

# All Saint's Woodhead

—by Stuart Donald

The Parish of Fyvie whose name in Gaelic is Fyvyn taken from *Fia Chein* signifying a deer-hill. There is a hill in the Parish which is named Deer Hill, and Fyvie is known as one of the largest parishes in Aberdeenshire, its surface area under 50 square miles. Lying between Aberdeen & Banff, it is bounded on the east by the parishes of Meldrum and Daviot; on the west by Rayne and Auchterless; and to the north by Turriff and Monquhitter. During a visitation of the parish in 1836 there were 430 Episcopalians according to the Statistical Account.



All Saints' Woodhead of Fyvie: porch and spirelet, unique on a Fyvie church

David Bertie in his book *Scottish Episcopal Clergy* tells us that the Episcopalians of Fyvie held the Parish Church until 1717, when the Episcopalian Incumbent George Dalgarno, who was inducted to the Parish Church dedicated to St Peter in 1685, died on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1717 rendering his Incumbency vacant. He had been able to hold the post because of a decision of the General Assembly after the Presbyterian Settlement of 1689. The agreement allowed all sitting Episcopalian Incumbents to continue in office until their retirement, due to a dearth of Presbyterian clergy to fill all the posts. As soon as Dalgarno died, the Episcopalians were decanted from the Parish church and were forced to make their own worship arrangements. Bertie tells us that services were held informally in an empty house at Fetterletter. It would seem that eventually, the congregation aspired to some sort of chapel probably before 1726. In an old file of Woodhead muniments, there was found a postcard which has annotated on the reverse, an inscription which seems to suggest that this was the site of the chapel. In 1746, as retribution for the '45 Rebellion, the edict went out to destroy all Episcopalian meetinghouses and therefore Alexander Davidson (subsequently Gordon) 11<sup>th</sup> Laird of Gight rose to the call and had the chapel demolished. Thereafter a meetinghouse described in documents before 1757 was built at Macterry which was served for a time with clergy from the nearby Folla Rule [Folla being a corruption of a Celtic term *follich*, meaning *place of the mosses*; and Rule being a reference to the 4<sup>th</sup> century Saint



Three stone consecration crosses embedded in the east wall originally from the Fyvie Monastery Church dedicated to St Mary

*Regulus or St Rule as he was known.* The present Episcopalian church dedicated to All Saints' named after the Priory Church, was built in 1848-49 to a design by architect John Henderson at Woodhead; located in a very romantic setting, the building has been described as the quintessential Scottish village church and at least one other Episcopalian Church in this diocese, St Mary's at Inverurie, is built to the same design. Nicholas Pevsner, the architectural historian describes the church as having an early English four bay nave with slightly lower chancel and entrance porch including the neat addition in 1870 of a spirelet by James Matthews.

All Saints' is built in a sylvan setting surrounded by a sleepy graveyard 'monitored' by a legion of crows who signify the presence of strangers disturbing their sanctuary with a noisy chorus. The congregation, heirs of a pre-Reformation congregation that worshipped in the Parish Church dedicated to St Peter, in turn, was the ancestor of a Monastic Church, a cell of the important Abbey of Arbroath, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and All Saints' that stood about a mile away from Woodhead, supporting a Tironensian 12th century Monastery named St Mary's Priory.

During the building of All Saint's, the Incumbent was David Wilson. He married Bishop William Skinner's daughter, Mary Garioch. David had been advanced to the office of Dean of Aberdeen and held strong views that the Scottish Communion Office should be the only rite of the Scottish Episcopal Church [as opposed to the English Liturgy which had been allowed since the days of the Repeal of the Penal Acts]. Bishop Suther attempted to suspend him from office for such views [which were contrary to his own], but the Episcopal College, on Wilson's appeal overturned his decision. After David Wilson's marriage to Skinner's daughter, in due deference to Skinner's eminence in ecclesiastical circles, he added 'Skinner' to his own name being known as 'Skinner Wilson' for ever after. Another eminent clergyman to serve All Saints' was Francis Turreff MA. He was a keen naturalist and an authority on ornithology. In Special Collections at King's College Aberdeen, there are several volumes of



The Revd Francis Turreff MA Rector of All Saint's 1903-1937

*Asian African Australian & Oceanian Birds and American Birds*; and in the Botanical field there are 2 volumes entitled *Coloured Drawings of British Plants*, and 3 volumes coloured drawings of *Cultivated Plants*. His collection of stuffed birds in glass cases, I understand, is now in a New York museum.

I am indebted to Helen Taylor of Fyvie Heritage Trust for Turreff's photo and for background information on the parish and to Dr Alan Knox, formerly Collections Manager at Aberdeen University and a keen ornithologist, for information on Turreff's 'naturalist' activities. Etymological, statistical and topographical references are from The Statistical Account for Scotland 1843.



Brass circular Pyx shown open with curtains of gold cloth



A view of the chancel showing the finely carved Altar and reredos and the traditional east window



'All Saints' Burial Ground —the Skinner Wilson Graves; [left to right] (i) Mary Skinner wife of Dean Wilson died 1864; (ii) The Very Revd David Wilson MA Dean of Aberdeen, died 1880; (iii) Mary Grace Wilson daughter of Dean Wilson 1841-1912