

A PLACE OF SOME CONSEQUENCE

BICENTENNIAL INTRODUCTION

In 2000 I published a short history of Kintore Church and its parish to celebrate the millenium and 2000 years of Christianity.

Now, as the church prepares to celebrate its current building's bicentenary, it has been decided to republish the history on the church website, one chapter a month, throughout 2019.

I have made a few changes to the original text to include new historical findings, for example on the Romans, and intend to write a new final chapter bringing the life of the church up to date. But by and large it is the same history as published in 2000. Kintore is still "A Place of Some Consequence" for its parishoners old and new and the wider community.

Val Reid
Kintore 2018

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTION

The title of this short history of Kintore and its parish church comes from a comment made by the Reverend Robert Simpson in the New Statistical Account of 1843. It is a very appropriate title, because Kintore, although a small burgh, has enjoyed a long connection with royalty and played a part in several important historical events. It has also played a part in the economic changes which have shaped modern Scotland, especially from the late 18th century onwards.

The parish church has played a central role in parish life since the Reformation and before, continuing to do so even in this more secular modern age.

So it is appropriate to produce this booklet as a project for the MilleniumYear, celebrating 2000 years of Christianity.

The booklet makes no claim to be a fully comprehensive history of the church or the parish. It is however an attempt to bring together information from a wide variety of sources and organise it into something which will hopefully be readable, useful and easily digested by both Kintore natives and visitors to the parish.

CHAPTER ONE

PARISH AND ROYAL BURG

The name of the parish of **Kintore** probably comes from the Gaelic "**Ceann-an-torr**" meaning "settlement at the head or end of the conical hill". The hill referred to is probably that at **Thainstone**, the highest point of the parish. Kintore is set in the rich alluvial valley of the River Don and there has been a settlement since at least Bronze Age times, probably because of the good supply of water from a large number of fresh springs. There was also a good supply of granite stone for building, wood from the

ancient woods at Crichtie, Thainstone and Tom's Forest, food in the form of trout and salmon from the river, and later on, when people learned to cultivate the soil, good farming land. An ideal place for settlement in fact!

Several **ancient burial sites** were found around the parish, for example at Boghead, on Tuach Hill and in the old mound of the Castle Hill which was demolished to make way for the railway in the 19th century. There are also remains of several stone circles such as those at Crichtie, Tuach Hill and Leylodge.

Kintore also has connections with the **Romans**. There is great evidence of a Roman camp stretching from Deersden, near the path of what is now the Kintore bypass, to the site of Kintore School, crossing over what is now Henderson Drive and Kintore Park. An archaeological dig, carried out when the new primary school was under construction, revealed a large number of bread ovens and other artefacts. The Romans may have stopped there on their way to what we now refer to as the Battle of Mons Graupius, against the Picts, although the site of the battle is very much up for debate, and most recent theory places it further south in Angus. However there was also another even bigger Roman marching camp at Logie Durno. So the jury remains undecided!

We are fairly certain that Kintore's first charter dates from the time of **King Kenneth McAlpine** in the 9th century, probably around 854AD. Legend has it that the citizens of Kintore helped Kenneth to defeat the Danes at the **Battle of Tuack** (Tuach) by covering their cattle in oak leaves and driving the enemy back in terror. This explains the use of the cattle and oak on Kintore's ancient seal. A modern reference to it is in the name Oakhill Road, given to one of the streets which overlooks the Tuach Hill today. Sadly no evidence remains of any charter.

Kintore had a number of later royal connections in the Middle Ages. **King William the Lion** granted a "Toft" of land in Kintore to Richard, Bishop of Moray, and his descendents **Alexander II** and **Alexander III** both seem to have spent some time in the area. In fact it is more than likely that Alexander III built **Hallforest** Castle and as well as a hunting lodge it became a seat of power from which the kings issued charters.

King Robert Bruce is said to have camped at Thainstone on his way to the **Battle of Barra** near Inverurie in 1309. There Sir Robert Keith fought with him against the **Earl of Buchan**, head of the **Comyn family** who were Bruce's greatest rivals for the Scottish throne. He was so grateful to the **Keith** family for their help in gaining him the throne and supporting him during the **Wars of Independence** against Edward I and Edward II of England, including commanding the cavalry at the Battle of Bannockburn, that he granted them the ownership of Hallforest Castle and its surrounding lands in 1324. The Keiths became **Earls of Kintore and Earls Marischal of Scotland**. So this was a very important connection for the burgh.

Another earlier royal connection was with **King David II** who gave a thanage of Kintore to his sister. This later became known as a barony and in 1375 it was gifted by King Robert II to the Earl of Moray. He then went on to give parts of it, including Thainstone, Fullerton and Kinkell to one **William Chalmers** in 1383.

There is also a local story in connection with **King James II**. Legend has it that he came to Kintore to do business with one of his favourite courtiers, Lord George Keith, and asked one of the locals called **Thain** to take a message to Geordie Keith at Hallforest. Thain had no idea that it was the king on his doorstep and gave the unknown traveller into trouble for not addressing the local lord properly. However he did go to deliver the message and was very embarrassed to discover his mistake from Lord Keith who returned with him to meet the king. Fortunately, Thain's wife was more perceptive than he was and sensed that the visitor was an important person. While her husband was away she cooked a roast fowl (possibly a goose?) for her visitor and the king rewarded the couple with a large piece of land called the **Goosecroft**. This land lies in the modern village between the road and the railway line and Thain's house was roughly where the post office is today. Interestingly the Goosecroft was passed down to **Burgess John Smith** in 1661 and as late as 1843 one of his descendents, William Smith, was postmaster in Kintore. Some time later the name Goosecroft was "transferred" across the street and is now the name of the former manse.

Kintore received its next **Royal Charter** in 1506 from **James IV** who used to enjoy hunting at Hallforest. It was

"Granted to the burgesses and community, with power to the burgesses and community to choose annually Baillies and other necessary officers."

Alexander Watt "The Early History of Kintore" 1865.

James IV also granted lands to the important members of the burgh and common grazing lands along by the Tuach, Wardbrae, Dalwearie and Tofthills. These were for the use of all inhabitants of Kintore.

Neither Kintore nor Inverurie seem to have been particularly important or wealthy burghs at that time. They are not mentioned in the list of burghs north of the River Forth which were taxed by the crown in 1483. Their taxation was included in that of Aberdeenshire. Between 1511 and 1609 most of the town lands had been taken over by the Keiths. But Kintore seems to have had the right at least to hold its own trials separately from Aberdeen.

Local historian **Alexander Watt**, writing in 1865, tells us that the boundaries of the burgh were set before the Earl of Kintore (Lord Keith) and Mr Alex Patone of Kinaldie in April 1699 for approval. All the occupiers of the crofts in the parish were called to sign a document bearing witness that they knew and understood the boundaries, about the riding of the burgh marches and the allocation of the pastures. The minister was present at the signing. Most of this land seems to have been granted and divided up in 1621,

"with houses, yards, crofts, commonty, mosses, moors, privilege, pasturage, parts and pendices within the town and parish of Kintore"

Alexander Watt "The Early History of Kintore" 1865.

The **Keiths** continued to play a very important role in the parish and burgh for centuries. As already mentioned they had been granted Hallforest Castle by King Robert Bruce after **Marischal Robert Keith** successfully led the Scottish cavalry at

Bannockburn in 1314 and played an important part in securing Bruce's victory in that historic battle.

Sir John Keith was created **Earl of Kintore** in 1677 but sadly by that time the family had actually moved in 1662 outwith the parish of Kintore to the mansion house of Caskieben which they renamed Keithhall. They renovated and enlarged their new home between 1697 and 1699.

The Keiths are also famous for founding **Marischal College**, one of Aberdeen's two ancient universities, in 1594, and a nephew of Robert Keith (of Bannockburn fame), William Keith, built **Dunnottar Castle**.

The Keiths were supporters of the **Protestant Reformation** in Scotland, and later became **Covenanters** when King Charles I threatened to take away the democratic independence of the Church of Scotland and restore bishops and even possibly the Roman Catholic religion to Scotland. The city of Aberdeen had been holding out against the covenant and so an army of 2000 men from Kintore and surrounding area, followers of Keith, Forbes, Fraser and Leslie threatened to storm its gates. The Marquis of Huntly to the north was also a Royalist and so there were many skirmishes in the Garioch area. In fact the leader of the Royalists in Scotland, the Marquis of Montrose, was also involved in engagements in the area on his way north. However the Keiths did switch their allegiance to Charles II at the Restoration in 1660 because he agreed to honour the Covenant and respect the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

One of the most lasting contributions of the Keith family to Kintore was the building of the **Town House** in the village square on the site of the old Mercat Cross. The Earl of Kintore became Provost of the Burgh and financed the cost of building the Town House which cost £850 Scots. It took the ten years between 1737 and 1747 to build. Later on, in 1772 the Keith family donated the clock. There was already a bell in existence, positioned on a tree in the Churchyard. This had been made by a French bellmaker, Albert Gelly, in 1702 for the use of the parish and the magistracy.

The Town House contained a Council Room, a Schoolroom and Schoolhouse, a Tolbooth prison, and a meal giral where the Earl stored the grain he received as rent from his tenants in Kintore. It was indeed a multi-purpose building and much of it was for the Earl's own use so maybe he wasn't so generous after all. And the combination of prison and school, which seemed to be considered quite normal in the mid-18th century would surely cause outraged protests from parents today!

Although the 18th century seems to have been a period of prosperity for Kintore, things seem to have gone downhill in the 19th. At the time of the Great Reform Act of 1832 Kintore and Inverurie lost their right to send an MP elected jointly with Aberdeen. In 1833 at a **Royal Commission** Kintore was reported as being "*in the most impoverished condition of any town in Scotland.*" However this view may have been overly gloomy because it was given by a chief magistrate whose view of the town was so negative that he suggested it should give up its independent burgh rights and go back to being part of the county. Certainly at the time it seems to have had little property (its only revenue was a feu-duty of £9.40 Scots paid by the Earl of Kintore and some money paid to the poor of the parish) But it had no debts either. In a

few years the coming of the railway was to bring a whole new prosperity to the parish and the burgh.

In the twentieth century there were some very interesting developments in the life of the Royal Burgh. On 23rd April, 1959 the **Lord Lyon** presented **Kintore** and **Mr Matthew Dundas, the Burgh Provost**, with its official **heraldic coat of arms**. There was an impressive ceremony on the curved steps of the Townhouse, witnessed by many Kintore residents still alive today. The coat of arms was in the shape of a shield showing an uprooted oak tree and acorns, surmounted by battlements and supported by two horned bulls raised on their hind legs. The motto on the coat of arms was **“Truth is Strength”**. The bulls and the oak were in reference to the help the burgh gave to King Kenneth in the **Battle of Tuach** against the Danes in the 9th century.

Unfortunately Kintore lost its Royal Burgh status when it became part of Gordon District at the local government reorganisation of 1975. Not only that, but the burgh had its signs bearing the coat of arms removed and taken away. There began a fierce battle first to have the signs returned to the burgh so that at least they could be stored safely “at home”, and then to have them re-erected. Leaders of this campaign included former Provosts **Mr Donald Henderson** and **Mr Ed Strachan**, along with **Mr John Barron**, the former town’s officer. **Mrs Betty Henderson** began a letter writing campaign to among others local MP Russell Fairgrieve and the Lord Lyon. Petitions were signed, public meetings were held, and Community Council and local District Councillors became involved with Mrs Priscilla Ramsey championing the burgh’s cause. Eventually the signs were returned to Kintore Townhouse for storage in 1978. It took a further three years for victory to be won.

On 18th March 1981 Mrs Betty Henderson was eventually able to write the following letter to the divisional road surveyor of Grampian Regional Council.

“Dear Mr Mitchell,

With reference to your letter of the 6th instant, for which I thank you, I have been in contact with the community council and they also agree that the signs may be re-erected.

Before this is done we are having the signs re-painted. After this has been completed we will be in touch with your department to make arrangements for them to place them in position.

Thank you very much for your help and assistance in this matter.”

It took over two more months before the matter was eventually completed.

“After a long wait Kintore’s signs have been re-instated . The original signs are back at Townhead, Torryburn and Kirkton. -----It has actually taken over five years to have the signs re-erected after they were taken down at re-organisation.

When asked how long it took to put them up Mr Cameron (Chairman of the Community Council) replied “About twenty minutes!” ”

Inverurie Advertiser, 3rd June 1981.

The burgh signs still stand proudly in position in the new millenium and as Kintore Church celebrates its bicentennial.

