

Old Luce Church

CHRISTIANITY probably reached this parish in the fifth century during the activities of St. Ninian and his followers in Galloway. Two chapels that once existed in the parish—one dedicated to the Virgin Mary at Kilfillan and the other called Kirk Christ at Sinniness may have been associated with the later work of the Priory of Whithorn.

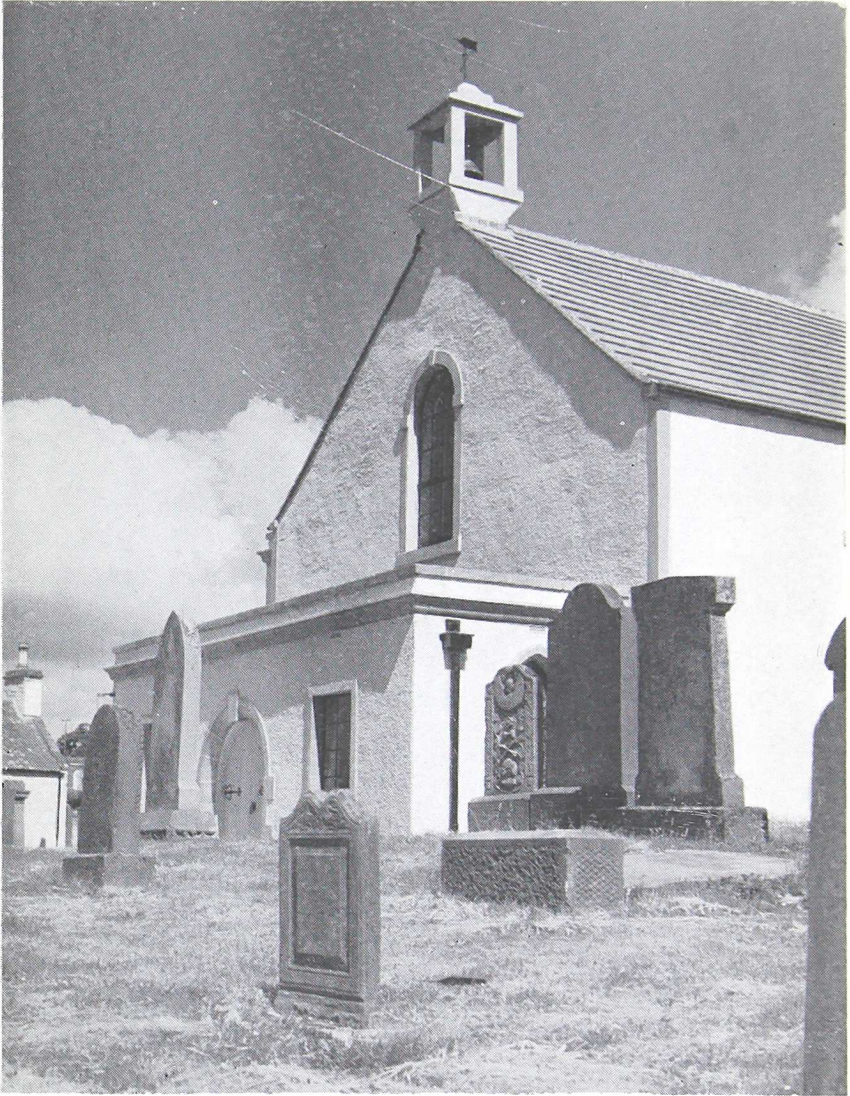
In 1190 the Abbey of Glenluce was established by Roland of Galloway. Glenluce—usually interpreted as “The Valley of Light”—became an active Christian centre, the monks being of the Cistercian Order, and the influence of the Abbey continued for more than four hundred years. The freestone of which much of the Abbey is built is not available locally and probably came from Dumfries-shire or Cumberland. The Abbey fell into ruin from 1627 onwards.

The parish of Glenluce was originally one with its church dedicated to St. Michael, and the church was served by a Vicar from the Abbey until the Reformation. The appointment of a Reformed minister is noted in 1574 and in 1636 a new church was erected. The next century saw the division of the parish into New Luce and Old Luce (1647) and the activity of the Covenanters. Another Old Luce church lasted from 1740 until 1814 when the present structure was built and it has now undergone two years of renovation work.

Prior to the renovation, the Church was a fine example of post Reformation architecture. Access to the ‘T’ shaped building was gained through a small entrance porch on the West Gable where now stands the new entrance Vestibule. The pulpit was situated centrally between the four windows on the South wall and stood on a small raised chancel encompassed by a low choir screen.

An ornate wooden sounding board had been fitted at a later date over the pulpit in an attempt to improve the acoustics under the three galleries on the first floor each of which was served by its own external stone staircase, open to the elements. Two centre aisles, again ‘T’ shaped in plan, formed the circulation to the ground floor pews.

Vision was somewhat disturbed by four supporting columns under each of the three galleries. There was no



OLD LUCE PARISH CHURCH: EXTERIOR



OLD LUCE PARISH CHURCH: RENOVATED INTERIOR

stained glass in the Church and although the windows on the South Elevation were leaded lights with tinted glass these were not of the original period and were slightly out of character. There was no vestry, and a disused boiler house on the East Gable comprised the total extent of the buildings.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the renovations have been extensive. The roof timbers have been repaired and rot proofed prior to re-tiling, and the old belfry has been renewed in every detail. This houses the old bell which is now rung electrically and the whole unit is surmounted by a new weather vane.

As the circulation of the Church has been redesigned to take place internally, it has been possible to remove two of the old external stairs while the third one is retained not only for aesthetic reasons but also to serve as a fire escape from the Choir loft. A more spacious entrance vestibule stands on the site of the old one and a new enclosed staircase replaces the external stair on the North wall. A small porch has also been erected to protect the Vestry entrance in the North gable. The old boiler house has been demolished and in order to blend the old with the new and also to hide the various scars occasioned by the removal of staircase, etc., the whole of the stonework has been drydashed with a white stone chip.

Internally, the extent of the renovation is much more obvious, all the woodwork, which is oak, all the plasterwork, stonework, painterwork, lighting ; all are new. The existing pews, however, have been stripped to lighten them and re-waxed.

In the new Vestibule are two stained glass windows from Ladyburn Church. One of these windows depicts Jesus as "The Good Shepherd" and the other as "The Light of the World." Standing in the centre of the Vestibule is the Communion Table previously used in Old Luce Church. The solid oak of the new double entrance doors is repeated by oak parquet flooring.

The East gallery has been removed to make way for the new Chancel and the West gallery has been extended so that access to it and the North gallery can be gained from the new interior stairway. Steelwork has been inserted under these galleries so that all the old supporting columns could be removed. The North gallery has been divided upstairs to give an Organ and Choir loft to the Church, and behind the dividing wall is a new Session House. Underneath this

gallery is the new Vestry and a store room. The Communion Table, formerly used in Ladyburn Church is now in the Vestry.

The new organ is a Three Rank, Two Manual and Pedal unit extension Pipe Organ. This was built entirely in the Church and apart from the beauty of its tone it adds its own intrinsic beauty to the scene.

The former electric tubular heaters have been fitted under the pews and these, together with the new lights are serviced by a completely new electric installation.

A beautiful, and much enlarged new Chancel is located at the East end. This is backed by a natural stone wall in the centre of which is set the round stained glass window also from Ladyburn Church. This window is flood-lit externally so that its beauty will not be lost to the Church during the winter evenings.

Mounted on the stone wall of of the Chancel is a simple Celtic cross of black hammered wrought iron on a silver ring.

The new Pulpit, Communion Table and Font have been designed as a suite and are executed in oak and White Sicilian Marble, which, in the case of the Communion Table is engraved in gold lettering, "THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."

The Pulpit Fall, has the Church of Scotland emblem of the burning bush. The aisles and part of the Chancel are covered with Iona blue carpet which echoes with the pale blue of the vaulted ceiling.

Throughout this renovation, every endeavour has been made without resorting to copyism to respect the old Scottish character demanded by the original building and good materials, unadorned, and in good proportion have been utilised rather than an excess of extraneous ornamentation foreign to the period.