

## Compilation of extracts from publications referring to St Dionysius, Ayton

### Extract from First Statistical Account 1790 written by Rev George Home

The parish church appears to be an old edifice, and has lately received several improvements, which its former state rendered extremely necessary.

### Extract from Second Statistical Account 1834 written by Rev George Tough

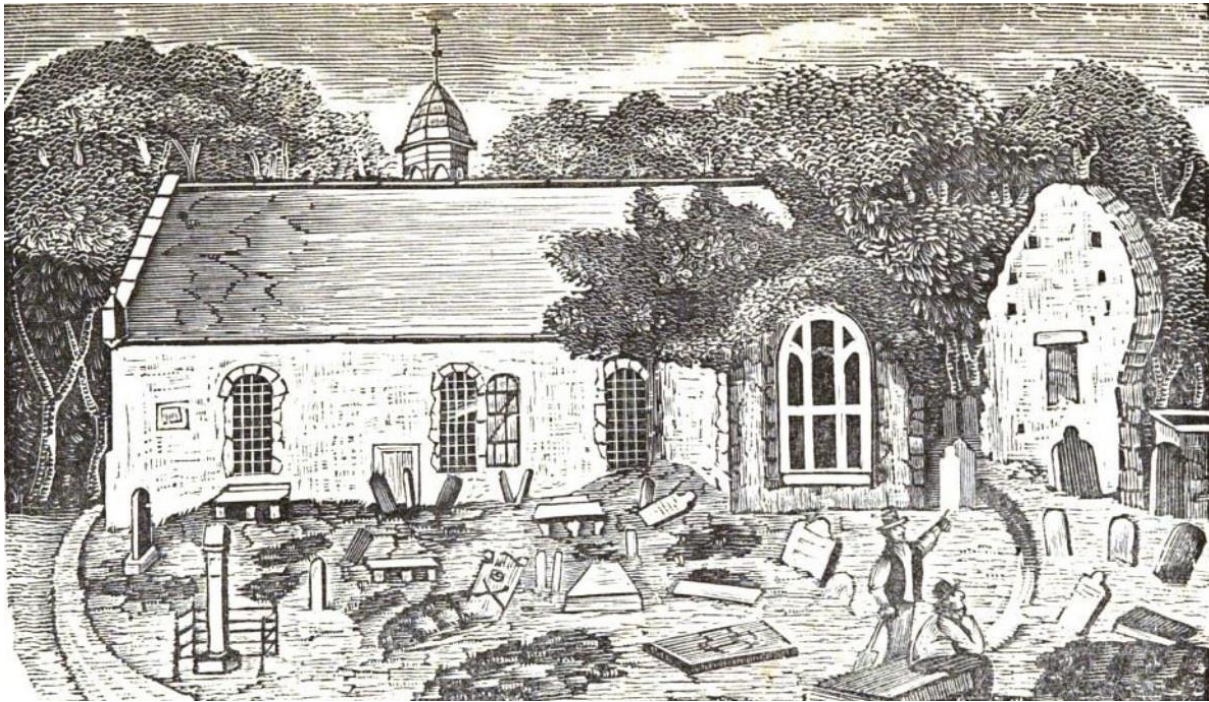
Ecclesiastical State.— The church, although nearly half a mile from the village, and a quarter from the manse, is quite central for the parish, and is scarcely three miles distant from the remotest habitation. It stands on a romantic spot on the banks of the Eye, nearly opposite to Ayton House, in a situation of sweet seclusion. As already noticed, it is supposed to have been founded in the 12th century. Besides the present place of worship, consisting in part of the ancient walls, there still remain entire those of the south transept, all beautifully mantled with ivy, and now consecrated a second time, by the place having been converted into the burying-ground of the Ayton family, and adorned with appropriate shrubs and flowers by the pious care of the surviving relatives. In this portion of the ruins there is a stone window, with circular, and not pointed arches, which may be a guide to the antiquarian as to the age of the erection. There is likewise remaining, the gable of the chancel, the sidewalls of which have been assisted in their decay, by the sacrilegious hands of plunderers, for the sake of the sandstone. In the gable of the present church, there is a large circular arch, nearly the whole width of the wall, but now built up, which must have formed the spacious communication with the chancel, and of course wide enough to admit the grand processions to and from the altar in Catholic times. The hewn stone of the walls, appears, from its quality, to have been brought from the sandstone quarry by the sea side at Greystonlees; and this perhaps may account for the church being built on the south side of the river. Its original dimensions comprehending the external ruins, had afterwards been contracted within narrower limits, corresponding with the actual population,—probably at the time when it was converted into a Protestant church. Up wards of twenty years ago, it underwent repairs and an enlargement, by the addition of a northern aisle and steeple. Its capacity was thus better adapted to the increased population, but it would even then, (and still more now,) have been too small, were it not for the accommodation supplied to the redundant population by the two meeting houses in the village. These latter have also

afforded similar accommodation to the growing population of the surrounding parishes. It would have been ultimately a saving to the heritors to have built a new church at the time of the last enlargement. The present although still in pretty good repair, will not last so long as a new one, and when repairs are next called for, it will probably require to be rebuilt and further enlarged. In its present state, it may contain nearly 500 sitters. None of the seats are free, except the communion benches, one or two of which are left for use in the middle passage, but seldom required. The pews are the property of the heritors for themselves, their tenants, and servants. A few seats were given by the heritors to the kirk-session, to be let for the benefit of the poor; but for these little or no rent is received. The feuars and others who have no legal accommodation would, no doubt, obtain liberty to erect a gallery for themselves in the west end of the church, but they have hitherto preferred being indebted to the indulgence of such seat-holders as have spare room, or they occupy the seats of such tenants and farm-servants as attend the meeting-houses.

**Extract from *A History of Coldingham Priory* by Alexander Allan Carr, Surgeon  
1836**

The Church was a cell or dependancy 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, 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 Parsona 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 1554, subscribed a contract entered into by Sir Patrick Home of Ayton, and his kinsman, William Home of Prendergust. 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, and the south wing 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 present 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 Lambertton; but not long afterwards it became, as it is now, a parish per se. The stipend attached to the living is sixteen chalders, with a glebe, valued at £38 yearly. The present incumbent is the Rev. George Tough.

**Extract from *The Churches and Churchyards of Berwickshire* by Robson.1896**

**Ayton**

The church of Ayton is supposed to date back to a period not later than the close more probably the middle of the twelfth century. it was granted by the Scottish Edgar to St. Cuthberts monks, and thus became the property of the priory of Coldingham, of which it was a subordinate cell, and remained such till the Reformation. It was dedicated to St. Dionysius. In the year 1380 the church was the scene of an important historical event. John of Gaunt, in this year, met the Scottish commissioners whom King Robert II. had appointed to arrange for a renewal of the truce between the two countries; and a similar meeting was held in the church in 1384. Then on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1497, a truce was entered

into between England and Scotland to last for seven years. It was signed in the church of Ayton, on behalf of King James, by Andrew Forman, &c., &c.

Amongst the earlier chaplains he was probably the first connected with this church was Robertus Parsona Capellae de Ayton, the date of whose tenure of office is somewhat indefinite, but was between the years 1166 and 1232.

The original building stood in the churchyard, and was built in the form of a St. Johns cross. The foundations of that part of its walls which constituted the nave, as also the eastern wall of the chancel and a considerable portion of the south transept, constructed of square hewn sandstone, remained undisturbed, and formed part of the successor of the original church. The whole fabric is now roofless, but forms a picturesque ruin.

The old belfry stands almost complete, clothed with a thick mantle of ivy, while the side walls are in some parts fairly entire. The south transept of this original church has been used for many years as the private burial vault of the Fordyce family, formerly proprietors of Ayton Castle. The window in this part is worthy of special notice. It affords an excellent specimen of the intermixture between the Saxon and Norman styles of architecture, as seen from its circular arch and massive mullions a style which was introduced into Scotland during the twelfth century. Grave doubts, however, are entertained as to the antiquity of this part of the old building. After a very careful and minute examination of the place a few years ago, Mr. Ferguson writes: "If the adjunct called the south transept has not been a late addition to the church, the window has been a late insertion in the transept. It is round headed, no doubt, but is of much larger dimensions than the ordinary type of Norman window, and is divided into three lights by mullions crossed by a transom bar. The tracery is still entire, and is of the most ungainly description, looking more like the debased work of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries than that of any of the mediaeval styles. Of course, the fact of its being bar tracery conclusively shows that it is long posterior to the Norman period; and it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that it may have been one of the improvements referred to in the Old Statistical Account as having been made upon the church not many years before it was written. The east wall of the church was nearly entire about half-a-century ago, but has since been removed, so that the dimensions of that portion of the building cannot now be ascertained. The nave has been about 75 feet long by 20 feet 6 inches wide, but none of its original features are now visible. The belfry tower on the north side was a late addition. (Hint. Ber. Nat. Club, 1899.)

Near the village of Ayton is a holy well, still in use, which was dedicated to St. Ebba.

One communion cup of considerable antiquity is engraved "This cup originally given by Magdallan Rule of Peelwalls to the Church of Ayton in 1677. Renewed and enlarged in 1780." Another cup is engraved "The Parish Church of Ayton 1780."

The present church is a handsome structure, and was erected in 1865, in the Gothic style of architecture. It is cruciform one transept complete, apse, and cloister. It contains a handsome rose window and an elegant spire 130 feet high.

The churchyard is large, and contains many tombstones of varying form and size, some of which date 250 years back. An exceedingly small stone bears date only 1648.

A large horizontal stone has the following interesting inscription: "Patrick Home of Bastilridge deceast in the year 1657 aged 48 . "Heir lyes William Home of Bastelrige his son who deceast Agust 3 1693 aged 54."

A large stone bears the following beautiful lines:

"Though distant climes divide us here below,  
Though far apart we moulder into dust,  
Hope says, and gently dries the tears of woe,  
You all shall meet to mingle with the blest."

A neat little stone is inscribed thus, and is interesting on account of the strange and incongruous mixture of small and capital letters: " HErE LIES ThE BOdY OF GOrGE BrUN WhO DeId THIS LIFE JUIY ANE 1729 ANd OF MarGrET hOG HIS SPOUS WhO DYd NEVMBrE 8 1725."

The following words appear on a very small stone: "Here lyes the corps of Gelbert Hoog who departed this life decmber the 28 day 1736 his age 80 years. Helen Allanshaw who died December 20 day 1724.

A large aisle surrounded by a strong wall contains the tombs of the ancestors of the Hoods of Stoneridge. In the interior was inserted a tablet with the following: OLIM SIC ERAT. "This aisle was built and the tombstones repaired by John Hood of Stoneridge. A. D. 1830." The inscription on one of the stones repaired runs thus: " Here lyeth the corpse of Thomas Hwde born 1648

Departed this lyffe 1697" His father James Hwde sold ye land of Hoodstand in Aymouth parish which belonged to his predecessor."

There is also the large family burying ground of The Inneses of Ayton Castle (the place has been sold by them quite recently). It is enclosed by a high and massive iron railing. The family of Fordyce, formerly proprietors of Ayton Castle, have also a private burying vault here formed of the interior of the south transept of the original church. A marble tablet in the interior is thus inscribed: "In memory of the Right Honourable John Fordyce, M.P., of Ayton. Many years Receiver-General for Scotland and Commissioner of Woods and Forests under the Right Honourable William Pitt. He died in London, 1st July, 1809. "Also of Katherine, his wife, daughter of Sir William Maxwell, 3d Bart, of Monreith. She died 6th March, 1815."

The names of the ministers that have been in Ayton since 1585 are as follows:

Robert Hislop 1585 to 1586.

John Home 1586 to 1601.

William Hog 1601 to 1616.

Alexander Home 1617 to 1626.

George Home, M.A. 1627 to 1650.

Alexander Gibsone, M.A. 1652 to 1652 (a Few months).

William Hume 1653 to 1664.

John Bethune, M. A. 1667 to 1689.

George Hume, M. A. 1694 to 1706.

Thomas Anderson 1712 to 1751.

Patrick Hepburn 1753 to 1772.

George Home 1773 to 1816.

Abraham Home (assistant and successor) 1799 to 1814.

George Tough (assistant and successor) 1814 to 1842.

Daniel Cameron 1843 to 1882.

J. J. Marshall Lang Aiken, B.D. (present incumbent) 1882.

There is a United Presbyterian Church at Ayton, originally built in 1776 and rebuilt in 1872. It is an elegant Gothic structure, with a tall spire. The present minister is William Wilson, settled in 1869.

AYTOUN CHURCH, BERWICKSHIRE.

The town of Aytoun (formerly written Eytun) stands on the river Eye, about seven miles north from Berwick-on-Tweed, and half a mile from the railway station.

The old church is situated in an open burial-ground, in connection with which a new church was erected some years ago. The old building appears, from the remains of its ivy-covered walls, to have been of considerable extent, but no details can now be made out. The only portion which remains in a tolerable state of preservation appears to have formed a south aisle or wing.



FIG. 1513.—Aytoun Church.

There is a plain segmental headed doorway in the east side, and a large circular headed window in the south end (Fig. 1513). The latter is divided by two mullions into three lights, each finished at the top with a round-arched head. The window has a transom in the centre. It is evident from the nature of the design and the form of the mouldings that the window is of late date, probably of the end of the sixteenth century.

Aytoun was granted by the Scottish Edgar to St. Cuthbert's Monks, and thus became the property of the Priory of Coldingham, and shared its fate.

## Extract from HES Canmore

### RCAHMS County Inventory: Berwickshire

#### Site visit 1908

Ayton Church.

This ivy-covered ruin stands in a burial ground to the east of the present church. The only portion in fair preservation is a wing or aisle to the south of the east end of the nave, 20 feet across, and 29 feet in length along its east wall. It has a segmental-headed doorway in the east wall 5 feet in width, and at the south end a round-headed window 5 feet across, divided by mullions into three lights, crossed by a transom at the centre, with round-arched heads. It is now closed, and used as a burial-ground.

The church was dedicated to St Dionysius. It was often used as a place of conference by Scotch and English Commissioners in dealing with a truce.

RCAHMS 1915, visited 3 August 1908.

See Eccles. Arch., iii. p. 543 (illus.); Ber. Nat. Club, 1890-91, p. 93; Carr's Coldingham, p. 131 (illus.).

OS Map: Ber., xii. NW

## Extract from "Some Reminiscences from the middle of the last century"

### By S.E. Simpson 1923

#### The Old Parish Church

Of those far-off days I have many hallowed memories. I can picture its old-fashioned box seats and very few pews. The sittings were then all plain unpainted wood, except for the circular patch of white paint with blackletters intimating the various places in the parish to whom the sittings were allotted with the numbers foreach. We entered by the West door, where, I remember, hung a big board which enumerated the various charges for grave-digging, the use of the mortcloth and other charges. I remember my forbears sat in the first box seat on the left on entering. Along with them sat the then School-master of Burnmouth, Mr. Falconer, his father, and sister. The seat immediately in front was occupied by the late Charles Colville, writer, Ayton. Away to the East end of the aisle was the Laird's gallery, or the Castle Loft, as it was called. The pulpit stood against the South Wall, and right in front of it was the north aisle with the Bell Loft at the end, the Vestry being underneath it, with another entrance to the Church. I remember how we had all to tum out to Church in those days,



and no excuse excepting illness could prevent us being present at the services. So, from being a regular attender, I have many strong impressions of the good that can be received in early life. What a boon this would be to the youth of today if they took advantage of it.

### **HES Listed Buildings entry 1971**

Summary

**Category** - B

**Date Added** - 09/06/1971

**Local Authority** - Scottish Borders

**Planning Authority** - Scottish Borders

**Parish** - Ayton

**NGR** - NT 92794 60953

**Coordinates** - 392794, 660953

Description

Earlier to mid-12th century; extensively altered and rebuilt late 18th century; now ruinous. Roofless remains of former Ayton Church, set in graveyard, to NE of later Ayton Parish Church. W and E gables and much of S wall missing. Majority of N wall, N aisle and bell tower, and SE burial aisle in place. Originally rectangular-plan, later made T-plan with addition of N aisle. Harl-pointed sandstone rubble (squared and weathered in part); ashlar upper to bell tower; ashlar dressings throughout. Quoins; long and short surrounds to openings (blocked in part). Various burial aisles and enclosures incorporated within remains, including Fordyce family aisle to SE with large, round-arched, traceried window centred in S gable (2 sandstone mullions; single transom; round-arched heads); gravestones within; iron-railed enclosure to side. Overgrown burial aisle to NE (Alexander Skene). Various plaques and gravestones set in walls. Full-width, single storey, lean-to projection adjoining S elevation N aisle.

Statement of Special Interest

No longer in ecclesiastical use. A picturesque, ivy-clad group of ruins, thought to date, in part, from the 12th century, shortly after Ayton was granted to

Durham Monastery. Dedicated to St Dionysius, this was originally a chapel attached to Coldingham, as Ayton was not a parish in its own right until after The Reformation. According to Binnie, as the "...first church of any size in Scotland", the building was used for a series of significant meetings between the Scots and the English, such as that which, in 1380, saw the renewal of the truce between the 2 countries. Much of what remains today is thought to date from the late 18th century when, according to THE STATISTICAL ACCOUNT, several improvements were carried out. These improvements are thought to include the building of the

N aisle, the bell tower and the SE burial aisle. Originally thought to be the S transept, most now agree that this was built specifically as a burial aisle, added to the E end of the S wall. See separate list entries for the surrounding graveyard ('St Dionysius' Church (remains of), Graveyard') and the nearby Ayton Parish Church.

## References

## Bibliography

STATISTICAL ACCOUNT (1791) p83. Sharp, Greenwood & Fowler's map, 1826 (site marked). NEW STATISTICAL ACCOUNT (completed 1834, published 1845) pp144-145. Ordnance Survey Name Book (1856-1858) Reel 60, Book 3, NMRS. Ordnance Survey map, 1860 (evident). D MacGibbon & T Ross THE ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE OF SCOTLAND, Vol 3 (1897) p543.

BERWICKSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB TRANSACTIONS, Vol 13 (1890-91) pp93-95.

J Robson THE CHURCHES AND CHURCHYARDS OF BERWICKSHIRE (1896) pp12-14. BERWICKSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB TRANSACTIONS, Vol 16 (1896-98) pp18-19. BERWICKSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB TRANSACTIONS, Vol 21 (1909-11) p241. RCAHMS 6TH REPORT & INVENTORY OF MONUMENTS & CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE COUNTY OF BERWICK (1915) p4. C A Strang BORDERS AND BERWICK: AN ILLUSTRATED ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE (1994) p22. G A C Binnie THE CHURCHES AND GRAVEYARDS OF BERWICKSHIRE (1995) pp24-26. NMRS photographic records.

### Archaeology Notes from HES Canmore. Approx 1980

NT96SW 8.00 92794 60953 St Dionysius Church

NT96SW 8.01 92819 60933 Churchyard

(NT 9279 6095) St Dionysius's Church (NR) (remains of)

OS 6" map, (1970).

The roofless remains of the original Ayton Parish Church, which was dedicated to St Dionysius, stand within a burial ground E of the modern church. It was erected in the early 12th century, though there is evidence of extensive alteration and rebuilding. It now stands in two sections, the main body of the church to the N, and a now detached transept S of the E end of the nave. The walls are 2ft thick and of uneven height, 18ft maximum. The best preserved portion, the S transept, measures 20ft by 29ft and has a segmental-headed doorway in its E wall, and a round-headed window, divided by mullions into three lights, in the S wall. It is now closed and used for burials.

RCAHMS 1915, visited 1908; D MacGibbon and T Ross 1897; J Ferguson 1892; RCAHMS 1980, visited 1979; I B Cowan 1967.

The remains of this church are in poor condition. It is divided by a modern footpath into two sections. The S transept appears to be of different construction to the remainder of the church, which in general is an early structure with some 'modern' work (e.g. window jambs, quoins, etc) incorporated in its walls.

Visited by OS (JLD) 2 November 1954.

Previous field report confirmed.

Visited by OS (WDJ) 25 January 1966.

Extract from The Churches and Graveyards of Berwickshire by G.A.C. Binnie  
1995

AYTON OLD PARISH CHURCH

Ayton was originally in Coldingham parish but became a separate parish after the Reformation. The date is uncertain, but it was possibly in 1627, when Lamberton was added to Ayton parish. Lamberton was united with Mordington parish in 1650.

The first parish church was built and dedicated to St Dionysius some time early in the 12th century shortly after Ayton had been granted to Durham Monastery, although the exact year is unknown. It was a chapel dependant on Coldingham with a chaplain. Robertus, Parsona Capella de Ayton, *Robert, parson of the chapel of Ayton*, was in office for some period between 1166 and 1232, and was mentioned in 1220. There was an altar in the old church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which had endowments from various lands in the parish. As the first church of any size in Scotland, Ayton Church was used for various meetings between representatives of England and Scotland. In 1380 John of Gaunt met Robert II's commissioners in the church to arrange a renewal of the truce between the two countries, and there was a similar meeting in 1384. In 1497 a seven years truce was signed in Ayton Church by Andrew Forman (of Hutton) on behalf of James IV, who was to meet his death at Flodden in 1513.

The remains of the old parish church are in the cemetery, not far from the steep bank of the Eye. The west and east gables have gone as has much of the south wall, but most of the north wall, north aisle and the belfry tower remain, to a maximum height of 5.5 metres. The writer in the First Statistical Account wrote that the building "has lately received several improvements which its former state rendered extremely necessary", and the New Statistical Account speaks of the tower and belfry and north transept having been added "upwards of 20 years before". Carr has an illustration of Ayton Church showing a sundial on the south-west corner similar to that at Chirnside. In addition it shows the gable of what could have been the east end of the chancel, with the bell tower and church as described by Ferguson. That east gable has now gone apart from its footing, but it can be seen that there was a rectangular building measuring about 21 by 6 metres. It was made T shaped by the insertion of a north aisle almost at the centre of the north wall with a 3 metres square bell tower in turn in its north wall at its centre. It looks as though the original entry

into the bell tower was through a door in its west side and that when a gallery was added at some later date, that door was built up and access to the bell tower and gallery obtained from the back of the north aisle itself. A window in the north aisle could well have been closed off at this time also.

In the north-east angle between the north aisle and the rest of the church is the much overgrown private burial aisle of Alexander Skene who has a marble plaque to his memory on the adjacent inside wall of the church. This records that he died in 1823 aged 56 when in command of HMS Britannia.

Corresponding to the position of Skene's burial aisle across the width of the church at its south-east end is another burial aisle. This was assumed by Carr and Ferguson to be a south transept, but it has manifestly been added to the east end of the south wall. This is a burial aisle, probably built for the Fordyce family of Ayton Castle who used it in the late 18th century.

James Home of Ayton Castle was unwise enough to join the Jacobites in the 1715 Rebellion and led the Mersemen. As the result he was dispossessed of his estate in 1716. The Commissioners of the Sequestered Estates sold it to the Dowager Countess of Home (mother of James) in 1724. She in turn sold the estate in 1731 to Alexander Fordyce who had been one of the commissioners. The earliest Fordyce gravestone in the burial aisle is dated 1798. Ferguson thought that the unusual window at the south end of the Fordyce aisle was probably 17th or 18th century, despite having a Norman style semi-circular arch with three massive mullions with iron bars.

It is likely that this burial aisle was constructed as part of the works mentioned in the First Statistical Account. Probably the north aisle was added at the same time with its later gallery giving a total of 400 seats. At the same time the original walls at the extreme east end of the church were demolished leaving the east gable to be removed between Carr's illustration in 1836, and Ferguson's description 55 years later. The Hood burial aisle stands fairly near, and was made in 1830 from similar red sandstone to that of the church and it could be that some of the east end of the church disappeared in that direction.

There was a bell in the tower dating from about 1500. It was last recorded as being seen at a meeting of the Berwickshire Naturalist's Club somewhere in Ayton in 1868, three years after the move to the new church. A rubbing of the inscription on the bell is held in the British Museum. It

reads" Campana Sancte Cuthberte Tommas Balrno", *The bell of St Cuthbert*, and the name of the donor or founder.

.References

Anon. 1911, Reports of meetings for 1911: Ayton for Coldingham and St Abb's Head, History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, 21, 241

Carr, A, 1836, Coldingham Priory; Edinburgh; 128, 130-32