

Sacred Landscape Project

Buckhaven

Fig 1. John Blaeu, *Sherifdome of Fyfe* (1654).¹



Fig 2. Coat of Arms of Buckhaven, Methil and Innerleven.²



¹ 'John Blaeu, *Sherifdome of Fyfe*', *National Library of Scotland. Map Home*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/00000444>.

² 'Buckhaven and Methil', *Heraldry of the World*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=Buckhaven_and_Methil.

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For the purposes of this report periods have been broken down as follows: 1. Early Medieval (500-1000). 2. High Medieval (1000-1300). 3. Late Medieval (1300-1560). 4. Reformation and Early Modern (1560-1800). 5. Late Modern (1800-2021).

Historical References are presented in the following format;

4 Dec 1516

Letters of safe conduct made with the consent of the Regent (James Hamilton, earl of Arran, regent for James V), for all people of both sexes of the kingdoms of England, Spain and the Isle of Man, of all ranks, coming to the kingdom of the Scots by land and sea, on foot or horse to the church of Candida Casa (Whithorn) in honour of St Ninian confessor on pilgrimage.³

³ Matthew Livingstone, eds, *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: HMGRH, 1908-1982), i, no. 2844.

St Ninian was the most popular Scottish saint in the later middle ages. As the safe conducts issued by James I and the regency council of James V quoted above show, pilgrims were travelling to his shrine from England, the Isle of Man and Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Italicised text = translated or transcribed primary source information from Latin or Middle Scots. The original language is kept where translation or modern spelling is unnecessary

Standard text = Dr Tom Turpie's explanatory comments or added factual information

Bibliographic details for each reference can be found in the accompanying footnote

All photographs by T Turpie unless otherwise indicated

Abbreviations

ER- Stuart John et al, eds. *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1878-1908,
NSA- *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1834-45)

OSA- *Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1791-9),

RMS- John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914),

TA- Thomas Dickson, ed, *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* (Edinburgh, Scottish Record Office, 1877-1916),

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Introduction

Buckhaven is a port town on the north shore of the Forth, bounded by Wemyss to the west and Methil to the east. It first enters the written record as *Bukhawyne* in the early sixteenth century, although it is likely that its natural and sheltered harbour attracted settlement long before that time.⁴ A local tradition, first recorded in 1778 by the minister of Wemyss parish, Dr Harry Spens, is that many of the early inhabitants of the settlement were Dutch, arriving in the area in the sixteenth century fleeing religious persecution. Buckhaven's long history as a fishing station, and its reputation for self-sufficiency, may have contributed to such legends. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it developed into one of the most important fishing stations in Fife. In the early twentieth century, waste from coal mining led to the destruction of its local beaches and harbour. The growth of fishing, and then coal mining led to significant increase in the population from approximately 500 in the 1790s to 1500 in 1838, 4500 in 1901, and nearly 20,000 (combined with Methil and Leven) by 1952.⁵ The most recent estimate, from 2016, puts the population at c.4,200.⁶ Until the nineteenth century, Buckhaven was part of Wemyss parish. Population growth ultimately led to the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the district with Buckhaven and Methil forming their own burgh and separating from Wemyss in the 1890s. The town is now largely contiguous with Methil and Leven to the east, and is part of a larger district known as Levenmouth.

In the Middle Ages, and through the late nineteenth century, the settlement was part of the parish of Wemyss, with the villagers travelling 2 to 3 miles along the coast to worship at St Mary's By the Sea in East Wemyss. The earliest formal religious building to be constructed in Buckhaven was a Burgher Church in 1795. A number residents of Buckhaven had seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1739, attending churches in Kirkcaldy and Kennoway, before constructing their place of worship 1790s. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, significant industrial development and concomitant growth of the population led to the establishment of a number of different churches in the town. This included a United Presbyterian (1869), Free Church (1870), a new Church of Scotland parish (1899), and Baptist

⁴ William Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss* (Edinburgh, 1988), ii, 187.

⁵ 'Parish Populations, Fife', *GENUKI*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/ParishPopulations>, 'Wemyss, Census', *GENUKI*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/Wemyss#Census>.

⁶ 'Mid-2016 Population Estimates for Settlements and Localities in Scotland', *National Records of Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/settlements-and-localities/mid-2016-population-estimates-for-settlements-and-localities-in-scotland>.

(1908/1915) Episcopal (1910) and Salvation Army congregations. Later in the twentieth century, Pentecostal (1969), Jehovah's Witnesses (1971) and Evangelical/Brethren (1986) churches opened in the town. The three Church of Scotland charges of St Michael's, St Andrew's and St David's formed a union in 1972 using the latter church. In 2008, this combined congregation united further with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian's) and Buckhaven (St David's). In addition to the shared Church of Scotland charge, there are currently four other active churches in Buckhaven (Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Salvation Army, Church of God).

Religious sites and the landscape of Buckhaven

Its naturally sheltered harbour was key to the development of medieval and early modern Buckhaven, while the rise and fall of the mining industry in the wider district has been the main stimulant for development in the modern era. Rather than a local landscape shaped directly by its sacred past, the religious history of Buckhaven has tended to witness different faith groups reacting to the changing patterns of settlement and population that have resulted from fluctuations in local fishing and coal industries. Population increases from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century led to Presbyterian, Baptist and various Evangelical organisations providing meeting places to serve the growing community. This proliferation of meeting places has had a major impact on the townscape of Buckhaven in the modern era, with a peak of seven active places of worship in the early 1970s.

Consistent turn over, recycling of places of worship, and newer structures were required to house the growing population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recently, population decline and falling church attendance have left some places of worship redundant. This development started with the abandonment of the Links Church in 1869, and more recently has seen the demolition of St Michael's Church (1970s), the conversion of St Andrew's church into a theatre (1987), and the repurposing of the former United Free Church/Christian Fellowship building into houses. What remains to be seen is whether the current relatively healthy provision of five active places of worship (Church of Scotland, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Salvation Army, Church of God) can be sustained against the backdrop of falling attendance, financial pressures on organisations such as the Church of Scotland, and the viability of congregational unions due to increasing transport links. It is likely in future that there will be further consolidations of congregations, with pressure for the

conversion of any places of worship made redundant to residential property, particularly those that are located in prime central locations.

1. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)

Sites of Interest

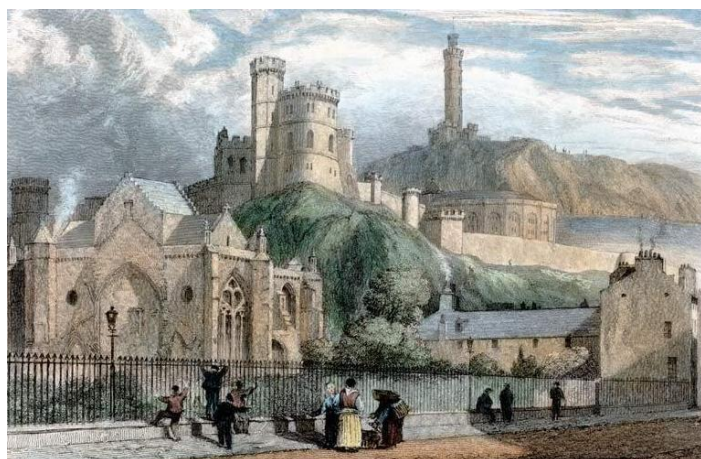
St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

Introduction/Nature of the Site

Buckhaven first enters the written record in a charter of 1527 which noted that the fishermen of *Bukhawyne* belonged to the parish of Wemyss.⁷ In a further charter of 1531, it was recorded that the village was part of the barony of Easter Wemyss and in the possession of the Colville family.⁸ The villagers of Buckhaven travelled to St Mary's by the Sea in East Wemyss. This church, from the 1460s appropriated to the Trinity Church and Hospital in Edinburgh, was the main place of worship in the district. It underwent considerable rebuilding and augmentation in the early sixteenth century.

I. St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

Fig 3. John Ewbank Trinity Church, Edinburgh (1825).⁹



St Mary's, along with most of the property of the Hospital of Soutra, was confiscated by the Crown in the 1460s and granted to the Church and Hospital of the Holy Trinity in Edinburgh, recently founded by Mary of Gueldres (1460). It was noted in 1463 that the parsonage tithes of the church of Wemyss (the income from corn and other crops) were used specifically to sustain 13 bedesman at

the Trinity Hospital. We learn from these documents that St Mary's was served by a perpetual vicar, a priest who was paid from the vicarage tithes (the income from animal products). After 1502 these tithes were wholly in the possession of the Provost of Holy Trinity, who paid a vicar pensioner a salary of 20 marks per year to minister to the population of Wemyss.

From a dispute that took place between the Provost and the Laird of Wemyss in the 1520s, it would seem that considerable alterations to the church occurred in 1527-1528. The records note that the church was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain of the Chapel of Our Lady in West Wemyss. A chapel and aisle dedicated to St Katherine of Alexandria was added to the church in East Wemyss by the late fifteenth century and founded by the Colville family (who had purchased MacDuff Castle c.1420). Katherine, whose main

⁷ Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 187

⁸ John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914), (RMS), iii no. 980.

⁹ 'Trinity College Church', *Wikimedia Commons*, Accessed 29 October, 2021, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity_College_Kirk_01.jpg.

shrine was at Mount Sinai in Egypt, was a popular saint in late medieval Scotland. Altars in St Andrews (Holy Trinity) and Inverkeithing and the churches of Cupar and Newburgh were dedicated to her. A miraculous well associated with Katherine was located in Liberton near Edinburgh. Furthermore, altars and chapels in her honour could be found in every major church in Scotland.¹⁰

1425

Nicholas de Greenlaw (son of a priest) resigned the church of Wemyss and moved to Auldbar.¹¹

1433

Donald Kennedy (canon of Soutra) was presented to church on death of Robert de Kirkcaldy (also a canon). The perpetual vicarage of the Kirk Wemyss was described as ‘wont to be ruled by brothers of the hospital of Soutra’. In 1438, Kennedy was accused by Thomas Lauder, the master of Soutra, for detaining a certain proportion of the income of the church. Kennedy complained that the Master takes so much yearly from the fruits that from the vicar could not be maintained from what was left.¹²

Dispute of 1527-28

A long running dispute between David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), over some of the tithes of West Wemyss and the Kirkland of Wemyss led to a case heard in St Andrews. The dispute was eventually settled by arbitration. Three years’ worth of teind sheaves for 1526-28 were to be restored to the Provost. The arbiters also advised the Provost to yield up the offerings due to him from the Lady chapel of Wemyss, because the parish church of Wemyss was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain there.¹³

19 Oct 1527

At a court held in St Andrew a dispute between the David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), respecting the teinds belonging to the provost as vicar. The judges pronounced in favour of David that; *Sir John had wickedly and unjustly interjected his extrajudicial appeal to the Roman Court (the Papal Curia)..commanding the said vicar.....to pay half the sum £99 8s 8d Scots within two months (the other half thereafter).*¹⁴

6 Feb 1528

The case went to arbitration and reached a settlement that in order to allow both parties to *shake hands and forgive ilk ane the rancor of their hearts.....the provost should peaceably lead the teind shieves of Wester Wemyss.... And of the Kirkland of Wemyss for three years...*

¹⁰ Tom Turpie, *Kind Neighbours. Scottish Saints and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 70-89.

¹¹ W. H Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal letters*, (London, 1893), (CPL), vii, 380-81.

¹² Annie I. Dunlop, ed., *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1433-1447* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press 1983), (CSSR, iv), no. 112, CPL, ix, 21.

¹³ Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*. i, 111-113 & ii, 274-278.

¹⁴ Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6.

The judges also noted that; *the offerings of the chapel of Wemyss pertaining to the said provost by of the parish church of Wemyss, because Sir Patrick Jackson, chaplain thereof was biggand and purposed to big and continue, the judges asked the provost to supersede the said offerings for Patrick's good deeds.....*¹⁵

Altars and chapels in parish church

26 October 1541

*The King has handed over to feufarm to Norman Leslie, feudatory of the earl of Rothes, and to Elizabeth Lindsay his wife, the lands of East Wemyss [...] with the donative advowson of the aisle and altarage of **Saint Catherine** within East Wemyss parish church, shire of Fife.*¹⁶

Dec 1545

*Thomas Birrell in town of Freuchie binds himself to deliver in East Wemyss on the feast of St Andrew (30 Nov) two bolls of barley **for the altar of St Mary** situated in the parish church of East Wemyss.*¹⁷

6 Jan 1597

*Instrument of Sasine in favour of Sir John Boswell of Balmuto, knight, of a fourth part of the lands of Spittal, in lordship of Lochoreshire and sheriffdom of Fife, together with the coal of half of the lands of Dundonald, lying as above; on precept of sasine in charter dated 3 December 1596, by Robert Colvill, son and apparent heir of James Colville of East Wemyss, **chaplain of St Katherine's Chapel**, in parish church of Wemys, and said James, patron of said chapel, in favour of said Sir John Boswell.*¹⁸

¹⁵ Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6

¹⁶ RMS, iii, no. 2493

¹⁷ William Muir, ed, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart* (Glasgow: Maitland Club 1853), p.15.

¹⁸ National Records of Scotland (NRS), Boswell of Balmuto Papers, GD66/1/110.

2. Reformation and Early Modern Period (1560-1800)

Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

Buckhaven Links Church

Introduction/Nature of the Site

The early modern era was a period of considerable development for Wemyss and the surrounding district. There is evidence for coal mining in Methil and East Wemyss from the late sixteenth century, which also stimulated local salt production.¹⁹ A stone harbour was built by David, 2nd earl of Wemyss at Methil by the mid-1600s, and similar works seem to have been undertaken at West Wemyss for the export of coal and salt.²⁰ Initially, coal mining seems to have had a limited impact on Buckhaven, which was primarily a fishing port. Sibbald described Buckhaven as a *fisher town* in 1710, and in 1778 the minister of Wemyss, Dr Harry Spens, recounted the legend of the Dutch origins of the townsfolk. Buckhaven remained part of the parish of Wemyss (with its church in East Wemyss) throughout the early modern period. However, one of the elders and a Buckhaven resident, Mr John Thomson, seceded from the church in 1739 with a number of other members and joined the Burgher Church. The minister of Wemyss noted in 1793 that there were a small number of *dissenters* in the parish. Although they did not belong to the established church, they had not yet formed formal congregations. By 1795, however, they had built a church on the west end of the links. Although the fisher folk of Buckhaven had a reputation for piety and a strict observance of the sabbath, one local story recounted by Frank Rankin suggests this was not always the case.

Sibbald 1710

*A mile from this is the village of Buckhaven, a fisher town belonging to the Earl of Weems. They have ordinarily twelve fishing boats with six men in each 5 and furnish Edinburgh with white fish. In August yearly they with others take herring, and make much money by this.*²¹

Harry Spens 1778

As far as I have been able to learn, the original inhabitants of Buckhaven were from the Netherlands about the time of Philip II (1556-1598). Their vessel had been stranded on the shore. They proposed to settle and remain. The family of Wemyss gave them permission. They accordingly settled at Buckhaven. By degrees they acquired our language, and adopted our dress, and for these threescore years past, they have had the character of a sober and sensible, an industrious and honest set of people. The only singularity in their ancient customs that I remember to have heard of was, that of a richly ornamented girdle or belt, wore by their brides of good condition and character at their marriage, and then bid aside and given in like manner

¹⁹ RMS, vii. No 1026.

²⁰ Angus Graham, 'Archaeological notes on some harbours in Eastern Scotland' in *Proceedings of Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, 101, (1968-9), 200-285 at 281-282.

²¹ Robert Sibbald, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross, with the description of both, and of the firths of Forth and Tay, and the islands in them ... with an account of the natural products of the land and waters* (Cupar, 2nd edition, 1803, original 1710), pp. 327-328.

to the next bride that should be deemed worthy of such an honour. The village consists at present of about 140 families, 60 of which are fishers, the rest land-labourers, weavers.²²

Rev George Grib, 1793

There are but few dissenters in the parish. There is a Burgher Meeting place at Buckhaven, but has no minister. Those of the Anti-Burgher persuasion have places of worship at in the parishes of Dysart and Markinch. There are about 24 who join the Presbytery of Relief, and 6 of the Episcopal persuasion.²³

Rankin, 1978

There is a story about one fisherman who went down to the harbour one very stormy Sabbath day to make sure his boat was safely tied up. He was hauled in front of the Kirk Session to be reprimanded for working on the Sabbath. 'Weel', he said, (misquoting Matthew Chapter 12, Verse 11), 'Remember what Jesus said about saving a coo on the Sabbath day'. 'Weel', he said, 'my boat's my coo'.²⁴

I. St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

Fig. 4. St Mary's By the Sea (Fawcett).²⁵



Although there is no direct account of the arrival of the Reformation in Wemyss, the church seems to have been relatively easily adapted to the new form of worship that dominated after 1560. After Methil was absorbed into the parish of Wemyss in the early 1600s, considerable alterations were made to the building, which was now located at the centre of the expanded parish. The earl of Wemyss constructed a family mausoleum outside the church in the 1640s, which would

become known as the Wemyss Aisle. This led to an extension of the building eastward, with the burial place connected to the earl's private loft in the church by a stair. Two further aisles were added to the church in the late 1600s. Furthermore, what Fawcett describes as a *square birdcage bellcote* was added to the west gable.²⁶ The minister George Grib was pleased to describe the building and the further work that happened in 1792 as a *well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship*.

²² Sibbald, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross*, p. 327 nt 1.

²³ *Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1793), (OSA), xvi, 529.

²⁴ Frank Rankin, *Auld Buckhynie. A Short History of Buckhaven* (East Wemyss, 1986), p. 39.

²⁵ Richard Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 31 October, 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158932>.

²⁶ Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.

1636 (8 Sept) *visitation of the church by the Pres of Kirkcaldy found the minister (Patrick Mearns) to be competent, while the earl of Wemyss and lord Elcho were ordered to arrange the 300 marks pa for the new schoolmaster.*²⁷

1644 (21 Aug) the earl of Wemyss agrees to build a place for burial outside the kirk of Wemyss.²⁸

1658 (26 Sept) the kirk session considering the condition of the kirk yard dykes which are altogether ruinous. The session orders a collection for the repair.²⁹

1659 (12 June) *it was the mind of the session to strike through a window besouth the little kirk door that leads to the pulpit for making greater light in the church.*³⁰

1682 (6 May) the minister and session order a collection to be made for the repair of the church.³¹

1688 Margaret, Dowager Countess of Wemyss requests in her will that she be buried *In our isle at the church of Weymss.*³²

Rev George Grib, 1793

*The church is an old gothic building in the form of a cross; there are evident marks of considerable additions to it; but no date that can fix its age.... It was repaired and much improved in 1792, and is now a well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship. The church and manse are in the thriving village of Easter Wemyss, the most central part of the parish.*³³

II. Buckhaven Links Church

Fig. 5. Site of Buckhaven Links Church (Amanda Gow, 2007).³⁴



Mr John Thomson, a Buckhaven resident and one of the elders of Wemyss Parish Church, seceded from the Church of Scotland with a number of others and joined the Burgher Church in 1739.³⁵ They attended first Bethelfield Associate Church in Kirkcaldy, and later Kennoway Arnot Church (after 1750), before a number of local residents applied to the Burgher Presbytery of Dunfermline to form a congregation in Buckhaven in 1792. This was accepted and a congregation numbering around 90 was

²⁷ NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fols. 191-192.

²⁸ NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fol. 464.

²⁹ NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 100.

³⁰ NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 141.

³¹ NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1668-1701, CH2/365/3, fol. 134.

³² Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 258.

³³ *OSA* (1793), xvi, 526.

³⁴ 'Buckhaven Links Kirk', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 6 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10480/image/481/name/Buckhaven+Links+Kirk+Wemyss+Fife>

³⁵ Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*. p. 41.

formed in 1794. They moved into their own church on the Links in 1795. The first minister was David Telford, and his admission to the charge was signed by 122 people. Telford had a reputation as an active preacher and the congregation grew under his watch which lasted until 1824.³⁶ A contemporary Dr McKelvie remarked of Telford that *It is doubtful if any minister of his denomination ever exercised a greater influence over his flock than he did. I know it used to be remarked that Mr Telfer was prophet, priest, and king in Buckhaven.*

Dr Hay (c.1824)

He was a man of unfeigned piety, great modesty, obliging disposition, and unpretending condescension. If not conspicuous for brilliant parts he possessed what was better adapted for the sphere in which Providence had placed him great affection of heart, amiability of temper, simplicity of manners, and no small measure of good sense."

Dr McKelvie (footnote to Dr Hay's journal)

*It is doubtful if any minister of his denomination ever exercised a greater influence over his flock than he did. I know it used to be remarked that Mr Telfer was prophet, priest, and king in Buckhaven.*³⁷

³⁶ Robert Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900* (Edinburgh, 1904), ii, 393-396.

³⁷ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, ii, 393.

3. Late Modern (1800-2021).

Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss
 Buckhaven Links Church
 St David's Church, Buckhaven
 St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven
 St Michael's Church, Buckhaven
 Buckhaven Baptist Church
 Salvation Army
 Buckhaven Christian Fellowship
 Jehovah's Witnesses
 Buckhaven Church of God

Introduction/Nature of the Site

In the early nineteenth century, Buckhaven developed into one of the most important fishing stations in Scotland. After a lull in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, coal began to be mined in large quantities in the parish of Wemyss in the late nineteenth century. Fishing was in decline in Buckhaven by the 1860s. As it had largely become a mining town, the coal refuse ultimately led to the destruction of the harbour and beaches. The growth of fishing and then coal mining saw a significant increase in the population from 500 in the 1790s, to nearly 1500 in 1838, 4500 in 1901 and nearly 20,000 by 1952.³⁸ Buckhaven was included in the parish of Wemyss until the late nineteenth century. Population growth led to the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the 1890s, as such, Buckhaven and Methil formed into a burgh and separated from Wemyss.

Significant industrial development and concomitant growth of the population led to the establishment of several different churches in the town during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this included a Free Church (1870), Church of Scotland (1899), and Baptist (1908/1915) and Salvation Army congregations. Pentecostal (1969), Jehovah's Witnesses (1971), and Evangelical/Brethren (1986) churches were opened in the second half of the twentieth century. Population peaks in the 1960s and 1970s, decline in church attendance (more than 50% of the population of Wemyss, Buckhaven and Methil was recorded as having 'No Religion' in the 2011 census), and denominational mergers, have led to recent church closures in Buckhaven.³⁹ In 1972, the three Church of Scotland charges of St Michael's, St Andrew's, and St David's formed a union using the latter church. The congregation united with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church in 2008. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian's) and Buckhaven (St David's). In addition to the shared Church of Scotland charge,

³⁸ 'Parish Populations, Fife', *GENUKI*, 'Wemyss, Census', *GENUKI*.

³⁹ 'Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill; Religion', Identity, *Scotland's Census*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>. In 2011 5,753 belonged to the Church of Scotland, 1,064 to the Roman Catholic Church and 561 to other Christian denominations.

there are currently four other active churches in Buckhaven: Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Salvation Army, and Church of God.

I. St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

In 1810-11, considerable building work was done on the church at East Wemyss. Fawcett suggests that *the rectangular two-, three- and four-light transomed windows, which light much of the church, together with the crowstepped gables, probably date from these operations.*⁴⁰ However, in 1838, the minister commented that the church was *far too small* for the parish. This pressure for space was relieved through the foundation of a 'chapel at ease' in West Wemyss (1835), a *quod sacra* parish in Methil in 1838, St Michael's Church in Buckhaven (1900,) and the secession of a large part of the congregation joining the Free Church after the Great Disruption in 1843. Major repairs carried out in the late nineteenth century, combined with the addition of a hall in the 1920s, have made it difficult for architectural historians to judge what of the medieval structure remains. The Free Church congregation of St George's re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929, and in 1976 there was a union between that congregation and those of St Mary's and St Adrian's churches in West Wemyss. As a result, St Mary's was closed for worship. It was then converted into a recording studio, and since 1985 it has been used as a private house.⁴¹

Rev John Maclachan, 1838

*The parish church is in East Wemyss, and is conveniently situated for the great body of the people as it could well be. It is an old building in the form of a cross. The date of its erection cannot be ascertained. It has undergone several repairs; and, although the construction is bad, yet upon the whole it is a decent and comfortable place of worship. It has sittings for about 1000 persons. It is by far too small for the parish. From 900 to 1000 communicate annually. The people are very attentive to the ordinance of religion.*⁴²

*There is a Dissenting meeting-house in connection with the United Associate Synod, situated on the Links of Buckhaven, about two miles from the parish church.....the congregation is respectable and divine service is well attended.*⁴³

1840 Leighton

*The parish church, which is in the village of east Wemyss is an old building in the form of a cross, but the date of its erection is unknown. It is seated to accommodate 1000 persons. The number of communicants are from 900 to 1000 annually. The present incumbent is the Rev. John McLachlan; the patronage is in the town council of Edinburgh.*⁴⁴

1862 Westwood

⁴⁰ Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.

⁴¹ 'St Mary's By the Sea, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4627/name/St.+Mary%27s+By+The+Sea+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁴² *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1838), (NSA), (1838), ix, 399.

⁴³ NSA, (1838), ix, 399-400.

⁴⁴ John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, p. 170.

*East Wemyss, in which is the Parish Church, a building in the form of a cross. It was rebuilt by General William Wemyss upon the site of an old Church, the date of whose erection is not authenticated. There is also a Free Church in East Wemyss.*⁴⁵

1988 Gifford 1988

*Being converted into a recording studio (1985). Crowstep gabled harled kirk in a small graveyard beside the harbour. The core is probably of 1528, when the church is said to have been virtually rebuilt. Typical late medieval skinny rectangle, with a small one bay chancel at the E end...*⁴⁶

II. Buckhaven Links Church

By 1838 the congregation of the church on the Links had joined the United Associate Synod, and in 1846 at the accession of a new minister (William Cowan), it had a congregation of 353.⁴⁷ By 1869, now part of the United Presbyterian Church and, according to Westwood *with a flourishing congregation*, the decision was taken to construct a new, larger, place of worship. The new building on Church Street, capable of seating 860 people and built at a cost of £2,600, was opened on 12 April.⁴⁸ The old links church was converted into houses, and the whole area was buried under refuse from Wellesley colliery in the early 1900s.

Rev John Maclachan, 1838

*There is a Dissenting meeting-house in connection with the United Associate Synod, situated on the Links of Buckhaven, about two miles from the parish church.....the congregation is respectable and divine service is well attended.*⁴⁹

Westwood, 1862

*Buckhaven, the largest village in the Parish, and one of the largest fishing villages in Fife, fishing being the principal trade of the inhabitants; in addition to which, the curing of herrings is a necessary adjunct of its staple trade. At the Links of Buckhaven, in close proximity to the village, is a U. P. Church, with a flourishing congregation.*⁵⁰

⁴⁵ A. Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory for the Counties of Fife and Kinross* (Cupar, 1862), pp. 214-215.

⁴⁶ John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, (London, 1988), p. 203.

⁴⁷ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

⁴⁸ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

⁴⁹ NSA, (1838), ix, 399-400.

⁵⁰ Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory*, pp. 214-215.

III. St David's Parish Church, Buckhaven

Fig 6. Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church (2021).⁵¹



By 1838 the Burgher church on the Links had joined the United Associate Synod.⁵² By 1869, now part of the United Presbyterian Church and, according to Westwood *with a flourishing congregation*, the decision was taken to construct a new, larger, place of worship. The new building on Church Street, capable of seating 860 people and built at a cost of £2,600, was opened on 12 April.⁵³ The new church, called St David's, was described by Gifford as

Plain Gothic with buttresses making a feeble attempt to suggest a nave and aisles behind the gable. It had a congregation of 558 when the United Presbyterian Church combined with the Free Church of Scotland in 1900 to become the United Free Church. In 1929, at the union between the United Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland, the congregation decided to join the Church of Scotland. In 1972, there was a union between Buckhaven's three Church of Scotland charges (St Michael's, St Andrew's, and St David's) to form Buckhaven Parish Church. In 2008 that congregation united with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian's) and Buckhaven (St David's).⁵⁴

Smith 1952

*A new building replaced in 1869 the old Church of St David's in Buckhaven, said to have been built in part of stones carried up from the beach by fishermen.....*⁵⁵

Gifford 1988

*Being converted to secular use (1987). Originally built at St Andrews as an Episcopal chapel in 1824-25, and rebuilt in Buckhaven as a Free church, 1870, it is by William Burn. Crocketed pinnacled Perp front, with a rather small door under the elaborately hoodmoulded five-light window, its label stops carved with human faces. Inside a nave and aisles; thinly detailed ribbed plaster ceiling.*⁵⁶

⁵¹ 'Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church', *Presbytery of Kirkcaldy*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <https://www.presbyteryofkirkcaldy.org.uk/congregations/buckhaven-wemyss-parish-church/>.

⁵² Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

⁵³ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

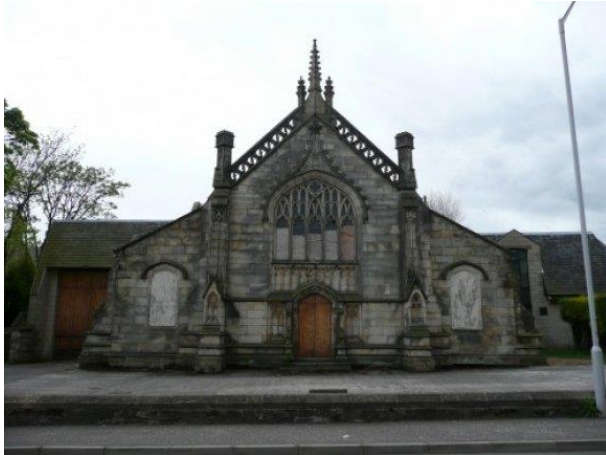
⁵⁴ 'Buckhaven Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4620/name/Buckhaven+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁵⁵ Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 565.

⁵⁶ Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland*, p. 105-106.

IV. St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven

Fig 7. St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven (Gow, 2007).⁵⁷



After the Great Disruption of 1843, adherents of the Free Church in Buckhaven initially attended the church in East Wemyss, before the decision was taken to form a separate congregation in the town in 1866.⁵⁸ Some 140 members of the church at East Wemyss joined the new congregation. In 1870, they purchased an Episcopal Chapel first built in North Street, St Andrews (1824-25) for £130.⁵⁹ It was dismantled and carried brick by brick to Buckhaven on Thomas Walker's

boat 'The Sea King' and opened in 1870.⁶⁰ It had a congregation of 240 in 1900, when it became a United Free Church, and continued as such until the congregation united with St David's and St Michael's in 1972. The building was closed until 1987 when it was converted into a theatre.⁶¹

Ewing 1914

In response to a request from Free Church residents here, a station was established in 1866. Church and manse were erected, and in 1875 the charge was sanctioned. The development of the mining industry brought increase of the population.

Rankin, 1978

In 1866 a congregation of the Free Church was formed in Buckhaven and they held their services in the school. In July 1870 an Episcopal Chapel in North Street, St Andrews was put up for sale and the Free Church bought it for £130, dismantled it stone by stone, and brought it to Buckhaven in Thomas Walker's boat 'Sea King' and re-erected it next to St David's Church in 1872.⁶²

Gifford 1988

Being converted to secular use (1987). Originally built at St Andrews as an Episcopal chapel in 1824-25, and rebuilt in Buckhaven as a Free church, 1870, it is by William Burn. Crocketed pinnacled Perp front, with a rather small door under the elaborately hoodmoulded five-light window, its label stops carved with human faces. Inside a nave and aisles; thinly detailed ribbed plaster ceiling.⁶³

⁵⁷ 'St Andrew's Church, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4638/name/St.+Andrew%27s+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁵⁸ William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, 147.

⁵⁹ Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, ii, 144.

⁶⁰ 'St Andrew's Church, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 39.

⁶¹ 'Buckhaven, Church Street, St Andrew's Theatre', *Historic Environment Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22711>.

⁶² Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 39.

⁶³ Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, pp. 105-106.

V. St Michael's Church, Buckhaven

A Church of Scotland 'chapel at ease' was established to serve the inhabitants of Buckhaven in 1901. Constructed in St Michael's Street, it was named after the location. It became a full parish church in 1929. It was known as Buckhaven Parish Church until 1972 when a union between Buckhaven's three Church of Scotland charges (St Michael's, St Andrew's and St David's) occurred forming Buckhaven Parish Church. At that date it was found to need extensive repairs and the decision was taken to demolish it. Private residences were then erected on the site and no signs of the church remain, however, its baptismal font can be found in the grounds of Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church (St David's).⁶⁴

VI. Buckhaven Baptist Church

Fig. 8. Buckhaven Baptist Church (Gow, 2007).⁶⁵



Buckhaven's Baptist Church was formed in the early 1900s as part of a wider revival moment in Fife. The earliest mission began in November of 1908, with a church formally founded in 1910. This early congregation had 20 members and met in the Rechabite Hall, before building their own church in College Street in 1915. Capable of seating 200, it was built by G. C Campbell.⁶⁶ The congregation remains active and has been on the same site for

more than a century.

Rankin, 1986

*A Baptist mission was formed in Buckhaven in 1908. At first the services were held in the Rechabite Hall until a church, seating 200, was built in College Street opened for worship in 1915.*⁶⁷

⁶⁴ 'St Michael's Parish, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10481/name/St.+Michael%27s+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>, Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ 'Buckhaven Baptist Church, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8074/image/229/name/Buckhaven+Baptist+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁶⁶ George Yuille, *History of the Baptists in Scotland from Pre-Reformation Times* (Glasgow, 1926), pp. 143-144.

⁶⁷ Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 43.

VII. Salvation Army

Fig. 9. Salvation Army (Gow, 2007).⁶⁸



A corps of the Salvation Army was first launched in Buckhaven in 1897, fell into abeyance, and was then re-founded in 1936.⁶⁹ They met in Mullin Hall until 1978 after which they moved to their current site in Michael Street in a former telephone exchange. They are still active in Buckhaven.

VIII. Buckhaven Christian Fellowship

The Buckhaven Christian Fellowship moved into the building on Institution Street in 1969. It had formerly been a United Free Church constructed in 1934. The Fellowship were a Pentecostal Church, originally known as the Assembly of God. The group had left the site at some point before 2006, when the building was demolished and sold to make way for houses.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ 'Salvation Army, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8659/name/Salvation+Army+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁶⁹ David Armistead, *The Army of Alba. A History of the Salvation Army in Scotland (1879-2004)* (London, 2011), pp. 92 & 166.

⁷⁰ 'Buckhaven Christian Fellowship, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10476/name/Buckhaven+Christian+Fellowship+Wemyss+Fife>.

IX. Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses

Fig 10. Buckhaven Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses (Gow, 2007).⁷¹



Jehovah's Witnesses were first established in Buckhaven in 1971, moving into a building constructed c.1900 and previously occupied by a group known as the Church of Christ.⁷² The building underwent significant renovation in 1980, and is still in active use.

X. Buckhaven Church of God

Fig 11. Buckhaven Church of God (Gow, 2007).⁷³



The Buckhaven Church of God was formed as a breakaway from the Open Brethren in 1986.⁷⁴ They are an evangelical organisation part of the global organisation known as the Churches of God.⁷⁵ The church is still active.

⁷¹ 'Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Wemyss, Fife' - *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10478/name/Kingdom+Hall+of+Jehovah%27s+Witnesses+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁷² 'Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Wemyss, Fife'.

⁷³ 'Church of God, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10477/name/Church+of+God+Wemyss+Fife>.

⁷⁴ Church of God, Wemyss, Fife'.

⁷⁵ 'Beliefs', *Churches of God*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, https://churchesofgod.info/church_of_god_beliefs/#WhoWeAre.

Epilogue. The Sacred Landscape of Buckhaven in the Twenty-First Century

Of the nine churches, missions and chapels constructed in Buckhaven between the late eighteenth and late twentieth centuries, five remain in active use. The loss of churches and congregations has been a steady process resulting from a combination of mergers between congregations and denominations, Methil's decline as a port town, and the general trend in a fall in church attendance seen across Scotland after World War II. The earliest place of worship in the town, the Links Church was superseded by St David's in 1869 (and was subsequently demolished) and the merger between the three Church of Scotland congregations in 1972, led to the abandonment and demolition of the St Michael's (1976) and conversion of St Andrew's into a theatre (1987). The congregations of other independent churches and missions has fluctuated over time, to the extent that it remains difficult to trace the history, and interconnections, of many of these organisations.

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