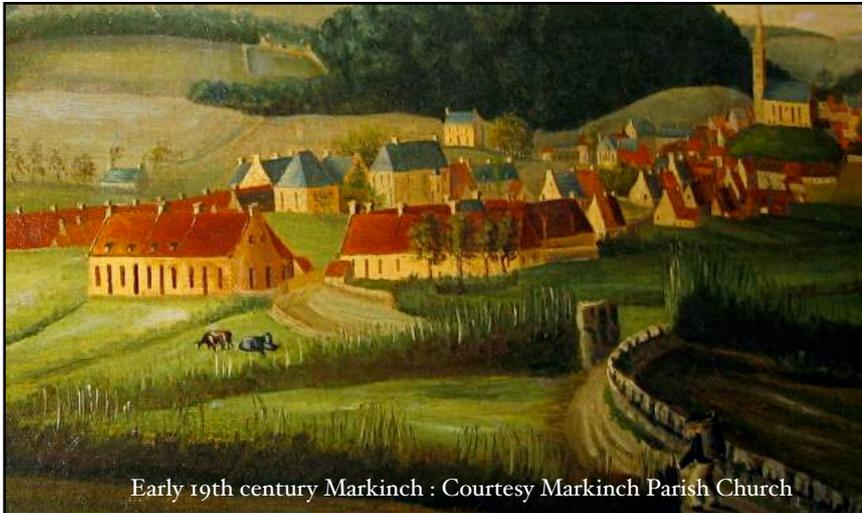




Special Edition for "Doors Open Day" on Markinch Parish Church



Early 19th century Markinch : Courtesy Markinch Parish Church

The prominent mound on which Markinch Parish Church stands has been a place of worship for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. The earliest written reference dates from around 1050.

The present building dates from the 12th century and its tower is perhaps the finest, architecturally, of its kind in Scotland.

The adjoining church has been rebuilt in several stages and recent research has begun to reveal when and why these took place. There are also traces on

the more modern building of the 12th century and of the pre-Reformation predecessors and we can now begin to speculate what they looked like.

Finally, although the documentary evidence for the medieval building is almost non-existent, we are slowly uncovering documents from the 17th to the 20th centuries that show how the modern building changed and evolved as religious practices altered over time.

This special newsletter on the church has been produced to coincide with Doors Open Day.

Christian Origins

Although the church is dedicated to St Drostan, a saint who lived in the 6th century, we have as yet no firm evidence as to why or when he became linked to Markinch.

It is likely, however, that the mound had a very early church or cell, perhaps even a small Pictish monastery, ringed with a bank and ditch. When the church was renovated in the 1880s workmen uncovered an oblong stone measuring six feet by three with a hole pierced in it. Reports of the time say that it was covered with "rude sculptures", but it seems to have been reburied and we may have to wait until the next church renovation to find out more.



Timber, wattle or stone?

A LINK WITH MACBETH?

Markinch Church has one of the earliest charter references in Scotland. Around 1050 Bishop Malduin granted the church "with all its land" to the Culdees of Loch Leven. Separate grants of land are recorded at about the same time. MacBeth and his wife Gruoch granted land at Kirkness and Bogie "for the intercession of prayers". If these grants are connected then they could have been a kind of spiritual insurance policy before MacBeth and Malduin's churchmen set off on the arduous

journey to Rome (see Fiona Watson 2010). When he arrived he is recorded to have "scattered silver like seed to the poor". He returned to a prosperous Scotland. Perhaps the prayers of the Culdees and the charitable donations were both sound investments!



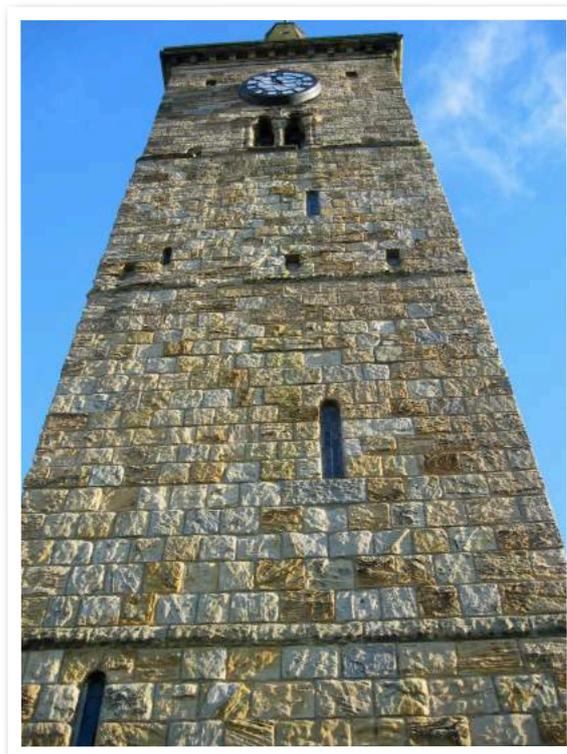
St Serf's Inch Loch Leven

THE MACDUFFS, EARLS OF FIFE AND THE NEW ROMANESQUE BUILDING

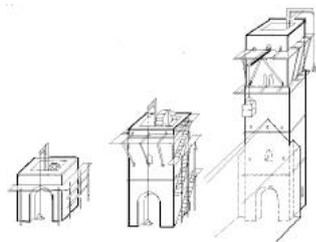
We do not yet know when the Norman-style tower was built or by whom. However, it is possible that either Earl Constantine of Fife, one of his descendants or one of the successor chiefs of the Clan MacDuff was the driving force. Rules of succession were changing at this time.

Links with the MacDuff family are far more sound than the speculative link with MacBeth previously referred to. In fact, in the 19th century the church was referred to as “MacDuff’s Kirk”. It is now known to have been granted to St Andrews Priory around 1160 by no less than three individuals, the bishop of St Andrews, Duncan Earl of Fife and his relative Aodh (Hugh) grandson of Gillemichael, the MacDuff clan chief. The transfer process was complex and probably reflects a split function of MacDuff clan chief (see Taylor 2010).

The church that was offered up to the new Priory was itself relatively new. Although the spire is modern, it is a fine example of the Norman or Romanesque style that swept across Europe at that time. The condition internally makes it unique.



CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES



“Putlog holes” used to support scaffolding can still be seen on each side of the tower. Stones (and stonemasons as well) were probably winched up on a wheel wedged inside the tower.

The marks of the masons (below) can be seen on most of the stones inside the tower. This is unusual and may indicate that an inspection to determine the

workmen’s recompense only took place occasionally.

Although the building probably took several years to build, its construction indicates a single architect who may have signed the building with his mark close to the belfry door. The size and uniformity of the building blocks is remarkable and only matched by St Rules in St Andrews which it resembles in several respects. However we do not know which of the two was built first. Perhaps, contrary to accepted wisdom, St Rules was an attempt to outshine Markinch in height and width rather than Markinch being a smaller scale copy of St Rules.



The tower is exactly sixteen and a half feet or one rod square. “Raggles” or roofmarks on the side of the tower indicate that the nave was about 24 ft. The chancel appears to have been about 18 ft. wide. These and the masons’ marks (some replicated at Durham Cathedral) require further research.



VESTIGES OF OLD NAVE AND CHANCEL THAT SURVIVE

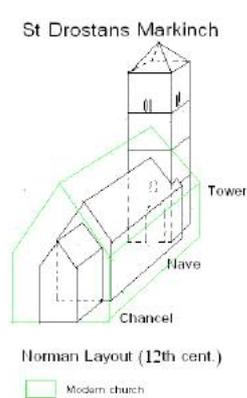
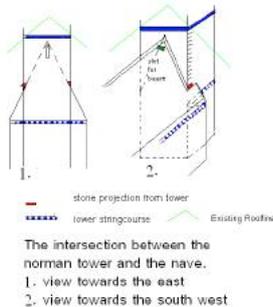
Look carefully at the building and you will see traces of the original nave and chancel.

There are two spurs of stone (one eroded) on the tower above the first string course. These

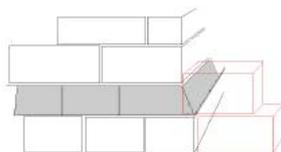


mark where the nave building intersected with tower. Projecting the raggle line on the east side of the tower

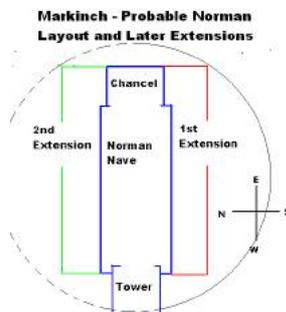
through this stone indicates a steeply sloping roof, probably projecting as far as the string course just visible on the last surviving section of the nave's western wall. Part of the eastern chancel wall may also survive surrounded by later masonry.



It may be that the corner stone of the old nave is visible at the base of of the eastern wall.



If these calculations are correct then we can combine



them with observations of external masonry. This produces a plan (above) showing that the church building that we know

today expanded in two main stages, first to the south and then later to the north. (The plan also indicates a possible ring ditch from an earlier church that it is also hoped to investigate further.)

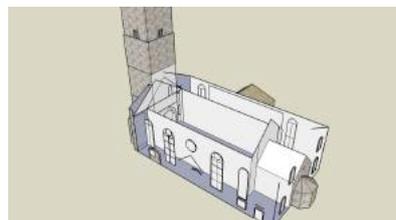
Finally, there are pieces of masonry imbedded in the rubble south wall that indicate that the old building was reused in the



extension. The most interesting of these are the two stones showing a chip-cut saltire pattern. This is a common theme in

various parts of Europe and one of the pieces at Markinch may represent part of an arch or doorway. Other stones marked with arrow sharpening scores would have originally been at ground level.

However, despite all these vestiges it is clear from the illustration below that very little of the original nave and chancel now survive and we can perhaps best imagine them entirely enclosed in the more modern building waiting for



archaeological evidence to prove or disprove the theories.

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13TH CENTURY

The Prior's House (Mansefield) - Sometime before 1228, the land on which the present building stands was granted to the church (dedicated at the time to Modhrustus or Dear Drostan) by Malcolm, Earl of Fife. It has been rebuilt several times. The "toft" mentioned around 1160 was probably just to the south and was where the Vicar or his nominated representative lived.

Rededication - As part of a mass modernisation programme across the whole of Scotland, Bishop de Bernham re-dedicated the church to St John the Baptist in 1243. However, the people of Markinch continued to celebrate St Drostan's day (15th December) until the 19th century.

Grant of the Glebe - In 1286, the glebe to the east of the church (later known as Minister's Meadows) was granted to the church by William de Valloniis with the support of his mother and sister. The charter mentions the gardener of the priory house and the vicar whose name was Ranulph, the first named churchman of Markinch.

Visit of Edward I - In 1296 his invading army stopped off at Markinch on a journey between St Andrews and Dunfermline. The building is referred to by his French chronicler as the "moustier"

or minster. Only three (probably stone built) houses were recorded.

14TH - 15TH CENTURY

The 14th century was a time of war, plague and famine in Scotland. There are virtually no records of Markinch church during this period except brief references to two remarkable vicars whose early career included a period in nominal charge of the church. Thomas de Haddington was part of a three man mission carrying money and a ruby ring to the pope in Avignon shortly after the brief succession of Balliol in 1332. Henry de Lichton was a highly educated man who went on from his early Markinch days to become a diplomat, a writer and a cathedral builder. The six known vicars of the 15th century seem mostly to have been granted the post as a prebend or benefice and may have had little interest in Markinch.



16TH CENTURY

John Hepburn's family coat of arms is on the east wall of the church. As Prior of St Andrews, he was probably responsible for some major

refurbishment and possible rebuilding of the old Romanesque nave and chancel. Little remains of his work and we have no plans from this period. He founded St Leonards College in 1512, partly funded by revenues from Markinch church lands.

Cardinal Beaton - Markinch was David Beaton's parish church and his parents, John Beaton of Balfour and Isabel Money Penny were buried there. Their tombs, engraved with their images, were still undisturbed as late as 1639. Cardinal Beaton employed a French master craftsman to embellish the tombs. After his assassination in 1546 his body, after being stored in lead on the St Andrews foreshore, was spirited away, some say to a family lair beneath Markinch church.

THE REFORMATION

Ties with the Priory of St Andrews were broken in 1564 but it was not until 1686 that the building was enlarged and slated (Stevenson). Its internal layout would have reflected the new style of worship. There was probably an extension to the south which had three doors, traces of which can still be seen today, the westerly one having a red sandstone arch and the middle one serving as an entrance for the minister close to the pulpit. An aisle to the north may also have been built around this time close to the burial vault



of the Leslies. It is probable that the interior was utterly transformed during the 16th and 17th centuries with all vestiges of the Roman Catholic faith being destroyed or buried. A delicately carved winged dragon has recently turned up in a neighbouring garden.

18TH CENTURY ALTERATIONS

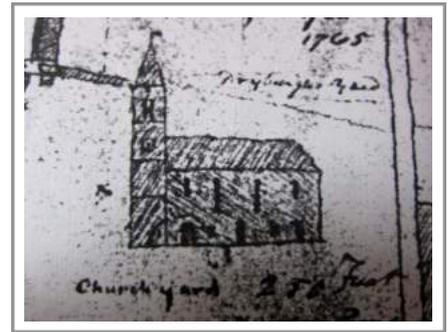
We have a record of the feuars (tradesmen and small landowners) of Markinch building their own loft to the west of the church in 1740. Recent research shows that the heritors planned major changes to the building in 1788. The east and west doors on the front wall were blocked and were to be replaced by square windows. New doors were to be opened up on the east and west sides of the building and a new pulpit and baptismal font was to be installed. This may therefore have been the time when the tower lost its original door, to be replaced by the one we see today, and when the curious apse-like structure now serving as a boiler house was constructed as an east porch. Above all, the loft ar-

rangements inside the church were to be rationalised by a uniform seating plan agreed and paid for by all the heritors. Space was allocated according to land rental. Internal access to the galleries was to be from three stone built stairs.

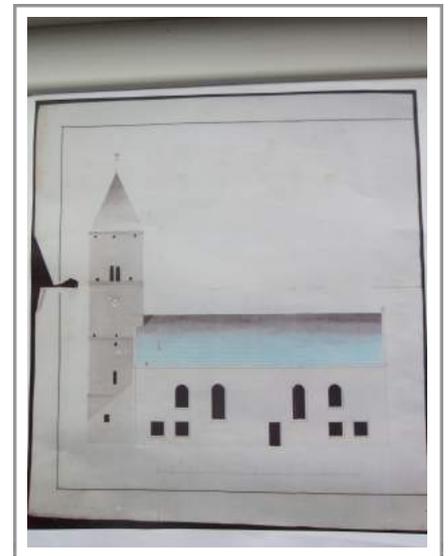
Records of estimates from tradesmen indicate that most of the planned work was carried out. The west loft was extended, removed from the feuars and granted to the Wemyss estate.

EARLY 19TH CENTURY ALTERATIONS

Early 19th Century Alterations - In 1806 the decision was taken to renew the roof and enlarge the building. In the following year the church was heightened and expanded to the north, covering the burial ground of the Balfour family. They were to be given specially allocated space in the planned new churchyard. The Leslie-Melville burial vault remained undisturbed and was given a new entrance. The builder was Alexander Leslie of Largo and the architect James Barclay of Edinburgh aided by Thomas and George Barclay who probably had local connections. Around 1820 the lower part of the tower was requisitioned for locking up "vagrants and vagabonds".



Earliest known sketch of Church showing doors now blocked off and early spire. Date : around 1760. Source : Thomson map of Markinch held by Fife Council archives.

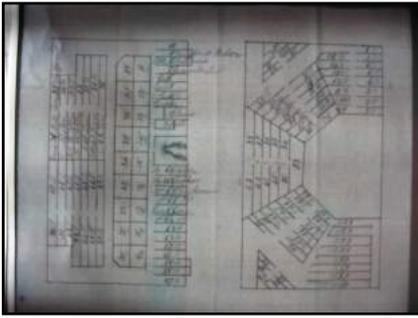


Drawing prepared for 1807 improvements. E. & W. doors blocked. Source ; National Archives of Scotland



Sketch drawing from mid 19th century showing minister's preparation room and spire as built showing secondary pinnacles now lost.

CHANGES IN INTERNAL LAYOUT



Above Pew allocation in 1807 showing “box pews”

Below Pew re-allocation in 1880s

Source : National Archives of Scotland

We have little direct evidence of the original layout of the church although there seems to have been a gallery high up on the western wall accessed through an arch from the tower. There would certainly have been an altar at the eastern end with limited access and a more public area for the ordinary visitor in the nave area. Gradually, the floor would have become filled up with burials until there was no longer room and they were buried close to the outside wall.

In the high Medieval period, a screen would have separated the altar area. We have only a glimpse into the church in the 17th century from a French visitor who describes the elaborate tombs of the Bethune or Beaton family.

Major changes took place after the Reformation when the large Protestant landowners or heritors began to establish rights over parts of the church interior. These claims seem to have been formalised according to rental around 1637 and then reviewed in the 18th century. Lack of space meant that lofts or galleries began to be built, at first for the major landowners such as the Leslie-Melvilles but later for the tradesmen and townspeople (1740).

A major reallocation took place in 1805 and the interested parties were allocated pews in terms of inches per heritor.

Please note - whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the conclusions in this Newsletter follow the known facts, every historical interpretation should be seen as part of a “work in progress”.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR ON YOUR NEXT VISIT

Note the putlog holes and the signs of wear showing how timbers were once placed in them to support scaffolding

Note the fine diamond or lozenge studded string course

In the 17th century this was the main entrance to the kirk but was blocked off in the late 18th century.



Raggle lines show where the roof of the minister's entry porch once stood and a rough arch shows where he gained entry to the pulpit area.

Change in stonework showing where building was heightened.

Reused Romanesque chip cut carving either side of reconstructed window

Are these reused lintel stones from a previous building?



FURTHER READING

A more detailed history of the church can be found in “Markinch Its Church and Parish” by Ian Gourlay and Ken Wilkie 2010. Although a recent publication, it has stimulated further research which updates some of the conclusions reached in the text. That research is being taken forward by a Markinch Heritage Group sub- committee. Vol II of “The Place-Names of Fife’ by Dr Simon Taylor is also requisite reading with respect to the history of the parish. For more contact bruce.manson@btinternet.com