

# Historic Kirkyards Aberdeenshire's Historic Kirkyards

## **Midmar Old Kirk**

Midmar is one of those deeply interesting places where we can study the traces of its former inhabitants from remote prehistoric times.

The earliest 'Religious Centre' here is the stone circle on the site of the present Parish Kirk and Kirkyard on the North slope of the picturesque hollow in which the old Kirk was constructed in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Christianity came to Midmar through St Kentigern and two Welsh disciples St Nidan and St Finan. The fact the medieval Parish Kirk carries the name of St Nidan provides a strong indication that it occupies the site of the first Christian Chapel erected around the seventh century.

During Norman administration in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries Midmar was established as a Parish along

*Reconstruction illustration of medieval community*



feudal boundaries, a church was built in the hollow a little to the South of the stone circle and immediately to the East of the motte with its timber palisade and tower. Between these lay a small community. The accompanying illustration provides an indication of how this 'community' may have appeared.

Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century this early association of church and castle was severed with the construction of a new stone castle a mile to the South, around 1570, although the earlier timber construction would have fallen into disuse a considerable time earlier.

The old Kirk rebuilt in 1677 remained on this site until it was replaced in 1787 by the present Parish Kirk, curiously returning to the original 'Religious Centre'.



*Reconstruction of a burial in late 17th century*

The interior of the Kirk has been divided into four compartments three of which are set aside for burials of the heritors of the estates of Corsindae, Kebbity and Midmar; the fourth is for the Parish ministers.

The Kirkyard contains a grave marker to George Bel master mason and builder of the nearby Midmar Castle.

*'Heir Lyis Georg Bel Meason Deceisit in Balogy ano 1575'.*

Balogy is the ancient name for Midmar.

The Bel (Bell) family were responsible for the construction of the castles – Fraser, Cluny, Craigievar, Pitfichie and Lickleyhead.

Also worth noting is a memorial to William Meston blacksmith, Midmar, Father to a son also William born in Midmar 1688 who after being educated at Marischal College became tutor to the Keith family of Inverugie Castle Nr Peterhead, the Earl Marischals of Scotland and through their patronage Professor of Philosophy. His association with this Jacobite family led to reduced circumstances following the 1715 rebellion. He died in 1745 and is buried in the Spital Kirkyard in Aberdeen.

## **Kirk Bell**

In many cases the bell from the old Parish Kirk was installed in the new. The bell in the present Kirk bearing the inscription 'Peter lansen Anno 1642' was taken from the Old Kirk of Kinnerny, a Parish divided between Midmar and Cluny in 1743.

## Description

Straightforward and simple this old Kirk has the rare virtue of truth and quietness. Its elongated narrow plan makes it clear that it is constructed upon medieval foundations. In detail the little structure shows how near its builders were to the spirit of the middle ages.

The delightful east window with its mullion and transom is entirely Gothic. The South elevation contains evidence of heightening in the middle portion consistent with the 'new vogue' of placing the pulpit mid way on this side of the Kirk following the final triumph of Presbyterianism in 1690.

## Historical Tradition

St Columba was tolerant in recognising the good in druidical worship and sought to integrate this good into Christian worship.

He accepted stone circles were a place for outdoor worship and adopted them by placing his 'Churches' within the circles.

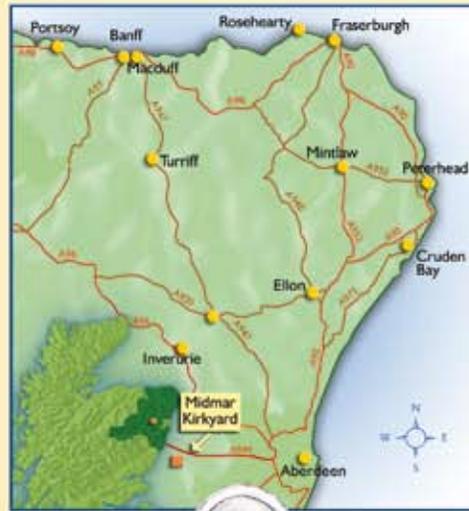
It is therefore possible the earliest Christian Church met in or near the Midmar Circle and that St Nidan built his shelter, called a 'Cell' of turf, stone and wood in the hollow where the medieval kirk was eventually constructed.



*Old kirk following repairs in 2004 under Aberdeenshire's Historic Kirkyards project.*

The earliest reference to Midmar is in the 'Taxation of Scottish Benefices' in 1275.

The Gaelic for Midmar, Magh-Barr, meaning the Head of the Plain is appropriately descriptive for the situation of Kirk and Parish.



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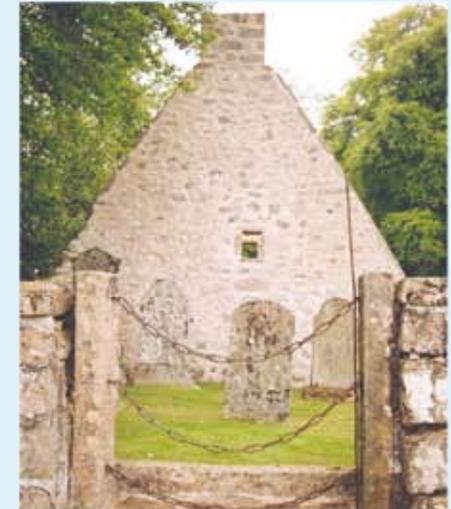
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