

Kiltearn

Old Parish Church

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ruins of the old parish Kirk are an important part of the history of Kiltearn. The first reference to a minister here is in 1227, and the blocked medieval window on the east side shows there was an early church on the site. By 1500 the Kirk was the centre of a thriving local community here, with crofts, an alehouse and a mill.



After the Reformation in c. 1560, Scotland's official religion became protestant, and churches focused on the pulpit. The current post-reformation building dates to 1790 when the earlier church was rebuilt by the principal Munro families at a cost of £750.

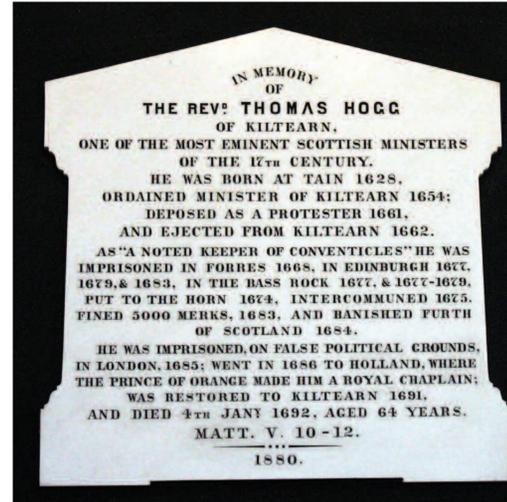


The expanded 1790 Kirk could seat 700 worshippers and incorporated impressive external stone stairs leading up to a 'laird's loft' with two ante-rooms with fireplaces to warm the laird's family between services. The external stairs to the loft can still be seen.

Even when the village of Evanton was constructed around 1805, this kirk continued to serve the community for the next 150 years, although, like many churches, it was abandoned for a generation after the Disruptions in the mid-1800s. The church eventually closed in the 1950s.



In the 1960s, after the roof slates were removed, the roof collapsed and the building fell into disrepair. Today, the ruins of Kiltearn old parish kirk remain a testament to the long religious history of this area.



PEOPLE

Kiltearn's most famous minister was Thomas Hog, who became minister in 1654. His tombstone is near the south west door of the church and a plaque in the present church records his turbulent history (left).

A low point in the history of Kiltearn was the appointment by the local heritors (landlords) of Thomas Munro as minister in 1816

without consulting the congregation. During his ministry, less than 20 people attended his services as most of the congregation had

moved to the Secession Chapel in Evanton.

The gravestone of William Munro is situated near that of Thomas Hog. He is thought to be an ancestor of James Munroe (above), one of the Founding Fathers and 5th President of the U.S.A.



ANCIENT GRAVEYARD STONES

Kiltearn ancient kirkyard contains over 400 headstones. Families purchased lairs (burial plots) in which they and their descendants could be buried and a lair plan from 1905 lists 363 lairs, many marked by enclosures, stone or iron markers. The kirkyard contains a wide variety of headstones, slabs, wall plaques, obelisks, pedestal and table tombs, mainly constructed of local stone.

Note the symbols of mortality and eternal life depicted on this 17th or 18th century grave slab (left) with its skull, crossed bones, two funeral hand bells, a coffin and grave diggers' tools. It also



has a heraldic device of three beasts and the Clan Munro symbol of an eagle's head, found on 10 other stones.

This slab (right) from 1670 is the earliest dated stone found so far and, like many older stones, lies protected just below the turf.



Further Information

Further information about the Kirk, including a full gravestone survey, a standing building survey and results from the historical research can be found at Cornerstone Café in Evanton and at Dingwall and Alness libraries, or at the Trust's website at www.ect.scot

This panel was erected as part of the Old Kiltearn Parish Kirk Community Research Project organised by Evanton Community Trust and delivered in conjunction with ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands)

