



St Mary's Kirk, Auchindoir

St Mary's Kirk at Auchindoir, between Rhynie and Lumsden, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, is one of the country's finest surviving medieval parish kirks. The main doorway is early Romanesque, and there is a well-preserved early 16th-century sacrament house, similar to those at Deskford and Kinkell.^[1]

The early 13th-century kirk has been roofless since the early 19th century, but the walls and gables are nevertheless in good condition. In the care of Historic Scotland, it is registered as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.^[2]

Unusual survivor

St Mary's is rare for a Scottish church in that it has survived into the modern era without any major alterations. Although surviving medieval churches are reasonably common throughout the country, almost all were significantly altered during and after the Reformation, often so heavily transformed that it is difficult to see their medieval origins.^[3] Of the few other churches which have survived the Reformation largely intact, e.g. Rosslyn Chapel in Midlothian, nearly all are of a later date than Auchindoir.

Another factor making Auchindoir unusual is that most surviving Romanesque structures in Scotland are either large monastic houses or cathedrals, or else chapels and churches associated with larger monastic or ecclesiastical complexes. As a modest parish church St Mary's is an unusual survivor.

History

St Mary's Kirk was built in the early 13th century and served as the place of worship for the nearby motte and bailey castle, next to a gorge to the south-east of the church. First mentioned in 1236, the church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. West of the church was a source called St Mary's Well, which was supposed to relieve toothache. In 1514 the church was elevated to a prebend of King's College in Aberdeen, thereby

St Mary's Kirk



St Mary's Kirk, Auchindoir, Aberdeenshire



57°18′31″N 2°52′07″W﻿ / ﻿

Scheduled monument

Official name	Auchindoir, St Mary's Church, Mote Hill and Dovecot
Type	Ecclesiastical: church, Secular: doocote, dovecote, pigeon loft; motte
Designated	7 February 1936
Reference no.	SM90267 (https://www.truve.scot/designation/SM90267)

receiving the income of a canon. It was subsequently used as a parish church, surviving the Reformation largely intact. However, in the 17th century it was redecorated, with most of the lancet windows replaced with larger windows.^[4]

In 1810, the church ceased to be used as a place of worship and the old timber work was sold publicly. The following year, a new village church—the North Parish Church, also called Newton of Auchindoir—came into use, and St Mary's was abandoned.^[5]

Architectural features

The church has been described as one of Northern Scotland's finest specimens of 13th-century First-Pointed architecture. It is said to belong to the period when "the already softened features of the Norman were beginning to merge altogether into the still more flexible and varied forms of the First-Pointed style." One peculiarity is that the church stands north and south rather than east and west.^[6] It had already lost its roof at the beginning of the 19th century but the walls of rubble and freestone quoins remain intact. The nave leads directly into the chancel without any structural division. Alterations were made in the first half of the 16th century and during the 17th century when doors and windows were added. The belfry on the west gable dates from 1664.^[7]

One of the most impressive feature of St Mary's is its Norman-arched doorway with well-preserved chevron decorations. Standing next to the outer wall in the north-east corner of the church, a grave slab dated 1580 and dedicated to "O.L.H.M." and "A.S.", together with the arms on the adjacent plaque, is associated with the Gordons of Craig from Craig Castle.

Inside the church, at the east end of the north wall, there is a highly decorated sacrament house in the Second-Pointed style of the early 1500s, set in what used to be a lancet window.^[4] It is surmounted by a representation of Christ on the cross. There is an inscription on the sacrament house that reads: "HIC•E•CORP D N I C V M" (*HIC Est CORPus Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Virginis Mariae* meaning "Here is the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Virgin Mary").^[8]

Two shields are set in the east wall near the sacrament house—one dated 1557 with the Gordon arms and motto "Hoip in God" while another, initialed V.G : C.C., bears the arms of



The south doorway of St Mary's Kirk, Auchindoir



The 16th-century sacrament house at St Mary's Kirk

Gordon and Cheyne with the motto "Grace me Gyid". They correspond to the time when William Gordon and Clare Cheyne were laird and lady of the castle.^[5]

References

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4. "St Mary's Kirk" (<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/rhynie/stmarys/index.html>), *Undiscovered Scotland*. Retrieved 17 May 2012.
5. Andrew Jervise: "Notes respecting the Castle of Craig and the Old Kirk of Auchindoir, etc., in Aberdeenshire" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=EX0vAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA323>), *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.8, 1871. Pages: 328–9.
6. *Descriptive Notices of the Ancient Parochial and Collegiate Churches of Scotland*, London, 1848, Page 144.
7. "Auchindoir, St Mary's Church" (<http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/17230/details/auchindoir+st+mary+s+church/>), *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland*. Retrieved 17 May 2012.
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II.

NOTICES RESPECTING THE CASTLE OF CRAIG AND THE OLD KIRK
OF AUCHINDOIR, Etc., IN ABERDEENSHIRE. By A. JERVISE, Esq.,
CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT., BRECHIN.

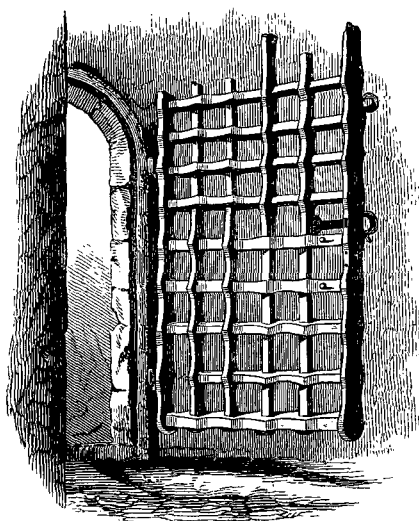
The Castle of Craig is situated in the parish of Auchindoir, in the north-east of Aberdeenshire. It overlooks a romantic den, through which flows a burn with pretty waterfalls, and commands an extensive view of hill and dale.

Like too many of our old Scottish castles, that of Craig has been sadly mangled, in the vain hope of adapting it to the requirements of modern times. It had been originally a square tower, of about 60 feet in height, with battlements and corner turrets. The battlements and turrets, apart from being much destroyed, are hidden from view by, and incorporated with, a heavy unseemly roof. The great hall, with the exception of two shields (one initialed I·G : L·B., with the Gordon and Barclay arms impaled), presents none of its ancient features—the large hearth and stone-seats or sedilia in the windows having been removed long ago, and the size of the hall curtailed by the erection of a wooden partition.

Fortunately, the original gate or *yett*, which is composed of wrought iron (and constructed in the curious way represented in the accompanying woodcut), is still upon the entrance; and the small reception hall (?) with groined ceiling, is also pretty entire. In the centre of the roof of this apartment are the Scots arms, from which spring four large, and as many small groins. Two of the first bear shields; one is charged with the five passion wounds of Our Saviour, the other with the Gordon arms, and the initials V. G. The smaller groins present little peculiar, except that one of them has a demi angel carved upon it.

Upon the fourth landing of the stair, which leads to the principal rooms and top of the castle, is a chapel or oratory, about 17 feet wide by about

7½ broad, with an awmbry on the right side, where the altar had stood. Near to this (on the south side of the house), is a gloomy chamber, called *the prison*; and a room upon the ground flat, with a stone projecting from the arched roof, and an iron ring in it, is pointed out as the place from which the Gordons suspended criminals prior to dropping them into a well or dungeon below. The dungeon, it is added, reached to the bottom of the adjoining den.



Iron "Yett," Castle of Craig, Aberdeenshire.

There are three different shields upon the old front of the castle. The centre shield is charged with the royal arms of Scotland; and that on the left bears, quarterly, the arms of Gordon, . . . Barclay, and Stewart of Lorne, also the initials P · G : R · B. at the top : upon the base :—

IÖISLEIS : V · G : E · S.

The first of these initials (P · G : R · B.), possibly refer to Patrick Gordon *in* Fylyemont—the first Gordon of Craig—who, in 1507, had a

charter of the lands of Johnslays, and the mill, &c., from King James.¹ Patrick Gordon's wife had possibly been a Barclay, and of the Towie race Patrick Gordon had a son, William, who, in 1511, was infeft in the lands of Auchindoir and Fulyemont, &c., an indenture of manrent having been entered into in that year between his father and Sir Alexander Irvine of Drum for that purpose, by which he was bound to furnish the king "in tyme of his weris witht fyve rydand men, tua speiris weill furnist," &c.² It is probably to this Gordon that the next initials (V · G : E · S) refer. If so, his wife had been in some way connected with the Stewarts of Lorne. The third shield, which bears the Gordon and Cheyne arms impaled, has also this date (1528) and the initials :—

MðX8 : V · G : C · C :

I have seen no record of a marriage between the Gordons of Craig and the Cheynes about the above date ; but subsequently, William Gordon (possibly the William Gordon to whom the above initials refer), nephew of the previous laird, had a charter of Johnslays from his uncle in 1556 ; and in 1562, he (as William Gordon of Auchindoir) and his wife, Clare Chein, had a grant of the superiority of the lands of Johnslays.³ It is to the last-mentioned laird and his wife that, I think, we are indebted for the curious sacrament-house or stone altar-piece of the church of Saint Mary of Auchindoir, if not for the church itself.

A number of pieces of carved stones are pointed out at Craig, as having been brought from the castle of Lesmore ; but more probably these are some of the gorgoil and other ornaments which had been thrown from the battlements of Craig castle when it was being *improved* ! Two rude granite boulders, near the front door, are called the "headin' stanes" of the barons of Lesmore, in testimony of the truth of which, one of the stones bears marks made by the executioner's axe ! An ash-tree in the lawn, although much destroyed by the ravages of time, still presents signs of life, though said to be as old as the memorable year of the Revolution.

As before seen, Patrick Gordon *in* Fulyemont, who lived in 1507, was the first of the family that held lands in Auchindoir ; and, according to

¹ Antiq. of Aberdeen and Banff, vol. iii. p. 454.

² Ibid. vol. iii. p. 455.

³ Ibid. vol. iii. pp. 457, 776.

the family genealogy, "Patrick Gordon *of Craig* fell at Flodden in 1513." We know that Patrick Gordon's successors, about 1630, owing to their adherence to Popery, became very much embarrassed in circumstances; and that for the *sin* (as it was then considered) of being a *papist*, the old laird was banished to a distant town in Scotland; while his son, with his wife (who was probably a daughter of Sir James Gordon of Lesmore)¹ and their children, were expelled furth of the kingdom. Finding the income from his "poor estate" too small for their maintenance apart, the old man, who described himself as "both aged and sickly," petitioned the king to allow him to "depart the kingdome to live with his sonne, becaus by their estate undevided they may be all the more able to subsist than otherwise."² Whether the prayer of the petition was granted is not recorded; but it is worthy of note, that the son here mentioned appears to be the person who is so much lauded for his learning and other gentlemanly accomplishments by Dr Arthur Johnston, in his verses *Ad Gordonium Cragachindorium*, although the poet's opinion of Craig and its locality is by no means flattering.³

Although the Gordons became reduced in circumstances, the property of Craig does not appear to have been lost to them; and it was probably after some of the family of the last-named laird, or their descendants, went abroad and acquired wealth, that the Gordons of Craig were again able to take their place beside, and to become connected with, some of the old Scots families.⁴

Over the present entrance-gate to the castle are two shields; one bears the Gordon arms, with the motto BYDAND. It is dated 1667, and initialed T·G·E·M·I·C., which may imply two marriages; while the next, dated 1726, might imply that the laird was three times married: The initials in this case are F·G·E·B·A·F·K·C., and the bearings, quarterly, are those of Gordon, Barclay, Forbes, and Campbell. It had probably been in these later times that the old character of the castle was destroyed; for it was not until about 1832 that a new house was constructed. It is built in connection with the old castle, and was erected in the time

¹ Douglas' Baronage, p. 31.

² Antiq. of Aberdeen and Banff, vol. iii. p. 459.

³ Delitiæ Poet. Scotorum (1637), vol. i. p. 590.

⁴ Douglas' Peerage, vol. i. p. 192; Baronage, p. 32.

of the late James Gordon and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Johnstone of Alva. Mr and Mrs Gordon died respectively in 1852 and 1851; and Mr Gordon was succeeded by his brother, Francis, of Kincardine O'Neil, who died in 185—, and who was succeeded by his daughter, Elizabeth Shepherd Gordon, or Johnstone, wife of Captain Charles K. Johnstone, a brother of the present Mr Johnstone of Alva. Mrs Johnstone Gordon died at Nice in 1863, leaving three daughters, the eldest of whom is married to Major Scott of Gala. The succession to Craig having been limited, in the case of Mrs J. Gordon, to heirs male of her body, the estate is now the property of a distant relative of the last Gordon, who has succeeded through the female line.

The lands called Fulyemont or Fidelmonth in early times, are now known as Wheedlemont. There are three circular hollows upon the Upper Wheedlemont, called Picts' Houses, each about 12 by 14 feet in diameter, and from 30 to 36 inches deep. The bottoms, until lately disturbed, were hard and crusted, as if by fire, and fragments of querns of mica-schist have been found near them.

Upon the conical-shaped hill of Knockcailleach, an elliptical entrenchment encloses about 100 acres. On the south and west sides, which are easiest of access, a ditch surrounds the base; and the remains of a dyke are upon the north, which is said to have stretched at one time as far as the Hill of Noth. Balinsarg, possibly a corruption of Balindarg, is the name of an adjoining field.

On the Kearn side of the parish, stone celts and other relics have been found, some of which are in the National Museum.¹ Upon the top of a planted knoll, north of Druminnor House, stands the *Corse Stane*, a large rough boulder, from 10 to 12 feet in height, along with other three stones of a similar description. A mound, which had been favourably situated for a fortress, called the Castle Hill, is on the Kinnethmont side of the parish, but no trace of ruins is to be seen.

So much for the Castle of Craig, and its historical associations, &c. In regard to the building of

THE OLD KIRK OF AUCHINDOIR,

a much earlier date has been assigned to it than I am inclined to admit,

¹ Proceedings, vol. vii. p. 369.

by one well qualified to judge of such matters. The writer referred to says, that it belongs "apparently to that precise period in the progress of the art, when the already softened features of the Norman were beginning to merge altogether into the still more flexible and varied forms of the First-Pointed style."¹ The architectural peculiarities and the measurements of the building are well given by this writer, who, however, appears to have overlooked the somewhat odd orientation of the church—for it stands *north and south*—as well as the armorial bearings and their similarity to the carving of the adjoining awmbry; also the fact of the church having been added to at the south end. This last point is confirmed by the appearance of the building, also by local tradition.

As previously indicated, I am inclined to ascribe the erection of the sacrament-house, if not the old kirk of Auchindoir, to the laird and lady whose arms and initials are upon shields within it. One of these shields, dated 1557, bears the Gordon arms, and motto, *HOIP IN GOD*; the second, initialed *V · G : C · C.*, presents the arms of Gordon and Cheyne impaled, with the motto, *GRACE ME GYID*. The date and initials correspond with the time of the before-mentioned William Gordon and Clare Cheyne.

There is no doubt but the principal door of the church, which is near the south-east end, *appears* to be in the First-Pointed style, and that the outer moulding of the arch is composed of the dog-tooth ornament. Still, it seems to me that the handiwork does not belong to the period indicated, but that it is simply an *imitation* of the old style, points which a peculiar *something* in the execution seems to suggest. And this is so far proved by the fact, that the remaining initials *A · S.*, upon the transverse lintel of the north-east door, bear evidence of having been the work of the craftsman who lettered the awmbry and the armorial bearings. The sacrament-house or awmbry, which is on the north-west of the church, and about six feet high, is in the Second-Pointed style. It is surmounted by a well-proportioned representation of Our Saviour upon the cross, with the legend, *INRI*, over the head, and a human skull at the feet. In allusion to the sacred nature of the symbols which the awmbry contained, the following inscription is carved upon the front

¹ Descriptive Notices of the Ancient Parochial and Collegiate Churches of Scotland. London, 1848, p. 144.

of it. The first line is upon a ribbon on the roof, and the initial part upon the sill of the awmbry door:—

HIC · E · CORP' · DNĪ · CVM
M · A · S¹

The press, or awmbry, which is about 12 by 15 inches in size, has an inner recess on the south side; and the decorations around it show (although their best features have been spoiled at some period by a well-meant attempt at revision), that the work, as a whole, had been a very creditable specimen of local art.² There is a door on the west, nearly opposite to the principal one, also with arched top; and, about a foot from the bottom, in the thickness of the wall, is a recess for a strong wooden bolt. A piscina is built into the front wall; and a square hole, or press, is upon the right of the north entrance.

The ruins, which are ivy-clad, stand within the burial ground, and upon a knoll, about 100 feet above the level of the romantic den and burn of Craig. A conical mound in the vicinity is called *The Cumins' Craig*, where a castle is said to have stood. St Mary's Well is about 100 yards to the west. According to tradition, it was originally proposed to build the church at a place called Kirkcairns (now Glencairns), to the south of Lumsden Village; and but for the warning voice of *The Virgin*, who appears to have been a good judge both of locality and soil, the kirk would have been placed in an obscure, sterile district. Besides being in the neighbourhood of good land, fine views of the upper part of Strath-bogie, and of the surrounding hills, are obtained from the present site.

In 1236, a dispute arose between the Bishops of Moray and Aberdeen regarding the diocesan jurisdiction of the Kirk of *Dauendor*; and in

¹ These words may be thus rendered:—"Here is the Body of Our Lord, with Mary, the Apostles, and Saints." The writer before referred to has copied these words thus:—"HIC E CORPI DNĪ CVM MĀS."

² Two tombstones lie within the church, in front of the awmbry or altar-piece, embellished with carvings of the Gordon arms. The inscriptions from these tombstones, as well as from those of the Forbeses and Grants, &c., at Kearn, will appear in a volume of Epitaphs and Inscriptions from Burial Grounds and Old Buildings in the North-East of Scotland, now in the press, by the writer of this paper.

1513-14, it was erected into a prebend of King's College, Aberdeen.¹ It ceased to be used as a place of worship in 1810, when a new church was erected in a more convenient spot. The old timber work was sold publicly ; and the back of the pulpit, which was bought by the late farmer of Newton of Auchindoir, is preserved at that farm-house. It is of fir, and divided into several panels. One panel contains a shield with the Davidson arms, and the initials, M.W.D., *i.e.*, Mr W. Davidson, minister of the church at the undernoted date. Round the arms are these words, in interlaced capitals :—

HOLINES · TO · THE · LORD · CHAPT · 28 · OF · EXOD · VER · 36.

A second panel (the rest of them have but a plain scroll ornament) bears :—

IEHOVA · THY · THVM̄IM · & · THY · VRĪ · VITH ·
 THY · HOLY · ON · 1625.

The new church of Auchindoir, which stands in a field, on the north bank of the Bogie, without a bush, dyke, or tree to relieve its bleak aspect, is in the *barn style*, which was so long common to Scotch churches. It is also the church of Kearn, which parish was agreed to be disjoined from that of Forbes in Strathdon, about 1795, and united to Auchindoir. Mary Fair, now held at Lumsden Village, long stood at Newton of Auchindoir, where there was an Episcopal church until about seventy years ago.