

# Culross Research Report



Culross Abbey, 2024. (B. Rhodes)

## Sacred Landscape Project

St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

Report by Dr Tom Turpie

February 2024

## Introduction

Located on the north shore of the Forth, Culross is one of the best preserved early modern burghs in Scotland. On the southwest fringes of Fife, it was until 1891 considered a detached part of Perthshire for administrative purposes. This situation dated back to the Middle Ages when the parish belonged to the earldom of Strathearn, largely contiguous with modern day Perthshire.<sup>1</sup> A small harbour town in the Middle Ages, and home to a colony of Cistercian monks, it was in the early modern period a centre of salt panning and coal mining industries. The prosperity that these industries brought produced a legacy of outstanding sixteenth and seventeenth century buildings, including the Town House and Culross Palace. Coal mining and salt panning declined by the late eighteenth century and in the modern era the town was largely bypassed by industrial development and the railway network. The limited development in the town in the modern era, and its relatively unspoilt early modern landscape, has meant that Culross has become a sought-after location for historical films and television, including *Kidnapped* (1971) and more recently the *Outlander* series (2013-).

In addition to its secular buildings, Culross possesses the ruins of a Cistercian Abbey, constructed in the thirteenth century. The sacred history of the site however, began before the abbey was founded in 1217. This history is connected to the careers of three saints, Serf, Tenew (Enoch), and Kentigern (Mungo). The association with Serf (or Servanus) is marked on the seal of the burgh of Culross (see Fig 2). A monastic centre of some form associated with that saint was founded in Culross in the early Middle Ages. By the late Middle Ages, the town was home to the abbey, a parish church dedicated to St Serf, and a chapel founded in honour of St Kentigern. After the Reformation, parts of the abbey were converted for use as the parish church, and the former (West) Church was abandoned. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Church of Scotland continued its use of the abbey, while Free Church and Roman Catholic congregations were founded elsewhere in the parish. Currently, Culross Abbey Parish Church (Church of Scotland) is the only active congregation in the area.

Fig 1. 'The Prospect of ye House and Town of Colross'. John Slezer (1714).<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Simon Taylor & Gilbert Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One. West Fife between Leven and Forth* (Donington, 2006), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Prospect of ye House and Town of Colross' - John Slezer's Engravings of Scotland, *National Library of Scotland*, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/91169238>.

## Religious sites and the landscape of Culross

Deposits of important minerals in its hinterland, tourism, and its coastal location have all played key roles in the development of Culross. However, its sacred history, and connection to an important local saint, are the likely catalysts for the foundation of a community in the early Middle Ages. The connection to St Serf, and the perceived power of his relics remained important for the remainder of the Middle Ages. This led to the establishment of a Cistercian Abbey in the town, and of further sacred buildings such as the chapel of St Kentigern. While the relics of the saint were less significant after the Reformation, the 1 July Feast Day remained an important social event and community bonding activity well into the modern era. The conversion of the abbey into the parish church has also meant that the monastic buildings continue to have a significant legacy for the population.

The period post c.1850 saw the proliferation of churches and support buildings such as manses and church halls in Culross and the surrounding villages, with a significant impact on the landscape. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, mergers between denominations, the consolidation of congregations, and the general decline in church attendance, left only one church (Culross Abbey Parish Church), in use. The response to redundant church buildings in Culross has been mixed, with the old West Church briefly used as a burial ground before its abandonment in the nineteenth century, and a similar fate befell the ruined chapel of St Kentigern. Conversely, large sections of the abbey were recycled and used as a parish church in the sixteenth century (and up until today), and the former Free Church (1943), was converted into private housing in the 1990s. The fate of the former RC church in High Valleyfield is uncertain.

Fig 2. Coat of Arms of Royal Burgh of Culross.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> 'Culross- St Cyrus', *British History Online*, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/scotland/pp246-259>.

## 1. Early Christianity (c500-c1000AD)

### Site of Interest

St Serf's Church?

### Nature of the Site

Culross first enters the written record in the thirteenth century with the publication of the life of St Serf (*Vitae Sancti Servani*- hereafter *VSS*) and charters associated with the foundation of a Cistercian Abbey by Maol Choluim I, Earl of Fife in 1217.<sup>4</sup> However, it is clear from documentary and archaeological evidence that both a secular and religious community had existed there long before that date. Culross' early sacred history is connected to three saints, Serf (feast day 1 July), Tenew (or Enoch, 18 July), and Kentigern (or Mungo, 13 January). Serf was an important local saint with dedications across Western Fife, Kinross, and Clackmannanshire. Culross was the centre of his cult, with relics of the saint housed at the Cistercian Abbey (1217), and presumably the religious building that preceded it. There are a number of different traditions regarding Serf's provenance. In the chronicle of John of Fordun (c.1380, including earlier materials) and the Aberdeen Breviary (1509), Serf is described as a contemporary of St Palladius (d. 461AD), placing his life and death in the 400s. Serf also appears in the legends of St Kentigern of Glasgow (d.614) and his mother Tenew/Enoch. This alternative tradition places his activities in the early 500s. According to the *Vita St Kentigerni* (c.1180), the saint's pregnant mother, Tenew, was cast adrift in a coracle from Aberlady Bay, eventually washing up on the shore near Culross where she was looked after by Serf. He became Kentigern's mentor, before that saint moved west to convert the kingdom of Strathclyde. A further tradition connects Serf with Adomnan of Iona (d.704)- and it is a date of around 700AD that is accepted by Alan Macquarrie, for the activities of the saint.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the accuracy of these various accounts, it is clear that a religious community of some form was located at Culross from the eighth century if not earlier.

### I. St Serf's Church?

The earliest religious community in Culross was likely located on the same site as the thirteenth century abbey. Carved stones have been found there predating the foundation of the abbey. Moreover, the main source of information regarding the saint, the *VSS*, locates Culross as the site of an earlier church.<sup>6</sup> According to the *VSS*, the saint was born in Canaan and then travelled west, eventually arriving in Scotland where he met St Adomnan of Iona (d.704). Adomnan suggested that Serf settle in Fife, which brought the saint into conflict with a local king, Bruide son of Dargart. After curing the king of a dangerous illness, Serf was granted the right to set

<sup>4</sup> Archibald, A. M. Duncan, ed. *Regesta Regum Scottorum V: The Acts of Robert I, 1306-29* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1986), no. 141 (Inspection of Robert I dated 5 Dec. 1318 of 1225 inspection of Alexander II).

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, p. 223. Alan Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani: The Life of St Serf', *Innes Review* 44:2, (1993), 122-152, at 150-151.

up his community in Culross, where he died some years later. Wyntoun's chronicle (1407x24) provides a similar account of the foundation of the community, adding his fosterage of St Kentigern, which is not included in the VSS. Sibbald and Leighton, writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were convinced that the church founded by Serf belonged to the Celi de or Culdee order of monks. Although the church dedicated to St Serf on Lochleven was certainly a Celi de church, there is no evidence that those monks established a branch at Culross, and Serf himself was unlikely to have been a member of that order.

#### Foundation of the church

*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. St Serf then came to the place called Culross, desiring to dwell there; he cleared away ad the spines and thorn-bushes which were growing freely there. But hearing this the king of Scotland, Brude son of Dargart, who at that time ruled over the Picts, became very angry, because he was dwelling there without his leave. So the king sent his spies to kill St Serf and and his familia. Meanwhile, an illness attacked the wicked king so that suddenly he was not far from giving up his spirit. So he sent in haste for the saint, and when he came the king in his illness spoke to him, saying, 'Saint of God, for Christ's sake in whom you trust, restore me to health, and you wid have the place where you dwell in perpetual alms.' The saint, moved by his prayers and piety, restored the king to health. Then he founded his burial-ground and dedicated his church at Culross.<sup>7</sup>*

#### Serf's death

*On the first of July, he gradually gave up his spirit and commended it to his Creator. After his death his disciples and almost ad the people of the province carried his body to Culross. And there they reverently buried him with songs and hymns and canticles, where his merits and the powers thereof have flourished to the present day.<sup>8</sup>*

*Andrew Wyntoun (1407x24)*

*Brude Dargaudies sone in to Scotland*

*King our the Pictis ban regnande*

*Was mowit in his crewelte*

*Agane Sancte Serf and his menshe.*

*He sent felon men for him*

*To slay haim al don but mercy';*

*Bot his king our takeyn was*

*Suddanly with gret seikness,*

*And at be prayer specyalle*

*Off Sancte Serf he was made haill.*

*Be kynge nam fel fra bat purposse,*

*And gaf til Sancte Serf al Culrosse,*

<sup>7</sup> Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani', 148.

<sup>8</sup> Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani', 152,

*With alkyn profitis all frely. ...*

*Thare first Sancte Serf tuke his resset  
To leif on it at he may get,  
And thare fosterit St Mungow,  
That syne was bishop of Glasgow..<sup>9</sup>*

*Efter al this Sancte Serf past  
West on to Culrosse alssa fast,  
And be his state [quehen] bat he knew  
Bat til his endyngre nere he drew,  
His wrechit warlde he forsuyk.  
His sacremantis bar al he tuk  
With schrift and ful contricion.  
He salde withe gud devocion  
His cors halowit sepulcre...<sup>10</sup>*

Celi De in Culross?

*Robert Sibbald 1707*

*Some of the seats were designed by the name of the Culdee, as St. Monan. Yea there were of them at Culross ; and wherever either a monastery or priory came to be built afterwards ; yea in the cathedrals there were some of them, as at Abernethy, Dunkeld and Brechin.<sup>11</sup>*

*John Leighton 1840*

*At Dunfermline there was an early Culdee establishment formed, as there was also at Kirkaldy ; and, according to Winton, Bridei, the son of Derili, founded one at Culross, about the year 700. Saint Serf, we are informed by Winton, resided here for many years before he went to Loch Leven ; and by the same authority we are informed that he afterwards went there, where he died and was buried. Here St Mungo, the supposed founder of the See of Glasgow, was for some time a disciple, previous to his removing to the West.<sup>12</sup>*

*In 1217, he also established a monastery of Cistercian monks at Culross, where there had previously been an establishment of Culdees; and after his death, which occurred in 1229, he was buried in the church of St Servanus at that place.<sup>13</sup>*

---

<sup>9</sup> Francis Amours, ed, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1903-1914), iv, pp. 80-82.

<sup>10</sup> Amours. *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun*, iv, pp. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Sibbald, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross, with the description of both, and of the firths of Forth and Tay, and the islands in them ... with an account of the natural products of the land and waters* (Cupar, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1803, original 1710), p.178.

<sup>12</sup> John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), i, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Leighton, *History of the County of Fife*, i, p. 25.



## 2. High Medieval Christianity (1000-1300)

### Sites of Interest

Abbey of Culross

Culross Parish (West) Church,

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

Although Culross first appears in charters from the thirteenth century, it is likely that religious and secular communities existed there prior to that time. Culross was part of the trading hinterland of the Royal Burgh of Inverkeithing, following its foundation c.1160, and all ships using the harbour had to pay customs and tolls to the baillies of that burgh.<sup>14</sup> Although the parish of Culross was within the earldom of Strathearn, the secular lord was the earl of Fife, and in 1217 Maol Choluim I, Earl of Fife (1204–1228), founded a Cistercian Abbey in the town. The parish church, which belonged to the diocese of Dunblane, was located to the northwest of the village and was gifted to the Cistercian monks by Maol Choluim in 1217.

### I. Abbey of Culross

Fig 3. Culross Abbey Church (Fawcett).<sup>15</sup>



The Cistercian Abbey of Culross is located on high ground to the north of the burgh. It was founded in 1217 by Maol Choluim I, Earl of Fife (1204–1228), who was himself buried in the church in 1228-1229. It was a daughter house of Kinloss Abbey in Moray (founded c.1150), and Hugh, former prior of Kinloss, was the first abbot. The Cistercians, or the White Monks, were a reformed order founded in the late twelfth century at the Burgundian Abbey of Citeaux. They became, and remain,

one of the largest and wealthiest of the Roman Catholic monastic orders. Culross was one of two Cistercian monasteries founded in Fife (the other was at Balmerino) and one of fourteen in the Kingdom of the Scots. There were also eight houses of Cistercian nuns. Reformed European orders of monks, such as the Cluniacs, proved attractive to the Scottish monarchs and nobility of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries because they brought with them a strong reputation for piety. They also brought new and innovative methods in farming and useful international trading connections. It is likely that the monks were attracted to the site at Culross because it had an existing church and a connection to an important local saint.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Dennison, 'Medieval Burghs', in Donald Omand, eds, *The Fife book* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000), pp 136-144, at 139

<sup>15</sup> Richard Fawcett, 'Culross- Architecture', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158088>.

Culross Abbey was dedicated to St Mary and St Serf. Mary served as the patron saint of the Cistercians. The joint dedication of Mary with Serf was a recognition of the long-term connection of that saint to the site and his role as a local patron. According to Richard Fawcett, the original abbey had a *small rectangular presbytery for the high altar, transepts with a pair of chapels on the east of each side, and a long aisle-less nave*. The eastern parts of the thirteenth-century structure are largely intact following their reuse as a parish church after the Reformation. They are some of the best examples of Cistercian architecture of that period to survive in the British Isles.<sup>16</sup>

*5 December 1214 X 6 December 1229*

*Malcolm, earl of Fife, has given, granted and by his charter established to God and Blessed Mary and Blessed Serf of Culross and the monks of the Cistercian order serving God there in perpetuity (i.e., Culross Abbey), for the foundation of their new abbey, for the welfare of the soul of his lord King William and the prosperity of his lord King Alexander, king of Scotland, and all their ancestors and successors, and for the welfare of the soul of himself and his father and mother and the souls of all his ancestors and successors, the whole shire of Culross (FIF) , by its right bounds, with church and castle and all just pertinents, and the shire and lands of Cults (FIF), Inzievar (FIF), Crombie (FIF), and a toft within the villa of 'Castletoune' (Dunimarle Castle, FIF), and £20 sterling annually from the monastery of North Berwick (ELO) in perpetuity and £10 annually from the Earl's Ferry, the church of Tullibole (KNR) with all its just pertinents, and the land of Gogar (CLA) next to the Water of Devon with 60s. sterling yearly from the ferme of Logie-Airthrey (STL) for the 60 acres of the said land of Gogar which was taken away from the monks by perambulation of the country in the presence of Earl Malcolm, and £33 6s. 8d. of annual rental in the villa of Cupar (FIF) and the mills of the same villa for the lands of Mountquhanie (FIF) and Rathillet (FIF), which had previously belonged to the monks but which they resigned to the earl for this sum of money, in free forest, in feu and heritage, with sake and soke, toll, team and infangthief, in free, pure and perpetual alms.<sup>17</sup>*

*24 February 1225*

*King Alexander II for Culross Abbey; recites a charter of Malcolm, earl of Fife, in which earl has given whole shire of Culross with its church and castle; lands of Cults (in Torryburn, FIF), Inzievar (FIF) and Crombie (in Torryburn, FIF); one toft in Castletoun (now Dunimarle, FIF); £20 payable yearly by monastery of North Berwick; £10 yearly from Earlsferry; church of Tullibole (KNR); land of Gogar (CLA) beside River Devon; 60s. yearly from fermes of Logie-Airthrey (STL) in exchange for sixty acres of land at Gogar; £33 6s. 8d. annual rent from villa and mills of Cupar in exchange for lands of Mountquhanie (FIF) and Rathillet (FIF); with right of free forest, in feu and heritage, and with soke and sake, toll, team and infangthief, in free, pure and perpetual alms. King Alexander thus ratifies, approves and establishes these donations and grants.<sup>18</sup>*

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard Fawcett, 'Medieval Churches, Abbeys and Cathedrals', in Donald Omand, eds, *The Fife book* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 125-144, at 130-131.

<sup>17</sup> Duncan, ed. *The Acts of Robert I*, v, no. 141 (Inspection of Robert I dated 5 Dec. 1318 of 1225 inspection of Alexander II)

<sup>18</sup> K.J. Stringer, *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, iii, *Acts of Alexander II*, (forthcoming) iii, no. 99.



*1 March 1313x1320*

*Duncan, earl of Fife, son of Earl Duncan, son of Earl Colban, has given, granted and by his charter established to St Mary and St Serf of Culross and the monks there, all donations, rents, pensions, lands, possessions and liberties which Malcolm, earl of Fife, his ancestor, patron and founder of the monastery of Culross gave to them and established by his charter, for the health of the souls of King William and his predecessors, and for the health of the souls of lord Alexander, king of Scotland, and all his parents and successors, and for the health of his own soul and of his father, mother, and the souls of his predecessors and successors, the whole land of Culross and the shire with church and castle and all pertinents and the land of Cults, Inzievar, Crombie and a certain croft within the villa of Castleton (now Dunimarle) and the church of Tullibody, the land of Gogar next to the water of Bonane and 60s. from the rents of Logie-Airthrey annually, for 60 acres of the land of Gogar, taken away from the same monks by perambulation of the country made in the presence of Sir Malcolm the earl, and £33 6s. 8d. annual rent in villa of Cupar and mills of the same, according to the tenor of Earl Malcolm's charter concerning the said sum, and £20 annually from North Berwick priory and £10 from Earl's ferry annually. To be held of him and his heirs, in free, pure and perpetual alms. He also wills and grants, for the health of the soul and prosperity of his lord, Robert, king of Scotland, and all his relations and successors, and for the health of the souls of his father, mother, predecessors and successors, that the monks may enjoy and possess all their lands, etc., as they were enjoyed and possessed before the war, notwithstanding the loss of their charters. Warrantice.<sup>19</sup>*

*Andrew Wyntoun (1407x24)*

*(1229) Malcolm, that tyme be Erl of Fiff,  
 Ended his dayis of lif;  
 In Culros his body lyis  
 His spirite in til Paradysse  
 Off qwit monkis that abbay  
 He foundit and dowit in his day.<sup>20</sup>*

## **II. Culross Parish (West) Church**

The parish church of Culross is first recorded in the 1217 foundation charter of the Cistercian Abbey of Culross. Maol Choluim I, Earl of Fife, gifted full possession of the church, both its parsonage and vicarage tithes, to the monks as part of his endowment of the monastery. The church lies around 800 metres to the northwest of the village on the old drover's road to Kincardine, which was included in the medieval parish of Culross. Fawcett concludes that *the church was first built at an unknown date, but possibly in the thirteenth century, as a rectangular structure, with windows in its east and south walls*. Further additions to the structure can be dated to the later Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> William Douglas, 'Culross Abbey and its Charters, with notes on a fifteenth-century manuscript', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 60 (1925- 26), 67- 94, at 73-75.

<sup>20</sup> Amours, *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun*, v, 88-90.

<sup>21</sup> Fawcett, 'Architecture'.

5 December 1214 X 6 December 1229

*Malcolm, earl of Fife, has given, granted and by his charter established to God and Blessed Mary and Blessed Serf of Culross and the monks of the Cistercian order serving God there in perpetuity (i.e., Culross Abbey), for the foundation of their new abbey, for the welfare of the soul of his lord King William and the prosperity of his lord King Alexander, king of Scotland, and all their ancestors and successors, and for the welfare of the soul of himself and his father and mother and the souls of all his ancestors and successors, the whole shire of Culross (FIF) , by its right bounds, **with church** and castle and all just pertinents.....<sup>22</sup>*

Fig. 4. Culross West Kirk. (B. Rhodes)



### 3. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)

#### Sites of Interest

Abbey of Culross

Culross Parish (West) Church,

Chapel of St Kentigern

#### Introduction/Nature of the Site

In the late Middle Ages, Culross remained a small community based around the abbey and the harbour. It was nominally within the economic hinterland of the Royal Burgh of Inverkeithing. Although in the fifteenth century the officials of Inverkeithing had to resort to the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland on a number of occasions to protest that their rights to collect customs from all ships using the harbour at Culross were being ignored.<sup>23</sup> The abbey and parish

<sup>22</sup> Duncan, ed. *The Acts of Robert I*, v, no. 141 (Inspection of Robert I dated 5 Dec. 1318 of 1225 inspection of Alexander II).

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Dennison, *Evolution of Scotland's Towns: Creation, Growth and Fragmentation* (Edinburgh, 2018), p. 15, James Marwick, ed, *Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1826-1902), i, pp. 375, 401, 435-436 (Culross)

church continued to be the main religious institutions in the town, and a further chapel, dedicated to St Kentigern, was founded in 1503. One of the most important events in the town was the Feast Day of St Serf which took place on 1 July. Long after the Middle Ages, this festival continued to be marked by the townspeople, who walked in procession carrying the branches of trees to commemorate the legend of the town's foundation from the *Vita St Servani*. There is tentative place-name evidence for two further chapels in the parish. *Barchappell*, located to the north of the abbey, was first noted in a charter of 1587, and *Chapelbath* appears in 1543, but no further information survives regarding these foundations.<sup>24</sup>

*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. St Serf then came to the place called Culross, desiring to dwell there."<sup>25</sup>*

Festival of St Serf

*1794 Robert Rolland and Walter McAlpine*

*This Servanus, or St Serf, lived at the time in a hermitage, where the monastery was afterwards built, and was, as is said, the son of a King of Canaan. After various peregrinations, he departed his life at Culross, of which town he became the tutelary saint, and in honour of him, a whole day annually was formerly solemnized by the people here. This was attended by with a variety of ceremonies, particularly parading the streets and environs of the town very early in the morning, with large branches of birch and other trees in their foliage, accompanied with drums and other musical instruments, adorning the cross, and another public place called the Tron, with a great profusion and variety of flowers, formed into different devices, and spending the evening in festivity and mirth. The day appropriated to this was 1<sup>st</sup> day of July....while the Saint himself is forgotten and not so much as known to many of them, his ceremonies are still preserved and his spirit continues to inspire them with social mirth and joy.<sup>26</sup>*

*1845 Rev AB Duncan and Rev John Balfour*

*The festival of St Serf was kept here yearly on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, when the inhabitants marched in procession carrying green boughs. The custom has not altogether disappeared, although the day has been altered to 4<sup>th</sup> of June, birthday of his late Majesty George III.<sup>27</sup>*

*1885 David Beveridge Culross and Tulliallan*

*St Serf is regarded as the patron saint of Culross. and its Abbey Church is dedicated to him and the Virgin. His festival day is the 1st of July, which up to the Reformation and even beyond it was observed with great ceremony, the inhabitants walking in procession and carrying*

<sup>24</sup> Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 226 & 230.

<sup>25</sup> Macquarrie, 'Vita Sancti Servani', 148.

<sup>26</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1791-9), OSA, x, pp. 146-147.

<sup>27</sup> *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1834-45) (NSA), x, p. 600.

branches of trees. Frequent references are also made to it as a legal term in ancient documents connected with the locality.<sup>28</sup>

## I. Abbey of Culross

Fig 5. Culross Abbey Tower (B. Rhodes).



In the late Middle Ages the Abbey of Culross received significant additions to its fabric. Conventual buildings were added in the fourteenth century, before the most significant change occurred in the late fifteenth century, probably during the abbacy of Andrew Mason (1486-92). In that period a central tower was constructed between the monk's choir and the part of the nave previously used by the lay brothers. This may have reflected changes in the membership of the abbey community, with a reduction in the numbers of lay brothers, those non-clerical members of the Cistercian order who were responsible for manual labour and other tasks.<sup>29</sup> The abbey housed the relics of St Serf, and one miracle attributed to the saint was recorded in Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*. Evidence of pilgrims visiting the shrine is limited, although James IV made an offering at the relics in 1511. The abbey also housed altars dedicated to the Holy Trinity and St Kentigern, who had reputedly been born in Culross.

### Altars in the abbey

16 Jan 1327

Royal charter (Robert I), granting *the barony of Philpstoun, in the shire of Edinburgh and constabulary of Lithlithgow, to the church of St Mary the Virgin and St Servanus (Culross), providing for the monks to celebrate a mass for the health of his soul at the altar of the Holy Trinity in that church.*<sup>30</sup>

1560

*Rental of....the altar of Sanct Mungo within the abbey kirk of Culross pertaining to .....John Brown in Culros, chaplains of the same.*<sup>31</sup>

### Miracles and relics

10 June 1334

*In 1335 (sic) Sir John de Strivelyn, a knight of the king of England, with a great multitude of both English and Anglicised (Scots).....all assembled together in the middle of Lent in the aforesaid year to besiege the castle of Loch Leven.....Meanwhile (after the English forces had tried various stratagems against the castle), the annual celebration of the blessed Margaret queen of Scots was drawing near, and the aforesaid John de Strivelyn, desiring to attend this*

<sup>28</sup> David Beveridge, *Culross and Tulliallan; or, Perthshire on Forth, its history and antiquities* (Edinburgh, 1885), i, p.65.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Fawcett, *The Architecture of the Scottish medieval church, 1100-1560* (New York: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 383-385.

<sup>30</sup> John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914), (RMS), i, App. 1. no. 25.

<sup>31</sup> James Kirk, ed, *The books of assumption of the thirds of benefices* (Oxford: British Academy, 1995), 522.

*celebration which is customarily held every year at Dunfermline, made some of this people go with him; but he ordered many to stay and keep watch in the fortress and around the loch because of the siege of the castle (following the departure of Sir John the garrison, with the help of St Serf, managed to divert the loch to flood the English camp and lift the siege).<sup>32</sup>*

While this incident indicates the popularity of St Margaret with both the English and the Scots, the miracle itself was attributed by Bower to St Serf.

*5 Oct 1511*

*Item, offerit (by James IV) to Sanct Serfis fertur, 14 shillings.<sup>33</sup>*

## II. Culross Parish (West) Church

Fig 6. Culross Parish Church South Aisle (Fawcett, 2011)



The parish church of Culross remained fully appropriated to the Cistercian monks up to the Reformation when £200 from the abbey's income was allocated to the new minister of the church, an indication of the value of the tithes. At some point in the late Middle Ages, there was extensive rebuilding work at the church. Two doorways in the nave reuse medieval grave slabs for their internal lintels, and an aisle projecting from mid-point of the south wall seems to have been added prior to the Reformation. Traditionally this was identified as a seventeenth-century mortuary aisle, but Fawcett argues that it was a side chapel added to the structure while the church was still in use, in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> It is possible that the church had already been abandoned by the

Reformation, although evidence is patchy. The earliest reference to the name West Kirk, dates from 1540.<sup>35</sup>

*1560 Thirds of Benefices*

*(deducted from the rents of Culross abbey) yeirlie to ane minister to serf in the kirk of Culros, conforme to the Buk of Reformatioun, £200'.<sup>36</sup>*

<sup>32</sup> Donald. E. R Watt, ed, *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English* (Aberdeen, 1987-1999), vii, pp. 99-101.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Dickson, ed, *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* (Edinburgh, Scottish Record Office, 1877-1916), (TA), iv, p. 176.

<sup>34</sup> Fawcett, 'Architecture', Paddy Monaghan, *The Story of the Culross West Kirk* (Culross, 1999), p. 8.

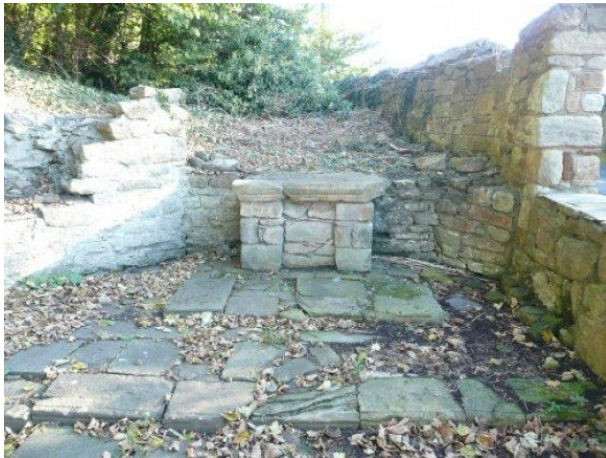
<sup>35</sup> RMS, iii, no. 2869, 'Culross West Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 24 August 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/1641/name/Culross+West+Church+Culross+Fife>.

<sup>36</sup> Kirk, ed, *The books of assumption of the thirds of benefices*, 292



### III. Chapel of St Kentigern

Fig 7. St Mungo's Chapel (Ewan Malecki (October 2007)).<sup>37</sup>



In 1503 Robert Blacadder, Archbishop of Glasgow (1484-1508) founded a chapel dedicated to St Kentigern in Culross. The foundation was part of a broader campaign by the archbishop, whose family were from a nearby Tulliallan, to promote the cult of his diocesan patron, commonly known as Mungo. This included endowing a new altar dedicated to the saint in Glasgow Cathedral, and the planning of an ambitious new aisle in the church.<sup>38</sup> According to the *Vita St*

*Kentigerni* (composed in the twelfth century), the saint's pregnant mother (Tenew) was cast adrift in a coracle from Aberlady Bay, eventually washing up on the shore near Culross where she gave birth to Kentigern. He was raised under the mentorship of St Serf, before undertaking a mission in the west where he converted the kingdom of Strathclyde. The chapel was located to the southeast of the abbey, close to the shore on a site probably considered at the time to have been Kentigern's birth place. It was a rectangular structure, divided into two chambers divided by a rood screen, with the chancel slightly higher than the nave.<sup>39</sup> In 1511 James IV made an offering in the chapel while passing through Culross.

*31 May 1503*

Royal charter (James IV) confirming a charter by Robert Blackadder, archbishop of St Andrews, *founding a chapel in honour of St Kentigern built near the monastery of Culross*

*The King has confirmed in mortmain a charter of Robert, archbishop of Glasgow, by which, with the consent of his chapter, for the salvation of William, bishop of Aberdeen, etc., he founded a chaplainry for perpetual ministry in the church of the most blessed Kentigern, confessor, built by him near the monastery of Culross.*<sup>40</sup>

*5 Oct 1511*

*Item, the 5 day of October, offerit (by James IV) in the chapel of Sanct Mungo besid Culrose, 14 shillings.*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> 'St Mungo's Chapel', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 August, 2021,

<http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/1645/image/2221/name/St.+Mungo%27s+Chapel+Culross+Fife>

<sup>38</sup> *RMS*, ii, no.2723. The Blacadder Aisle was the last major building work completed at the cathedral, what remains today is a remnant of the ambitious plans that the archbishop had for a new east wing, and Norman Shead, "Benefactions to the Medieval Cathedral and See of Glasgow," *Innes Review* 21 (1970), 3-16 at 15.

<sup>39</sup> Fawcett, *The Architecture of the Scottish medieval church*, pp. 356-357.

<sup>40</sup> *RMS*, ii, no.2723.

<sup>41</sup> *TA*, iv, p. 176.



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

### Sites of Interest

Culross Abbey Parish Church  
Culross Parish (West) Church,  
Chapel of St Kentigern

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

Culross was made a burgh of barony in 1489. It was elevated to Royal Burgh status in 1592, with further privileges, including the right to hold a number of fairs, granted in 1662.<sup>42</sup> These changes reflected a period of considerable change for the town following the establishment of two coal mines by Sir George Bruce of Carnock in 1575 and 1595, one of which, the Moat Pit, extended underneath the Forth. The seventeenth century also saw a considerable expansion of the salt panning industry, with salt and coal exports leading to an expansion of the harbour. Following the Reformation there were significant changes to the religious provision in the town, with the suppression of the monastery, and the conversion of parts of it into the parish church. Although the former West Kirk was allowed to decay, its graveyard was still used for burials. By the late eighteenth century, a number of parishioners (the minister estimated about 50) left the established church to join the Burgher and Anti-Burgher secession churches in Inverkeithing and Dunfermline. Some traditions survived these religious changes, including the marking of the feast day of St Serf as described in 1794.

1794 Robert Rolland and Walter McAlpine

*After various peregrinations, he (St Serf) departed his life at Culross, of which town he became the tutelar saint, and in honour of him, a whole day annually was formerly solemnized by the people here. This was attended by with a variety of ceremonies, particularly parading the streets and environs of the town very early in the morning, with large branches of birch and other trees in their foliage, accompanied with drums and other musical instruments, adorning the cross, and another public place called the Tron, with a great profusion and variety of flowers, formed into different devices, and spending the evening in festivity and mirth. The day appropriated to this was 1<sup>st</sup> day of July.... while the Saint himself is forgotten and not so much as known to many of them, his ceremonies are still preserved and his spirit continues to inspire them with social mirth and joy.<sup>43</sup>*

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1661/1/441. Date accessed: 10 August 2021.

<sup>43</sup> *OSA*, x, pp. 146-147.

## I. Culross Abbey Parish Church

Fig. 8. Culross Abbey Church Interior (Fawcett).<sup>44</sup>



Shortly after the Reformation, the presbytery, transepts choir and tower of the Abbey were converted into the parish church of Culross. This situation was formerly recognised by an Act of Parliament in 1633. The former abbey buildings were further repurposed in 1637 when a manse was built on the site of the northern part of the west range of the abbey cloister. The original two-storey building was extended with a further storey added in 1752, before further additions were made in the early nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The location of

the new parish church was more convenient for those living in the burgh, although the steep hill up to the abbey could cause problems for parishioners, as noted in a petition to the Kirk session in 1630. There were also complaints from those living in further flung parts of the parish, especially from Kincardine which was subsequently disjoined from Culross in 1663.<sup>46</sup>

Fig. 9 Bruce of Culross and Carnock Monument (Bess Rhodes)



Kirk Session records for Culross survive from the 1630s. As John McCallum has shown, sabbath breaking seems to have been one of the major concerns of the elders and minister in that period, although on one occasion two men were brought before the session for seeking miraculous cures at a chapel in Strathearn. One major addition to the new church was a funerary monument constructed for George Bruce of Culross and Carnock (d. 1625) in the former North Chapel. Constructed by John Mercer, it was completed in 1642.

Formal recognition of Abbey as parish kirk

18 June 1633

*Considering that the abbey kirk of Culross has been the kirk wherein the cure has been served by preaching of the word of God, celebrating the holy communion and exercising and using of other ecclesiastical discipline since the reformation, and that the kirk, called the parish kirk of Culross, is an old kirk wherein service is not, nor has not, been used since*

<sup>44</sup> Fawcett, 'Architecture'.

<sup>45</sup> 'Culross Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 24 August 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4618/name/Culross+Abbey+Parish+Church+Culross+Fife>.

<sup>46</sup> Monaghan, *The Story of the Culross West Kirk*, p. 10.

*memory of man and is altogether ruinous, decayed and fallen down in diverse parts, so that the said abbey kirk of Culross is the most apt and fit kirk for serving of the cure thereat in time coming, and be reputed and held the ordinary parish kirk for that effect in all time hereafter, therefore our said sovereign lord and estates foresaid in this present parliament have erected and by this act erects the said kirk called the abbey kirk in a free parish kirk to the said burgh of Culross, parishioners and inhabitants within the said parish thereof, to be called in all time coming the parish kirk of Culross, so that the inhabitants within the bounds thereof shall in no way be astricted hereafter to the said old kirk, called the parish kirk of Culross, nor discipline thereof, and upheld the same to that effect, but shall only be subject to the discipline to be used at the said abbey kirk of Culross, now to be called the parish kirk thereof in all time coming ...*<sup>47</sup>

### 1630 Kirk Session

*Item, the sessione ordained seats to be sett up in the tolbooth and the prayers to be read upon wednesday and freyday in the morning....for the ease of the people.*<sup>48</sup>

McCallum suggests that the parishioners had complained about climbing the steep hill to the parish church (in the old abbey) in winter...

Number of Cases pursued by Culross Kirk Session, 1630-1640.<sup>49</sup>

Sabbath Breach	229	Violence	6
Fornication	98	Kirkyard/ Burial related	4
Verbal	65	Witchcraft and related offences	4
Communion Absence	18	Unknown	4
Receiving Forbidden Person	15	Marital	2
Disobediance	14	Child-Death	2
Drink	13	Incest	2
Adultery	13	Superstition	2
Scandalous Carriage	10	Sexual Assault	1
Religious Ignorance	6		

### 1637 Kirk Session

Two Culross men were found to have gone with another man *distracted in his wittes* to a chapel in Strathearn apparently seeking cures, *it wes judged a great scandal and offence....* The men were punished relatively harshly with public repentance, a fine of half a dollar (roughly £1 Scots) and imprisonment for 24 hours.<sup>50</sup>

### Burial Aisles and the Bruce Vault

#### 1760 Richard Pococke

<sup>47</sup> *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1633/6/101. Date accessed: 10 August 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in John McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish. The Reformation in Fife, 1560-1640* (St Andrews, 2010), p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish*, p. 198.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish*, p. 204.

*Going a mile further we came to Cullross or Kyllenross. This is just within the Shire of Perth, into which we entered again; it is a small town and was erected into a Burg of Barony in 1484. The present parish Church, was the Abbey Church of the Cistercians founded here by Malcolm Earl of Fife in 1217, the Monks being brought from Kinloss.*

*The tower is in the Saxon style, and so is a door to the south of it which was the Entrance of the Convent; some Gothic doors are built near it; in a Chapel to the North is a fine Monument to Mr George Bruce and his Lady with their Couchant Statues, and their three sons and five daughters kneeling below.<sup>51</sup>*

*1885 David Beveridge Culross and Tulliallan*

*The little chapel or aisle on the north side of the choir, now in ruins, but exhibiting still in the fragment of a window a beautiful specimen of ancient architecture, was then known as the Little or Old Aisle, to distinguish it from the New Aisle recently erected by George Bruce. The old burial- place of the Preston family in the porch has long been disused, in consequence of their descendants. Sir Robert Preston and Lady Baird, having built other mausolea for themselves; but the vault of the Cunninghams of Balgownie, though a modern structure, adjoins the Little Aisle.<sup>52</sup>*

*1794 Robert Rolland and Walter McAlpine*

*The monastery.....lies NW from St Mungo's, at the head of the town, on a rising ground, commanding a beautiful and extensive prospect of the Frith...Considerable remains of it are yet to be seen...on the north side was the Abbey Church, which had a tower or steeple in the middle, still entire, as is also a part of the church now made use of for the parish church.<sup>53</sup>*

*Assessment of the people and seceders.....*

*A proper regard to religion, and to respect for its institutions, almost universally prevail. There is no place of worship but that of the established church. The number of sectaries, chiefly Burgher and Anti-Burgher Seceders, does not exceed 50, and these show no symptoms of sourness or bigotry, but on the contrary are exceedingly mild, civil and obliging in their manner, living in perfect good neighbourhood with all around them, and are by no means the least industrious in the parish. The fashionable modes of free thinking are hardly known, and avowed by none, except by such, and these extremely few, as, from conscious vice and folly, account it in their interest not to think at all.<sup>54</sup>*

---

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Kemp, ed, *Tours in Scotland by Richard Pococke 1747, 1750, 1760, Bishop* (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 288.

<sup>52</sup> Beveridge, *Culross and Tulliallan*, i, p. 218.

<sup>53</sup> OSA, x, pp. 146-147.

<sup>54</sup> OSA, x, p. 149

## II. Culross Parish (West) Church

Fig 10. Old Gravestone at Culross (West) Church (Canmore, 2012).<sup>55</sup>



The parishioners of Culross moved into the eastern parts of the former Abbey shortly after the Reformation, although when exactly they ceased to use the West Kirk is unclear. In 1633, when this arrangement was formalised, it was noted that the church had not been used in living memory. After it fell out of ecclesiastical use, the church's roof was taken off and parts of the structure were adapted for use as burial places for several local families.<sup>56</sup> A range of early seventeenth century funerary monuments can still be found in the church yard.

Formal recognition of Abbey as parish kirk

18 June 1633

*Considering that the abbey kirk of Culross has been the kirk wherein the cure has been served by preaching of the word of God, celebrating the holy communion and exercising and using of other ecclesiastical discipline since the reformation, and that the kirk, called the parish kirk of Culross, is an old kirk wherein service is not, nor has not, been used since memory of man and is altogether ruinous, decayed and fallen down in diverse parts, so that the said abbey kirk of Culross is the most apt and fit kirk for serving of the cure thereat in time coming, and be reputed and held the ordinary parish kirk for that effect in all time hereafter, therefore our said sovereign lord and estates foresaid in this present parliament have erected and by this act erects the said kirk called the abbey kirk in a free parish kirk to the said burgh of Culross, parishioners and inhabitants within the said parish thereof, to be called in all time coming the parish kirk of Culross, so that the inhabitants within the bounds thereof shall in no way be astricted hereafter to the said old kirk, called the parish kirk of Culross, nor discipline thereof, and upheld the same to that effect, but shall only be subject to the discipline to be used at the said abbey kirk of Culross, now to be called the parish kirk thereof in all time coming ...<sup>57</sup>*

1760 Richard Pococke

*Going a mile further we came to Cullross or Kyllenross .... Going on, I saw the old small parish Church of Culross, which is patched up with several kinds of buildings, and over the doors are tombstones with Crosses on them ; over the west door is an oblong square window separated from the door only by a single stone ; this west end seems to be of great antiquity.<sup>58</sup>*

1794 Robert Rolland and Walter McAlpine

<sup>55</sup> 'Culross, West Church and Churchyard', *Canmore*, Accessed 24 August 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/48029/culross-west-church-and-churchyard>.

<sup>56</sup> Fawcett, 'Architecture'.

<sup>57</sup> *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1633/6/101. Date accessed: 10 August 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Kemp, ed, *Tours in Scotland by Richard Pococke*, p. 288.

*About a quarter of a mile to the west of the Abbey Church are the ruins of the old church, which was, before the Reformation, the parish church, and which, with the church yard around it, still used as a burial-ground.<sup>59</sup>*

## **5. Late Modern (1800-2021). Religion in modern Culross**

### Sites of Interest

Culross Abbey Parish Church  
 Culross Parish (West) Church,  
 Chapel of St Kentigern  
 Culross Free Church  
 St. Serf's Roman Catholic Church

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The coal mining and salt panning industries that had played such an important role in the development of early modern Culross were firmly in decline by the end of the eighteenth century, and consequently the harbour gradually fell out of use. The town was largely bypassed by industrial and urban development in the Victorian era, and significantly by the new railway network. The population declined from 1,502 in 1801 to only 1,120 in 1901 (including the villages of Valleyfield and Blairburn). It received something of a boost with the opening of new pits at Valleyfield and Blairhall in the early twentieth century, which saw the population increase to 4,220 by 1951.<sup>60</sup> The National Trust began to take an interest in the town in the 1930s, and has since worked to restore many of its fine early modern buildings. It began to attract film makers from the 1970s, and is now a sought-after location for period dramas. The burgh of Culross and the surrounding villages were served by the Church of Scotland parish church located in the former Abbey, a Free Church (1843) and a Roman Catholic Church (1922). In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, denominational mergers, unions between congregations, and a changing population have left only the Culross Abbey Parish Church as an active congregation. The tradition of celebrating St Serf's feast day (1 July), gradually died out in the nineteenth century after it was switched to the 4 July to mark the birthday of George III (1760-1820).

### *Wilson 1868*

*It has a picturesque and pleasing appearance, as seen from the Frith; but it is scattered, dingy, mean, and decayed within itself, the mere skeleton of an ancient town, almost destitute of any attraction, excepting some architectural antiquities. Most of its houses are shabby, all its streets are in disrepair. It was once a seat of great thoroughfare, first as a seat of monastic power, and next a seat of manufacture and commerce; but it now sits in loneliness,*

---

<sup>59</sup> OSA, x, pp. 146-147.

<sup>60</sup> 'The population of the parishes of Fife, from 1755 to 1961', *GENUKI*, Accessed 7 September 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/ParishPopulations>.



*encompassed in the near distance by tumultuous traffic, yet is scarcely ever visited by either trader or tourist.*<sup>61</sup>

*John Geddie 1894*

*This is Culross, a noon of Fife difficult to get at, and still harder to get away from. Railways do not come within two miles of it, no passengers by water land at its little pier.....forlorn old royal burgh.....*<sup>62</sup>

*1902, Cunningham*

*the Burgh of Culross is one of the little towns of the ancient 'Kingdom' which has seen a good many changes.....Away back in the dim and distant past, buildings, which now lie in ruins, echoed and re-echoed to the feet of an army of ecclesiastic dignatories....*<sup>63</sup>

*Festival of St Serf*

*1845 Rev AB Duncan and Rev John Balfour*

*The festival of St Serf was kept here yearly on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, when the inhabitants marched in procession carrying green boughs. The custom has not altogether disappeared, although the day has been altered to 4<sup>th</sup> of June, birthday of his late Majesty George III.*<sup>64</sup>

*1885 David Beveridge Culross and Tulliallan*

*St Serf is regarded as the patron saint of Culross. and its Abbey Church is dedicated to him and the Virgin. His festival day is the 1st of July, which up to the Reformation and even beyond it was observed with great ceremony, the inhabitants walking in procession and carrying branches of trees. Frequent references are also made to it as a legal term in ancient documents connected with the locality.*<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> John M. Wilson, *Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland* (London and Edinburgh, 1868), p. 335.

<sup>62</sup> John Geddie, *The Fringes of Fife* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 22

<sup>63</sup> Andrew. S Cunningham, *Romantic Culross* (Dunfermline, 1902), p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> NSA, x, p. 600

<sup>65</sup> Beveridge, *Culross and Tulliallan*, i, p.65.

## I. Culross Abbey Parish Church

Fig 11. South transept (R. Fawcett 2012).<sup>66</sup>



The presbytery, transepts, choir, and tower of the Abbey have remained in use as the parish church of Culross throughout the modern era. It received repairs in the 1820s and 1860s, and a significant restoration by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson in 1903-1906, including the rebuilding of the south transept and presbytery. In the east end of the church is a stained-glass window depicting saints Serf and Kentigern (Mungo), with the coats of arms of Culross and Glasgow. The church was

served by two ministers until 1926 when it was decided a second charge was no longer necessary. The congregations of Culross Abbey Parish Church and of St Kentigern's were united in 1943 and the former Free Church in the Low Causeway fell out of use. More recently the church has united with Torryburn and High Valleyfield to form a single parish, with services alternating between the different sites.

*1845 Rev AB Duncan and Rev John Balfour*

*The object of greatest historical interest is the Abbey or Monastery of Culross, founded by Malcolm, Thane of Fife, in 1217. It occupies a commanding position at the top of the town, and some rather beautiful remains of it exist. The only part in good preservation is what now forms the parish church, and which was formerly the chapel of the monastery. It is in the form of a cross with a massive square tower on the west.*<sup>67</sup>

*The church of this place was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and also to St Serf or Servanus, who resided here, and who educated St Mungo or Kentigern, the Patron Saint of Glasgow.*<sup>68</sup>

*The church stands at the upper part of the town, and although the northern district of the parish is distant from it, it is well situated for the population, the great proportion of which reside in the town. The church being part of the ancient monastery, the time of its erection is the same as with that of the monastery. It had fallen, like most old churches in the country, into a state of great disrepair; but about fifteen years ago, it received a most complete and judicious repair, and is now one of the most comfortable places of worship in the country; while, from its structure and the ancient tower attached, it has all the venerable appearance which one expects to find in a building that dates so far back. It is seated for nearly 700.*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Fawcett, 'Architecture'.

<sup>67</sup> NSA, x, p. 599.

<sup>68</sup> NSA, x, p. 600

<sup>69</sup> NSA, x, pp. 603-604.

*Alexander Smith, 1952*

*The Monk's Choir of the Old Monastery is used for worship, as it has been for hundreds of years, by the people of Culross.....*<sup>70</sup>

## II. Culross Parish (West) Church

Fig 12. Eastern face of the mausoleum. Image: Ewan Malecki (October 2007).<sup>71</sup>



The West Parish church, abandoned for ecclesiastical use in the sixteenth century, continued to be used as a burial ground into the nineteenth century. In late nineteenth century a new mausoleum was constructed, probably to serve the Dalgleish family. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the graveyard has fallen out of use and the church has become a picturesque ruin on the tourist trail around Culross.

*1845 Rev AB Duncan and Rev John Balfour*

*About a quarter of a mile to the west of the abbey, are the ruins of the former parish church; but which, as appears from the terms of an act of Parliament of Charles I sanctioning the use of the present, as the parish church had not been in use 'in the memorie of man'.*<sup>72</sup>

*1894 John Geddie,*

*Along a sombre approach of araucarias and wellingtonias we stroll, until we strike a delightful cross-road wandering away into woodland glades, and shortly come upon a sequestered nook where the remains of the Old Parish Church of Culross are hidden.*<sup>73</sup>

*1902 Andrew S Cunningham, Romantic Culross*

*The ruined building lies about three quarters of a mile to the west of the Abbey through the Kincardine moor. Regarding the early beginnings of the church, history is silent; but authorities do not hesitate to say that its primitive style of architecture takes us back to the days of David I*

*From the ruins left it is difficult to say much of the architecture of the church. An ash tree of considerable dimensions has grown within the walls, and here and there patches of ivy cling to the ruins. It is apparent that long before the Reformation the Church had undergone*

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 407.

<sup>71</sup> *Places of Worship in Scotland*, 'Culross West Church'.

<sup>72</sup> NSA, x, p. 600.

<sup>73</sup> Geddie, *The Fringes of Fife*, p. 23.

*extensive repairs.....No one can visit the sacred spot without feeling that the stillness of age is upon it.*<sup>74</sup>

### III. Chapel of St Kentigern

The chapel of St Kentigern became a site of antiquarian interest in the late nineteenth century. It was cleared of the rubbish that had accumulated inside in the 1860s, and an excavation was carried out that revealed four skeletons. It was excavated again in the 1920s by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland, which provided an accurate picture of the size and dimensions of the church. It is now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland.

*1845 Rev AB Duncan and Rev John Balfour*

*At the east end of the town are remains of a chapel, called St Mungo's Chapel, near to which, tradition says that saint was born.*<sup>75</sup>

*1885 David Beveridge Culross and Tulliallan*

*It has already been hinted that the abbots of Culross and the Blackadders of Tulliallan entertained little mutual goodwill, notwithstanding of Archbishop Blackadder, a cadet of the family, having erected and endowed a chapel at Culross in honour of a distinguished native, the patron saint of Glasgow. Probably, indeed, the ground of St Mungo's on which the chapel was built belonged really as an appanage to the Cathedral of Glasgow ; and the little edifice in question, with its ministering chaplains, may have been regarded with no favour by the occupants of the splendid monastery at the top of the hill.*<sup>76</sup>

*At the south-eastern extremity of the Abbey grounds, just without the eastern side of the garden of St Mungo's, and closely adjoining the public road, are the remains of St Mungo's Kirk or Chapel, founded by Archbishop Blackadder in 1503, on the reputed locality of the landing of St Thenew and birth of St Mungo. It is probable, indeed, that an older cell or chapel marked this site, and the ground seems in former times to have been part of the patrimony of St Mungo's Cathedral in Glasgow.*

*The chapel is a complete ruin, almost level with the ground, with the exception of the north wall, which resembles a sunk fence in the bank above, and leaves it a matter of uncertainty whether it was originally built in this form or from the first stood detached, the intervening space between the wall and declivity having been subsequently filled up by the gradual descent of earth and rubbish. Two large beech-trees, certainly not of remote antiquity, flourish on the summit of this space. There is also the decayed trunk of an ancient elder-tree which grows near the north-western extremity, where some remains of the west wall and entrance are still visible. Of the south wall only the foundations are traceable, and these project into the public*

---

<sup>74</sup> Cunningham, *Romantic Culross*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>75</sup> NSA, x, p. 600

<sup>76</sup> Beveridge, *Culross and Tulliallan*, i, pp. 93-94.

road beyond the resent enclosing wall, which was built by Sir Robert Preston. The eastern extremity of the building formed a three-sided apse — a construction differing from the ordinary shape of the apse, which is generally semicircular. The lower part of its east and north-east side is still entire, the latter exhibiting on the outside a fine front of hewn stone. Traces of windows are also to be seen here. The length of the chapel from east to west is 54 feet, and the breadth 20 feet. A wall, still partly remaining, separated the outer compartment or nave from the interior or chancel, and the raised floor of flagstones with their rounded edges is still very plainly marked here in front of the site of the high altar and east window. Traces of sedilia or seats appear along the north wall, which has a height of from 10 to 12 feet.

About twenty years ago *St Mungo's Chapel*, which had been long abandoned to neglect, and turned into a receptacle of rubbish, was cleared out, and the outlines of the building, with its pavement of flag- stone, disclosed to view. It was visited shortly afterwards by a party of members of the *Scottish Antiquarian Society*, including Drs Joseph Robert- son and Robert Chambers, who were conducted to the various objects of interest around *Culross* by the Rev. W. Stephen, who acted as cicerone. Some excavations made either then or a short time previously resulted in the discovery of four skeletons — three of grown persons, and one of a child.<sup>77</sup>

1902 Andrew S Cunningham, *Romantic Culross*

The chapel stood at the south-eastern extremity of the *Abbey grounds* and closely adjoined to the public roads. The chapel had long been in ruins, and two beech trees flourish in the centre of the floor space.<sup>78</sup>

RCAHMS 1933, visited 19 March 1928.

The building has been two-chambered, while the semi-octagonal apse of the sanctuary and such architectural detail as is left are typical of the close of the 15th century, the approximate time of erection. The internal dimensions have been 20 feet from north to south by 55 feet 10 inches from east to west, within walls 2 feet 8 inches in thickness. At the east end is the base of the altar which is raised two steps above the general level of the floor paving. Both steps have a quirked edge-roll. Traces of other altars, set against the screen-wall separating nave and chancel, were found in excavation but, through a fall of debris, they are not at present visible.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Beveridge, *Culross and Tulliallan*, ii, 295-298.

<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, *Romantic Culross*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>79</sup> Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* (Edinburgh, 1933), pp. 77-78.

#### IV. Culross Free Church

Fig. 13 Culross Free Church (@Amanda Gow, 2007).<sup>80</sup>



At the Great Disruption of 1843 the second minister of Culross, John Balfour, left the Established Church, but did not form a new congregation in the town. In 1845 the remaining minister, Reverend Duncan, claimed that there were only 16 *dissenting* families in the parish. It was not until 1846 that a Free Church congregation was formed in Culross, and in the following year, with the support Mr Cunninghame of Balgownie, a church was built on the Low Causeway to the west of the town.<sup>81</sup> With a renewal of mining operations in the area around Culross in the late nineteenth century the congregation grew, and a manse (1873) and church hall (1883) were built in the town. In 1900 it had a congregation of 113, and in 1901, following the union between the Free and United Presbyterian Church, it became known as Culross United Free Church. In 1929 the congregation re-joined the Church of Scotland and changed its name to St Kentigern's Church. The congregations of St Kentigern's and Culross Abbey Parish Church united in 1943 and the former church in the Low Causeway fell out of use. In 1996 it was converted into private flats and is now known as Cunninghame House.<sup>82</sup>

##### *1845 Rev AB Duncan*

*The number of families in the parish connected with the Established Church is 333, of Dissenting or Seceding families, 16, and one Episcopalian family.*<sup>83</sup>

##### *1902 Andrew S Cunningham, Romantic Culross*

*At the Disruption the minister of the Second Charge in Culross left the Establishment. He did not, however, see his to comply with a request by some people to form a new charge, and went to reside in Edinburgh instead. A mission was formed, however, and services conducted for some time in the Town Hall. At the close of 1846 Mr Cunninghame of Balgownie inaugurated a scheme for building a church, and in the following year the work was completed.....In 1871 the first full minister was ordained.*

*The church has within recent years been largely altered and repaired, so that it is now of the most comfortable in the district*<sup>84</sup>

##### *Alexander Smith, 1952*

<sup>80</sup> 'Culross Free Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 14 September 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8090/image/1502/name/Culross+Free+Church+Culross+Fife>.

<sup>81</sup> William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, p. 139.

<sup>82</sup> *Places of Worship in Scotland*, 'Culross Free Church'.

<sup>83</sup> *NSA*, x, pp. 603-604.

<sup>84</sup> Cunningham, *Romantic Culross*, pp. 44-45.



*A year or two after the Disruption, the Free Church in Culross was born; and, after 1871, when it received full status, a church and manse were built. The Union of 1901 caused no change, but, in 1929, Culross United Free Church entered the union, becoming known as St Kentigern's Church of Scotland, and, in 1943, was united with the congregation of the Abbey under the minister of the latter. The former church of St Kentigern's has now been sold, and is being prepared as a meeting place for the local body of Freemasons.*<sup>85</sup>

## V. St. Serf's Roman Catholic Church

Fig. 14. St Serf's Roman Catholic Church (@Amanda Gow, 2007).<sup>86</sup>



The opening of new pits at Valleyfield and Blairhall in the early twentieth century, which saw the population increase to 4,220 by 1951, also led to the formation of a new Roman Catholic Congregation in the Culross area.<sup>87</sup> The church was constructed in High Valleyfield by Reginald Fairlie in 1922. It is a simple rectangular building with small transepts and a small bellcote which was added at a later date. In 1952 Alexander Smith noted that there was a

large Roman Catholic population in the area, and this remained the case in the 2011 census, when 545 (12% of the population) were recorded as belonging to that church.<sup>88</sup> However, by 2017 the church had fallen out of use and the parish is not included within the list of churches in the Roman Catholic Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld, and Dunblane.<sup>89</sup>

*Alexander Smith, 1952*

*The centre of Roman Catholic influence and direction is with the priest of St Serf's in High Valleyfield. There is a considerable Roman Catholic population in the Valleyfields, and to a lesser degree in Blairhall and Culross Burgh.*<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife*, pp. 408-409.

<sup>86</sup> 'St Serf's Roman Catholic Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 14 September 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10522/image/4058/name/St.+Serf%27s+Roman+Catholic+Church+Culross+Fife>.

<sup>87</sup> GENUKI, 'The population of the parishes of Fife, from 1755 to 1961'.

<sup>88</sup> 'Culross- Religion', *Scotland's Census*, Accessed 14 September 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>.

<sup>89</sup> *Places of Worship in Scotland*, 'St Serf's Roman Catholic Church'.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife*, pp. 408-409.

## **Epilogue. The Sacred Landscape of Culross in the Twenty-First Century**

The tradition of celebrating St Serf's feast day (1 July), gradually died out in the nineteenth century after it was switched to the 4 July to mark the birthday of George III (1760-1820). In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, denominational mergers, unions between congregations, and a changing population have left only Culross Abbey Parish Church as an active church in the town.

The loss of churches and congregations has been a steady process, beginning with the scrapping of a second charge at the parish church in 1926, then the merger between the two Church of Scotland congregations in 1943, leading eventually to the conversion of the former Free Church to private accommodation (1996). The Roman Catholic Church closed more recently, although when this happened, and why, is unclear.

## Bibliography

### Manuscripts

National Records of Scotland

### Maps

National Library of Scotland

John Slezer's Engravings of Scotland, 'The Prospect of ye House and Town of Colross' - *National Library of Scotland*, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://maps.nls.uk/view/91169238>

### Printed Primary

Amours, Francis J. ed. *The Original Chronicle of Andrew Wyntoun*, Edinburgh, 1903-14

Beveridge, David, *Culross and Tulliallan; or, Perthshire on Forth, its history and antiquities* (Edinburgh, 1885),

Brown K.M. et al eds, *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, St Andrews, 2007-2021

Cunningham, Andrew. S. *Romantic Culross*, Dunfermline, 1902

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

Duncan, A. A. M, ed, *Regesta Regum Scottorum V : The Acts of Robert I, 1306-29*, Edinburgh, 1986,

Ewing, William, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Edinburgh, 1914,

Geddie, John, *The Fringes of Fife* (Edinburgh, 1894),

Kemp, Daniel ed, *Tours in Scotland by Richard Pococke 1747, 1750, 1760, Bishop*, Edinburgh, 1887,

Kirk, John, ed, *The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices*, Oxford, 1995,

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

Macquarrie, Alan, ed. *Legends of Scottish Saints. Readings, hymns and prayers for the commemorations of Scottish saints in the Aberdeen Breviary*, Dublin, 2012

Marwick, James ed, *Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1826-1902),

*New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1834-45)

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan*, Edinburgh, 1933

Sibbald, Robert, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross, with the description of both, and of the firths of Forth and Tay, and the islands in them ... with an account of the natural products of the land and waters*. Cupar, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1803, original 1710

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

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

Stringer, K.J (ed). *Regesta Regum Scottorum, iii, Acts of Alexander II, (forthcoming)*, iii,

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

Watt, Donald E. R. ed. *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, Aberdeen, 1987-99

Wilson, John M. *Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland*. London and Edinburgh, 1868

#### Secondary Sources

Dennison, Patricia ‘Medieval Burghs’, in Donald Omand, eds, *The Fife book*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000, 136-144.

Dennison, Patricia, *Evolution of Scotland's Towns: Creation, Growth and Fragmentation* (Edinburgh, 2018)

Douglas, William, ‘Culross Abbey and its Charters, with notes on a fifteenth-century manuscript’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 60 (1925- 26), 67- 94

Fawcett, Richard, *The Architecture of the Scottish medieval church, 1100-1560* (New York: Yale University Press, 2011),

Fawcett, Richard, ‘Medieval Churches, Abbeys and Cathedrals’, in in Donald Omand, eds, *The Fife book*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2000, pp. 125-144,

McCallum, John *Reforming the Scottish Parish. The Reformation in Fife, 1560-1640*, St Andrews, 2010

Macquarrie, Alan, ‘Vita Sancti Servani: The Life of St Serf’, *Innes Review* 44:2, (1993), 122-152

Monaghan, Paddy, *The Story of the Culross West Kirk*. Culross, 1999

Shed, Norman, “Benefactions to the Medieval Cathedral and See of Glasgow,” *Innes Review* 21 (1970), 3-16

Taylor Simon & Markus Gilbert, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One. West Fife between Leven and Forth*, Donington, 2006,

## Websites

*British History Online*, ‘Culross- St Cyrus’, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/scotland/pp246-259>.

*Canmore*, ‘Culross, West Church and Churchyard’, Accessed 24 August 2021, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/48029/culross-west-church-and-churchyard>.

*Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Richard Fawcett, ‘Culross- Architecture’, Accessed 24 August, 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158088>

*GENUKI*, ‘The population of the parishes of Fife, from 1755 to 1961’, Accessed 7 September 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/ParishPopulations>

*Places of Worship in Scotland*, ‘Culross West Church’, Accessed 24 August 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/1641/name/Culross+West+Church+Culross+Fife>.

*Places of Worship in Scotland*, ‘St Mungo’s Chapel’, Accessed 25 August, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/1645/image/2221/name/St.+Mungo%27s+Chapel+Culross+Fife>

*Places of Worship in Scotland*, ‘Culross Parish Church’, Accessed 24 August 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4618/name/Culross+Abbey+Parish+Church+Culross+Fife>.

*Places of Worship in Scotland*, ‘Culross Free Church’, Accessed 14 September 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8090/image/1502/name/Culross+Free+Church+Culross+Fife>.

*Places of Worship in Scotland*, ‘St Serf’s Roman Catholic Church’, Accessed 14 September 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10522/image/4058/name/St.+Serf%27s+Roman+Catholic+Church+Culross+Fife>

*Scotland’s Census*, ‘Culross- Religion’, Accessed 14 September 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>

## 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),