

Anstruther Easter & Anstruther Wester Research Report

[Also Including Cellardyke]



Anstruther Easter Parish Church. (B. Rhodes)

Sacred Landscape Project

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Introduction

Anstruther is a coastal community located in the East Neuk of Fife, traditionally divided into two settlements on either side of the Dreel Burn. The core role played by this coastal location in the identity of these communities, and the long-standing connection to fisheries, has been marked on their burgh seals since the Middle Ages. It is prominently displayed on their current seal, when the burghs of Anstruther Wester, Anstruther Easter, Kilrenny and Cellardyke were united into a single political unit in 1929 (Fig 2). The two settlements first enter written records in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, there is strong evidence suggesting they had been occupied for some time. The sacred past of the local area can be traced to the early Middle Ages and is associated with a holy man called St Ethernan. The cult of St Ethernan, and his later medieval incarnation, St Adrian, drew pilgrims to the Isle of May. As such, it made Anstruther an important part of the sacred landscape of the wider region throughout the Middle Ages. Anstruther, along with Pittenweem, have traditionally served as the mainland access point for the small island (a mile long and 500 metres wide) located five miles off the coast. A parish church was established in Anstruther Wester in the twelfth century and remained the focus for religious activity in the town until the late twentieth century. Anstruther Easter belonged to the parish of Kilrenny in the Middle Ages and was served by a chapel-at-ease from the fifteenth century. It became an independent parish in the seventeenth century and since the expansion of the town in the modern era, a number of different Non-Conformist congregations have joined the Established Church in the town. Cellardyke was founded in the sixteenth-century, and became an independent parish, with its own church only in the late nineteenth.

Religious Sites and the Landscape of Anstruther

While fresh and saltwater fishing were the main stimulants for the development of communities on either side of the Dreel Burn, from as early as the ninth century they were also part of a wider sacred landscape. This landscape was based around the cult of St Ethernan and his late medieval successor, St Adrian. The parish churches at Anstruther Wester (which possessed relics of the saint) and Anstruther Easter were part of a network of sites connected to the cult that included the shrine on the Isle of May, the parish church at Kilrenny, and the monastery located first on May and later at Pittenweem. The wider religious landscape also included the Caipie Caves and St Irnie's Well at Kilrenny. Pilgrimage to the shrine on the Isle of May encouraged the development of the harbours at Easter and Wester Anstruther, while the establishment of a priory of Cluniac monks on the island, and their Augustinian successors at Pittenweem from the fourteenth century, impacted the landholding and the exploitation of terrestrial and maritime resources in Anstruther and its hinterland. The renewal of tourism to the island from Anstruther in the modern era has combined with leisure sailing and some remaining fishing, to guarantee the continuing maintenance of the harbour and the maritime traditions of the town.



Abraham Ortelius' Scotia Tabula (1580).¹

Since the twelfth century, the growth of the communities, encouraged by their monastic owners and stimulated by fisheries and pilgrims, has led to the construction of churches making an important contribution to the built landscape. The parish church constructed in Anstruther Wester has dominated the skyline since the twelfth century. The building of a chapel in the fifteenth century, and a parish church in the seventeenth, has also added to Anstruther Easter skyline. The period post-1800 has seen the proliferation of churches and support buildings such as manses and church halls in Anstruther Easter. Since the late nineteenth century, unions

¹ First map to depict the towns, 'Abraham Ortelius' Scotia Tabula (1580). *National Library of Scotland. Map Home*, Accessed 10 March, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/00000197#zoom=5&lat=1144&lon=1990&layers=BT>

between congregations, and the disappearance of others, has resulted in two sites (St Adrian's in Anstruther Easter, and Cellardyke Parish Church) still in ecclesiastical use. While some of these churches and support buildings have been demolished, others, such as the parish church of Anstruther Wester converted into a community hall c.1970, have been taken into public control and transformed into vital community resources for the people of Anstruther.



View out from graveyard of former Anstruther Wester Church. (B. Rhodes)

1. Early Christianity (c500-c1000AD)

While there are no contemporary documentary sources for Anstruther in the early Middle Ages, there is considerable archaeological and place-name evidence for early Christian practices in the area. Two carved stones and an ancient enclosure ditch surrounding the later medieval church at Kilrenny, a few miles inland from Anstruther, are evidence it was an early Christian site. Edwina Proudfoot, Ross Trench-Jellicoe, and Simon Taylor have concluded that it was the site of a monastery dating from the seventh or eighth centuries and perhaps founded by missionaries from Galloway, members of the British or Ninianic church.² On the Isle of May, there was a church or chapel from at least the ninth century. To the east of Anstruther, the

² Simon Taylor & Gilbert Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume Three. St Andrews and the East Neuk* (Donington, 2009), pp. 323-325 & 39, Edwina Proudfoot, 'The Picts and the Early Medieval Period', in Omand, Donald (eds), *The Fife book* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 50-51, Ross Trench-Jellicoe 'The Skeith Stone, Upper Kilrenny, Fife, in its context', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 128 (1998), 495-513.

Coves, now known as the Caiplie Caves, contain Pictish era carvings including early Christian symbols. The area, and its fishing tradition, also feature in a story from the life St Kentigern of Glasgow (d.614), said to have occurred in the sixth century, but first recorded in the 1140s.

The chapel on the Isle of May, the monastic site at Kilrenny and the Caiplie Caves, are connected to two saints, Ethernan and Adrian. Ethernan may have been *Itarnan*, a holy man whose death among the Picts was recorded in the Annals of Ulster in 669AD.³ The only extended account of the life and legends of this saint, (Feast Days 3 March and 2 December), survive in the Aberdeen Breviary, published in 1510.⁴ No time frame for the saint's life is included in these stories, and there is no direct connection to Fife. However, the core of his cult was located in the East Neuk. The church on the Isle of May was dedicated to him (until the fourteenth century at least), as was the monastery of nearby Pittenweem, and the placename Kilrenny means church of Ethernan.⁵ By the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the relics on the Isle of May were said to belong to St Adrian (Feast Day, 4 March). In legends first noted in Andrew of Wyntoun's chronicle (1407x24) and expanded upon in the Aberdeen Breviary (1510), Adrian was described as a ninth century missionary from the region of Pannonia in modern day Hungary. Significantly, Adrian shared his Hungarian origins with two other important saints, St (Queen) Margaret of Scotland, and St Martin of Tours (connected to St Ninian). Adrian was later martyred by marauding Danes on the Isle of May, along with a large group of (unnamed) companions. The only surviving member of the party was St Monan, the titular saint of the church and town located to the west of Anstruther. The name Adrian is a Latinised version of the Gaelic name Ethernan and veneration of Adrian was recorded in the same locations as Ethernan. Adrian is therefore almost certainly an offshoot or adaptation of the cult of St Ethernan. This fluidity in the cult of the saints is not unusual. The legends of individual saints were often adapted in this way for political purposes or to suit contemporary fashions in devotion as in this case, to link the saint to Margaret and Ninian.

Jocelin of Furness, Vita St Kentigerni, 1147x67.

St Kentigern, or Mungo as he is commonly known, was believed to have died in the year 614. The prologue of a twelfth-century life of Mungo by Jocelin of Furness related the trials and tribulations of St Thanay/Enoch, the mother of the future patron saint of Glasgow. Having been raped and impregnated by a rejected suitor, Thanay was punished by his family by being first thrown from a cliff, and then, when that failed, set adrift in the Forth in a coracle:

and carried out into deep water beyond the Isle of May. And as that pregnant girl departed from the shore all the fish of that self- same coast attended her in procession as their mistress,

³ Sean Mac Airt & Gearold Mac Niocall, eds, *Annals of Ulster: Text and translation Pt. 1* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 138-139.

⁴ The legends describe a saint who was born into a noble family of Scots, before receiving his education in Ireland. Ethernan later returned to undertake missionary work in Scotland, founding a number of churches. This chain of events was fairly common in the legends of Scottish saints, and was replicated legends of St Duthac of Tain amongst others, Alan Macquarrie, ed. *Legends of Scottish Saints. Readings, hymns and prayers for the commemorations of Scottish saints in the Aberdeen Breviary* (Dublin, 2012), pp. 2-5.

⁵ Taylor & Markus, *Place-Names of Fife*, pp. 323-324 & 339. As William Beat, the minister of Kilrenny noted in the 1790s, St Irnie's was the name given by locals to the church of Kilrenny, *OSA* i, p. 409.

and after the day of her departure the take of fish there ceased. And the river- mouth, so prolific in fish as mentioned above, because it received the child unjustly condemned, remaineth unproductive unto the present day ; but the fish who followed her remain where she was abandoned. From that time until now the fish are found there in such great abundance, that from every shore of the sea, from England, Scotland, and even from Belgium and France, very many fishermen come for the sake of fishing, all of whom the Isle of May conveniently accommodateth in her ports. ⁶

*The legends of St Adrian in 1407x22 Andrew of Wyntoun Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland
When Constantine was reigning
Over the Picts in Scotland,
St Adrian with his company
Came from the land of Hungary
And Arrived in Fife
There he chose to leid his life*

Adrian was given permission by Constantine to dwell and preach in his kingdom:

*Then Adrian with his company,
Together came to Caplachi
And some men went to the Isle of May
Choosing to dwell there to the end of their days
Some others choose to go north
At Inverary St Monan
Who of that company was one,
Chose him to led his life there.*

*Hub, Haldane and Hungar
Came from Denmark at this time
In Scotland with a great multitude
In by the land they slew many,
And put to death many a martyr;
And upon Holy Thursday
St Adrian they slew on May
With many of his company
In to that holy isle they lay.⁷*

1440s Bower Scotichronicon

⁶ Alexander P. Forbes, ed. *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern* (Edinburgh: Edmonstone and Douglas, 1874), p. 131.

⁷ Francis J. Amours, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1903-1914), iv, 177-179.

*There are also other islands in an arm of the sea of Ocean which is called the Firth of Forth, namely Bass, Fidra, May, where the priory is a cell of the canons of St Andrew of Kilrymont, and where St Adrian is buried with his companions, the hundred holy martyrs.*⁸

The Caiplie Caves



Entrances to chapel and mortuary caves from south east. (Historic Environment Scotland)

The Caves of Caiplie, or the Coves as they are known locally, are located some 3 miles to the east of Anstruther. They are natural caves carved in the rock face by sea action, which in places have been artificially enlarged. The largest cave, known as the ‘Chapel Cave’, contains a number of incised and pecked crosses, many of which have been identified as dating from the early Middle Ages.⁹ A further cave, known as the ‘Mortuary Cave’, is 6 metres to the north. In 1841 a long cist cemetery was found in front of this cave containing a Pictish arch symbol cut into the wall.¹⁰ The location has long been associated with Ethernan and Adrian, a connection made by Mathew Conolly in 1867, and by Wood who described the site in 1887. When the site was first excavated in the mid-nineteenth century, it was identified as *Caplachi*, a place mentioned in Wyntoun’s (c14) account of the travels of Adrian and his group.¹¹

⁸ Donald. E. R Watt, ed, *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English* (Aberdeen, 1987-1999), i, p. 15.

⁹ ‘Early Medieval Carved Stones Project’ *Canmore*, Anne Ritchie, 2016, Accessed 12 March 2021, <http://canmore.org.uk/event/1009920>

¹⁰ Peter Klemen, Tom Turpie, Louise Turner and Thomas Rees, *Historic Kilrenny, Anstruther Wester, Anstruther Easter and Cellardyke. Archaeology and Development* (Glenrothes, Scottish Burgh Survey, 2017), p. 19-20.

¹¹ John Stuart, *The sculptured stones of Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1856), ii, lxxxix-xc.



Detail of a carved cross in the cave. (Historic Environment Scotland)¹²

The exact way in which these caves were used in the early Middle Ages is unclear, however, it is likely they were occupied by hermits. Simon Taylor notes that a nearby spring, known as the *Hermits' Well*, was supposed by tradition to have been named for its use by the holy men, who occupied the Coves.¹³ Other crosses date from the High and Later Middle Ages, indicating that the caves continued to have a sacred purpose, perhaps as a stopping place on the pilgrim routes to the Isle of May, Crail, and St Andrews.

1843 George Dickson

There are some remarkable caves or coves, as they sometimes called, situated in the eastern part of the parish and close by the shore. They are considerably above high-water mark, but the rocks, in their outward form, have every appearance of having been at one time under the action of water; while within the caves there are still further indications of such having been the case by the rocks being drilled in many places by the Pholas. There are likewise to be seen in the interior of the caves, artificial cuttings and chiselled crosses, which indicate that at some period they have been used as the abode of men.

Some human bones were lately found, when removing a portion of earth from the interior of the caves; and a friend on hearing of these circumstances, has suggested the idea that they have been the resort of the leper, or the hermit, or the persecuted in evil times.¹⁴

¹² 'Detail of Carved Cross', *Canmore*, Accessed 11 March 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1593636>.

¹³ Taylor & Markus, *Place-Names of Fife*, pp. 323-324, 342, 'Caiplic Caves, Hermit's Well', *Canmore*, Accessed 11 March 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/34026/caiplic-caves-hermits-well>.

¹⁴ NSA, ix, 971.

1855 Ordnance Survey Name Book,

*a small spring well close to the Coves, that is supposed by tradition to have received its name from circumstance of its supplying the hermits, with water, who occupied the Coves.*¹⁵

1869 Mathew Conolly

*St. Adrian was the chief of a band of Christian missionaries who came to Scotland from Hungary, (according to ancient tradition), or from Ireland, (according to modern supposition): and established themselves in the east of Fife, leading holy lives and devoting themselves with great earnestness to the conversion of the people. The caves of Caiplie, which still bear numerous incised crosses on their walls, are supposed to have been thuir place of abode when resident on the mainland. They had also a monastery on the Island of May to which they resorted, sometimes to escape persecution, at other times for solitary meditation and prayer, and " in order that being free from the tumults of the world and the strife of tongues, they might hide themselves in the presence of God," and receive fresh strength and grace for the discharge of their arduous labours. While there, on a Holy Thursday, in the year 872, they were attacked by the Danes, and barbarously murdered, and their monastery was consigned to the flames.*¹⁶

1887 Wood

*The cave is still to be seen at Caiplie where the second of these missionaries (St Adrian) took up his abode. The entrance has been carved into a rather handsome Gothic arch. On the one side a part of the stone has been cut away so as to form a place for the altar, over which are three crosses conspicuously carved in the rock. At the extremity of the cave is (or was) a flight of steps leading up to a small cell above, in which the Culdee preacher had his dwelling-place.*¹⁷

2. High Medieval Christianity (1000-1300)

In the twelfth century, Anglo-Norman colonists and the Gregorian and Cluniac Reform movement arrived in eastern Fife, leading to the establishment of a continental style system of parishes in the area, and of monasteries belonging to new reformed orders of monks and canons. The parish and settlement of Anstruther Wester was first recorded in a charter from 1178x1188 in which the Scottish king, William I (1165-1214) granted the Cluniac Monks of the Isle of May the right to levy and collect taxes from fishing boats using the port.¹⁸ By the thirteenth century, there appears to have been a small, but flourishing, fishing and trading community on the west bank of the Dreel Burn with its own parish church. Anstruther Easter was differentiated from its neighbour in the Middle Ages by the term *little* or *be east the burn*. The community on the east bank of the Dreel first enters the historical record in a charter of 1220x1227 in which Henry, Lord of Anstruther confirmed a gift of three booths in his town of

¹⁵ Cited in Taylor & Markus, *Place-Names of Fife*, p. 342.

¹⁶ Mathew Conolly, *Fifiana: or Memorials of the East of Fife* (Glasgow, 1869), p. 204.

¹⁷ Walter Wood, *The East Neuk of Fife: its history and antiquities* (Edinburgh, 1887), pp. 7-8.

¹⁸ G.W.S. Barrow, ed, *Regesta Regum Scottorum, Acts of William I (1165-1214)* (Edinburgh, 1971), no. 207, John Stuart, ed, *Records of the Priory of the Isle of May* (Edinburgh, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1859), no. 14.

Anstruther made by his ancestors to the Abbey of Dryburgh.¹⁹ Anstruther Easter was part of the parish of Kilrenny, which meant a longish walk to church for its inhabitants, later described as *the space of a mile of deep evil way in the winter time and other rainy times in the year*.²⁰

Anstruther Wester parish church

The Scottish Gaelic origins of the town's name, and an early reference in the *Vita Kentigerni* to fishing communities on the Dreel, shows that a settlement existed at Anstruther Wester before it enters the historical record. The settlement is likely to have had a church of some form since its inception. However, before 1225, written evidence of religious provision in the parish does not exist. The parish church is first mentioned in the context of a dispute between the Abbey of Dryburgh and the Priory of May concerning the income granted to the priory from taxing ships using the port at Anstruther Wester. The canons of Dryburgh were the patrons of the neighbouring parish of Kilrenny, which included Anstruther Easter, and claimed that ships used both sides of the stream. The dispute, settled through arbitration, left the monks paying the canons one silver merk per year in compensation. From this charter we learn that by 1225 the monks of May had been granted the patronage of the parish church of Anstruther Wester. This patronage gave them the right to choose the parish priest and to collect the parsonage and vicarage tithes of the parish. In return, the monks of the Isle of May provided a priest and maintained the fabric of the church. Eighteen years later, on 28 June 1243, the church was visited and consecrated by David de Bernham, bishop of St Andrews. This consecration does not mention a dedication for the church, and in fact no medieval sources do. Simon Taylor has suggested that it was dedicated to St Ethernan at this point, before he was joined (or replaced) as the dedicatee by St Nicholas in the later Middle Ages.²¹

1225 Liber de Dryburgh

The abbot and convent of Dryburgh state that ships and small fishing boats put into that stream dividing the boundaries between the parish of Kilrenny and the parish of Anstruther (FIF), because of the proximity of the places, are occupying the parish of Kilrenny, that is extended up to the middle of the channel of the same stream, and their anchors are being fixed within the boundaries of the same parish, and staying within those boundaries all night, [therefore] half of the teinds of all ships and small fishing boats put in that place and occupying the boundaries of the parish, ought to belong to the mother church of Kilrenny, which half the said abbot and convent say the prior and monks of May seize and detain to the prejudice of the said church. The lawsuit was ended thus: the monks of May, for good peace, shall pay annually in perpetuity 1 mark to the parish church of Kilrenny at the same church, that is, half at Pentecost and half at Martinmas, by the procurator of the abbot and canons. By this payment, the monks shall be free and immune from all exaction and legal action of canons, saving that the canons, who receive spiritual dues from their own parishioners remaining in the same parish, shall

¹⁹ John Spottiswoode, *Liber S. Mari de Dryburgh*, (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1847), nos. 22 & 24.

²⁰ RPS, 1641/8/322. Date accessed: 17 March 2021, <http://rps.ac.uk/trans/1641/8/322>.

²¹ Taylor & Markus, *Place-Names of Fife*, pp. 56-57.

*receive the teinds in full [and] the monks shall receive teinds in full from all others coming from elsewhere.*²²

1243 (28 June) Pontifical Offices of St Andrews

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

*The parochial church of Anstruther (Spelt Eynstrother), on 28 June.*²³



Dreel Burn from Anstruther Wester Churchyard. (B. Rhodes)

3. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)

Anstruther Wester and Anstruther Easter were home to thriving fishing communities in the late Middle Ages. The merchants of the port on the west of the Dreel had developed longer distance trading connections that resulted in the shipping of dried and salted fish and animal hides to Leith for the international market.²⁴ The construction of a large and complex parish church at Anstruther Wester, and of a chapel-of-ease at Anstruther Easter, reflect the growing populations and prosperity of the two settlements.

²² Spottiswoode, *Dryburgh*, no 192, Stuart, *Priory of the Isle of May*, no. 40.

²³ Alan O. Anderson, ed, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, (London, 1922), ii, 523.

²⁴ Klemen et al, *Historic Kilrenny*, pp. 35-36.

Anstruther Wester parish church (St Nicholas)

The parish church of Anstruther Wester, along with the possessions of the Priory of May, was transferred to the Augustinian canons of Pittenweem in the fourteenth century. They employed a vicar-pensioner, a clergyman paid an annual wage rather than sustained by the tithes, to tend to the spiritual needs of the parishioners.²⁵ The church was almost certainly dedicated to St Nicholas by the later Middle Ages. In 1541 the burgh was granted the right to hold an annual fair on the 6 December feast day of that saint, as such, strongly suggesting he was the patron saint of the parish.²⁶ Nicholas was a popular saint among coastal or mercantile communities across northern Europe in the late Middle Ages, and churches dedicated to the saint could be found in Aberdeen, Dundee, and Dalkeith.



Anstruther Wester Church, shortly before conversion to Dreel Halls. (B. Rhodes)

With only the west tower surviving from the medieval structure, the current building is largely the result of remodelling done in 1846.. However, until the remodelling, much of this pre-Reformation structure was still in place. Using information from the surviving architecture, and a range of later documentary sources, Richard Fawcett has demonstrated that the late

²⁵ At the Reformation in 1560 it was recorded that these vicars were paid £20 per year, in addition to which they had a toft (a site for a house) of two acres in the town and pasture and grass sufficient for one horse and twelve cows, John Kirk, ed, *The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices* (Oxford, 1995), p.74.

²⁶ *RMS*, iii, no. 2292.

medieval church was a large and complex building.²⁷ It had a separate choir and nave, with the latter flanked by north and south aisles, which would have held subsidiary altars. The west tower was added to the building sometime in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. It was originally made up of three floors, with the top floor serving as the belfry (the fourth floor was added in 1742). The new tower, and size of the church, hints at the general prosperity of Anstruther Wester in the later Middle Ages. One reason for this prosperity was the continued connection between the town and the Isle of May. In 1503 and 1508 James IV used the port of Anstruther Wester as his embarkation point for combined hunting and pilgrimage trips to the island. This connection was also emphasised by the possession of the church of relics related to the island, with later sources recording that half a stone coffin, said to have been the resting place of St Adrian, was kept in the choir.

Anstruther and the Isle of May

1507 (27 Aug) James IV stopped in Anstruther, having landed on the way back from a pilgrimage to the Isle of May (shrine of St Adrian). While there he gave 20s to the priests in Anstruther.²⁸

1508 (30 June) James IV hired a boat in Anstruther to take him to the Isle of May for a combined pilgrimage/hunting trip (to shoot fowls with a culverin) at a cost of 28s.²⁹

The Stone Coffin of St Adrian

1791 Rev James Forrester

*There is a stone coffin which has stood exposed to the injuries of the weather, time immemorial, in the churchyard. Tradition says it once contained the relics of St Adrian.*³⁰

1838 George Milligan, minister of Elie and respondent to the 2nd Statistical Account noted that *In the church (of Anstruther Wester) there is the half of a stone coffin-the other half is on the Island of May. It is reported to be the coffin of St Adrian, who had a monastery on the isle just mentioned, and is said to have been killed during an incursion of the Danes. There is no certainty however, that the tradition is correct*.³¹

In 1869 Mathew Conelly, MP for Anstruther, added that by that date the coffin was in the church yard (the church had been renovated/rebuilt in 1846). *There is a stone sarcophagus, pretty entire, in the churchyard, which tradition reports to be the coffin of Bishop Adrian, slain by Danish aggressors in the Isle of May.*

²⁷ For all that follows see Richard Fawcett, 'Anstruther', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 14 March 2021, <http://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158382>.

²⁸ TA, iii, 294.

²⁹ TA, iv, 130.

³⁰ OSA, iii, 84.

³¹ NSA, ix, 620.

*The stone coffin, part of which is still within the ruins of the May Chapel, is said to have contained his remains, the other part we have been asked to believe, floated across the frith of Forth, and was placed in the church of West Anstruther, where it still remains.*³²

Fair

24 Feb 1540

*The King has confirmed to the prior of the monastery of Pittenweem, and to its monks, and to their successors, the lands of Pittenweem, Anstruther on the west side of the burn of the same [...]; and he has created the town of Pittenweem (created by King James III as a burgh of barony) and the town of Anstruther, with their lands and boundaries, as free burghs of barony [...] with the liberty of the prior etc. to enfeoff tenants, and to burgesses to have market crosses and a market weekly on Saturday and Monday, and public fairs three times a year, that is to say.....on the feast of St Nicholas (6 Dec) in winter and for its octave in **Anstruther**.*³³

Anstruther Easter. Chapel of St Ayle



Former site of Chapel of St Ayle in Anstruther Easter.³⁴

Anstruther Easter was part of the parish of Kilrenny until 1634, but by the late Middle Ages it was home to a growing fishing community.³⁵ At some time in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, a chapel-at-ease was constructed to serve them.³⁶ It was built on land belonging to the Abbey of Balmerino (where the Scottish Fisheries Museum now stands) and administered by the monks. In 1435, an indenture between Balmerino and the bishop of St

³² Mathew Conolly, *Fifiana: or Memorials of the East of Fife* (Glasgow, 1869), pp. 196 & 204.

³³ *RMS*, iii, no. 2292.

³⁴ 'Scottish Fisheries Museum', *Fife Contemporary*, Accessed 6 Apr 2021, <https://www.fcac.co.uk/venue/scottish-fisheries-museum/>

³⁵ Klemen et al, *Historic Kilrenny*, pp. 36-38.

³⁶ It was not mentioned in a charter describing the town in 1350, and was therefore built sometime between then and its appearance in a charter in 1435.

Andrews gave the monks the right to use the chapel to administer the sacraments to the local people. This meant that they would no longer have to travel to Kilrenny to baptise their children or get married, and the chaplain would have been able to administer the last rites.

The identity of St Ayle is unclear and there are no other dedications to a saint of that name in Scotland. He may have been saint of northern France (there is a town called Sainte-Ail in the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle), or it could be a misspelling of popular saints like Giles or Hilda. The chapel may have fallen out of use before the Reformation as it was let in 1535 to a man called Thomas Wood, on the condition that he maintain the fabric and provide accommodation for any monks visiting Anstruther.³⁷ Thereafter houses were built on the site, some traces of the chapel could still be seen in the 1880s, and they were acquired and converted into the Scottish Fisheries Museum in the 1960s.

*1435 Indenture made at St Andrew 8 April 1435 between Henry bishop of St Andrews and John de Hailes, abbot of Balmerino... in the chapel of St Ali on your lands is a baptismal font, the right is granted to baptise and administer the sacraments in said chapel....for a fee of 26d per year paid to the cathedral chapter of St Andrews.*³⁸

*1590 (2 Jul) Royal charter for good service to John Betoun of Balfour confirming his parcel of land with houses and gardens in the town of Anstruther lying to the east of the chapel of St Ailis, by the sea with a tenement occupied by Janet Black, in the town on the north part of the road of the king.*³⁹

1887 Wood

*There was no church or parish of EA before the Reformation (though there is a trace of a chapel called St Ailie's).*⁴⁰

1888 Gourlay

*It was long the custom of the Freemasons on St John's night to encircle the ruins hand-in-hand in honour of their patron saint. At this time the experienced eye could trace the plan of the chapel, a long narrow fabric, with a window of two lancet lights over the altar at the east end, a porch, large enough for the size of the nave, with stone seats and a niche as if for a statue, above the door at the west gable, where in its airy pinnacle the vesper bell so sweetly floated in calm and storm.*⁴¹

1895 Millar

At Anstruther, the monks of Balmerino had a chapel named St Ayle's or St Ylde's, which they acquired in 1435 from the Bishop of St Andrews. St Ayle's house (NO50SE 21), or part of it, is

³⁷ Stephanie Stevenson, *Anstruther. A History* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2004, 1st Edition 1989), p. 171.

³⁸ William Turnbull, ed, *Chartularies of Balmerino and Lindores* (Edinburgh, Abbotsford Club, 1841), App no. 4.

³⁹ *RMS*, v, 1749.

⁴⁰ Wood, *The East Neuk of Fife*, p. 363.

⁴¹ George Gourlay, *Anstruther, or, Illustrations of Scottish burgh life* (1st published, Cupar, 1888, 2nd edition, Anstruther, 2003), pp. 51-52.

*still standing at Anstruther, though the chapel has disappeared, having probably not long survived John Knox's preaching in that town in June 1559.*⁴²

1988 Architectural description by John Gifford

*Scottish Fisheries Museum, Harbourhead, Anstruther Easter. N range dated 1721 but with a pair of lancets from the medieval St Ayle's chapel which stood on the site (It is said to have been a long narrow rectangle with an e window of two lancet lights, a large porch and an image niche above the w door).*⁴³

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

The sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries were a period of expansion for Anstruther Easter, stimulated by its creation as first a burgh of Barony (1571) and later a Royal Burgh (1583), and investment in its harbour facilities. This commercial growth, and concomitant population expansion, led to its separation from Kilrenny and creation as a new parish in 1641. This same process of investment and commercial development saw the foundation of new port at Silverdykes, what is now Cellardyke, located on the east flank of Anstruther Easter. It would be the nineteenth century before this new settlement had its own religious provision. The sixteenth century was also a period of expansion for Anstruther Wester. It was a burgh of barony from 1541, and a Royal burgh from 1587. However, a combination of war (the town was sacked in 1651), plague and two major storms in 1655 and 1670 which destroyed the harbour and swept away the town's main street, saw the demise of the port.

Anstruther Wester parish church (St Nicholas)

On 25 June 1559 Protestant reformers arrived in the East Neuk of Fife. They first purged the church of Crail, publicly burning its holy cross, before moving on to Anstruther Wester the following day and destroying the objects in the church they considered to be idolatrous. It was probably around this time that the coffin associated with St Adrian seems to have been moved to the churchyard where it could still be seen in the nineteenth century. The churchyard also contains four interesting memorials dating from the seventeenth century.

James Melville (26 July 1556 – 1614), began to teach at the church of Anstruther Wester in 1586 and was made minister of Anstruther and Kilrenny in spring of 1587.⁴⁴ The survival of Melville's diary, and of the earliest kirk session records for a parish outside of St Andrews, mean we have an unusually vivid picture of the development of the new Protestant Church in Anstruther. Thoroughly explored by John McCallum and Michael Graham, these sources

⁴² A. H. Millar, *Fife: pictorial and historical: its people, burghs, castles and mansions*, 2v. (Cupar, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1895), ii, p. 300.

⁴³ John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, (London, 1988), pp. 70-71.

⁴⁴ While the early part of his diary was written in Anstruther in 1600, Melville did not have a lot of say about Anstruther Wester. He discusses his financial problems and briefly refers to the building of his house in the town (Easter) in 1590, G.R Kinloch, ed, *Diary of James Melvill, 1556-1601* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1829), pp. 1-6.

provide evidence of apostasy, the development of the programme of worship and instruction practiced in the parish, and of kirk discipline.



James Gordon, *Fyfe Shire* (1642).⁴⁵ Church of St Nicholas

The church itself survived largely intact until the 1840s and was adapted for Protestant use through the abandonment of the choir and, eventually the north aisle. The only major renovation was the replacement of the roof in 1761. One notable retention was a *fine row of arches*, remembered wistfully by JFS Gordon, after they were destroyed as part of remodelling in the 1840s.⁴⁶ In 1789 a new bell was hung in the tower, and in 1794-95 a new town hall was constructed next to the church in order to share use of the bell tower.⁴⁷ Between the destruction of the old townhouse during the storm of 1655 or 1670, and the construction of the new building, the church tower also acted as the tollbooth, meeting house for the council and prison.⁴⁸ From the 1740s the tower also accommodated a beacon as a navigational aid for shipping, probably in the form of a brazier located in the cap house at the top of the tower.⁴⁹ This was an obvious choice, as the church dominated the townscape of Anstruther Wester in the early modern period, as can clearly be seen on all the early maps to include the burgh, such as Ainslie's map of 1775 (Fig 10), by which time, however, it was dwarfed by the impressive new church across the burn in Anstruther Easter.⁵⁰

One link to the pre-reformation church was the annual fair held on 6 December (St Nicholas' Day), first granted in 1541 and confirmed in 1587, and a further fair to be held in March first noted in 1705, which was connected to the feast day of St Ethernan (3 March) or Adrian (4

⁴⁵ 'James Gordon, *Fyfe Shire* (1642)'. *National Library of Scotland. Map Home*, Accessed 10 March, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/00000999#zoom=6&lat=2576&lon=5015&layers=BT>

⁴⁶ Stevenson, *Anstruther*, p. 114, citing J.F.S. Gordon, *Scotichronicon*, Glasgow, 1867-8.

⁴⁷ Fawcett, 'Anstruther'.

⁴⁸ Stevenson, *Anstruther*, p. 72.

⁴⁹ Fawcett, 'Anstruther'.

⁵⁰ 'John Adair, *The East Part of Fife* (1684), *National Library of Scotland. Map Home*, Accessed 10 March, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/00001009>.

March).⁵¹ In 1645, among the religious tumult of the Civil War, a visitation of the church of Anstruther Wester by the Presbytery of St Andrews provided an opportunity for the elders of the church to unleash a torrent of complaints about the minister, George Dewar, who was later removed from the post. Just 6 years later, Oliver Cromwell's forces sacked the town, plundering the church and throwing the Bible into the sea.

The reformation comes to Anstruther;

4 June 1559 Archbishop Spottiswoode's History of the Church of Scotland

*By this exhortation (sermon by John Knox) the hearers were so moved, as they fell immediately to the pulling down of altars and images, and destroyed all the monuments which were abused to idolatry in that town (Crail). The like they did the next day in Anstruther.*⁵²

25 June 1559 Pitscottie's History and Chronicles of Scotland

*Be this way the congregation (Lords of the Congregation), gathered and come forward, first to Carrail (Crail), and cast down the images and alter thair of and burnt the rude quilk was ane great idol and abussit all men and women baitht with pillgramage. This they did the 25 day of Junii and on the morne heireafter come to Sanctandros and reformitt the kirkis thair of and caist done the allteris and imageis and all uther idolaterie.*⁵³

Apostasy

1580 (12 July) General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

*Captain Robert Anstruther appeared before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and lamented that he had been in France, and certain years past had given his bodily presence to the mass, although in his conscience he had hated the same as idolatry, and always kept an upright mind toward the religion of this realm-so feeling grief in his conscience for his defection he came to the session to utter his repentance and submit to whatever correction the Kirk would enjoin him. And as to the 'butchery and massacre' at Paris, he declares he kept the kings gate of Loire at the time and past no further.*⁵⁴ *1581 (28 Apr) The Assembly noted that having weighed the heaviness and gravity of the defection the kirk concluded that his repentance be made in the city of St Andrews, after the form of the discipline set out against apostates.*⁵⁵

⁵¹ RMS, iii, no. 2292.

⁵² Michael Russell, ed, *History of the Church of Scotland ... / by ... John Spottiswoode* (Spottiswoode Society, London, 1851), i, 276.

⁵³ A. J. G. Mackay, ed. *History and Chronicles of Scotland by Robert Lindesay of Pitscottie* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1899), i, p. 151.

⁵⁴ Thomas Thomson, ed. *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1839-45), ii, 458-459.

⁵⁵ Thomson, ed. *General Assemblies*, ii, 514. This event is also recorded in the diary of James Melville, who noted that following his repentance Robert was received back into the church and died a year later. He described Robert 'as a very wise and valiant man of arms', he left to the poor of Kilrenny, where he was born, the sum of 1000 marks, Kinloch, *Diary of James Melvill*, p. 62.

Programme of Worship and Education

Graham, 1996, McCallum, 2010

When the minister and elders discovered on 28 Jan 1589 that Alexander Young and his wife, charged with violating the Sabbath, were *ignorant of all Cristian doctrine* the time seemed ripe to launch an educational effort. Soon, after the session resolved that one of its members would walk around the parish each Sunday during the sermon time and record names of those absent from the kirk. Further, in preparation for the next communion celebration, all adults parishioners would be examined on points of doctrine and basic belief.⁵⁶

By 1590, when James Melville had been minister for four years, a vigorous programme of worship and instruction was in place in Anstruther. The schedule on Sundays was for the main preaching service to begin at 9am and end by 11am. The afternoon ‘doctrine’ session would start at 1pm and end in 3pm, and the rest of the day was to be spent in catechising. The Sabbath was now unequivocally a day for public worship, and for both public and private religious education. By 1631, George Dear, minister of Anstruther, was under contract with the burgh to preach three times a week.⁵⁷



Panel on Anstruther Wester Church reading ‘My hous is the hous of prayer’. (B. Rhodes)

⁵⁶ Michael. F Graham, *The Uses of Reform. ‘Godly Discipline’ and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560-1610* (Brill, Lieden and New York, 1996), pp. 230.

⁵⁷ NRS, TE1/1 Commissioners for Surrenders and Teinds Sederunt Book, p. 208, John McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish. The Reformation in Fife, 1560-1640* (St Andrews, 2010), 75-77.

Kirk Discipline

Graham 1996

There were some efforts to change future behaviour, rather than merely impose punishments. For example, in July 1583 the session passed a resolution against wedding customs which included lavish dress and a chain of virgins accompanying the bride. In such cases the participants were to be punished, and the *brydis to gang hame again unmarrit*.⁵⁸ After James Melville took over in 1588 the total caseload grew to around 5 times what it had been before. The disciplinary net was widening to take in various types of quarrels, and even those who had decline to attend services.⁵⁹

Descriptions of the post-reformation church

Rev James Forrester, 1791

*The parish church appears to be a very ancient building, from the remains of a large choir, and the gothic structure of the steeple. It was new roofed in the year 1761.*⁶⁰

Drunken Minister.

1645 (25 Sept) *The church of Anstruther Wester was visited by the Presbytery of St Andrews.* The senior elder John Thomson noted that *he kept to many companions*. This view was reinforced by William Strang who stated that the minister's conversation was not suitable because he was a drunkard. According to Strang, the minister used obscene language, that he is a false swearer and is frequently found in the tavern. Another elder confirmed that he had seen the minister drink, but not this year or the last. He also noted that Dewar always took action in the Kirk Session against drinking on the Lord's Day, but took no other action for restraining drinking. Robert Drummond criticised catechising and stated that he was *given to companie* and does not use the different rules of the church against drunkards. He had heard that the minister can be found in the tavern where he lives, and not infrequently. Thomas Richardson noted that the minister *keeps too much company* James Scot, however, declared that *he is a good fellow*, but that he has heard of his drunkenness. All the rest of the elders agreed that his *given to company*.⁶¹ 1645 (21 Nov) Dewar admitted to drunkenness but not to the use of obscene language and asked that he be admonished in session, but that it be taken no further. The Presbytery however, would not agree to this and removed Dewar from all his ministerial functions. They later noted that Dewar no longer had the means to educate his children, or provide them with an inheritance and put together a commission to gather funds for their upkeep.⁶²

⁵⁸ Graham, *The Uses of Reform*, pp.228.

⁵⁹ Graham, *The Uses of Reform*, pp.228

⁶⁰ OSA, (1791), iii, 81.

⁶¹ NRS CH2/1132/18 Presbytery of St Andrews, Minutes, 1641-1656, fols. 66-68.

⁶² NRS CH2/1132/18 Presbytery of St Andrews, Minutes, 1641-1656, fols. 70-71.

The sacking of Anstruther Wester (1651)

George Gourlay, 1888

*Open, or I will chastise thee and thine', cried the Colonel. He blew it open, and kept his word, for the town was so plundered that even the stand for the hour-glass was torn from the pulpit, while the drunken sergeant, to add insult to injury, threw the big Bible in the sea.*⁶³

Gourlay's account was confirmed by burgh records which noted that;

16 September 165, 'paid for ane-to hold the sand-glass the had being plundered by the 'Inglis'. 7 Oct to Matt Thomson for 'drying the ould bybill (bible), which was cast in the sea be the 'Inglis' when the town was plundered'.⁶⁴

Fairs

24 Feb 1540

The King has confirmed to the prior of the monastery of Pittenweem, and to its monks, and to their successors, the lands of Pittenweem, Anstruther on the west side of the burn of the same [...]; and he has created the town of Pittenweem (created by King James III as a burgh of barony) and the town of Anstruther, with their lands and boundaries, as free burghs of barony [...] with the liberty of the prior etc. to enfeoff tenants, and to burgesses to have market crosses and a market weekly on Saturday and Monday, and public fairs three times a year, that is to say, on the feast of blessed Mary Magdalene (22 July) in summer and on the feast of St Clement in the summer, and for their octaves, in Pittenweem, and on the feast of St Nicholas (6 Dec) in winter and for its octave in Anstruther.⁶⁵

1705 (14 Sept) Act changing a weekly market and two fairs in favour of the burgh of Anstruther Wester

Our sovereign lady, with the special advice and consent of the estates of parliament, does, by this act, appoint and ordain a market to be kept weekly upon Thursday, and two fairs to be held yearly, one upon the first Tuesday of July and the other upon the second Tuesday of October, in all time coming, at the burgh of Anstruther Wester, and that in place of the weekly market formerly appointed to be held there on Sabbath, and of the yearly fairs, one in March and the other in December formerly kept at the said burgh; and does hereby give and grant to the magistrates and council of the foresaid burgh.⁶⁶

⁶³ Gourlay, *Anstruther*, pp. 5 & 33.

⁶⁴ *NSA*, ix, 619.

⁶⁵ *RMS*, iii, no. 2292.

⁶⁶ *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1705/6/155. Date accessed: 18 March 2021, *RPS*, 1705/6/155. Date accessed: 18 March 2021.

Memorials



Fairfoul tombstone in the churchyard of St Nicholas'. (Historic Environment Scotland)

RCAHMS 1933, visited 29 June 1927.

Several 17th-century table-stones lie in the churchyard, and four of these are of some interest: The first bears the initials A.K. and the date 1667. The name is illegible, but the word "MERCHANDE" can be deciphered. The second commemorates NORMAND FAIRFVL, a former bailie who died in 1661. The third shows the names of John Oliphant, who died in 1644, and of Peter Oliphant, the date of whose decease is left uncarved. The fourth is dated 1626 and displays the usual funereal devices of skull, cross bones, and Bible. The name is illegible, out

on the lower part of the stone are the initials M.I.F. and a shield charged with three papingoes or parrots, apparently for Fairfowl or Fairful.⁶⁷

Anstruther Easter parish church (St Adrian)



Melville's Manse. (Historic Environment Scotland)⁶⁸

There is no record of the fate of the chapel of St Ayle when the Reformation came to Anstruther in 1559. It was certainly out of ecclesiastical use by the 1550s, but a reference to it in 1590, suggests that part of the building survived, before it was incorporated into the houses built on the site in the seventeenth century.⁶⁹ When James Melville took charge of the parish of Kilrenny in 1590, he recognised that the growth Anstruther Easter meant that the community required its own church. Melville purchased the land in 1592, but he was soon distracted by church politics and was unable to complete the project. He did however, finish a new manse, at a cost of 3500 Scottish marks. It was sold by Melville's grandson to Lord of Anstruther in 1637, but was occupied by a minister once again when it became the property of the town again in 1717.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* (Edinburgh, 1933), p. 25.

⁶⁸ 'Anstruther Easter, Backdykes, Melville Manse', Canmore, Accessed 18 March 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/34066/anstruther-easter-backdykes-melville-manse>.

⁶⁹ Stevenson, *Anstruther*, p. 171.

⁷⁰ Stephanie, *Anstruther*, pp. 194-195.



Ainslie Counties of Fife and Kinross with the Rivers Forth and Tay (1775).⁷¹

Melville's scheme for the creation of a new parish finally came to fruition in 1641 when Anstruther Easter was disjoined from Kilrenny and became the smallest parish by area in Scotland at the time.⁷² Construction of the church on a site on high ground above the main street of the town had begun in 1634, and, with the help of a 3500-mark grant from the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland, the church was ready for use by 1641, with a steeple and bell added in 1644. Purpose built for Protestant worship, it is described as a *stubby T-plan church* by Gifford, with a tower at the west end.⁷³ In a tribute to the town's fishing heritage, a salmon shaped weather cock was located at the top of the church spire.⁷⁴ In 1572 the town was granted the right to hold weekly markets and two annual fairs on *St Carnai's day* (the name recorded in the charter is probably a mis-spelling of Ethernan) and the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin (8 September).⁷⁵ It was no surprise, with this existing connection, that the new church was dedicated to St Adrian.

The Manse

James Melvill's diary, 1600

but God moved the peiples hartes to haue a ceare of me, and mak me fufficient securitie of four bounder markes in stipend; the town of Anfrtruther Eifter bund for the twa part, and the gentlemen to Land wart for the thride, and fordar oblefit thamfelues to big me a hous vpon a piece of ground, quhilk the Lard of Anfrtruther gaiff frielie for that effect. This was vndertakin and begoun at Witfonday in an. 1590, bot wald neuer haiff bein perfyted, giff the bountifull

⁷¹ 'John Ainslie, County of Fife and Kinross', *National Library of Scotland Maps Home*, Accessed 18 March 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/74400369>.

⁷² *RPS*, 1641/8/322. Date accessed: 17 March 2021, <http://rps.ac.uk/trans/1641/8/322>.

⁷³ Gifford, *Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, pp.67-69.

⁷⁴ *NSA*, ix, 613.

⁷⁵ *RMS*, iv, 2032. Ethernan becomes Tarnan and therefore Carnan in the phonetic spelling style of the middle ages.

hand of my God haid nocht maid me to tak the wark in hand myfelff, and furnished ftranglie to my confideratioun all things neidfull, fa that neuer ouk paft bot all fort of Workmen was Weill peyit, never a dayes intermiffion fra the beginning to the compleitting of it, and never a foar fingar during the haill labour. In Junie begoun, and in the monethe of Merch efter, I was refident therin.⁷⁶

1791 William Beat

The manse was originally built by Mr James Melvill, an eminent reformer. On the lower lentil of the highest window, which directly overlooks the town, he ordered this inscription to be made, 'The Watch Tower' which remains distinct to this day.⁷⁷

The new parish

1641 (17 Nov) Ratification and act regarding the erection of the kirk of Anstruther Easter

Our sovereign lord, with consent of the estates of this present parliament, considering that there was a petition and supplication given in to the general assembly held at Edinburgh, 21 August 1639, at the instance of Sir William Anstruther of that Ilk, knight, gentleman usher of his majesty's privy chamber, and of the bailies of the burgh of Anstruther Easter, for themselves and in name and on behalf of the whole other inhabitants of the barony of Anstruther and burgh foresaid of Anstruther Easter, making mention that where the said burgh of Anstruther Easter, being a part of the parish of Kilrenny, and being populous and distant from the kirk of Kilrenny by the space of a mile of deep evil way in the winter time and other rainy times in the year, and the remainder of the said parish of Kilrenny (beside the inhabitants of the said barony of Anstruther and burgh of Anstruther Easter) being as many people as conveniently may be served and eased within the said kirk of Kilrenny the time of divine service, the forenamed supplicants, for their better ease and commodity in frequenting and repairing to God's worship and for edification of the people and administration of the sacraments, have caused build a kirk with a kirkyard upon the said Sir William Anstruther's heritage allotted by him for that use within the said burgh of Anstruther Easter, and intend to provide a stipend to the minister thereof, they obtaining the said barony of Anstruther and burgh of Anstruther Easter and the inhabitants thereof dismembered from the said kirk and parish of Kilrenny and erection thereof in a separate parish by itself; and therefore desiring the said late general assembly to dismember the said barony of Anstruther and burgh of Anstruther Easter and whole inhabitants thereof from the said burgh and parish of Kilrenny, and to erect the same in a separate parish by itself, and to appoint and ordain the inhabitants of the said bounds to repair to the said kirk of Anstruther Easter as their parish kirk in all time hereafter for divine service, receiving of the sacraments and to use the kirkyard thereof for burial of their dead.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Kinloch, *Diary of James Melvill*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ OSA, i, 412.

⁷⁸ RPS, 1641/8/322. Date accessed: 17 March 2021, <http://rps.ac.uk/trans/1641/8/322>.



Anstruther Easter Church. (B. Rhodes)

5. Late Modern (1800-2021).

Anstruther Easter and Cellardyke prospered in the nineteenth century as their fleets supplied the insatiable demand for fresh and cured fish from the growing urban centres in Scotland's central belt. The rapidly growing populations of both settlements were served by a new parish church in Cellardyke and by the establishment of Burgher, Baptist, Congregational, United Presbyterian, Evangelical and Free Church congregations in Anstruther Easter at various points in the nineteenth-century. By contrast, the early nineteenth-century saw the final demise of Anstruther Wester as a commercial port, and economic and demographic stagnation. The twentieth century saw a similar pattern of development in all three communities. This involved the gradual decline in commercial fisheries, and their replacement by light industry and tourism as the main local employers. Their populations have grown steadily as the picturesque towns remain sought-after locations for commuters to St Andrews, Dundee and beyond, and for retirees from across the British Isles. By 1952 unions between congregations, and the disappearance of others, had left four active churches in Anstruther (three Church of Scotland congregations and the Baptist Church).⁷⁹ By the 2011 census, 32% of the combined population of 1,061 in Anstruther Easter and Wester were recorded as having no religion (lower than the 36% in the country as a whole), with a little over half belonging to the Church of Scotland (49.7%) and the remainder to Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations.⁸⁰ Only two sites (St Adrian's in Anstruther Easter, and Cellardyke Parish Church), are still in ecclesiastical use. While some of these churches and support buildings have been demolished, others have been repurposed and are in private use, or, like the Dreel Halls in Anstruther Wester, function as community resources.

Anstruther Wester: Parish Church

The core of the late medieval church of St Nicholas at Anstruther Wester remained in use well into the nineteenth century, described as late as 1838 as in *tolerable condition*, and noted as a *very ancient structure*. In 1845, shortly after George Taylor painted the church (Fig. 16), there were several falls of plaster from the ceiling and this precipitated a decision to modernise the building. The following year the church was remodelled to the designs of the architect James Smith. It was reduced in size and complexity to a simple rectangular structure, 14m long and 9m across.⁸¹ The renovation of 1846 saw the abandonment of the remains of the choir, the *fine rows of arches* mentioned by Rev. J.F.S. Gordon in 1867 and Gourlay in 1888, the eastern parts of the nave and the north aisle. The west tower was the only part of the medieval structure to survive.⁸² There were further renovations in 1856, when the steeple was replaced by a simpler spire, and again in 1905.

⁷⁹ Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), pp. 596-597.

⁸⁰ 'Anstruther Wester and Easter, Religion', *Scotland's Census*, Accessed 4 August 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>.

⁸¹ Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, pp. 69-70.

⁸² Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, pp. 69-70, Gordon, J.F.S. *Scotichronicon* (Glasgow, 1867-68), i, pp. 305-308.



Anstruther St Nicholas, 1844, Taylor. (R. Fawcett)⁸³

Unlike its neighbour, no new churches were founded in the town in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This may have been due to the small population west of the burn, only around 600 in the 1880s, and ease of access to the various new churches in Anstruther Easter and Pittenweem. The ministers who contributed to the Statistical Accounts in 1791 and 1838 however, were at pains to stress that very few *dissenters* lived in the parish. In 1961 the decision was taken to unite the parish churches of Anstruther Wester and Easter. It was deconsecrated in 1970 and converted into a Hall named after Hew Scott, a nineteenth-century minister, before changing its name again in 2014 to the Dreel Halls. In combination with the old town hall, since 2014 it has been owned and managed by Anstruther Improvements Association and serves as a community space for events, children's groups and exhibitions.⁸⁴

Rev James Forrester, 1791

*All the inhabitants are of the Established Church, except one man and his wife who attend the relief congregation at Pittenweem.*⁸⁵

Rev George Milligan, 1838.

The church is very conveniently situation for the greater part of the population, being built in the burgh where the bulk of the people reside.....There does not appear to be any record as to the period in which it (parish church) was built, but from the style of its architecture it must

⁸³ In the collections of the Anstruther Fisheries Museum, from Fawcett, 'Anstruther'.

⁸⁴ 'About', *Dreel Halls*, Accessed 30 Mar 2021, <http://www.dreelhalls.org/>

⁸⁵ *OSA*, iii, 83.

*have existed a considerable time previous to the Reformation. It was new roofed in 1761, and has been frequently repaired at considerable expense to the heritors. At present it is in tolerable condition. From its situation almost on the sea shore, and on the bank of the Dreel, it is like to be damp in winter; a stove, however has been erected in it, which will add much to its comfort.*⁸⁶

*The number of Dissenters in the parish is just 15, in addition to 4 Episcopalians. Almost all of the families, and almost of all of the individuals are connected to the establishment...*⁸⁷

John Leighton 1840.

*The parish church is a very ancient structure, although the date is not known.*⁸⁸

George Gourlay, 1888

*It is said by some that a Culdee cell, with its oaken post and wattled roof, supplanted a Druid Circle on the banks of the Dreel. Be this as it may, it was the masons in the train of St Margaret who erected the old sanctuary, with its double row of saxon pillars, the chancel at one end and the tower, the one fragment left to use at the other.*⁸⁹

Anstruther Easter: Parish Church

In 1837, the minister of St Adrian's, Robert Wilson, noted that a considerable portion of the town's population neither attended his church, nor one of the three meeting houses of Non-Conformists that could be found in the parish. Despite this, on the eve of the Great Disruption, Wilson provided a confident account of the role of the established church in Anstruther Easter. He counted around 330 of the 1000 or so residents of the burgh among his congregation, and, following some internal repairs in 1834, Wilson described his church *as now probably one of the most elegant country churches anywhere to be seen.*⁹⁰ After listing *the means of spiritual improvement afforded to the parishioners* that his church provided, and noting the success of his recently established Bible and Missionary Society, he recorded that thirty three families in the parish belonged to three different Non-Conformist meeting houses found in the town.⁹¹ Further renovations were carried out in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with notable features including a six light mullioned east window with stained glass: St. Peter and St. Philip (1905), The Miraculous Catch, Christ Stilling the Storm, St. John and St. Andrew (1907).⁹²

In 1961 the decision was taken to unite the parish churches of Anstruther Wester and Easter, and the more modern church at Easter was chosen for the new congregation which took the

⁸⁶ NSA, ix, 675.

⁸⁷ NSA, ix, 676.

⁸⁸ John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, 105.

⁸⁹ Gourlay, *Anstruther*, p. 10.

⁹⁰ NSA, ix, 300

⁹¹ NSA, ix, 300

⁹² 'Anstruther Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 30 Mar 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/888/name/Anstruther+Parish+Church+Anstruther+Easter+Fife>.

name Anstruther (St Adrian's) Parish Church. In 2016 a further union took place between the Parish Churches of Anstruther and Cellardyke, with the congregation choosing to call the new entity, St Ayle Parish Church. This name was chosen as a tribute to the earliest recorded church in the Anstruther Easter, the fifteenth-century chapel of St Ayle. Since 2019 the congregation has been linked to Crail, sharing facilities and a minister.

Robert Wilson 1837

It is believed that worship is performed in relatively few families. It must however, be added, that there is a large body of the inhabitants of this parish, whose general conduct and habits entitle them to respect; and that there are a few who afford good evidence of being actuated by the spirit and the principles of vital Christianity.⁹³

The church is most conveniently situated in large burying-ground, which is surrounded by an excellent wall....the roof of the church was repaired many years ago and in 1834 it underwent a thorough repair internally, being entirely re-seated in a most commodious form, and having a pulpit placed in one end and a gallery in the other- it is now probably one of the most elegant country churches anywhere to be seen.....⁹⁴



Memorial on exterior of Anstruther Easter Church. (B. Rhodes)

⁹³ NSA, ix, 298.

⁹⁴ NSA, ix, 300

The outward means of spiritual improvement afforded to the parishioners are; public worship on the Sabbath, forenoon and afternoon, and occasionally also in the evening; the yearly celebration of the Lord's Supper in the month of May; a Sabbath evening school; prayer meetings held once in two months and the usual visitations of the sick by the minister...The communicants in all are about 330...., with about 85 heads of family. A Bible and Missionary Society, composed of members belonging to the Established Church in Anstruther and Kilrenny, has since its formation three years ago, distributed yearly to various missionary objects about £18.⁹⁵

The Manse

Robert Wilson 1837

It remains to this day with very few alterations, and these only in the interior....The situation is remarkably well-chosen....A staircase in the form of a round tower, is carried up the whole height of the building, at the top of which there is a small apartment, commanding a very fine prospect and having on the outside, chiselled in stone, these words, "The Watch Tower". This manse, at present far inferior to modern manses, might with judicious repair, be made a most commodious dwelling, and might remain for generations a monument of the judgement and liberality of one (Melvill) who, during his harassed life, was scarcely permitted to occupy it for any length of time together.⁹⁶

St Ayle in the East Neuk 2019

St Ayle Parish Church was the name chosen by the congregation when the Parish Churches of Anstruther and Cellardyke became a harmonious union in 2016. The name has a special connection to our community as a chapel dedicated to St Ayle was built in the 15th century to serve the spiritual needs of the fishermen, coopers and brewers who lived here.⁹⁷

Anstruther Easter: **Burgher and United Presbyterian Church**

The Burgher Church was one of the three Non-Conformist congregations in the parish identified by Robert Wilson (1837).⁹⁸ In 1818 a group called the *Managers of the Associate Society of Anstruther* asked to join the Burgher Presbytery of Perth, who in 1820 supplied them with a grant of £20 to construct a church in the Backdykes. They had between 40 and 50 members when the new church was opened in 1821. In 1847 they became part of the United Presbyterian Church, and in 1852 built a new, and considerably larger church on the same site, with room for 400 and a vestry and classroom. This was known as the Anstruther Erskine United Free Church, and had, by 1898, a congregation of around 100. In 1904, following the union with the Free Church (1900), the two congregations in the town were combined and moved to the Chalmers Memorial Church. This meant that the 1852 church building was

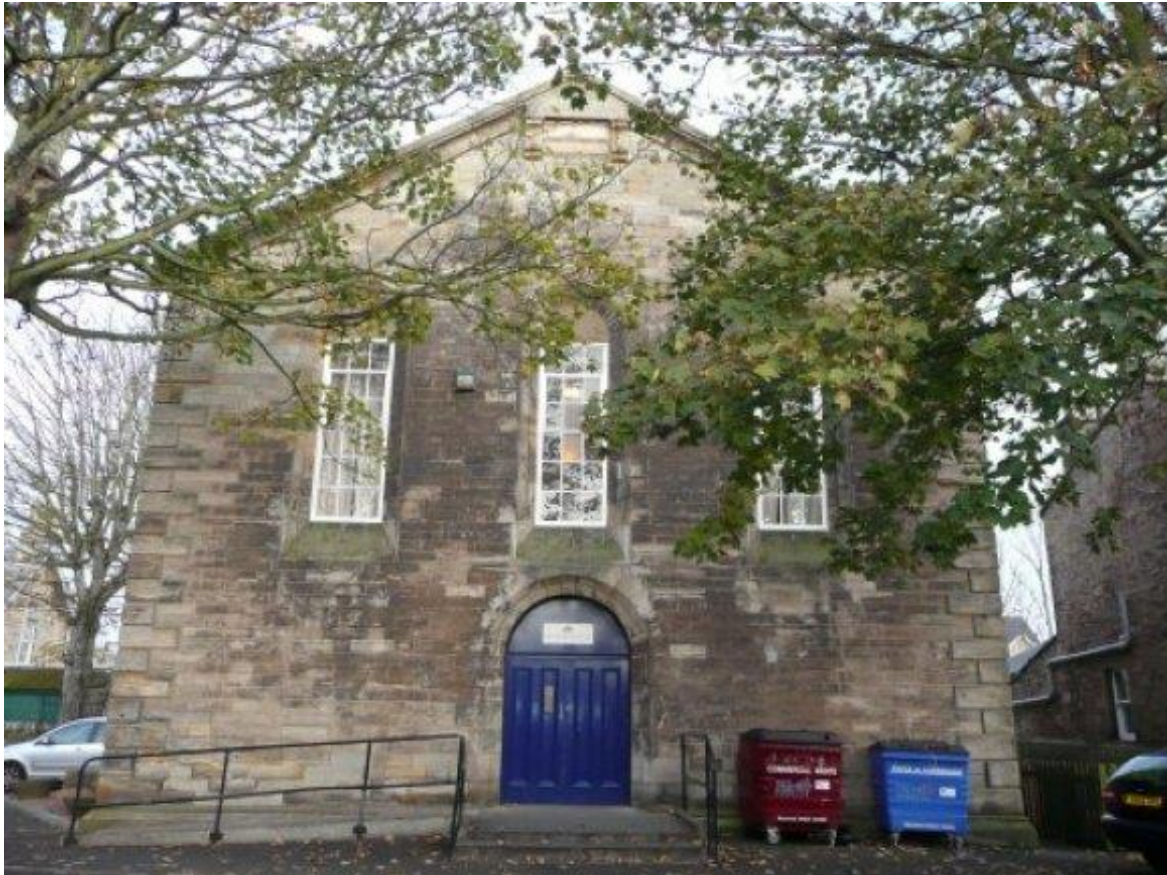
⁹⁵ NSA, ix, 302.

⁹⁶ NSA, ix, 300-301.

⁹⁷ 'History, St Ayle', *St Ayle in the East Neuk*, Accessed 26 May 2021, <https://www.stayle.org/st-ayle>.

⁹⁸ NSA, ix, 302.

surplus to requirements and it was sold.⁹⁹ Since 1900 the building has been used as a Labour Exchange (1938) and Shirt Factory (1978). It is now part of the East Neuk Community Centre, known as the Erskine Hall (since 1994).



Anstruther Erskine United Free Church, 2007. (SCHR Ltd.)¹⁰⁰

The missionary minister, William Meikle

Mr Meikle after some hesitation accepted (the charge of AE), and was ordained, 27th September 1848. On 29th November 1853 he intimated to the Presbytery that he had accepted an invitation to become minister of a Scottish congregation in Mobile, Alabama, and was to leave this country in a few days. He also mentioned' that in his new sphere of labour he would require to exercise prudence, he was told, in stating his mind on the subject of slavery, and the Presbytery in parting with him expressed the confident hope that he would continue to maintain the Church's testimony against the sin of man holding property in man. He ultimately removed to Oakville, Ontario, and was residing in 1899 at Toronto as a retired minister.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Robert Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900* (Edinburgh, 1904), ii, 398-400.

¹⁰⁰ 'Anstruther Erskine United Free Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 30 Mar 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/7798/image/3351/name/Anstruther+Erskine+United+Free+Church+Anstruther+Easter+Fife>, View Original © Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us for permission to use this image.

¹⁰¹ Small, *United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900*, ii, 399-400

Anstruther Easter: **Baptist Chapel**



Anstruther Baptist Church, 2007. (SCHR Ltd.)¹⁰²

The Baptists were one of the three Non-Conformist in the parish identified by Robert Wilson (1837).¹⁰³ The church was formed following a visit to the town by James Haldane in 1812, and meetings were held thereafter in the Tabernacle. In 1839 the congregation split into two sects (Baptists and Paedo-Baptists), who shared the building until 1860 when they moved into a new chapel, built in what Gifford describes as an *unexciting Gothic* style, on the East Green, a site in the eastern part of the town, close to the shore.¹⁰⁴ It had seating for 220 people, and was enlarged with a further 120 seats in 1882. The church Jubilee celebrations in 1909 at Anstruther town hall.¹⁰⁵ In 2003 a union between the Baptist congregations at Pittenweem and Anstruther formed what now known as the Coastline Community Church. They moved in new premises in Pittenweem, and the chapel in Anstruther is no longer in use.

¹⁰² 'Anstruther Baptist Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 30 Mar 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4592/image/2381/name/Anstruther+Baptist+Church+Anstruther+East+er+Fife> View Original © Copyright 2021, SCHR Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us for permission to use this image.

¹⁰³ *NSA*, ix, 302.

¹⁰⁴ Gifford, *Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, p.67.

¹⁰⁵ George Yuille, *History of the Baptists in Scotland from Pre-Reformation Times* (Glasgow, 1926), pp. 141-143, David W Bebbington, ed, *The Baptists in Scotland. A History* (Glasgow, 1988), p. 220.

Gourlay 1888

*Not many weeks had elapsed after the visit in 1798 of the eloquent sailor James Haldane when old weaver's shop in the East Green was known far and near as the 'Tabernacle'. Such is the origin of the once noted Congregational Church in Anstruther.*¹⁰⁶

Anstruther Easter: **Congregational/Evangelical Chapel**

The third Non-Conformist congregation in the parish identified by Robert Wilson (1837) were Congregationalists.¹⁰⁷ Their church was formed in around 1800, following preaching in the town by James Haldane and Joseph Rate in 1798. They met initially at 28 East Green, a weaver's shop owned by a Mr Thaw, known locally as the Tabernacle meeting house. A number of the group let to form the Baptist Church in 1812, with those remaining moving into a chapel on the Crail Road in 1833, built at a cost of £400.¹⁰⁸ In 1844 there was a split within the congregation, with a large proportion embracing the Evangelical form of worship. The Congregationalists thereafter held meetings in the Town House in Shore Street, and their chapel became the Evangelical church. They joined the Evangelical Union in 1861, and worshipped on the site until 1916 or 1919. At this point the church seems to have disbanded, and the building was secularised, subsequently becoming used as a warehouse by Grey & Pringle.¹⁰⁹



Former Anstruther Congregational Chapel, 2023. (B. Rhodes)

¹⁰⁶ Gourlay, *Anstruther*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ NSA, ix, 302.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow, 1960), pp. 273-274.

¹⁰⁹ Gifford, *Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, p.67.

Anstruther Easter: **Free Church**

Following the Great Disruption in 1843, the minister of Anstruther Easter, William Ferrie, joined the Free Church, taking with him around 300 of his former congregation. They built a small church in 1844 on a site in Hadfoot Wynd. In 1858 a larger, Gothic-style building was constructed on the same site, designed by the architect John Milne of St Andrews.¹¹⁰ In 1889 they moved again, this time to the Chalmers Memorial Church, after which time the 1850s building was abandoned and the site built over. Named after Thomas Chalmers, a key figure in the formation of the Free Church who was born in Anstruther, the new church was designed by the architect David Henry. It occupied a prominent position within the town as can be seen in the photograph from 1891 (Fig 16).¹¹¹ The Free Church congregation joined with the United Presbyterians in Anstruther in 1900 and subsequently formed the Anstruther Chalmers Memorial United Free Church. After re-joining the Church of Scotland in 1929, it was known as Anstruther Chalmers Memorial, until a link was established with St Adrian's Parish Church in 1973. Ten years later the church fell out of use, and into a derelict state. It was completely destroyed in a fire in 1991. There is no visible trace of the building, and houses have been built on the site.



Chalmers Memorial Church c.1890 . (HES: Erskine Beveridge Collection).¹¹²

¹¹⁰ William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, p.151.

¹¹¹ Gifford, *Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, p.67.

¹¹² 'Erskine Beveridge Collection', *Canmore*, Accessed 30 Mar 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/747687>.

1888 Gourlay

Mrs Mouat, the cousin of Eliza Cunningham, gave the site on the eve of the Disruption as a mark of esteem for her early friend Dr Chalmers. These were stirring days. The voice of the eloquent young minister William Ferrie rung like a trumpet with the crown rights of the Redeemer....and so, as in the days of old, the shoemaker threw aside his last and the tailor his needle to help as barrowmen to build the church. It was a modest structure with red tile roofs as in a farmyard, but, nevertheless, with the glorious emblem of the burning bush over the door. The Church was remodelled, at a cost of £800, in the summer of 1859.¹¹³

Cellardyke: Parish Church



Cellardyke Parish Church, 2023. (B. Rhodes)

It was in the early nineteenth-century that Cellardyke became known as the *Cod Emporium of Scotland*.¹¹⁴ The fleet peaked in size in the 1880s when Cellardyke was second only to Buckie amongst Scottish fishing ports, with 203 boats served by 650 men.¹¹⁵ The success of the fishing industry saw a steady increase of the population of the parish of Kilrenny in the early nineteenth

¹¹³ George Gourlay, *Anstruther, or, Illustrations of Scottish burgh life* (1st published, Cupar, 1888, 2nd edition, Anstruther, 2003), pp. 51-52.

¹¹⁴ Gourlay, *Fisher Life, or the Memorials of Cellardyke*, p. 62, Harry. D. Watson, *Kilrenny and Cellardyke* (John Donald, 3rd Edition, 2003), pp. 85-86

¹¹⁵ Watson, *Kilrenny and Cellardyke*, pp. 148-149.

century from 1043 persons in 1801 to 2039 in 1841.¹¹⁶ In 1806 the medieval parish church at Kilrenny was largely rebuilt, retaining only the tower and north wall from the earlier period. George Dickson, writing in 1843, suggested that it would have been more sensible to build the church closer to Cellardyke, where the bulk of the population of the parish now lived.¹¹⁷ A new church was finally built in Cellardyke in 1882, in a style described by Gifford as *Craggy Gothic*. The building has a main cell with north and south transepts, a tower on the north east corner and a session house to the rear of the building. The foundation of a new church followed a split in the congregation of Kilrenny precipitated by the arrival of a new minister, whose unpopularity with the fisherfolk of Cellardyke resulting in them joining the Free Church. Two years later Cellardyke was finally created into a separate parish and ordained its first minister.¹¹⁸ In 2016 a further union took place between the Parish Churches of Anstruther and Cellardyke, with the congregation choosing to call the new entity, St Ayle Parish Church. This name was chosen as a tribute to the earliest recorded church in the Anstruther Easter, the fifteenth-century chapel of St Ayle. Since 2019 the congregation has been linked to Crail, sharing facilities and a minister.

John Leighton 1840.

not on the whole of this coast a more adventurous set of fishermen than those belonging to Cellardyke; nor any who go more regularly in all weathers to the deep sea white fishing or in season to the herring fishing in the north'.¹¹⁹

1843 George Dickson

Having, upon inspection in 1806, been found in a dangerous state, it was taken down, and a plain commodious building erected on the same site, capable of accommodating about 800 sitters, but, in consequences of the rapid increase of the population, it should have been enlarged. Adjoining the church is an excellent school-room, to which a considerable addition has lately been made, and a comfortable dwelling-house at the same time built for the accommodation of the schoolmaster. Both kirk and school are so placed, as to be convenient for the country part of the population; but, as the great bulk of the inhabitants is in Cellardyke, it would have been desirable to have had them put down nearer to the locality.¹²⁰

1887 Wood, The East Neuk of Fife

The fishers of Cellardyke are a fine, stalwart race of men, active and self-reliant. The only building in the town that deserves notice is the Free Church Hall, a plain but commodious building.¹²¹

Commenting on the split of 1882, local historical Harry Watson (2003) noted that;

¹¹⁶ NSA, ix, 978.

¹¹⁷ In the census of 1841, it was noted that 1486 of the parish's population of 2039 lived in Cellardyke, NSA, ix, 981.

¹¹⁸ Watson, *Kilrenny and Cellardyke*, pp. 146-147.

¹¹⁹ Leighton, *History of the County of Fife*, iii, 95.

¹²⁰ NSA, ix, 981.

¹²¹ Wood, *The East Neuk of Fife*, p. 367.

In comparison with these tragedies, events on shore pale into insignificance, although as usual there was no shortage of controversial issues to excite the townspeople. Principal among these, as the 70s gave way to the 80s, was the new church on Toll Road. It is difficult now to recapture the mood which led to the split in the Kilrenny congregation, but the dissatisfaction of the Cellardyke fisherfolk with the new Kilrenny minister was at least partly to blame.¹²²

St Ayle in the East Neuk 2019

St Ayle Parish Church was the name chosen by the congregation when the Parish Churches of Anstruther and Cellardyke became a harmonious union in 2016. The name has a special connection to our community as a chapel dedicated to St Ayle was built in the 15th century to serve the spiritual needs of the fishermen, coopers and brewers who lived here.¹²³

Epilogue. Sacred Landscape of Twenty-First Century Anstruther and Cellardyke

Only two sites (St Adrian's in Anstruther Easter, and Cellardyke Parish Church), are still in ecclesiastical use, and both are used in rotation as part of shared charges. Anstruther has seen a steady depletion in the number of churches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, losing the Burgher/United Presbyterian Church (1900), Congregational Chapel (c.1919), Anstruther Wester Parish Church (1970), Chalmer's Memorial Church (1983) and Baptist Church (2003)

While some of these churches and support buildings have been demolished, others have been repurposed and are in private use, or, like the Dreel Halls in Anstruther Wester, function as community resources.



Notice on Cellardyke Church, reflecting the new dedication to St Ayle, 2023. (B. Rhodes)

¹²² Watson, *Kilrenny and Cellardyke*, p. 146.

¹²³ 'History, St Ayle', *St Ayle in the East Neuk*, Accessed 26 May 2021, <https://www.stayle.org/st-ayle>.

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