

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 30th 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 alate 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.