

THE STORY OF SPYNIE KIRK by John Cruickshanks

The parish of Spynie is situated in the heart of the lowlands of Moray, just to the north of the burgh of Elgin. Its length from east to west is just over five miles, while its breadth varies from nearly three miles at the west end to just over half-a-mile at the east. It is bounded on the west by the parish of Alves, on the north by Duffus and Drainie, on the east and south by St. Andrews, and on the south by the burgh and parish of Elgin. The River Lossie forms a considerable stretch of the southern boundary, but the burgh of Elgin has extended beyond the river and now covers a large part of the parish. This part has been removed from the pastoral care of Spynie Church and is now attached to the parish church of Elgin.

A ridge of high ground running from east to west occupies the centre of the parish and, in former times, much of the ground to the north of this ridge was covered by a shallow loch — the loch of Spynie — which, throughout the ages, varied greatly in area and depth as the successive proprietors of the surrounding lands were more or less successful in their efforts to drain it and reclaim ground for agriculture. It has now almost completely disappeared except for a small area near the ruins of the Bishop's Palace and the site of the once flourishing burgh of Spynie in the north-east corner of the parish.

The existence of this loch had a considerable influence on the economy of the parish for, up to about 1500, the loch had an opening to the Moray Firth and a town and harbour as mentioned above. This was the centre of population of the parish, and therefore, the obvious site for the parish church. It is little wonder that later on it attracted the Bishops

of Moray to establish there, first their residence and then the cathedral church of Moray.

At what period the parish church of Spynie was first erected we have no knowledge. The parochial system was introduced during the reign of Malcolm Canmore and his sons, Alexander I and David I, and the Bishopric of Spynie, the second in Scotland after St. Andrews and before Dunkeld, was erected in 1107, the first year of the reign of Alexander I. There was probably a church of some kind — most likely of wood or stone and clay — from about this time. There certainly was a church at Kintrae from very early times for Bishop Bricius, in a charter dating from the beginning of the 13th century, refers to it as "the old church of Kintrae". This probably was not in any sense a parish church, but may have been originally a preaching station of the Culdees. It is mentioned along with Spynie as a prebend of one of the canons of Elgin Cathedral in 1242, but after that date it appears to have been united with Spynie and we hear no more of it as a place of worship. Robert Young, writing about the parish in 1871, states that some remains of this old church — or of a burying-ground in connection with it — continued to exist until about 1820. There is now little trace of it although its site on the Estate of Westfield is still known as Chapel Field, and from time to time large stones are still turned up by the plough.

The first cathedral church of Moray and residence of the bishops was at Birnie and remained so during the time of the first four bishops, that is until 1184. Kinneddar then became the cathedral for a few years, but it is recorded that Bishop Richard died and was buried at Spynie in 1203. This suggests that, prior to this date, the bishops had taken up residence at Spynie, and so it is not surprising that we find the next bishop, Briciusor Bryce, successfully petitioning Pope Innocent III to

have the Church of the Holy Trinity at Spynie made the cathedral church of the diocese. It seems likely that at this time, or more likely, somewhat earlier, a substantial church worthy of the dignity of a cathedral was erected at Spynie near the residence of the bishop probably on, or adjacent to, the site of Spynie Churchyard. Before his death in 1222 Bricius was again petitioning the Pope to have the cathedral removed to Elgin which, however, was not done until two years after his death.

In my view, it seems probable that the Church of the Holy Trinity at Spynie was erected about the same time as — or soon after — the church of Birnie, and in much the same style. We know that Birnie Church was first built not later than 1150 and this fact, together with the removal of the cathedral from Birnie to Kinneddar in 1184 and to Spynie some years later, supports the belief that the Church of the Holy Trinity was erected after 1150 (probably after 1184) but before 1215, the date of Bricius' application to Pope Innocent III.

On the removal of the cathedral to Elgin, Spynie, no doubt, reverted to the status of a parish church, but, as the residence of the bishops long continued there and as the population continued to be considerable, this north-east corner of the parish must have been a place of some importance. Indeed, the village of Spynie was erected into a burgh of barony in 1451 and, in the following year, the church lands of Moray became a regality. This points to the growing importance of the Bishops of Moray and, in consequence of this, the burgh of Spynie was a flourishing place with seamen, fisheries, a ferry and extensive trade. The splendid palace of the Bishops of Moray was probably also founded by Bishop Bricius, and it was certainly much enlarged and extended by his successors between 1203 and about 1500, when the main tower was

built. The imposing ruins of the palace are still standing about half-a-mile from the old churchyard.

Two events, however, contributed to the decline of the place. Spynie Loch was gradually growing shallower, and about 1500 its outlet to the sea became silted up. As a result of this, trade and fishing declined and the decay of the burgh began. Soon after came the Reformation in 1560 which removed the beneficent influence of the bishops. Although Protestant bishops took over the palace until 1686 they did not possess the temporal power of their Roman Catholic predecessors, and this contributed to the decline. The decay and de-population of Spynie in time led to an agitation to have the church removed to a more central and populous part of the parish, and in 1735 this was accomplished. The new church was erected at Quarreywood) on the north slope of the central ridge of the parish where there were not only a number of small tenants but also the two sizeable villages at Dykeside and Quarreywood.

A gable of the old church was still standing in the churchyard until about 1850 when it fell, and there is now no trace of the building. Whether this was the Church of the Holy Trinity of the late 12th century we cannot tell. It is not impossible that it was, for the original church of Birnie, founded in 1150, still stands and is in use to this day as the church of that parish.

It is recorded that the old church stood adjacent to the churchyard of Spynie and was 74 feet long and 35 feet broad. In fact the church stood in the centre of the churchyard and the position of its east door is marked by a stone cross, which was erected by the parishioners in 1908. The head of the cross which is very old was found among the ruins of the building. The shaft and base are modern. The dressed

stones which formed the doorways in its south and west walls were removed and built into the new church. On the lintel of the east doorway there is cut a date, partly obliterated when the stone was re-dressed, which appears to be 1691, and this may indicate that the Church of the Holy Trinity was replaced by another building — or perhaps repaired — at that time. The belfry, which had been erected in 1723, was also removed from the old church and now bears the date 1735. The bell, also taken from the old building, is inscribed: "This beal — for the Pearis of Spynie Me Fecit 1637, Soli Deo Gloria. Michael Bogertwys." Michael Bogertwys or Burgerhouse was one of a family of Dutch bell founders who provided bells for many churches in the north-east of Scotland. It is said to be the gift of John Guthrie, who was the Protestant Bishop of Moray from 1623 to 1638. He was deposed by the famous Glasgow Assembly along with the other Scots Bishops, but remained in the palace until he was forced to surrender to Colonel Munro, the Covenanting officer sent against him in 1640. There is a tradition that the bell was not set up until after the Bishop left Spynie, never to return.

The church at Quarreywood or New Spynie, as it was called, still stands and is in use as the parish church. It is a very plain building, devoid of ornament, and built in the old Scots style in the form of a T. It looks due south and has a back aisle to the north. Its dimensions are 61 feet x 17 feet 6 inches, and the north aisle is some 20 feet square. The plans on page 5 show the church as it was soon after its erection in 1735.

It will be noted that, while there are now only two doorways, it originally had four. One in the centre of the south wall was reserved for the minister, while the other two in the south wall (which are formed by the stones removed from the old church) and the one in the west wall of

the north aisle, were for public use. On the south wall above the minister's door was erected a sundial, placed there by the son of the minister at the time of the removal to Quarreywood. On it is engraved "Johannes Dougal, fecit, 1740".

Inside, the north aisle joins the main part of the building in an imposing archway. The pulpit is in the centre of the south wall, and there are two galleries or lofts. That at the east end was erected for his own use by Ludovick Dunbar of Westfield, one of the heritors and an elder of the church in 1736. That at the west end was for "strangers and servants". It is not known when the pews were erected but they are certainly old, many of them being of the old "box" style. The craftsmanship is poor and appears to be the work of the village wright or carpenter. They occupy positions originally allocated to the nine heritors of the parish. A very full description is given in the minutes of the Kirk Session of the method of allocating the space, and the minutes also reveal that, on communion occasions, a fence was erected to separate the west wing of the church from the remainder where the tables were set up. The purpose of this fence was to exclude non-communicants from the tables while permitting them to observe the dispensation of the sacrament. On these occasions, one of the elders was detailed to "guard the fence".

About the centre of the east wall of the north aisle is a recess about 18" square x 12" deep. Around the opening a rebate is cut in the stonework as if to accommodate the wooden frame of a door so as to make the recess a cupboard or aumry. This is probably where the communion vessels were kept. The church possesses two very old pewter trays, and two silver cups inscribed "Two Communion Cups belonging to the Kirk of New Spynie". We learn from the Session records that these cups were made in 1732 by an Elgin silversmith, William Livingstone, from the

metal of three old cups, one of which bore an inscription. The Session intended to reproduce this on one of the new cups but it was never done, and now is lost forever. The church possesses two other silver cups of similar size and design. They are not inscribed but date from c. 1875. There are two platters in silver plate measuring 10" in diameter and inscribed "Kirk Session of New Spynie, May 1880". Two newer platters of silver plate, 8" in diameter, were gifted by the Women's Guild and inscribed "Spynie Parish Church, October 1968". Since April 1959 the congregation has used individual communion cups, but the two silver cups of 1875 and the four platters are also used.

The communion table, baptismal font and six choir chairs were all gifted by the Women's Guild in 1949 and, in the same year, another six similar chairs by the Bishopmill Mutual Improvement Association. The only other objects of interest are two collections of communion tokens — one very old and the other dated 1877 — two old wooden collection ladles last used in September 1947, and the old cutty stool or stool of repentance, This is roughly made, perhaps by the carpenter who erected the pews. The Kirk Session records make no reference to the making of the stool, but innumerable reference to its use! The last recorded occasion on which it was occupied by a defaulter was in 1801, after which time a monetary penalty took the place of public appearance before the congregation. It may be worth recording that there are still extant the minutes of the Kirk Session from 1721 in four volumes, and three volumes of account books.

When the church was removed to Quarreywood in 1735 a new manse was also built there. It was "a good house in the Scotch style". On the lintel of the front door were cut the letters "W.D. 1736 K.K." being the initials of the minister, William Dougall, and his wife Katherine King.

Apparently the manse fell into disrepair about 1840, when it was replaced by the present building. As Spynie Church was linked with that of Duffus in 1958 and the minister of the linked charges resides in Duffus, this manse was then sold. The glebe remained at Spynie for some years after 1735, but as this was very inconvenient, a new glebe of 6 acres was provided at Quarreywood. It was sold about the same time as the manse.

The churchyard of the parish is still at Spynie and is still used for the interment of old parishioners. It contains many old and interesting stones, but one comparatively new one is of more than passing interest for it marks the grave of James Ramsay Macdonald, the first Socialist Prime Minister, who was born in nearby Lossiemouth. Among the old stones are those of several former ministers of the parish. Lachlan Shaw, historian of Moray, gives the following as the ministers of Spynie since the Reformation: —

James Philip, Exhorter in 1570.

Andrew Young, admitted about 1574.

Alexander Watson, Minister in 1614.

Alexander Ralphson (or Ranson) 1621 or 1622.

Thomas Craig, Minister in 1624, died 1639.

Robert Innes, translated from the parish of Ogstoun, admitted 28/9/1640 translated to St. Andrews 1646.

William Cloggie, admitted 21/1/1647, died December 1659.

Samuel Tulloch, ordained 27/6/1660, died November 1706.

Robert Bates, ordained 6/9/1707, died October 1719.

William Dougall from Birnie, admitted 7/3/1721, died 12/10/1766.

Robert Paterson, admitted 18/6/1767 died 31/7/1790.

James McLean, ad interim 29/5/1791 to 1793.

Alexander Brown, admitted 12/9/1793, died 8/1/1816.

George McHardy, admitted 22/9/1814, died 15/9/1817.

Thomas Cannan, admitted 17/9/1818, translated to Carsphairn
7/9/1826.

Alexander Simpson, ordained and admitted 2/11/1826, died
9/1/1852. John Kyd, P.D., ordained and admitted 9/9/1852 . . . 1875.

Since that time, the following have ministered in the parish:— John
Garioch, 1876, died 1906.

John Mair, ordained and inducted 11/4/1907, retired January 1946.
Archibald Richmond, inducted July 1946, removed to Guthrie and
Rescobie January 1953.

George McCaskill M.A., from South Leith. Inducted October 1953,
removed to St. Margaret's, Tolcross, Glasgow, 30/4/1957.

On the departure of Mr McCaskill, the pastoral care of Bishopmill,
which is part of the burgh of Elgin, was transferred to St. Giles Church,
Elgin, and the parish of Spynie was linked with that of Duffus. Rev.
Benjamin Sibbald, minister of the latter, was inducted as minister of
Spynie also on 24th August 1958. The linking was not carried through
without considerable opposition, but Mr Sibbald's wise ministry soon
achieved a most harmonious relationship between the two
congregations. He retired on 1st May 1963, and was succeeded by
Rev. G.K.G. Donaghy B.A., from Selkirk, who was inducted to the linked
charges on 29th November 1963.

The two parishes continue to live and work in the greatest harmony, sharing in each other's activities and holding joint services at midsummer and on Christmas Eve in the two churches alternately.

The following dates may be of interest to members of the congregation:—

- 29th November 1908 . . . First organ installed.
- 2nd December 1908 . . . Last precentor retired.
- 1910, 1911 and 1926 . . . Purchase of oil stoves for heating the Church.
- 1910 Oil lamps installed.
- 1934 Central heating installed to replace cast iron stove (date of installation unknown).
- 1952 Electric lighting installed.
- 1952 Electrically-blown organ installed.
- 1959 Space under W. Gallery enclosed to form Vestry.
- September, 1962 . . . Electric heating installed.
- 1965 Electric organ purchased and installed.

It is interesting to note that this account of the parish church of Spynie was written in the house where Robert Young completed his

work "The Parish of Spynie" in 1871 — exactly one hundred years ago. I acknowledge my indebtedness for much of the above information to this writer, and also to Lachlan Shaw, historian of Moray, and to the Old Statistical Account of Scotland.

John Cruickshanks
Millbank,
Bishopmill,
Elgin.

11th January, 1971.

POSTSCRIPT

Since the foregoing brief account of the church and parish of Spynie was written, events have taken place which make it possible to bring up-to-date and, unhappily, to conclude the story of Spynie as an independent kirk and parish.

On 30th November 1977, the Rev. G.K.G. Donaghy retired from the ministry and the charge became vacant. Because of the serious and growing shortage of manpower in the ministry of the Church of Scotland and the greater financial commitments on congregations, the Presbytery of Moray decided that it was not possible to agree to the appointment of a new minister to the linked charge of Duffus and Spynie. They proposed instead a union of these two Churches and a deferred union with Hopeman when that charge should fall vacant. They also proposed that Spynie church should no longer be used as a place of worship. This last proposal was strenuously resisted by the congregation and office bearers, and Presbytery then suggested closing Duffus Church. Our friends in that congregation were equally vehement in support of their church and finally, after many meetings, delegations from Edinburgh and Presbytery, petitions and protests, agreement to union was reached on the basis that all three churches would continue to be used weekly as places of worship. The Service of Union took place on 20th July 1979, and the united congregation is, at the time of writing, engaged in finding a minister to serve the new charge and help to weld the three congregations into one.

Our happy experience of linking with Duffus gives rise to hope that the three parts of the new congregation will work amicably together and soon achieve a union in spirit, as well as in name.

During the difficult period of the vacancy, Spynie Church has been well served by two interim moderators. Rev. Peter Diack M.A. undertook this duty and acted for almost a year. He was succeeded by Rev. Ernest W. Burnett M.A., formerly minister of Rothiemay, who occupied the pulpit on many occasions since the vacancy. Mr Burnett not only undertook the duties of interim moderator, but continued to preach weekly in both Duffus and Spynie until the union took effect. In all respects he has fulfilled the office of minister of the linked charges and has endeared himself to both congregations.

When the union became effective in July 1979, Mr Burnett was appointed interim moderator of the united charge, and in this he has the able assistance of Rev. James Laing, M.A., formerly of St. Andrews, Lhanbryde and interim moderator of Hopeman church during the illness of the minister, Rev. John Porteous, and after his retirement and death early this year.

After seven centuries of witness to the Christian faith, Spynie is no longer an independent charge, but it is good to know that our old church will continue to serve its congregation as a place of worship as it has done for the past 243 years.

J.C. 30th September, 1979.

It was my intention to confine this story of Spynie Kirk to its existence as an independent charge, but since it has been decided to publish it in connection with the 250th anniversary of the present building in 1986 a brief statement of affairs since the union with Duffus and Hopeman may be necessary to bring the account up to date.

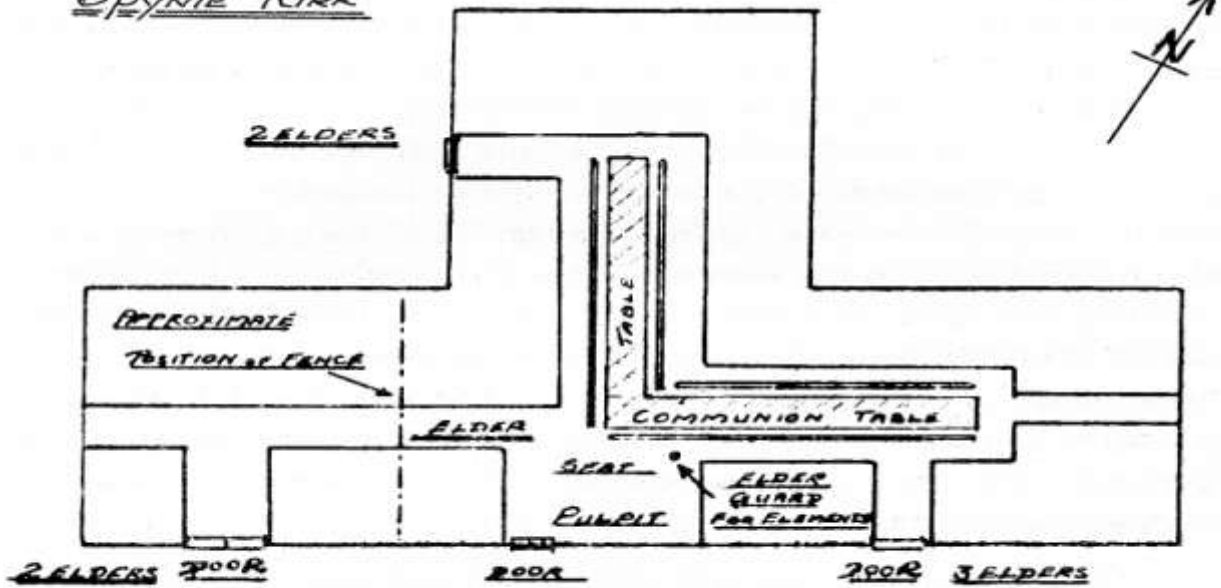
As stated the union became effective in July, 1979 and in February, 1980 Rev. Robert S. McLeish from Cairnie, Glass became the first minister of the united charge. Under his leadership the three sections quickly settled down to work together as one congregation and achieved a remarkable degree of success. Mr. McLeish left us in May, **1984** to become minister of Insh—Leslie—Oyne—Premnay. His departure was greatly regretted but after a vacancy of six months the congregation called Rev. John Stuart from Bedrule, Denholm and Minto in the Borders and he was inducted in November, **1982**.

The union continues successfully and Spynie Kirk, although now part of Duffus, Spynie and Hopeman shares in and contributes to that success.

J.C. - 30th September, **1986**.

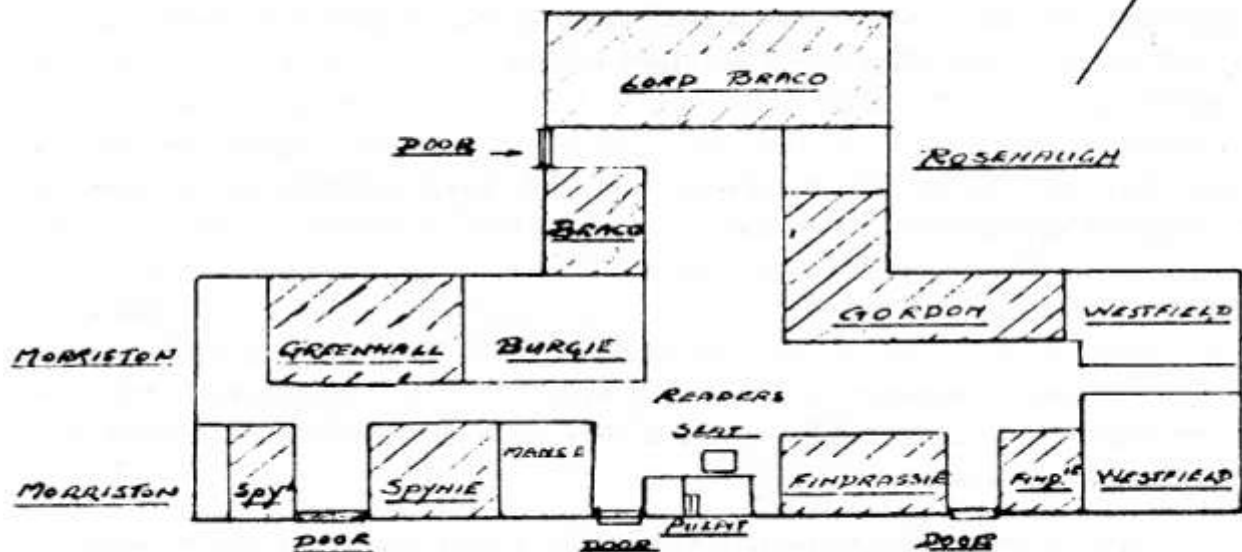
(Edited and produced for the web by Rev Jenny Adams & Mr Tom McPherson 2013)

SPYHIE KIRK



1736 ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNION

SPYHIE KIRK



DIVISION OF KIRK AMONG HERITORS
4TH MAY 1736