



A brief history of Biggar Kirk and a tour of its principal features including its oak roof.

Tam Ward 2019.

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Introduction

Biggar Kirk (Pl 3), formerly known as St Mary's Church is unique, being the last Pre-Reformation church to be built in Scotland. A fascinating history of the church dating back to the 12th century is available and some aspects of the building which have never been considered are given here. The church was dedicated to St Nicholas about 1399, became St Mary's church, then was known as Biggar Kirk, it is now termed Biggar Parish Church and/or Biggar Kirk.

History

Firstly, much of the information given here is gleaned from two comprehensive histories of the church; 'Biggar St Mary's A Medieval College Kirk', written by the Rev D S Rutherford, M.A. who was minister from 1928 until the 1950's, the book was published in Biggar (Rutherford 1946), and the other book is 'Biggar and the House of Fleming' by William Hunter (1867). They are the most authoritative accounts of the church and its history and are essential reading for anyone who wishes to know more than this paper can hope to achieve. Copies of the books are available for consultation in Biggar Museum archives.

It is not known if a church in Biggar pre-dates the first documented reference of 1164, but it may be considered likely because it would seem that the name Bigre existed as a settlement prior to the incoming 'guest' of King David I, or perhaps his grandson Malcolm IV; Baldwin the Fleming, who became the first Sherriff of Lanarkshire. His caput, the massive motte which lies within the grounds of the former manse (now a private house) and overlooking the Burn Braes (Pl 1), is one of the largest in Scotland and no doubt reflects the importance of the man who created and occupied it. Castle, church and Kings Highway (High St) (Pl 2) were the three principal features of most medieval towns.



Pl 1. Biggar Motte. From Burn Braes.



Pl 2. Medieval Biggar.



Pl 3. The church view from the Moat Park steeple.

The history of the church site is traceable in documentation back to 1164 when one Parson Robert of Bigir is mentioned. A list of priests/ministers are recorded between that time and 1542, and thereafter a more complete list exists for the Post Reformation period. However, the existing building was begun in 1545 and completed after 1547. Practically nothing is known of the church building before 1531. The founder of the present building; Malcolm Lord Fleming, aspired to create a Collegiate Church for the greater glory of the Fleming family, and also as a means of ensuring their speedy passage through purgatory, as the office bearers of the new church were entrusted to pray for the souls of the departed Flemings.

The story of the foundation of the existing church is embedded in a tale of murder! In 1524, John Lord Fleming with his son Malcolm and friends were hunting on their own lands of Kilbucho. John Tweedie of nearby Drumelzier accosted the hunting party and after some argument Lord Fleming was slain and his son Malcolm taken prisoner back to Drumelzier Tower. The Law was set in motion and by all accounts Tweedie got off light for the murder. He agreed to pay the sum of £10 Scots, to be paid annually for a chaplain to pray for the soul of his victim in Biggar church, the chaplainry was set up for the recital of prayers and masses for the soul of John Fleming.

Malcolm Fleming seems to have made up his mind by 1540 that a simple chantry in the Parish church was below his status as Lord High Chamberlain under James V, so he set in motion the idea to build not just a new church, but a Collegiate Church. There were only forty such

churches in Scotland, the nearest one being at Carnwath where Fleming's neighbour and friend Lord Somerville had one and which had existed since about 1425.

Collegiate churches as the name suggest were created as churches where prayers and masses were enacted for the benefit of the souls of the founder and his family, they also acted as educational and charitable centres and had a number of office bearers.

Malcolm Fleming was at the ill-fated shambles of the Battle of Solway Moss in 1542 when his King; James V retreated ingloriously to Falkland Palace where he died in despair a few days later, just after hearing of the birth of his daughter Mary (Queen of Scots). Malcolm was captured at the battle but released the following year for ransom. It was not until 1545-6 that his charter was completed and perhaps work began on the new church.

The foundation charter of Lord Fleming was remarkably written in his own hand and details all the requirements of the building and its organisation when completed. There was to be a *provost* who ruled over the church, eight office bearers called *prebendaries* who had various duties, all clearly stipulated, *four boys* were to be maintained with shaven crowns and gowns of blue and with unbroken voices, to sing in the church, *six poor men* were to be retained by the church and looked after, but they had to sit by the Fleming's tombs - and pray for them. The details of the charter is extraordinary and includes the daily and yearly rituals to be performed in the church. All of these details are given in Rutherford's book (*ibid*).

No sooner had this all been organised, and the church nearly completed when Fleming and many of his retainers were off to war again. In 1547 the 'Rough Wooing' by the now deceased Henry VIII was still being conducted. The English arrived at Pinkie to the east of Edinburgh where they were met by the Scots and gave the home team another resounding defeat. This time Lord Malcolm Fleming perished with many of his men.

Nevertheless, Fleming had made provision in his will, completed before marching to his death, for the completion of his new church, still believing that the looming Reformation would not succeed. He stipulated that funds be made for the completion of the church and offices and for vestments, chalices etc for its running, but most importantly that should he die from any cause including falling on the battlefield, his body should be found, returned to Biggar and buried in his church. It is likely that the first solemn occasion enacted in the church would be the founder's own funeral.

Malcolm's son James was left to finalise the work, but he became preoccupied with his services to the Queen (Mary) and as late as 1558 when he died in France his will stated that his brother John should finalise the work including the building of their father's tomb. So even at this late period the church was not completed at least as far as internal arrangements were concerned, nor were the entire organisation of the services, and perhaps office bearers in place. The *Collegium* may never have functioned as such. In 1560, the Reformation was truly established, and Catholic doctrine and mass were made illegal by Act of Parliament, and many churches were vandalised in the name of the new religious principles.

The Post Reformation history of the building, its ministers, patrons and practices continues to the present and makes fascinating and often exciting reading; for example, during the Covenanting period, Restoration of the Monarchy (Charles II) followed by the Glorious Revolution, problems with Patronage, the various secessions and several restorations of the building itself, all are fully and competently given by the two publications given above and

will not be repeated here in any detail, the main purpose of this paper is the building itself and to be used as an aid for visitors to the church.

Early illustrations of the church

Caution must be exercised regarding early illustrations because of ‘artists licence’ and modifications in copying from drawings and paintings to woodcuts and engravings. They are nevertheless valuable for the most part in showing how buildings did change over time, but the devil is in the detail.

The earliest known depiction of the church is on Timothy Pont’s map dated 1596 and when the church was only about fifty years old. It has been shown that many of Pont’s illustrations of buildings are fairly accurate and the example of Biggar church (Pl 4) is a good case in point. The building is given as a cross shaped church but of course there is hardly any other detail. He also shows Boghall Castle accurately surrounded by a D shaped wall and, tantalisingly, the town as a series of towers connected by walls. It is possible that a 14th century map of Great Britain (Pl 5a) may show a church in Biggar, but historical records do show a church existed in the 12th C.



Pl 4. Biggar Kirk on Pont’s map, 1596.



Pl 5. Biggar Kirk Communion token.

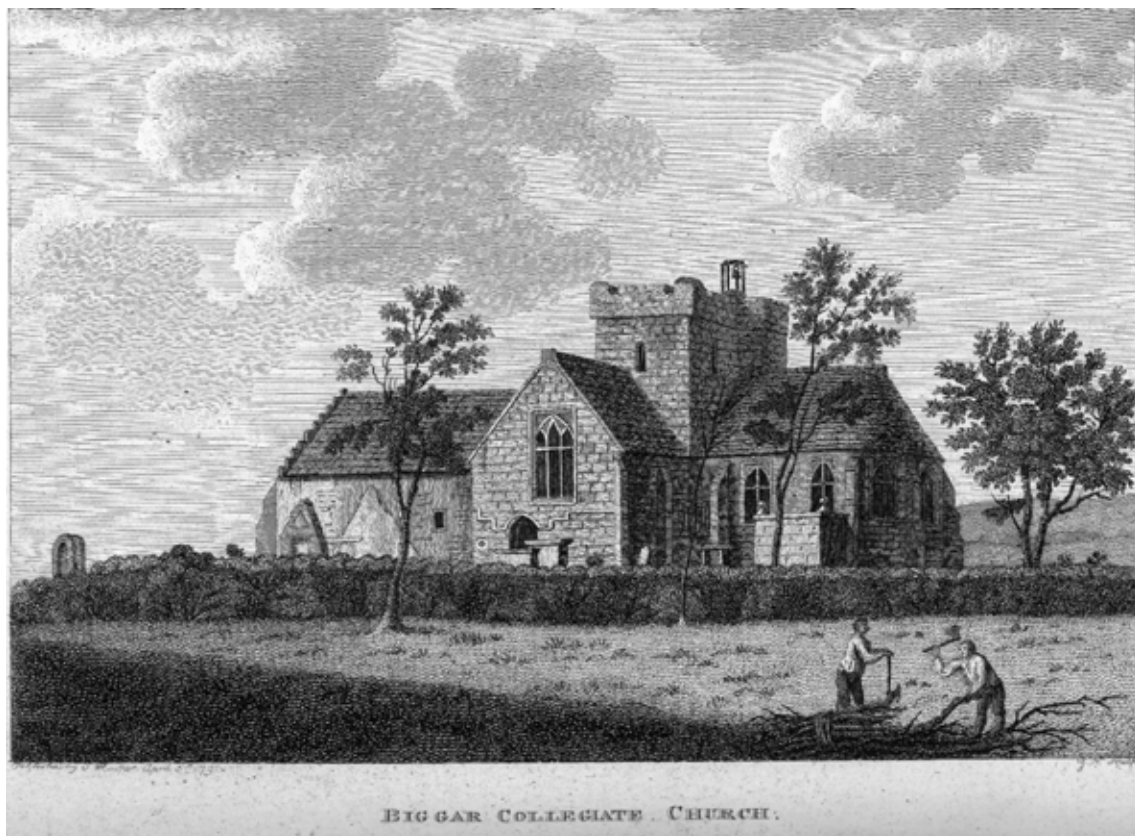


Pl 5a. Buildings in Biggar, Lanark and Peebles on a map of Great Britain dated to 1325 – 1350, original in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The buildings are likely to be churches as the other buildings appear to represent castles.

In 1759 according to the square lead communion tokens which survive (Pl 5), the church, styled ‘Biggar Kirk’ had a porch door where the present one is, the scar of this earlier porch still exists (Pl 6), but instead of a door in the south transept, two windows are given and the upper one does not show the reality in size of the original there. Two small rectangular windows are shown on the south wall of the nave which don’t concur with other early illustrations, but a pennant on a bell tower is shown beside the crenulated main tower. The roof seems to depict lead sheets rather than slates, but that may not have been the case. Interestingly the die for this token was found in the Castlegate in Edinburgh and was acquired by Adam Sim of Coulter for his famous collections.

In 1789 Francis Grose published the first of his two volumes of ‘Antiquities of Scotland’ and in Vol I he gives an excellent illustration of the church (Pl 6), but interestingly captioned

“Published by J Hooper April 5th, 1790”. The illustration was drawn from a window in the then manse (Pl 2) which still exists as a house. He also gave a plan of the church (Pl 11) with interesting details, but as we will see below he formalised the alignment of the building. Here we are shown a ruinous porch with the scar of a gable and a small single rectangular window all on the south side of the nave. There is no buttress on the SW corner of the south transept, and an inexplicable circle is shown to the left of the arched doorway. No finials are shown on any roofs and the bell is mounted on a framework, not a stone tower as shown on the *earlier* communion token. Most telling are the facts that no gun ports are shown on the crenelated tower and the crow steps on the nave are numbered as nine. Only one illustration later shows the gun ports and in every other case the number of crow steps vary in number from ten to fourteen, while in reality there are nineteen! Grose also gives what appears to be an arch at the graveyard entrance, the arch may have been removed around 1797. Grose mentions the jousts which were probably still complete at that time. A tomb with two finials on the south chancel wall no longer exists.



Pl 6. Grose’s illustration of Biggar Collegiate Church (1789).

Rutherford’s book gives a view (Pl 7) entitled “From an engraving dated 1857” but does not accord a source. Here we see a non-porched door and a small window on what appears to be a whitewashed nave, and it has an inexplicable chimney at its western gable end. The nave appears as foreshortened compared to the chancel. Importantly the main tower *is* given with the gun port on the south side and two waterspout holes which may be compared exactly with what exists today (Pl 3). No bell mounting, or tower is shown but a rope contraption is shown on the SW corner of the tower exactly the same as later illustrations, but which also show the bell (e.g. Pl 8). The window in the south transept is shown with square panes. The remainder of the church east end is accurate, and sheep are grazing contentedly in the graveyard.



Pl 7. Illustration in Rutherford's book.

In 1864 and 1867 illustrations of the church are given by Irving and Hunter respectively in their excellent publications. Beginning with the earlier book the church view by Grose is repeated (Pl 6) with another (Pl 8) which seems to be the same as the one given by Rutherford (Pl 7) with some minor differences; a single window but no door porch is shown on the nave and the buttress on the SW corner correctly given in Rutherford is fudged on the later picture and could be taken as a separate building against the nave gable. The nave window (Pl 8) may be the one still seen as a blocked and formerly heavily barred opening just above the more modern vestry window (Pl 103), such a barred window is another aspect of a defensive building. The string course also given on Rutherford is missing in the later image, apart from a buttress, however, it does show the bell rope attached to a bracket and additionally shows the bell mounted on a support frame adjacent the top of the turn pike stair which appears roofless. A cross on a pole may be a lightning conductor.

Pl's 7, 8 & 10 also show a chimney on the west gable, given that a door existed there originally (Pl 112) this may be a mistake, as a chimney does exist just along the north wall of the nave (Pl 111), it served the heating boiler installed in 1871 on the south side of the nave, the flue must run across and under the nave floor. The earlier and later illustrations (Pl 6) and (Pl 9) do not show a chimney at the gable end.

Hunter gives another view (Pl 9) but this one is in some respects hypothetical as it depicts proposals for the 1871 restoration works, some of which were carried out. The entrance in the nave is shown with its present porch and finials on each side, and two large windows are appearing on the south wall of the nave in keeping with the style of the chancel window. The upper of the two windows on the left and which would have lighted the new gallery does not appear to have been built but the lower one is the present window of the vestry. The only other difference in this external view is that of the turn pike stair/bell tower. The hexagonal walls

were taken up to form a stone belfry but not with a conical roof as was proposed, but with crenelated wall tops in keeping with the main tower (Pl 3). The 1871 restoration saw many other changes within the church, but early illustrations are not known for any of these.



Pl 8. Illustration in The Upper Ward of Lanarkshire.



Pl 9. Illustration in Biggar and the House of Fleming.



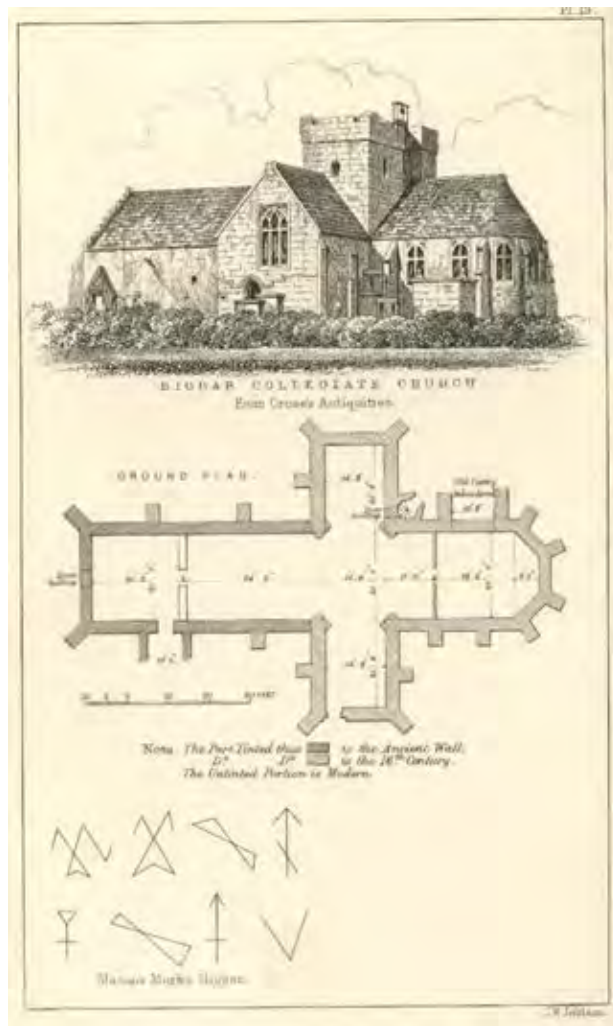
BIGGAR KIRK, from the North.

Pl 10. The only old rear view of the church known. Showing the line of the demolished chapter house and the external doorway to the stair. The nave window is fictitious.

The building

The church is built in cruciform shape (Pl 10 [Grose]) and it will be immediately clear that two distinctly different styles are represented. Because the church was originally the parish church, accommodation for the parishioners had to be provided. This took the shape of the nave and would have been the only part of the church the parishioners were allowed to frequent. It is built of random rubble 'plum whin', the locally quarried volcanic rock which most buildings in Biggar of the time and considerably later were made from, e.g. Boghall Castle. The nave only had a couple of small windows on the south wall, with another slit window on the north wall (Pl 110) and taken with its original earth floor must have been a rather inhospitably dark and damp place to worship.

The north and south transepts and the chancel however were an entirely different matter. They are built with ashlar on the external wall faces and from sandstone most probably quarried at Stanemuir near Carnwath. There is some debate whether the nave was already built and part of the earlier church which was supposedly removed to create the present building (at least the transepts, choir and tower). Grose was of the opinion that the existing nave is older than the chancel and crossing (see Pl 11).



Pl 11. The church plan and mason's marks from Grose's Antiquities of Scotland (1798).

The nave.

Dealing firstly with the simpler part of the church; the nave, whether or not it was built before or at the same time as the more refined east end:

It was an extremely plain hall like structure when first used, only two small windows existed in the south wall, and a possible one on the north side where the blocked evidence (Pl 110) may still be seen, and an arched door in the west gable (Pl 112) gave access to the church. The long walls had two buttresses each and the gable had two angled corner supports. The west end is interesting in having crow steps or 'corbies' on the gable wall and surmounting the apex at one time was a small stone cross. The skew putt [lowest stone in the gable coping] on the south side has the Earl of Wigton escutcheon carved on it, but it is difficult to discern unless the lighting is favourable.

Nevertheless, there may have been some

discord over it, as it is carved in reverse! (Pl 99), on it the Fleming chevrons are quartered with the Fraser cinquefoils – but the wrong way around. One might have expected such a mistake would have been noted at the time and been corrected. This anomaly was noted by Hunter (ibid) in his description of the church. It is possible that a similar carving existed on the north side of the nave gable.

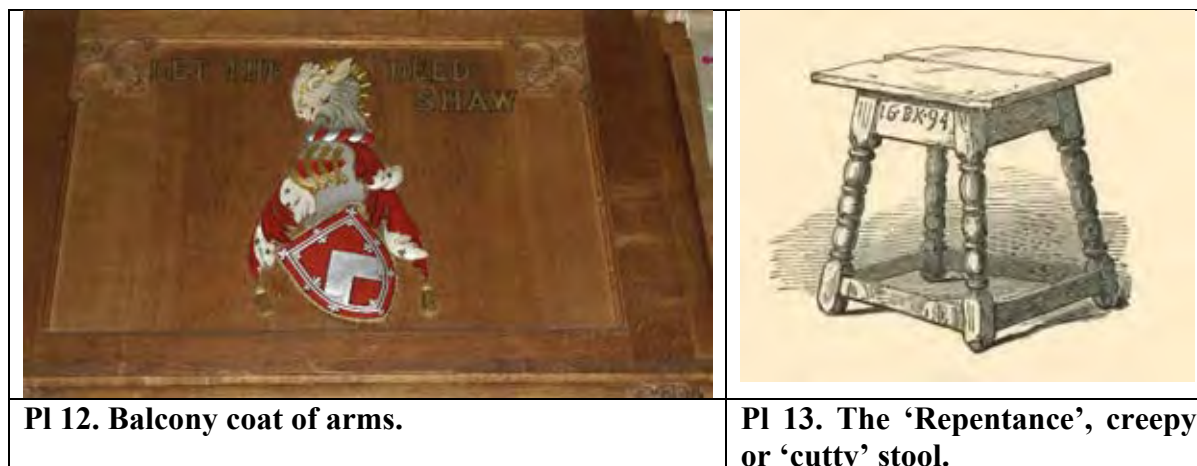
Later windows (1870) were inserted into the nave to compliment the styles of those in the chancel and they have now all been filled with colourful stain glass memorials, the latest being by the artist; the late Crear McCartney in 1991 to commemorate the Rae family, who were horticulturists in Biggar, and the theme is the 'Four Seasons' (see below).

The present door and porch are later constructions (1870) and were modified over time as various illustrations show. The intriguing scar of a gabled addition on the south side as seen in Pl 6 has been suggested by some as being an early transept, giving support to the theory that the nave is older than the chancel end, however, another theory is that it was a vestry before the present one was configured into the building.

A gallery was later built (1870) at the west end, and on its balustrade is the original Fleming shield, with motifs of a goat's head, and their motto 'Let the Deed Shaw'. The motto was the original Fleming motto as was the simple white chevron with a red background (Pl 12). "Let

the Deed Shaw” (show) was traditionally uttered by Sir Robert Fleming after Robert Bruce had murdered the Red Comyn in Greyfriars church in Dumfries in 1306.

Below the gallery is the vestry, its gable window was the original entrance into the nave. The original Romanesque roll moulded doorway frame survives intact down to the doorstep (Pl 112). The mullions and windowsill are clearly later insertions but still attempting to fit in style with the roll moulding of the earlier opening.



Of particular interest in the hallway is a ‘cutty stool’ inscribed “16BK94” (Pl 13), for its date and **Biggar Kirk**. Sometimes known as ‘the creepy’, the repentance stool replaced the even harsher joughs (below) for persons who were guilty of misdemeanour, at least as far as the kirk was concerned. The accused had to sit on the stool sometimes for several Sunday services, wearing a paper hat, below the pulpit for all to see and be publicly rebuked and humiliated for their offence.

Like all churches, Biggar had its communion tokens of lead in the days before the modern paper or card types. One early example dates from 1759 (Pl 5) and has an excellent depiction of the church at that time, showing features, and it is one of the earliest illustrations of the building. Examples of the tokens are held in the church and at Biggar Museum.

All of the chancel end of the church, the transepts and cross tower are built with fine ashlar outside in contrast to the nave. The walls are heavily buttressed with watershed tables. The window openings are all original although that in the north transept was lowered at a later time (1888) (Pl’s 27 & 29).

Masons marks Figs 1 – 4.

Twenty three masons marked can still be seen at various points on the external wall faces, however, in the recent restoration work (e.g. Pl 105) much chiselling of the stones surfaces has taken place, presumably to remove scaling stone, it is likely that many mason’s marks have been eroded. In some places parts of marks may survive but only where they can definitely be seen are they given here. The illustrations here with dotted lines show uncertainty with present marks. Such features are notoriously difficult to discern unless the lines are prominent and the lighting conditions are good, it is possible that others may exist, especially on those parts of the walls obscured by gravestones, however it is certain that many have been removed by

natural scaling of the stone surfaces and by insensitive chiselling in recent times. Those seen by the writer are described here in anti-clockwise direction, all are to be found on the chancel and transepts and buttresses. Comparison may be had by the few given by Grose in Pl 10.

No 01. West wall of the south transept. Downward pointing arrow with a crossed shaft above. Total height 60mm.

No 1. North side of the buttress on the west wall of the south transept. 'Half' arrows crossed and with end joined to form a delta shape and with a single line running upwards from it. Total size 80mm by 65mm. This is the only example of its types noted in the survey.

No 2. North side of the buttress on the west wall of the south transept. Same shape as No 1 but turned anti clockwise and without the extending line. 80mm long.

No 3. South side of the buttress on the west wall of the south transept. Triangle with crossed line on left side. Length 50mm.

No 4. South transept west wall. Inverted triangle, 35mm.

No 5. South transept west wall. 'Half ' arrow pointing downwards with crossed shaft above. 50mm height.

No 6. South transept west wall. Triangle, 35mm.

No 7. South transept west wall. Inverted triangle, 35mm.

No 8. South transept east wall, south of mid buttress. Inverted triangle with downwards shaft half crossed. 50mm high.

No 8a. South transept east wall, south of mid buttress. Inverted triangle 30mm.

No 9. South transept east wall, north of mid buttress. Triangle 30mm.

No 10. South transept east wall, north of mid buttress. Triangle with crossed shaft above. 50mm high. [Low level at drainpipe].

No 11. West side of left buttress on chancel south wall. Arrow pointing right with angled line on shaft. 95mm long.

No 12. West side of left buttress on chancel south wall. Crossed 'half' arrows with other possible lines. 80mm long.

No 13. West side of left buttress on chancel south wall. Arrow pointing left with angled line on shaft tail. 110mm long.

No 14. Chancel south wall beside apse buttress. Triangle with crossed shafts on left side. 85mm long.

No 14a. Chancel south wall apse buttress face.

No 15. Chancel south side apse buttress. Arrow pointing right with possible angled crossed shaft. 90mm long.

No 16. Chancel south side apse buttress. Arrow pointing left [High level] 60mm long.

No 17. Chancel south side apse buttress. Arrow pointing left with vertical line on shaft end. 85mm long.

No 17a. Chancel south side apse buttress. Triangle with crossed upper point lines. 60mm long.

No 18. Chancel end near Wardlaw memorial. Arrow pointing right with angled line crossing shaft. 70mm long.

No 19. Chancel end north buttress of apse [north side of], triangle with extended line to left and possible other, 65mm long.

No 20. Chancel north wall beside stair tower. Double vertical lines with angled ends, top to the left and bottom to the right, total height 75mm and space between lines 10mm. At low level.

No 21. Chancel north wall beside stair tower. Crossed diagonal lines with right side possibly closed to form a triangle, 85mm long, at low level.

No 22. Base of stair tower, north wall of chancel. Arrow pointing right, 70mm long.

No 23. Chancel north wall beside stair tower. Arrow pointing left with angled line crossing shaft, 70mm long, at low level beside drainpipe.

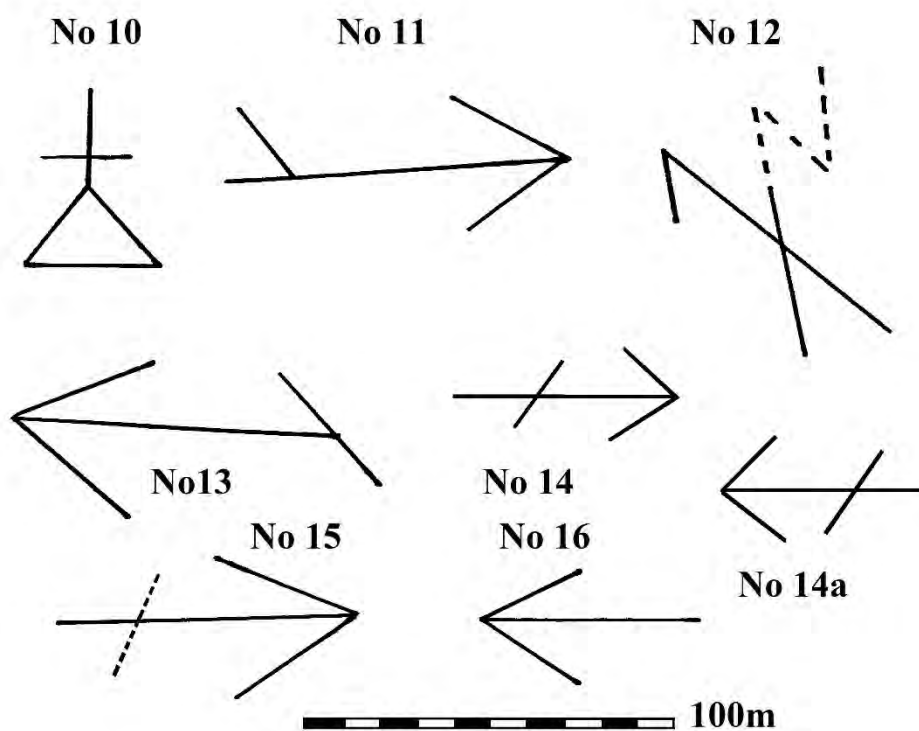


Fig 3. Mason's marks.

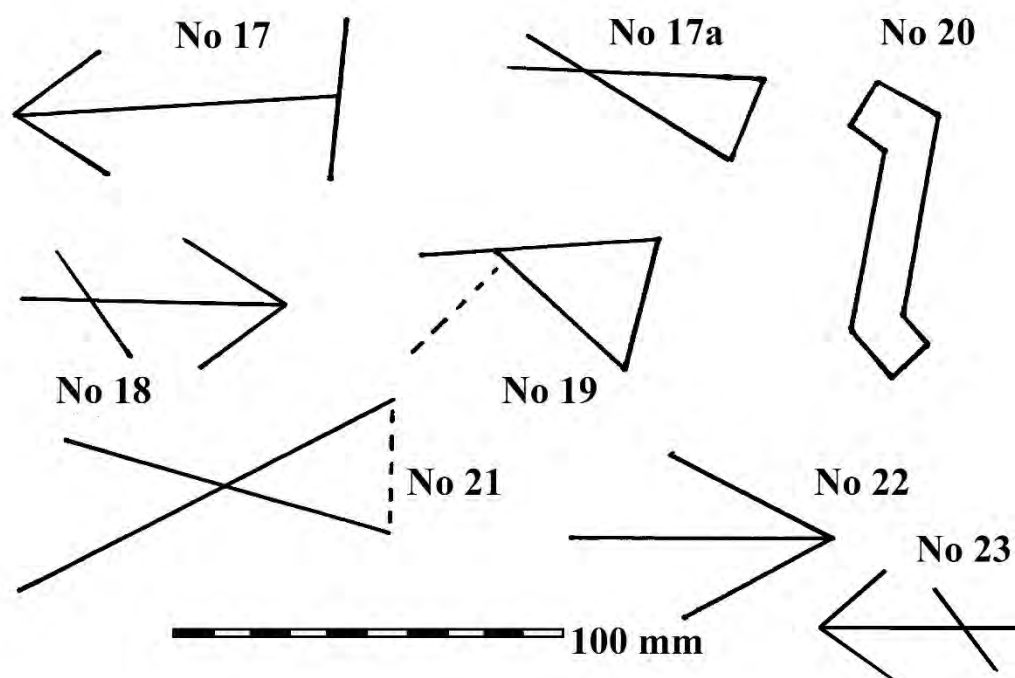






Fig 4. Mason's marks.

				
Pl's 14 - 17	Masons marks	Compare with Pl 10		

The transepts.

The north and south transepts on Biggar Kirk create a perfectly proportioned Christian cross (Pl 10) and the cruciform shapes of catholic or pre-reformation churches is very common.

The south transept has the principal entrance (Pl's 18 & 105) to the original church for office bearers, the founder and other dignitaries. The 'common people' would have used the west doorway (Pl 112) of the nave (now a vestry window). The Norman 'style' transept doorway is interesting as it contrasts with the windows which are 'Scottish' Gothic, although the two styles are often seen side by side in Scottish churches. The top arch door moulding continues on both sides as tracery and runs around both transepts and the chancel, giving some relief to the appearance of the walls. The central moulding is only around the top of the doorway, it was supported on each side by now missing columns. The inner moulding continues to ground level and although there is much erosion of the stones, their original form can still be appreciated (Pl 18). Compare with the original west doorway on the nave, now a vestry window (Pl 112).

	
Pl 18. South transept door with jousts chain on left & OS benchmark below.	Pl's 19 & 20. Biggar Kirk jousts chain (left) and Greenhill reproduction jousts installed by the writer (right)



Pl 21. Stamps into the lead plug of the joughs: JC and RJC with a possible O below.
Photo J Ness.



Pl 22. Illustration in Biggar & House of Fleming showing the joughs in 1862, exactly the same as today.

To the left of the door are parts of the 17th century joughs chain (Pl's 18 & 19) which held the iron two piece neck collar, and which was the precursor of the cutty stool (see above). Here the offender would be made to stand shackled to the wall and facing all who entered the church, a large padlock on the joughs prevented any form of escape from the humiliation. Hunter (ibid) mentions that possible traces of juvenile joughs can be seen lower down on the other side of the door, whatever they were, nothing of these are to be seen today, much of the stonework has been modified, they may have been removed during restoration work. However, Hunter does show the joughs to be exactly the same as today (Pl 22).

A complete set of original joughs still exists on the church at Dunsyre, but more closely, a replica set can be seen on the wall of Greenhill Farmhouse Museum in Burn Braes (Pl 20), however, the chain is liberally too long, see the collar fragment on the church with only a single link attached to the wall, the offender would have his or her head rubbing against the stone! Of particular interest are stamped marks into the lead plug of the joughs (Pl 21), one set has JC, and another has RJC with a possible O below. Other possible initials may have been more rudely incised with a chisel. The purpose and meaning of these marks is not understood but they do appear to be official, perhaps to show that the lead plug had not been tampered with, but that is speculation.

On the left of the church door at a lower level is an OS benchmark carved into the wall, it gives an unmarked height of 726 feet (221m) OD (above sea level).

The interest in this doorway continues and an aspect never mentioned before, it is the fact that it has once been protected on the inside by a stout bar, the evidence of which survives behind the door on each side (Pl's 23 & 24). These aspects were discovered during the 1934 restoration work. Such a feature is normally considered defensive, re-enforcing a door against unwanted entrance is not quite the type of thing expected on a house of God? This door is designed to keep people out! And taken with the gun ports and crenellations on the cross tower and the heavily barred window (Pl 103) (below), it all smacks of a church in need of protection, seemingly a hedging of bets against the looming Reformation and its adherents?

Sadly in recent years the church has again been fortified against wanton vandals by being locked with a stout metal gate in the porch, once it was open all day for visitors, now one must be lucky to find a volunteer in attendance or make a special arrangement for entry out with church sermons and events.

The large south transept, triple lancet window set within a rectangular space, contains a stain glass memorial to the extremely popular Rev John Christison (Pl's 91 & 105), who was minister of the church for fifty years from 1823 and who was responsible for the first major restoration completed in 1871, the window also commemorates his wife and the minister had the pleasure of seeing it installed in his lifetime. This restoration work finally replaced the earth floors within and created the large windows in the nave, which were eventually filled with stain glass.



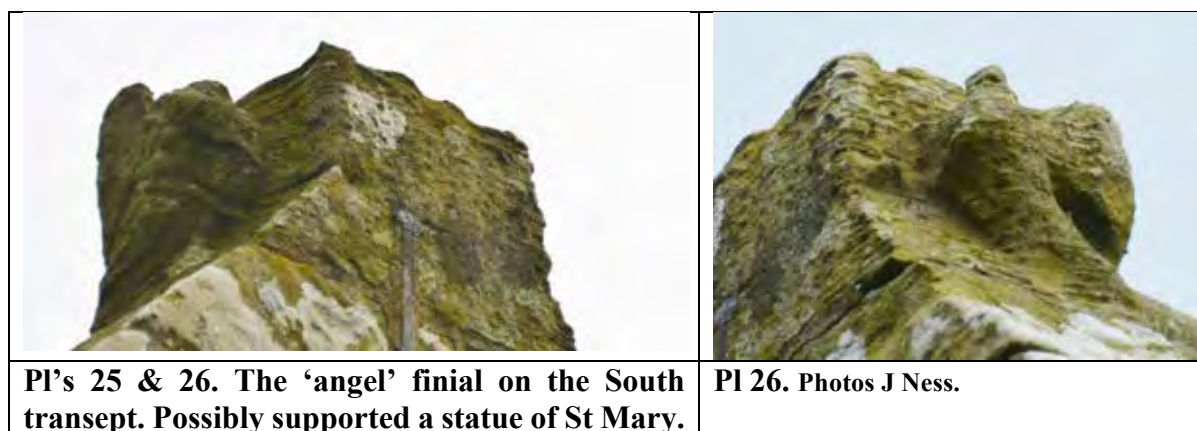
Pl 23. Door bar slot at the south transept door.



Pl 24. Door bar groove, behind the south transept door.

Plate 22 also shows the style of windows before the installation of stain glass in the later 19th century, these appear to have been square panes in leaded frames.

The south transept gable has an important detail in its finial (Pl's 25 & 26), the stone has been anchored with an iron staple, but on each side there are traces of carved figures. These have been interpreted as angels which may have supported a statue of the Virgin Mary, being a representation of the Assumption when Christ and the Apostles were said to have transported her body and spirit to heaven. In the charter of January 1546 Malcolm states this was the invocation submitted by him to Cardinal Beaton. The festival was celebrated on August 15th each year. Of course, like all catholic adornment in Scottish churches, these would be defaced or destroyed after the Reformation, however, just enough survives to tell of another little aspect of the pre-reformation church in Biggar.



All of the church roofs including the more recent organ room have stone ridges and the wall heads have eave drip stones which cast water from the roof away from the walls before the advent of gutters.

The north transept is also interesting and beginning with its original window (Pl's 27 & 29); this was lowered in 1888 to allow light below a gallery which was then installed there and which at one time had an organ, access to this former gallery was via an offshoot stair (Pl 28) which was built in 1888 from the original turnpike stair. The block doorway to the former gallery is no longer discernible on the internal east wall (Pl 31). Strangely, two iron pintle hinges (Pl 29) are located on the window sides below the cross bar, these could only have served for shutters. The apex of the gable wall is known to have had a stone cross finial on it, a fragment of which remains (Pl's 29 & 30), it is likely that each gable had a finial of some sort, the one on the south side possibly being the Virgin Mary's assumption.

A recess (Pl 32) in the transept east wall has no obvious function and its date of construction is uncertain, however it is suspected as being a late feature in the building's history.

Externally, the north transept buttresses have been repaired to some extent around 1871.



Pl 27. The lowered north transept window, note the three lower courses of new stone on each side but the original sill has been re-used.



Pl 28. Extension stair to former north transept gallery. The lower slit window was re-built at the same time in 1888. The upper two slit windows are roll moulded 1540's.



Pl 29 & 30. Cross finial on north transept and lowered window (1888). Note the two hinges high on each side.



Pl 31. The north transept doorway to the internal gallery (now removed) & Pl 32 the inexplicable wall recess.

The doorway leading to the tower stair has seen some changes in its history. It appears to have been the original entrance to the turnpike stair, however Grose shows it (Pl 11) as 'door builtup' and with an external door to the stair. That concurs with the image in Plate 10; the sketch by Mr Drummond RSA. In 1888, the old internal doorway must have been reinstated and at the same time the external one was built up and replaced by the more modern slit window there.

The internal doorway (Pl 33) as seen today has the entire original lintel but only the outer roll mouldings of the jambs on each side are original, the inner roll mouldings are replacements and they must have been cut out during the various alterations. On the left side is a stone showing people have been sharpening knives on it (Pl 34).



Pl 33. The tower entrance with altered stonework.



Pl 34. incisions caused by sharpening blades.



Pl 35. View through the nave to the chancel with Gothic arches of the tower crossing.
Photo J Ness.

The chancel (Pl 35) with its apsidal east end and three *original* windows; finally completed in 1871 with stain glass (below), has an interesting story, some of the clues of which can be traced on the building.

Firstly, on the north side, a chapter house, (later used as the vestry), was originally built to facilitate the office bearers to have their business meetings. This was pulled down in the 19th C but later re-built on the original lines as an organ room (Pl 41) which it is currently used for, the organ was installed in 1934. When the wall was opened for the organ pipes (Pl 38), an earlier piscina was discovered, it had been reused as an ordinary building stone. This is now built into the south wall of the chancel (Pl 36) and is reckoned as being a relic of the 12th century stone church; it was the wash basin to clean the communion vessels after use.

A mysterious high level door in the north wall (Pl 37) once led to an organ loft above the rood screen, it was accessed from the turn pike stair, behind the door is a space of 0.3m deep, being the blocked up doorway, however on a part of the stair wall a piece of missing plaster reveals the door lintel on that side (Pl 51). Traces where the timber rood screen was fixed to the columns on either side of the chancel arch may be seen to have been plugged with stone.



Pl 36. 12th century piscina, the sink for washing sacred vessels, discovered in 1934. Photo J Ness.



Pl 37. The original access to the rood screen crossing and organ loft, discovered in 1934. Photo J Ness.



Pl 38. The organ room with war memorial and original chapter house entrance.



Pl 39. The War Memorial for The Great War.



Pl 40. The original chapter house doorway.

The doorway (Pl's 38 & 40) into the organ room is the original which once led to the chapter house, the original 'roll moulded' lintel survives but the door jambs are modern. Adjacent to this is the bronze memorial to those twenty five Biggar men who lost their lives in The Great War (Pl 39).

The font basin (Pl 42) was installed in 1934 and it came from a Biggar garden at that time, it was possibly a bowl or pot quern for the hand grinding of grain, they are often referred to as 'knocking stanes' because of the pounding action to mill the grain.



Pl 41. The organ room, built on the original line the chapter house. Note the finials are the same as the main porch built in 1870. The ashlar stone matches the rest of the chancel. It has a fake window. Note also the changes in building line on the stair tower at roof level and then the final topping off in 1870 to form the present bell tower.

Pl 42. The font installed in 1934 "from a Biggar garden"!



The three apse and two south wall windows are original but with 19th century stain glass and replacement stone in the sides and mullions. The windows are described below.



Pl 43. The apsidal end of the church. The apse had the first stain glass installed in the church in 1871 (see Pl's 86-88 & 98). The Wardlaw memorial is below the window.

The internal walls and probably the ceilings were most likely colourfully painted prior to the Reformation, it is recorded in many places that such decoration was stripped or obliterated from churches during the beginnings of the new doctrine of the Reformation. Crockett (1900) states that "in 1795 the organ loft, fine oak ceiling and emblazoned escutcheons and the whole daubed with a thick, odious coating plaster and whitewash" existed. The walls were stripped of plaster in 1871 and pointed to present the austere appearance seen today. However, if any previous decoration did exist, there is no longer any record or evidence for it, particular attention was given in the survey of the roof timbers in the attic (below), but no decoration was seen.

All of the present timber ceilings (e.g. Pl 44) were installed in 1871 when many of the old timbers of the roof were replaced and presumably the plaster and lathe ceilings were pulled down (see attic below).



Pl 44. The chancel wooden ceiling replaced a plaster and lathe one in 1871. The first electric lights were installed in 1934.



Pl 45. St Mary's Aisle Carnwath, tomb of the Sommerville's.



Pl 46. St Brides in Douglas, tomb of the Douglas's.

The Fleming burial place/s.

Malcolm Fleming clearly states in his will, made before he went off to his death at the Battle of Pinkie (1547), that his body (if killed) was to be found and be buried within his church. It is not certain whether his wishes were actually carried out or not, although it is likely. The normal practice for landowners was to be buried with their families in the most consecrated ground possible; inside a church and usually in the chancel area, or in special side aisles and chapels. At Both the collegiate church of Carnwath (Pl 45) and Douglas church (Pl 46) and there are effigy tombstones for the Somerville's and Douglas's respectively, but unfortunately no such monument survives for Biggar. It is possible that such features at Biggar were destroyed after the Reformation, since it seems likely that such prominent memorials would have been installed by the Flemings, who were after all, one of the most prominent households of Scotland. Malcom's tomb was certainly not completed by the time his son James had died in 1558, whether the second son John completed any elaborate burial tomb is unknown.

It is certain that many of the Fleming family were buried below the floor of the chancel but what remains is unknown. Burial *within* Scottish churches became illegal after the reformation and there are several instances of landed families, including the Flemings resisting the law and continuing to bury within ‘their’ churches – and be censored for it, but often with impunity.

Such is the case with the last Fleming to be buried within the church; Lady Clementina in 1799, and there is an urban myth (which may be true) that during the restorations in 1871 a gold ring was removed from her body and was retained by a local family. It had an inscription “ In thee my choice I do rejoice” [Brian Lambie pers comm].

The pulpit appears to have changed places periodically (Fig 7).

The tower, turnpike stair and crossing set the scene for the joining of the various arms of the cruciform church.

Firstly the four gothic arches supporting the tower spring from rather austere semi hexagonal double pilasters (Pl 47), the arches themselves, although graceful (Pl 49) are simply formed with a top arch moulding supported on oak? leaf bosses (Pl’s 48 & 50). The lower ends of this moulding have been carelessly planned and built as some do not match equally (Pl 48), one of the bosses sitting on top of another while another single boss supports two mouldings (Pl 50).



Pl 47. The Gothic arches supporting the tower.



Pl 48. Mismatched leaf bosses.





Pl 49. The Gothic arches supporting the tower.



Pl 50. Single boss for two arches.

The turn pike stair is accessed via a roll moulded doorway (above) (Pl 33) and immediately inside on the left, the way to the former gallery in the north transept leads up to the blocked doorway. The access to the rood screen loft must have been from the turn pike stair, and there is an indication of a lintel showing where plaster has scaled off the curving wall (Pl 51). Sixty three clockwise steps brings the visitor to the roof top level, but before reaching the roof there is the tower room (Pl 54), the only points of interest within is a simple unfinished fireplace and four lancet windows with clear leaded glass (Pl 53), these windows were blocked with stone slabs in 1867, if that was from the beginning is unknown, however good views along the roof ridges to the finials are had from these windows, especially to the cross on the north transept (Pl's 29 & 30). The windows on the N, S and W sides are centrally position to look along the roof ridges but the chancel one is offset to the south side. Accesses to the transept roof spaces has been rudely knocked through the walls; that to the north is via the back of the unfinished but original fireplace (Pl 54), whose chimney can be seen blocked up on the roof parapet (Pl 56). However the access tunnels to the nave and chancel attics appear to be original or at least earlier concepts of the building. Access to the nave and transepts was also gained via hatches which can be seen in the gable ends of the present timber ceilings on each, these hatches would have served for maintenance to the roof ventilator systems also installed in 1871, but when the electricity lighting was installed in 1934 cables etc had to pass from one attic to the other, hence the holes through the walls.

There is a reference to the room being used as a library at one point.

	
<p>Pl 51. The rood loft doorway lintel?</p>	
	
<p>Pl 52. The bell</p>	<p>Pl 53. Tower room north window.</p>

The church bell (Pl 52) is mounted at the top of the turnpike stair in the extension to the tower, which was built with crenellations in 1871, in keeping with the style of the main roof parapet. The bronze bell has nothing of note to commend it, it has no inscription, it measures 0.5 in total height and is 0.46m in diameter at the open end and has an iron clapper.

At this point a short flight of steps leads to the roof, sometimes known as ‘the lead loft’ because it was sheeted with lead. At the foot of the steps are two pintle hinges set in the doorway but these could not have held a door which would have to have opened on to the step, which obviously would have blocked it. It may be that the original roof level was lower, and access was by this door, or it may be that a change of plan meant the door was not required.



Pl 54. The tower room with fireplace, north window and doorway.

The roof of the tower gives commanding views (Pl's 55 - 62) in all directions over the town and beyond to the various ranges of hills in each direction. However the first points to note are the embrasures and gun ports on the parapet walls. The gun port on the north wall is offset to make allowance for the tower room fireplace chimney which is now blocked up on the wall top. The 1871 bell tower which replaced wooden structures seen in early illustrations is seen close up.

The view to the south (Pl 60) is towards the Hartree Hills with Cardon and Coulter Fell (hills). At one point; Cross Cryne, Edward II determined the borders between Scotland and England would meet – it never happened! However this was the route for armies coming to and from Tweeddale and Clydesdale, a hoard of silver pennies from the reigns of Edward I and II was found there. The view south is also over the sad remains of Boghall Castle, the ancestral home of the Flemings and used at the time the church was built. The tall spire of the former Gillespie church is prominent.

Looking west (Pl 61) over the former Moat Park church one sees the mighty Tinto Hill upon which lies one of the largest prehistoric burial cairns in Scotland. The nearby Knock Hill overlooks the town and it was here that much of the town buildings stone was quarried including that for the church nave and Boghall Castle.

Looking north west (Pl 57 & 62), on the left side is Biggar Common on the horizon, here, at two locations the Biggar Archaeological Group have excavated the two largest collections of Early Neolithic pottery to be found in Scotland so far, and one is the earliest dated at c 5900 years ago. On the right side is Bizzyberry Hill, also prominently overlooking the town, it has two Iron Age hillforts on its ridge.

Looking east over the chancel (PL 59) is the top end of Biggar at 700 feet above sea level, the Corn Exchange clock tower is visible on the main Street. Beyond in the distance are the Broughton Heights and the start of the Scottish Borders.

Magnificent views are obtainable *from* all these hills which also abound in archaeological sites of all periods in Scotland, dating back 14,000 years.



Pl 55. The author (right) and assistant Gordon Porteous.



Pl 56. Looking N, the offset gun port (left) and embrasure (right). The blocked chimney is in the centre.



Pl 57. View north west to Biggar Common.



Pl 58. View north to Bizzyberry.



Pl 59. View east to the Border Hills.



Pl 60. View south to Hartree Hills, Cardon, Coulter Fell and Cross Cryne.



Pl 61. View west to Tinto and Knock Hills.



Pl 62. View north west showing embrasures, central gun port and Biggar Common.

Attic spaces. Figs 5 & 6. Plates 63 – 72.

The roof of the church, or more correctly the four roofs, have many original roof trusses or parts of them in situ, however numerous complete trusses have been replaced during the various restorations and *additional* modern roof trusses have been inserted *between* the originals, the spacing between which vary from 26" to 33". The cross sections of the truss members also varies somewhat, and one in the nave was recorded as; the long main timbers being 7"x5", the main horizontal as 6"x6" and the upper horizontal as 5"x5" and the lower angle truss being >5"x5". The lengths of the truss parts vary from attic to attic as the nave roof is highest, with the chancel slightly lower and the transepts both the same but being the lowest. All joints between truss components are by angled mortice and tenon and pinned with one or two wooden pegs. None of the original sarking boards survive, therefore all of the roofs have been re-covered with both timber and slates at some point/s. The original roof trusses are of oak, a partial truss displayed in Biggar Museum was analysed for species. An entire survey of the roofs was done by the writer and his assistant since it was known that some at least of the timbers were marked in Roman numerals, often an indication of pre-fabrication. Two forms of numbering were adopted; finely chiselled and uniform characters, and simple scratches. In some instances the original beams are obscured by later planking nailed to their sides thus covering possible marks. The nave and transepts have ceiling access hatches at their gable wall ends, this must have been the only access to the roof spaces before holes were crudely knocked through the tower room walls, probably in 1934 when electricity was first installed.

The four separate roofs; nave, chancel and two transepts are itemised as follows:

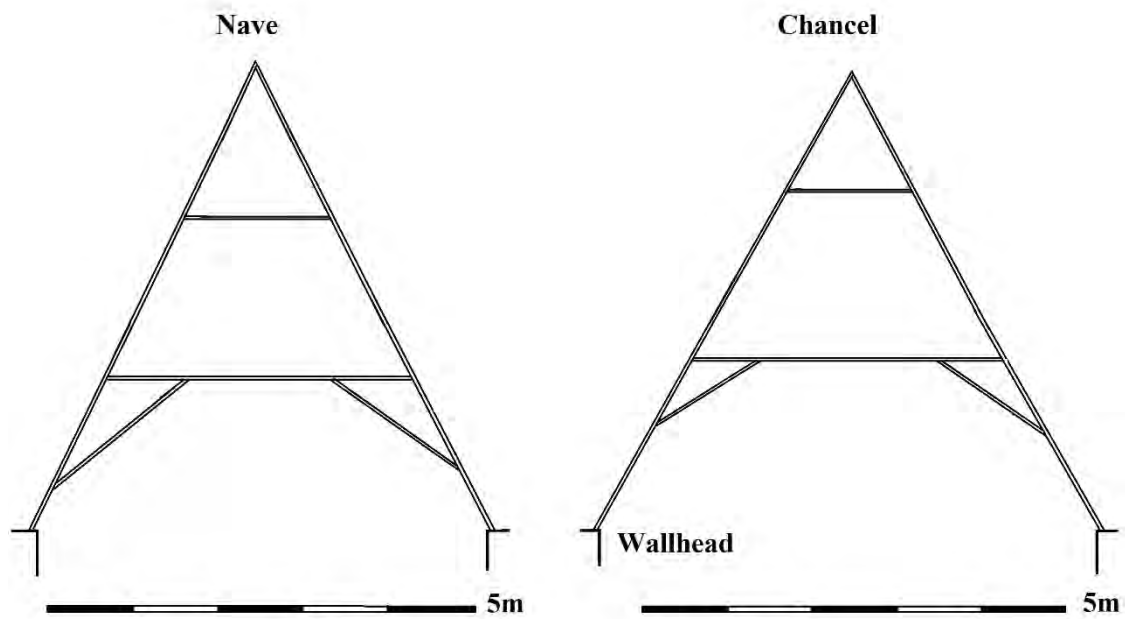


Fig 5. Nave and chancel roof trusses.

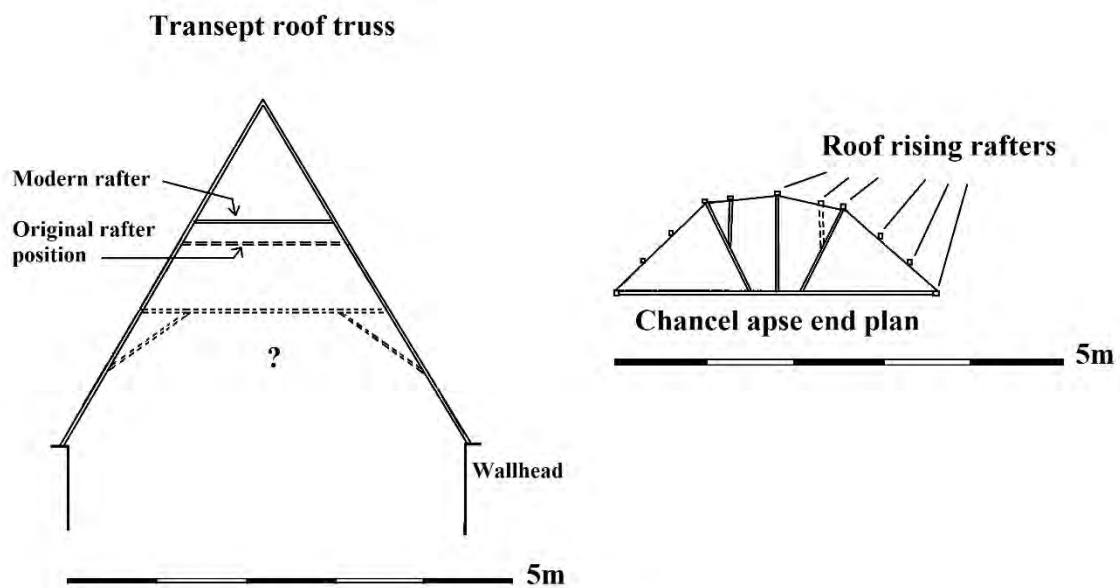


Fig 6. Transept roof truss and chancel apse plan.

Nave roof. Plates 63 – 66. Fig 5.

The entire length of the nave attic is 71.1m measured between the gable and tower walls. The dimensions of the roof truss section are as follows; Long rafters 6.1m, top ties 1.7m, rafter/tie 3.3m and struts 1.35m . The nave roof is higher than the other three. There are nineteen original roof trusses of a possible twenty three, and some of these have missing components, e.g. many do not have their lower angle trusses. It is also obvious that many cross members are not in original positions as they have open mortise slots on the upper and edge sides of the beams, several have their neatly cut Roman numerals upside down. They are recorded starting from the nave gable end and are numbered here as ‘positions’ with nineteen actual trusses surviving within the range of a possible twenty three.

Positions 1 – 3 replaced by modern trusses.

Position 4 has the lower angle trusses missing, the remainder are chisel marked IIII. Some joints have two dowels.

Position 5 has the lower angle trusses missing, the remainder are chisel marked III with the top horizontal beam marked with an additional X (i.e. IIIX; a non-number unless inverted).

Position 6 has the lower angle trusses missing, some are chisel marked II, while one has VI but inverted, suggesting re-use of a timber.

Position 7 has the lower angle trusses missing and no marking is visible.

Position 8 has the lower angle trusses missing and the top horizontal truss is marked XII but inverted.

Position 9 the north main and top horizontal trusses are both upside down, some are chisel marked I, but the top horizontal truss has IXX, obviously the truss is not part of a set and has been installed in an inverted position to its original intended. The south long truss has a ‘star’ marked composed of three crossing scratches.

Position 10 has the lower angle trusses missing, all others are chisel marked XIII while the long south truss is additionally scratch marked with XI but with a circle on the X and another oblique X.

Position 11 has the lower angle trusses missing, all are marked with an overlapping V seen as a W, the top horizontal is further scratch marked with IX but is obviously upside down.

Position 12 is chisel marked with IIV and VII ! clearly the former is incorrectly marked.

Position 13 is replaced by modern trusses.

Position 14 is a *complete* set of trusses and *all* are chisel marked VIII.

Position 15 has the lower angle trusses missing, the top horizontal beam is chisel marked IIIX. One joint has a finely pointed dowel peg.

Position 16 and 17 are replaced by modern woodwork.

Position 18 is a complete set of trusses and *all* are marked XIII but each I is sloping away from the X. The top horizontal truss is clearly re-used in an upside down position as there are two vacant mortise holes on the upper side.

Position 19 is a *complete* truss set and *all* are chisel marked VIII, the upper horizontal truss has a neat patch on its southern side inserted with five dowels, this indicates a re-used truss. The north long truss has an X with a circle incised within it.

Position 20 is a *complete* set of trusses; *all* are marked X.

Position 21 is a *complete* set of trusses; *all* are marked XI. However there are previous hap lap slots cut in the top horizontal beam.

Positions 22 and 23 have been replaced by modern timber.

Position 24 has only the top horizontal truss showing, and it is chisel marked XI but with a sloping I between them.



Pl 63. Nave, typical apex joint.



Pl 64. Nave, typical cross beam joint with wooden peg.



Pl 65. Nave, typical re-use of beam in new position

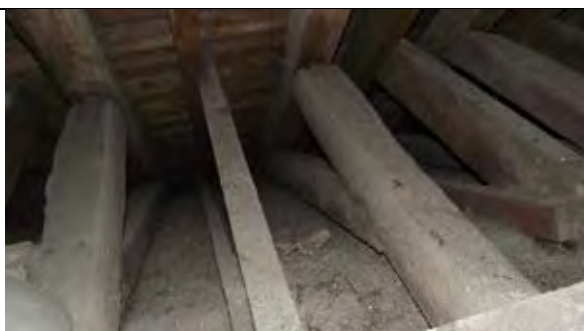


Pl 66. Nave, truss No 19, marked No 9.

Chancel roof. Plates 67 – 70.**Figs 5 & 6.**

The chancel roof is the most complete as far as original woodwork is concerned; most of the trusses are complete. Working from the tower wall, the first four trusses are totally modern (1871), measuring from the wall the distances to each old truss is as follows; 1.92m, 3.3m, 3.95m, 4.6m, 5.2m, 5.9m, 6.5m, 7.15m, 7.75m, 8.4m and 8.9m to the last one (which only has an original strut on the north side. The second truss in the sequence has rotten parts (old) and both struts missing. The fifth truss is marked VIII on all parts, but two numbers are reversed! It also has a displaced mortise joint on the lower beam. The tenth position has both struts missing. Therefore there are eleven original trusses and most in sequence. The main roof trusses measures as follows; long rafters 5.75m, top ties 1.65m, rafter/tie 3.3m and struts 1.2m.

The east end of the chancel is apsidal and therefore the roof is slightly more complicated. Three horizontal infill rafters fan out to form the roof shape (Pl 67 & Fig 6), the centre one is 0.9m long and the two angled beams are 1.1m. They are jointed into original roof rafters rising from the wall head and strengthening the two angle beams have been short struts which also tie into original roof rafters, however only that to the north survives. In between the main roof truss and both of the angle beams are a further two original roof rafters, making nine original apsidal roof rafters in total (excluding the main truss). Furthermore lower down each of the nine have been short vertical 'side posts' to strengthen them on the wall heads, only two survive and they are circa 1m high.

**Pl 67. Chancel, apse end.****Pl 68. Chancel, apse end showing lower angle trusses.****Pl 69. Chancel, showing matching pair of timbers with IIIIV. With insect repellent.****Pl 70. Chancel, showing lathe fragments surviving on underside.**

South Transept roof. Plates 71 & 72. Fig 6.

The south transept roof measured from the tower and gable walls internally is 5.7m long. There is only 1.2m clearance between the roof apex and the top tie, all of which are modern, and making access extremely restricted. The position of the *original* top tie is seen by the vacant mortise slots on the roof rafters being 1.8m down (on the angle) from the apex. There are eight original roof trusses and their positions from the tower wall are as follows; 0.15m, 0.9m, 1.65m, 2.35m, 3.1m, 3.85m, 4.55m, 5.51m and the last one is also 0.15m from the gable wall. There are no markings visible on the timbers. The main roof truss rafters measure 6.56m long, no other ancient dimensions are available.



North Transept roof. Fig 6.

The north transept roof measured from the tower walls internally is also 5.7m long. However, due to an in situ metal ventilator (1871?) placed centrally in the roof space, access beyond it was not attempted. Nevertheless, six original roof trusses were seen but no markings were recorded. The dimension of each transept are therefore assumed to be the same.

Roof timber discussion.

The original roof trusses construction has been entirely by mortise and tenon joints pinned with wooden pegs. Only truss parts survive, and many are missing. The timbers are 'rough' sawn for the most part and vary slightly in cross section (circa 100 – 150mm).

A section of a Kirk roof joint is displayed in Biggar Museum and this was analysed and shown to be oak, presumably they all were of this type of wood. But the sarking is likely to have been pine. No original sarking (planking) on the roofs exists which is a pity as this would almost certainly have shown that slates were fixed by the economy of using wooden pegs rather than individually made iron nails, as is known from the nearby Newlands Church near Peebles. Sarking analysed from Hyndford House (c1640) in Lanark showed it to be pine, probably Baltic pine and this may have been the case at Biggar Kirk.

Much of the roof timbers are therefore modern, possibly all dating to the major 1871 restoration work. It seems that much of the old wood was removed and many surviving trusses had to be straightened or realigned by the addition of new timber, and completely new trusses being inserted in the gaps between the originals which were spaced approximately at 30" [760mm] intervals.

Because of the high incidence of timbers in the nave bearing inverted Roman numbers and the 'spare' mortise slots on the horizontal beams it is clear that two possibilities present themselves; one is that the roofs have undergone numerous repairs - or possibly that second-hand timbers have been used originally. The latter idea is given more credence since some of the timbers which appear as secondary, are still numbered in concordance with their fellows on those particular trusses.

If the theory of second-hand timbers being used originally is correct it does seem surprising as the church has been built to a reasonably high standard, however, the cost of timber and its transport must have been significant and if second-hand wood became available, it is possible that was what happened.

It is unknown whether *originally* the roofs were obscured from below by a ceiling and/or if any had been painted or were otherwise decorated as references in Rutherford's book suggest, no trace of such was seen in this survey. However, at the chancel end it was clear that plaster and lathe had covered the ceiling there as was evidenced by pieces of lathe surviving, fixed with tiny iron nails about 10mm long.

The original timbers are all seen to have woodworm holes, hopefully inactive, but in general they are rigid timbers. No trace of bats living in the attics was observed nor wasp nests as one may have expected in such an old roof, this may be due to the fact that insect repellent devices have been hung in each attic space.

Perhaps significantly the roofs are different heights with the nave being higher than the chancel and the transepts lower than the chancel. Plate No 9 shows this but the later survey plan, and one would have assumed the more accurate; the Cluny drawings (Pl 76 & 78) show the nave and chancel as the same height, serving as a hint of caution when viewing illustrations, regardless of who executed them. The main difference is the higher height of the nave and this may lend some support to Grose's theory that the nave was already in existence when the rest was added.

Bell tower and external roof.

The top of the turnpike stair now contains the small church bell (Pl 52), whose rope descends the stair to the entrance door within the church. The bronze bell has no legend or inscription, it measures 0.5m in total height from the canon (hanger) to the mouth but 0.37 from the crown (bell top) to the mouth, the latter is 0.46m in diameter and the bell has an iron clapper.

The bell tower is crowned by crenellations or embrasures (Pl's 56 & 109) similar to the main tower walls, giving the appearance of battlements. The stair tower was capped off in the 1871 restorations. The most extraordinary aspect of the main tower wall heads are the double battlemented embrasures on each wall (Pl 73), the walls also have typical 16th century gun ports (Pl 74) placed centrally between the crenellations (apart from the north side). Here we have a defensive roof from which to fire guns! Clearly, Lord Fleming was preparing for his Catholic church tower to be used as a fighting platform to fend off any attackers from the other faith; Protestantism!



Pl 73. Embrasures and gun port.



Pl 74. Gun port, typical 16th C

Just below the roof ridges there is a distinctive secondary build line for the tower (Pl's 73 & 109), shown by a difference in the stone colour. But the upper part seems to be a single build to the parapet wall heads. The whole must be fairly contemporary since the second and upper phase begins below the roof ridges.

The gun loops cannot be later insertions, but they are not given on the earliest engravings of the church by Grose (Pl 6).

The tower wall heads are extended outwards slightly by double, rounded corbelling (Pl 73, 105 & 109).

If access by visitors can be arranged to reach the tower roof, magnificent views in all directions are to be had; to the north is Bizzyberry Hill, east is the town, the Corn Exchange and the Broughton Hills beyond, to the south are the scant remains of Boghall Castle and the Hartree Hills, and to the west is the former Moat Park Church and the Burn Braes with Tinto Hill beyond (Pl's 55 - 62).

Other proposed alterations and changes.

No doubt over the years many changes to the church were suggested but not carried out, apparently one was to build an aisle along the north side of the nave as is shown on a sketch plan in Biggar Museums (Fig 7). This sketch is the work of Brian Lambie, founder of Biggar Museums and local historian par excellence, but the source of the information is presently not known, however, since Mr Lambie was so knowledgeable on such matters it is assumed here that he was working from records, perhaps in church hands? The sketch gives dates for various aspects of the church and shows the alternating position of the pulpit, date of the gallery in the north transept and its access stair, and a northern aisle which was never built.

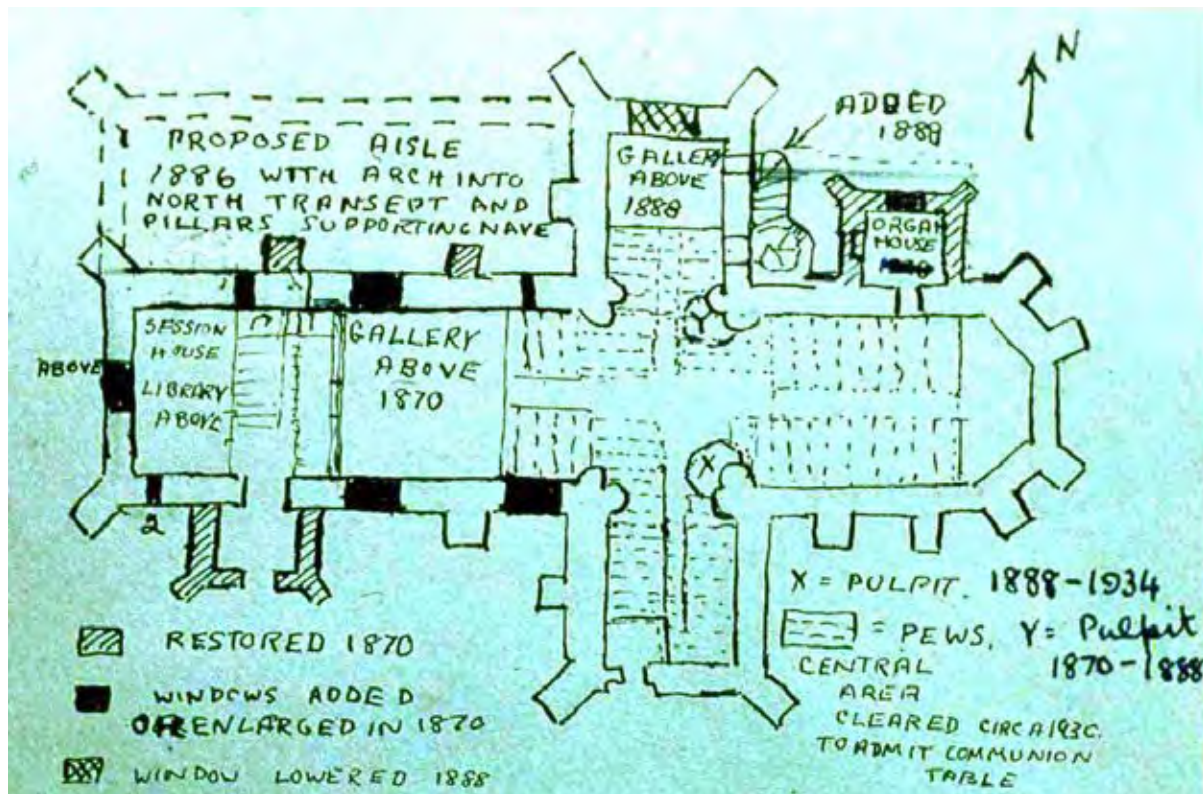
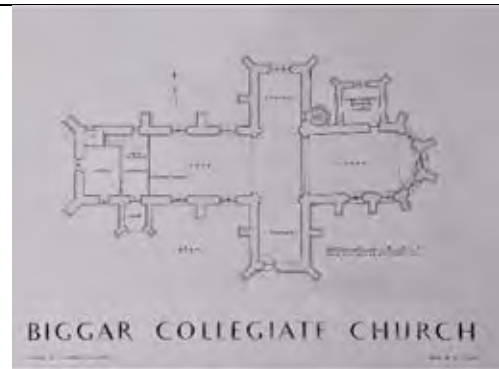


Fig 7. Sketch plan with various proposals and alterations, 1886-88.

Plans of the church.

Plate 11 shows Grose's plan (1789) of the church with dimensions, and it will be seen that he reckoned the nave was older than the rest of the building. He also has the building running perfectly in alignment from east to west (Pl 11) but this was shown to be in error in the detailed drawings by Cluna (below but date uncertain), because here we see the nave and chancel are slightly out of line (Fig 8). If this is correct it may lend support to Grose's belief that the nave was already built when the more elaborate chancel and transepts were added in the 1540's.

Biggar Museum has a set of architectural drawings measured by A C McNab and R A Cluna and drawn by the latter. The Cluna drawings (Pl's 75 - 83) however show all the gables as being with corbises or crow steps when in fact only the west gable had them. It is also in error regarding the heights of the nave and chancel roofs, the nave being much higher. The belfry top extension is omitted, as is the chimney on the north wall of the nave and also the stair access (Pl 28) which was added in 1888 to give access to the gallery in the north transept. Once again, caution is advocated when view pictorial representation, perhaps the exception being photographs. Nevertheless the architectural drawings give the necessary detail of features and proportions to be appreciated such as door and window mouldings.



Pl 75. Cluna plan, note the skewed alignment of the nave and chancel.



Pl 76. Cluna plan, the south elevation.



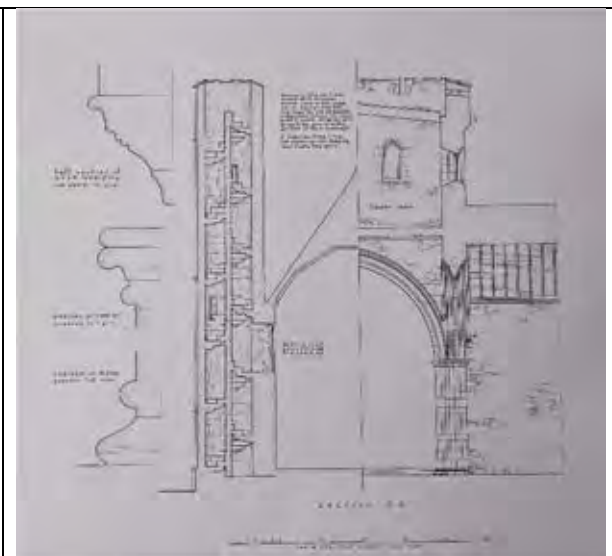
Pl 77. Cluna plan, east elevation.




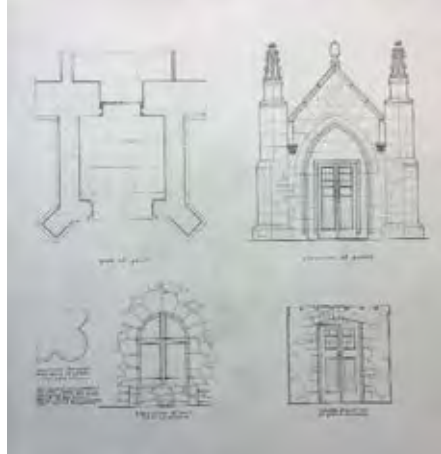
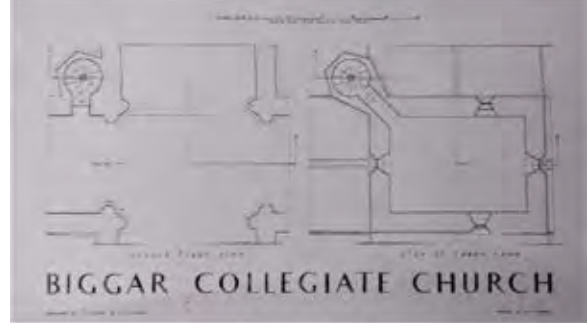

Pl 78. Cluna plan, north elevation.



Pl 79. Cluna plan, west elevation.



Pl 80. Cluna plan, stair and tower section.

	
<p>Pl 81. Cluna plan, south door and mouldings.</p>	<p>Pl 82. Cluna plan, former west door and later porch.</p>
	
<p>Pl 83. Cluna plan, tower plans.</p>	<p>Pl 84. View through the nave to the chancel with Gothic arches of the tower crossing. Photo J Ness. [see also Pl 35]</p>

The interior. (Pl 84)

The interior of the church is most pleasing in its proportions but rather austere as far as the walls are now seen, cut back to the bare stone which was thought to be appropriate in 1870/1935 when the main restorations were done. It was certainly plastered at one time, but it is not known if any of the pre-reformation church had painted walls or ceiling/roof, none were found in the restorations or in the present attic survey of the beams, however it is likely. The present coloured glass windows (below) date from 1871 beginning in the chancel apse and add to the attractiveness especially when sun light is beaming through.

Stained glass windows. All photos of stain glass by J Ness with the exception of Pl 98.

The chancel windows must originally have been glazed, possibly with stain glass, but the present window glass throughout the church dates from the 19th and 20th centuries, the last window being installed in 1991 by local artist; the late Crear McCartney. Plates 7 & 22 show the south transept having square windowpanes, presumably plane glass. The windows are described here in clockwise rotation from the north transept (Fig 8), however, the biblical meaning of the illustrations in each window cannot be given by the writer, nor at present are the majority of artists known:

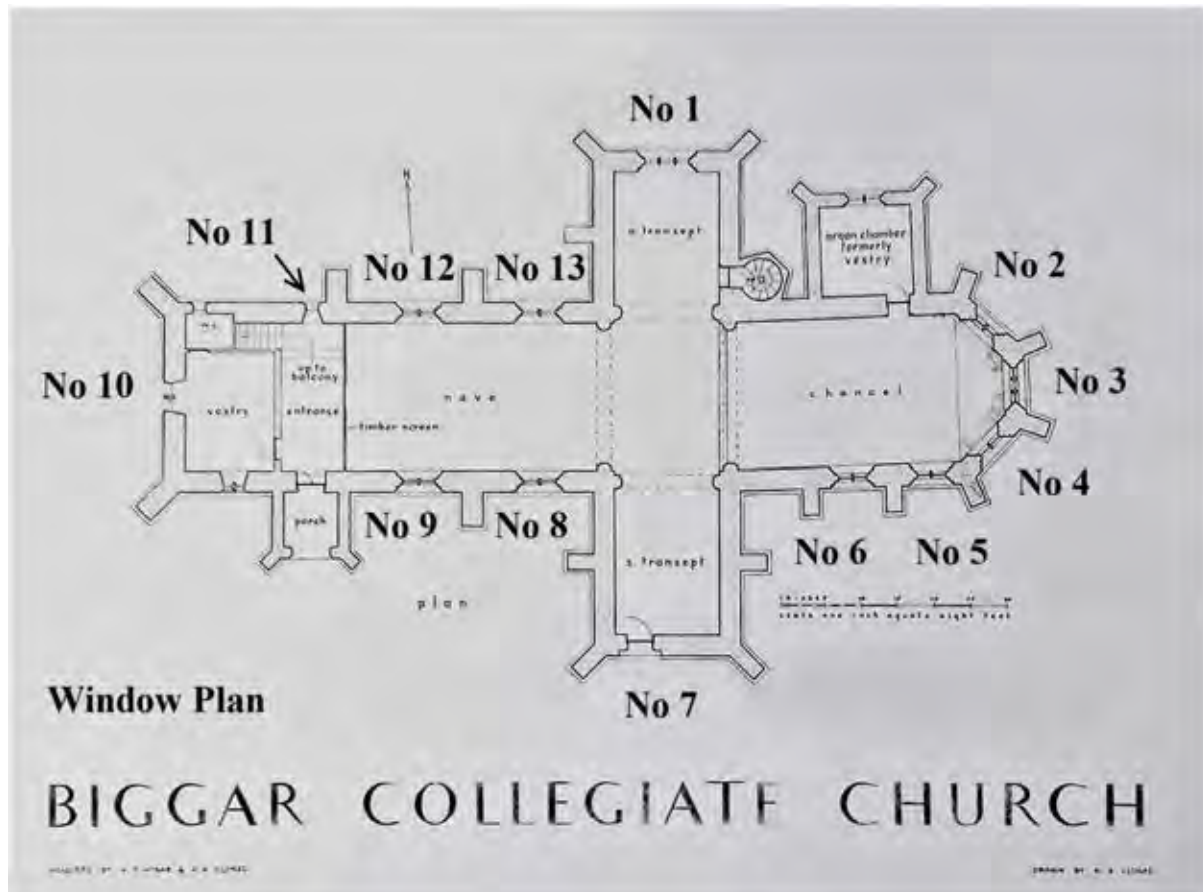


Fig 8. Window plan. No's 7 & 10 windows are higher levels not shown on this ground plan by Cluny. Note the mis-alignment of the chancel with the nave.

PI 85.

Window No 1. North Transept. Legend.

*As every man hath received the gift
 Even so minister the same one to another
 To the Glory of God
 And in Loving memory of
 Peter MacLellan
 Died 13th August 1932
 Also his wife
 Helen Edith Aikman
 Died 11th December 1944*



PI 86

Window No 2. North Apse. Legend.

*Glory to God in the Highest and
On Earth Peace Goodwill Toward men*

In Memory of Helen Gillespie of Biggar Park

Erected by her daughter Helen Jane Young 1874





PI 87

Window No 3. Central Apse. Legend.

Be thou faithful unto death

And I will give you a crown of life

FAITH – HOPE – CHARITY

Presented by Jane Gray Jamieson Murray Hill 1871

PI 88

Window No 4. South Apse. Legend.

Fear not ye for I know that

Ye seek Jesus which was crucified

Presented by Melville Christison Smith 1872



PI 89

Window No 5. Chancel east. Legend.

Top left section = “He that believeth in me though he were dead” -

Top right section = “ Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die”.

Base = “To the glory of God and in pious memory

Of James William Baillie of Coulter Allers

Born 24th October 1824 Died 13th April 1880

Erected by his widow”.



PI 90

Window No 6. Chancel west. Legend.

Top section = “He is not here for he is risen”.

Base = “To the glory of God and in loving memory of

William Daniel Collyer esquire of Cormiston

B. 28th February 1824. D. 14th October 1897

And of Jane Scott Mien his widow B 18th March 1840. D. 22nd May 1900

This window was presented by their family 1927”.



PI 91

Window No 7. South Transept. Legend.

I ascend unto my father and your father and to my God and your God

Presented by the parishioners and friends	In commemoration of his having
Of the Rev John Christison AM	Completed his fiftieth year as
In acknowledgement of his having	Minister of Biggar in 1873
Projected and carried out with	And in memory of his beloved wife
Untiring energy the restoration	Ramsay Hannay Maclellan born at
Of this church in 1871	Kirkcudbright 1807 Died at Biggar 1861



PI 92

Window No 8. Nave, south east. Legend.

Suffer little children to come unto me

And forbid them not

For of such is the kingdom of heaven

In loving memory of

John Lamb Murray of Heavyside (1838-1908) for forty years elder of this church

And of Jane Findlay Murray his wife (1839-1876)

A Ballantyne & Son Edinburgh [maker]



Pl 93

Window No 9. Nave, south west. Legend.

To the glory of God, and in loving memory
Of Robert Gray Murray. of
Spittal born 1852. Died 1925.

Elder of this church for 38 years
and of Ann Mathews his wife B.1853 D. 1941
Gifted by their son Thomas B Murray 1944



PI 94

Window No 10. Nave, west gable. Legend.

To the glory of God

And in loving memory of

Latto Alexander Morrison. 1870-1940

And his wife

Marion Blackwood Murray. 1869-1920



PI 95

Window No 11. Vestibule. Legend.

I will dwell in the house of the lord forever

He leadeth me he restoreth my soul

Beside still waters

Though I walk through the valley of the

Shadow of death I will fear no evil



Pl 96

Window No 12. Nave, north west. Legend.

King Robert the Bruce

David Livingstone

Sir Andrew Wood

Sir William Wallace

James IV King of Scots

Saint Andrew

JGM

Robert Wishart Bishop of Glasgow

To the glory of God and in enduring memory of loyal Scots through the ages



Pl 97

Window No 13. Nave, north east. Legend.

A time to be born

A time to dance

To everything there is a season and a time

To every purpose under the heaven

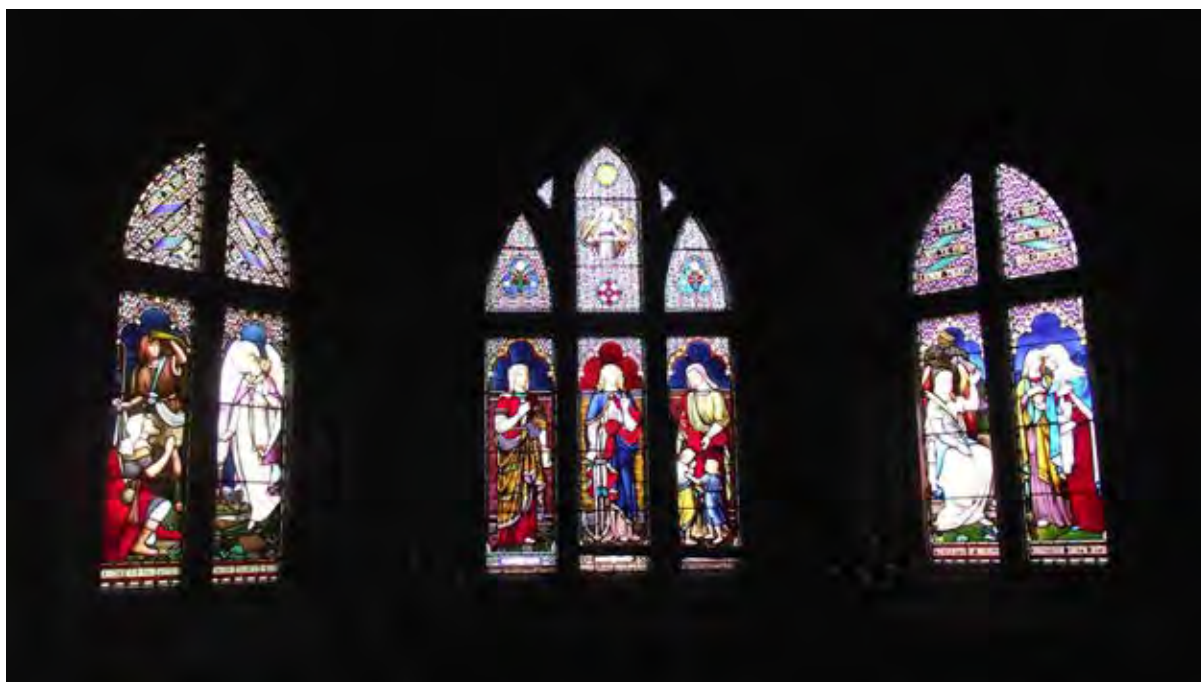
A time to keep silence

A time to mourn

To the glory of God in memory of John Rae horticulturist Biggar 1903-1989

[Cear McCartney, artist and maker. 1991]





Pl 98. The three apse windows (see above) [Photo T Ward].

External tour of the church.

A walk around the church will show the various features given above.

Beginning at the south side of the nave:

Under favourable lighting conditions the armorial of the skewput can be seen with the reversed image of the Wigton arms (Pl 99) it is possible that the north skewput was also carved. Note the stone roof ridges and eve drip stones on wall heads all the way round the church. Note the random rubble construction of the nave with local 'plum whinstone'. The modern cement gable finial had a cross at one time. On the roof of the porch, built in 1870 but sadly now 'fortified' against vandalism, is a finial (Pl 100) which has been a sun dial, the 'hands' of the solar clock are missing. Two ornate finials have what appears to be small frogs? (Pl's 101 & 102) Carved on three tiers of four bosses. These are the same as the finials on the organ house at the rear of the church also built in 1870.



Pl 99. The reversed armorial on the west gable skewput.



Pl 100. The sun dial finial on the main porch. Photo J Ness.



Pl 101. Main porch built in 1870 with the organ room. Photo J Ness.



Pl 102. Porch finial (1870) same as the organ room. Photo J Ness.

Inside the porch is the pre-reformation tombstone, below (Pl 115).

Rutherford (ibid) gives a complete description of this stone which is paraphrased below (Cemetery).

Above the present vestry window is an early blocked window (Pl 103). It has been heavily barred with interlocking iron as shown by the bar slots top and sides, the sill is missing. This window is another aspect of a defensible building – to keep people out!

The two later nave windows (Pl 104) have been made in the same style as the original chancel windows, the stain glass is described above. Look for 16th C mason's marks on the west wall of the south transept (Pl's 11, 14-17) and continuing round to the north transept.



Pl 103. Blocked window on south wall of the nave, note the former iron bar holes.



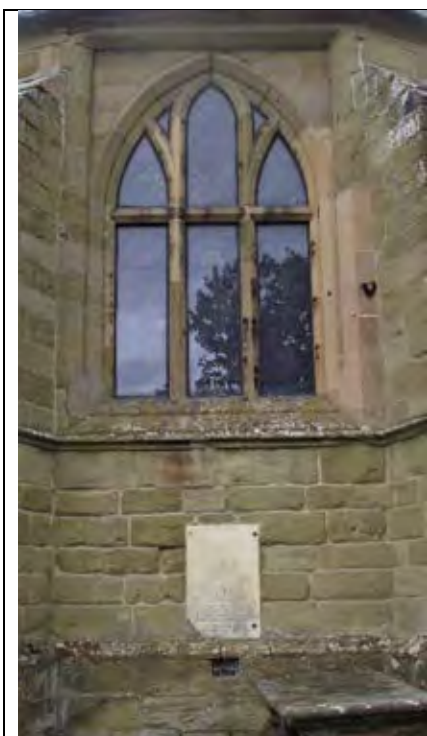
Pl 104 . Later 1871 windows in the south wall of the nave.

The corner and wall buttresses for the building continue around the church. The original south transept window now with the Christison memorial window [1871] would, have flooded the chancel crossing with light in the early days. The original south transept (Pl 105) Norman style doorway survives but the stone is eroding, and the two vertical columns are now missing and here the best views of the decorative tracery which runs around the chancel are seen. The jough chain is on the left side of the entrance with the OS benchmark carved below. Look for further traces of mason's marks around the chancel, although during the most recent re-pointing of the building, much of the dressed stonework has been chiselled, presumably to removed scaling surfaces, comparison between the parts of original smoothly finished ashlar and the rudely cut modern chiselling will be readily appreciated.



PI 105. The south transept gable with Norman style entrance, wall tracery, Christison Memorial window in the original window frame, the ‘assumption’ finial and battlemented tower. Note the quaint gravestone (below). Photo J Ness.

The apse windows (PI's 106 & 108) stonework is mostly original although parts have been replaced, the old and the new can easily be seen. On the apse wall is the memorial to Alexander Wardlaw (PI's 106 & 107), the much revered chamberlain to Lord Fleming [see below for inscription].



Pl 106. Central apse window showing replacement stonework (1871) on the rhs.



Pl 107. Memorial to Alexander Wardlaw. The last baron baillie.



Pl 108. The apsidal end of the chancel.



Pl 109. The 1871 organ room, built on the line of the original chapter house.

Moving round the building here is the organ room (Pl 109), the stonework is built on the line of the original chapter house which was demolished in the 19th century. The base of the turnpike stair has an adjoining stair (Pl 28) built (1888) to accommodate the access to the laird's loft in the north transept. The original 'rolled mouldings' of the tower stair windows can be seen from here, but the lowest slit window was installed in 1888 along with the stair (Pl 28), here was an external door for access to the tower (Pl 10). Look for mason's marks low on the walls here.

The north transept window can be seen to have been lowered in 1888, to give light to below the internal gallery (now removed), the new inserted stonework can be differentiated from the original windowsill stones which have been lowered (Pl's 27 & 29). Look for the two iron hinges, one on each side.

The north side of the nave has two later windows complimenting those on the south side (Pl 104), all built in 1871 in the same style as the original chancel and transept windows. A probable blocked slit window can be detected on this wall, its sill is still in situ (Pl 110). The chimney seen on the north wall of the nave is for the boiler installed in 1871 beside the main door into the church, the flue ran under the floor from south to north.



Pl 110 . Blocked slit window on north nave. Note the 'random rubble' stonework with 'plum whin'.
Photo J Ness.



Pl 111. North buttresses, note the change of build on the tower at roof level, and the boiler chimney.

The west gable has the 'crow steps' running up to the roof ridge which is supposed to have had a cross finial. Perhaps the north skewput also had a carving on it. The arched doorway (Pl 112) which gave original access to the nave is interesting as it has been converted to a window of the present vestry. The cruciform mullions are inserted to replicate other windows on the church, but their ends are formed with 'rolled moulding' to fit in with the original door frame whose full extent can be seen.



Pl 112. The former west door to the nave, now converted to the vestry window. Note the doorstep and matching of stonework to the original rolled moulding.

That completes the circular tour of the building.

The cemetery.

The Gladstone tomb stones; table topped (Pl 113), are to the right of the porch. The grandfather of the famous Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone lived in a humble cottage just north of the town, (now gone). It appears that the great man never took much, if any interest in his forebears, or ancestral home!

The cemetery has been surveyed three times; firstly in 1916 and then in 1972 and more recently and in more detail by the Biggar Archaeology Group (BAG 2018, www.biggarchaeology.org.uk).

Among some of the many interesting features of the Kirk and cemetery are quaint tombstones dating back to the 18th C. However, one stone had been re-used as a house door lintel at No 3 Howieson Square; this rare Pre-Reformation stone (Pl 115) was thankfully returned to the church and can now be seen in the entrance porch. The following description is by Rev Rutherford, former minister:

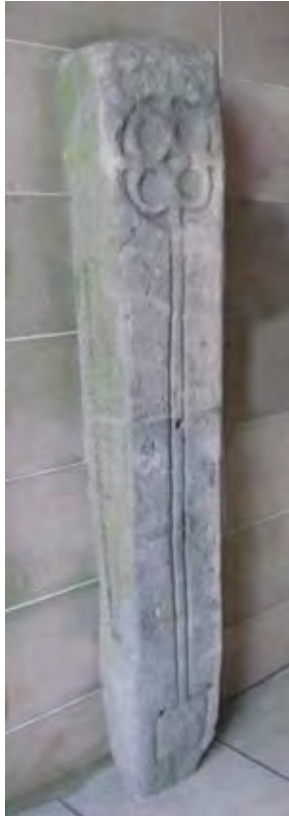
“At the bottom there is an incised square representing the Mount of the Crucifixion. From this rise two long narrow incised lines forming the shaft of the Cross and symbolising man’s redemption through the Christ of Calvary. The lines continue upwards towards the head of the stone where they end in four incised circles symbolising the resurrection into everlasting life. The circles with their never-ending line represent God the eternal Father above, without beginning and without end. The design in fact is the story of man’s salvation through Our Lord”.



Pl 113. Gladstone family gravestone.
Note the veiled urn stone.



Pl 114. Alexander Wardlaw memorial stone.



PI 115. The rare Pre Reformation stone in the church porch. Whoever it commemorated must have been an important person, perhaps an ecclesiastic? Or a member of the earlier Fleming family.

Other interesting stones and memorials are as follows:

Outside the apse at the east end is a wall stone commemorating Alexander Wardlaw (PI's 106-108 & 114) who was the last Baron Bailie for the Fleming family and a well-respected man. His epitaph is reputed to have been penned by Allan Ramsay the poet:

Here lyes a man whose upright heart

With virtue was profusely stor'd

Who acted well the honest part

Between the tennants and their lord.

Betwixt the sands and flint rock

Thus steered he the golden mien

While his blyth countenance bespoke

A mind unsullied and serene

As to the Bruce the Flemings prov'd

Faithfule so to the Flemings heir

Wardlaw behav'd and was belov'd

For justice, candour, faith, and care

continued

His merit shall preserve his name

To latest ages free from rust

Till the Archangel raise his frame

To joyn his soul amongst the just.

Just to the south of the church is a good example of an 'Adam and Eve' stone (Pl 116). It dates to 1709 and in memory of the Bertram family of farmers from Coulter. Both figures have aprons reaching the ground and stand beside the apple tree with much fruit on it, however two of the fruits are carved as skulls. The serpent is entwined round the tree and offering Eve an apple from its mouth, and she is accepting it.

A stone near the arched doorway (Pl 117) depicts an almost comical skeletal figure on one side and is dedicated to a shoemaker Henry Telfer who died in 1707, the year of the Act of Union.



Pl 116. A rare 'Adam & Eve' stone for the Bertam family.



Pl 117. Quaint gravestone for Henry Telfer, shoemaker, died 1707. Was this the stature of Biggar folk at one time!

Near the main door into the church are several table tomb stones. Look for the Gladstone's (Pl 113) who were in immediate forebears of the great prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, his grandfather lived at Toftcombs in a humble cottage, now gone. The Prime Minister never appears to have taken any interest in his forebears or ancestral home.

Of particular interest is the memorial and burial place of Thomas Ord (Pl's 118 & 119), who lived for some time in Biggar and died there. The extraordinary man is often referred to as "The Founding Father of Pinder's Circus", a minister's son; he trained and performed as an equestrian but with phenomenal skills and talent. His remarkable story is told in two publications: by his grand-daughter in 1902 (Shand 1902) and more recently in 2010 (McMillan 2010).



Pl 118. Thomas Ord burial place.



Pl 119. Thomas Ord gravestone.



Several early stones around the church have 'symbols of mortality' and Latin legends on them, this was to remind the living that their time was limited in this world and should be used wisely; e.g. '*Memento Mori*' "Remember, you must die", and, '*Tempus Volat*'; 'Time Flies'. Early Christians did not believe in cremation, but this came into vogue in the late 19th century when cemeteries became full and for hygienic reasons, Grecian urns started to appear on headstones, these represent receptacles for ashes, often veiled (Pl 113) to indicate 'between life and death'; 'earth and heaven' (Pl's 120 & 121). The 'symbols of mortality' seen on many gravestones are

there to remind the visitor that their time is not limitless and that they should make good use of it while they are around.

Skulls and cross bones indicate the state one will eventually be in the grave, wings with heads and skulls represent the departed spirit of the deceased, the hourglass obviously tells of time running out, sometimes tools of a particular person's trade are given or masonic symbols. In several of the surrounding village cemeteries there are good examples of 'portrait tombstone' particularly from the 18th century where costume of the period is depicted along and hair styles.

Cemeteries are the history books in stone of many communities, and Biggar also has a few Commonwealth Graves of those who gave their lives in the World Wars. An excellent modern survey in PDF form, of the old cemetery and its tombstones at Biggar is available at www.biggararchaeology.org.uk.

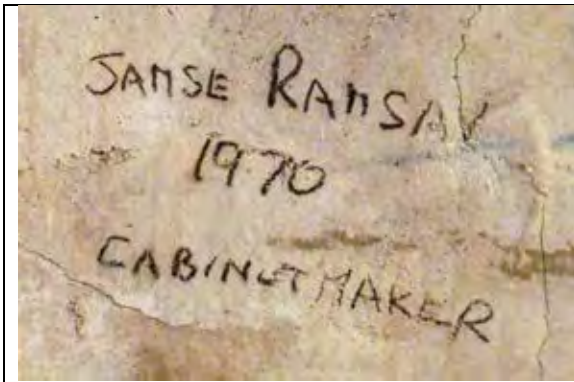
It seems likely that many of the early illustrations of the cemetery will have fictional representations of gravestones and memorials, although that would be difficult to test.

	
<p>Pl 120. This stone has cross bones intertwined with a serpent.</p>	<p>Pl 121. Symbols of mortality, just to remind everyone they are not here for ever.</p>

Appendix I

Graffiti on the turn pike stair. Plates 122 – 126.

Over the years, since from 1897, as far as may be seen, visitors have left evidence of their visits to the church by leaving their signatures and dates of their visit. For the most part these are to be found marked in pencil on the walls of the turnpike stair. For the sake of completeness they have been all been recorded beginning at the top and working down the spiral stair. Some names are known to the writer as local people (Pl's 122 – 125), especially tradesmen who were working on the building, but most are likely to have been casual visitors from out with the town. Only a few are included here but they have all been recorded in their entirety, some inscriptions are badly faded or partially flaked.



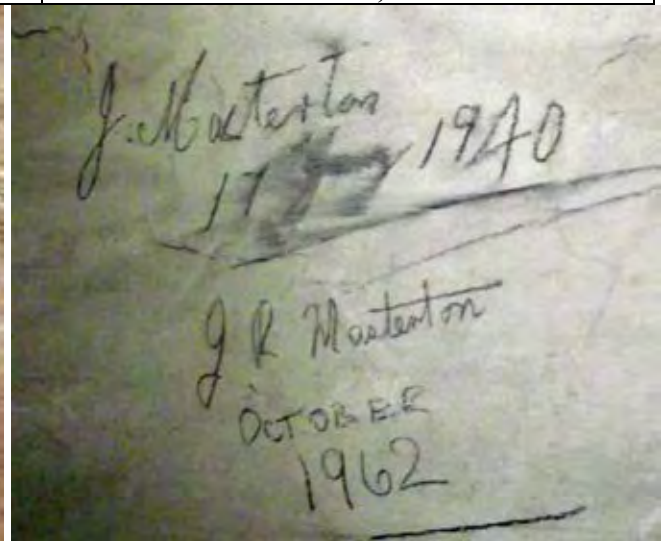
Pl 122. James Ramsay, Cabinet Maker.



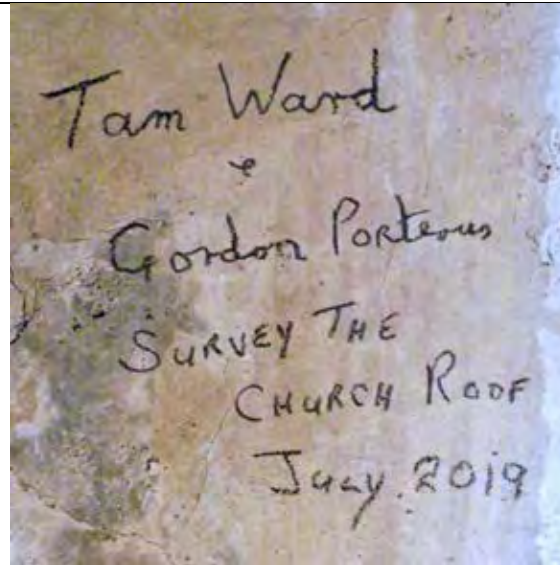
Pl 123. William Ireland, Painter.



Pl 124. Boab (Bob) Aitken, Mike Moore & David Moore, slaters.



Pl 125. James Masterton (senior) & James Masterton (son), builders.



Pl 126. Tam Ward & Gordon Porteous.

Pl 127. Old laver, perhaps the oldest in any Scottish church? Possibly 16/17th century.

James Ramsay ran his business as a cabinet maker from a shop in Biggar. William (Bill) Ireland worked as a local painter, Bob Aitken served his time with his father and brother who ran a Biggar slating business, Bobs work can be seen on the Moat Park tower across the road from the church, the Two 'Jimmy' Masterton's were father and son builders who worked all their lives in the town. The latest graffiti is by Tam Ward and Gordon Porteous, both born and bred in Biggar and responsible for the current work. A fuller study of the graffiti may be attempted at another time, but it is all recorded for posterity.

The Church Contents.

Like most churches, routine and special services were conducted using pewter and silver vessels and plate, especially at Communion times. Biggar Church has a fine representation of such items: jugs and flagons, chalices and plates. The church also has an important collection of Communion Tokens and items of biblical interest from foreign parts such as the Holy Land, the latter were apparently collected for teaching purposes by the Rev John Christison (see above).

A further study and report on the collection may form a separate paper but in the meantime the most important object, currently on display at Biggar Museum, is the very early ewer or laver; a pewter jug (Pl 127) and reputed to be one of the oldest to survive in Scotland, dating certainly to the 17th century and perhaps to the previous one. Given the importance of this jug a full

description is repeated here and taken from an early authority on Scottish pewter (Wood, *no date*)

“The laver is frequently spoken of in old records, and the word itself is the Scots for a water jug; and as they appear to have been an article of everyday use in Scotland from the Sixteenth century down to the middle of the eighteenth century, it is unlikely that at first any special form of laver was made for church use.

What may be considered an exception to the ordinary type of this vessel is the pewter laver belonging to the Parish Church of Biggar (Plate XVII.[Pl 127 this report]); as will be seen from the illustration, it is more of the Roman amphora shape. Tradition says that this particular vessel belonged to the church before the Reformation and that it was used to contain the holy water. This may or may not be true, but there is no evidence one way or the other. It is possibly, however, of a little later date than the sixteenth century, for on comparing it with a French pewter jug of seventeenth century workmanship now in the Cluny Museum in Paris, one is at once struck with the strong resemblance. That in the Cluny Museum has a somewhat different handle which is perhaps the least graceful part of the Biggar vessel; but in other respects the Cluny jug is very similar, though of much more graceful lines than that at Biggar, which though showing a great deal of character in its design, is of somewhat squat appearance, with high shoulders, whilst the other has the more general sloping "bottle" shoulders. There seems very little doubt that this laver from Biggar, though not of French make, was most certainly made under French influence, possibly from some vessel brought over from France and used by the Scottish pewterer as his model. This laver appears to have had a lid at one time, as part of the hinge still remains upon the handle. The handle itself is the weak point of the whole vessel, and looks as if the craftsman had lacked inspiration, and contented himself with putting on a handle cast in one of his stock moulds”.

Crocket (*ibid*) mentions that the laver was found in the church.

Modern research may shed even more light and data on this important relic of Biggar Church.

A rather astounding and somewhat disturbing statement in the same publication states that :

“In 1599 those parents whose children had died without being baptized had to appear at the church the next Sunday and sit in the penitent's seat clothed in sackcloth”.



Biggar church also holds vessels once used in both the former secession Moat Park and Gillespie churches, who were welcomed back into the fold of the unified Church of Scotland in 1929. The three churches however continued to operate separately with their congregations until firstly, the Gillespie Church closed to become a public hall and annexe of the school and currently is a Community Centre but still run by the Church for the benefit of the townspeople and; the Moat Park Church closed in the 1970's, the building was taken over by Biggar Museum Trust and converted to a Heritage Centre, it is now being converted into houses.

The church is also recorded as having a special book;

An Edition of the work of Berosus, a literary priest of Babylon, who flourished in BC 230, the book belonged to the first Provost; John Stevenson with his signature, motto; ‘Spe Expecto’, (I look toward it in hope) and date of 1548. It found its way to the Sim Collection but was

presented to the church by William Hunter in 1873, along with the last Baillie records of the town [these have not been seen by the writer].

The Motto is currently used by the church as its own Motto, appearing in its porch to welcome the congregation and visitors (Pl 128), and appearing in its matriculation of arms (Pl 129) secured in 1995.

	
<p>Pl 128. Welcome to Biggar Kirk. [www.biggarkirk.btck.co.uk]</p>	<p>Pl 129. Matriculation of Arms, 1995. Note the inclusion of two chalices in the armorial.</p>

In the vestry is a print of the painting by Robert Gemmell Hutchison (1855-1936); ‘The Young Communicants’ (Pl 130). It shows the minister with young persons in the vestry, note the window behind them. The Edinburgh artist married a Biggar girl and was noted for his paintings of children. The Biggar Museum also has one of his paintings of Biggar Church with men mowing the graveyard grass with scythes (Pl 131), there are no trees shown among the headstones.



Discussion

Biggar Kirk is important in Scottish architectural and historical terms, both locally and nationally, and of fascinating interest for the visitor, whether taken as a brief or prolonged visit, the church and cemetery offer much to maintain attention. The church is instantly pictorial both inside and out; the interior with a full complement of beautiful stain glass windows offers a great deal to photographers and local historians alike, the exterior, no matter what season of the year, lends itself equally for the same reasons. If it can be arranged, the views from the battlemented tower are magnificent, overlooking much of the town and giving unfettered vistas of the surrounding hills. Few small Scottish towns can make such claims because most have churches of late 18th century or later dates, the time when Scottish Presbyterianism demanded plain buildings although concessions were made to stain glass window memorials. Nineteenth century churches with their lofty steeples and in some cases ornate architectural features broke the mould somewhat, but for an entire suite of reasons given above - Biggar Kirk takes a bit of beating.

Of particular significance are the features which allow the description 'defended church' to be applied. Built originally as a consequence of a murder, at a time of both religious and political turmoil, and with architectural characteristics normally found on defensive buildings to keep people out, and the fact it is the last Pre Reformation church to be built in Scotland, surely place this building in a special place of Scottish architecture and history.

It was hoped that the roof survey may have shown some Pre Reformation decoration, but none was found. However the survey has shown that the roof, although containing many original timbers has been subject to much alteration over the years and it is possible to state that it may well have been originally built "on the cheap" using second hand or inferior timber. Much new data has therefore been added to the story of this church, not the least the new list of mason's marks around the walls. Further scrutiny of the building may no doubt add even more details than this paper has managed to do, for example the iconography of the stain glass windows and their artists. Such studies are rarely if ever complete, new information will come to light and new interpretations of such information may be put forward, hopefully this effort may kickstart further work at some time in the near or distant future.

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Acknowledgements.

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Unless otherwise stated photographs are by the author. Photographs by Jim Ness are acknowledged in the report.

Gordon Porteous assisted with the attic surveys.

Post Script.

Unfortunately, and because of a spate of vandalism, the church is now generally locked when not in use for services, but limited access may be available subject to voluntary attendants. For access, contact may be made with Beadle Peter Brotherstone at ptb165@gmail.com or at www.biggarkirk.btck.org.uk .