

Sacred Landscape Project

Dysart

Fig 1. Dysart. Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, 1" Coloured Sheet 40 (1867).¹



Fig 2. Coat of Arms of Dysart (1890).²



¹ 'Ordnance Survey One-inch to the mile maps of Scotland, 1st Edition, 1856-1891 - Sheet 40', *National Library of Scotland. Map Home*, Accessed 15 Apr, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/216384257>.

² 'Dysart', *Heraldry of the World*, Accessed 15 April, 2021, <https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/wiki/Dysart>.

Contents

Contents Page

Key

List of Figures

Introduction

Religious Sites and the Landscape of Dysart

Research

Part 1. Early Christianity (c500-c1000AD)

I. St Serf's Cave

Part 2. High Medieval Christianity (c1000-1300)

I. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

Part 3. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)

I. St Serf's Cave

II. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

III. Chapel of St Dennis

Part 4. Reformation and Early Modern Period (1560-1800)

I. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

II. Dysart Relief Church 'The Auld House'

III. Pathhead Anti-Burgher Church

Part 5. Late Modern Period (1800-)

I. St Serf's Cave

II. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's/Barony Church)

III. Dysart Relief Church/United Presbyterian

IV. Pathhead Anti-Burgher Church

V. Dysart Free Church

VI. Church of the Latter-Day Saints

VII. Carmelite Convent

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

Bibliography

Key

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Historical References are presented in the following format;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

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),

List of Figures

Fig 1. Dysart. Ordnance Survey 1st Edition, 1" Coloured Sheet 40 (1867)

Fig 2. Coat of Arms of Dysart (1890)

Fig 3. St Serf's Cave, © Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd

Fig 4. Dysart, St Serf's Cave, @ R. Fawcett

Fig 5. Dysart Old Parish Church, exterior from north east, @ R. Fawcett

Fig 6. St Serf's Tower and the Pan Ha @ Turpie

Fig 7. Dysart Old Parish Church, interior of Sinclair Aisle @ R. Fawcett

Fig 8. *Census of Great Britain, 1851, Religious worship and education*

Fig 9. Dysart Barony Church @ Richard Fawcett, 2012

Fig 10. Engraving of the Old Church of St Serf's, 1853

Fig 11. United Presbyterian Church, Normand Road @ Stuart Mee (Dec. 2007)

Fig 12. Dysart St Clair Parish Church, @ Richard Fawcett

Fig 13. Mackintosh Mural – Image credit Elisabeth Viguie-Culshaw

Fig 14. Dysart Carmelite Convent, Stuart Mee (Dec. 2007)

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

Introduction

Dysart is a harbour town located on the south coast of Fife between Kirkcaldy and West Wemyss. It has a fascinating sacred history that stretches back to the early Middle Ages. The settlement may have been established as early as 700, when the important Fife saint, Serf of Culross, is said to have used a local cave as a hermitage. First recorded as *Disard* and *Disard* (desert, place of hermitage) c.1220, the name of the town may well refer to this sacred origin.⁴ The cave and hermitage at Dysart remained an important sacred site throughout the Middle Ages. A parish church near the cave dedicated to St Serf was established by the twelfth century. Through the patronage of the Sinclair family, the church was expanded into a large and impressive structure in the fifteenth century. Following the Reformation, Dysart's parish church was the main focus for religious activity in the town until the mid-eighteenth century, when the expansion of the town saw the introduction of a series of Non-Conformist congregations and churches, including a colony of Carmelite Nuns in 1931. Following the amalgamation of Dysart and Kirkcaldy in 1930, there have been several unions between congregations, while others have disappeared. Only two active churches remain in the town: the Carmelite convent and the Church of Scotland congregation now known as Dysart St Clair (based at the former Free Church in the West Port).

Vita Sancti Servani c.1200

Then St Serf came to Kinneil with no more than a hundred companions in his following; and he threw the staff he was holding across the sea, and a fruit-tree grew from it, which is called Morglas by men of the present time. Then the angel said to him, "That is where your body will rest, where that lovely tree has grown."⁵

⁴ The earliest written form of the Scottish Gaelic name *Dysart* can be translated as *place of hermitage or place of religious retreat*, Simon Taylor & Gilbert Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One. West Fife between Leven and Forth* (Donington, 2006), pp. 468-70.

⁵ Alan Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani: The Life of St Serf', *Innes Review* 44:2, (1993), 122-152 at 148.

Religious sites and the landscape of Dysart

It is likely that the establishment of a settlement at Dysart is the result use by the cave-based hermitage of St Serf, or another holy man, in the early Middle Ages. This establishment stimulated the development of a secular community in the vicinity of the site, taking advantage of the fishing and trading opportunities afforded by the harbour, and later of the mineral deposits in the rural hinterland. In the later Middle Ages, this community was served by a substantial parish church dominating the townscape. It played a dual role as a sacred centre and a component of the coastal defences of the northern shore of the Forth.

In the modern era, the proliferation of meeting places to serve the growing population had a major impact on the townscape of Dysart. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new churches were constructed in the town. The early nineteenth century also saw the reuse of parts of the redundant parish church of St Serf's as a family mausoleum, while later in the century the former Relief Church was converted into a handloom factory. This repurposing of redundant religious buildings has proved a model for the twentieth and early twentieth centuries, when mergers between denominations, the consolidation of congregations, and the general decline in church attendance, has left only two churches (the former Free Church in the West Port, and the Carmelite Convent in Dysart House), still in ecclesiastical use. In the modern era, the designation of a section of the town as Conservation area in 1978, and the work of the Dysart Trust and Fife Historic Buildings Trust (2008-2014), has also helped to identify, preserve, and promote the town's sacred heritage. This is particularly evident with the conservation work at St Serf's Church. In the last two decades, the trusts have worked with private enterprise to convert the redundant Barony and Relief/UP Churches into residential units, providing a solution to the problem of the deterioration of the fabric of these structures, and an answer to the demand for housing in what is a sought-after location along the Fife coast. The establishment of a convent at Dysart House in 1931 saw the conversion of a secular building into a sacred establishment. For modern Dysart however, it is the reuse of redundant churches for housing, combined with the exploitation of the town's sacred past to attract visitors, that is likely to see the most significant impact on the urban landscape in the present and near future.

1. Early Christianity (c500-c1000AD)

Site of Interest

St Serf's Cave

Nature of the Site

Dysart first enters the documentary record around the year 1200, however, it is clear that a community had existed there before that date.⁶ Dysart's early sacred history is connected to St Serf or Servanus (feast day 1 July). He was an important local saint with dedications across Western Fife, Kinross, and Clackmannanshire. The main centre of his cult was Culross, where a Cistercian abbey dedicated to St Serf and the Virgin Mary (1217) possessed his relics in the later Middle Ages. There exist several different traditions regarding the provenance of the saint. In the chronicle of John of Fordun (c.1380 but including earlier materials) and the Aberdeen Breviary (1509), Serf is described as a contemporary of St Palladius, placing his life and death in the 400s. Serf also appears in the legends of St Kentigern of Glasgow (d.614) and his mother Thanay/Enoch. This alternative tradition places his activities in the early 500s. According to the *Vita St Kentigerni* (composed in the twelfth century), the saint's pregnant mother (Thanay or Enoch) was washed up on the shore near Culross and tended by Serf. He became Kentigern's mentor, before that saint moved west to convert the kingdom of Strathclyde. A further tradition connects the saint with Adomnan of Iona (d.704). Using this tradition it is a date of around 700AD that is accepted by Alan Macquarrie, for the activities of the saint.⁷ The main source of information on the saint, the *Vita St Servani*, was composed sometime in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, probably at the abbey in Culross, and it includes the link between Dysart and St Serf.⁸ If the connection between Serf and Dysart is genuine, and we accept Macquarrie's c700 date for Serf, this would place the first settlement in the late seventh or early eighth century.⁹

⁶ Cosmo, Innes, ed, *Registrum de Dunfermelyn* (Bannatyne Club, 1842), no. 111

⁷ Alan Macquarrie, *Legends of Scottish Saints. Readings, hymns and prayers for the commemorations of Scottish saints in the Aberdeen Breviary* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 414-416.

⁸ Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani: The Life of St Serf', 150-151.

⁹ Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 468-470.

I. St Serf's Cave

Fig 3. St Serf's Cave, © Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd.¹⁰



The earliest documentary record of the cave at Dysart comes from the *Vita Sancti Servani* composed in the thirteenth century. According to the *Vita*, the cave was regularly used by Serf as a hermitage (a quiet spot intended for meditation). The *vita* includes one miracle that took place in the cave (changing water into wine), and a theological battle of wits between Serf and the Devil. The cave contains three natural chambers, into which benches have been carved, while steps and an ashlar door and a window between two

of the chambers were added at a much later date. Although recent commentators have suggested that Celi de monks used the cave, apart from the benches, there is no archaeological or documentary evidence for the use of the site prior to the late Middle Ages.¹¹

Vita Sancti Servani c.1200

At one time St Serf was in the cave of Dysart with a brother monk who was ill and wanted to have wine to drink, but could not obtain any. Then St Serf took water from the spring that was there and blessed it, and it was changed into wine, and the sick man was healed. But in the same cave St Serf was lying in his bed one night after Matins, when the Devil came to him to tempt and dispute with him. The Devil said to him, 'Do you think you are a wise clerk, Serf?' He answered, 'What do you want, most wretched of creatures?' The Devil said, I would like to dispute with you, and ask you some questions.' St Serf said, 'Begin, wretch, begin'.

(following a long discussion)

*The Devil then seeing that he could not prevail against the holy man, but that he was defeated in the disputation, said, 'You are wise, Serf, and I cannot dispute with you further.' Serf answered, 'Go, wretch, go, and leave here quickly; and never appear to any man again in this place.' And that place is held sacred in honour of the thrice holy St Serf to this very day.*¹²

1510 Aberdeen Breviary

*Once, however the devil tempted St Serf with many questions in the cave of Dysart, but by divine power he withdrew in confusion, and from that day the devil has never reappeared to anyone in that cave; and the place is held famous in honour of St Serf until now.*¹³

¹⁰ 'St Serf's Cave, Dysart', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 15 April, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10547/image/19341/name/St.+Serf%27s+Cave%2C+Dysart+Kirkcaldy+and+Dysart+Fife>.

¹¹ 'St Serf's Cave, Dysart', *Places of Worship in Scotland*,

¹² Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani', 150-151.

¹³ Macquarrie, *Legends of Scottish Saints*, pp. 159-161.

2. High Medieval Christianity (1000-1300)

Sites of Interest

Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

Introduction/Nature of the Site

The settlement of Dysart first appears in charters from the early thirteenth century, however, it is clear a community existed there before that time. There are few early records relating to the town, in part, because of a fire that destroyed Dysart House in 1722. The port was part of the trading hinterland of the Royal Burgh of Inverkeithing, while the parish church was termed a free parsonage.¹⁴ The majority of Scottish parish churches were gifted by the crown and local noblemen to monasteries or other religious institution. The institution would 'appropriate' a proportion of the tithe revenues of the church, in return for providing a priest and maintaining the building. Chartularies of appropriating institutions like monastic houses and cathedral chapters are often key sources of information for parish churches in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As it had an independent church, and the port was under the jurisdiction of Inverkeithing, there is limited information on high medieval Dysart.

I. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

The earliest record of the parish church of Dysart occurs in the context of a dispute between it and the church of Kirkcaldy belonging to the Abbey of Dunfermline. The Bishop of Dunblane settled the dispute in 1220 by ordering the monks of Dunfermline to pay the rector of Dysart 100 shillings per year.¹⁵ From this charter it is clear that, before a formal system of parishes was introduced to Fife in the twelfth century, Dysart had acted as the mother church for the district, and that Kirkcaldy and several other churches had been its dependent chapels.¹⁶ Twenty six years later, the church was visited and consecrated by David de Bernham, bishop of St Andrews, and in 1274, the church was noted as a free parsonage, contributing 2 merks 5s 4d to a Papal tax intended to fund a crusade.¹⁷ There is no evidence indicating the size or shape of the church that served the inhabitants of Dysart in the high middle ages.

1246 (26 Mar) Pontifical Offices of St Andrews

These are the churches that bishop David [of Birnam] has dedicated: —...

*Dysart...on 26 March.*¹⁸

¹⁴ All ships and boats using the harbour had to pay a tax to the officials of that town, Patricia Dennison, 'Medieval Burghs', in Donald Omand, eds, *The Fife book* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000), pp 136-144, at 139.

¹⁵ Innes, ed, *Registrum de Dunfermelyn*, nos. 111 & 112.

¹⁶ Richard Oram, 'Dysart- History', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 15 April 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158540>, Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 468.

¹⁷ Annie, I Dunlop, ed, 'Bagimond's Roll: Statement of the Tenths of the Kingdom of Scotland', *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, vi (1939), pp 3-80 at 37.

¹⁸ Alan O. Anderson, ed, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, (London, 1922), ii, 525.

3. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)

Sites of Interest

St Serf's Cave

Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

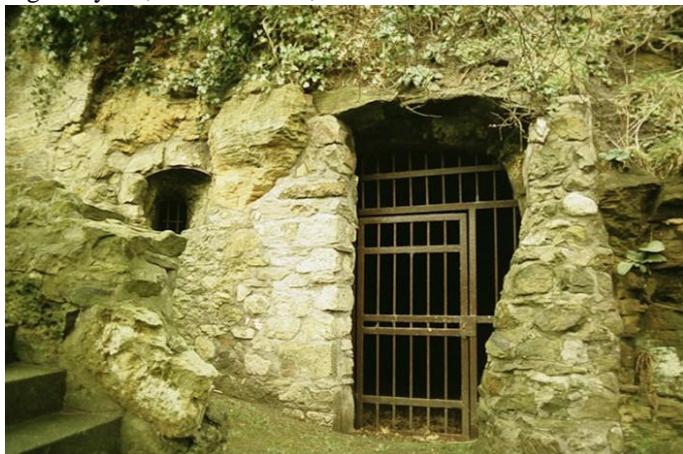
Chapel of St Dennis

Introduction/Nature of the Site

The later Middle Ages were a time of expansion and economic development for the community at Dysart, particularly after the town and surrounding countryside came into the control of the Sinclair or St Clair family c.1407. The export of salt and coal from the harbour to the Low Countries is first recorded in the 1450s. Dysart had been made a Burgh of Barony and was no longer subject to the control of Inverkeithing at some point before 1510. This growing prosperity, and the patronage of the Sinclair family, was reflected in the construction of an impressive parish church in the late fifteenth century, which Richard Fawcett has stated *must be regarded as one of the most important buildings of the area*.¹⁹ There is also some evidence that a further chapel may have been founded in Dysart in this period, and that St Serf's Cave was visited by pilgrims.

I. St Serf's Cave

Fig 4. Dysart, St Serf's Cave, @ R. Fawcett.²⁰



There is interesting evidence that would suggest that the cave at Dysart was part of a pilgrim trail in the late Middle Ages. The lessons of St Serf in the Aberdeen Breviary, published in 1509-10, noted that *the place (Dysart) is held famous in honour of St Serf until now*. A property case at the Sheriff Court of Cupar in 1517 noted the existence of a chaplain *of the cave of St Serf in Dysart*. It is possible that some of the alterations to the cave, such as the ashlar door and pointed arch window, were added at this time.

The cave is known locally as the *Rud Chapel*, or *Chapel of the Holy Rood*, although there is no medieval evidence to support this dedication.²¹

1510 Aberdeen Breviary

¹⁹ Richard Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 15 April 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158540>.

²⁰ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

²¹ Jim Swan & Carol McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh* (Dysart, 1997), p. 76.

*Once, however the devil tempted St Serf with many questions in the cave of Dysart, but by divine power he withdrew in confusion, and from that day the devil has never reappeared to anyone in that cave; and the place is held famous in honour of St Serf **until now**.*²²

4 Aug 1517

A Fife Sheriff Court record noted that *an annual rent of 6s 8d per year was owed from the lands of Skeddoway to the chaplain of the cave of St Serf in Dysart.*²³ The reference was included in a document outlining the terms of the tenancy of the lands of Skeddoway (Dysart) inherited from his father by David Allerdies.

II. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

The parish church remained a free parsonage in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, worth around £40 per year. This changed in 1477, when it was annexed to the collegiate church of St Mary on the Rock at St Andrews. The income from the church at Dysart was thereafter used to fund a member of the clergy at St Mary's (this was known as a prebend), who was obliged to pay 60 marks per year *for the increase of divine worship*. This meant in practice paying for the parish priest. Later records indicate he was paid around 40 marks per year and provided with a manse.²⁴ In the fifteenth century, the earlier church was expanded into a large and impressive structure. This appears to have involved the lengthening of the nave and the addition of two aisles. Afterwards, the most significant addition was the eight-storey tower and porch. Richard Fawcett has suggested the tower *was clearly always intended to be the most prominent feature of the church.*²⁵ It had an unusual martial appearance: shot holes in the two lowest storeys of the south side and may well have been part of the coastal defences along northern shore of the Forth. The eighth storey (the garret) was provided with a fireplace, suggesting that it may have been occupied by a watchman. It has a roof with rafters dated to a period between 1502 and 1511. Although there is little documentary evidence to provide a firm date for the construction of the church, Fawcett has suggested that the main building work took place in the early 1400s, with the tower and porch added in the early 1500s.²⁶

²² Macquarrie, *Legends of Scottish Saints*, pp. 159-161.

²³ William Croft Dickinson, *Sheriff Court Book of Fife, 1515-1522* (Edinburgh, 1928), p. 80.

²⁴ John Kirk, ed, *The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 70, 71 and 188.

²⁵ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

²⁶ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

Fig 5. Dysart Old Parish Church, exterior from north east, @ R. Fawcett.²⁷



This embellishment of the church was partly a result of the medieval development of the doctrine of purgatory. This was the idea that most people did not proceed directly to heaven when they died, but spent time in an unpleasant waiting area. Receiving official sanction from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, it was believed that to lessen the time your soul spent in purgatory it was important to lead a good life, to die well, and to secure prayers and masses for your soul after death. The most effective form of such prayers by the later Middle Ages were those performed by priests at chapels and altars dedicated to saints, who would be expected to intercede with God on your

behalf. The precarious nature of life in the era of war, famine, and plague combined with this new doctrine, brought about a proliferation of such altar foundations, known as chantries or chaplainries in Scottish churches. The church of Dysart and its high altar were dedicated to St Serf, and there are several references in wills to parishioners seeking burial in that part of the church.²⁸ There were several further altars in the body of the church. The chaplain of the altar of St James (the patron saint of pilgrims) was first recorded in 1545, and an altar dedicated to St Anne (the mother of the Virgin Mary), was recorded in 1549.

Dedications to biblical figures became increasingly prevalent in the latter part of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in Scotland, and altars dedicated to Anne could be found in most of the large churches including cathedrals at Glasgow and Aberdeen and churches in St Andrews, Corstorphine, Edinburgh (St Giles and St Cuthbert's), Haddington, Linlithgow, Paisley, Perth, and Stirling.²⁹ St James was particularly popular in Fife, with dedications to the saint found at Cupar, Crail, Kinghorn Easter, North Queensferry, and St Andrews. Altar's dedicated to St James are found throughout in large churches from the late Middle Ages. His popularity in Scotland stemmed from his role as the patron saint of pilgrim and as the name saint for several members of the Stewart Royal House. More unusual was the dedicatees of an altar in the new aisle constructed at the church in 1545. It was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St Magnus of Kirkwall. While dedications to Mary are very common, those to Orcadian saint Magnus are rare in mainland Scotland. This is strong evidence that it was the private chapel of the Sinclair family, located in south chancel. The family's mainlands had been in Orkney, before they were exchanged with the crown for estates in Fife and elsewhere in the fifteenth century.³⁰

Early 'rectors'

²⁷ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

²⁸ NRS St Andrews, Register of Testaments, 1 Aug 1549-12 Dec 1551, CC20/4/1, fols, 14 & 79.

²⁹ Tom Turpie, *Kind Neighbours. Scottish Saints and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2015), pp. 70-89.

³⁰ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

1402-1406 church held by two Crown appointments, 1) Richard Knight (envoy of Robert III). 2). From 1406-38 John Leche (chaplain of Robert III), value is £40.³¹ 1438 on death of Leche (or man of same name) James Forrester collated (value £45).³²

Annexation

1477 Calendar of Papal Letters

William Mowat resigns the church in favour of Thomas Kennedy, in return for annual pension of 55 marks from the fruits. 1478 church erected into a prebend of St Mary on the Rock, Thomas becomes a canon and retains the church. *He and his successors enjoined to pay 60 marks yearly for the increase of divine worship in the said church. Thomas complained that he cannot afford the 60 marks and the 55-mark pension, as a result 60 marks dropped to 20 marks.*³³

Altars and chapels in the church

1545 3 October

Protest by Alexander Roust, for himself and in the name of Thomas Francs (Franche), masons in Linlithgow, for damages and expenses occurred through non-implemment to them by Mr John Hepburn, rector of Dalry, of his obligations under a contract betwixt them and him for building an aisle in the parish church of Dysart in honour of God Almighty, the **Blessed Virgin Mary and St Magnus**.³⁴ In 1543-44 Franche had worked as Master of the Masons on the New College in St Andrews.³⁵

Dec 1545

George Strachachin was inducted chaplain of the altar of **St James the Apostle** in the parish church of Dysart at the hour of 8pm at the said altar for his whole life.³⁶

2 Oct 1544

Agnes Melville, widow of John Lathrisk, gave £100 for the soul of her late spouse and those of her parents to the **altar of St Ann the mother**, situated in the church of St Serf in the town of Dysart.³⁷

9 Aug 1549

³¹ Francis McGurk, ed., *Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland of Benedict XIII of Avignon (1394-1419)* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1976), 97 & 136, William Henry Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal Petitions* (London: GRO, 1893), p. 622.

³² Annie I. Dunlop, ed., *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1433-1447* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press 1983), no. 498.

³³ William Henry Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal letters* (London: GRO, 1893), xiii, 563, 578 & 590.

³⁴ James Beveridge & James Russell, eds, *Protocol Book of Dominus Thomas Johnsoun, 1528-1578* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society, 1920), no. 345. John Hepburn seems to have been in the entourage of, and was probably related to, Patrick Hepburn, bishop of Moray (1538-73) whose sister Margaret (d.1542) was married to William Sinclair, 2nd earl of Caithness (d. 1513). John witnessed her last charter in 1542 and was also recorded as escorting Elizabeth Sinclair (nee. Keith) to view the body at Ravenscraig castle shortly after, William Muir, ed, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart* (Glasgow: Maitland Club 1853), p.8. As Richard Fawcett suggests, the Sinclair connection probably explains the fairly rare (outside of the far north at least) Magnus dedication, Richard Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

³⁵ Robert Kerr Hannay, *Rentale Sancti Andree* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1913), p.198.

³⁶ Muir, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart*, p.15.

³⁷ Muir, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart*, p. 13.

*Testament of Margaret Touris specifies burial before the altar of St Anne in the parish church of Dysart, she paid 41s toward the burial.*³⁸

III. Chapel of St Dennis

Fig 6. St Serf's Tower and the Pan Ha (Turpie).



One further religious building may have been built in late medieval Dysart. This was a chapel said to be dedicated to *St Dennis*, probably St Denis/Denys, one of the patron saints of France. It was said to have been located at Pan Ha', a low-lying stretch of land close to the Forth, occupied by salt pans in the Middle Ages.³⁹ William Muir, who edited a book of Dysart records in 1853, suggested that the altar of St Anne, mentioned in 1544, was in the chapel of St Denis. The record however, as Taylor and Markus note, clearly states that it was in the church of St Serf.⁴⁰ Writing in 1794, George Muirhead noted the local tradition that the chapel had been part of a Dominican Friary. Cowan and Easson concluded that there *is no reliable evidence* there was ever a

Dominican house in Dysart, although it has been speculated that they owned property in the town.⁴¹ The ruins of the building were converted into a forge shortly before 1794, and an Ordnance Survey of 1853/54 found some old walls, but no remains of a chapel. There is no firm evidence to support the existence of the chapel, with the earliest discussion dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

1789 Rev George Muirhead

Responding to a letter asking about the chapel; *All that we have been able to collect from tradition is that there had been a priory of Black friars at this place. Their chapel was named St Denis and had long been in a ruinous state till it was lately repaired and converted to a forge.....What remained most entire of it was a building of 30 feet by 16, two storeys, the under half having a vent in the end.*⁴²

1794 Rev George Muirhead

*There was a priory of Black Friars in Dysart. Their chapel, called St Dennis, was long in a ruinous state, but was lately converted into a forge.*⁴³

1845 Rev David Murray

*Towards the south or lower part of the town of Dysart, there was anciently a small chapel, generally said to have been dedicated to St Dennis; it is still called St Dennis's Chapel; part of the original wall is standing; but the building has long been used as a smithy.*⁴⁴

³⁸ NRS St Andrews, Register of Testaments, 1 Aug 1549-12 Dec 1551, CC20/4/1, fols, 15-16.

³⁹ Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 469

⁴¹ Ian B Cowan and David E. Easson, *Medieval religious houses in Scotland: with an appendix on the houses in the Isle of Man* (London, 1976), p. 122.

⁴² Cited in Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, p. 80.

⁴³ OSA, (1794), xii, 522n.

⁴⁴ NSA, (1845), ix, 134.

1840 John Leighton

*Although not mentioned in Spottiswoode's list of religious houses, there is said to have been a priory of black friars in Dysart, the chapel of which was dedicated to St Dennis. Part of the old wall of this chapel, which still retains its name, yet remains, but it has for a long period been converted into a smithy. Near the chapel of St Dennis is the old church of Dysart.*⁴⁵

1853 William Muir

*The altarafe of St. Anne was in the chapel dedicated to St. Denis, the situation of which is well defined in this deed — "infra ecclesiam sancti serviani — infra villam de dyst.*⁴⁶

1853 Ordnance Survey

*The Revd. [Reverend] Mr. Muir who has lately been delivering lectures on the antiquities of Dysart says "In an old deed I have found the situation of St. Dennis' Chapel well defined" - "The Chapel contained one Altar dedicated to St. Anne the Matron. The last Mortification I have found made to the Romish Church, was made to the Altarafe on the 2nd October 1544 by Agnes Melville of the..."*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, p. 161.

⁴⁶ Muir, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart*, p. 13 & 16. The record reproduced by Muir in his volume only mentions the church of St Serf.

⁴⁷ 'Ordnance Survey Name Books Fife and Kinross-shire, 1853-1855', *Scotland's Places*, Accessed 21 April 2021, <https://scotlandspplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books/fife-and-kinross-shire-os-name-books-1853-1855/fife-and-kinross-shire-volume-70?display=transcription>

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

Sites of Interest

Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)
 Dysart Relief Church 'The Auld House'
 Pathhead Anti-Burgher Church

Introduction/Nature of the Site

The early modern period was one of economic peaks and troughs for Dysart. It began with an era of economic and demographic expansion roughly from 1560-1630 based around the salt and coal trade. This was followed by a period of hardship and decline in the mid-seventeenth century, including a five-year occupation by Oliver Cromwell's forces (1651-56). Dysart recovered in the late eighteenth century again as there was a further upswing in the salt and coal industries, around those trades and the textile industry. The boom in the second half of the eighteenth century saw a significant increase in the population of the town and the surrounding villages, which from the mid-1700s were served by Anti-Burgher and Relief churches, in addition to the established church. By the 1790s, even the reduced congregation at St Serf's could no longer be comfortably housed in the parish church.⁴⁸

I. Dysart Parish Church (St Serf's)

Following the Protestant Reformation, the large and aisled church at Dysart was found to be poorly suited to the new, preaching-focused, form of worship. The church required regular repairs from the 1580s onwards. A survey carried out in 1778 showed that the congregation used only part of the nave of the medieval church, abandoning the aisles and the chancel. This was an arrangement likely in place after 1560.⁴⁹ In the early 1790s, an architect produced plans for rebuilding the church, however, in the Statistical Account of 1794, the minister George Muirhead complained that these plans had not been carried out. This left him with a church ill-suited to preaching and too small for a congregation large enough to have been served by two ministers in the eighteenth century. Muirhead had much to say about the religious habits of the people of Dysart, partly attributing the large numbers who attended the *sectaries*, or did not attend church at all, to the lack of space in St Serf's.

⁴⁸ OSA, (1794), xii, 505-507

⁴⁹ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

Fig 7. Dysart Old Parish Church, interior of Sinclair Aisle @ R. Fawcett.⁵⁰



Following the Reformation, some of the abandoned sections of the church were used as family burial chapels. The south chancel aisle was separated from the rest of the church and became (or more likely continued as) the burial place of the Sinclair family. A visitation of the church in 1636 found it in a state of decay, which Lord Sinclair promised to remedy. In 1663, a local burgess, David Christisone, requested that his father be buried in the choir (which had also fallen into disuse), as it was the burial place of his

ancestors.

Repairs

1583 A date stone on the church suggests it was in that year that the programme of extensive repairs was carried out by the town council whose magistrates appointed a slater to *turf and theik* the whole church and *mend the hollis*.⁵¹ A note in the council records from 17 Jan 1583 mentions a contract with a slater anent the repairing of the kirk, £9 paid to the slater.⁵²

1610 more repairs were carried out in that year, but 9 years later there was a riot amongst the congregation who took out their annoyance at the deposition of the minister on the fabric of the church.⁵³

1626 (3 Jan) Andrew Hirdfor paid 10 marks for mending the windows upon the southern side of the church and in Sinclair aisle.⁵⁴

1668 (30 Aug) the session notes the hazard in which the fabric of the church was if it should not be repaired and helped before the winter and considering that there was little hope of getting money off the parishioners, they decide to stent the heritors.⁵⁵

1668 (27 Dec) the treasurer John Ballrie presents his compt for the expenses of the repair of the church, the two largest costs were £38 13s 4d to two slaters John Youle and John Anderson, and £41 16s 8d for repairing the glass windows. Total cost of the materials and men was £128 1s 10d.⁵⁶

Burial Aisles

1636 (16 June) visitation of Dysart by the Pres of Kirkcaldy finds the minister to be competent, but the brethren regretted the state of the church. My lord Sinclair's aisle is

⁵⁰ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

⁵¹ Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, p. 78.

⁵² NRS Dysart Court and Council Book, 1581-1585, B21/8/4, fol. 41.

⁵³ Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, p. 79.

⁵⁴ NRS Dysart Kirk Session, 1619-1643, CH2/390/1, fol. 49.

⁵⁵ NRS Dysart Kirk Session, 1654-1695, CH2/390/3, fols. 79-80.

⁵⁶ NRS Dysart Kirk Session, 1654-1695, CH2/390/3, fols. 84-85.

altogether decayed in the glass windows. Lord Sinclair was present and promised to repair the same with all diligence.⁵⁷

1668 (24 Feb) Lady Catherine Carnegie died at Dysart and was interred **in Lord Sinclair's aisle** in the parish church of Dysart.⁵⁸

1663 (3 Feb) request by David Christisone, junior who requests to the kirk session that his late father might be buried in **the choir**, in the burial place of his predecessors. He is prepared to give the session 100 marks for the poor box.⁵⁹

OSA, Rev George Muirhead, 1794

The church is old; its date unknown; tradition says it was built by the Picts. The architect, if he intended it for preaching, cannot be praised for its contrivance. It is dark, the side walls low, and the incumbencies of pillars mean that it is difficult to make the voice reach it.⁶⁰ About a year ago the kirk session applied to the heritors to make it more commodious. An architect was desired to inspect it, who gave in some plans of alteration, and there the matter stands... Numbers are obliged to take seats in neighbouring congregations; some go to the sectaries; others, it is to be feared, take advantage of this circumstance to forsake public worship altogether..... The people, in general, attend church regularly, but a few are beginning to be so fashionable as to attend only occasionally.⁶¹

Muirhead had much to say about his congregation:

To see religion proper among them, would gratify the highest wish of their pastor, who, having the comfort to be settled in the place of his nativity, and being called to be a fellow labourer with his father in the same charge, could not possibly desire a more eligible situation for the exercise of his ministerial functions. He cannot be but interested in everything that relates to them, and especially in what concerns their eternal welfare; and his joy would be great, to perceive from their conduct, that his labours among them have not been in vain.⁶²

⁵⁷ NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fols. 169-170.

⁵⁸ William Fraser, *History of the Carnegies Earls of Southesk and their Kindred* (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 122.

⁵⁹ NRS Dysart Kirk Session, 1654-1695, CH2/390/3, fol. 11.

⁶⁰ *OSA*, (1794), xii, 518-19.

⁶¹ *OSA*, (1794), xii, 519n.

⁶² *OSA*, (1794), xii, 523-524.

II. Dysart Relief Church ‘The Auld House’

George Muirhead noted in 1794 that people from Dysart attended three Non-Conformist churches. One (the Burghers) was in Kirkcaldy, while the Anti-Burghers and Relief had churches in the parish, with congregations which, combined, included 552 Dysart families. The Relief Church was founded in 1752 by Thomas Gillespie, a former minister of the church of Scotland, who had been deposed for opposing the presentation of ministers by right of patronage. The Relief Congregation at Dysart, founded sometime in the 1760s, was one of the earliest to be formed. In 1772 they opened their own church, which later became known as the *Auld House*, in a former malt barn on Relief Street. It cost £600 and could sit 650 people.⁶³

OSA, Rev George Muirhead, 1794

(having blamed the size of the parish church for the numbers of people resorting to *sectaries*) Muirhead noted; *Almost the only sectaries in the parish are Burghers, Anti-Burghers and Relief, amounting in all to 552 families. The two last mentioned have churches in the parish, the former attend worship in Kirkcaldy parish. The animosity between the churches and secession, is now happily much abated. The people, in general, attend church regularly, but a few are beginning to be so fashionable as to attend only occasionally.*⁶⁴

III. Pathhead Anti-Burgher Church

In 1794, George Muirhead noted that people from Dysart attended three Non-Conformist churches. One (the Burghers) was in Kirkcaldy, while the Anti-Burghers and Relief had churches in the parish, with congregations which, combined, included 552 Dysart families. Following the succession of one group who opposed the presentation of ministers by right of patronage from the Church of Scotland in 1733, , there was a further split in 1747. That was between those who supported (Burghers) and those who opposed (Anti-Burghers) the Burgher Oath, which required holders of public offices to approve what was described as religion "presently professed in this kingdom". The Anti-Burgher Congregation in Dysart was formed in 174 They initially met in an old barn before constructing their own church in 1763 at a cost of £100. It could sit 795. It was located in Pathhead (present day Kirkcaldy) in the parish of Dysart at the time.⁶⁵

⁶³ Robert Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900* (Edinburgh, 1904), ii, 384-386.

⁶⁴ *OSA*, (1791), xii, 519n.

⁶⁵ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, ii, 357-59.

The early twentieth century saw the collapse of the textile and coal industries and the decline of the harbour as a commercial entity. These financial problems forced the merger of Dysart with Kirkcaldy in 1930. A community of Roman Catholic Carmelite Nuns was established at Dysart House after 1931. The property formerly belonged to the Sinclair family and which includes St Serf's Cave. In the twentieth century, denominational mergers and unions between congregations have seen the closure of churches. By 1952, in addition to the nuns, there were two Church of Scotland congregations in Dysart, as well as a United Free Church.⁶⁷ In 2021, only the Carmelite Convent and the former Free Church in the West Port (Dysart St Clair's) are active churches in Dysart.

I. St Serf's Cave

St Serf's Cave was used as a wine cellar for Dysart House in the eighteenth century. It did not attract the interest of the authors of the first (1794) or second (1845) Statistical Accounts. In the mid-nineteenth century, the cave began to garner antiquarian interest: with William Muir (1853), the Ordnance Survey Name Books (1850s), John Geddie (1894) recording the legend of St Serf and the Devil, and Geddie noting that it had been recently turned into an oratory. The cave is now on the property of the Carmelites and is occasionally open to the public on special occasions such as Doors Open Day.

Ordnance Survey Name Book (1853-1855)

2 Chains NW [Northwst] of the Church is a cave, said to have been at one time tenanted by the Devil. The Revd. [Reverend] William Muir who has been making great research respecting the antiquities in the neighbourhood, in his lecture says "The inhabitants of Dysart were too timid to take effectual measures to eject him or too weak to succeed. Fortunately, they thought of applying to St. Serf for aid & sending a deputation to Portmoak imploring the aid of that Saint, he is said to have come to Dysart & ejected the Devil from the Cave."⁶⁸

William Muir 1853

The parish church of Dysart was dedicated to St. Serf, and most deservedly, if Popish legends are to be credited; that powerful saint having done the inhabitants of Dysart the service of ejecting the Devil from a cave in the vicinity of the town.⁶⁹

John Geddie, 1894,

Hardly is there room for the strings of coal carts to pass on their dusty way — the Via Carbonaria — between the ruined porch and arches of St. Serf's and the retaining wall of the grounds of Dysart House, inside of which, within a stone-throw of the Church, is the cave, now turned into an oratory, where the Saint, who made Dysart his "desert," was so sorely tempted of Satan.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), pp. 485-486.

⁶⁸ 'Ordnance Survey Name Books Fife and Kinross-shire, 1853-1855', *Scotland's Places*

⁶⁹ Muir, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ John Geddie, *The Fringes of Fife* (Edinburgh, 1894), pp. 99-101.

II. Dysart Parish Church (St Serfs/Barony Church)

Fig 9. Dysart Barony Church @Richard Fawcett, 2012.⁷¹



In 1802-03, the congregation moved a new parish church in an event known locally as *the year of the big flittin*.⁷² Known as the Barony Church and capable of sitting 1600 people, it was located to the north of the old parish at the top of the town. Designed by Alexander Laing, David Murray described it as *a neat plain building* in 1845, by which point the congregation was around 1200. This had risen slightly by 1851 when it was recorded that 1088 attended the morning service, and 1140 the afternoon service.⁷³ A

hall was added to the building in 1932. The congregation merged with St. Serf's United Free Church in 1972 to become Dysart Parish Church; it moved to the latter's building in the West Port. It was used by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) until 1997. Recently, it was converted into affordable housing as part of Fife Historic Buildings Trust project (2008-2014).⁷⁴

Fig 10. Engraving of the Old Church of St Serf's, 1853.⁷⁵



The old parish church of St Serf's was abandoned following the construction of the Barony Church and its roof was removed and sold. The north aisle was demolished in 1805 to make way for a wagonway taking coal from the Engine Pit to the harbour. Shortly after this, the Sinclair burial aisle (formerly the south chancel aisle) was reconstructed and provided with a new roof so that it might be used as a mausoleum for the family of the earl of Rosslyn. Repairs were

carried out at tower of the church in the 1890s following the acquisition of the estate of the earls by Sir Michael Nairn. Further work has been carried out by the Dysart Trust which has been responsible for several historic buildings in the burgh since 1964. The tower is opened to the public on Doors Open day each year. Between 2008 and 2014, Fife Historic Buildings Trust

⁷¹ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

⁷² Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, p. 82.

⁷³ *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p 25.

⁷⁴ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'. 'Dysart', *Fife Historic Buildings Trust*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <https://fifehistoricbuildings.org.uk/project/dysart/>.

⁷⁵ Muir, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart*, p. 22.

led a major 5-year project in Dysart, which included the conversion of the Barony Church into affordable housing, and repairs to St Serf's Tower.⁷⁶

1845 Rev David Murray

*Near to St Dennis' chapel, stands the old church of Dysart. Its remains bear all the signature of it having been a splendid and venerable building. On one of the windows the date 1570 has been observed. The steeple and porch, however, are evidently of more ancient workmanship.*⁷⁷

*The (new) parish church was built in 1802. It is a neat plain building, is seated for 1600 examinable persons, and cost from £1800 - £2000'. Its situation, which is at the top of the town, is fully convenient for the parishioners in general...The number usually attending the parish church is from 1200 to 1300...There are about 1800 names on the communion roll; but of this number not more than 600 or 700 communicate in the parish church, at each sacrament.*⁷⁸

RCHAMS field visit 1925

*The ruins of this church stand close to the sea, not far from Dysart harbour, and may be identified from a considerable distance by the great western tower (Fig. 254 [SC 1107080]), which rises 74 feet in height from ground to parapet. The church dates mainly, if not entirely, from the early 16th century and has been an oblong of 141 ¾ by 50 feet, comprising a central nave with north and south aisles. The north aisle has been removed, and a road runs over its site, while the nave and south aisle are fragmentary. The western tower is built out from the south aisle, which is unusual but not exceptional, for at St. Giles, Edinburgh, and at St. Michael's, Cupar (NO31SE 15), there were towers similarly placed.*⁷⁹

III. Dysart Relief Church/United Presbyterian

Fig. 11. United Presbyterian Church, Normand Road@ Stuart Mee (Dec. 2007).⁸⁰



The Relief Church was one of the two *dissenting chapels* in the parish noted by David Murray, the minister of the new Barony Church in 1845. He estimated they had a combined congregation of 800-900. The congregation joined the United Presbyterian Church in 1847 and the 1851 census recorded 285 attendees at the morning service and 336 in the afternoon.⁸¹ By 1867, they had outgrown the *Auld House* and moved to a new church on Normand road at a cost of £2600. The old building was sold and turned into a handloom factory. The new church could hold 650 people, and

⁷⁶ 'Our Trust', *The Dysart Trust*, accessed 11 May 2021, <http://www.dysart-trust.org.uk/ourtrust/ourtrust.htm>.

⁷⁷ *NSA*, (1845), ix, 134.

⁷⁸ *NSA*, (1845), ix, 142.

⁷⁹ Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* (Edinburgh, 1933), pp. 130-31.

⁸⁰ 'Normand Road United Free Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/6200/name/Normand+Road+United+Free+Church+Kirkcaldy+and+Dysart+Fife> (Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us for permission to use this image)/

⁸¹ *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p 25.

in 1899, they had a congregation of around 500.⁸² In 1900 the UP Church joined with the Free Church to become the United Free Church. When many United Free congregations rejoined the Church of Scotland in 1929, The parish chose to remain independent. The church closed in 2009 and was sold in 2014. The new owners received planning permission to convert it into residential units the following year.⁸³

David Murray, 1845

*There are two dissenting chapels in the parish, the one belonging to the Synod of Relief, the other to the Anti-Burghers. ...the usual congregation in both places does not exceed 800 or 900 at the most.*⁸⁴

John Leighton, 1840

*There is a chapel connected with the Relief Synod at Dysart, of which the Rev. William A. Pettigrew is minister; and one belonging to the Associate Synod of Original Seceders, of which the Rev. James Black, A. M. is minister*⁸⁵

Robert Small, 1900

*The present church, on a more prominent site, was built in 1867 at a cost of £2600, with sittings for 650. The old building was then turned into a hand-loom factory. A new manse was built in 1876 at a cost of £1120, of which the people were to raise £870, and the Board allowed £250. The membership at the close of 1899 was within a unit of 500, and the stipend £280, with the manse.*⁸⁶

IV. Pathhead Anti-Burgher Church

The minister of the Anti-Burgher Church, Thomas Gray, opposed the union with the Burgher's in 1820. This resulted in the loss of 2/5 of his congregation in the process to the new Union Church in Kirkcaldy. In 1845, his church was one of the two *dissenting chapels* in the parish noted by David Murray, the minister of the new Barony Church. He estimated they had a combined congregation of 800-900. The census recorded 362 attendees at the morning service in 1851 and 330 in the afternoon. The congregation voted by a majority of 40 to 6 to merge with the Free Church in 1852, after which they became known as Dunnikier Free Church. In 1901, the church was sold and the congregation moved to a new building on Dunnikier Road. The church was demolished in 1967.⁸⁷

⁸² Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, ii, 384-386.

⁸³ 'Normand Road United Free Church', *Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <https://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/details/1041094>.

⁸⁴ NSA, (1845), ix, 142.

⁸⁵ Leighton, *History of the County of Fife*, iii, p. 159.

⁸⁶ Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, ii, 384.

⁸⁷ 'Old Dunnikier Free Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10561/name/Old+Dunnikier+Free+Church+Kirkcaldy+and+Dysart+Fife>, William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, p 145

David Murray, 1845

*There are two dissenting chapels in the parish, the one belonging to the Synod of Relief, the other to the Anti-Burghers. ...the usual congregation in both places does not exceed 800 or 900 at the most.*⁸⁸

John Leighton, 1840

*There is a chapel connected with the Relief Synod at Dysart, of which the Rev. William A. Pettigrew is minister; and one belonging to the Associate Synod of Original Seceders, of which the Rev. James Black, A. M. is minister.*⁸⁹

V. Dysart Free Church

Fig 12. Dysart St Clair Parish Church, @ Richard Fawcett.⁹⁰



Following the Great Disruption in 1843, the minister of Dysart, John Thomson, and a large part of the congregation joined the Free Church.⁹¹ Their first church was opened the following year (1844) on the corner of West Quality Street and Fitzroy Street. The census of 1851 recorded 759 attendees at the morning service and 955 in the afternoon.⁹² The congregation had outgrown the building by 1874, as such, a new church was constructed in the West Port, described by Richard Fawcett as a *compact parish church*

*in a Romanesque style.*⁹³ The old church was sold and had become a Masonic Lodge by 1890. In the north transept of the new church, there is a mural, uncovered in 2004, and believed to have been painted by Charles Rennie Mackintosh in 1901.

Following the union between the Free and United Presbyterian churches in 1900, it became known as St. Serf's United Free. The congregation re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929. In 1972, the parish merged with the Barony Church to become Dysart Parish Church using the building in the West Port. A union between the congregations of Dysart and Viewforth occurred in 2012; the resulting church is known as Dysart St Clair Parish Church and is still based in the church in the West Port.

⁸⁸ NSA, (1845), ix, 142.

⁸⁹ Leighton, *History of the County of Fife*, iii, p. 159.

⁹⁰ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

⁹¹ Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, ii, p. 144.

⁹² *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p 25.

⁹³ Fawcett, 'Dysart- Architecture'.

Fig 13. Mackintosh Mural – Image credit Elisabeth Viguie-Culshaw.⁹⁴



VI. Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded in New York State by Joseph Smith in 1830. Missionaries began arriving in Scotland in the late 1830s and 1840s. A branch had been founded in Dysart by 1851 with 81 members noted in the census of that year.⁹⁵ After an early success, the church in Scotland declined in the late part of the nineteenth century due to a combination of the emigration of its members and persecution. The headquarters in Utah hold records of its membership up until 1875, when the congregation seems to have closed.⁹⁶ Where they met is unclear.

⁹⁴ 'Mackintosh Mural', *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society*, Accessed 5 May 2021, <https://www.crmsociety.com/whats-on/mackintosh-mural/>.

⁹⁵ *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, p 25.

⁹⁶ 'Dysart, Fife', *Family Search*, Accessed 11 May 2021, https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Dysart,_Fife,_Scotland_Genealogy.

VII. Carmelite Nunnery

Fig 14. Dysart Carmelite Convent, Stuart Mee (Dec. 2007).⁹⁷



Dysart House, first built in 1756, was sold in May 1930, to Mrs Elsa Wetterstedt Mitchell, and a month later she gifted it to the trustees for the Sisters of the Carmelite Community.⁹⁸ They established a closed community with room for 24 nuns. They belong to the order known as the Discalced or Teresian Carmelites, who were formed in the sixteenth century by St Teresa of Avila. The convent is dedicated to St Thérèse of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who died in 1897. It became an Infirmary Carmel in the 1980s and was

dedicated to the care of the sick and older nuns of the order. Mass and other services are now held in the convent for members of the public.⁹⁹

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

Following the amalgamation of Dysart and Kirkcaldy in 1930, there have been a number of unions between congregations, while others have disappeared, leaving only two active churches in the town: the Carmelite convent and the Church of Scotland congregation now known as Dysart St Clair (based at the former Free Church in the West Port). The loss of churches in Dysart has been a steady process in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, beginning with the Barony Church (1972) and then the UP Church (2009), both having been converted to residential units in the last decade.

⁹⁷ 'Carmelite Convent', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/6673/name/Carmelite+Convent+Kirkcaldy+and+Dysart+Fife> (© Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us for permission to use this image).

⁹⁸ Swan & McNeill, *Dysart, A Royal Burgh*, pp. 95-96.

⁹⁹ 'Home', *Dysart Carmel*, Accessed 11 May 2021, <https://www.dysartcarmel.org/>.

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