

Historical Notes-The Comyns, Cumyns & Cumines

The Comyns who were Flemish from Comines in Flanders, came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066. They arrived in Scotland in the time of Malcolm Canmore later in the 11th century. In 1212 William Comyn married Marjorie, heiress to the last Celtic Mormaer of Buchan and through her, became Earl of Buchan, the first 'Norman' Earl in Scotland. It was he who founded the Abbey of Deer in 1219. This former abbey, which is in the care of Historic Scotland, is a place of great peace and tranquility and well worth visiting.

The Comyns, who were the most powerful force in Scotland during the 13th century, have suffered hugely in name as a result of their opposition to Robert the Bruce in connection with the claim each made to the Crown of Scotland.

Tradition states that the Comyns built a castle at Rattray as one of their North East strongholds and occupied it until 1308 when, following defeat by the army of Robert the Bruce near Oldmeldrum, they were driven from their lands. At this time Buchan was laid to waste in what became known as the 'Herschip of Buchan'.

The family of Cumine of Rattray whose burial ground lies within the confines of the Chapel are linked to the 'Red' Comyns of Moray. It was Red Comyn (John Comyn III the younger of Badenoch) whom Robert the Bruce murdered in Dumfries in 1306.

The family returned to the North East when they purchased the Pitullie Estate near Fraserburgh in 1734.

The Rattray Estate came back to the Cumines in 1817, and remains in the family today.

A dispute between adjoining landowners over the ownership of Rattray, the Keiths (Earl's Marischal) and the Hays (Earls of Errol), was resolved in 1564 by Mary, Queen of Scots when she granted it the status of a Royal Burgh.

**Rattray...a vanished Royal Burgh.
The stones which are St Mary's have stood on this site for over 800 years.
Pause for a moment and imagine the history they have witnessed.**



Aberdeenshire's
HISTORIC
KIRKYARDS

The remains of St Mary's Chapel have been consolidated as part of Aberdeenshire's Historic Kirkyards project in 2006.



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Aberdeenshire's
HISTORIC
KIRKYARDS



St Mary's
Chapel

Rattray



Historic Kirkyards Aberdeenshire's Historic Kirkyards

The Chapel of St Mary, Rattray

This ancient site has associations with people and families who have influenced the course of history in Scotland and beyond.

The Chapel, which was constructed in the 13th century, is one of the oldest structures still standing in North East Scotland.

The use of this site for religious purposes almost certainly predates the Chapel through an association with the spread of Christianity in Buchan during the 6th to 8th centuries.

The structure is thought to have been erected by William Comyn as a private chapel, dedicated to a son who was drowned accidentally in a well.

The first recorded reference to the site is in 1220 through note of a gift made by William Comyn, Earl of Buchan. This gift was initially in the form of alms and later in money. Further mention is made in 1451 and 1460. In 1460 King James III confirmed a charter for the payment of five pounds (Scots) and two stones of wax to the chapel of the 'Beate Marie Virginis of Ratreff', (Blessed Virgin Mary of Rattray). This annual payment was probably continued until the Reformation in 1560.



Reconstruction illustrating the Chapel in the high medieval period.

The plain architectural form and general finishes of the chapel would have been in sharp contrast to the workmanship on the decorative detailing of the window and doorway openings.

Although the chapel may have served the Burgh of Rattray until the great storm of 1720, which sealed the fate of the settlement, it is more likely it was simply replaced by the Parish Kirk of Crimond about 1576 following the Reformation.

The old Parish Kirk was itself replaced in 1812 by the present kirk in the village of Crimond. The new kirk is associated with the loveliest of hymn tunes 'Crimond', and has a clock which has 61 minutes on its face.

The illustration opposite shows the location of the chapel (bottom left) and castle (top right) in relation to the medieval settlement of Rattray.

A granite stone, dated 911 AD, built into the south wall in the 19th century does not relate to any known event associated with the chapel.

As a result of neglect over many years, the kirkyard with its broken down walls had almost become part of the surrounding farmland. In 1848 through monies provided by a former parishioner, the present walls were constructed.

