation to providing for the wants of the people both in religious and educational matters. In conclusion, he referred to several parties who lived in the near neighbourhood, and who were active in promoting all matters tending to the well-being of the inhabitants of the parish: and he alluded in feeling terms to the position Alexander Mitchell Innes, Esq., of Ayton Castle held as lord of the manor, and chief resident heritor, and to the reciprocated feeling of the inhabitants towards him and family.

Mr MITCHELL INNES then made a few remarks, and in allusion to what Mr Cameron had said, stated that he was at all times ready to do anything for the benefit and well-being of those amongst whom he lived. He also took advantage of the occasion to mention that he was very much pleased to see that the volunteers had turned out so well, and he expressed his admiration of the movement in general, and particularly of the manner in which the young men of the parish had turned out to join the movement. He hoped that the feeling would long continue to spread, not only in this parish, but everywhere throughout the kingdom as it was the best safeguard the nation could have. He then called for three cheers for Captain Popplewell and the volunteers, which was heartily responded to.

Professor CAMPBELL SWINTON then rose, and in a most able and eloquent speech dwelt on the harmony which existed amongst the heritors in relation to all matters of a religious and educational character, although they were of different Christian persuasions. He then detailed the steps which had been taken in obtaining the consent of the heritors towards the erection of the

present structure. Referring to the active part Mr Mitchell Innes had taken in the matter, he compared him to King David, who was not content to live in a house of cedar whilst the ark of God stood within curtains. Mr Innes, who lived in a splendid mansion, which they could even now gaze upon, was not content that the worship of God should take place in an edifice of such a simple style as that which had so long existed in the parish, but wished that a structure in accordance with the present style of architecture should be erected. After a few more remarks he called for three cheers for Mr, Mrs and Miss Innes, which were enthusiastically recorded.

Major L'AMY called for three cheers for Mr Wardrop, the architect, which were also warmly accorded; and to which Mr WARDROP made a suitable reply.

The company then dispersed.

A numerous company were entertained to luncheon at the Castle by Mr Innes, and the volunteers were also invited to a dinner at the same place. The party enjoyed themselves exceedingly, and dancing was engaged in during the evening. – *Berwick Warden*