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## AYTON

Ayton parish lies in the south-east of the county, its eastern boundary being the North Sea coast from the village of Burnmouth to Gunsgreen on the south side of Eyemouth Bay. The village of Ayton extended to the south side of the Eye Water and to the east of the parish church until the end of the 18th century when the owner of Ayton Castle persuaded the householders there to move to the north side of the river, and away from the castle policies.

The ruins of the old parish church are close to the south bank of the Eye in the parish graveyard. This lies to the east of the Victorian parish church, which stands near to the bridge at the south end of the village main street.

For over a century there were in Ayton two Secession Churches of the Burgher and Antiburgher persuasions. Their various church buildings have now been demolished. Summerhill Burgher Church was at Ayton Old Town at first, and latterly at Kirklands at the west end of Beanburn. Springbank Antiburgher Church was in Beanburn, not very far from its rival. Confusingly, because Summerhill congregation started off in the east end of the village it was known as the East Church even when the new building was erected in the western outskirts of the village, and Springbank continued to be known as the West Church, even when it lay to the east of its rival.

Burnmouth Church is about two thirds of the way down the steep road between Upper and Lower Burnmouth. It was a United Presbyterian Church originally, and became a United Free Church before becoming Church of Scotland at the union of 1929.

There was an Episcopal congregation in the parish around 1700, a Baptist congregation was in existence in the 1840s and Methodists were active in Ayton and Burnmouth in the 1860s and 1870s. There is now no evidence of where these congregations met.

### 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 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **AYTON PARISH CHURCH**

Ayton parish church was opened in 1865, and stands prominently on the south bank of the Eye, just across the bridge from the village. Alexander Mitchell Innes of Ayton Castle gave the site and £3000, with the other heritors raising the remaining £1500 or so of the total cost. The stone came from Harelaw Quarry near Chirnside. The tower is variously stated as being 37 or 40 metres (120 or 130 feet) high. There was seating for 750 people with pews on three sides of the pulpit, and a laird's pew behind the pews to the east of the pulpit. This enabled access to the church to be available for worshippers from Ayton Castle through the vestry door at the north-east corner of the church, the part nearest to Ayton Castle itself. The main door of the church is that nearest the main road, with a secondary door in the angle between the east and south aisles.

## **INTERIOR**

In 1973 there were repairs when the east wing was converted into a chancel, with a children's area where the Ayton Castle pew used to be. The pews were turned so that they all faced the pulpit. The church is a fine building and the alterations of 1973 have made it seem even more like a Victorian English parish church. There is a large stained glass rose window in the west gable. Until mains

electricity came to the village, the large pipe organ was powered by electricity generated by the Eye Water, which runs past only a few metres away.

In the tower are stored memorial plaques to the Rev James Stark, minister of Springbank Church for 50 years, and to the Rev Thomas Montgomery of Summerhill Church, both memorials having been removed from their respective churches before their demolition. Also stored in the tower is a carved stone inscribed "Springbank 1778, Rebuilt 1871". The church bell is inscribed "Mears & Stainbank, founders, London", and "Presented by Christian, wife of William Mitchell Innes, Esq. of Ayton and Whitehall, and daughter of Thomas Shairpe, Esq. of Houston West-Lothian. AD 1865".

#### COMMUNION PLATE

In 1677 a silver communion cup was given to the church and in 1780 it was enlarged and engraved with the words "This cup originally Given by Magdallan Rule of Pilwalls To the church of Ayton in 1677. Renewed and enlarged in 1780". A second similar cup has the inscription "The Parish Church of Ayton 1780". There are also four cups (one poorly repaired at some time), two flagons and five plates all engraved with the words "Ayton Parish Church 1884". They cost £43 and are all probably of pewter. One cup and one plate are also marked "Presented on the occasion of the new communion service", presumably in 1884, but the significance of this is not known. The old set of four cups and two flagons was given into the care of the moderator at that time, but their present whereabouts is now unknown. The silver trowel used to lay the church's foundation stone in 1865 is also part of the church's collection.

#### MINISTERS

John Home was in the parish in 1554. Sir John Flint was the reader in 1574 when William Lamb, a notary public in 1557, was minister of "Coldinghame, Aitoun and Lammerton.

1585-86	Robert Hislop.
1586-1601	John Home.
1601-16	William Hog.
1617-26	Alexander Home.
1627-50	George Home.
1652	Alexander Gibsone, died after seven months.
1653-64	William Hume.
1667-89	John Bethune, deprived.
1694-1707	George Hume.
1712-51	Thomas Anderson.
1753-72	Patrick Hepburn.
1773-1816	George Home.
1799-1814	Abraham Home, assistant.
1814-42	George Tough, assistant and successor.
1843-82	Daniel Cameron.
1882-1933	James J M L Aiken.
1935-69	David Hodges, an Australian.

Linked with Burnmouth in 1969.

1969-78	John T Peat.
1978-83	Duncan Anderson.
1983	David Heberton.

Linked with Grantshouse united with Houndwood, linked with Reston in 1983.

John Flint was witness to charters in 1553 when he was vicar of Ayton. He was vicar pensioner in 1563 and until he died some time before 1586. Flint conformed to presbyterianism in 1560 and was a reader until 1580. He was vicar pensioner of Ayton in 1574, which meant he had a fixed income. Flint was summoned in that year for irregularities with giving the sacraments, and was ordered to abstain from all functions in the kirk "till the Superintendent of Lothian try his learning and ability".

Alexander Home was commendator of Eccles Priory in 1620 and probably received the income of the post without having to do any of the work of a titular abbot.

George Home was deposed in 1650 and was left in financial need. He was given an allowance by Smailholm parish in 1654, and by Tranent in the following year. In 1657 he was in Edinburgh Tolbooth for debt, so he seems to have been recurrently hard up. In 1661 he was given the stipend of Foulden parish for one year by Act of Parliament, although he had only been in the charge for nine months.

William Hume seems to have been deprived and had no stipend for two years because of "the prevailing usurping power" and because of his loyalty to what he considered to be the rightful authority. With a change of government he petitioned Parliament, and was reinstated. By an Act of Parliament in 1661 he received two years arrears of pay. His widow, described as a "poor distressed gentlewoman" was given 18 shillings by Bunkle Church Session in 1674.

In 1707 another George Home, who was the laird of Abbey St Bathans, was virtually forced out of the parish as he had become so unpopular with his parishioners. He had previously survived an unsubstantiated charge of drinking to excess in Duns. This type of accusation was common at that period, and one which could be very hard to refute, so that it difficult to know the truth. However this time the charge of being "addicted to intoxication" was only dropped because of his departure to be minister of his home parish of Abbey St Bathans, where he was the patron and laird.

Abraham Home was appointed in 1799 to be the successor to his father, the third Rev George Home of Ayton. He was in that post for 15 years, and then he resigned from Ayton in 1814 to become the heir of George Home of Paxton. He lived in Paxton for a time. Home's niece, Miss Agnes Stephen, was the adopted and possibly natural daughter of Ninian Home, brother of George. Abraham was expected to marry her, but when he refused he was disinherited. He returned to the ministry and became minister of Greenlaw. The £300 annuity he was granted by George Home when he resigned from Ayton could not be withdrawn, and he received this for the rest of his life. Miss Stephen became the second wife of Admiral Milne of Milnegraden in 1819.

George Tough was a craftsman in his own way. He made an orrery, or a clockwork model of the solar system, which he presented to George IV on his famous visit to Edinburgh in 1822.

## **BURNMOUTH CHURCH**

About one third of Ayton Summerhill United Presbyterian congregation was composed of fishermen and their families from Burnmouth, some three or four kilometres away. They usually attended Sunday evening services and exclusively occupied the gallery of Summerhill Church. From about 1884 there was a United Presbyterian preaching station with Sunday evening services held at some now unknown place in Burnmouth. These were conducted by a Coast Mission agent, and for a time William Wilson of Ayton Springbank Church conducted monthly Sunday evening services. One of the missionaries in Burnmouth was a Mr Short and for about 20 years he and his wife made gifts to Berwick Infirmary "from the inhabitants of Burnmouth".

In 1888 a public hall to hold 300 people was built by the Good Templars. It was opened by Principal John Cairns, the intention being to use it on weekdays for public meetings and on Sundays for services conducted by a student. In the event, evening services were held, conducted on alternate Sundays by John Duncan of Summerhill Church and by a student missionary. In 1897 a congregation of the United Presbyterian Church was formally established. The Good Templars had been losing ground and by the congregation's own efforts the public hall was purchased from the Templars for use as a church in the same year. By 1899 the membership was 108.

The church stands on a small piece of level ground on the roadside between Upper and Lower Burnmouth, about one third of the way above the harbour, and with a fine outlook to sea. The entrance is at the landward end of the building, through a small garden. It looks like the village hall it once was, except for a small belfry at the seaward end, added in 1929. In the same year the windows were replaced and oak pews from Dunblane Cathedral took the place of the forms which had previously been in use. The uninscribed bell was installed in 1929, but is thought to have been founded in about 1850. It may have come from Summerhill Church. Burnmouth Church was renovated in 1973.

Inside the church there is a memorial plaque to the Rev Robert Hamilton, and a roll of honour of the 64 people, including six women, from Burnmouth who served in the 1914-18 War; there were eight fatalities. The communion table and chairs came from Ayton Summerhill Church after it closed in 1934, as did some silver plated communion plate. Two plates are uninscribed, two small cups and one large cup, are inscribed "West U P Congregation Ayton 1779" with the additional inscription "Burnmouth Kirk 1938" on the two smaller vessels. There are also a pewter collection plate and bowl, both undated but in use since the church opened.

#### MINISTERS

1888	A M Moodie, probationer.
1890-96	David S Cairns.
1896-1904	Alexander Urquhart.
1904-15	Alexander A Russell.
1915-22	John W Downie.
1922-29	John Wallace Ross.
1929-35	Robert Hamilton.
1935-69	David A Hodges.
Linked with Ayton in 1969.	
1969-78	John T Peat.
1978-83	Duncan Anderson.
1983	David Heberton.

David S Cairns was appointed as a student missionary and was ordained in 1898. He was later minister of Summerhill church. Alexander Urquhart was appointed as a student, and ordained in 1898.

#### **SPRINGBANK CHURCH**

The Secession Church spilt into Burgher and Antiburgher factions in 1774 and for over 120 years congregations from the two groups worshipped in Ayton.

In 1771 members of the Antiburghers living in Coldingham asked for sermons to be preached for their benefit in Coldingham, but as it was 24- kilometres from the nearest congregation, the request was turned down. In the face of objections from the Duns congregation which delayed the proposal for four years, a congregation was eventually established at Ayton in 1779. They worshipped at first in a large carpet factory, of which no trace or knowledge now remains. Feu duty on a new site was paid from 1776, and the first minister was appointed in 1779; the only written record of the year of opening is on the carved stone now in the tower of the parish church which gives it as 1778. It had accommodation for about 270 people. This building stood very near if not actually on the site of the second church.

By 1836 there were 130 communicants, about 20% from Coldingham, about 60% from Ayton and the others from other parishes. The Burgher and Antiburgher Churches had united to become the United Associate Church in 1820, but it was not until 1862 that the first proposal for the union of the Ayton churches was made. This was turned down by the Springbank congregation, following the advice of their minister. A further attempt at union was made in 1868 but again was opposed by the

Springbank congregation. Perversely, in view of the attempts at union, it was decided to rebuild and in 1871 a new church with accommodation for 350 and costing £1500 was opened by Principal John Cairns. He had been born in the parish when his father was a shepherd at Ayton Hill Farm, which used to be beyond Ayton Cocklaw. Cairns first attended school in Ayton.

Following the opening of the new church, congregational income fell and had to be augmented from central sources by 1884. Still the congregation was against union despite outside pressure and even when union was inevitable in 1894 only 73% of the members voted in favour of it. After union the joint congregation worshipped at first in each church in alternate months, but Summerhill, the larger building, was chosen as the home of the united congregation in 1895. Springbank Church was sold shortly afterwards and demolished. Its site is marked by Springbank Villas on the north side of Bean Burn. A memorial plaque to the Rev James Stark is preserved in the tower of Ayton parish church. The communion plate, all silver plated, is in use in Burnmouth Church. There are two small goblets and one large goblet, inscribed "West U P Congregation Ayton 1779", the year the first minister was appointed. Two plates have no inscription.

#### MINISTERS

1779-90	John Turnbull, deposed for immorality.
1792-1816	Robert Wilson.
1819-69	James Stark.
1869-95	William Wilson.

#### **SUMMERHILL CHURCH**

The Rev Alexander Dickson of Wallace Green Church in Berwick preached in Ayton at the baptism of a child of a member of his Burgher congregation. A large company heard him and as a result a congregation was set up in 1771 by the Presbytery of Kelso. In 1777 the Edinburgh Burgher Presbytery agreed to a request from Ayton to provide sermons and this was done. A church with seating for 295 had been erected by 1782, more or less contemporaneously with Springbank Antiburgher Church. The church was enlarged in 1814 by the erection of an additional aisle which provided seating for 560 people in total. The site of this church was on the eastern outskirts of the village in Ayton Old Town. It was on the west side of the Eyemouth road, the site lying behind the last two or three houses.

On a site to the west of the village a new church was built at a cost of £1300 and opened by Principal John Cairns in 1864. It had seating for 500. Although having the advantage of a larger and wealthier congregation than its Springbank neighbour, Summerhill suffered from the loss of members as United Presbyterian Churches became established in Chirnside and Eyemouth, and also from the commencement of services in Burnmouth. In addition they were unfortunate in their choice of ministers. Thomson, the first, turned out to be an drunkard, whose father retired to Ayton to live with his son, but found it too much for him and returned to his native town after testifying that "he had seen his son drunk at different times". After Thomson was deposed, he enlisted as a soldier and was killed by falling from a rock in Gibraltar, perhaps the result of his alcoholism. The second minister seemed to be less than diligent, and Montgomery was the main stumbling block the Springbank congregation found to the proposed union of the two United Presbyterian Churches in 1862 and 1868 which the higher church authorities tried to impose. Burnmouth members attended the Sunday evening services and used the gallery exclusively but Montgomery had the knack of holding together the congregation with its disparate groups of towns-folk, farm workers and fisherfolk from Burnmouth. Duncan, the next minister was unable to hold the groupings together as Montgomery had and the congregation began to disintegrate. The two Ayton congregations of what was now the United Presbyterian Church at last united in 1894. From 1895 the larger Summerhill Church was used.

The congregation united with the parish church in the parish church building in 1934 after the union of the two denominations. The church and manse were sold and the church was

demolished in 1936. The communion table and chairs are still in use in Burnmouth Church. The communion plate is now gone.

The Rev David S Cairns was the nephew of the locally famous Principal John Cairns and he was born and went to school for a couple of years in Ayton. He had spent a winter as a student missionary in Burnmouth in 1890, and again was in charge of Burnmouth in 1893 after he was ordained. When he left Ayton in 1907, he became Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology in Aberdeen United Free Church College, and went on to become Principal in 1923.

Summerhill Church stood in Bean Burn on the outskirts of the village on the north side of the road immediately behind the old manse, now a private house called Kirklands.

#### MINISTERS

1783-94	John Thomson.
1795-1845	David Ure.
1846-81	Thomas Montgomery.
1882-93	John G Duncan.
1895-1907	David S Cairns.
1907-19	John MacLaren.
1919-29.	William D O Rose.
1931-33	John Paul.

John Thomson was deposed for drunkenness.

#### **AYTON EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Ayton, like Eyemouth and Coldingham, had an Episcopalian group meeting in it for some years after 1689, but the place is now unknown. It could have been in one or more private houses.

John Bethune (or Beaton) refused to pray for William and Mary and was deposed from the church at Ayton in 1689. The appointment of a successor was stalled for five years by the Earl of Home, who insisted in putting forward Bethune for the vacancy. Despite Bethune having been disqualified for the ministry by order of the Privy Council, Home appealed and appealed again up to King William himself, each appeal in turn being dismissed. The result was that the next minister, George Hume, was not ordained until 1694, and not before William Anderson the village schoolmaster had "invaded the pulpit" three times and had been excommunicated.

In 1696 James Adamson, who had been deposed from Simprim, was "keeping a schismatical meeting by turn every Lord's Day" in Coldingham, Eyemouth and Ayton. In 1700 a meeting house was still maintained in the parish of Ayton in a private family home, where the Lord Chancellor "could not meddle with it". A year later there was still a schismatical meeting at Prendergust, John Home of Broomhouse, (deprived of Hilton in 1689) being the "preacher in ordinary". The last record of the "Episcopal House" at Ayton was in the Synod records for May 25th, 1725, when John Middleton the preacher was charged with being the father of the child of Isobel Forman of Foulden, and with having sent her away to Newcastle from 1721 to 1725. He left the district and was declared a fugitive, but was still performing marriages in Leith a year later.

#### **AYTON BAPTIST CHURCH**

A Baptist church of some kind was in existence in 'Aytoun' from about 1842. It only survived for a short time and its site is now unknown.

#### **AYTON METHODISTS**

Methodists were active in Ayton parish after the Evangelical Revival in Eyemouth in 1860. There was said to have been a Methodist Chapter in Burnmouth by 1876, but its history is unknown. Methodists in Ayton village struggled on holding meetings in their homes but no church building was ever constructed.

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