



Pencaitland Parish Church

The following history of Pencaitland Church was written as a “walk-around” guide to this beautiful place of worship. It was written by R.W.Barker, Session Clerk for over thirty years, and first published in 1970. It was subsequently reprinted in 1993, following the celebration of the church’s 750th anniversary of its consecration.

There has been a church at Pencaitland from an early date in the history of the parochial system in Scotland, if not from its very inception, and so that we may get our story into proper perspective we should have a brief look at the way in which the parish system of church organisation arose. It was left to the sons of the Saintly Queen Margaret to reconstruct the organisation of the Church, and David I (1124-1153) was particularly active in this work. However, it was his brother and predecessor, Alexander I (reigned 1107-1124) who put English or Norman bishops into the Celtic Cathedral of St. Andrews.

Before the Scottish Reformation, Pencaitland Parish was in the Diocese of St. Andrews, the Archdeaconry of Lothian and the Deanery of Haddington. During the time of David, a peaceful Norman invasion of Scotland took place and settlers from England, or farther afield, were granted tracts of land in return for keeping law and order in the area. In due course with the establishment of episcopal dioceses, the baronial areas, in some of which new churches had been built by the barons, became natural subdivisions of the diocese, and became the parish. This division into parishes was not completed in David's reign, however, and long after his death many districts remained without a Parish Church.

The earliest complete part of the present building at Pencaitland, which we shall discuss in more detail later on, is the Winton Aisle which dates from the 13th century, but parts of an earlier building which was known to exist at Pencaitland in the 12th century are probably incorporated in the Nave, so there has been a Church here for a very long time. As far as the history of Pencaitland Parish is known, it would appear that William the Lion (1165-1214) probably granted the lands to Everard de-Pencaithland. Certain it is that Everard granted the Church of his manor of Pencaithland to the monks of Kelso along with its tithes and other rights. No mention of the Church as one of the possessions of Kelso is made after 1309, however.

During the War of Succession the manor was forfeited and was granted by Robert the Bruce to Robert De Lawder. Why he was dispossessed is not known, but Sir John Maxwell is soon shown as the overlord, and he granted the advowson of the

Church to Dryburgh Abbey, along with an annuity from his Pencaitland lands. This was confirmed by William (Landal), the Bishop of St. Andrews, in 1343 and a photograph of the charter granting the advowson hangs in the Winton Aisle. Mention is also made of a chapel at Payston. The monastery collected the teinds or tithes and in return provided a vicar or vicars to minister to the people. That Pencaitland was a valuable possession of Dryburgh is obvious from the reference made to it in old records. The hill above the river and behind the manse was still until recently sometimes referred to as the Vicar's Brae. The teinds from parish churches were a valuable source of income for the monasteries, some of which collected the dues from over thirty parishes.

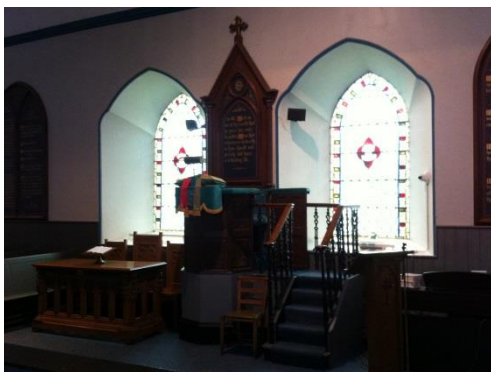
The story of Pencaitland Church, then, is the story of the Church of Scotland as a whole, since the setting up of the parochial system, and the various changes in the form of worship through the centuries are reflected in the building itself. Here we have a church building, and this is none too common in Scotland, in which the various parts are of different ages, reflecting different architectural trends and religious need and which are still in regular use.

It is interesting to note that Pencaitland Church was dedicated by Bishop de Bernham, who in less than ten years of his episcopate dedicated no fewer than one hundred and forty churches. Dedication of existing as well as new churches was one of the practices of the good bishop during the tour of his diocese. The consecration service would have lasted several hours, because we know the service was an elaborate one as the order of service used by David de Bernham when consecrating churches has been preserved. The date of the consecration was 1242, but whether the building referred to: - "Ecclesia de Pencaitland" was the Winton Aisle or a larger church on the foundation of which the present nave is built is not certain.



During all the period since its foundation the history of the building itself has been uneventful. There are no bullet marks on the walls, no cannon balls are lodged in the belfry, and it must be one of the few old churches which Cromwell neglected to use as a stable for his horses.

The records pertaining to Pencaitland in particular before the Reformation are scanty, and not until the regular keeping of Session Records begins does the history of the church become a little less clouded. Of the ministers of Pencaitland, there have been many worthy men, but two deserve special mention because of their place in history—David Calderwood (1641-1650) author of the monumental History of the Kirk of Scotland and who was ordered to be banished by James VI for his opposition to, among other things, the king's wish to introduce episcopacy: and Rev. James Gibson who was presented to the vicarage of Pencaitland in 1580 by the king, who was exercising the right formerly the prerogative of Dryburgh Abbey. Gibson was brought before the Privy Council and imprisoned on a charge of High Treason for preaching a sermon in which he accused the king of persecuting the church, though this sermon was not preached in Pencaitland.



The building itself consists of a nave, with a gallery at the west end with two Aisles on the north side: one, the older, called the Winton Aisle and the other the Saltoun Aisle. Whilst both these Aisles and the tower at the west end of the church can be easily dated, the nave presents rather a different proposition. Although the furnishings are arranged in the manner of an early post reformation church in Scotland, with the pulpit in the centre of the

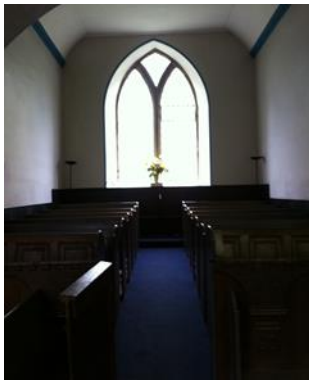
south wall, so far as the shape of the nave is concerned we must remember that Ian Lindsay said "There is no doubt that the basic plan of the small Scottish Parish Church for the next six hundred years was laid in the 13th Century."

The foundations are certainly medieval, so we know an early church existed on the present site of the nave, and some of the masonry above the level of the foundation is probably incorporated in the walls. The Royal Commission of Ancient and Historical Monuments (1924) said that the proportioning of the lower part of the walls suggest the much altered remains of a 12th Century Church. MacGibbon and Ross were of the opinion that it is not unlikely from the narrowing of the east end on the north side that a chancel arch may have existed. Most authorities, whilst not fully committing themselves, date the present nave as mainly 16th century. That it was early 16th century is suggested by two facts. Firstly, after the Reformation in 1560 there was little church building in Scotland for 50 or 60 years; secondly at the east end of the south wall of the nave there is a blocked up doorway, which was most probably a priest's door opening into the Church.



The Winton Aisle dates from the 13th century, and is of first pointed architecture. It may have been the original church of Pencaitland, or may possibly have served as the Sacristy to the main part of the early church. While in England the reserved Eucharist was almost invariably suspended above the altar in the

hanging pyx, in Scotland the pyx was placed in a richly adorned Sacrament House, at any rate in the North and East of Scotland. It is possible that this building was used for such a purpose. At some time after the Reformation the Winton Aisle housed a Laird's Loft. Entrance was through the east window by way of a flight of steps on the outside. A water colour of the interior of the church painted in 1880 shows that the interesting west window was almost wholly obscured, and that the loft took the form of a gallery built into the Aisle and supported in the centre by a strong wooden post. The loft itself extended to the north wall of the building, but the part under the loft does not appear to have extended so far back. There was probably a small room there. At any rate the Kirk session minute of July 29th 1707 refers to "the giving out of the elements at the little room under the loft stair appointed for that use." Of course the present gallery may also have been referred to as the loft. The building was restored in 1882 when the memorial tablets in the Aisle were re-sited. At this time the seating on the north side of the present central aisle of the nave was at right angles to its present position, presumably facing the pulpit.



The Saltoun Aisle dates from the late 17th century. In looking round the church let us look at the outside of the building, starting at the west door, in the tower, and in deference to the old superstition which says that it is bad luck to walk widdershins round a church, we shall proceed in a clockwise direction. On the first buttress is the chain to which the jougs were attached. When the collar was lost is not known, but an illustration of the complete instrument of punishment was printed in a book published in 1898. Near the jougs there is a round-headed window and it is obvious there was once a door-way here. There was a corresponding one, now also converted to a window, on the opposite side of the church. These door-ways probably pre-date the tower and it is probable that they were separate entrances for the men and women who in some places in Scotland, as elsewhere, were segregated during worship, the custom persisting in a few churches up to the 19th century. If these were doorways used by the different sexes, the men's door would have been on the south of the nave and the women's on the north. It is not likely, however, that the custom existed here after the building of the tower when the new west doorway was constructed.

At this part of the church we can note the medieval foundations, which are found most of the way round the building, but which disappear at the late 17th century Saltoun Aisle, which we now reach, and which projects at right angles to the nave. The west side of the Saltoun Aisle contains a late Renaissance doorway, now blocked up. The initials over the pediment are those of Sir John (?) Sinclair. Pencaitland was created a Burgh of Barony in 1695 in favour of Sir Robert Sinclair of Stevenson. There is also an ogee-headed window, likewise built up. Note the much weathered face on the north-west corbel. This was probably a piece of an earlier building incorporated in the new work either when it was built, or at a later

date. At the top of the north-east corner of the east wall of the Saltoun Aisle is the date 1864 when repairs were presumably carried out.

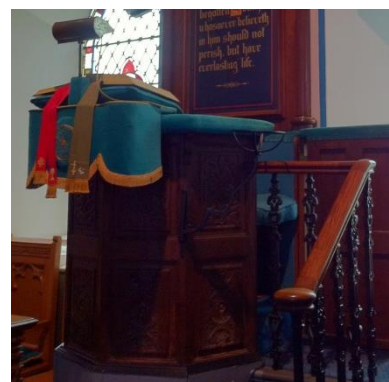
Adjoining the Saltoun Aisle is the Winton Aisle, a venerable structure dating from the 13th century and which was originally roofed with stone slabs. The carved faces of devils, animals, men and angels on the corbels are worthy of notice. Two large windows have been filled in, although the doorway is obviously of earlier date than the stone used for blocking the windows, and is probably 17th century work, perhaps inserted when the aisle became a Laird's Loft. It will be noticed that the original buttresses have been strengthened by later additions; the north wall of the Aisle is very much out of the perpendicular.

Proceeding to the east end of the nave, we can see that the east door has been clumsily knocked through the wall, obviously in post-reformation times.

The south wall of the nave, where the early foundations again reappear, has five buttresses. Of these, the ones at each end are probably contemporary with the rest of the structure, the remaining ones being added later to prevent a bulging of the wall, probably as late as the 19th century. At the east end of the south wall is a blocked-up priest's door which led into the chancel—an indication that the nave, although of later date than the foundations, certainly pre-dates the Reformation. Features which can be observed from the south of the church are the three sundials, and the windows of the nave.

Returning to the tower we see that it bears the date 1631 and the initials of John Oswald, the incumbent at that time. The tower houses a bell in the upper octagonal portion. The bell is dated 1636 and bears the legend "Pencaitland, fear ye the Lord". The tower at one time served as a doo-cot, and is lined with nesting boxes for the pigeons, a cause of much chagrin to the present Kirk Session, who are apt to forget the ancient law of sanctuary and wage a constant war, albeit largely a non-violent one, against the birds which still attempt to populate it. The date of the bell is a mystery in a way, because the following entry appears in the Session records, Dec. 27th 1657 "William Cairnes reported to the Session that he and David Rid (?) had been at Edinburgh and that the Laird of Woodhead and they had spoken to a merchant for a bell of 10 stone weight who promised to send to London for one." Incidentally as the tower was built in 1631 does this mean that the church had no bell for 26 years?

When we go inside the church again the pulpit is worth a little attention. It is a fine example of 17th century work, although the base is modern. The carving is stylised. It is not certain whether a canopy (see Gifford church, among others) was provided, but there may well have been one which was removed at a later date. The baptismal bracket, although not an outstanding piece of workmanship is interesting, as



comparatively few of these now remain. Originally the minister baptised from the pulpit and sprinkled the water, with varying degrees of accuracy, on to the baby held below. The bracket is still in use on occasions, although now, of course, the minister descends from the pulpit during the ceremony. The old oak pew fronts and pews at the front of the transept known as the Saltoun Aisle are 16th or 17th century and repay examination. Some old oak is also built into the front of the gallery, which dates from 1635.

The fine stained glass window in the Winton Aisle was erected by parishioners to the memory of Mary, Lady Ruthven (1789-1885) and the one over the east door commemorates the Rev. James Coullie, minister of the parish from 1872-1924.

Looking again at the Winton Aisle it is considered most probable that the present single arch separating the Aisle from the former chancel was at one time arcaded. Once again the change was probably made at the time of the conversion to a Laird's Loft. At least one authority considers that this change has hopelessly spoiled the Aisle. The West Window of the Winton Aisle is the original one.

There are records of burials in the church, notably under the gallery, in the Winton Aisle and in the erstwhile chancel, where there is a memorial to the Rev. William Denune, minister (1685-1704), who was buried there.

THE FURNITURE

The Communion table with the matching lectern and font, and the three Communion chairs are worthy of notice. The first three were gifted to our church when St. Margaret's Church, Dumbiedykes, Edinburgh closed, and the chairs were generously donated by Mr James McGregor, in memory of the Reids of Tyneholm.



It is interesting to study the hand carving on these items. Various plants are featured, and although the work on the table was done at the beginning of this century, it would appear that the craftsman who did it was inspired by the works in stone and wood which decorated our medieval churches. Symbolism has been prevalent in the church from the earliest times, and it is too much of a coincidence to imagine that the decorator of our furniture chose the plants he featured by chance.



The plants shown are as follows:

The Vine—because of the Last Supper, and because Christ said "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him; the same bringeth forth much fruit."

The Lily and the Rose—both were emblems of the Virgin Mary. The carvers thought of the Song of Solomon—"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." Though we now call the flowers by these names, the rose of the Song of Solomon was taken to be the rose of medieval gardens, and the lily of the valley was considered to be the Madonna Lily.

Oak Leaves and Acorns—The Leaves and Acorns of the Oak, which was a sacred tree long before Christianity, were believed to ward off evil spirits.

Holly - This, too, was thought of as a protective plant.

Sunflower—Still commonly used as symbol of the Church, with its many seeds dispersing over the world.

Wild Hop and possibly Mulberry - These have also frequently been carved down the ages.

Thistle—The Scottish connection is obvious.

Bryony Leaves and Tendrils - This would appear to be the remaining plant, although it occurs extremely rarely in Scotland and then only where introduced. With its huge roots it was regarded as a substitute for the powerful Mandrake. The carving on the backs of the Communion chairs matches that on the frieze under the top of the table.



Mention should also be made of the wrought iron flower stands which Mrs M. Thomson of Tyneholm Cottages gifted to the Church in memory of her father and mother, who are well remembered for their Church connections.

The organ was installed in 1889 at a cost of £115. It was originally pumped by hand, but an electrical blower was fitted in 1953, being donated by the Misses Fraser. (This organ has since been replaced by a modern instrument.)

MASONS' AND OTHER MARKS

There are few of these, but the following may be seen.

1. On the inside of the west face of the tower:- IK
2. On the north east corner of the Saltoun Aisle:- A Bench Mark
3. On the north west corner of the Saltoun Aisle:- DUNC JOIN
4. On the buttress on the east wall of the Nave:- AIRIX

THE CHURCH YARD

We have a valuable record of our local history in the headstones in the churchyard. It is most unfortunate that many years ago quite a few of the older ones were

removed, but we must be grateful for those we have left. Although many are now worn and some unreadable, it is not too late to record many of the inscriptions and this has recently been done by Mr and Mrs Murphy.

On the south wall of the church there are some interesting inscriptions, one near the old priest's door dating from 1610. Below it is a skull set into the wall. Note also the inscription in which the letter 'N' is always reversed, and the one which says "These three died of a violent fea ... (fever) in the year 1736." Epidemics were common in those days.

One of the most interesting features is the number of stones bearing the tools of the trade followed by the deceased. There is a spoon and quarryman's or miner's tools among others, and the finest is near the gate leading to the manse, the burial place of a tailor.



These are only a small number of the interesting stones to be seen, but we hope you will go exploring on your own.



THE OFFERING HOUSE

We are all familiar with the two small pantiled buildings, one at each entrance to the churchyard. It is interesting to know that they were erected as collecting or offering houses, so that the elders would not have to stand outside in inclement weather. The houses were originally built in or about 1759, for there is a record in the old treasurer's books which refer to the payment, in 1760, for their building. In 1759 two stools for collecting were purchased. Are these the ones we still use? Possibly they are, as they are very old, and there is no subsequent similar reference in the account books. If they have, indeed, lasted for 200 years the Session of the times can be considered to have made a good buy.

The problem of providing shelter, however, arose long before the offering houses were built. An entry in the Session records for 1723 states: "The Session considering the great hardship the elders are put to in collecting for the poor on the Lord's Day without any covert from the weather in the winter season, they appointed a Box of Dealls to be made for a covert unto them untill they be better provided." The spelling is that of the times.

The East offering house, however, was rebuilt to the original design in 1911 at the cost of £12.18.6d. This was necessary because the heritors, in removing a tree, unfortunately mistook their aim and felled it on top of the building. An argument ensued about who was responsible for the rebuilding—The Session or Heritors, and the Session lost the day.

Although built as offering houses, there is no doubt that the buildings were also used as watch-houses against body-snatchers when occasion demanded.

MINISTERS AT PENCAITLAND

We have already said that for a long period before the Reformation the spiritual welfare of the parish was in the hands of the monks of Kelso until about 1309 and from 1343 the parish was served until 1560 by the monks of Dryburgh or by a substitute provided by them. There are, therefore, comparatively few years in which other clergymen were in office, but the charter of 1343 refers to the parson of the time, who was Sir Gilbert del Glen. (The title "Sir" would probably not imply knighthood. After the fashion of the Middle Ages it was given to a clerk in Holy Orders who was not a graduate. A graduate was called master, or doctor).

After the Reformation, there is a complete record of the incumbents. The charge was disjoined from the Presbytery of Dalkeith between 30th March, 1583 and 11th October, 1587. Keith Marishall was in the charge till 1588.

Ministers of Pencaitland since the Reformation with dates of the induction are as follows:

1567 Andrew Blackhall (Ormiston and Cranston being the charge)

1576 John Gray-Reader

1580 James Gibson

1598 Archibald Oswald

1629 John Oswald

1641 David Calderwood

1653 Alexander Vernon

(George Shiell M.A., Minister of Durisdeer was presented by Charles II 16th April and coll. 14th May 1669 but his inst. was cancelled July following).

1669 Robert Douglas

1674 James Cockburn

1685 William Denune

1705 Matthew Simson

1757 George Anderson

1793 David Pyper

1814 Angus Makellar

1843 Maxwell Nicholson

1855 William Lyon Riach

1872 James Coullie

1925 George G. Morgan M.A.

1964 John M. Wilson M.A.

1970 L. David Levison M.A. B.D.

1982 Colin V. Donaldson

1999 Mark Malcolm

2009 David J Torrance

We hope you will take a walk round this old church and enjoy your visit; but let us not forget that above all it is a place for meditation and prayer. We should like you, before you leave, to spare a moment for private prayer, and to remember the minister, office-bearers and congregation who worship here, continuing the tradition of past centuries.