

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY KIRK AND ITS MINISTERS

Kintore did not have its own independent church until relatively late in the history of the parish. Instead it was one of a number of kirks or “vicarages” which were subordinate to the ancient church of **Kinkell**. The others were Kemnay, Skene, Kinellar, Drumblade and Dyce. Although most of these are neighbouring or fairly close together, the inclusion of Drumblade, near Huntly, seems rather strange. We hear from John A. Henderson in “**Epitaphs and Inscriptions**”(1907) that the pre-Reformation Church was dedicated to St Mary and that it probably

“existed here from very remote antiquity, but it is highly probable that its site occupies a spot consecrated for worship by our pagan forefathers.”

John A. Henderson found a manuscript dating from around 1800 which described the old church in Kintore as follows;-

“The kirk is placed east and west and is 82 or 83 feet by 25 outside measure. It appears to be very ancient and is well built. Near the west end are two singularly formed doors opposite to each other, but the one on the north wall by which in Popish times the holy water was brought into the church, is now closed up as useless.”
Manuscript c 1800.

The kirk also had lofts and galleries which were added after the parish of Kinkell was annexed to Kintore (1754) to accommodate the extra parishioners. This was an interesting role reversal ending Kinkell’s dominance and was possibly the result of shifts in population. The new galleries ran round three sides of the church and stairs had been built to the western gallery in 1760. The old kirk also boasted a weather cock and a jugs (a kind of pillory designed to publicly punish and humiliate sinners and those who had broken the commandments). It did not, however, possess a bell after 1748 when the French bell which had hung from a tree in the churchyard was installed in the new Town House.

This old church, however solid, was probably not considered big enough for a growing community and was replaced by the present building in 1819. More about that in the next chapter!

In 1420 Kintore Kirk became a prebend of Aberdeen and remained affiliated to **Aberdeen Presbytery** after the 16th century **Protestant Reformation** until it became part of Garioch Presbytery in 1702. At the time of and just after the Reformation the **Reverend William Johnston** was minister of both Kinkell and Kintore.(1586-1597) He seems to have delegated a great deal of both the preaching and pastoral care in Kintore to a succession of **readers**, who included **John Wylie** and **John Leslie**.

The first “independent” minister with sole charge of Kintore was **William Forbes** (1593 – 1600) but he left his flock “without consent” for the very understandable reason that Kintore offered him no proper stipend and he was offered a better charge elsewhere - in the parish of Leslie. His successor, **Archibald Rait** (1600-1628) could presumably afford to take on the living because he was also a burgess of Aberdeen and had married a daughter of the wealthy Bishop of Aberdeen. It was eventually agreed in 1602 to provide Rait with a stipend of 50 merks, which apparently was a measly sum even in those days, being less than £3 Scots per annum.

Alexander Lunan MA became minister of Kintore in 1628 and stayed in post until 1640. In 1632 he married Jean Forbes, daughter of the then landowner of Monymusk.

His successor **John Cheyne**, who was minister from 1640 to 1649, had been in prison for opposing the Covenant and played host to the **Marquis of Montrose**, the Royalist leader, on 12 March 1645. This was likely to make Cheyne very unpopular with the local lairds and heritors, the **Covenanting Keiths**, and so it was a very plucky if rather foolhardy thing to do.

After Cheyne came **Andrew Strachan** who had a lengthy tenancy in the manse between 1649 and 1679. He had been minister at Tullynessle beforehand, and was also a visiting preacher at **Aberdeen University** (presumably the Protestant branch at Marischal founded by Lord George Keith). Strachan’s son James carried on the family tradition and became minister at Oyne.

William Gordon MA was Kintore’s minister from 1680 until 1697. He had previously been the schoolmaster at Monymusk and then a minister in Edinburgh. (It was very common for trainee ministers to earn a living as schoolmasters until they qualified. Those who failed to do so and had to continue in teaching became known as “stickit ministers”). Rev. Gordon was fortunate enough to escape that sad fate! He also produced a worthy son, William, who became a magistrate in Aberdeen.

The change of century saw **William Thomson MA** in the pulpit at Kintore. Like Gordon, he had been a schoolmaster – at Old Rayne – and held the post of minister at Kintore until 1717.

James Shand (1718-1726) had previously been minister at Kemnay. His eldest son, George, became Lord Provost of Aberdeen from 1764 till 1765. It would appear that the atmosphere of Kintore produced many clever and high achieving young men.

The next minister was another who produced a son to follow him into the ministry. **George Moir** (1727-1737) also married a daughter of Forbes of Monymusk and their son became the minister at Fyvie.

James Darling, the next minister came from Keithhall but doesn't seem to have done anything or produced anyone particularly interesting. His successor, **Alexander Gordon**, who served between 1742 and 1766, was educated at **King's College**. This was an unusual background for a Kintore minister, most of whom were **Marischal College** trained. He sadly died quite young at the age of 47. It's interesting to note at this point that most of Kintore's ministers lived to a good age, unlike poor Gordon, and most of them died in office. It must have been a rewarding and fulfilling charge if most of them were content to stay for so long. Of course there was no such thing as retirement in those days and ministers tended to work as long as they were fit to do so. However few of Kintore's incumbents seemed to want to move to pastures new – once the stipend which had been denied poor William Forbes was in place and later increased.

George Adam (1767-1799) is recorded for posterity and has contributed to the research for this history because he wrote the parish entry into the "**Statistical Account of Scotland**" published in the 1790s by **Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster**. The 1790s was a time of great economic, agricultural and industrial change in Scotland and Britain and Sinclair, a wealthy Caithness landowner, wanted to put together a full picture of life in Scottish parishes at the time. So he wrote to all the parish ministers asking them to complete a kind of questionnaire about life in their localities. They were asked to comment under headings like **Population, Topography, Cultivation and Livestock, Industry, Antiquity, Ecclesiastical State and Miscellaneous**. In 1793, Adam describes Kintore as follows:-

"Till lately there were few houses better than country houses (he means cottages or huts) none but the manse, the house built for the Earl of Kintore's factor, the church and a very neat town-house and prison built about 50 years ago. Two good houses, one of them elegant, were built last year.

The prison is seldom used, owing to the good morals and peaceable disposition of the people.

In a flood the river is more than a mile broad"

Apparently the great flood of 17 September 1768 had carried away most of the crop. So some things haven't changed much!

Adam tells us a great deal about the state of Kintore Church in the 1790s. The only two heritors to have any control over parish life were the **Earl of Kintore** and **Duncan Forbes Mitchell of Thainstone**. They had a great deal of influence when it came to choosing the ministers. (See Chapter Three) The minister's stipend was 10 chalders of victual (mainly beer barley), £11.13 shillings cash and 9 acres of glebe to grow food on. The session clerk received £3.12s per annum and the schoolmaster £7, although for this he had to be postmaster as well. He had 30 pupils in winter but only 20 in summer when the farms were busy. The weekly collections came to about £14 a year and this had to support 20 people on the poor roll. The poor also got money from fines paid by sinners, the rent of pews and the interest on £200 mortifications (money which had been left to the church in wills).

In 1792 there were eight boys and five girls baptised in the parish kirk. Adam's average ceremonial workload was around 16 baptisms, six marriages and 14 burials. The population seems to have been fairly static although Adam describes the people of Kintore as healthy, some of them living until the ripe old age of 80 or 90.

John Sinclair's great work took almost ten years to edit and publish but he was persuasive and determined enough to get almost a 100% response from the ministers of Scotland. This allowed him to produce a great record of Scottish life at a very important time in our social and economic history. The exercise was repeated and ministers produced two further Statistical Accounts in the 1840s and 1950s. More of the Kintore contributions to these will be discussed later.

John Shand became minister of Kintore in 1799 and stayed until his death in 1833. He saw a lot of change including the building of a new church for the parish. He produced 12 children, many of whom went on to have distinguished careers. They also seem to have been an adventurous crew and several of them settled and then died abroad, for example John, a navy man, died in Bengal and Francis, an advocate, passed away in Jamaica. They were more typical of the modern age which was about to influence life in Kintore and so are a fitting note on which to end this chapter.