

## **Very Abridged History of Dunlichity Church**

I can well remember being taught in school that it was St Columba, St Patrick and St Ninian who brought Christianity to Scotland. In hindsight we now know that Christianity was already here in Scotland, brought by traders, Roman soldiers and others, not to mention lesser known saints such as Kessock after which the Kessock Bridge in Inverness is named.<sup>(1)</sup> What people like St Columba did though was to establish a structure for that faith to grow upon, to bring education, learning and the Gospel writings, and to build centres such as Iona and Candida Casa (at Whithorn) from which monks could go forth and share the knowledge they had. This brought a gradual improvement to people's lives and especially to those who lived in the vicinity of such monasteries and abbeys.

Tracing Daviot Parish Church's past, the earliest record we find is of it having been granted its charter in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century as a mensal [Common] kirk of Elgin Cathedral and the Abbey of Pluscarden.<sup>(2)</sup> Dunlichity is also mentioned in that record.

Not being a Gaelic Scholar I shall comment only briefly to say that I favour the name Dunlichity as having been derived from Dunlecatti signifying "Hill of Cattle" as Elizabeth (Suzie) McKay also suggests in her book 'A Discarded brat'.

One edition of the Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticiani (The roll call of ministers and parishes of the Church of Scotland) also tells us,

"Dunlichity, of old Lundichity – the Church of the vicarage of Lundichity was dedicated to St Finan"

Prior to the Reformation in 1560 the church would have been Catholic, after the Reformation it was Church of Scotland, then Episcopalian, Church of Scotland, then Episcopalian, then Church of Scotland then Episcopalianism, then Church of Scotland when William of Orange came to the throne and from 1690 Protestantism prevailed thereafter.

"In 1643 the year of the Solemn League and Covenant, saw the burning at the Mercat Cross in Inverness, of an idol of St Finian, found in a home near Dunlichity Church"

I was able to trace the former readers and ministers of Dunlichity church back to 1569 thanks to Lachlan Shaws book "The History of the Province of Moray". Just after the reformation due to the initial shortage of ministers they were readers until 1579 when Hugh Gregory became parson of Lundichity. In 1580

though we find James Duff minister not only of Dunlichity but also Daviot, Abertarff, Boleskine, Dores, Moy and Dalarossie! In 1618 James Vaus became the first minister of the united charge of Daviot and Dunlichity.

In the transaction of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club we read, “The Sacrament of the Supper was seldom administered in Highland country parishes under the Episcopalian regime. The necessary vessels and linen cloths were often lacking, and when needed had to be borrowed... Churches were often without pulpit, desk, or glazed windows; and earthen floors were in many cases used for burial purposes.

Fighting and drunkenness were not unknown within churches and churchyards on the Lord’s Day. ‘In 1672, two lairds – Martin McGillivray of Aberchalder and Alexander Mackintosh of Farr had a “ploy” – as the minute of Presbytery has it – on the Lord’s Day within the Church of Dunlichity’

After the Jacobite Rebellions of 1715 & 45 new issues came to the fore, issues now of Church and State, of patronage and establishment leading to a major split in the Church of Scotland in 1843 and the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland.

During this period, in 1781, the Rev Alexander Gordon became minister and it was he who between 1791-99 produced ‘Of Daviot and Dunlichity a Statistical Account’ in which we learn,

‘The Church in Dunlichity was rebuilt in 1759... the roof was then slated for the first time... Further repairs were done in 1882, at which time there was built the ‘Watch-house’ to protect the graves from robbers and from others who may have had an unwelcome interest in their contents.’

Rev Dr John MacPherson minister of Daviot and Dunlichity (1929-1970) tells us,

‘The present church at Dunlichity, like the church at Daviot, also stands in a graveyard belonging to the Inverness District Council. It is oblong in shape, with a gable at each end, and faces north south, and is sited near the point where the road to Loch Duntelchaig joins the road to Brin, 12 miles from the west end of the Parish and 8 miles from the manse at Daviot. It was thoroughly overhauled and painted in 1949 at a cost of £65. A large hand bell, with the date 1702 inscribed on it, is kept locked in a safe repository in the vestry. According to tradition, this bell was used for calling people to worship on the Lord’s Day.’

Further, he adds,

“According to tradition, the building previous to the present church had a porch, where the men of the district left their bows and arrows during Sunday services and the marks made by the sharpening of arrows and swords could be seen on the sandstone cheeks of the porch. Such marks are still to be found on a corner stone in the wall of the burial enclosure of the Shaws of Tordarroch and of the Mcphails of Inverarnie near the east end of the church.”

Mr Cumming ungraciously tells in his article ‘Some notes on Strathnairn Church history’

Dunlichity was never a big church and indeed most of the time was a squalid building with little light getting in and frequently much rain getting in. Dogs were allowed in church and fought over the bones of the congregations ancestors that were buried in the church as well as outside. Hats were worn, pipes were smoked. At one time there were not even pews or seats, old and infirm people brought their own.

Thankfully, things have certainly much improved since those days and Dunlichity has since then, become a very special church, with its continuing connections in particular to the Clan McGillivray and its use as a place of worship down through 400 years of united witness to the Christian faith of the people of Strathnairn and many thousands of years, yet before that.

I checked Dunlichity was not the oldest union of Church of Scotland churches there were about 75 others before. But it is the oldest union where both churches are I believe still in use at least for the present.

A real mistake would be made by its closure. A disconnect of not only this place with the history of our past that it represents, but also the end of yet another rural church that was built to serve the people of this united parish. Times may have changed, but sacred places are special places whose importance is more than just bricks and mortar. Rather, they are home to God’s people and a witness to God’s presence. I say that in particular because I often wonder if it was because I looked out of my kitchen window each day over what was Merchiston Railway Station, now gone, to St Michael’s Church that sowed in my heart the significance of the Christian Faith and led me ultimately to become a minister.

We celebrate 400 years of joint worship and witness this day. Much to be thankful for. May that connection to the past continue to inspire you as you look then to the future. Remembering ever that history is above all “His Story”. His making of himself known to you, and how you respond to that will ultimately determine what happens next. This year, in ten years time and perhaps too in 400 years time from now!