HOSPITAL, SPITTALHILL
W J Dillon, AP F7.9.1956, p13

The challenge of history seems never at an end. Sometimes it is only a small fragment from a past age which provokes us with the riddle of its origin, and Ayrshire is full of such challenges - the urn at Ochiltree, the moot at Symontoun, the old church in the woods at Barnweill. But the challenge may remain long after the object has gone. It may be merely a provocative name on a map - the Castlehill at Ayr tormenting us to find the castle, the Hare Stane at Monkton goading us to find the connection of witch and hare. One of the most challenging of all the names on a map is that of Spittal, the medieval word for an hospital for the sick, the poor or the leprous. Here in our shire we have well authenticated spittals at Fail, St Leonard's and Kingcase. But map-names suggest that there were many more and one in particular has set out a challenge because there is no trace of a building or reference in a charter to help us to decide whether the name, Spittalhill, is on the map from fact or fancy.

Just a mile above Bogend Toll on the main Monkton to Kilmarnock road there is a farm called Spittalhill. It is now possible to prove that there really was a spittal in the vicinity and that it was dedicated to St Thomas of Canterbury. So, at long last, a little Ayrshire mystery has been solved and all that remains to be doen is to find, if finding is at all possible after the long years of silence, the exact site of the hospital of St Thomas.

We will never know anything of the history of the spittal but we can trace intriguing connections between this little remote Ayrshire establishment, the Crusaders and St Thomas a Becket. Thomas a Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral on December 29, 1170, and one of his assassins was Hugh de Morville who is reputed to have founded Kilwinning Abbey as a proof of his remorse. Although this legend seems to have no authenticity the death of Thomas a Becket did have an effect on Ayrshire, not in Cunninghame but in the Dundonald area. The spittal built here connects up St Thomas and the Stewarts of Dundonald and linking these two far removed people is the history of the Crusades.

Thomas a Becket was murdered in 1170. He was canonised in 1173 and his body was translated to a shrine behind the high altar in his cathedral in 1220. All these events took place at the time of the early Crusades. It is beyond dispute that St Thomas was the most popular of all English saints of the time and there was intense devotion to him. This is seen at its height in the siege of Acre in 1190. Richard Coeur de Lion was besieging this stronghold of Acre, or Aconia, as it was sometimes called. A chaplain to the Dean of London who was present at the siege took an oath that when the city fell he would found a chaepl, dedicated to St Thomas, in which all who died in Acre could be buried. So many were killed that Coeur de Lion founded an Order based on this new church. The Order was that of St Thomas of Aconia and its business was to attend to the burial of slain crusaders. Members wore a uniform of white with a large red cross on it but differentiated from similar-looking orders by the inclusion of a scallop in the cross. This Order was the connecting link between Thomas a Becket and the Crusaders.

The new Order spread all over the world; for example, there was an hospital of St Thomas the Martyr of Aconia in London al during the middle ages. Its founder was Richard Coeur de Lion and this royal example caused many Crusading knights to follow suit. It must have been a Crusader who founded the hospital of St Thomas of Aconia in

Dundonald. The Stewarts of Dundonald were enthusiastic Crusaders. The founder of the family, Alan, went with Coeur de Lion to the Holy Land and was actually present at the fall of Acre and at the setting up of the church of St Thomas. Walter Stewart of Dundonald, who succeeded as Stewart in 1204, was one of a trio of great crusading leaders of the tremendous armies which went to Palestine under the banner of Louis the Saint in 1270. Thus the Stewarts of Dundonald would be well aware of the fashion of setting up hospitals under the direction of the Order of St Thomas. One of the Stewart family must have set up the local hospital commemorated by the place name Spittalhill.

It has been impossible to find any record of this spittal until very recently when there came into our possession a copy of a charter drawn up by James Stewart of Dundonald about the year 1300. This charter donated to William de Shaw the lands of Hayleys, Wardlaw and Drumchyber in the tenement of Dundonald. The boundaries of these lands are given in full. Near the end of the charter the boundaries run "as far as the main road leading to Ayr and across it as far as a little ditch leading to the lands of the hospital of St Thomas of Aconia and from there ascending to the burn called Drumchabir". This part of the charter places our spittal as near the main road and next to Drumchabir Burn but the site has yet to be found. The main point to notice at present is that the charter proves for the first time that Spittalhill does denote a real spittal and that it was dedicated to St Thomas a Becket, all of which is new knowledge in the history of our shire.

PARISH CHURCH

See also John W Nimmo, Symington Village Church and People, [Darvel], Alloway Publishing, 2003.

List [P/BL/5/AR: September 1962] 1
Contains Norman work in rebuilt T-shape structure. P McGregor Chalmers, architect, 1919. Ref: Hay, 231-232. B.

Cowan, 1967, 194
Belonged to Fail from early date. Positive proof first appears in 1454; but cure was a vicarage in 1259 (+Chalmers, III, 514); Paisley Reg., 136-7; Cal of Entries in Papal Reg rel to GB & Ireland; Papal Letters edd Bliss et al, London, 1893, x, 693-4). Annexation cont. at Reform, (Thirds of Benefices, 21, 95, 167, 270; Prot Book Simon no.II; Reg of Presentations to Benefices, SRO, i, 125).

Paterson, 1852, II, 477
Granted to Fail in 1252. Continued in their possession until reformation

Hay
Embossed alms basin.

1SA, VI, 641
Old and bears no date. Dark and too small. "Walls and roof, which is of oak, said to have been grown in the parish ... are still good, but the ceiling begins to fall". Thoroughly repaird, c.1752, furnished with pews, painted and roof plastered.

2SA, V, 569 [1797]
Repaired and added to in 1797. 400 sittings.

Chalmers, 1825, II, 514
Church is old; date of erection unknown.

OS Name Book [1850s]
Addition of 1797 - "now a commodious building".

Clouston
1865 Wilson bell.

Groome, VI, 424
Remodelled in 1880. 359 sittings.

HR 46/1 11.6.1900
Church walls harled 1900.

HR 46/1 10.6.1907
Rosemount loft to be lined with wood to height of 5'.

AA 6.2.1919
The Presbytery of Ayr told of proposed restoration of church. P McGregor Chalmers in his report said it had been a pleasant surprise to him when he examined the church to find it to be a beautiful Norman church, built in the C12 ... The ancient work had been preserved almost entire. The fine ashlar work on the interior walls was hidden at present in lath and plaster; the richly ornamented treble window in the

E gable, the finest thing of its kind in any Scottish parish church, was concealed behind the present gallery, and the fine, ancient oak roof, well preserved, was removed from sight by the modern plaster ceiling which could easily be removed.

BI 29/348 March 1919 — In course of examination with a view to alteration, P MacGregor Chalmers found the parish church to be C12 Norman. Fine interior ashlar work, richly decorated treble window in east gable - the finest thing of its kind in any Scottish parish church - and ancient oak roof all hidden behind modern excrescences. Chalmers suggested restoration.

HR 46/1 2.6.1919 — New roof with new slate put on. Oak porch erected at W door with leaded doors and windows [Est cost £150]. New drain formed to tackle dampness of foundations. E and W galleries remobed during restoration and gallery in N transept enlarged. Reseated and restored throughout. P MacGregor Chalmers, architect. Thomas Niven, and Matthew Muir & Co., Kilmarnock, contractors.

Russell, DS — 8 windows: 1919,1919,1919,1920,1920, 1939,1919,1942: all by **Douglas Strachan**.

AA 13.11.1919 — Re-opened last Thursday. 3 East windows filled with stained glass - Nativity, Crucifixion - Ascension - by Douglas Strachan, Edinburgh. Mr Strachan is also engaged on a south window, Last Supper, gift of P Mackie of Corraith.

AA 23.9.1920 — Memorial window to Captain J Mackie Logan, †1917. Dedicated last Sunday. "Last Supper", Douglas Strachan, Edinburgh. Triple light E window is also by Strachan.

AA 13.10.1921 — Ayrshire Yeomanry window dedicated last Sunday: "Christ Preaching from a Ship", Matthew 13. Design: Douglas Strachan.

AP 14.10.1921 — War Memorial window dedicated last Sunday.

AA 30.12.1926; KS, Sa 1.1.1927, 7d — Memorial window to Sir Peter Jeffrey Mackie unveiled last Sunday. Design: **Douglas Strachan**.

AP, F 5.12.1930, 4d — Congregations now united.

AP 22.12.1939 — Window, "Walk to Emmaus", by Douglas Strachan, gift of Mr and Mrs J G Young, unveiled last Sunday. Other windows in church also by Douglas Strachan.

AP 18.9.1942 — Memorial Window to Rev John G Boyd unveiled last Sunday. "Mary Anointing the Lord's Feet". No designer named.

Honey draft — J G Boyd window is 1942, Douglas Strachan.

ACC Planning, 5005 — February 1948. Various works at church, Trinity Cottage, Kerrix Road (a garage). No decision.

CH2/532 1.2.1949 — East end remodelled "to make it conform more closely to the ancient Norman style".
Stone communion table and platform, 1949, gift of Sir Thomas Houldsworth. 2 sets of elders stalls, of stone, gift of Mrs Arthur. Wooden minister's chair and desk, gift of Mrs E Gage Boyd.

CH2/532/23 5.7.1949 — Organ consul moved; pews beside communion table removed.

ACC Planning, B287 — July 1956. Demolish existing west porch, and build new one, for Kirk Session.

CH2/532/24 4.9.1956 — New entrance porch to be built. Some stones taken from former UF church of Symington.

AP, F 28.12.1956, 11 — 3 sketches by J Flannagan. Photocopy herewith.

AP 29.4.1960 — Notes on its octocentenary. Founded 1160. Granted to Fail 1252. Extensive repairs, 1750. Additions in 1797: north transept and galleries. 1919 Restoration. Blaxter Stone communion table by T J Beveridge FRIBA gifted in memory of late Sir Henry Houldsworth of Coodham. Blaxter stone elders stalls in meory of late Andrew Arthur of Rosemount. 3 light E window by late Douglas Strachan. [Alterations

and additions by **J T Beveridge and Dallachy** exhibited at RGIFA 1954]

Honey draft — 1970 **Gordon Webster** s.g. window i.m.o. Rev Thomas Ritchie.

AP, F 25.9.1970, 19abc & photo — Stained glass window in memory of Rev Thomas Ritchie unveiled last Sunday. A lesson was read by Rev George Paterson, secretary to the Church of Scotland's Advisory Committee on Artistic Questions: Rev Ritchie had been the committee's Vice Convener. Baptism of Christ, by **Gordon Webster**, Glasgow.

COMMUNION PLATE

AA, Th 18.7.1968, 15abcd — Photograph and description.

CHURCHYARD

HR 46/1	10.6.1907	Gate Piers (2) rebuilt 1907 and steps up renewed. Thomas Wharrie of London granted permission to erect a vault in his enclosure in the kirkyard.

MANSE [1] [now SYMINGTON HOUSE], 7 Kerrix Road

List 2		Built c.1786; harled, stone dressings; 2 storeys; 3 sash windows; thin corner pilasters; ridge roof, end stacks, rolled gabled skews; Victorian gabled porch; screen walls, outbuildings. Ref: NSA, V, 569. B.
GM, Th 27.1.1785, 25a		Contractors wanted for a new manse at Symington. Plans with **John Swan**, mason in Kilmaurs.
OS Name Book	[1850s]	A plain but neat building - erected 1786 - 2 storeys high slated and in good repair.
HR 46/1	24.8.1892	1892, repairs and addition. Allan Stevenson, Ayr, architect. J & J Andrew, masons; N & G Ferguson, joiners. Cost £139 19s.
	10.6.1918	1918. Rear window of drawing room altered to be a French window, with 2 steps.
CH2/532/22	4.10.1933	To be let. Minister to build himself a new house on the glebe.
CH2/532/23	3.7.1945	Has now been sold.
ACC Planning, A2822		October 1950. Garage, Symington House, for McInnes Shaw.
ACC Planning, A7446		June 1954. Greenhouse, &c., Symington House, for Mrs MacInnes-Shaw.

STABLE

HR 46/1	13.1.1908	Demolished 1908: materials used for building church hall.

MANSE [2], 6 KERRIX ROAD

CH2/532/23	5.9.1944	House built by minister in 1933 has been purchased by church for use as manse.
ACC Planning, A679		February 1949. Alterations, and garage, Symington Manse, for Kirk Session.

CHURCH HALL

HR 46/1	13.1.1908	1908. Materials of old manse stable used for building new church hall.
AA, Th 1.8.1968, 9a		Plans for extension approved by ACC, Tuesday.
CO3/8/7/5	Bldg Wrt BA 1739	21.8.1968. Extension to church hall. Stevenson & Ferguson, Ayr, architects.

CHURCH OFFICER'S HOUSE

CH2/532/22	28.6.1933	Plans for reconstruction approved.

FREE CHURCH

Ewing, II, 59		Built by February 1844
AA 25.4.1844		Formally opened last Sunday.
CH3/656/3	26.11.1845	Railings to be erected at an est cost of £236 11s 4d.

	10.12.1845	Wall and railings to be erected. Weir, Symington, mason; Joseph Porter, Symington, smith.
	12.7.1847	Church and session house whitewashed, 1847.
	15.6.1853	West gable to be roughcast, 1853
	27.10.1865	New bell obtained, 1865
AP, F 5.12.1930, 4d		Congregations now united.
FES, IX, 185		Converted to hall after union in 1930. Demolished in 1954.

FREE CHURCH MANSE

Ewing, II, 59		1846. Manse added to Free Ch school in 1846.
CH3/656/3	5.5.1846	Plans for manse approved.
	18.11.1846	Work to commence. Est cost £416.
OS Name Book	[1850s]	1847
CH3/656/3	9.4.1862	Ground added to make new entrance to manse, 1862.
CH3/656/4	31.10.1881	Stable repaired, 1881.
	27.4.1892	Drawing room enlarged and new window inserted on garden side
	24.9.1920	Porch built; walls pointed; rhones and conductors renewed; outhouses repaired. Hugh Higgins, Prestwick, mason; Fred Noble, joiner.

DANKEITH CEMETERY, 389331

ACC, FinC, 11.10.1951, 111	Agree to acquire land (2.375 acres) for £145.
ACC Planning, A5176	October 1952. New Cemetery, Dankeith, for Ayr County Council.

HEALTH CENTRE

CO3/8/7/5	Bldg Wrt BA 2409	3.12.1970. Health centre, Brewlands Drive, for ACC. C6795.
SVR 1970-1971		15.2.1971

LIBRARY

ACC, GPSC 22.4.1954, 18	To be formally opened 28th April `954.

LIBRARY, Brewlands Road

C August 1972 (Guy Copland 34)	Plans for new library, Symington, approved.
SVR 1973-1974	16th May 1973
AA,CO 3./10/5/34, 14.12.1973	Completed.

MEMORIAL HALL

Andrew, K	Robert Hay Boyd Memorial Hall. 1908.

PLAYING FIELD

ACC Planning, A7413	June 1954. Playing field, Symington, for Archibald MacInnes-Shaw.
PAVILION	
ACC Planning, A8945	August 1955. Wooden sports pavilion, Playing field, Symington, for Ayr District Council

POLICE STATION, 17-21 Kilmarnock Road, 388313

AP 19.11.1937		Contractors - Police Station, Symington - ACC County Architect.
BI 48/573	December 1937	ACC inviting tenders for Police Station at Symington.

SCHOOL

List 7	OLD SCHOOL HOUSE. Stucco, incised lines in imitation of stone courses; 2 sash windows, that to right double; panelled door, rectangular fanlight; moulded eaves. B.
1SA, VI, 641	Parish School built in 1788 with slate roof. Schoolroom, kitchen and small bedroom

=? AA 14.2.1805		Conts - schoolmaster's house.
HR 46/1	10.6.1907	In use as club.

SCHOOL

KS 22.7.1876		Conts - School at Symington. Messrs Ingram for Symington SB.
ACC Planning, A4894		July 1952. Addition to form staffroom, &c., for Ayr County Council.
Pers comm.		Domestic conversion by Sandy (Alexander T) Hendry.

SCHOOL

CO3/8/7/5	Bldg Wrt BA 981	12.12.1966 School, Brewlands Road, for ACC.
AA, CO 3/10/5/26, GPC 14.10.1966		To negotiate a price for Catrine P.S. with George Reid & Son Ltd. "The same plan will be used as in the case of the new Symington Primary School, and these contractors submitted the second lowest offer to build the school at Symington."
AA, CO 3/10/5/27, GPC 16.12.1966		Let to William McClure & Sons, Irvine. £93190. With furniture, &c., total estimated cost is £108,290.
AA, CO 3/10/5/28, AR 6.12.1967		December 1966 – April 1968.
AA, CO 3/10/5/28, GPC14.6.1968		Completed since last report. Work began in December 1966.
SVR 1968-1969		27th August 1968.

SCHOOL [FREE CHURCH]

Ewing, II, 59		Built 1844 at same time as Free Church.
CH3/656/3	26.11.1845	Cost £161 3s 11d.
Lamb, 132		Former FC school and manse became the church hall.

WAR MEMORIAL

List 3	Polished granite column, 4 rusticated bands, ball finial; stands on square panelled base. C.
AP 4.3.1921	Unveiled last Sunday.
KS 5.3.1921	Peterhead Granite. Design: Thomas Lyon. Exec: Matthew Muir & Co. [Ref from GT Bell]

© Rob Close 2026