

# Fintry Kirk - the original story - Part 1

Without a doubt, it is the Church that creates our original true community.

Fintry has a story that goes back 3,000 years and beyond. We have evidence of people living in this sheltered hidden valley back to over a thousand years *before* Christ. Yet we cannot give detail to these peoples. We can only imagine their existence. Very likely living as separate groups around the valley; small numbers who would use the safety of a high point like Dunmore Hill to watch for the enemy and to retreat to in attack.

But the one sure thing we can claim is that the formal unifier of this valley will be the Kirk. People have been gathering to worship on the site of the present church for over 800 years! This is before Wallace and Stirling Bridge, and Bruce and Bannockburn. Think about that... a continuous unbroken line of community gathering in our own wee village. Nothing else we have done since then can match that achievement. The Kirk is the true original heart of Fintry.



Travel back to this point of 1207, when we first find a mention of the Church Parish of Fintry. We have just completed the first uniting of Scotland from its separate kingdoms. A significant time for us in Fintry to mark our re-birth.

We could actually have been worshipping on this spot for hundreds of years before then, but we just don't have any written proof. Certainly there are formal churches well established by then in places like Stirling and Falkirk. Our own early kirk is dedicated to St Modan who was preaching in west central Scotland in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and who influenced places around us. Could St Modan have even paused at Fintry in his travels?

Other evidence that worship here is much earlier than 1207 includes the fact that we have Maldonan, third earl of Fintry living in the 1200s at a motte, or Norman style castle, below Dunmore. At almost the same distance in the opposite direction was Sir John de Graham's Castle at our end of the Carron reservoir. Sir John's family and predecessors may have been there even in the 1100s or earlier. An archaeological dig there last year confirmed this part of Fintry's story.



A huge pride should be taken from the other roles of the Kirk. Of course, back in the early Middle Ages, the whole country was Catholic and virtually everyone believed in God and went to Church every Sunday. The same would happen in Fintry. But even beyond worship, the Kirk would set the standards for behaviour and life in the community of Fintry. It was effectively the early police and court. The minister backed by the session, when it became a Protestant Church, would ensure that moral and social values were part of life. If you committed a "crime", the whole village would know when you were shamed in public on Sunday! You might even be publically punished by being chained in "juggs" outside the kirk - the local equivalent of stocks.

The church is the big proof that early Fintry, or Clachan (hamlet) of Fintry is all built round the east end of the valley. Culcreuch Castle may have been a mile westwards but the local community originally grew round the Kirk. The new village, Newton of Fintry, is of course a designed community from the 1700s.

More of what happened next in the January newsletter!

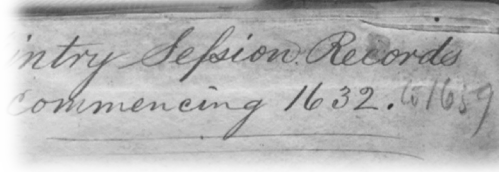
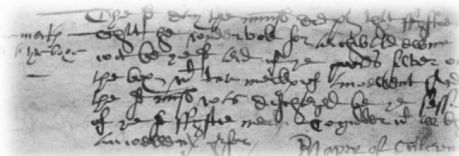
*David Smith, Chairman Fintry Museum Society.*

## Fintry Kirk - the original story - Part 2

There is written proof that some form of church building on the present site goes back to at least 1207. We can safely assume folk were gathering to worship here in Fintry way before that. We certainly know that a Church is built here in 1633. But this is surely a replacement building to improve on what was there before. We know there is a record of ministers as far back as 1560. One specifically named is George Auld, minister from 1586. It is the only mention we have of 16<sup>th</sup> century minister, but lost records do *not* mean there were no ministers, nor church before 1560.

Rev. George Auld's initials are on the very bell we hear every Sunday.  
So our bell has been ringing in Fintry for well over 400 years!

The Kirk Session records are full of details and events of real people and life and death in Fintry over hundreds of years. The oldest found copies are safely stored in Stirling Archives for anyone to see. The wonderful copperplate writing, old spellings and early Scots language all mean they are hard to decipher. Definitely a job for someone with expertise and time. Who knows what gems are lying in them!



Move forward to 1769 and Peter Spiers arrives in the valley. He bought Culcreuch Castle then for £15,000. That would be about £1.3million today! (Or back then a skilled craftsman would take over 500 years of work to earn that money!) This changes everything for the Kirk. Spiers builds the new village of Fintry a mile away, to provide workers' homes for his new cotton mill. The old Clachan of Fintry (hamlet) built around the church becomes the minor village.

This is not the end of the church, but a revival. The population booms from a few hundred to a peak of over 1600 at one point. (Today it is about 600). The church must have been packed every week as back then, everyone went to church. That road from the present Fintry to the Kirk would be absolutely filled every Sunday morning with hundreds of locals, putting on their "Sunday best" clothes to come together to worship.

Just picture the social event that Sundays provided. The whole village on their one day off a week (unless you were a farmer on seven days a week, with just a wee break for Kirk.) The blethering and story-sharing on that journey must have been a huge Sunday treat.



The Church did so much for the community back then. The poor and elderly would be cared for in an early social security system of parish poor funds. The Church would back the provision of schooling for children long before free school for all was made law in 1872.

We can guess that Peter Spiers was one of the quiet benefactors who paid for the rebuild of the present church in 1823. He was certainly a member of the Kirk Session until he died six years later in 1829.

Lovely old customs give us a picture of life at the Kirk in the 1700s. The old graveyard used to be a place where the wives hung out their sheets to dry on the gravestones. The beadle was ordered to pull the sheets off and throw them in the midden or dung heap to discourage them! There must have been some amusing, angry verbal exchanges in the kirk-yard!