

Ellon Parish Church—Aberdeenshire

The Parish Church of Ellon was rededicated on 29 September, 1968 after the completion of a most extensive plan of renovation costing £22,000.

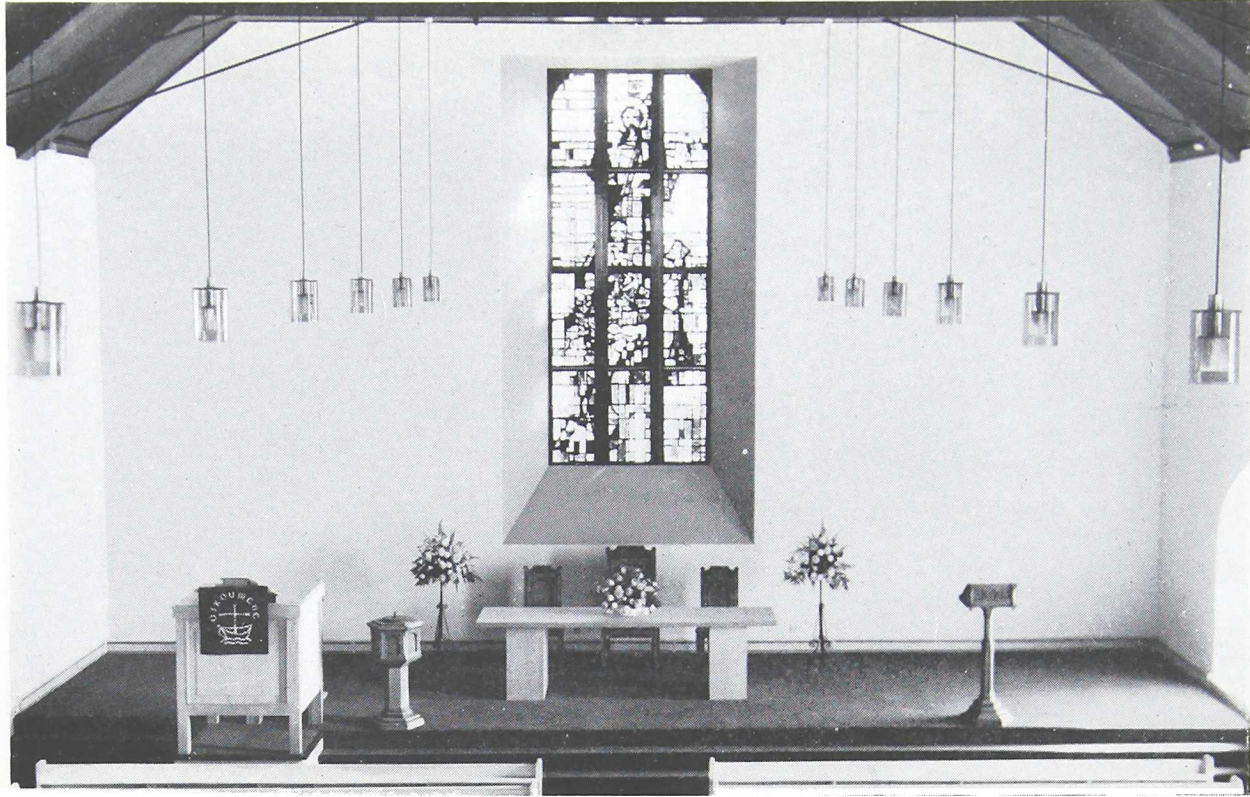
In the “Book of Buchan” (1910), the church is described as “an unpretentious, barn-like structure, reminiscent of an austerity in religious life which Scotland has now forgotten.” To remedy this situation in part a new entrance porch and North Wing have been erected and the main interior has been renovated and re-orientated giving a place of worship that has a dignified and beautiful simplicity. This work was necessary because the building was becoming delapidated and even dangerous. The Heritors’ Records show a long history of troubles due to damp and lack of ventilation. As the minister had an annual allowance for necessary repairs to church and manse in the nineteenth century amounting to £7, maintenance must have been none too easy !

The Church stands on a site that has been used for Christian worship at least as far back as 1132 when a reference is found in the “Book of Deer.” There may be some evidence of a much earlier connection with Christianity in what is known as the Pictish Symbol Stone to be found in the masonry of the church. Such stones are believed to be a relic of pagan worship and their appearance in or near some old churches perhaps indicates where the first missionaries proclaimed the Gospel. As this stone, built into the north wall, would have been completely covered by the building of the new North Wing it was decided to rescue it from complete oblivion and give it a place of greater prominence about five feet up in the stonework used to close the old east doorway of the church and in a position below the large stained glass window.

The Kirk and kirklands of Ellon were conferred on the Cistercian Abbey of Kinloss by David I and about 1310 Robert the Bruce confirmed the charter which was operative till the Reformation. From about 1516 to 1532 Thomas Chrystal, Abbot of Kinloss took considerable interest in the church, renewed the roof and the paving and placed in the church an altar piece “which combined statuary with painting as in the chapel of B.V.M. at Kinloss.” All that



ELLON PARISH CHURCH: INTERIOR BEFORE RENOVATION



ELLON PARISH CHURCH: INTERIOR AFTER RENOVATION

remains of this earlier church with its family burial aisles is a memorial known as the Annand monument which seems to have been part of the old chancel wall.

The church was much neglected after the reformation and by 1737 the galleries were too weak to be used on communion Sundays so that use was made of a tent, but the church lasted till 1777 when the new church was opened with seating for 1200. Capacity seems to have been the main interest in the outlaying of £650 stg. for the structure. Several alterations in the interval gave rise to a wooden ceiling and the two manual Harrison Organ, built in 1884, transferred to an apse in 1887 and in the present renovation modified and resited in the gallery now on the west side of the church.

A new entrance in the West wall replaces the inadequate one on the north wall and the little used east doorway. The former organ chamber (south apse) has been turned into a memorial apse to house memorials previously spread through the church, this contains also stained glass windows and a cross of Burma teak.

A new pulpit was made by voluntary labour and the Pulpit Fall and Bible Markers were gifted by Pluscarden Priory and made by the Nuns of Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester. The motif on the fall is the boat with cross mast symbol of the World Council of Churches. A new and more adequate communion table has been installed to fit the dimensions of the new chancel area and the furnishings which existed have been restored to their original oak.

The following notes regarding the Stained Glass Windows may be of interest.

The Stained Glass Windows by John S. Milne, D.A. (Supervisor of Art, Aberdeenshire Education Authority).

The desire to create an atmosphere of reverence and humility provided the stimulus for the designs. I am much indebted to Dom Ninian Sloane of Pluscarden Priory and to his assistants for the brilliant development and interpretation of the first design sketches and for their skill, devotion and craftsmanship in the construction of the windows.

On entering the church the words "FATHER FORGIVE" shine down the aisle as an immediate reminder of the supreme sacrifice which forms the basis of Christianity. The semi-abstract concept permits the onlooker to make a personal interpretation as opposed to a clearly defined "picture" window leaving little to the imagination.

The East Window

The risen Christ, hands upraised bestows comfort, healing and peace on troubled mankind. Vertical shapes in the folds of the robe accentuate and complete the Cross forming the background. The human family kneels at the Saviour's feet. At the bottom left a woman raises her infant child for blessing, whilst immediately above another turns away her head. The centre panel contains male figures representing "everyman," their heads and hands in an attitude of repentance. On the right another woman looking upwards kneels in reverence.

The colour scheme of this group, dark in the lower area, rising to warmth and light is symbolic of man's salvation through forgiveness, whilst the lighter areas behind, representing Everlasting Light, emphasise the structural arrangement of the figures whose simple attire lends a timeless quality. Muted cool tones were considered advisable in the lower sections to minimise glare.

The Apse Windows

"This do in remembrance of Me." These two small lancets echo the motif of the large East window. The dimensions dictated a simpler and less realistic approach.

South East Window of Apse

The hands of Christ hold aloft the chalice from which light streams upwards culminating in a circular arrangement of lines suggesting the crown of thorns against a subdued cruciform shape. The design of the chalice was influenced by the type in use during the early days of the Presbyterian Church. A predominantly blue colour scheme was chosen to harmonise with the large East window, as both are seen simultaneously on entering the church.

South East Window of Apse

In several slabs of vivid red orange glass are wheat heads. As in the other lancet light streams upwards from the hands "breaking the bread" towards the circular thorn motif, and beneath the hands against cool greens are an oval loaf of bread and two round portions bearing the Easter Cross, Extremely skilful faceting of the glass accentuates the warm brilliance.

The Stained Glass Windows by Dom Ninian Sloane, O.S.B.,
Pluscarden Priory.

The essence of glass is not to represent the scene in 'glorious Technicolour' but to represent the artist's vision through a screen of lead and glass, in this case Epoxy Resin and glass, as in faith one sees through the 'glass' only imperfectly—but the translation of an idea must always be so—the medium itself always obscures the original idea to some degree.

Verre d'Alle or 'glass flagstones,' however, is a medium no other form of modern art can challenge for depth and richness of colour. Even on a grey day its resonant deep blues and intense rich browns and greens delight the eye, but, like all glass, it really comes into its own when blessed with sunlight—then one sees a modern medium that owes nothing even to the medieval pieces in Chartres, Le Mans or Notre Dame. For the one inch thick slab glass from which the windows are built cannot but be richer than the quarter inch thin plate glass that was all they had for almost nineteen hundred years. Faceting also gives an added dimension of modernity and beauty. This process is where the craftsman chips the glass to diamond-like planes that give quality to the rich spectrum of the fifty-eight colours used.

The large East window took two monks and one lay assistant two months to build along with the two lancets in the south wall of the church—one designed around the chalice, and the other mirroring Ellon's golden fields of wheat and barley grown for the breaking of bread which has gone on within these walls for so many centuries.