

Nigg Old Church

Denomination: Formerly Church of Scotland

Status: Museum owned and operated by a private trust

Visited by: Bruce and Elspeth Lindsay with Lorna Macpherson

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In 1843 most members of the congregation of Nigg Parish Church, exercising their right to protest, left the Church of Scotland to join the newly established Free Church of Scotland. A hundred years before



there was a similar 'walk out', as members chose to join the ranks of the first secession from the Church of Scotland. The reason most commonly cited for these dramatic events was that of patronage, the placement of ministers by local landowners (or heritors) but, as with many protest movements, the cause was complex rather than limited to a single issue.

By 1929, as circumstances changed, religious fervour cooled and compromise was reached, most of the dissenting groups rejoined the Church of Scotland. The

future looked bright but in 1991 the church closed to worship; not the victim of protest and schism but of dwindling attendance in the context of an increasingly secular society.

Today the church is owned and cared for by a private trust dedicated to the preservation of an important part of the nation's heritage for future generations. And it is worth preserving, not just for the building itself but as a memorial to the struggles and achievements within the Kirk and of highland congregations in particular, from the Reformation to the present day. Of the building itself, two words capture its essence; elegant simplicity.

In the Churchyard amongst the many gravestones is a 'cholera stone' beneath which, in 1832, an elder buried a bag containing the miasma ('vapour cloud') of the disease in the belief this would protect the parishioners from infection. Whilst the stone is a curiosity, the most interesting item on display in the church is a Pictish cross-slab of the late 8th or early 9th century. The stone is one of many in the area and may be related to a former Pictish monastery in Portmahomac some miles away. According to legend the Picts were converted to Christianity by Saint Ninian from Whithorn (5th century?) or Saint Columba from Iona (6th century). Research over the last thirty years or so has increased our understanding of the Picts and their culture. Their distinctive art work indicates they were a skilled people.

