

## The Old Churches of Kinross: A Walk

**A one-mile walk from the current Kinross Parish Church of Scotland visiting the churches which are its 'ancestors'. It finishes at the site of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century parish church, at the end of Kirkgate Park by Loch Leven**

### **Previous Churches:**

There are five former churches in Kinross from which the current parish church is descended. In part, this is because Kinross-shire was one of the strongest and earliest sources of the 'original Secession' from the established Church of Scotland in 1732. This explains why the monument to the Secession, an impressive stone obelisk, lies within the parish, at Gairneybridge on the old Great North Road (now the B996). There is a car park and information board.

It was to be almost 250 years before all the Presbyterian churches in the town were once again under one roof, when the two remaining Church of Scotland churches united in 1979.

**Station Road - Kinross Parish Church:** The current church dates from 1832 and is open to visitors Monday – Friday 10am to 12 noon. The main weekly service is at 10.30am on Sundays. A guide leaflet is available: 'An Architectural History of Kinross Parish Church'. The church has parking (in the lane on the west side of the church) and disabled access and disabled toilets.

**Lomond Mews - Manse:** Leave the church grounds by the original gate with the old oil-lamp holder above. Cross carefully over to Lomond Mews opposite where you can see, among modern houses, the rear of a previous manse (minister's house) which dates from 1784.

**Swansacre - The Free Church and its School:** Proceed westwards down Swansacre to the Kinross Learning Centre on the right, which was originally the Free Church school built by that congregation in 1847 – a generous service to the community by a recently-founded congregation. Adjacent to this, at the junction with Piper Row, is a Ministry of Defence building used by Cadets. It may not be obvious but this incorporates the Kinross Free Church, one of the ancestors of the current Parish Church. The doorway and the latticed side windows are remnants of its original design as a single-storey church. It was built in 1843 and named the Chalmers Church, after the minister who led 'the Disruption' from the established Church of Scotland to form the Free Church earlier that same year. It is a testament to the new congregation that they financed the building so quickly.

The church is relatively small compared with many in Scotland, where the new Free Church often deliberately rivalled the scale and prominence of the Parish Church. Presumably the modest scale in Kinross reflected the existing tradition in Kinross-shire of strong membership of the earlier Secession churches.

**High Street, Church Centre – The West United Presbyterian Church:** This strong Secession tradition is made manifest in stone and slate on the High Street at the top of Piper Row, the narrow street opposite the Drill Hall. Here there is a gothic-style church built for the Secessionists in 1884 and much larger than the Free church. The architect was Robert Baldie, a Glasgow architect who specialised in designing churches – over 30 are known.

The church was known as the West United Presbyterian Church, the United Presbyterians being a denomination dating from 1847 which included the earlier United Secession church. The rear of the site was previously the location of the town's first Secession church of 1748 and its old entrance piers survive at the rear of the Church Centre, further down Swansacre.

The new 1884 building was named the Erskine church after Ebenezer Erskine who led the 1732 Secession, having been a Church of Scotland minister at nearby Portmoak until 1731.

By the late nineteenth century it was common for even small communities in Scotland to have, as here in Kinross, at least one church for each of the three main Presbyterian denominations – United Presbyterian, Free Church and Church of Scotland. It was said that a typical Scottish village had 'ae street and three kirks'.

Following the union of the United Presbyterian Church with the Free Church in 1900, this became the Kinross United Free Church. Then, with the union of the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland in 1929, it became the East Church, Church of Scotland. The previous single parish church (the current church of 1832) became known as the West Church from that date until the union of the East and West churches in 1979 when it became once again the single Parish Church of Scotland in the town.

The East church was retained by the combined congregations and converted into the "Kinross Church Centre" which provides a useful resource for the church and community, including halls for let, a café open to the public and a Day Centre for elderly people. Much of the original internal character remains in the entrance hall and upstairs hall, which is at the old gallery level.

### **North of the Town Centre: St. James' and St. Paul's**

These two churches can be visited in a diversion northwards up the High Street from this walk (extra 1ml. return). St James Catholic Church is reached first. It dates from 1956 and is the first Roman Catholic church in the county for 700 years. It was designed by William Friskin, a Dundee architect who was Chairman of the Governors of Dundee College of Art. At its 50<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary in 2006 a new stained glass window was dedicated, of St. James the Great of Compostella by Lorraine Lamond.

Further on, in The Muirs, is St. Paul's Scottish Episcopal church. This delightful, village-scale church was designed by John Lessels in 1875. He was Kirkcaldy-born but practised from Edinburgh. Locally, he had undertaken alterations at Kinross House and Orwell church, Milnathort. The characterful interior of St.Paul's includes some fine stained-glass windows. In the grounds there is a rare example of a prefabricated, corrugated-iron hall.

**Mill Street, East United Presbyterian Church:** Returning to the walk at the Church Centre on High Street you should cross over to the east side of the High Street and proceed south (downhill) and turn east (left) in to Mill Street. Here, on the right, is another Secession Church, the main building dating from 1797. The Secession church itself split shortly after being founded because of a difference of opinion about whether or not to accept the government's new 'Burgess Oath'. This was the church of those – the Anti-Burghers - who would not accept the oath. The Burghers remained in the first Secession church, on the site of the current Church Centre which we have already visited.

As with that church, this congregation also became part of the United Presbyterian Church when these different strands re-united in 1847. They built the smaller hall alongside in 1890.

**High Street, Town Hall steeple:** Crossing back over High Street, proceed southwards down the High Street to the steeple attached to the old Town Hall. This was originally a church tower, the last remaining part of the Kinross Parish Church immediately previous to the current building of 1832. This church was built here in 1741 in the centre of the burgh, although the tower itself was not built until 1761. The form of the tower is of a local type, with other examples nearby at Milnathort, Strathmiglo and Auchtermuchty. Note the heavily-detailed surrounds to the door and first floor window which are in the style of the influential 18<sup>th</sup>.century Aberdeen architect, James Gibbs. The window surround incorporates a Lion Rampant, symbol of Scotland. The clock was added in 1875.**The Kirkgate – the original Parish Church:** Opposite the old steeple is the entrance to Burns-Begg Street, named after a local family who were descendants of Isobel Burns (Mrs. Begg), youngest sister of Robert Burns. To the left you can see the back of the old Anti-Burgher kirk already visited in Mill Street. The street becomes the Kirkgate ('church street' in Scots) which leads through the Kirkgate park to the original site of Kinross's parish church, in the graveyard at the end of the road. The old church which stood here would have been used at various times through its history for Roman Catholic, Episcopalian and Presbyterian forms of Christian worship and is therefore part of the common heritage of all Christians in Kinross. It was this location which gave the town its name, from the Gaelic 'Ceann Rois', the head of the peninsula. The church here was dedicated in 1246 and abandoned in 1741. The old vault in the kirkyard is a family aisle added to that church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the architect Sir William Bruce but the current appearance is from a reconstruction in 1860. Bruce was the owner and designer of Kinross House.

At the entrance to the kirkyard is a watch tower which relatives would occupy when they guarded new graves overnight to prevent theft by the 'body snatchers' or 'resurrectionists', who would dig up bodies to sell to medical science. The grave stones in the kirkyard date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century

### **St.Serf's Inch - the earliest churches:**

The history of worship here probably goes back even before the first records of 1246. The loch-side location and the dedication of the 1246 church to St.Serf suggest that this was already a place of worship, perhaps originally in the open air, where services would be led by monks who rowed over from the Priory on St. Serf's Island in the loch. The medieval Roman Catholic priory of the Augustinian order was preceded by a Culdee monastery from Celtic times. Before that the original missionary to the area, St.Serf, is said to have based himself on the island in the sixth century. The three ancient parishes around Loch Leven – Kinross, Orwell and Portmoak - all had their original churches in similar loch-side positions suggesting a common origin from the island monastery. In all three cases the sites of the churches were moved inland at a later date to be closer to the developing new centres of population.

*Sources: The Buildings of Scotland: Perth and Kinross, John Gifford, 2007*

*Dictionary of Scottish Architects (at [www.scottisharchitects.org](http://www.scottisharchitects.org))*

*A Brief History of the Presbyterian Churches of Kinross, Nan Walker, 1982*