

Bowden Kirk

SOME etymologists hold that in the name Bowden can be found a clue to the history of the church. The most popularly accepted derivation is that which finds in the name a reference to Bothan, a saint who lived at the beginning of the seventh century and who appears to have had associations with East Lothian and Berwickshire. According to this theory the name signifies the dene or glen of Bothan. It is an explanation which would have more to commend it were there any other tradition which associated S. Bothan with this parish.

J. B. Johnston's theory is that the name derives from two roots signifying the house upon the hill. This explanation also seems hardly satisfactory since, although the village lies on the southern slopes of the Eildon Hills, there is no tradition, of which I am aware, of any particular house on the hill.

In old charters the name is variously rendered Bothenden, Boulden, Botheldene and Boudoun. Bot or Both (cf. Hebrew Beth) is a familiar root meaning house or home, and Den is still more familiar and self-explanatory. Might not the name then signify the house in the glen? And, if so, might not that house be the ancient House of God which stands upon a shelf above the south bank of the Bowden Burn at just that point where the stream enters a deep and dusky glen? Etymologically that theory may be quite untenable, but it does seem to fit the facts, instead of endeavouring to adapt the facts to the suggested derivation.

The question of just how ancient this kirk is has aroused considerable discussion. At the time of the octocentenary celebrations in 1928 there was quite a lengthy newspaper correspondence as to whether the traditional belief that the church dates back to 1128 was in fact justified. Reviewing this controversy from the vantage point of a date two decades later it appears to the writer that, in a matter which must of necessity be to a considerable extent conjectural, the honours of the debate were with the then minister of the parish, the late Revd. John Burr, who was naturally a doughty protagonist of the traditional view.



BOWDEN KIRK



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(Interior, looking eastward)

The main argument advanced against this view came from an eminent Scottish architect whose opinion that the church belonged to the seventeenth century was based upon his expert knowledge of church fabrics, and was, so he claimed, endorsed by the fact that the only dated stones in the structure have the years 1644, 1661 and 1666 carved on them.

Proverbially, however, doctors can disagree; and it is the case that a no less eminent authority on church architecture, Dr M'Gregor Chalmers, who was in charge of the work of restoration carried out in 1909, gave the imprimatur of his name and professional status to the claim for twelfth century standing to the building. Possibly the fact (and this is a fact and not a mere conjecture) which most inclined him to this view was the discovery when the work of restoration was proceeding that the church had at one time undoubtedly been a stone-roofed edifice. Such an architectural feature seemed, in his view, to furnish almost irrefutable proof of the antiquity of the church.

But what of the alleged evidence to the contrary provided by the dates on certain stones? The sufficient rejoinder would seem to be (1) that they all appear on parts of the building for which no claim for twelfth century standing has ever been made; (2) that at least two of the dates probably refer, not to the erection of the parts of the fabric in question, but to their adaptation, long after erection, to the purpose of serving as burial vaults; and (3) that architectural authorities agree that twelfth century buildings do not carry dates, that the claim for twelfth century origin is made chiefly for the nave, and that there is not a single date on this, the main portion of the structure.

Other points in support of early origin could be advanced did space permit, but enough has perhaps been stated to show that the balance of architectural evidence is strongly in favour of the pre-Reformation origin of the church, and in no way conflicts with the traditional view of its twelfth century foundation.

How then does the traditional date 1128 arise? It is the date of the second of four early charters in which Bowden is mentioned. The name first appears in the foundation charter of Selkirk when it was granted to the monks by David I. under the name Bothenden. The date of this charter is claimed to be not later than 1124. Greater certainty appears, however, to attach to the date of the second charter which records that in 1128 David

removed these monks to Kelso and again granted Bowden to them, this time under the name Boulden. In 1159 Malcolm IV. confirmed the parish to the monks by the name of Botheldene, and in 1232 Bishop Walter again confirmed the Church of Boulden to the monks of Kelso. The third charter speaks of "confirmation," which suggests that there must have been by then a sufficiently established and equipped church in the parish. We are therefore taken back to the previous reference of date 1128 which has been assumed as the traditional date of foundation.

During the long period of its history the fabric of the church has undergone many vicissitudes and suffered, sometimes quite literally, many changes, and to-day the only existing portions of the original are said to be the west gable and north wall of the nave. Originally the building appears to have been rectangular, but in the fifteenth century transepts were added. These were situated in the middle instead of, as is more usual, nearer the chancel end. In 1644 a burial vault was built on to the east end for the ducal house of Roxburgh, and the eastern gable was taken down to permit of the construction of a private pew with a with-drawing room behind and above the vault. In 1661 the north transept was similarly adapted for burial purposes for the house of Cavers Carre, the transept arch was built up, and a private pew (which still exists, though now removed to another position) was erected with a room behind, which was employed for the enjoyment of mundane meals between diets of worship. The year 1794 was a black one in the history of the fabric, for it was then that the south transept disappeared. The necessity for extensive repairs to the roof and south wall of the nave resulted in the replacement of the distinctive stone-vaulted roof by a slated roof covering a low flat plaster ceiling, whilst the wall repairs resulted, not only in the throwing into the graveyard of the transept, but also in the lowering of the wall by some eighteen inches and in the introduction of ugly and featureless square-topped windows. The next alteration of importance took place some seventy years later when, in order to suit the convenience of tenants on his estate, the then Duke of Roxburgh enlarged the eastern gallery by taking in a portion of the room behind it.

At the commencement of this century the plan of the church was as follows: the pulpit was placed against the centre of the south wall with the Holy Table in front; in the centre of the north wall was the Cavers Carre pew with

the room behind it occupying the transept, and on either side of this Laird's Loft was another private pew—one for the Buccleuch estate and the other for Linthill; the pews in the nave were parallel to the length of the church, *i.e.*, they all faced the pulpit, and at the east and west ends of the building there were galleries, the former containing the Roxburgh estate pews and having a small room behind it. Whatever its virtues it was not a thing of beauty.

In the early years of this century the roof was again found to be in a precarious condition. Since its renewal meant a major operation the possibility of effecting at the same time a complete restoration of the edifice became quite feasible. After careful consideration of ways and means and of suggested plans the work was ultimately put in hand in 1908 and completed the following year. Externally, little alteration was made in the appearance of the building. The south wall was again rebuilt (and the excellence of the stonework is a feature which visitors always note) this time to its original height, and its windows were rounded at the top. The belfry was rebuilt and strengthened, and a somewhat unattractive and meaningless slope from the roof of the chancel to the roof of the nave was replaced by a massive gable surmounted by a handsome Latin cross. Two external features which immediately strike visitors are the height of the eastern gable due to the chancel being above the Roxburgh vault, and the number of doors into the building. In addition to the main entrance in the south wall leading through a small porch into the nave, and the entrance on the north side into the vestry, there are four doors reached by external flights of steps into the chancel, the gallery, the north transept and the Laird's Loft.

Internally, however, the church was entirely remodelled and renewed. By gracious permission and with the financial help of the Duke of Roxburgh the eastern gallery was removed and the space above the vault laid out as a chancel. Similarly Major Riddell Carre gave his consent and help to the removal of his ancient family pew to a position on the north wall between the transept and the chancel, and to the inclusion in the church of the space in the transept formerly used as a room behind the pew. As a result of the latter alteration there was brought to light the four feet thick fifteenth century transept arch which now furnishes one of the main features of architectural interest

in the interior of the church. In addition extra accommodation became available for worshippers in the transept, which was converted into a gallery. At a later date an organ was installed here and the remaining space was set aside for choir stalls.

The natural stone walls of the chancel are of chiselled ashlar, and those of the nave are oak panelled for five feet, above which they are cemented and painted off-white. The furnishings throughout are of oak, beautifully carved, whilst the timber barrel-vaulted ceiling of the nave is a particularly attractive feature.

The present plan of the interior is as follows : at the east end the chancel, reached by a rather steep flight of five steps ; at the south base of the chancel arch the pulpit ; the pews in the nave divided by a central aisle, and most of them parallel to the gables of the church ; on the north wall the Laird's Laft with beneath three pews parallel to the wall ; in the north transept the organ and choir ; and at the west end a comparatively shallow gallery. As Mr Burr, to whose vision and energy the restored church is an enduring memorial, stated with pardonable pride : " Altogether the Church of Bowden is now not only one of the most ancient, but also one of the most beautiful, of Scottish country churches, and will descend to posterity at once an interesting monument of the past, and a beautiful and useful feature of the present and the future."

The church has been further enriched and adorned by many gifts of memorial windows and mural tablets. One of the latter has the particular interest that it was erected in memory of Lady Grisel Baillie who was the first Deaconess of the Church of Scotland, and who was set apart for the duties of her office in Bowden Kirk. The smallest of the memorial windows, apart from its intrinsic attractiveness, has the added interest that it has been installed in the north wall in what is alleged to have been the priests' entrance into the church.

Two other gifts to the church should be recorded, the one an electric light installation with lamps of a particularly pleasing design for the nave, and flood-lighting for the chancel ; the other a new bell and belfry. It is said that the latter gift was prompted, in part at least, by the donor's dislike of the somewhat unmusical tone of the bell in use, and was intended to be a substitute for it. But the new bell was too large for the existing belfry, and in any event there were many who were much attached to the sound,

unmusical though it might be, of the ancient bell ; so a new and additional belfry was built above the vestry in which the gift was duly installed. Thus the church possesses two belfries and two bells, each of which is rung every Sabbath morning.

A separate note on the Laird's Laft is perhaps fitting since this is a well-nigh unique feature of the church. It is made of black oak, and in its present position projects so far into the nave as to require the support of three pillars. Above the pew is a canopy, also of oak, in the front of which appears these letters : S D

T K G H which stand for Sire Thomas Karr Dame Grisell Halket. In front of the pew is a square panel which exhibits in true heraldic fashion the family coat-of-arms. Below the gallery and on an oak beam let into the wall of the nave is painted this admonition, to which a hand directs attention :

" Behold the axe lyes at the trees root
To hew doune these that brings not forth good frute,
And when they're cut the Lord in to his ire
Wil them destroy and cast into the fire."

These notes, perforce brief, may fittingly conclude with some reference to the ministry of Bowden. Thomas Duncansone, who was minister from 1568, and who at the time of his death was Father of the Church, was succeeded in 1617 by his son Andrew. His ministry was, however, very brief, since in 1618 he was translated to Lessudden. Thereafter there came in succession John Knox in 1621, Henry Muschett in 1659, James Knox in 1662 and his younger brother Henry in 1681. The two last-mentioned were great grand-nephews of the reformer. The ministry of George Mulligan, who was settled in 1691, was comparatively brief, and he was followed in 1697 by Archibald Deans. The next ministry, that of James Hume which commenced in 1742, was marked by controversy at the time of his settlement which was so acute that the dissentients joined the Secession movement and founded a congregation in the village of Midlem, which is in Bowden Parish. Despite the stormy commencement of his ministry Mr Dean served the parish acceptably for the long period of fifty years, being succeeded in 1792 by Thomas Kirkpatrick. This was another brief ministry. In 1795 William Balfour was ordained, and ministered in Bowden until his death in 1828, being succeeded the following year by Thomas Jolly. Mr Jolly "came out" at the Disruption.

The vacancy thus created was filled by the ordination the same year of James M. Allardyce who was minister for forty-eight years, in the course of which he was laureated by his university. After the eight-year ministry of Alfred Macfarlane Mr Burr was ordained in 1899 and remained minister of the parish until his death in 1940, in which year he was succeeded by the writer.

D. LYNDESAY SMITH.