

# **Wemyss Research Report**

## **[Including Methil and Buckhaven]**



Wemyss Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)

## **Sacred Landscape Project**

**St Mary's College, University of St Andrews**

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John Blaeu, *Sherifdome of Fyfe* (1654).<sup>1</sup>



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



## Part 1 - Buckhaven

Tile on walls by former St Andrew's Church, showing the stone for the church being brought from St Andrews to Buckhaven by sea, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



## Introduction

Buckhaven is a port town on the north shore of the Forth, bounded by Wemyss to the west and Methil to the east. It first enters the written record as *Bukhawyne* in the early sixteenth century, although it is likely that its natural and sheltered harbour attracted settlement long before that time.<sup>5</sup> A local tradition, first recorded in 1778 by the minister of Wemyss parish, Dr Harry Spens, is that many of the early inhabitants of the settlement were Dutch, arriving in the area in the sixteenth century fleeing religious persecution. Buckhaven's long history as a fishing station, and its reputation for self-sufficiency, may have contributed to such legends. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it developed into one of the most important fishing stations in Fife. In the early twentieth century, waste from coal mining led to the destruction of its local beaches and harbour. The growth of fishing, and then coal mining led to significant increase in the population from approximately 500 in the 1790s to 1500 in 1838, 4500 in 1901, and nearly 20,000 (combined with Methil and Leven) by 1952.<sup>6</sup> The most recent estimate, from 2016, puts the population at c.4,200.<sup>7</sup> Until the nineteenth century, Buckhaven was part of Wemyss parish. Population growth ultimately led to the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the district with Buckhaven and Methil forming their own burgh and separating from Wemyss in the 1890s. The town is now largely contiguous with Methil and Leven to the east, and is part of a larger district known as Levenmouth.

In the Middle Ages, and through the late nineteenth century, the settlement was part of the parish of Wemyss, with the villagers travelling 2 to 3 miles along the coast to worship at St Mary's By the Sea in East Wemyss. The earliest formal religious building to be constructed in Buckhaven was a Burgher Church in 1795. A number residents of Buckhaven had seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1739, attending churches in Kirkcaldy and Kennoway, before constructing their place of worship 1790s. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, significant industrial development and concomitant growth of the population led to the establishment of a number of different churches in the town. This included a United Presbyterian (1869), Free Church (1870), a new Church of Scotland parish (1899), and Baptist (1908/1915) Episcopal (1910) and Salvation Army congregations. Later in the twentieth century, Pentecostal (1969), Jehovah's Witnesses (1971) and Evangelical/Brethren (1986) churches opened in the town. The three Church of Scotland charges of St Michael's, St Andrew's and St David's formed a union in 1972 using the latter church. In 2008, this combined congregation united further with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish

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<sup>5</sup> William Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss* (Edinburgh, 1988), ii, 187.

<sup>6</sup> 'Parish Populations, Fife', *GENUKI*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/ParishPopulations>. 'Wemyss, Census', *GENUKI*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/Wemyss#Census>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Mid-2016 Population Estimates for Settlements and Localities in Scotland', *National Records of Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/settlements-and-localities/mid-2016-population-estimates-for-settlements-and-localities-in-scotland>.



Church. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian's) and Buckhaven (St David's). In addition to the shared Church of Scotland charge, there are currently four other active churches in Buckhaven (Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Salvation Army, Church of God).

Window on Buckhaven Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



### **Religious sites and the landscape of Buckhaven**

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

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

Buckhaven Baptist Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)





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

### Sites of Interest

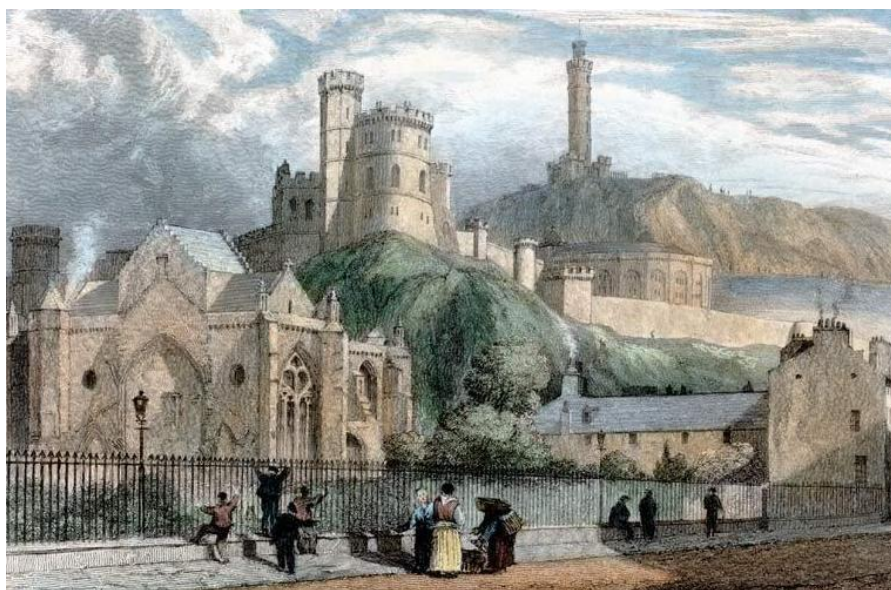
St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

Buckhaven first enters the written record in a charter of 1527 which noted that the fishermen of *Bukhawyne* belonged to the parish of Wemyss.<sup>8</sup> In a further charter of 1531, it was recorded that the village was part of the barony of Easter Wemyss and in the possession of the Colville family.<sup>9</sup> The villagers of Buckhaven travelled to St Mary's by the Sea in East Wemyss. This church, from the 1460s appropriated to the Trinity Church and Hospital in Edinburgh, was the main place of worship in the district. It underwent considerable rebuilding and augmentation in the early sixteenth century.

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

John Ewbank Trinity Church, Edinburgh (1825).<sup>10</sup>



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

<sup>8</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 187

<sup>9</sup> John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914), (*RMS*), iii no. 980.

<sup>10</sup> 'Trinity College Church', *Wikimedia Commons*, Accessed 29 October, 2021, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity\\_College\\_Kirk\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity_College_Kirk_01.jpg).

from animal products). After 1502 these tithes were wholly in the possession of the Provost of Holy Trinity, who paid a vicar pensioner a salary of 20 marks per year to minister to the population of Wemyss.

From a dispute that took place between the Provost and the Laird of Wemyss in the 1520s, it would seem that considerable alterations to the church occurred in 1527-1528. The records note that the church was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain of the Chapel of Our Lady in West Wemyss. A chapel and aisle dedicated to St Katherine of Alexandria was added to the church in East Wemyss by the late fifteenth century and founded by the Colville family (who had purchased MacDuff Castle c.1420). Katherine, whose main shrine was at Mount Sinai in Egypt, was a popular saint in late medieval Scotland. Altars in St Andrews (Holy Trinity) and Inverkeithing and the churches of Cupar and Newburgh were dedicated to her. A miraculous well associated with Katherine was located in Liberton near Edinburgh. Furthermore, altars and chapels in her honour could be found in every major church in Scotland.<sup>11</sup>

1425

Nicholas de Greenlaw (son of a priest) resigned the church of Wemyss and moved to Auldbar.<sup>12</sup>

1433

Donald Kennedy (canon of Soutra) was presented to church on death of Robert de Kirkcaldy (also a canon). The perpetual vicarage of the Kirk Wemyss was described as ‘wont to be ruled by brothers of the hospital of Soutra’. In 1438, Kennedy was accused by Thomas Lauder, the master of Soutra, for detaining a certain proportion of the income of the church. Kennedy complained that the Master takes so much yearly from the fruits that from the vicar could not be maintained from what was left.<sup>13</sup>

Dispute of 1527-28

A long running dispute between David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), over some of the tithes of West Wemyss and the Kirkland of Wemyss led to a case heard in St Andrews. The dispute was eventually settled by arbitration. Three years’ worth of teind sheaves for 1526-28 were to be restored to the Provost. The arbiters also advised the Provost to yield up the offerings due to him from the Lady chapel of Wemyss, because the parish church of Wemyss was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain there.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Turpie, *Kind Neighbours. Scottish Saints and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 70-89.

<sup>12</sup> W. H Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal letters*, (London, 1893), (CPL), vii, 380-81.

<sup>13</sup> Annie I. Dunlop, ed., *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1433-1447* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press 1983), (CSSR, iv), no. 112, CPL, ix, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*. i, 111-113 & ii, 274-278.



19 Oct 1527

At a court held in St Andrew a dispute between the David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), respecting the teinds belonging to the provost as vicar. The judges pronounced in favour of David that; *Sir John had wickedly and unjustly interjected his extrajudicial appeal to the Roman Court (the Papal Curia)..commanding the said vicar.....to pay half the sum £99 8s 8d Scots within two months (the other half thereafter).*<sup>15</sup>

6 Feb 1528

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

The judges also noted that; *the offerings of the chapel of Wemyss pertaining to the said provost by of the parish church of Wemyss, because Sir Patrick Jackson, chaplain thereof was biggand and purposed to big and continue, the judges asked the provost to supersede the said offerings for Patrick's good deeds.....*<sup>16</sup>

26 October 1541

*The King has handed over to feufarm to Norman Leslie, feudatory of the earl of Rothes, and to Elizabeth Lindsay his wife, the lands of East Wemyss [...] with the donative advowson of the aisle and altarage of **Saint Catherine** within East Wemyss parish church, shire of Fife.*<sup>17</sup>

Dec 1545

*Thomas Birrell in town of Freuchie binds himself to deliver in East Wemyss on the feast of St Andrew (30 Nov) two bolls of barley for the altar of St Mary situated in the parish church of East Wemyss.*<sup>18</sup>

6 Jan 1597

*Instrument of Sasine in favour of Sir John Boswell of Balmuto, knight, of a fourth part of the lands of Spittal, in lordship of Lochoreshire and sheriffdom of Fife, together with the coal of half of the lands of Dundonald, lying as above; on precept of sasine in charter dated 3 December 1596, by Robert Colvill, son and apparent heir of James Colville of East Wemyss, chaplain of St Katherine's Chapel, in parish church of Wemyss, and said James, patron of said chapel, in favour of said Sir John Boswell.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6.

<sup>16</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6

<sup>17</sup> RMS, iii, no. 2493

<sup>18</sup> William Muir, ed, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart* (Glasgow: Maitland Club 1853), p.15.

<sup>19</sup> National Records of Scotland (NRS), Boswell of Balmuto Papers, GD66/1/110.

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

### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss  
Buckhaven Links Church

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The early modern era was a period of considerable development for Wemyss and the surrounding district. There is evidence for coal mining in Methil and East Wemyss from the late sixteenth century, which also stimulated local salt production.<sup>20</sup> A stone harbour was built by David, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Wemyss at Methil by the mid-1600s, and similar works seem to have been undertaken at West Wemyss for the export of coal and salt.<sup>21</sup> Initially, coal mining seems to have had a limited impact on Buckhaven, which was primarily a fishing port. Sibbald described Buckhaven as a *fisher town* in 1710, and in 1778 the minister of Wemyss, Dr Harry Spens, recounted the legend of the Dutch origins of the townsfolk. Buckhaven remained part of the parish of Wemyss (with its church in East Wemyss) throughout the early modern period. However, one of the elders and a Buckhaven resident, Mr John Thomson, seceded from the church in 1739 with a number of other members and joined the Burgher Church. The minister of Wemyss noted in 1793 that there were a small number of *dissenters* in the parish. Although they did not belong to the established church, they had not yet formed formal congregations. By 1795, however, they had built a church on the west end of the links. Although the fisher folk of Buckhaven had a reputation for piety and a strict observance of the sabbath, one local story recounted by Frank Rankin suggests this was not always the case.

#### *Sibbald 1710*

*A mile from this is the village of Buckhaven, a fisher town belonging to the Earl of Weems. They have ordinarily twelve fishing boats with six men in each 5 and furnish Edinburgh with white fish. In August yearly they with others take herring, and make much money by this.*<sup>22</sup>

#### *Harry Spens 1778*

*As far as I have been able to learn, the original inhabitants of Buckhaven were from the Netherlands about the time of Philip II (1556-1598). Their vessel had been stranded on the shore. They proposed to settle and remain. The family of Wemyss gave them permission. They accordingly settled at Buckhaven. By degrees they acquired our language, and adopted our dress, and for these threescore years past, they have had the character of a sober and sensible, an industrious and honest set of people. The only singularity in their ancient*

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<sup>20</sup> RMS, vii. No 1026.

<sup>21</sup> Angus Graham, 'Archaeological notes on some harbours in Eastern Scotland' in *Proceedings of Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, 101, (1968-9), 200-285 at 281-282.

<sup>22</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), pp. 327-328.



*customs that I remember to have heard of was, that of a richly ornamented girdle or belt, wore by their brides of good condition and character at their marriage, and then bid aside and given in like manner to the next bride that should be deemed worthy of such an honour. The village consists at present of about 140 families, 60 of which are fishers, the rest land-labourers, weavers.*<sup>23</sup>

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

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

*Rankin, 1978*

*There is a story about one fisherman who went down to the harbour one very stormy Sabbath day to make sure his boat was safely tied up. He was hauled in front of the Kirk Session to be reprimanded for working on the Sabbath. 'Weel', he said, (misquoting Matthew Chapter 12, Verse 11), 'Remember what Jesus said about saving a coo on the Sabbath day'. 'Weel', he said, 'my boat's my coo'.<sup>25</sup>*

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

St Mary's By the Sea (Fawcett).<sup>26</sup>



Although there is no direct account of the arrival of the Reformation in Wemyss, the church seems to have been relatively easily adapted to the new form of worship that dominated after 1560. After Methil was absorbed into the parish of Wemyss in the early 1600s, considerable

<sup>23</sup> Sibbald, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross*, p. 327 nt 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1793), (OSA), xvi, 529.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Rankin, *Auld Buckhynie. A Short History of Buckhaven* (East Wemyss, 1986), p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 31 October, 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158932>.

alterations were made to the building, which was now located at the centre of the expanded parish. The earl of Wemyss constructed a family mausoleum outside the church in the 1640s, which would become known as the Wemyss Aisle. This led to an extension of the building eastward, with the burial place connected to the earl's private loft in the church by a stair. Two further aisles were added to the church in the late 1600s. Furthermore, what Fawcett describes as a *square birdcage bellcote* was added to the west gable.<sup>27</sup> The minister George Grib was pleased to describe the building and the further work that happened in 1792 as a *well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship*.

1636 (8 Sept) *visitation of the church by the Pres of Kirkcaldy found the minister (Patrick Mearns) to be competent, while the earl of Wemyss and lord Elcho were ordered to arrange the 300 marks pa for the new schoolmaster.*<sup>28</sup>

1644 (21 Aug) the earl of Wemyss agrees to build a place for burial outside the kirk of Wemyss.<sup>29</sup>

1658 (26 Sept) the kirk session considering the condition of the kirk yard dykes which are altogether ruinous. The session orders a collection for the repair.<sup>30</sup>

1659 (12 June) *it was the mind of the session to strike through a window besouth the little kirk door that leads to the pulpit for making greater light in the church.*<sup>31</sup>

1682 (6 May) the minister and session order a collection to be made for the repair of the church.<sup>32</sup>

1688 Margaret, Dowager Countess of Wemyss requests in her will that she be buried *In our isle at the church of Weymss.*<sup>33</sup>

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*The church is an old gothic building in the form of a cross; there are evident marks of considerable additions to it; but no date that can fix its age.... It was repaired and much improved in 1792, and is now a well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship. The church and manse are in the thriving village of Easter Wemyss, the most central part of the parish.*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.

<sup>28</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fols. 191-192.

<sup>29</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fol. 464.

<sup>30</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 100.

<sup>31</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 141.

<sup>32</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1668-1701, CH2/365/3, fol. 134.

<sup>33</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 258.

<sup>34</sup> OSA (1793), xvi, 526.



## II. Buckhaven Links Church

Site of Buckhaven Links Church (Amanda Gow, 2007).<sup>35</sup>



Mr John Thomson, a Buckhaven resident and one of the elders of Wemyss Parish Church, seceded from the Church of Scotland with a number of others and joined the Burgher Church in 1739.<sup>36</sup> They attended first Bethelfield Associate Church in Kirkcaldy, and later Kennoway Arnot Church (after 1750), before a number of local residents applied to the Burgher Presbytery of Dunfermline to form a congregation in Buckhaven in 1792. This was accepted and a congregation numbering around 90 was formed in 1794. They moved into their own church on the Links in 1795. The first minister was David Telford, and his admission to the charge was signed by 122 people. Telford had a reputation as an active preacher and the congregation grew under his watch which lasted until 1824.<sup>37</sup> A contemporary Dr McKelvie remarked of Telford that *It is doubtful if any minister of his denomination ever exercised a greater influence over his flock than he did. I know it used to be remarked that Mr Telfer was prophet, priest, and king in Buckhaven.*

Dr Hay (c.1824)

*He was a man of unfeigned piety, great modesty, obliging disposition, and unpretending condescension. If not conspicuous for brilliant parts he possessed what was better adapted*

<sup>35</sup> 'Buckhaven Links Kirk', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 6 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10480/image/481/name/Buckhaven+Links+Kirk+Wemyss+Fife>

<sup>36</sup> Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*. p. 41.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900* (Edinburgh, 1904), ii, 393-396.

*for the sphere in which Providence had placed him great affection of heart, amiability of temper, simplicity of manners, and no small measure of good sense."*

Dr McKelvie (footnote to Dr Hay's journal)

*It is doubtful if any minister of his denomination ever exercised a greater influence over his flock than he did. I know it used to be remarked that Mr Telfer was prophet, priest, and king in Buckhaven.<sup>38</sup>*

### **3. Late Modern (1800-2021).**

#### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

Buckhaven Links Church

St David's Church, Buckhaven

St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven

St Michael's Church, Buckhaven

Buckhaven Baptist Church

Salvation Army

Buckhaven Christian Fellowship

Jehovah's Witnesses

Buckhaven Church of God

#### Introduction/Nature of the Site

In the early nineteenth century, Buckhaven developed into one of the most important fishing stations in Scotland. After a lull in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, coal began to be mined in large quantities in the parish of Wemyss in the late nineteenth century. Fishing was in decline in Buckhaven by the 1860s. As it had largely become a mining town, the coal refuse ultimately led to the destruction of the harbour and beaches. The growth of fishing and then coal mining saw a significant increase in the population from 500 in the 1790s, to nearly 1500 in 1838, 4500 in 1901 and nearly 20,000 by 1952.<sup>39</sup> Buckhaven was included in the parish of Wemyss until the late nineteenth century. Population growth led to the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the 1890s, as such, Buckhaven and Methil formed into a burgh and separated from Wemyss.

Significant industrial development and concomitant growth of the population led to the establishment of several different churches in the town during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; this included a Free Church (1870), Church of Scotland (1899), and Baptist (1908/1915) and Salvation Army congregations. Pentecostal (1969), Jehovah's

<sup>38</sup> Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, ii, 393.

<sup>39</sup> 'Parish Populations, Fife', *GENUKI*, 'Wemyss, Census', *GENUKI*.



Witnesses (1971), and Evangelical/Brethren (1986) churches were opened in the second half of the twentieth century. Population peaks in the 1960s and 1970s, decline in church attendance (more than 50% of the population of Wemyss, Buckhaven and Methil was recorded as having ‘No Religion’ in the 2011 census), and denominational mergers, have led to recent church closures in Buckhaven.<sup>40</sup> In 1972, the three Church of Scotland charges of St Michael’s, St Andrew’s, and St David’s formed a union using the latter church. The congregation united with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church in 2008. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian’s) and Buckhaven (St David’s). In addition to the shared Church of Scotland charge, there are currently four other active churches in Buckhaven: Baptist, Jehovah’s Witness, Salvation Army, and Church of God.

### I. St Mary’s By the Sea, East Wemyss

In 1810-11, considerable building work was done on the church at East Wemyss. Fawcett suggests that *the rectangular two-, three- and four-light transomed windows, which light much of the church, together with the crowstepped gables, probably date from these operations.*<sup>41</sup> However, in 1838, the minister commented that the church was *far too small* for the parish. This pressure for space was relieved through the foundation of a ‘chapel at ease’ in West Wemyss (1835), a *quod sacra* parish in Methil in 1838, St Michael’s Church in Buckhaven (1900,) and the secession of a large part of the congregation joining the Free Church after the Great Disruption in 1843. Major repairs carried out in the late nineteenth century, combined with the addition of a hall in the 1920s, have made it difficult for architectural historians to judge what of the medieval structure remains. The Free Church congregation of St George’s re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929, and in 1976 there was a union between that congregation and those of St Mary’s and St Adrian’s churches in West Wemyss. As a result, St Mary’s was closed for worship. It was then converted into a recording studio, and since 1985 it has been used as a private house.<sup>42</sup>

*Rev John Maclachan, 1838*

*The parish church is in East Wemyss, and is conveniently situated for the great body of the people as it could well be. It is an old building in the form of a cross. The date of its erection cannot be ascertained. It has undergone several repairs; and, although the construction is bad, yet upon the whole it is a decent and comfortable place of worship. It has sittings for about 1000 persons. It is by far too small for the parish. From 900 to 1000 communicate annually. The people are very attentive to the ordinance of religion.*<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> ‘Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill; Religion’, Identity, *Scotland’s Census*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>. In 2011 5,753 belonged to the Church of Scotland, 1,064 to the Roman Catholic Church and 561 to other Christian denominations.

<sup>41</sup> Fawcett, ‘Wemyss, Architecture’.

<sup>42</sup> ‘St Mary’s By the Sea, Wemyss, Fife’, *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4627/name/St.+Mary%27s+By+The+Sea+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>43</sup> *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1838), (NSA), (1838), ix, 399.

*There is a Dissenting meeting-house in connection with the United Associate Synod, situated on the Links of Buckhaven, about two miles from the parish church.....the congregation is respectable and divine service is well attended.*<sup>44</sup>

*1840 Leighton*

*The parish church, which is in the village of east Wemyss is an old building in the form of a cross, but the date of its erection is unknown. It is seated to accommodate 1000 persons. The number of communicants are from 900 to 1000 annually. The present incumbent is the Rev. John McLachlan; the patronage is in the town council of Edinburgh.*<sup>45</sup>

*1862 Westwood*

*East Wemyss, in which is the Parish Church, a building in the form of a cross. It was rebuilt by General William Wemyss upon the site of an old Church, the date of whose erection is not authenticated. There is also a Free Church in East Wemyss.*<sup>46</sup>

*1988 Gifford 1988*

*Being converted into a recording studio (1985). Crowstep gabled harled kirk in a small graveyard beside the harbour. The core is probably of 1528, when the church is said to have been virtually rebuilt. Typical late medieval skinny rectangle, with a small one bay chancel at the E end...*<sup>47</sup>

## **II. Buckhaven Links Church**

By 1838 the congregation of the church on the Links had joined the United Associate Synod, and in 1846 at the accession of a new minister (William Cowan), it had a congregation of 353.<sup>48</sup> By 1869, now part of the United Presbyterian Church and, according to Westwood *with a flourishing congregation*, the decision was taken to construct a new, larger, place of worship. The new building on Church Street, capable of seating 860 people and built at a cost of £2,600, was opened on 12 April.<sup>49</sup> The old links church was converted into houses, and the whole area was buried under refuse from Wellesley colliery in the early 1900s.

*Rev John Maclachan, 1838*

*There is a Dissenting meeting-house in connection with the United Associate Synod, situated on the Links of Buckhaven, about two miles from the parish church.....the congregation is respectable and divine service is well attended.*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> NSA, (1838), ix, 399-400.

<sup>45</sup> John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> A. Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory for the Counties of Fife and Kinross* (Cupar, 1862), pp. 214-215.

<sup>47</sup> John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, (London, 1988), p. 203.

<sup>48</sup> Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

<sup>49</sup> Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

<sup>50</sup> NSA, (1838), ix, 399-400.

*Westwood, 1862*

*Buckhaven, the largest village in the Parish, and one of the largest fishing villages in Fife, fishing being the principal trade of the inhabitants; in addition to which, the curing of herrings is a necessary adjunct of its staple trade. At the Links of Buckhaven, in close proximity to the village, is a U. P. Church, with a flourishing congregation.<sup>51</sup>*

### III. St David's Parish Church, Buckhaven

Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



By 1838 the Burgher church on the Links had joined the United Associate Synod.<sup>53</sup> By 1869, now part of the United Presbyterian Church and, according to Westwood *with a flourishing congregation*, the decision was taken to construct a new, larger, place of worship. The new building on Church Street, capable of seating 860 people and built at a cost of £2,600, was opened on 12 April.<sup>54</sup> The new church, called St David's, was described by Gifford as *Plain Gothic* with *buttresses making a feeble attempt to suggest a nave and aisles behind the gable*. It had a congregation of 558 when the United Presbyterian Church combined with the Free Church of Scotland in 1900 to become the United Free Church. In 1929, at the union between the United Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland, the congregation

<sup>51</sup> Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>53</sup> Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395

<sup>54</sup> Small, *The History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, 394-395



decided to join the Church of Scotland. In 1972, there was a union between Buckhaven's three Church of Scotland charges (St Michael's, St Andrew's, and St David's) to form Buckhaven Parish Church. In 2008 that congregation united with Wemyss to form Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church. Services are held in West Wemyss (St Adrian's) and Buckhaven (St David's).<sup>55</sup>

*Smith 1952*

*A new building replaced in 1869 the old Church of St David's in Buckhaven, said to have been built in part of stones carried up from the beach by fishermen.....<sup>56</sup>*

*Gifford 1988*

*Being converted to secular use (1987). Originally built at St Andrews as an Episcopal chapel in 1824-25, and rebuilt in Buckhaven as a Free church, 1870, it is by William Burn. Crocketed pinnacled Perp front, with a rather small door under the elaborately hoodmoulded five-light window, its label stops carved with human faces. Inside a nave and aisles; thinly detailed ribbed plaster ceiling.<sup>57</sup>*

#### IV. St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven

After the Great Disruption of 1843, adherents of the Free Church in Buckhaven initially attended the church in East Wemyss, before the decision was taken to form a separate congregation in the town in 1866.<sup>59</sup> Some 140 members of the church at East Wemyss joined the new congregation. In 1870, they purchased an Episcopal Chapel first built in North Street, St Andrews (1824-25) for £130.<sup>60</sup> It was dismantled and carried brick by brick to Buckhaven on Thomas Walker's boat 'The Sea King' and opened in 1870.<sup>61</sup> It had a congregation of 240 in 1900, when it became a United Free Church, and continued as such until the congregation united with St David's and St Michael's in 1972. The building was closed until 1987 when it was converted into a theatre.<sup>62</sup>

*Ewing 1914*

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

*Rankin, 1978*

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<sup>55</sup> 'Buckhaven Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4620/name/Buckhaven+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 565.

<sup>57</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland*, p. 105-106.

<sup>59</sup> William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, 147.

<sup>60</sup> Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, ii, 144.

<sup>61</sup> 'St Andrew's Church, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> 'Buckhaven, Church Street, St Andrew's Theatre', *Historic Environment Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22711>.

*In 1866 a congregation of the Free Church was formed in Buckhaven and they held their services in the school. In July 1870 an Episcopal Chapel in North Street, St Andrews was put up for sale and the Free Church bought it for £130, dismantled it stone by stone, and brought it to Buckhaven in Thomas Walker's boat 'Sea King' and re-erected it next to St David's Church in 1872.<sup>63</sup>*

*Gifford 1988*

*Being converted to secular use (1987). Originally built at St Andrews as an Episcopal chapel in 1824-25, and rebuilt in Buckhaven as a Free church, 1870, it is by William Burn.*

*Crocketed pinnacled Perp front, with a rather small door under the elaborately hoodmoulded five-light window, its label stops carved with human faces. Inside a nave and aisles; thinly detailed ribbed plaster ceiling.<sup>64</sup>*

St Andrew's Church, Buckhaven. (B. Rhodes)



## **V. St Michael's Church, Buckhaven**

A Church of Scotland 'chapel at ease' was established to serve the inhabitants of Buckhaven in 1901. Constructed in St Michael's Street, it was named after the location. It became a full

<sup>63</sup> Rankin, *Auld Buckhyne*, p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, pp. 105-106.

parish church in 1929. It was known as Buckhaven Parish Church until 1972 when a union between Buckhaven's three Church of Scotland charges (St Michael's, St Andrew's and St David's) occurred forming Buckhaven Parish Church. At that date it was found to need extensive repairs and the decision was taken to demolish it. Private residences were then erected on the site and no signs of the church remain, however, its baptismal font can be found in the grounds of Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish Church (St David's).<sup>65</sup>

## VI. Buckhaven Baptist Church

Buckhaven's Baptist Church was formed in the early 1900s as part of a wider revival moment in Fife. The earliest mission began in November of 1908, with a church formally founded in 1910. This early congregation had 20 members and met in the Rechabite Hall, before building their own church in College Street in 1915. Capable of seating 200, it was built by G. C Campbell.<sup>67</sup> The congregation remains active and has been on the same site for more than a century.

*Rankin, 1986*

*A Baptist mission was formed in Buckhaven in 1908. At first the services were held in the Rechabite Hall until a church, seating 200, was built in College Street opened for worship in 1915.*<sup>68</sup>

Buckhaven Baptist Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



<sup>65</sup> 'St Michael's Parish, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10481/name/St.+Michael%27s+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>, Rankin, *Auld Buckhyme*, p. 39.

<sup>67</sup> George Yuille, *History of the Baptists in Scotland from Pre-Reformation Times* (Glasgow, 1926), pp. 143-144.

<sup>68</sup> Rankin, *Auld Buckhyme*, p. 43.



## VII. Salvation Army

Salvation Army (Gow, 2007).<sup>69</sup>



A corps of the Salvation Army was first launched in Buckhaven in 1897, fell into abeyance, and was then re-founded in 1936.<sup>70</sup> They met in Mullin Hall until 1978 after which they moved to their current site in Michael Street in a former telephone exchange. They are still active in Buckhaven.

## VIII. Buckhaven Christian Fellowship

The Buckhaven Christian Fellowship moved into the building on Institution Street in 1969. It had formerly been a United Free Church constructed in 1934. The Fellowship were a Pentecostal Church, originally known as the Assembly of God. The group had left the site at some point before 2006, when the building was demolished and sold to make way for houses.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> 'Salvation Army, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8659/name/Salvation+Army+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>70</sup> David Armistead, *The Army of Alba. A History of the Salvation Army in Scotland (1879-2004)* (London, 2011), pp. 92 & 166.

<sup>71</sup> 'Buckhaven Christian Fellowship, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 8 November, 2021,

<http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10476/name/Buckhaven+Christian+Fellowship+Wemyss+Fife>.

## IX. Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses

Kingdom Hall, Buckhaven, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



Jehovah's Witnesses were first established in Buckhaven in 1971, moving into a building constructed c.1900 and previously occupied by a group known as the Church of Christ.<sup>73</sup> The building underwent significant renovation in 1980, and is still in active use.

## X. Buckhaven Church of God

The Buckhaven Church of God was formed as a breakaway from the Open Brethren in 1986.<sup>75</sup> They are an evangelical organisation part of the global organisation known as the Churches of God.<sup>76</sup> The church is still active.

<sup>73</sup> 'Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Wemyss, Fife'.

<sup>75</sup> Church of God, Wemyss, Fife'.

<sup>76</sup> 'Beliefs', *Churches of God*, Accessed 8 November, 2021, [https://churchesofgod.info/church\\_of\\_god\\_beliefs/#WhoWeAre](https://churchesofgod.info/church_of_god_beliefs/#WhoWeAre).



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

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

Church of God, Buckhaven, 2021. (B. Rhodes)





## Part 2 – Methil

Methil and Denbeath Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



## Introduction

Methil is a port town on the north shore of the Forth between Largo and Wemyss Bay. When Buckhaven and Methil became a burgh in 1891, the new seal of the two contiguous settlements, with its Latin motto *Carbon Carbasque* (by coal and sail), marked their maritime heritage and connection to coal mining (see Fig 2.). The earliest settlement named Methil, which first enters the written record in the early 1200s, was located more than a mile inland. It was on the banks of the River Leven, where it can be seen on John Blaeu's map of 1654 (see Fig 2). This changed in the late seventeenth century, when investment in the harbour saw the focus of the settlement switch to the coast. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Methil was one of the most important ports for the export of coal in Scotland. This industry declined in the latter twentieth century, and has been replaced, to some extent with a focus on the development of green energy.

In the Middle Ages, Methil was a distinct parish, with the church located inland close to the site of the older settlement on the banks of the Leven. In the early seventeenth century, the parish was absorbed into the larger neighbouring parish of Wemyss, and the church fell out of ecclesiastical use, though the graveyard remained active into the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries significant industrial development and concomitant growth of the population of the new coastal settlement of Methil, led to the establishment of a number of different churches in the town, including multiple Church of Scotland charges and Free Church, Evangelical and Roman Catholic congregations, two seaman's missions and a number of other Gospel and Spiritual foundations. Of the more than a dozen churches, missions and chapels constructed in Methil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, six (2 Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Baptist and 2 Gospel or Spiritualist) congregations remain active today.

## Religious sites and the landscape of Methil

Rather than a local landscape being directly shaped by its sacred past, the religious history of Methil has tended to be that of faith groups reacting to the changing patterns of settlement and population in the local area that have resulted from fluctuations in the region's major industries and employers, coal mining and fisheries. This has meant that Methil's sacred history has been a fluid one, with places of worship falling in and out of use as population and settlement patterns change over time. The stimulus for the earliest settlement at Methilhill was probably access to freshwater fishing and the local agricultural hinterland. The settlement was served by its own church from at least the high Middle Ages, until the parish was absorbed into that of neighbouring Wemyss. The shift in the focus of the settlement to the coast in the modern era, and the growing population, then saw a response by Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and various Evangelical organisations to provide meeting places to serve the community. This proliferation

of meeting places has had a major impact on the townscape of Methil. There has been a consistent turn over and recycling of places of worship as newer structures were required to house the growing population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and more recently as a fall in population combined with falling church attendance to make some places of worship redundant. This process began with the abandonment of Methilhill Church c.1600, and its continued use as burial ground. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw newly constructed places of worship (such as Methil West and Old St Agatha's), quickly superseded and then abandoned and demolished when new churches designed to accommodate larger congregations were opened. Whether the current relatively healthy provision of 6 active places of worship (2 Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Baptist and 2 Gospel or Spiritualist) can be sustained against the backdrop of falling attendance and the financial pressures on organisations like the Church of Scotland, particularly as transport links make unions between congregations a more viable process, remains to be seen. It is likely in future that there will be further consolidations of congregations, with pressure for the conversion of any places of worship made redundant to residential property, particularly those that are located in prime central locations.

## **1. High (1000-1300) and Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)**

### Sites of Interest

Methil Hill Parish Church

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The name Methil may mean 'middle church', which Taylor and Markus have suggested refers to the position of the parish between those of Markinch and Wemyss.<sup>77</sup> The parish and settlement first enter written records in the early thirteenth century, although archaeological evidence suggests that there may have been a settlement there long before that time.<sup>78</sup> At that time Methil (spelt Methilkil or Methilhill) was located inland, on the banks of the River Leven, where it can be seen on John Blaeu's map of 1654 (see Fig 2). There were two main landowners in the parish in the Middle Ages, the bishops of St Andrews (who were also the patrons of the parish church), and local family headed in the early 1200s by man called John son of Michael (or Murdoch) of Methil. He made a number of grants from his estate of Methil in the early 1200s. By 1386 the estate was in the hands of John of Wemyss and Reres, who may have been a descendant of John.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Simon Taylor & Gilbert Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One. West Fife between Leven and Forth* (Donington, 2006), p. 583.

<sup>78</sup> W. H Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal letters*, (London, 1893), (CPL), i, 30.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Cameron, *Methil History and Trail* (East Wemyss, 1986), pp. 2-4.



## I. Methil Hill Parish Church

Site of Methil Hill Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



The parish church of Methil was located on the south bank of the River Leven about a mile and a half from its mouth. It is first recorded in 1207 and 1218 when it was noted that it was unappropriated and under the patronage of the bishops of St Andrews. The majority of Scottish parish churches were gifted by the crown and local noblemen to monasteries or other religious institution. The institution would ‘appropriate’ a proportion of the tithe revenues of the church, in return for providing a priest and maintaining the building. As Methil was ‘unappropriated’, the tithes paid by the parishioners were used to pay for the priest (who was selected by the bishops) and the fabric of the building, rather than being redirected to another religious institution. It was re-dedicated by David de Bernham, bishop of St Andrews in 1245, and in 1275 it was again recorded as an independent parsonage, paying 8 shillings to a Papal collector raising money for the crusades.<sup>80</sup> In the later Middle Ages a series of ‘rectors’ of the church were recorded. These men, also known as perpetual vicars, are likely to have been absentee priests, delegating the actual day to day cure of souls to deputies such as William Dour, who in 1494 was paid £4 per annum to serve *the cure*. The tithes of Methil (valued at £40 per annum at the Reformation) were used by the bishops of St Andrews to fund students who studied

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<sup>80</sup> Alan O. Anderson, ed, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (London, 1922), ii, 525, A. I. Dunlop, ed, ‘Bagimond’s Roll: Statement of the Tenths of the Kingdom of Scotland’, *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, vi (1939), 39.

abroad (as Stephen Bigli did in 1394), or to provide a salary for priests who served in the cathedral chapter at St Andrews (like Robert Pantyre in 1490).<sup>81</sup>

Remains of the church could still be seen as late as the 1840s, and Richard Fawcett has suggested that it was located on *a platform at the north-west end of the modern graveyard*, with a burial enclosure and obelisk marking what was the east end of the church.<sup>82</sup>

21 December 1207

*Pope Innocent III, in accordance with the letters of Pope Alexander [takes the bishop and church of St Andrews into his protection, and, establishes all their possessions, including] in Fife: Kilrymont (FIF), with the whole shire, Dairsie (FIF), Auchtermoonzie (FIF), the island of Loch Leven, Monimail (FIF), Tarvit (FIF), Muircambus (FIF), **Methil (FIF)**, Kilconquhar (FIF), Muckhart (PER), Pitgober (CLA), with the lands of the churches of Strathceihten' (i.e., Stradighty Martin, now Strathmartine, ANG), Rescobie (ANG), 'Cas' (possible Collace, PER), 'Dulbrudot' (perhaps Dalbog, ANG), Rossie (PER), 'Losse', and near Perth, Luncarty (PER), in 'Mareth' (Mounth) – 'Bukkan' (Buchan), Monymusk (ABD), Culsalmond (ABD), Ellon (ABD), with the lands of their churches and all their appurtenances; in Lothian: Kirkliston (WLO), Ecclesmachan (WLO), 'Keldeleth' (Kinleith, now Currie, MLO), Ratho (MLO), Lasswade (MLO), Wedale (Stow, MLO), Clerkington (ELO), Tynninghame (ELO), Broxmouth (ELO); possessions and rents in cain and conveth for the bishop's income, with their privileges.<sup>83</sup>*

19 December 1218

*Pope Honorius III takes the bishop and church of St Andrews into his protection, and, following the example of Alexander and Innocent, his predecessors, establishes all their possessions, including: in Fife, Kilrymont (FIF) with the whole shire, Dairsie (FIF), Auchtermoonzie (FIF), the island of Loch Leven with its belonging, Monimail (FIF), Tarvit (FIF), Muircambus (FIF), **Methil (FIF)**, Kilconquhar (FIF), Muckhart (PER), Pitgober (CLA), with the lands of the churches of Stradighty Martin (now Strathmartine, ANG), Rescobie (ANG), 'Cas' (possible Collace, PER), 'Dulbrudot' (perhaps Dalbog, ANG), Rossie (PER), 'Losse', and near Perth, Luncarty (PER); in Mounth – Buchan, Monymusk (ABD), Culsalmond (ABD), Ellon (ABD), with the lands of their churches and all their appurtenances; in Lothian, Kirkliston (WLO), Ecclesmachan (WLO), Kinleith (now Currie, MLO), Ratho (MLO), Lasswade (MLO), Wedale (Stow, MLO), Clerkington (ELO), Tynninghame (ELO), with its belongings, Broxmouth (ELO). In addition, he establishes the possessions and rents in cain and conveth applied to the bishop's table. He indulges that the bishop may recover any possessions unlawfully alienated; and*

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<sup>81</sup> John Kirk, ed, *The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices* (Oxford, 1995), 82.

<sup>82</sup> Fawcett, 'Methil- Architecture',

<sup>83</sup> CPL, i, 30.

*permits him to appoint the prior of the church, as his predecessors have done, and to correct his excesses; with inhibition to everyone to injure the said church.*<sup>84</sup>

*1245 (18 March) Pontifical Offices of St Andrews*

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

*The church of Methil (spelt Methkal), on 18 March.*<sup>85</sup>

1394-1408 Stephan Bigli (student at university of Paris) holds the church, dispensed for being too young in 1394 when he succeeded Stephen de Methil, moves to Forgrund in 1408, replaced by John de London.<sup>86</sup>

1415 John de Balbryny (rector of Auldcathy) obtains the church in an exchange with John de Ponfret.<sup>87</sup>

1450 George Young collated to the vicarage, supplicates for the revocation of an annual pension paid to David Sibbald from the fruits.<sup>88</sup>

1450 George Young (perpetual vicar of Methil), has a perpetual chaplaincy without cure in the parish church of St Andrews (£4, not specified where).<sup>89</sup>

1480 (10 June) reference to the late George Young who had given 5 marks to the altar of St James in the parish church of St Andrews.<sup>90</sup>

1490 chaplaincy at the altar of St Bartholomew in the parish church of St Andrews, founded by Robert Pantre, vicar of Methil. Value £10.<sup>91</sup>

1492 William de Monte Alto (MA) becomes rector of Methil on resignation at the curia of Robert Keith (£16 value), 20 marks (about £4) assigned as pension to William Douri, priest who serves the cure.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *CPL*, i, 61.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, ed, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, ii, 525.

<sup>86</sup> W.H. Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal Petitions* (London, 1893), (*CPP*), 594, 618, & 627, F. McGurk, ed, *Calendar of Papal letters to Scotland of Benedict XIII of Avignon* (Edinburgh, Scottish History Society, 1976), (*CPL, Ben*), 10-11.

<sup>87</sup> *CPL, Ben*, 312.

<sup>88</sup> J. Kirk, R.J. Tanner and A.I. Dunlop, eds, *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome 1447-71* (Edinburgh, 1997), (*CSSR*, v), v, no. 317.

<sup>89</sup> *CSSR*, v, no. 317.

<sup>90</sup> St Andrews University Library, Burgh Charters and Miscellaneous Writs, B65/23/88c.

<sup>91</sup> W. E. K Rankin, *The Parish Church of the Holy Trinity St Andrews* (Edinburgh, 1955), pp. 92.

<sup>92</sup> *CPL*, xv, no. 950.



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

### Sites of Interest

#### Methil Hill Parish Church

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The early modern era was a period of considerable development for Methil. In 1572 the lands had been formed into a burgh of barony, with the archbishop of St Andrews as the superior, and there is evidence for considerable coal mining in Methil and East Wemyss.<sup>93</sup> There were further expansions of coal and salt production, the latter stimulated by access to the fossil fuel, in the early seventeenth century. By the middle of that century the main focus of Methil had shifted to the coast where in 1660s a stone harbour was built by David, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Wemyss. The port was linked to coal mines at Denbeath and further in land, and in 1785 a wagonway was built to transport coal from mines around Kirkland to the harbour. The easy access to coal stimulated the town's other main activity, salt panning. In the early 1600s the parish of Methil was absorbed into that of neighbouring Wemyss, and the church was abandoned for ecclesiastical use. Thereafter the population travelled to the church at Easter Wemyss, and it would be the nineteenth century before the people of Methil had their own places of worship.

### **I. Methil Hill Parish Church**

The archbishops of St Andrews gifted the patronage of the church of Methil to the Wemyss family in 1571, and the parish itself was annexed to Wemyss sometime between 1614 and 1638.<sup>94</sup> No reason is given for this in the surviving records, but it may have been that a drop in population in the former inland settlement meant that it no longer made sense to have a separate charge at Methil. The Wemyss family, who were patrons of the church of Easter Wemyss, may also have been keen to pay for only one building. The church was abandoned at this point, but some remains could still be seen as late as 1838, and an excavation in the 1920s found the foundations of a large structure.<sup>95</sup> The graveyard remained in use even after the church was abandoned, and contains headstones from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It remains in use today.

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<sup>93</sup> John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914), (*RMS*), vii. No 1026.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife*, p. 583.

<sup>95</sup> 'Methil Mill Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/1519/name/Methil+Mill+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

Early modern table tomb near site of Methil Hill Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



The 'kirklands' of Methil were mentioned in 1661

*1 Jan 1661*

*Our sovereign lord, with advice and consent of his estates of parliament, ratifies and approves the charter made and granted by his majesty under his highness's great seal of this kingdom, to his majesty's right trusty cousin and councillor David, earl of Wemyss, lord Elcho ..... of all and whole the lands of Methil and barony thereof with the corn and waulk mills of the same, together with the mill-lands, sequels and astricted multures pertaining thereto; of the lands of Methilhill and Pirnie, with annexes, connexes, parts, pendicles and whole pertinents of the same, with coals and coalheughs of the foresaid lands of Methil, Methilhill and Pirnie, and of the mains of Methil, called the kirklands of Methil, and of all and whole the barony thereof...<sup>96</sup>*

*1710 Sibbald*

*Two miles to the east of this, is Methill, a village with salt pans belonging to the Earl of Weems ; here the pre- sent Earl's grandfather, Earl David, built an harbour, where ships do load with coal and salt. Here was a parsonage that is now suppressed.<sup>97</sup>*

<sup>96</sup> *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1661/1/192. Date accessed: 27 September 2021.

<sup>97</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. 328.

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*There was once a parsonage and vicarage at Methil, the patronage of which was disposed by Archbishop Hamilton to Sir John Wemyss of Wemyss who died in 1571...'.<sup>98</sup>*

*Rev John Maclachan, 1838*

*'The remains of two Popish chapels, the one at Methil-Mill and the other a little beyond Wester Wemyss'.<sup>99</sup>*

## II. St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

The parish church of Wemyss was first recorded c.1230 when it was granted by John of Methil, to the Hospital of Soutra.<sup>100</sup> From a dispute between the Provost and the Laird of Wemyss in the 1520s we know that considerable alterations to the church seem to have taken place in 1527-1528.<sup>101</sup> The records note that the church was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain of the Chapel of Our Lady in West Wemyss. There is no direct account of the arrival of the Reformation in Wemyss, but the church seems to have been relatively easily adapted to the new, preaching based, form of worship that dominated after 1560. After Methil was absorbed into the parish of Wemyss in the early 1600s considerable alterations were made to the building, which was now located at the centre of the expanded parish. In the 1640s the earl of Wemyss constructed a family mausoleum outside the church, which would become known as the Wemyss Aisle. This led to an extension of the building eastward, with the burial place connected to the earl's private loft in the church by a stair. Two further aisles were added to the church in later 1600s, and what Fawcett describes as a *square birdcage bellcote* was added to the west gable.<sup>102</sup> There was further work in 1792, and the minister George Grib was pleased to describe it as a *well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship*.

1636 (8 Sept) *visitation of the church by the Pres of Kirkcaldy found the minister (Patrick Mearns) to be competent, while the earl of Wemyss and lord Elcho were ordered to arrange the 300 marks pa for the new schoolmaster.*<sup>103</sup>

1644 (21 Aug) the earl of Wemyss agrees to build a place for burial outside the kirk of Wemyss.<sup>104</sup>

1658 (26 Sept) the kirk session considering the condition of the kirk yard dykes which are altogether ruinous. The session orders a collection for the repair.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1793), (OSA), xvi, 527.

<sup>99</sup> *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1838), (NSA), ix, 393.

<sup>100</sup> David Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre, of Trinity College, Edinburgh, and other collegiate churches in Mid-Lothian* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1861), no. 14.

<sup>101</sup> William Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss* (Edinburgh, 1988), i, 111-113 & ii, 274-278.

<sup>102</sup> Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.

<sup>103</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fols. 191-192.

<sup>104</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fol. 464.

<sup>105</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 100.



1659 (12 June) *it was the mind of the session to strike through a window besouth the little kirk door that leads to the pulpit for making greater light in the church.*<sup>106</sup>

1682 (6 May) the minister and session order a collection to be made for the repair of the church.<sup>107</sup>

1688 Margaret, Dowager Countess of Wemyss requests in her will that she be buried *In our isle at the church of Wemyss.*<sup>108</sup>

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*The church is an old gothic building in the form of a cross; there are evident marks of considerable additions to it; but no date that can fix its age.... It was repaired and much improved in 1792, and is now a well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship. The church and manse are in the thriving village of Easter Wemyss, the most central part of the parish.*<sup>109</sup>

St Mary's by the Sea, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



<sup>106</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 141.

<sup>107</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1668-1701, CH2/365/3, fol. 134.

<sup>108</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 258.

<sup>109</sup> OSA (1793), xvi, 526.

### 3. Late Modern (1800-2021).

#### Sites of Interest

Methil West Church

Scottish Coastal Mission

Methil Free Church and earlier Salt Girmel

German Seaman's Mission

St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church

Methil Parish Church

Methil and Denbeath Parish Church

Methil Evangelical Church

Flying Angel Military Chapel

Methil Tin Kirk (spiritualist), demolished 1970s

Gospel Hall

Central Gospel Mission Revival Centre

#### Introduction/Nature of the Site

By the middle of the nineteenth century, coal mining in Methil's hinterland, and local salt production had largely ceased. In 1857 M Barbieri described it as *the shrivelled-up skeleton of a once important place*. However, shortly after this time two pits were opened at Muiredge and Kincardie Brae, and the population of Methil rose from around 500 in 1851 to more than 12,000 a century later as the town became one of Scotland's main industrial ports.<sup>110</sup> In the nineteenth century a Church of Scotland mission (1838), Free Church (1890) and a Coastal Mission (1892) were established in the town, before the growing population in the early twentieth century was served by a German Seaman's Mission (1900), Roman Catholic Church (1903), two full Church of Scotland parishes (1924 and 1931), an Evangelical Church (1936) and several other Gospel and Spiritualist missions. Alexander Smith, the author of the Third Statistical Account in 1951, noted the presence of a *Gospel Hall*, *Central Gospel Mission* and *the Methil Town Mission*, as well as the Coastal Mission, four Church of Scotland congregations (one of which was the former Free Church) and Evangelical and Roman Catholic churches. With the decline of coal mining after World War II, the population of the town has dropped to around 10,000 (2016). Combined with a decline in church attendance (more than 50% of the population of Wemyss, Buckhaven and Methil was recorded as having No Religion in the 2011 census.<sup>111</sup>), and denominational mergers, this has led to a number church closures in Methil. Currently six

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<sup>110</sup> Cameron, *Methil*, pp. 21-26.

<sup>111</sup> 'Buckhaven, Methil, Methilhill; Religion', Identity, *Scotland's Census*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>. In 2011 5,753 belonged to the Church of Scotland, 1,064 to the Roman Catholic Church and 561 to other Christian denominations.

(2 Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Baptist and 2 Gospel or Spiritualist) congregations are active.

1857 M Barbieri

*METHIL.* — *A small sea-port village. It is an ancient and decayed place. It was erected into a free burgh-of-barony in 1662. It has a better harbour on the Forth than any in the neighbourhood. Population 530. Many of its houses are in ruins, and its trade nearly gone. It seems to be the shrivelled-up skeleton of a once important place.*<sup>112</sup>

1862 Westwood

*Methil a decayed-looking village with little trade, although it has a fine harbour, and once was a place of some note in the coal trade.*<sup>113</sup>

1894 Geddie

*Methil is the neighbour of Buckhaven to the east. Prosperity has come to it from time to time like a tidal wave, and left it again stranded high and dry. But yesterday it was a deserted and tumbledown village, living on the memory of the days before its upsetting neighbour Leven had been heard of, when it was a busy and thriving place, with salt-pans and windmills and a shipping trade. To-day it is again at the top of the flow. It is the chief port of shipment of the Fife coal-field. Large steamers come into its capacious docks and load under the great coal shoots ; acres of ground are covered with rail- way sidings and stores ; and houses sprout up like mushrooms.*<sup>114</sup>

1952 Smith

*Methil-hill also has its church, and various sects have meeting-places throughout the villages, served with enthusiasm by voluntary lay preachers, but there is no Roman Catholic place of Worship. It would be wrong to describe the people of the parish as fervent church goers, but each of the churches has its band of devoted workers, and their combined influence is still considerable.*<sup>115</sup>

*There are now seven Presbyterian congregations in Buckhaven and Methil, all but one of them (a United Free Church), being now Church of Scotland. But only two, Methil West, and St Michael's Buckhaven- are descended from pre-union Established Church. Perhaps it is because the parish church of Wemyss was at some distance from the present burgh, it is dissenting bodies that have the longest history therein.....*<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> M. Barbieri, *A Descriptive and historical gazetteer of the counties of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan* (Edinburgh, 1857), p. 324.

<sup>113</sup> *Westwood's parochial directory for the Counties of Fife and Kinross* (Cupar, 1862), pp. 214-215.

<sup>114</sup> John Geddie, *The Fringes of Fife* (Edinburgh, 1894), p. 115.

<sup>115</sup> Alexander Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Fife* (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 549.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 565.



*In addition to the above, there are in the burgh two Baptist congregations and a mission of the Episcopal Church in Scotland; the Roman Catholic community has at Cross roads a church.....The Scottish Coast Mission began work in Methil just after the formation of the burgh, and has done valuable work with seaman ever since. It opened the present Seaman's bethel in 1904. During the recent war, another mission, known as the 'Flying Angel', began work in the port, and it has done much, not least for visiting seaman....Other religious bodies include the Gospel Hall, the Central Gospel Mission, the Methil Town Mission, and in Buckhaven, a detachment of the Salvation Army.....*

*The influence of churches in the burgh is often profound; how widespread is more debatable. Roughly one quarter of the adults in the town would seem to be communicants on the rolls of several Presbyterian Churches...<sup>117</sup>*

### **I. Methil West Church**

Until 1838 Methil was part of the parish of Wemyss and the congregation attended the church in Easter Wemyss. Following an increase in the population in the early nineteenth century a *quod sacra* parish was established in Methil and a church was built in the High Street with room for 800 and at a cost of £1030.<sup>118</sup> The key difference between *quod sacra* and normal parish was that such churches were not obliged to provide burial services for the congregation and therefore rarely had cemeteries attached to them. Following the Great Disruption of 1843, the church appears to have been shut, but was operational again by 1876 when it was granted Chapel of Ease status, and with that promotion, the obligation to provide burial services. When a larger parish church was built in Methil in 1922-24 (now known as Wellesley Parish Church of Scotland) the West Church fell out of use. For some years it was used as a practice hall for the Wellesley Colliery band, and later as a storehouse until it was finally demolished in 1981.<sup>119</sup>

*Rev John Maclachan, 1838*

*I have also to record, that on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June last, the foundation stone of the church, in connection with the Establishment was laid in the village of Methil, the expense of which is to be £1030.....This new erection is to contain upward of 800 sittings, and will accommodate the inhabitants of Methil, Kirkland, Methil-Hill, Links of Buckhaven, and those of Innerleven.....the whole including a population of 1700.<sup>120</sup>*

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<sup>117</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566.

<sup>118</sup> *Quod Sacra* refers to a purely ecclesiastical parish, one that does not have any civil or local government functions. Until the late nineteenth century Church of Scotland parishes were often responsible for collecting records of births, deaths and marriages and other functions now undertaken by local government.

<sup>119</sup> 'Methil West Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10471/name/Methil+West+Church+Wemyss+Fife>, Cameron, *Methil*, p. 81.

<sup>120</sup> *NSA*, ix, 403

### *1840 Leighton*

*At Methill, a chapel has been erected in connection with the church of Scotland; and a portion of the parish, and of the neighbouring parish of Markinch, have been formed into a quod sacra parish, of which the Rev. John Wilson is minister.<sup>121</sup>*

### *1857 M Barbieri*

*The Church of Ease at Methil has been shut up since 1849; there is a Free Church; and a U.P. ch. at Buckhaven.<sup>122</sup>*

## **II. Scottish Coastal Mission**

Scottish Coast Mission, Methil (SCHR).<sup>123</sup>



The Scottish Coastal Mission, founded in 1850, was a Protestant organisation dedicated to ministering to sailors and maritime communities. By 1861 they employed 10 missionaries and had 29 stations along the east coast of Scotland. They began services in Methil in 1892, and opened the building known as the ‘Seaman's Bethel’ on Dock Street in 1904 at a cost of £8000. It was still active in 1952, but has since closed and been demolished.

### *1952 Smith*

*The Scottish Coast Mission began work in Methil just after the formation of the burgh, and has done valuable work with seaman ever since. It opened the present Seaman’s bethel in 1904.<sup>124</sup>*

<sup>121</sup> John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, p. 170.

<sup>122</sup> Barbieri, *A Descriptive and historical gazetteer of the counties of Fife*, p. 322.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Scottish Coast Mission’, *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10470/image/13146/name/Scottish+Coast+Mission+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>124</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566.

### III. Methil Free Church

Following the Great Disruption in 1843, a quod sacra Free Church parish was set up in Methil, before a full mission was established in 1852. The mission initially met at the Salt Girnol, a storehouse which had been constructed in 1665 by David, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Wemyss.<sup>125</sup> In 1882 a full congregation was formed in Methil, and in 1890 a new church was constructed at the corner of Fisher Street and High Street at a cost of £700. It received a major extension in 1902-03 which cost a further £800, to house a congregation which numbered 200 in 1895 and 213 in 1905.<sup>126</sup> In 1929 the congregation re-joined the Church of Scotland, changing its name to Methil East in the process.<sup>127</sup> In 1942 there was a union between Methil East and the newly constructed Innerleven East Parish Church, and the congregation moved to the new church.<sup>128</sup> The former Free Church was used as a workshop by a local taxi firm for some time, before it was demolished in 1978. No trace now remains.

The Salt Girnol

1903 Reverend Peter McAnish

*its floor shrewn with sawdust; it had beautiful chandeliers; its pulpit was covered with blue cloth; fastened with brass nails, and there were two rows of seats with backs.*<sup>129</sup>

### IV. German Seaman's Mission

German Seaman's Mission (Vintage Lundin Links and Largo).<sup>130</sup>



As a result of the large numbers of German sailors visiting Methil annually in the late nineteenth century a missionary from the German Church in Edinburgh (located in Leith) began

<sup>125</sup> 'The Salt Girnol', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10506/name/The+Salt+Girnol+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>126</sup> Cameron, *Methil*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>127</sup> William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, p. 147.

<sup>128</sup> 'Methil Free Church', *Imperial War Museums*, Accessed 5 October, 2021, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/85086>.

<sup>129</sup> Cited in Cameron, *Methil*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>130</sup> 'Belfrage's Tea Gardens', *Vintage Lundin Links and Largo*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <https://lundinlinks.weebly.com/blog/belfrages-tea-gardens>



to make periodical visits to the town. In 1898 the heads of that church decided to send a permanent missionary and they opened a church on Durie Street in 1900. The mission was suspended during World War I, and in the 1920s and 1930s the pastor was Gunner Belfrage, a Swedish masseur who also opened a tea garden in Lundin Links.<sup>131</sup> The mission was permanently closed at the outbreak of World War II, and is now a private house.<sup>132</sup>

21 April 1900 St Andrews Citizen

*Dedication of the German Seaman's Mission. The new hall erected for the Seaman's Mission is built on a central site, granted by Mr R G Wemyss at a nominal fee, by means of subscription by friends. On the ground floor is a reading room..... for the sailors, while the upper floor is devoted solely to the use of the missionary. The building was gaily decked out on Monday and the interior was crowded at the opening...it was attended by Herr Voss, the esteemed local missionary.*<sup>133</sup>

## V. Old and New St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church

St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church, Methil, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



Nearly four centuries after the Protestant Reformation, a Roman Catholic congregation returned to Methil with the opening of a church in 1903. Located on Methil Brae and called St Agatha's, the congregation had expanded to such an extent that in the early 1920s the decision was taken to build a new church on a site nearby. Designed by Reginald Fairlie, who was also

<sup>131</sup> 'Belfrage's Tea Gardens'.

<sup>132</sup> Cameron, *Methil*, p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> Cited in Belfrage's Tea Gardens'.

responsible for Methil Parish Church (1924-25), the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Graham Grey of Edinburgh, and it was opened in 1923. Old St Agatha's was demolished and the site is now home to a nursery. Fairlie was influenced by medieval church architecture, and reputedly used the plans of the medieval parish church of Methilhill (excavated in the early 1920s) in his designs for both St Agatha's and Methil Parish Church on Wellesley Road, although this is perhaps more obvious in the latter.<sup>134</sup> Gifford describes it as *Thrifty Romanesque in brick and concrete blockwork*.<sup>135</sup> Inside can be found some distinctive stained glass by the artist John Blyth, including the Lady Chapel with Holy Family and Nativity scenes, triptych style scenes in the north west transept depicting Mary with Jesus flanked by angels, and saints. The nave has images of saints Ninian, Patrick, Columba, Mungo, Cuthbert, Magnus, David, John Ogilvie, Andrew, Agatha and Margaret, and Peter appearing to St Agatha.<sup>136</sup> A hall was added to the church in the 1960s and it remains an active church.

## VI. Methil Parish Church

Wellesley Parish Church, Methil. (B. Rhodes)



In the early 1920s the steady growth of the population of Methil led the Church of Scotland to construct a new parish church in Methil to supersede the West Church built in 1838. Land was gifted by the Wemyss family on Wellesley Road and the commission was given to Reginald

<sup>134</sup> Cameron, *Methil*, p. 36.

<sup>135</sup> John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, (London, 1988), p. 106.

<sup>136</sup> 'St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church', *Historic Environment Scotland*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB46079>.



Fairlie, who was also responsible for St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church completed in 1923. It was built in 1924-25 at an estimated cost of £24,000.<sup>137</sup> Fairlie was influenced by medieval church architecture, and reputedly used the plans of the medieval parish church of Methilhill (excavated in the early 1920s) in his designs for both St Agatha's and Methil Parish Church on Wellesley Road, although this influence is perhaps more obvious in the latter. The design includes nave, transepts and a choir separated from the body of the church by an organ screen and a cloister and chapter house.<sup>138</sup> This blend of features of monastic and secular medieval churches is described by Gifford as *simple Romanesque*.<sup>139</sup> In 2012 there was a union between the church and that of Innerleven East, and since the merger it is now known as Wellesley Parish Church of Scotland.<sup>140</sup>

## VII. Methil and Denbeath Parish Church

Methil and Denbeath Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



In 1931, some 300 years after the closure of the parish church in Methilhill, a new Church of Scotland parish church was constructed on Chemiss Road, close to the site of the medieval church. As with the new Methil Parish Church on Wellesley Road, the opening of the new church was necessitated by the growing population of Methil, in particular the mining districts inland from the port. Originally known as Methilhill Parish Church, it was constructed in 1931

<sup>137</sup> 'Wellesley Road, Methil Parish Church', *Historic Environment Scotland*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB22712>.

<sup>138</sup> Cameron, *Methil*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>139</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland*, 106.

<sup>140</sup> 'Methil Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4639/name/Methil+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.



in a style described by Gifford as *Cheap gothic*.<sup>141</sup> As hall was added in the 1960s and there was a major repair in 2007, by which time, following a union with the Denbeath Parish Church, it had been renamed Methil and Denbeath Parish Church.<sup>142</sup> It remains in use today.

### VIII. Methil Evangelical Church

Methil Evangelical Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



Methil Evangelical Church was built in 1936, and was described by Alexander Smith in 1952 as the Methil Town Mission.<sup>143</sup> The church on Bowling Green Street is now part of the Leven Baptist Church group, and services are shared between the sites in Methil and Leven.<sup>144</sup>

### IX. Flying Angel Military Chapel (1940)

<sup>141</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland*, p. 106.

<sup>142</sup> 'Methil and Denbeath Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/7776/name/Methil+and+Denbeath+Parish+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566, 'Methil Evangelical Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 9 October 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4102/name/Methil+Evangelical+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>144</sup> 'Bowling Green Street, Methil', *Leven Baptist Church*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://levenbaptist.com/bowling-green-street-methil/>.

Shortly after the start of World War II a small chapel was built in Methil Docks to cater to the dock personnel and those involved in war production at the site. The chapel was demolished at the end of the war and its exact location is unknown.<sup>145</sup>

### **X. Methil Tin Kirk**

In 1952 Alexander Smith listed a number what he described as *Other religious bodies* in Methil, including a *Gospel Hall, the Central Gospel Mission* and *the Methil Town Mission*.<sup>146</sup> One of these was the Spiritualist Church, located on Methil Brae. It was closed by the 1970s the building was sold. It was demolished soon after and is now the site of a private house.<sup>147</sup>

### **XI. Gospel Hall**

In 1952 Alexander Smith listed a number what he described as *Other religious bodies* in Methil, including a *Gospel Hall, the Central Gospel Mission* and *the Methil Town Mission*.<sup>148</sup> The Gospel Hall was found on Wellesley Road. It is unclear when it fell out of use, but the building was later used as a warehouse and is now empty. A new Gospel congregation can be found in the High Street of Lower Methil. Known as Innerleven Gospel Hall, they are a small group not affiliated to any other church, who meet on a Sunday and Tuesday.<sup>149</sup>

### **XII. Central Gospel Mission Revival Centre**

In 1952 Alexander Smith listed a number what he described as *Other religious bodies* in Methil, including a *Gospel Hall, the Central Gospel Mission* and *the Methil Town Mission*.<sup>150</sup> It is unclear where that organisation met, but a group with the same name have a premises on Herriot Crescent. They meet on Sunday and Monday, and host a choir and children and youth clubs.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> 'Flying Angel Military Chapel', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 9 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10467/name/Flying+Angel+Military+Chapel+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>146</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566.

<sup>147</sup> 'Spiritualist Church', *Places of Worship*, Accessed 11 October, 2021,

<http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10468/name/Spiritualist+Church+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566.

<sup>149</sup> 'Who are we?', *Innerleven Gospel Hall*, Accessed 11 October, 2021,

[http://innerlevengospelhall.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2:whoarewe&catid=1:gospelhall&Itemid=11](http://innerlevengospelhall.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2:whoarewe&catid=1:gospelhall&Itemid=11).

<sup>150</sup> Smith, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, p. 566.

<sup>151</sup> 'Central Gospel Mission Revival Centre', *Facebook*, Accessed 11 October, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/CentralGospelMissionRevivalCentre/community/>.

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

Of the more than a dozen churches, missions and chapels constructed in Methil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, six (2 Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Baptist and 2 Gospel or Spiritualist) congregations remain active today. The loss of churches and congregations has been a steady process resulting from a combination of mergers between congregations and denominations, Methil's decline as a port town, and the general trend in a fall in church attendance seen across Scotland after World War II. The 1838 Church of Scotland building on the High Street (1981) and Old St Agatha's Roman Catholic Church (1920s) were superseded by new buildings and were eventually demolished. The merger between two Church of Scotland congregations in 1942, led to the abandonment and eventual demolition of the former Free Church (1978). The outbreak of World War II and the decline in the number of sailors visiting Methil made the German and Coastal Missions superfluous, while the congregations of other independent evangelical churches have fluctuated over time, to the extent that it remains difficult to trace the history, and interconnections, of many of these organisations.

Methil and Denbeath Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)





## Part 3 – Wemyss

Wemyss Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



## Introduction

Wemyss is a picturesque coastal settlement located on the north shore of the Forth. Lying between Dysart to the east and Buckhaven to the west, it has traditionally been divided into two distinct settlements, known as East(er) and West(er) with the Den Burn (now known as the Kingslaw Burn), providing the boundary. The place-name, first recorded as *Wemes* and *Wemyss* in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries is Gaelic in origin and has been translated by Simon Taylor as ‘Cave Place’ or ‘Place of the Caves’. This refers to the set of sea caves which lie along the shore to the northeast of the village of East Wemyss.<sup>152</sup> In the Middle Ages, the parish of Wemyss included Buckhaven and Innerleven, and between c.1630 and the mid-1800s, Methil and Methilhill. This report will focus on Wemyss itself, much of which belonged to the Wemyss family, and who were made earls of Wemyss in 1633. The main seat of the family prior to the fifteenth century was Macduff Castle near East Wemyss, before they constructed Wemyss Castle, close to West Wemyss. Both settlements were minor trading and fishing stations in the Middle Ages. All this changed in the sixteenth century as the Wemyss family began to exploit deposits of coal in East Wemyss and Methil. Investment in the harbours at West Wemyss and Methil (from c.1630 part of the parish of Wemyss) by David, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Wemyss, in the 1660s, saw them become major ports for the export of coal and salt from the district. After a lull in the late eighteenth century, coal began to be mined in large quantities again in the nineteenth century, as such, Methil became one of the most important industrial ports in Scotland. This led to an increase in the population of all the coastal settlements located in parish of Wemyss, and ultimately, the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the district, with Buckhaven and Methil separating from Wemyss in the 1890s. This industry declined in the late twentieth century, and has been replaced, to some extent with a focus on the development of green energy and tourism.

Wemyss has a fascinating sacred history dating back to the sixth and seventh centuries, when early Christians carved incised crosses in several of the caves near East Wemyss. By the high Middle Ages, the parish church of the district could be found in East Wemyss, first entering the written records in the early thirteenth century.<sup>153</sup> In the late Middle Ages, a chapel was constructed in West Wemyss, however, it was not until the nineteenth century before the villagers had their own church. After the Reformation, the neighbouring parish of Methil was absorbed into Wemyss. As such, the church at East Wemyss remained the only place of worship in the district until the nineteenth century. Population growth in the modern era led to a division of the parish and the establishment of several new places of worship in Buckhaven and Methil.

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Thomson, ed, *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree in Scotia* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1841), p. 353 and David Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre, of Trinity College, Edinburgh, and other collegiate churches in Mid-Lothian* (Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1861), no. 14, Simon Taylor & Gilbert Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One. West Fife between Leven and Forth* (Donington, 2006), pp. 579-80.

<sup>153</sup> Richard Oram, ‘Dysart- History’, *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 15 April 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158540>, Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 468.

A Church of Scotland ‘chapel at ease’ (1835) and later a full parish church (1895) were founded in West Wemyss, and a Free Church congregation were founded East Wemyss. Since 2008, when the parishes of Wemyss and Buckhaven merged, only one church in Wemyss is active (the church formerly known as St Adrian’s). Services are held at St Adrian’s and in Buckhaven.

Photograph of Jonathan's Cave wall showing wolf and pedestalled crosses c. 1890.<sup>154</sup>



### Religious Sites and the Landscape of Wemyss

The sea caves at East Wemyss and the natural harbour at West Wemyss were the main stimulants for the development of the two communities. Although there is evidence of religious activity within the caves, they do not appear to have been primarily used as sacred sites in the same manner caves at Dysart, Pittenweem and Caiplic were. In the last millennia the presence of castles close to the settlements, and later coal mining and fisheries have been the main influence on life in the district. There were relatively few changes to religious provision in the area until the modern era., The large medieval church in East Wemyss dominated the townscape until it was joined by St George’s in the late nineteenth century. In West Wemyss, the late medieval chapel of St Mary, and later St Adrian’s church, have vied with the castle as the major structures in the village. From a peak of three churches in operation across the two settlements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, now only one is in active use. Of the two redundant structures, St Mary’s was converted into a studio first and later a residential property in the 1970s and 1980s. The pressure for such properties in sought after locations like Wemyss will likely see the conversion of St George’s in East Wemyss in the near future.

<sup>154</sup> ‘J. Patrick photograph annotated by J. Romilly Allen of Jonathan's Cave wall showing wolf and pedestalled crosses c. 1890’, *Wemyss Caves 4D*, Accessed 21 October 2021, <http://4dwemysscaves.org/catalogue/#images> .



## 2. Early Christianity (c500-c1000AD)

### Sites of Interest

#### Wemyss Caves

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

Wemyss first enters the written record in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, however, place-name and archaeological evidence indicates that the area had been occupied for some time by that point.<sup>155</sup> Wemyss Caves include Pictish era carvings (c.600-900), while excavations of the ‘Sliding Cave’ have found materials that have been radio-carbon dated to 240-400AD.<sup>156</sup> The site of MacDuff Castle, located in East Wemyss, may also have been occupied in the early middle ages, although the current castle dates from the fourteenth century.

### I. Wemyss Caves

Fig 3. West Doo Cave c.1890.<sup>157</sup>



The caves at East Wemyss have been described by writers since at least the eighteenth century and have been the subject of the focused interest of historians and archaeologists from the 1860s when Professor James Simpson (the pioneer of anaesthetics) visited with a group of friends and published an account of the carvings found inside. Some of the earliest careful drawings of the carvings were made for John Stuart’s *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* in 1867. Further archaeological examinations took place in the 1920s, 1980s, early 2000s, and 2019.

<sup>155</sup> Thomson, ed, *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree*, p. 353 and Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre*, 14.

<sup>156</sup> Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 579-80.

<sup>157</sup> ‘J. Patrick photograph annotated by J. Romilly Allen of birds, crosses and S-shaped figure in the now collapsed West Doo Cave c. 1890’, *Wemyss4D*, Accessed 29 October, 2021, <http://4dwemysscaves.org/catalogue/#images>.

Christian symbols, mainly taking the form of crosses, have been found in Jonathan's Cave, as well as the Court, Doo, and Well caves.<sup>158</sup> An excavation of Jonathan's Cave in 1988 found a skeleton, carbon dated to c.1000AD. This has led to the suggestion that it may have been the site of a burial ground or chapel in that period.<sup>159</sup> Unlike other caves on the Fife Coast at Dysart (St Serf), Pittenweem (St Fillan), and Caiplie near Anstruther Easter (St Ethernan), no legends have survived associating those at Wemyss with a particular saint or holy man. Nor did they develop a reputation as a hermitage or place of pilgrimage, unlike those at Caiplie and Dysart which remained sites of pilgrimage until the Reformation.<sup>160</sup> While religious institutions developed at Dysart and Pittenweem directly connected to the caves and the saints with which they were associated, this does not appear to have been the case at Wemyss, although the church at East Wemyss was located close to the site.<sup>161</sup> Whether the caves were ever used as places of worship remains a matter of speculation, especially given the regular reuse of the sites, in addition to continued inundations from the sea destroying most evidence.

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*The name of the parish is said to be Gaelic, and signifies a cave, in allusion to the number of natural caves on the sea shore, near the village of Easter Wemyss. There are seven a little to the east of Easter Wemyss, and all but one about 100 yards from high-water mark. Four of them were long ago fitted up for, and still are pigeon-houses. There are two at the bottom of the cliff, and immediately under the ruins of the castle of Easter Wemyss; one of them is called Johnathan's Cave, from a man who, with his family, resided some time in it; the entrance to the other is very narrow, but after having gone through it, you find yourself in a very spacious place, in which is a well of excellent water. It is annually visited by the young people of Easter Wemyss, with lights, upon the first Monday of January Old Style; but from what this custom took its rise, the writer could never learn.....<sup>162</sup>*

*1867 Stuart*

*In the course of last autumn, Professor Sir James Simpson, with a party of friends, was led to inspect the neighbouring caves at East Wemyss, when it was found that on the walls of some of them were sculptures, among which were several of the symbols of the Scottish pillar-stones, and crosses of varying form. It afterwards appeared that the existence of these figures had been known in the neighbourhood for many years, but were not thought worthy of notice. As this most interesting discovery seemed to have a direct bearing on the history of the symbols, I lost no time in getting drawings made of the whole sculptures. The walls of the caves are in some*

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<sup>158</sup> J Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, eds, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland. Part 1* (Edinburgh, 1903), ii, 370.

<sup>159</sup> 'Jonathan's Cave', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 20 October, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/2625/name/Jonathan%27s+Cave+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>160</sup> See reports on Dysart and Anstruther for further discussion.

<sup>161</sup> For example, the churches at Dysart and Pittenweem which are located very close to, and in the latter case connected, to the caves.

<sup>162</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1793), (OSA), xvi, p. 513.

*places covered with marks of a different character, and there are exfoliations which at times render it difficult to determine whether a figure is natural or artificial, but with regard to all the more important sculptures there is no difficulty, and I may add that after the drawings were completed, they were compared by myself with the original figures. I was induced at the same time to examine other caves on the coast of Fife and in the isle of Arran, but did not discover any additional examples of the “symbols,” although, as will be seen, there are interesting sculptures in some of them.*<sup>163</sup>

*1895 Millar*

*...between Buckhaven and West Wemyss there are numerous caves or weems of considerable extent, from which it is supposed that the name of the parish has been derived.....having regard to the fact that there are sculptured markings on the wall of these caves, which show that they were a resort of Christians in early times....it is extremely probable that the cave contained one of the holy wells which pilgrims were wont to visit for pious purposes, and that this custom survived long after its meaning had been forgotten.*<sup>164</sup>

Wemyss Caves, 2015. (B. Rhodes)



<sup>163</sup> John Stuart, *The sculptured stones of Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1856-1867), ii, lxxxvi and xci-iii.

<sup>164</sup> A. H Millar, *Fife: pictorial and historical: its people, burghs, castles and mansions*, 2v. (Cupar, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1895), ii, p. 49.



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

#### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

#### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The place-name Wemyss is first recorded in the 1180s when Robert of *Weme*, a clerk, appeared as a witness to a charter of the bishops of St Andrews.<sup>165</sup> East Wemyss first appears in charters in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries when it was in the possession of Michael of Wemyss, ancestor of the family of Wemyss.<sup>166</sup> The family were patrons of the parish church which they granted to the Hospital of Soutra in c.1230. Furthermore, Ralph and Gilbert, noted as rectors of Wemyss, appear in early thirteenth century charters.<sup>167</sup> The settlement around that church probably developed to serve the needs of Macduff castle, with some minor fishing and trading taking place with boats drawn up on the shore (there was no artificial harbour).<sup>168</sup> The small headland at West Wemyss provides a natural harbour for that settlement. The villagers there also worshipped at St Mary's, although no records of the settlement there survives before the later Middle Ages.

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

Soutra Aisle.<sup>169</sup>



The parish church of Wemyss was first recorded c.1230 when it was granted by John of Methil, to the Hospital of Soutra. John was the son of Michael of Wemyss, men who were ancestors of the Wemyss family who would dominate the district for much of the second millennium. The hospital at Soutra, founded in the 1160s, was located on the main north/south road to Edinburgh and its purpose was to cater to pilgrims. Dedicated to the Holy

Trinity, the hospital was staffed by canons following the rule of St Augustine. The initial grant consisted of patronage of the church of Wemyss, dedicated to St Mary, with full possession granted in 1261. From 1261, all the tithes and other income from the church went to the

<sup>165</sup> Thomson, ed, *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree*, p. 353.

<sup>166</sup> Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre*, 14.

<sup>167</sup> Thomson, ed, *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree*, pp. 269 & 381.

<sup>168</sup> Anon, *East Wemyss Village Walkabout* (East Wemyss, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>169</sup> 'Soutra Aisle', *Wikimedia commons*, Accessed 29 October, 2021, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Soutra\\_Aisle\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_519314.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/57/Soutra_Aisle_-_geograph.org.uk_-_519314.jpg).

hospital, from which a portion was reserved to pay for a priest (known as a vicar pensioner) to minister to the parishioners. A portion of this income was also paid to the church of Dysart. This indicates that in an earlier period Wemyss appears to have been subordinate to that church, almost certainly part of a network of local churches centred on the mother church of Dysart.<sup>170</sup> The church was largely rebuilt in the 1520s, and it is not clear what of the high medieval structure has survived.<sup>171</sup>

*c.1239*

*John of Methil has given and granted and by this his present charter established to the hospital of Soutra all right that he had in the church of St Mary of Wemyss (FIF), for his soul and the souls of Earl Duncan (II of Fife) and others, in pure and perpetual alms, with all its liberties and pertinents and easements.*<sup>172</sup>

*22 January 1240 X 1242*

*David, bishop of St Andrews, for master and brethren of Soutra; has established right of patronage of church of Wemyss (FIF) which Sir John de Methil, knight, bestowed.*<sup>173</sup>

*9 January 1262*

*Gamelin, bishop of St Andrews, for Hospital of Soutra; has granted church of Wemyss (FIF) for their own uses, which Sir John of Wemyss, son of Michael of Wemyss, patron of church, gave, and which David, bishop of St Andrews, afterwards established, saving episcopal dues and sustenance of vicar and also saving pension paid to Dysart from church.*<sup>174</sup>

#### **4. Late Medieval Christianity (1300-1560)**

##### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

St Mary's Chapel, West Wemyss

##### Introduction/Nature of the Site

East and West Wemyss remained small settlements in the late Middle Ages, with the western part largely owned by the Livingston family, and the east by the family of Wemyss. In the early fifteenth century, the Wemyss family, who had become important regional landowners by that point, sold MacDuff castle to the Colville family and built a new seat (Wemyss Castle) in the western part of the parish. This may have stimulated the development of West Wemyss, which

<sup>170</sup> Oram, 'Dysart- History', Taylor & Markus, *The Place-Names of Fife. Volume One*, pp. 468.

<sup>171</sup> Richard Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture', *Corpus of Scottish Medieval Parish Churches*, Accessed 31 October, 2021, <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/corpusofscottishchurches/site.php?id=158932>.

<sup>172</sup> Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre*, no. 14.

<sup>173</sup> Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre*, no.30.

<sup>174</sup> Laing, ed, *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre*, no.40.

became a castle town. By the early sixteenth century, a chapel had been constructed there, possibly acting as a ‘chapel-at-ease’ for the settlement, or as a private chapel for the Wemyss family. The parish church at East Wemyss, from the 1460s under the control of the Trinity Church and Hospital in Edinburgh, remained the main place of worship in the district. It underwent considerable rebuilding and augmentation in the early sixteenth century.

## II. St Mary’s By the Sea, East Wemyss

St Mary’s, along with most of the property of the Hospital of Soutra, was confiscated in the 1460s by the Crown and granted to the Church and Hospital of the Holy Trinity in Edinburgh, recently founded by Mary of Gueldres (1460). In 1463, it was noted that the parsonage tithes of the church of Wemyss (the income from corn and other crops) were used specifically to sustain 13 bedesman at the Trinity Hospital. We learn from these documents that St Mary’s was served by a perpetual vicar, a priest who was paid from the vicarage tithes (the income from animal products). After 1502, these tithes were wholly in the possession of the Provost of Holy Trinity, who paid a vicar pensioner a salary of 20 marks per year to minister to the population of Wemyss.

From a dispute between the Provost and the Laird of Wemyss in the 1520s, we know that considerable alterations to the church seem to have taken place in 1527-1528. The records note that the church was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain of the Chapel of Our Lady in West Wemyss. A chapel and aisle dedicated to St Katherine of Alexandria was added to the church in East Wemyss by the late fifteenth century, founded by the Colville family (who had purchased MacDuff Castle c.1420). Katherine, whose main shrine was at Mount Sinai in Egypt, was a popular saint in late medieval Scotland. Altars in St Andrews (Holy Trinity and Inverkeithing and the churches of Cupar and Newburgh were dedicated to her. A miraculous well associated with Katherine, was located in Liberton near Edinburgh. Altars and chapels in her honour could be found in every major church in Scotland.<sup>175</sup>

1425

Nicholas de Greenlaw (son of a priest) resigned the church of Wemyss and moved to Auldbar.<sup>176</sup>

1433

Donald Kennedy (canon of Soutra) was presented to church on death of Robert de Kirkcaldy (also a canon). The perpetual vicarage of the Kirk Wemyss was described as ‘wont to be ruled by brothers of the hospital of Soutra’. In 1438 Kennedy accused by Thomas Lauder, the master of Soutra, of detaining a certain proportion of the church. Kennedy complained that the Master

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<sup>175</sup> Tom Turpie, *Kind Neighbours. Scottish Saints and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 70-89.

<sup>176</sup> W. H Bliss, ed, *Calendar of entries in the Papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland; Papal letters*, (London, 1893), (CPL), vii, 380-81.



takes so much yearly from the fruits that from the vicar could not be maintained from what was left.<sup>177</sup>

#### Dispute of 1527-28

A long running dispute between David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), over some of the tithes of West Wemyss and the Kirkland of Wemyss led to a case heard in St Andrews. The dispute was eventually settled by arbitration. Three years' worth of teind sheaves for 1526-28 were to be restored to the Provost. The arbiters also advised the Provost to yield up the offerings due to him from the Lady chapel of Wemyss, because the parish church of Wemyss was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain there.<sup>178</sup>

#### 19 Oct 1527

At a court held in St Andrew a dispute between the David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), respecting the teinds belonging to the provost as vicar. The judges pronounced in favour of David that; *Sir John had wickedly and unjustly interjected his extrajudicial appeal to the Roman Court (the Papal Curia)..commanding the said vicar.....to pay half the sum £99 8s 8d Scots within two months (the other half thereafter).*<sup>179</sup>

#### 6 Feb 1528

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

The judges also noted that; *the offerings of the chapel of Wemyss pertaining to the said provost by of the parish church of Wemyss, because Sir Patrick Jackson, chaplain thereof was biggand and purposed to big and continue, the judges asked the provost to supersede the said offerings for Patrick's good deeds.....*<sup>180</sup>

#### Altars and chapels in parish church

#### 26 October 1541

<sup>177</sup> Annie I. Dunlop, ed., *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1433-1447* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press 1983), (CSSR, iv), no. 112, CPL, ix, 21.

<sup>178</sup> William Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss* (Edinburgh, 1988), i, 111-113 & ii, 274-278.

<sup>179</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6.

<sup>180</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6

*The King has handed over to feufarm to Norman Leslie, feudatory of the earl of Rothes, and to Elizabeth Lindsay his wife, the lands of East Wemyss [...] with the donative advowson of the aisle and altarage of **Saint Catherine** within East Wemyss parish church, shire of Fife.*<sup>181</sup>

*Dec 1545*

*Thomas Birrell in town of Freuchie binds himself to deliver in East Wemyss on the feast of St Andrew (30 Nov) two bolls of barley **for the altar of St Mary** situated in the parish church of East Wemyss.*<sup>182</sup>

*6 Jan 1597*

*Instrument of Sasine in favour of Sir John Boswell of Balmuto, knight, of a fourth part of the lands of Spittal, in lordship of Lochoreshire and sheriffdom of Fife, together with the coal of half of the lands of Dundonald, lying as above; on precept of sasine in charter dated 3 December 1596, by Robert Colvill, son and apparent heir of James Colville of East Wemyss, **chaplain of St Katherine's Chapel**, in parish church of Wemyss, and said James, patron of said chapel, in favour of said Sir John Boswell.*<sup>183</sup>

### III. St Mary's Chapel, West Wemyss

Ruins of St Mary's Chapel (SCHR 2021).<sup>184</sup>



Sir Patrick Jackson was recorded as the chaplain of the 'Lady Chapel' in West Wemyss in the 1520s. This chapel was connected to the parish church in East Wemyss, as a dispute of 1527-28 noted that offerings at the chapel should be paid to the patrons of that church. No record survives indicating when the chapel was constructed. There is, however, an interesting, but unlikely, local legend that it was founded by Spaniards fleeing the Inquisition in the late fifteenth century.<sup>185</sup> In the 1530s Jackson invested money in the chapel and built a manse, protecting both with a sea wall, and in return the laird of Wemyss confirmed the chapel's possession of various lands and granted rights to a doocot and local salt pan. The purpose of the chapel is unclear from the surviving documents. It may

<sup>181</sup> John M. Thomson et al eds, *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1882-1914), (RMS), iii, no. 2493

<sup>182</sup> William Muir, ed, *Notices of the Local Records of Dysart* (Glasgow: Maitland Club 1853), p.15.

<sup>183</sup> National Records of Scotland (NRS), Boswell of Balmuto Papers, GD66/1/110.

<sup>184</sup> 'Wemyss Chapel Gardens', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 29 October, 2021, <http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4629/image/13165/name/Wemyss+Chapel+Gardens+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>185</sup> Anon, *West Wemyss Village Walkabout* (East Wemyss, 2002), p. 23.

have been a private place of worship belonging to the Wemyss family due to its location in the gardens of the castle and perhaps even falling under their patronage. However, it was also connected to the parish church, so it may have been an early chapel-at-ease for the villagers of West Wemyss. The chapel was abandoned at the Reformation, before being converted into a four-storey house by David, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Wemyss, in the 1620s.<sup>186</sup> Some ruins of the house still survive.

#### Dispute of 1527-28

A dispute between the David, laird of Wemyss and Sir John Dingwall, provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh (vicar of the church of Wemyss), regarding some of the tithes of West Wemyss and the Kirkland of Wemyss led to a case heard in St Andrews. As part of the settlement, it was noted that the arbiters also advised the Provost to yield up the offerings due to him from the Lady chapel of Wemyss, because the parish church of Wemyss was being built or repaired by Sir Patrick Jackson, the chaplain there.<sup>187</sup>

#### 6 Feb 1528

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

The judges also noted that; *the offerings of the chapel of Wemyss pertaining to the said provost by of the parish church of Wemyss, because Sir Patrick Jackson, chaplain thereof was biggand and purposed to big and continue, , the judges asked the provost to supercede the said offerings for Patrick's good deeds.....*<sup>188</sup>

#### February 1536

*David Wemyss of Wemyss, publicly acknowledged to the chaplain of St Mary's Chapel of Wester Wemyss (Patrick Jackson), who had just expended more than £1000 on the chapel and manse, that he and his predecessors had bestowed on the chapel various portions of lands.....the chapel also had a salt pan attached to it and a dovecot.*<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> 'Wemyss Chapel Gardens', *Places of Worship in Scotland*.

<sup>187</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, i, 111-113 & ii, 274-278.

<sup>188</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 274-6

<sup>189</sup> Cited in Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, i, 117.



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

##### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

##### Introduction/Nature of the Site

The early modern era was a period of considerable development for Wemyss and the surrounding district. There is evidence for coal mining in Methil and East Wemyss from the late sixteenth century, which also stimulated local salt production.<sup>190</sup> By the mid-1600s, a stone harbour was built by David, 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Wemyss, at Methil. Similar works seem to have been undertaken at West Wemyss for the export of coal and salt.<sup>191</sup> In the early 1600s, the parish of Methil was absorbed into that of Wemyss, and the church at East Wemyss remained the only place of worship in the parish. In 1793, the minister noted that there were a small number of *dissenters* in the parish, those not belonging to the established church and with no formal congregations.

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*There are but few dissenters in the parish. There is a Burgher Meeting place at Buckhaven, but has no minister. Those of the Anti-Burgher persuasion have places of worship at in the parishes of Dysart and Markinch. There are about 24 who join the Presbytery of Relief, and 6 of the Episcopal persuasion.*<sup>192</sup>

### III. St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

There is no direct account of the arrival of the Reformation in Wemyss, however, the church seems to have been relatively easily adapted to the new, preaching based, form of worship that dominated after 1560. After Methil was absorbed into the parish of Wemyss in the early 1600s, considerable alterations were made to the building, which was now located at the centre of the expanded parish. In the 1640s, the earl of Wemyss constructed a family mausoleum outside the church, which would become known as the Wemyss Aisle. This led to an extension of the building eastward, with the burial place connected to the earl's private loft in the church by a stair. Two further aisles were added to the church in later 1600s, and what Fawcett describes as a *square birdcage bellcote* was added to the west gable.<sup>193</sup> There was further work in 1792, and the minister George Grib was pleased to describe it as a *well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship*.

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<sup>190</sup> *RMS*, vii. No 1026.

<sup>191</sup> Angus Graham, 'Archaeological notes on some harbours in Eastern Scotland' in *Proceedings of Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, 101, (1968-9), 200-285 at 281-282.

<sup>192</sup> *OSA*, (1793), xvi, 529.

<sup>193</sup> Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.

1636 (8 Sept) *visitation of the church by the Pres of Kirkcaldy found the minister (Patrick Mearns) to be competent, while the earl of Wemyss and lord Elcho were ordered to arrange the 300 marks pa for the new schoolmaster.*<sup>194</sup>

1644 (21 Aug) the earl of Wemyss agrees to build a place for burial outside the kirk of Wemyss.<sup>195</sup>

1658 (26 Sept) the kirk session considering the condition of the kirk yard dykes which are altogether ruinous. The session orders a collection for the repair.<sup>196</sup>

1659 (12 June) *it was the mind of the session to strike through a window besouth the little kirk door that leads to the pulpit for making greater light in the church.*<sup>197</sup>

1682 (6 May) the minister and session order a collection to be made for the repair of the church.<sup>198</sup>

1688 Margaret, Dowager Countess of Wemyss requests in her will that she be buried *In our isle at the church of Wemyss.*<sup>199</sup>

*Rev George Grib, 1793*

*The church is an old gothic building in the form of a cross; there are evident marks of considerable additions to it; but no date that can fix its age.... It was repaired and much improved in 1792, and is now a well-lighted, warm and decent place of worship. The church and manse are in the thriving village of Easter Wemyss, the most central part of the parish.*<sup>200</sup>

St Mary's by the Sea, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



<sup>194</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fols. 191-192.

<sup>195</sup> NRS Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Minutes, 1630-1653, CH2/224/1, fol. 464.

<sup>196</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 100.

<sup>197</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1655-1668, CH2/365/2, fol. 141.

<sup>198</sup> NRS Wemyss Kirk Session, 1668-1701, CH2/365/3, fol. 134.

<sup>199</sup> Fraser, *Memorials of the family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, ii, 258.

<sup>200</sup> OSA (1793), xvi, 526.

## 5. Late Modern (1800-2021).

### Sites of Interest

St Mary's By the Sea, East Wemyss

St Adrian's Parish Church, West Wemyss

St George's Parish Church, East Wemyss

### Introduction/Nature of the Site

After a lull in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, coal began to be mined in large quantities the parish of Wemyss in the late nineteenth century. As such, Methil became one of the most important industrial ports in Scotland. This led to an increase in the population in all the coastal and inland settlements, and ultimately to the subdivision of the parish and civil jurisdictions in the district, with Buckhaven and Methil separated from Wemyss in the 1890s. The population of the parish of Wemyss, even shorn of its eastern part, has grown steadily in the modern era from around 5000 in 1851, to 15,000 in 1901 and 28,000 in 1951. Much of this population live in inland mining settlements. In 2011 the population of East Wemyss was 1,928, while around 250 people live in West Wemyss.<sup>201</sup> In 1838, the minister of St Mary's, John Maclachan, noted that around 100 people out of the population of East and West Wemyss belonged to Non-Conformist churches.<sup>202</sup> A Church of Scotland 'chapel of ease' was established in West Wemyss in 1835, and elevated to full parish status when the new church was constructed in 1895. In East Wemyss, a Free Church was built in 1843. The congregation re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929. From then until 1973, there were three Church of Scotland charges in Wemyss. A series of amalgamations between the various congregations took place in the 1970s and early 2000s. Since 2008, one Church of Scotland parish covers East and West Wemyss and Buckhaven. As of that date, one minister serves the newly named parish of Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish, with services alternating between churches in Buckhaven and West Wemyss (St Adrian's).<sup>203</sup>

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

In 1810-11, considerable work was done on the church at East Wemyss. Fawcett suggests that *the rectangular two-, three- and four-light transomed windows, which light much of the church, together with the crowstepped gables, probably date from these operations.*<sup>204</sup> However, in 1838, the minister commented that the church was *far too small* for the parish. This pressure for space was relieved through the foundation of a 'chapel at ease' in West Wemyss (1835), a *quod sacra* parish in Methil in 1838, St David's Church in Buckhaven

<sup>201</sup> 'Parish Populations, Fife', *GENUKI*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct/FIF/ParishPopulations>

<sup>202</sup> *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1838), (NSA), ix, 399-400.

<sup>203</sup> 'St Adrian's Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8060/name/St.+Adrian's+Parish+Church,+united+with+Buckhaven+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>204</sup> Fawcett, 'Wemyss, Architecture'.



(1869), and the secession of a large part of the congregation joining the Free Church after the Great Disruption in 1843. Major repairs were carried out in the late nineteenth century, which, combined with the addition of a hall in the 1920s, have made it difficult for architectural historians to judge what of the medieval structure remains. The Free Church congregation of St George's re-joined the Church of Scotland in 1929. There was a union in 1976 between that congregation and those of St Mary's and St Adrian's churches in West Wemyss. As a result, St Mary's was closed for worship. It was first converted into a recording studio, and since 1985, it has been used as a private house.<sup>205</sup>

War Memorial by former Church of St Mary's by the Sea, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



*Rev John Maclachan, 1838*

*The parish church is in East Wemyss, and is conveniently situated for the great body of the people as it could well be. It is an old building in the form of a cross. The date of its erection cannot be ascertained. It has undergone several repairs; and, although the construction is bad, yet upon the whole it is a decent and comfortable place of worship. It has sittings for about 1000 persons. It is by far too small for the parish. From 900 to 1000 communicate annually. The people are very attentive to the ordinance of religion.<sup>206</sup>*

<sup>205</sup> 'St Mary's By the Sea, Wemyss, Fife', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4627/name/St.+Mary%27s+By+The+Sea+Wemyss+Fife>.

<sup>206</sup> NSA, (1838), ix, 399.



*There is a Dissenting meeting-house in connection with the United Associate Synod, situated on the Links of Buckhaven, about two miles from the parish church.....the congregation is respectable and divine service is well attended.*<sup>207</sup>

1840 Leighton

*The parish church, which is in the village of east Wemyss is an old building in the form of a cross, but the date of its erection is unknown. It is seated to accommodate 1000 persons. The number of communicants are from 900 to 1000 annually. The present incumbent is the Rev. John M'Lachlan ; the patronage is in the town council of Edinburgh.*<sup>208</sup>

1862 Westwood

*East Wemyss, in which is the Parish Church, a building in the form of a cross. It was rebuilt by General William Wemyss upon the site of an old Church, the date of whose erection is not authenticated. There is also a Free Church in East Wemyss.*<sup>209</sup>

1988 Gifford 1988

*Being converted into a recording studio (1985). Crowstep gabled harled kirk in a small graveyard beside the harbour. The core is probably of 1528, when the church is said to have been virtually rebuilt. Typical late medieval skinny rectangle, with a small one bay chancel at the E end...*<sup>210</sup>

## II. St Adrian's Parish Church, West Wemyss

St Adrian's Church, West Wemyss.<sup>211</sup>



In a response to growing population of the area in the early nineteenth century, a Church of Scotland 'chapel at ease' was built in what is now Church Street in West Wemyss in 1835. It was intended to save the villagers the long walk to East Wemyss. This structure was replaced by a full parish church in 1895, and briefly served as a local gymnasium before it was demolished to make way for housing in the 1930s.<sup>212</sup> The new church, built on Main

<sup>207</sup> NSA, (1838), ix, 399-400.

<sup>208</sup> John M. Leighton, *History of the County of Fife: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1840), iii, p. 170.

<sup>209</sup> A. Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory for the Counties of Fife and Kinross* (Cupar, 1862), pp. 214-215.

<sup>210</sup> John Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, (London, 1988), p. 203.

<sup>211</sup> 'St Adrian's Church and Churchyard, Main Street, West Wemyss', *British Listed Buildings*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/200393189-st-adrians-church-and-churchyard-main-street-west-wemyss-wemyss#.YYFsKm3P02x>.

<sup>212</sup> 'West Wemyss Church of Scotland', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, <http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10493/name/West+Wemyss+Church+of+Scotland+Wemyss+Fife>.

Street by the architect Alexander Tod, and mainly funded by the Wemyss family, was called St Adrian's. Described by Gifford as a *Simple crow-stepped cruciform church.....built of pink sandstone rubble*, in the 1960s the cost of required repairs led the Church of Scotland to decide to close St Adrian's. However, it was saved in 1972 by Captain Michael Wemyss who established the Wemyss Trust to fund the repairs and future maintenance.<sup>213</sup> In 1976, a union between the congregation and those of St Mary's and St George's in East Wemyss resulted in the formation of Wemyss Parish Church. This continued until there was a further union with Buckhaven Parish Church in 2008. Since that date, one minister serves the newly named parish of Buckhaven and Wemyss Parish, with services alternating between Buckhaven and West Wemyss.<sup>214</sup>

#### *1862 Westwood*

*West Wemyss, in which there is a Chapel in connection with the Established Church, coal-works, saw-mill, brick-work....2. East Wemyss, in which is the Parish Church, a building in the form of a cross. It was rebuilt by General William Wemyss upon the site of an old Church, the date of whose erection is not authenticated. There is also a Free Church in East Wemyss.*<sup>215</sup>

#### *1988 Gifford*

*Simple crow-stepped cruciform church of 1890-95, built of pink sandstone rubble...*<sup>216</sup>

### **III. St George's Parish Church, East Wemyss**

St George's Parish Church, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



At the Great Disruption in 1843, a large group of the congregation of East Wemyss parish church broke away and joined the Free Church. They began building a church in Main Street on land donated by Mrs Swan the following year. It opened for worship in 1846. The congregation remained constant with 331 noted in 1848 and 324 in 1900.<sup>217</sup> In 1929, they re-joined the Church of Scotland and took on the name St George's, moving to a new building in 1936-37. The old church was then used as a storeroom for a factory. It was finally demolished in 1995 to make way for a sewage works.<sup>218</sup> The new church, described by

<sup>213</sup> 'St Adrian's Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*.

<sup>214</sup> 'St Adrian's Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*.

<sup>215</sup> Westwood, *Westwood's parochial directory for the Counties of Fife and Kinross*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>216</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland*, p. 426.

<sup>217</sup> William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), ii, 147.

<sup>218</sup> 'Wemyss Parish Church (former)', *Places of Worship in Scotland*, Accessed 25 October, 2021, [http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8059/name/Wemyss+Parish+Church+\(former\)+Wemyss+Fife](http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/8059/name/Wemyss+Parish+Church+(former)+Wemyss+Fife).

Gifford as *competent dead end Gothic revival*, was united with St Adrian's in West Wemyss in 1973, and with St Mary's in 1976 to become Wemyss Parish Church. This continued until there was a further union with Buckhaven Parish Church in 2008, and St George's was closed.

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*Gifford 1988*

*Competent dead end Gothic revival by Peter Sinclair, 1936-37. Red sandstone gabled front with the lower stages of a tower on the r...<sup>220</sup>*

### **Epilogue. The Sacred Landscape of West and East Wemyss in the Twenty-First Century**

From a peak of three churches in operation across the two settlements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, now only one (St Adrian's) is in active use. There is a tradition of the swift reuse of redundant churches in Wemyss dating back to the seventeenth century, when the late medieval chapel of St Mary in West Wemyss was converted into a house by the lord of Wemyss. With the construction of St Adrian's church in West Wemyss in the 1890s, the former parish church (1835) was converted into a gymnasium before being demolished to make way for housing in the 1930s. The first Free Church building (1846), made redundant following the construction of St George's in the 1930s, was used as a storeroom before being demolished in 1995. The medieval church of St Mary's in East Wemyss was first converted into a studio and then later a residential property in the 1970s and 1980s following mergers between congregations in East and West Wemyss. The current demand for residential rather than commercial property in sought after locations such as Wemyss will likely see the same result at St George's in East Wemyss in the near future.

Panel on St George's, Wemyss, 2021. (B. Rhodes)



<sup>219</sup> St Adrian's Parish Church', *Places of Worship in Scotland*.

<sup>220</sup> Gifford, *The Buildings of Scotland, Fife*, p. 106.



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