



Reconstruction to illustrate the Fordoun Stone and the type of structure used as St Palladius' cell.

Historical Note

Immediately north of the entrance gate is a polished granite column erected in 1850, in memory of the Protestant martyr, George Wishart. He was born at Pittarrow in this parish in 1513, and probably attended St Palladius's Chapel in his youth. He became the first of the seven Scottish martyrs of the Reformation when he was burned at the stake at St. Andrews on 1st March, 1546. A flaming urn surmounts the column around which the inscription is engraved in spiral form:

“The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance”.



Epitaph from a kirkyard gravestone -
*“Remember man, as thou goes by,
 As thou art now so once was I,
 As I am now so thou must be,
 Remember man that thou must die.”*



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St Palladius's Chapel

Fordoun Parish Kirkyard

Auchenblae



St Palladius

Mystery enshrouds the life of St. Palladius, the patron saint of this parish and the earliest Christian missionary in northern Scotland. He is believed to have been ordained by Pope Celestine in 430 AD and to have preached in Ireland before coming to the Mearns. The date and manner of his death are uncertain but it is written that he "was crowned with martyrdom" a few years after his arrival here. His relics were preserved within the chapel which he built and in succeeding churches. His chapel, recognised as the Mother Church of the Mearns, stood on this knoll high above the Luther Water.

Fordoun Kirkyard

The oldest tombstones in this extensive kirkyard are found in and around St Palladius's Chapel and to the south and east of the present church. Several stones are embellished with winged souls, skulls, bones and hourglasses. Many inscriptions list the occupation of the deceased. As would be expected in the heart of this agricultural district, tenant farmers and crofters are in the majority, but here also lie the innkeeper, bootmaker, flax spinner, bookseller, gamekeeper, minister, merchant, wright, coal merchant, blacksmith, fisherman and banker. The farmer's coulter, the miller's rhind and the wright's square are engraved on the appropriate stones. Above the memorial to shepherd, William Christison, is a hand with finger pointing heavenward and the word "HOME".

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

St Palladius's Chapel

St Palladius's Chapel probably stands on the site of the cell built by the saint in the 5th century. The oldest part of the structure dates from 1244, when a new church here was dedicated by the Bishop of St Andrews. The medieval church was restored in the first half of the 16th century, the piscina in the east wall and the aumbry in the north wall dating from this time. It is believed that the south wall was largely rebuilt and three arched windows inserted during the 17th century. The chapel was restored again in 1788. When the roof collapsed in 1828, the chapel was abandoned and the new kirk built alongside.

Within the ruined chapel are stone steps which lead to the crypt below. It is possible this is where the sacred relics of St. Palladius were preserved. Pilgrims came from far and wide to venerate the relics. Kenneth III is said to have been on such a pilgrimage to Fordoun when he died in 994. When Archbishop Shevez of St. Andrews came on pilgrimage in the early 16th century, he restored the chapel and donated a new silver shrine for the bones.

Fordoun Stone

When the pulpit of St Palladius's Chapel was being dismantled in 1787, a large sculptured slab was discovered below it. This stone, which may have been hidden there during the Reformation, is two metres tall and pierced by four circular holes in the upper half. One side is elaborately carved with a Latin cross and a hunting scene showing armed horsemen and a dog. The Pictish symbols of double disc and Z rod are also clearly engraved. Around the edge the letters "pidarnoin" are roughly incised in early Roman script. This may perhaps mean "Peace be with Idarnoin", he was a 7th century Pictish bishop. The stone is now in the vestibule of the parish kirk.



Reconstruction of St Palladius's Chapel and early village during the late Medieval period