

Ayton Church

A

Short History

Ayton Church

The Church at Ayton dates back to the middle of the twelfth century. It was granted by the Scottish King Edgar to St Cuthbert's 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 (St Denis patron saint of France).

In the year 1380 the Church was the scene of an important historical event - John of Gaunt along with the English commissioners namely John, Bishop of Durham, Lord John Neville and John Waltham - the sub-Dean of York and representing Scotland, were John, Earl of Moray, Archibald Douglas, Lord of Galloway, James Douglas, Lord of Dalkeith and the Provost of St Andrews, Duncan Little met to arrange for a renewal of a truce between the two countries, and a similar meeting was held again in the Church in 1434. Then on the 30th September 1497 a truce was entered into between Scotland and England that was to last for seven years. It was signed in the Church of Ayton on behalf of King James IV of Scotland by his Ambassador, Andrew Forman. The mediator of the last treaty was a spanish clergyman Pedro d'Ayala who was at that time Ambassador to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain at the court of King Henry VII of England, also present representing England were the Bishop of Durham and William Warham Master of the Rolls.

Probably the first Chaplain connected with this old Church in the churchyard was Robertus Parsona Cappellae de Ayton, the date of whose tenure of office is somewhat undefined, but was between the years 1166 and 1232.

LAYING OF FOUNDATION STONE OF NEW PARISH CHURCH - 8th September 1864.

The columns of the Berwick Advertiser, 10th September 1864, supply a full account of this important ceremony, attended by a large body of people, including members of the Presbytery of Chirnside, County Constabulary, Ayton or 3rd Berwickshire Rifle Volunteers, together with the school children. Many county families and friends were also present, among whom might be specially mentioned Alexander Mitchell-Innes, Esq., and family, and other Heritors of the parish. Seven young ladies dressed in white and connected with the Sunday School figured in the procession which formed up at the Parish School, namely,

Miss Jane Yule, Ayton Station; Miss Middleton, Ayton Cocklaw; Miss White, Ayton Law; Miss Margaret Delgaty, Ayton; Miss Catherine Patterson, Ayton; Miss Agnes Henderson, Ayton; and Miss Jane Anne Whitley, Ayton. The Minister, the Rev. Daniel Cameron, conducted the service, in the course of which the Architect, Mr Wardrop, Edinburgh, produced a case containing the coins and newspapers of the day bearing the following inscription:-

AYTON PARISH CHURCH.

The foundation stone of this Church was laid on

8th September, A.D., 1864,

In the 27th year of the reign of Her Most Excellent Majesty

Queen Victoria

by

Mrs Mitchell-Innes, of Ayton Castle, and

Miss Mitchell-Innes.

Minister of the Parish:

The Rev. Daniel Cameron

After the contents of the case had been deposited in a cavity in the foundation stone, Mrs Mitchell-Innes was presented with a silver trowel with which she spread the symbols - the corn, wine and oil - over the stone. Another large stone being lowered on top of the foundation stone, the latter was tapped three times by Miss Innes with a silver mallet, when Mr Cameron declared the foundation stone of the Church truly laid. The trowel and mallet were then presented to Mrs and Miss Mitchell-Innes respectively, and the young ladies already mentioned presented Miss Mitchell-Innes with a Bible mounted in silver. Mr Cameron, referring to Mr Mitchell-Innes, though not by name, said that by his princely liberality he had contributed in a great degree to the building of the new Church, which would prove at once a place of worship and an ornament to the parish.

The Heritors gave £1,500 towards the building of the Parish Church and Mr Mitchell-Innes of Ayton Castle contributed the remainder which is supposed to have been £3,000 - in all besides the field, a total of £4,500.

STRUCTURAL DETAILS

Estimated to accommodate 720 worshippers, the Church is cruciform in shape,

comprising nave, cloister, apsidal chancel and south transept, and is finished with a graceful spire rising over 120 feet. The tower, surmounted by the spire, is situated at the south angle over the principal doorway, and contains a bell in the key of A presented by Mrs Mitchell-Innes. Built with white dressed freestone and standing on a fine open site, the exterior of the building reveals much decorative beauty. On the north side are a small but neat vestry, and the entrance to the pews in the Apse through an open porch of ornamental timber work. In front of the pulpit, which commands both the transept and the nave, stand the baptismal font as well as the new Communion table and the reading-desk of light Spanish oak, commemorative of men of the parish who died in the Great War and gifted by members of the Young Men's Guild and Mr John Heron respectively. The traceried windows are enriched with coloured glass, the west light above the gallery being an architectural feature of much beauty. The latter, called the "Rose Window", is shaped like a wheel and is filled with geometric and foliated glass. At the east end of the chancel of apse are three twin light windows representing the Six Acts of Mercy; that in the south transept consists of four upright lights, the subject being "The Adoration of the Magi and the Shepherds" who are represented offering their gifts to the infant Saviour. On the north side are three upright lights depicting the "Sermon on the Mount". In the adjoining graveyard are tombstones dating 250 years back.

INSTALLATION OF PIPE ORGAN

Following a two days' bazaar, held in the Volunteer Hall, Ayton, in the Autumn of 1893, at which the sum of £1,013 was raised, an order was placed with Messrs Forster & Andrews, Hull, for a two-manual pipe organ, estimated to cost £600. Its erection in the course of the following year entailed some dislocation of church furnishing and curtailment of sitting accommodation; but these were generously sanctioned by the Heritors, the total outlay amounting to £800, leaving a balance of £200 or thereby, which was invested in Government securities for its permanent upkeep. The instrument superseded an American organ introduced in 1885, and was constructed in two divisions on either side of the window in the north wall. During the weeks occupied in its erection the congregation worshipped in the Volunteer Hall till, on the evening of the Fast Day preceding the Spring celebration of Communion, it was inaugurated at a recital given by Mr Charles Bradley, Organist, South Leith Parish Church.

SOME INTERESTING CHURCH PROPERTY

Among other objects of historical interest, the Church possesses:-

- (a) A Communion Cup which seems to have stood in need of enlargement, as set forth in the inscription: "This cup originally given by Magdallan Rule of Pilwalls to the Church of Ayton in 1677. Renewed and enlarged in 1780."
- (b) A Communion Cup engraved "The Parish Church of Ayton, 1780".
- (c) Two Pewter Cups, 1680, and two similar Flagons, 1766.
- (d) Handled Almsboxes (oak).
- (e) Communion tokens (discontinued in 1876).
- (f) Silver Trowel in glass case used in laying foundation stone, 1864.
- (g) Parchment embodying Crown Presentation to Ayton Parish Church of Rev. Daniel Cameron, 27th October 1842, with the great Seal of Scotland attached (in good condition).