Property in Care PIC (ID):	PIC095
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90225)
Taken into State care:	1953 (Guardianship)
Last reviewed:	2005

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MUTHILL OLD CHURCH AND TOWER

We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

MUTHILL OLD CHURCH AND TOWER

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises the remains of the medieval Muthill Church, including the 12th-century bell tower, which was originally free-standing, standing within a graveyard at the centre of the village of Muthill. The nave wraps around the roofed tower and was probably rebuilt in the 15th century. The north nave aisle wall and chancel were deliberately dismantled after it was abandoned for worship around 1828. The pointed arches of the nave arcades, the outer wall of the south nave aisle and the chancel arch survive to full height; only the lower walls of the chancel survive.

The tower is particularly important given its completeness and early date and is one of a small group of related Romanesque structures in central Scotland. The monument was taken into guardianship in 1953. Major consolidation works took place in the 1980s. The scheduled area was extended to include the graveyard in 1998.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- By the last quarter of the 12th century a community of Culdees (secular clergy on an Irish pattern) was established at Muthill. They are first recorded in 1178-95 when a prior and two brethren are referred to, and seem to have continued into the 13th century. Traditionally their church is thought to be within the Culdees Castle policies, about 1.5km to the south-west, but it is as likely that a church was founded for them, perhaps by the early bishops of Dunblane, on the site of the present Muthill Church. Originally, Muthill seems to have had a high status, perhaps functioning as a substitute cathedral at times. Architectural details suggest that the mid-12th century tower might share the same patrons and masons that built Dunblane's tower (see Dunblane Cathedral Statement of Significance).
- Presumably Muthill was re-founded as a parish church in the 12th century before being granted to Lindores Abbey by Malise, son of Earl Ferteth of Strathearn (1195-99) and it was confirmed to the abbey in 1199. This gesture resulted from the growing acceptance of the idea that layfolk should no longer have patronage over parish churches. The grant to Lindores was almost immediately contested by the Bishop of Dunblane who claimed that it had already been granted to him for the maintenance of his household. The bishop of St Andrews was asked to adjudicate and the teinds from the parsonage and one-quarter of those from the vicarage were confirmed to Dunblane by a Papal bull of 1237. By the mid-15th century the remainder of the vicarage tiends had been annexed to the sub-chanter of Dunblane Cathedral.
- Presumably sometime in the 15th century an aisle was added on each side of the nave, along with the arcade that opened into those aisles. This is traditionally attributed to Michael Ochiltree, Dean of Dunblane 1419-29 (later Bishop of Dunblane). However, the nave was the financial responsibility of the laity rather than the parson, the latter being responsible for the fabric of the chancel.

- Substantial changes to accommodate post-Reformation worship were implemented at various dates with galleries and reordering of seating, the new emphasis being on a centrally-located pulpit rather than an altar at the east end of the chancel.
- A new parish church was built in 1826-28. Its architect, James Gillespie Graham, also produced designs for the conversion of the old church in 1824 for the Episcopal congregation, which included the demolition of the chancel. Instead, a new Episcopal Church, dedicated to St James, was built nearby in 1836 and the medieval church was quarried for building materials for the new churches.
- Some repair took place in the late 19th century MacGibbon and Ross (1896) refer to a cement mortar repair of the south wall of the belfry after 1886. Some consolidation took place after the church came into care in 1953 including renewal of much of the sarking and slates of the tower roof.
- A major programme of works between 1984 and 1989 involved repair works to the roof including reslating using the existing slates and some second-hand slates and consolidation of the masonry using cement mortar. The flat wallheads of the nave were asphalted in 1996. Also at this time the recumbent effigy in the chancel and the McRobbie cross-slab were moved into the base of the tower to protect them from vandals and a grilled window was opened in the door to allow the stones to be viewed. Window grilles have since been strengthened to help resist persistent attack by vandals.

Archaeological Overview
- There has been no known archaeological investigation either within the footprint of the church or the graveyard.
- The interior of the church was used for interments before and after its abandonment for worship therefore ground-breaking works here and in the graveyard should be avoided.
- RCAHMS surveyed the upstanding remains of the monument as part of their 2004/05 programme.

Artistic/Architectural Overview
- Bell towers were treated relatively simply in 12th century. At Muthill the only openings are a doorway on the ground floor, simple openings in the intermediate storeys and two-light belfry openings at the top level. Its two surviving original belfry windows each have a round arch subdivided by a pair of smaller arched openings with a central column. The string course with decorative lozenge pattern demarcating the belfry stage is similar to the moulding around the altar recess in the lowest storey of the tower at Dunblane. The original roof was replaced with a pitched roof with crowstepped gables in the late medieval period, and two of its belfry windows were also replaced.
- The predecessor of the nave now seen appears to have wrapped around the tower, the chancel extending to its east. Later, aisles were added to the nave, probably in the 15th century, opening off the main space through arcades with octagonal piers. The roof swept over both nave and aisles, as shown in a 1799 sketch by John Claude Nattes. The aisles were lit by three-light windows within a containing arch; they are difficult to date, though there are parallels with the nave aisle windows at Dunblane (mid-13th century) but they are perhaps more likely to represent a late medieval revival of such types. Three survive in the south aisle (in its south wall and west gable). The north aisle has been

- demolished and was shorter than the south aisle with a small chapel against the north wall of the tower.
- Originally, the chancel was probably of a shorter length than that represented by the surviving lower courses: its extension over the steep fall of ground to the east has necessitated the construction of substantial sub-structures. Few surviving architectural details suggest a late medieval date for the east gable. Perhaps this extension can be ascribed to Michael Ochiltree, Dean of Dunblane. Evidence of a sedilia in the south wall of the chancel (illustrated in MacGibbon & Ross) has been lost, perhaps during consolidation work done in the 1980s. There would have been a door in the south wall of the chancel for the clergy; the layfolk would have entered through a narrower door in the south aisle to reach the nave. There was probably a sacristy in the corner between the north wall of the chancel and the east end of the north aisle reached by a doorway from the aisle.
- After the Reformation there are references to repair of the chancel in 1664, some re-ordering of the seats took place in 1720 as part of a larger programme of works and the Nattes illustration of 1799 (redrawn by MacGibbon & Ross) indicates that it had been extensively modified internally to meet reformed needs with a stair against the south wall of the chancel indicating the presence of galleries.

Stone Collection
- There are a number of monuments within the footprint of the church that are in guardianship. A badly eroded double effigy, though to be of Sir Maurice Drummond of Kincraig (†1362) and his wife Ada, daughter of Henry, Earl of Strathearn was moved in 1993 to South Gyle to be conserved by HSCC. It had been located against the north wall of the chancel and, possibly since 1880, it was afforded some protection by being covered by a wooden box but which deteriorated. The monument was secured inside the ground floor of the tower in 1996.
- Also in 1996, a 12th or 13th century cross-inscribed slab, known as the McRobbie slab, formerly located in a recess on the west side of the tower, was conserved by HSCC and cramped to the inner north wall of the ground floor of the tower. There are other moulded fragments within this same chamber.

Social Overview
- The graveyard is owned and maintained by Perth & Kinross Council. It is locked and the key can be obtained by visitors from the local Post Office during opening hours. The door to the tower is locked, access being restricted to Historic Environment Scotland staff.
- Muthill Village Museum Committee undertook a survey of the condition of the gravestones in 2003-04 as part of the Council for Scottish Archaeology's Carved Stones Decay in Scotland Project (sponsored by Historic Scotland). The museum is located next to the church.

Spiritual Overview
- Its associations with the Culdees and the diocese of Dunblane as well as its surviving form—bell tower and the nave arcades within a small graveyard—would suggest significant spiritual value despite it having been abandoned for worship in the early 19th century.

- The tower is a dominant landmark in Muthill and is visible travelling north or south through the village on the A822 and from other approaches. The village orients itself around the old parish church with school and post office.
- The graveyard is enclosed by a masonry wall topped by railings with an arched gateway providing access to the north side. The graveyard slopes considerably to the south. Houses and their gardens largely surround the graveyard, except for vistas of fields stretching to the north.
- The arches of the nave are prominent above the lower wall of the north aisle and, together with the tower, are a picturesque composition. Within the immediate vicinity of the church or from within its walls, nave arches and the chancel arch frame other elements of the ruin, tower, graveyard, surrounding buildings and more distant views.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?
- There has been little research on Muthill Church; our understanding of its early history, the changes it went through in the post-Reformation era until its abandonment in the 19th century and its wider associations could be much improved.
- A better understanding of the social value of the property would help improve access to it for all parties.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points
- The state of preservation and completeness of the tower makes it very important to our understanding of medieval Scotland and it is one of a very small group of surviving towers dating from this time.
- Its association with Culdees and the diocese of Dunblane also adds to its significance in the medieval period and to the formation of the parish of Muthill.

Associated Properties
St Serf's Church, Dunning; **Dunblane Cathedral**; St Drostan's Parish Church, Markinch; **St Andrews Cathedral (St Rule's Church)**; Monymusk Parish Church.

Keywords   early medieval; Romanseque; ecclesiastical; church; tower; carved stones; Ochiltree