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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

ST BRIDE'S CHURCH



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ST BRIDE'S CHURCH

SYNOPSIS

St Bride's (or Bridget's) Church, Douglas, stands on an elevated knoll on the northern edge of the town of Douglas, in Upper Clydesdale. It is surrounded by a large graveyard (not in State care). The property is known locally as 'Old' St Bride's Church, to distinguish it from the present-day parish church, also dedicated to St Bride.

The remains comprise the ruined nave, roofed chancel and imposing bell-tower of the parish church of Douglas. Dedicated to St Bride (Bridget) of Kildare (Ireland), the present structure originated in the 12th century and was probably built at the behest of William, son of Erkenbald, a Flemish immigrant granted the lordship of Douglasdale c.1160. William founded the famous Black Douglas dynasty.

St Bride's Church has architecture surviving from the early 13th century (south nave aisle), c.1300 (the chancel) and the early 16th century (bell-tower). It became a principal burial place and mausoleum of the Black Douglasses, and the chancel holds three of the finest secular medieval wall tombs in Scotland – to 'the Good Sir James' of Douglas (died 1330), Archibald, 5th Earl (died 1439), and James 'the Gross', 7th Earl (died 1443). It fell out of use in 1781, when a new parish church was built elsewhere in the town. The chancel was comprehensively restored c.1880 by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson for the 12th Earl of Home and entrusted into State care by the 13th Earl in 1950.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- **c.1160** – William, son of Erkenbald (Archibald), a Fleming, is granted the lordship of Douglas, in Upper Clydesdale, probably by Malcolm IV. He builds a castle and a church. A number of capitals, now on display in the chancel, date from this time, including two of Corinthianesque form that bear testimony to a fine Romanesque building. The church is dedicated to St Bride (or Bridget) of Kildare; the Irish saint is adopted by William and his heirs – the Black Douglasses - as their patron.
- **early 13th century** – a new aisle is added to the south side of the nave.
- **1299** – William Douglas, 'Le Hardi (The Bold)', dies in an English prison, three years after the start of the Wars of Independence against England. It is possibly he who has the present chancel erected.
- **1307** – James Douglas, son of William 'Le Hardi', joins King Robert Bruce's cause shortly after the latter's return from exile. The two of them raid Douglasdale and evict the English garrison from the castle and dale. Hereafter 'the Good Sir James' as he becomes known – he is also known as 'the Black Douglas' because of his mane of black hair - helps Bruce strengthen his hold on the Scottish throne, and is knighted by Bruce on the eve of the Battle of Bannockburn (**1314**). On Bruce's death (**1329**), Sir James carries his heart on Crusade, dying in **1330** during a battle at Teba, Andalucía (Spain). His body is subsequently returned to Douglas for burial, whilst Bruce's heart is taken to **Melrose Abbey** for burial.

- **1358** – Sir James's nephew and eventual successor, William, is belted Earl of Douglas by Bruce's son, David II. In **1378** he petitions the pope to have St Bride's raised to collegiate status, but his death in **1384** forestalls the attempt; St Bride's becomes a prebend of **Glasgow Cathedral** instead. Earl William is buried not in St Bride's but at **Melrose Abbey**. His son James, 2nd Earl of Douglas, is killed four years later (**1388**) fighting the English at Otterburn, and he too is interred at **Melrose**. At his death, the illegitimate son of 'the Good Sir James', Archibald 'the Grim', succeeds as 3rd Earl. Archibald has a fine new tomb erected on the north side of the chancel at St Bride's to house the bones of his father, 'the Good Sir James', in a position normally reserved for the church's founder.
- **1400** – Archibald 'the Grim' dies at **Threave Castle**, his residence in Galloway. He is buried not at St Bride's but at his own collegiate church close to his chief residence, **Bothwell Castle**, further down the Clyde. His son, Archibald, 4th Earl, becomes one of the greatest Scots of his age, rising to become Lieutenant-general of France and Duke of Touraine. However, in **1424** he is killed at the Battle of Verneuil (France), alongside his younger son James. Both are laid to rest in Tours Cathedral.
- **1439** – Archibald, 5th Earl of Douglas and 2nd Duke of Touraine, dies of the plague at **Restalrig**, near Edinburgh. His body is taken to St Bride's for burial. A second fine wall tomb is built for him along the north side of the chancel, east of that to 'the Good Sir James'. In **1440**, William, 6th Earl, is executed in Edinburgh Castle and buried in St Bride's. In 1443 James 'the Gross', the 7th Earl, dies at his chief residence, Abercorn Castle (W Lothian), and is laid to rest in the third fine wall tomb in St Bride's, on the south side of the chancel. Neither of the two succeeding earls of Douglas - William, 8th Earl (murdered in **Stirling Castle** in 1452) and James, 9th and last Earl (dies in Lindores Abbey (Fife) in 1491) - is interred at St Bride's.
- **early 1500s** – a fine octagon bell-tower is added to the south side of the church. In **1565**, a clock is added to it, reputedly presented by Mary Queen of Scots; this has the distinction of being probably the oldest working tower clock in Scotland.
- **early 1600s** - the nave is converted into a courthouse and jail, whilst the chancel remains in use as the parish church.
- **1746** – Prince Charles Edward Stuart stays the night at Douglas Castle (not the medieval one but that built c.1700 by the Marquesses of Douglas).
- **1781** – a new parish church, also dedicated to St Bride's, is built on the eastern edge of the town. The nave of the old church is then largely demolished.
- **1834** – J M W Turner visits and makes sketches of the interior of the chancel for Sir Walter Scott's last novel *Castle Dangerous*, Scott's contrived name for Douglas Castle.
- **1878** – Charles Douglas-Home, 12th Earl of Home, invites Robert Rowand Anderson, architect, to restore the chancel in memory of his mother, Lady Lucy Elizabeth, only survivor of Archibald Douglas, 1st Baron Douglas (whence the surname Douglas-Home), who had died the previous year. A two-tier burial vault is constructed beneath the chancel to house the mortal remains of the Home family.
- **1938** – Douglas Castle is mostly demolished, leaving only a 17th-century corner tower standing.

- **1950** – Charles Cospatrick Douglas-Home, 13th Earl of Home, entrusts St Bride’s Church into State care.
- **1993** – the Douglas Heritage Trust is formed and opens a Heritage Museum in the former dower-house of the Douglas-Homes, sited immediately to the west of St Bride’s Church.

Archaeological Overview:

Apart from a small watching brief in 2004 no recorded archaeological work has been carried out at St Bride’s Church. This watching brief demonstrated one thing – just how thorough the 1878 restoration had been.

Despite the construction in 1878 of the two-tier burial vault beneath the chancel floor, the buried archaeology of the site may still have potential to inform a better understanding of the physical development of the church building, and perhaps even cast light on any ecclesiastical use of the knoll prior to the 12th century.

The area in and around the church will have been used for burial purposes down the centuries. Whilst this activity will have compromised the underlying archaeology, there is the possibility that medieval human remains in and immediately around the church may survive.

The surviving architecture, including the tombs, would certainly repay detailed standing building analysis. This would aid understanding of its development as a building, and also greatly enhance our understanding of the fine tombs and effigies in the chancel. For example, the effigies have recently been conserved, and found to retain traces of paint. Given that these tombs/effigies are among the best preserved in Scotland, a more comprehensive analysis of them is certainly warranted.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

St Bride’s Church today comprises a ruined nave with a south aisle, a roofed chancel, and a full-height bell-tower to its south. The standing remains comprise interesting architecture from the 12th to the 16th centuries, and one of the best collections of funerary monuments in Scotland. The restoration of its chancel in 1878 was carried out under the direction of one of Scotland’s greatest Victorian architects.

The nave and aisle

The nave is now mostly ruined. The remnants of cubicle stone-block construction indicate a 12th-century date, and the existence of a number of carved *capitals* (now on display in the chancel) hint at a building of real quality. The latter include one of sophisticated Corinthianesque form, and another in which the volutes of the Corinthian form are replaced by masks, with an anthemion motif to the faces.

The two-bayed aisle, added to the south side of the nave, has evidence suggesting an early-13th-century date for construction. The south doorway and aisle arcade are good examples of early Gothic work, but that the aisle was of

real quality is most noticeable at the east end, which clearly housed a chapel, as shown by the trifoliate-headed *piscina*, with engaged shafts to the jambs, in the south wall. The east wall had a pair of lancet windows contained within rear arches carried on *en délit* shafts.

The bell tower

The bell tower is an attractive feature, octagonal in its upper storeys, with the belfry at the top pierced with eight small pointed windows and crowned by an octagonal stone spire. It is dated to the early 16th century, chiefly because of its clock, which bears the date 1565. This clock has the distinction of probably being the oldest working tower clock in Scotland.

The chancel

The construction of the new chancel is now thought to date from the late-13th/early-14th-century - externally by the form of the windows, in which the lights reach up to the window arch, and by the wall-head mask corbel table. As most of these details were renewed during the 1878 restoration, however, it remains unclear just how far the new work was based on what had been there before. However, the fact that the Good Sir James of Douglas's wall tomb (added around the mid-14th century) necessitated blocking up a window in the middle of the chancel's north wall probably clinches the c.1300 date.

Funerary monuments

The chancel houses several notable funerary monuments of the Black Douglases. These form one of the most important collections of such monuments anywhere in Scotland.

[Note: the late-19th-century alabaster tomb and effigy of Lady Lucy Elizabeth, Countess of Home, in the centre of the chancel does not fall within the responsibilities of Historic Environment Scotland. Neither does the two-tier burial vault beneath.]

The oldest, and simplest funerary monument is the worn effigy of a woman, lying on a raised plinth of coursed stonework in the SW corner of the chancel. It has no intrinsic evidence as to who she was, though tradition identifies her as Marjorie Abernethy (d.1259), the wife of Hugh of Douglas, uncle of 'the Good Sir James'.

The wall tomb and effigy assumed to be that of 'the Good Sir James of Douglas' (killed 1330) is centrally positioned along the north wall, in a position (north of the high altar) normally reserved for the founder of the church. It was built at the behest of his natural son, Archibald 'the Grim', 3rd Earl (d.1400). The canopy above the effigy (added later, probably in the early 15th century) contains a shield in the spandrel depicting the 'Douglas heart', adopted by William, 1st Earl, in recognition of his uncle's endeavours to take King Robert Bruce's heart on Crusade.

To its east, and also in the north wall, is the monument to Archibald, 5th Earl. Constructed probably shortly after his death in 1439, the tomb is of exceptional quality, almost the equal of his mother's, Princess Margaret, widow of the 4th

Earl, in **Lincluden Collegiate Church**. The Earl is shown, exceptionally, not in armour but in his robes of state, with a ducal coronet on his head and his feet on a lion. The front of the tomb chest has six panels, divided by buttresses and capped by canopies, within which are small figures with shields and scrolls for text, all originally painted and explaining who each one was (we presume them to have been members of his family). The elaborate tomb canopy is an ogee arch with a foliage trail between the mouldings, and framed by buttresses with a tabernacle at the head of each.

The monument in the centre of the south wall is a rare example of a double-effigy tomb. (Another fine example survives at **Inchmahome Priory**.) It depicts James, 7th Earl (d.1443), and Countess Beatrice Sinclair. The inscription dates the tomb to between 1448 and 1451. The Earl is shown in full armour, his wife in a flowing robe, and both have their hands clasped in prayer. The tomb-chest frieze is decorated with ten carved figures.

In addition to the above, there is an unusual container resting on the floor of the chancel, containing a pair of lead heart-shaped caskets sealed behind a glass plate. The 19th-century plaques ascribe them to 'the Good Sir James of Douglas' and Archibald, 5th Earl of Angus ('Bell the Cat'). These, and a third in **Melrose Abbey Museum**, are the only heart caskets surviving in Scotland.

The chancel restoration

The heart-casket container appeared as part of the restoration of the chancel in 1878. This was done at the behest of Charles, 12th Earl of Home, as a memorial to his mother, Lady Lucy Elizabeth (d.1877).

The restoration was carried out by the renowned architect, Robert Rowand Anderson, fresh from designing Mount Stuart for the Marquess of Bute. The restoration includes work of high quality, including a period tiled floor and fine stained-glass windows, but is now perceived to have been somewhat heavy handed.

Social Overview:

St Bride's Church stands close to the centre of the town of Douglas, on a prominent knoll, and today forms one of the town's key heritage attractions (the more so now since the demolition of the castle in 1938).

With the creation of the Douglas Heritage Trust in 1993, the public profile of St Bride's has been raised. The Trust, based in their fine wee museum sited immediately west of the church and graveyard, in the former dower house of the Douglas-Home family, offer formal tours of the church, which helpfully complement Historic Environment Scotland's very low-key key-keeping arrangements.

Spiritual Overview:

For 600 years St Bride's was the principal focus of religious worship in the town and parish of Douglas. Since its replacement as the parish church by 'new' St Bride's, the building has largely remained dormant.

The restoration of the chancel in 1878, by the 12th Earl of Home, breathed new spiritual life into the place, as the mausoleum of the Douglas-Home family. They still regard this as their ancestral sepulchre, in much the same way as did their forebears, the Black Douglasses, in medieval times. The family retains ownership of the whole site, and proprietorial rights to the burial vault itself.

The chancel still serves a spiritual role in addition to its sepulchral function. The ceiling is hung with banners of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry, formed 1819, and a bronze plaque beside the entrance gives the roll of honour of those who died during World War II, mostly in Japanese POW camps following the fall of Singapore in 1942.

Aesthetic Overview

The site as a whole is somewhat 'bitty'. Its single most striking feature is the charming octagonal bell-tower, with its ancient clock, that can be seen from some distance around.

Close up, it is perhaps the large graveyard (not in State care), with its attractive and informative array of headstones, that catches the eye. The nave is too ruined to hold the attention of the visitor (other than the odd architectural historian) for long. Even the roofed chancel is somewhat prosaic from the outside.

The interior of the chancel, by contrast, is atmospheric – and suitably dark and bewitching given its sepulchral function. The three wall tombs provide a muted medieval contrast to the more vivid High Victorian restoration, with its bright stained-glass, period tile floor and, centre stage, the creamy alabaster tomb and effigy of Lady Lucy, Countess of Home. The spidery banners of the Lanarkshire yeomanry hanging from the vaulted ceiling simply add to the 'Lady Haversham' effect.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Was there a pre-12th-century church on the site, as the elevated location might suggest? Archaeological excavation may provide the answer.
- What was the form and extent of the 12th-century church? Here too archaeological excavation may yet find more traces, for both *in situ* and *ex situ* material.
- When precisely was the original chancel built? If there are papers/plans etc surviving from Rowand Anderson's 1878 restoration, these may help to establish the original form of key architectural features (eg, the window tracery), heavily restored by him.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- St Bride's, close by the former Douglas Castle, was an important proprietorial church in the original heartland of the powerful Black Douglasses. It served as a principal family mausoleum, together with Bothwell Church (beside **Bothwell Castle**), **Lincluden Collegiate Church** (near **Threave**) and **Melrose Abbey**.

- The classically-inspired Corinthianesque stone capitals (now *ex situ*) are testimony to the high quality of the original (12th-century) church.
- The south aisle, although comparatively small in scale, has architectural elements that are of unusually high quality for a rural parish church.
- The three wall-tombs of the Black Douglases form one of the most important collections of such monuments anywhere in Scotland. Their potential to inform our understanding of medieval funerary practice, tomb construction and decoration is considerable.
- The five effigies are the sole, and lasting, representations of some of the most important historical figures in Scotland's medieval history, most notably that of 'the Good Sir James' of Douglas, due to his intimate association, in life and in death, with Robert I 'The Bruce'.
- The eye-catching bell tower bears possibly the oldest working tower clock in Scotland.
- The restoration of the chancel (1878) is an early example of the work of Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, arguably Scotland's greatest Victorian architect.

Associated Properties

(*other burial places of leading Black Douglases*) – Bothwell Church; **Lincluden Collegiate Church**; Lindores Abbey; **Melrose Abbey**; St Gatien's Cathedral, Tours

(*leading Black Douglas residences*): Abercorn; **Balvenie**; Berwick; **Bothwell**; Douglas (demolished); Darnaway; Hermitage; Newark (Selkirks); **Tantallon**; **Threave**

(*some other fine medieval secular tombs/effigies*): **Beaully Priory** (Mackenzie of Kintail); **Castle Semple** (Semple); Corstorphine (Forrester); Cullen (Ogilvie of Findlater); Fordyce (Ogilvie of Deskford); **Inchmahome** (Comyn); **Lincluden** (Douglas); **Maybole** (Kennedy of Dunure); **St Mary's Rothesay** (Stewart); **Seton** (Seton)

(*other major Rowand Anderson restoration schemes in Historic Scotland's care*) – **Broughty Castle**; **Dunblane Cathedral**

Keywords:

chancel; nave; aisle; bell-tower; clock; burial tomb; effigy; Romanesque; Black Douglases; 'the Good Sir James of Douglas'; Douglas-Home; Robert Rowand Anderson

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