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<b>Designations:</b>	Listed Building (LB52454)
<b>Taken into State care:</b>	1978 (Guardianship)
<b>Last reviewed:</b>	2004

## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# ST SERF'S CHURCH, DUNNING



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.



# ST SERF'S CHURCH, DUNNING

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Dunning was granted to Inchaffray priory by Gilbert, earl of Strathearn, and confirmed to the canons in 1203. As first constructed the church, dedicated to St Servanus, or St Serf, would have consisted of a rectangular aisle-less nave with the narrower chancel at the east end and a square tower at the west. The tower, fine Romanesque north doorway and transitional tower arch are the most striking features that survive from this time.

In 1687 a gallery or 'laird's loft' was inserted within the former chancel, accessed by an external stair alongside the east gable. The existing aisle was built in 1808–10 by Bowie and Frazer, possibly replacing an earlier aisle which might have been built in 1750, to meet the needs of the increasing population. The church was thus converted into a T-plan, with pews and a gallery in each arm, and the minister presided over the congregation from the pulpit against the south wall. The existing furnishings, stained-glass windows and stencilled decoration mainly date to the second half of the 19th century.

In 1972 the St Serf's congregation amalgamated with St Paul's; St Serf's is owned by the Church of Scotland General Trustees, and the church and the 1837 session house have been in state care since 1978. The monumental 3m-high Pictish free-standing Dupplin Cross was re-erected in the west tower in 2002 and is also in State care (see separate ISCS).

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

William I issued a confirmation charter in 1203 of a grant made by Earl Gilbert of Strathearn of the churches of Dunning and of St Serf at Monzievaird to the canons of Inchaffray. This is the first recorded reference to the church, though the architectural details suggest it was already in existence by then. The Romanesque three-stage square-plan ashlar west tower is 26m high and its fine pointed-arched transitional archway into the nave dates from this time. The round-arched north door into the nave and the corbels of the original chancel wallhead also survive. The south wall was entirely rebuilt in 1808–10, though early fragments incorporated into it suggest there may have been an equally fine south doorway.

The Rollos obtained a charter from Robert II in 1390/1 confirming Duncrub and other lands in Strathearn granted to John Rollock, secretary to David, earl of Strathearn. After the Reformation of 1560, St Serf's was adapted to conform to Presbyterian methods of worship. The laird's loft was constructed in 1687 in the time of Andrew, third Lord Rollo.

The minister complained of the lack of accommodation within the church in the early 1700s, and estimates for an aisle were obtained. A date of 1750 is carved above the corbel table on the north side of the chancel, but later alterations mean that it is no longer clear what that work may have entailed. Dunning had been

burnt by the returning Jacobites in 1716, and in the 1780s/90s John Bell, land surveyor, made plans for a new village and Lord Rollo subsequently feued surrounding land. The decision was taken to extend the existing church for the parishioners rather than build anew. The heritors objected to funding the 1808–10 extension and entered into a legal dispute with the presbytery; the Court of Session did not find in their favour. The south wall was both rebuilt and refaced in part; in the nave the old wall line was followed but in the chancel the south wall was taken down and re-erected one metre further out so that it continued the line of the nave south wall. The roof was raised to a uniform height, and west and north galleries were added to match that in the chancel. Part of eight of the steps of the forestair up to these galleries have been cut away to allow clearer viewing of the Romanesque round-arched doorway.

The transitional arch between the tower and the nave was blocked at this stage, if not before, and was uncovered during extensive works carried out in 1868; bases of a similar arch or pillars between nave and chancel, family vaults, a medieval font (now lost) and a blocked south doorway were also discovered at this time. The west gallery partly obscures the upper voussoirs of the transitional arch. This work also included lowering the ground level around the north aisle and the Rollo burial aisle due to water ingress.

The stained-glass windows date to 1907 and 1910, incorporating those of 1889. Major structural alterations necessitated the replacement of large timbers in 1890 due to tower repairs and the installation of a new clock. The bells in the tower date to 1526 and 1825, and two of the wall tablets in the former chancel date to 1612 and 1615.

The kirk session convened in the church itself until the session house was built next to the churchyard wall to the south in 1837.

### Archaeological Overview

Minor excavations for pipe trenches in 2001–02 next to the north forestair revealed disturbed ground, part of a wall probably belonging to the demolished boilerhouse and the lower step of the original external stair. Otherwise there is a strong likelihood of there being highly significant archaeological remains, in particular human remains, within both the church itself and the churchyard.

### Artistic/Architectural Overview

The tower of three unequal tapering stages of ashlar is lit by a single, two-light opening with single narrow opening above in each face of the top stage. It most closely relates to Muthill Church, also in Perthshire, and the tower at Dunblane Cathedral (both in state care). The finest surviving architectural details are the north doorway, with its inner order carried on nook shafts, and the tower arch, which has an early pointed arch with scalloped decoration, and massive three-quarter responds with scalloped capitals. The original, three-compartment plan has parallels at Stobo Church, Peebleshire, for example.

The post-Reformation extensions to create the typical T-plan are plain in form. The north aisle is constructed of rubble masonry and lit with small rectangular windows. The existing interior galleries and furnishings mainly date from the 19th century. The pews have been repaired and replaced at various intervals over that

century but mainly date to the 1808–10 rebuilding, or to a refurnishing by Matthew Lawson in 1868 with further alterations by Jones in 1890. The communion table of 1895 was made for Duncrub Chapel, using wood left over from the 1890 tower alterations, and gifted to St Serf's by Constance Rollo in 1916.

The Whytes of Muirhead donated the Ballantine & Gardiner stained glass windows in the south wall in 1899 (Christ the Good Shepherd and Christ the Sower) as well as the gallery windows (Christ as The Way, The Truth and The Life and The Angel Reaper) by Ballantine & Son in 1907. In 1910 the Whytes also donated those which commemorated the centenary of the church rebuilding and are attributed to James Ballantine II (they list the 19th-century ministers) at either side of the pulpit; these replaced or incorporated the 1889 windows of McCulloch & Gow. It is likely that the stencilling (trefoil pattern, 'Praise Ye The Lord' inscription) around these windows and the original pulpit were married with the installation of the stained-glass windows in 1889, 1907 or 1910 to minimise disruption. The stencilling is now largely obscured by its replacement from West Church, Auchterarder, in 1958.

**Stone collection:** A fragment of sandstone cross-slab, dating to the 6th–8th centuries, carved in low relief and measuring 1.2m x 0.5m x 0.1m, was discovered under the flagstone floor of the nave in 1868. It was later cramped to the wall of the church, then placed against a wall within the tower and removed for the installation of the Dupplin Cross. It depicts a three-headed cross with interlace designs down either side; the rear face is missing. Conservation works have been carried out by HSCC and the stone has been reinstated within the church. A gravestone dating to the 1670s had been propped against the inner wall of the tower, and will be stored on site but not on public display. For Dupplin Cross, see separate ISCS.

### Social Overview

St Serf's tower is the dominant landmark of Dunning and, though some recent vandalism in the graveyard has been noted, it is not generally a major problem. There is an active Community Council as well as a local historical society, the Dunning Parish Historical Society. The present Dunning Parish Church, originally the United Free Church built in 1910 (from 1929 known as St Paul's, Church of Scotland), contains the 1860 communion table from St Serf's; approaches for its return have been unsuccessful.

### Spiritual Overview

The church was dedicated to St Serf, who was probably Pictish in origin and may have lived around 700 AD. It might be inferred that there was an Early Christian cell associated with this locality (with reference to the cross-slab fragment described above) and St Serf has strong links with Culross in Fife. The church was granted to Inchaffray, an early monastic settlement, adapted as an Augustinian priory by the earl of Strathearn in 1200.

The church is used for occasional services and is open to the public from April to September. The churchyard has many memorials (the earliest date to 1623 and 1624) and is maintained by Perth and Kinross Council (active burial rights exist). The former chancel of the church also includes 19th-century Rollo monuments.

## Aesthetic Overview

The church tower is central to, and virtually dominates, the small village of Dunning; some of the buildings that bounded the churchyard were demolished 1874–75. The medieval street pattern is retained and radiates out from the Tron Square (market place) immediately adjacent to the church. The village is relatively unspoilt and picturesque, with pleasing vernacular proportions primarily dating to the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

Further research is required on the interior painted decoration; particularly dating and attributing the stencilled decoration.

Our understanding of the immediate setting of the church over time could be enhanced by further investigation.

No archaeological research excavation has been undertaken. Human remains were noted under the floorboards and during the lowering of ground levels in 1868; therefore caution should be exercised, though further evidence of the Romanesque church might be revealed.

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

- Although much remodelled, Dunning is one of the most complete surviving late 12th-century parish churches in Scotland.
- The tower of three unequal tapering stages of ashlar is a dominant landmark and a remarkable survival from the Romanesque period, as are the finely decorated north doorway and tower arch.
- The church demonstrates a variant on a common approach to the alteration of a medieval kirk to better accommodate the needs of Reformed worship.
- The 19th-century interior is well preserved and the galleries, pews, pulpit and communion platform are an important ensemble that escaped remodelling in the ecclesiological revival that took place from the late 19th century onwards.
- The survival of the stencilled decoration and stained-glass windows are an important document for our understanding of 19th-century church interiors, with the potential for further work using paint analysis.
- The archaeological potential of the site is very high, with great scope for improving our understanding of the development of medieval parish churches.
- The internationally important Dupplin Cross is displayed within the church tower, framed by the pointed tower arch.

### Associated Properties

**Muthill Church**; Stobo Parish Church; Chirnside Parish Church; **St Magnus' Church, Egilsay**; **Dunblane Cathedral** (tower); Duddingston Parish Church; **Dupplin Cross**.

Keywords

parish church; Rollo; carved stones; Picts; Reformation; Romanesque