

**ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
PORTSOY
ABERDEENSHIRE**



Standing Building Survey

Carried out 31st August 2017

by

Murray Archaeological Services Ltd



Report No: MAS 2017-19

by

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- Standing Building Survey -

1. Background

1.1 A standing building survey was required for the former Episcopal Church of St John the Baptist at Portsoy, Aberdeenshire, prior to its conversion into a dwelling house.

1.2 The archaeological condition (Condition No 1) was applied in the context of planning legislation (PAN 2/2011, SPP, SHEP), which states that it is necessary for developers to arrange for archaeological work to take place prior to development, in appropriate circumstances. Planning Application Number: APP/2017/1351.

1.3 A Level 1 Standing Building Survey was required which includes measured floor plans and a written account of the building's plan, form, function, age and development sequence, in addition to a photographic survey.

1.4 Murray Archaeological Services Ltd was commissioned to undertake the work by Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect, on behalf of his client Mr David Ashton. The site element of the survey was completed on the 31st August, 2017.

2. Desk-top survey

2.1 A search was carried out in the Sites and Monuments Record, Archaeology Service, Aberdeenshire Council, in the Sites and Monuments Records of the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS) and in the Listed Buildings Register of Historic Scotland.

2.2 The 25"/mile 1st and later Ordnance Survey maps were consulted.

2.3 Site plans of the site were kindly supplied by Andrew Keir and have been annotated and used as a basis for detailed plans of the observed areas.

3. The Site

3.1 The church lies to the W end of Seafield Street, the turnpike road that became the Victorian centre of the town. St John's is at the top of a slope on a bend in the road, and dominates the streetscape. The Free Church, later the parish church, was built some 29 years later a little further up the hill.



Illus 1 St John the Baptist church, looking NW

Parish: Fordyce

NGR: NJ 58777 65939

RCAHMS No: NJ56NE 137

Aberdeenshire SMR: NJ56NE0198

Historic Scotland Ref: 40280. B Listed Building.

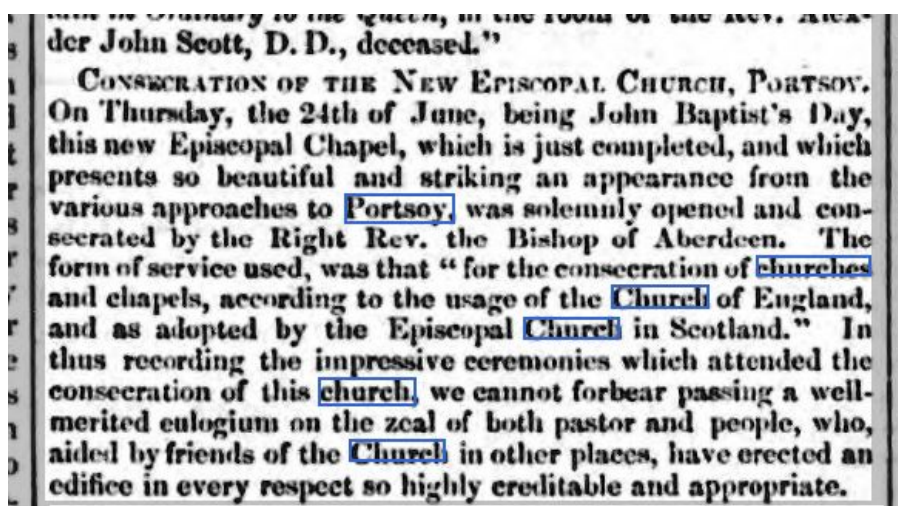
4. Documentary evidence

18th Century In the 18th century, Episcopalian support for the House of Stuart resulted in strict penal laws restricting their worship. The probable precursor of St

John's church was a chapel at New Durn burnt in 1746 by the Duke of Cumberland. Episcopal worship continued, first in a room in a house near the Old Harbour, and later in a small chapel on South High Street in 1797/8. (Pirie, 2013b).

1840 St John the Baptist church built. Designed by architect James Ross. From 1833 James Ross was based in Inverness. He died in 1853. His son Alexander, who was his apprentice from c.1848-1852, took over the practise after his death and was involved in later works at St John's church. <http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk>

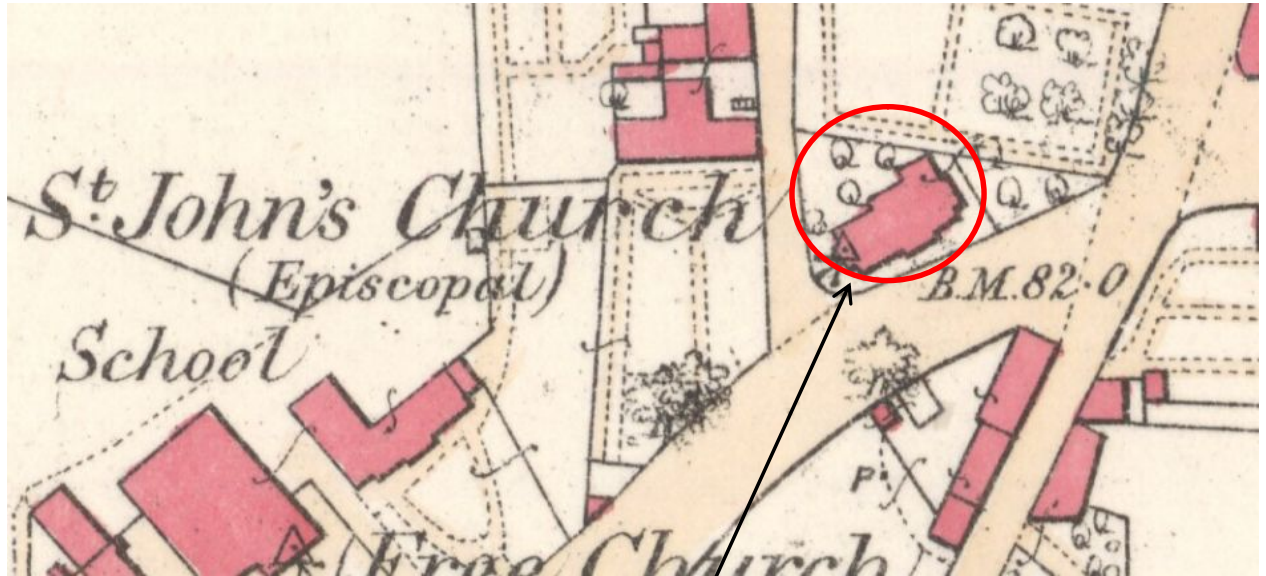
1841 St John's opened for worship.



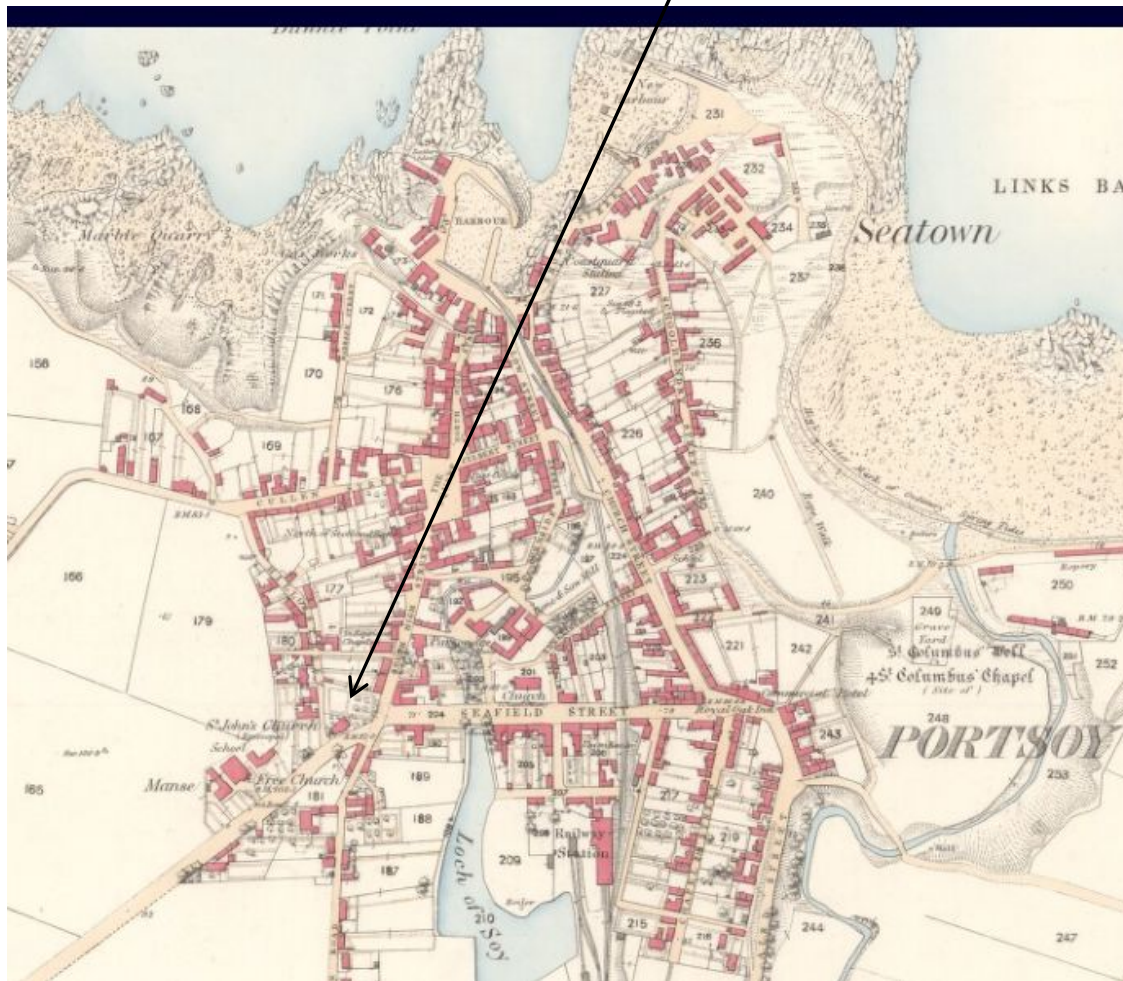
Illus 2 Extract from Oxford University and City Herald. 21st August 1841.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.uk

The New Statistical Account of 1834-45 vol.13 p.188 notes that the church was built but gives no details. <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Banff/Fordyce/13/188/> .

1866 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25” to the mile map (Banff sheet III.08 Fordyce, published 1871) shows the church and enclosing wall. There appears to be some sort of structure at the NE corner (where the boiler house now is). The more general view shows how the church would have dominated Seafield Street and the upper part of the town (Illus 4).

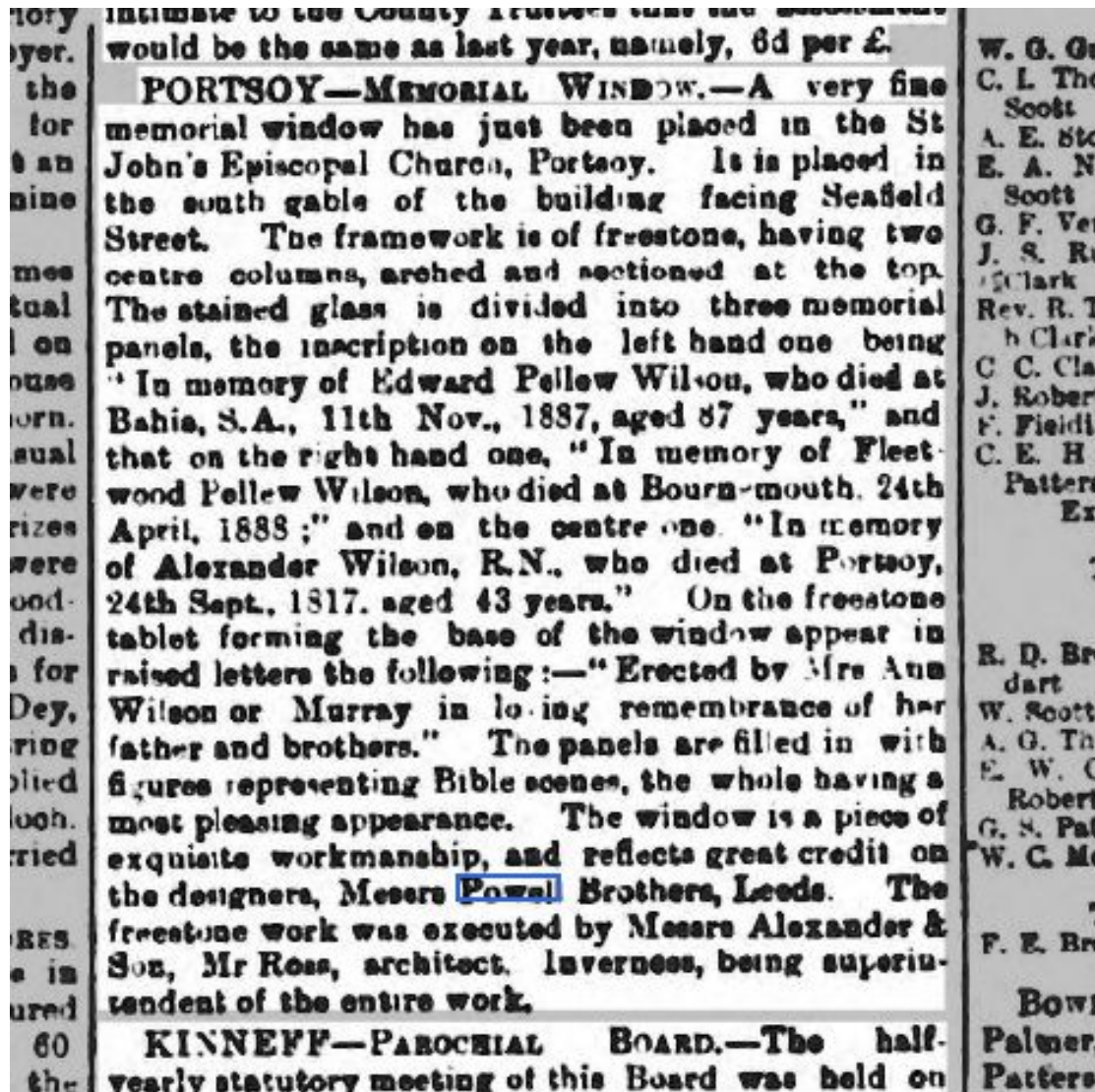


Illus 3 Detail of 1st edition OS map (25"/mile) Banff sheet III.8, surveyed 1866, published 1871
(www.nls.ac.uk)



Illus 4 1st edition OS map (25"/mile) Banff sheet III.8, surveyed 1866, published 1871
(www.nls.ac.uk)

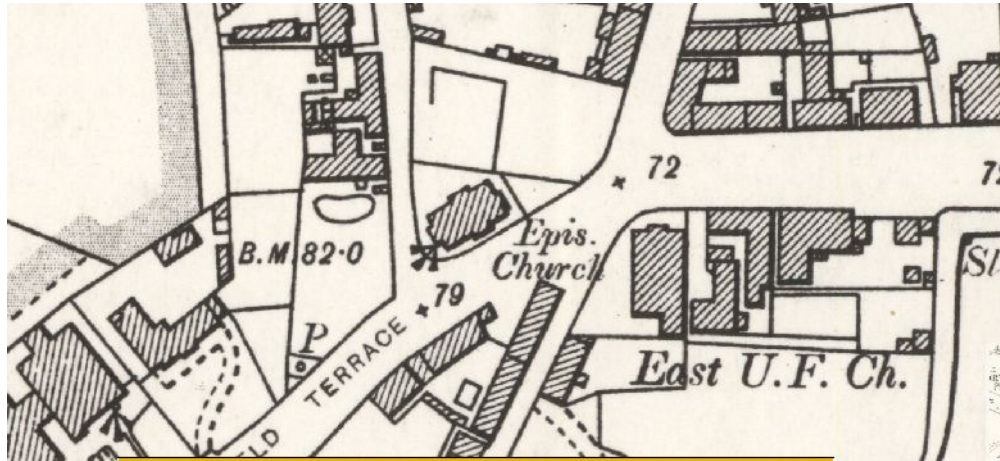
- 1889 Memorial window inserted in S wall (Illus 5). The Mr Ross, architect, who supervised the work would have been Alexander Ross, the son of the original architect.



Illus 5 Extract from Aberdeen Press and Journal 23rd July 1889.

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

- 1902 By the 2nd edition 25"/mile Ordnance Survey of 1902 (published 1904. Banffshire Sheet 003.08) the church is shown without the outshot structure on NE corner. (Illus 6).

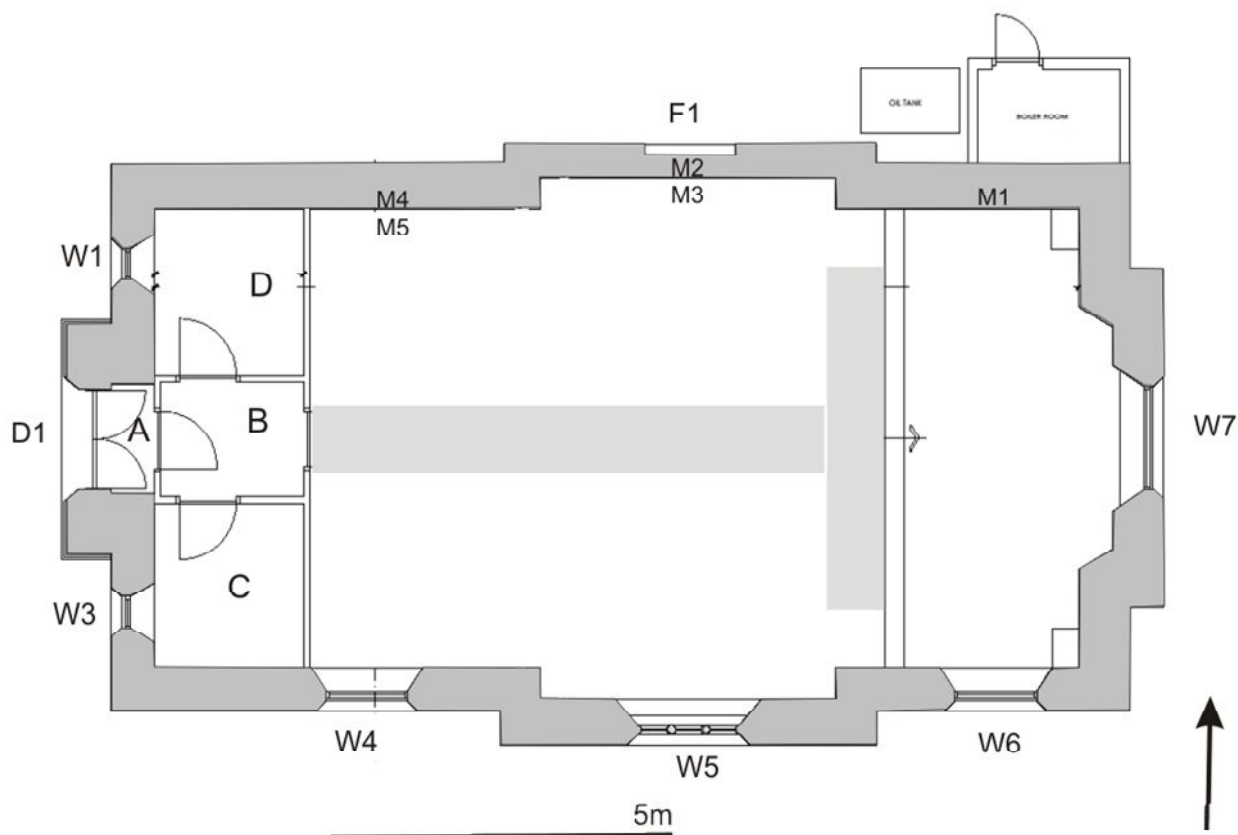


Illus 6 2nd edition 25"/mile Ordnance Survey of 1902 (pub 1904) (www.nls.ac.uk)

1959 St John the Baptist church reroofed and refurbished with the pulpit, lectern and pews from St Mary's church in Cullen. The altar rails were made and given by Charles Stewart, joiner at Fordyce. (Pirie, 2013b).

5 Methodology

- 5.1 The ground plans have been annotated to show details and to indicate differences in the building materials which may help in understanding the development and history of the building.
- 5.2 The areas recorded were photographed. The full set of photographs will be supplied on CD for the archive and a catalogue and annotated plans in the present report (Illus 52-53) indicate the position of each



Illus 7 Main plan annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.

6 The Building

THE CHURCH

The church was closed for worship in 2016 and, by the time of the survey in 2017, a number of internal fittings, specifically the font, lectern and pulpit had been removed.

Description

The church is a rectangular block set E/W with slight projections at E and W gables to frame the E window and W porch respectively. On the N and S walls, slight, gabled projections form the impression of truncated transepts (Illus 7). The rectangular belfry on the apex of the W gable emphasises the height of the building.

A small outshot boiler house stands against the E end of the N wall.

Dimensions Width: 8m, with E and W projections transepts giving maximum width of c.8.80m ext. Length: 15m, with N and S projections of c500mm giving a total length of 16m ext.

Walls Dark grey/black whitestone rubble with pale yellow sandstone quoins and details. The N wall is harled.

Roof Steeply pitched, slated. Bellcote at W gable apex. . Finials at the apex of the N and S transepts and at the E gable have a pyramidal capping to match the belfry. The W gable has matching pinnacles at the wall heads of the slightly projecting chancel.

(Illus 9)

Belfry

There is a sandstone belfry on the apex of the W gable. Rectangular, open to all sides with pyramidal top and cross on finial. The W face bears the date 1840 in high relief. The bell has been removed but iron strapping from the bell support remains on the W side and the pulleys for the bell rope can be seen both in the belfry and beside door D1.



Illus 8 Bellcote from W (above) and from SE (RHS).





Illus 9 View from NE showing finials and pinnacles.

W gable wall

The W gable which forms the entrance has been given a greater impression of height by the projecting central gable which almost gives the impression of a tower, topped by the belfry. This is further emphasised by the tall narrow windows.



Illus 10 W elevation

D1 W: 1.3m H: 2.35m. Gently pointed arch with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Iron pulley for bellrope attached to arch. Door of two leaves with blocked fanlight at the apex (Illus 11).



Illus 11 W wall door D1

W1, W3 W: 400mm H: 3.2m. (from elevation). Tall narrow pointed window with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Frosted glass divided into 2 panes with timber. (Illus 12-13)

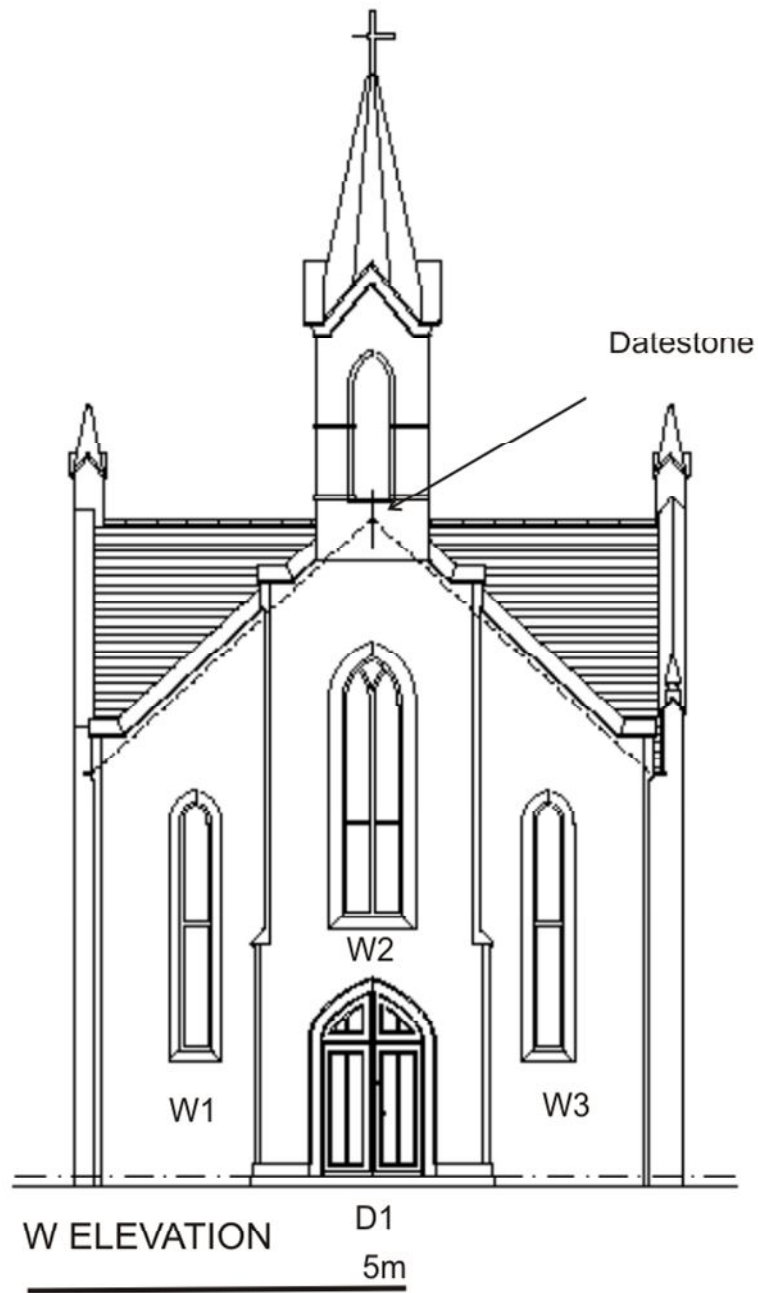
W2 W: 700mm H: 3.4m. (from elevation). Tall narrow pointed window with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Frosted glass divided into 5 panes by wooden tracery forming a Y with a lower cross bar. (Illus 12).



Illus 12 W1 (LHS) and W2 (RHS)



Illus 13 Detail of tooling on sandstone of W1



Illus 14 W elevation annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.

Wall



Illus 15 S elevation annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.



Illus 16 S elevation

The S wall is punctuated by three windows.

W4, W6 W: 1.15m H: 3.9m (from elevation). Tall, fairly narrow pointed arch windows with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Frosted glass divided into 5 panes by wooden tracery forming a Y with a lower cross bar. (Illus 7)



Illus 17 S elevation. W4 (LHS) and W5 (RHS)

W5 W: 1.5m H: 4.6m (from elevation). Rounded arch with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Stone tracery (part of the 1889 work). (Illus 17). Stained glass. (Illus 18-27).

The stained glass.

The stained glass is a memorial window erected in 1889 (Illus 5), the glass having been designed and made by Powell Brothers of Leeds. Charles and Albert Powell established a glass company in Leeds in 1872 and produced many stained glass windows for churches, particularly in N England in the last 3 decades of the 19th century before the company was taken over by Kayll & Co of Leeds in c.1905. It is of some interest that, on at least one other occasion, the architect, Alexander Ross, who supervised the instillation of this window at Portsoy (Illus 5) also chose to work with

the same glass company Powell Brothers on a window for St Andrews Episcopal Church, Brechin (Dundee Courier 21st March 1888), in 1888.



Illus 18 Memorial stone beneath memorial window W5

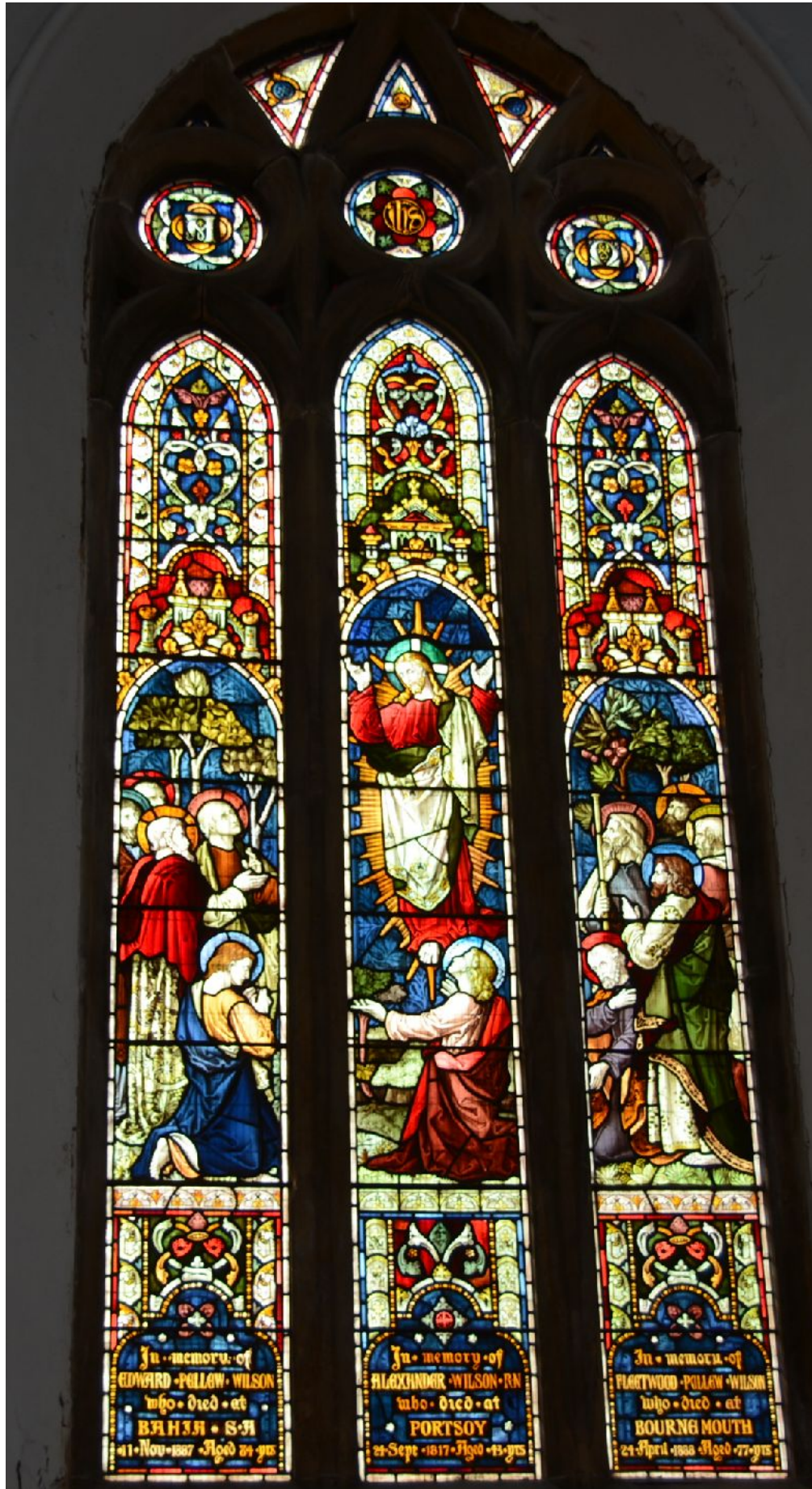
The window comprises three lancets with 3 roundels above and triangles at the apex. A memorial stone is set blocking the base of the window, with relief letters , *'Erected by Mrs Ann Wilson or Murray, widow of the Revd Peter Murray in loving remembrance of her father and brothers'*.

The stonework of the window tracery was also erected in 1889, by Alexander and Son (Illus 5,).

The upper triangles and roundels have geometric and foliate designs with the roundels respectively depicting the letters: alpha, ihs, and omega (Illus 19).



Illus 19 W window. Details of two of the roundels – alpha (LHS) and omega (RHS).



Illus 20 Central S window (W5)

The three lancets depict the Ascension of Christ (Illus 20) (note the nails in his hands Illus 21) watched by some of the disciples. Details show considerable skill in the painted glass of the faces and sumptuous richness in the fabric of the clothes (Illus 21-23).



Illus 21 W window detail from the central lancet



Illus 22 W window. Detail from E lancet

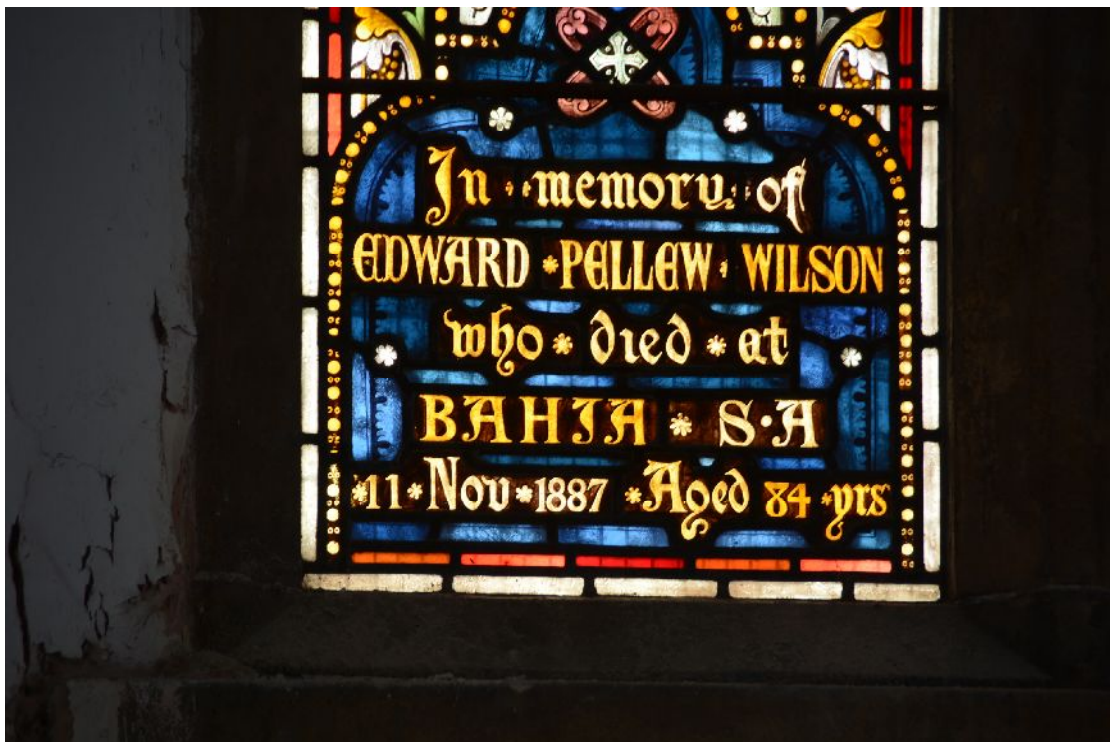


Illus 23 W window. Detail from W lancet

At the base of the lancets are the memorials inscriptions to Edward, Alexander and Fleetwood Wilson (Illus 25-27). Edward Pellew Wilson was born in Portsoy in 1803 and died in 1887 in Bahia, Salvador, South America, where he and his brother Fleetwood (born 1811, died 1888) had founded the firm of Wilson Sons and Company in 1837, a transportation and shipping company. Fleetwood managed the English end of the operation and died in Bournemouth in 1888. Their father, Alexander Wilson, was born in Portsoy in 1774 and died there in 1817 and was in the Royal Marines.



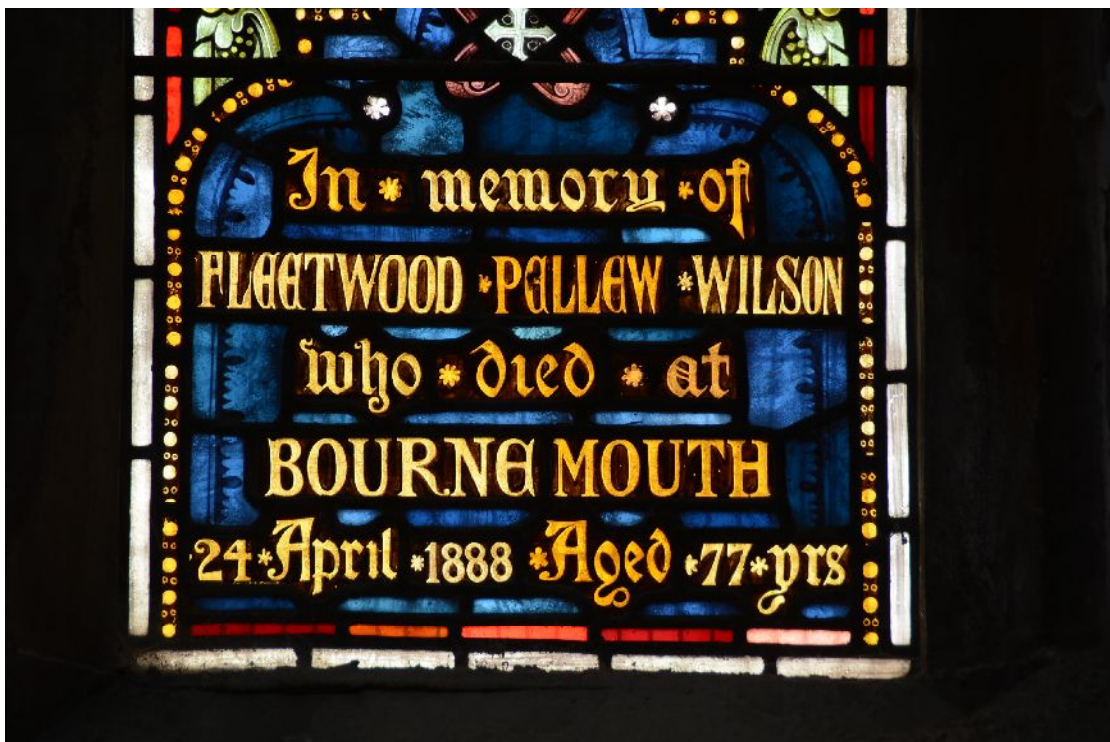
Illus 24 Detail of upper roundels and triangles



Illus 25 Detail of memorial dedication



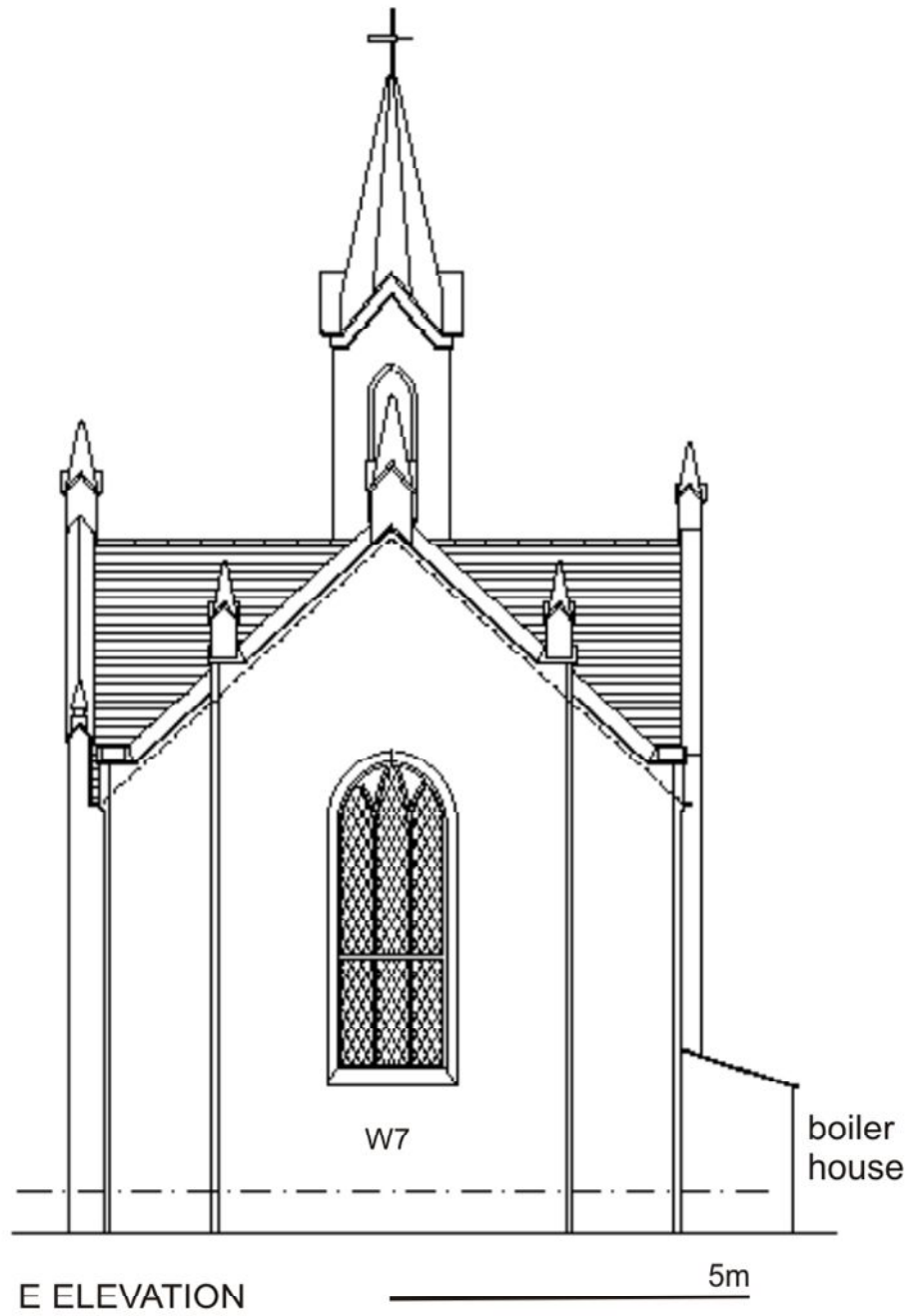
Illus 26 Detail of memorial dedication



Illus 27 Detail of memorial dedication

Bench mark. An OS benchmark on a metal plaque is inserted at the base of the S wall, near the SW corner of the building.

E gable wall



Illus 28 E elevation annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.



Illus 29 E gable from NE



Illus 30 W7 from inside

W7 W: 1.5m H: 4.2m Round arched window with tooled pale yellow sandstone rybats and arch, slightly splayed externally. Glass divided into 5 panes by wooden tracery forming two Y's with a lower cross bar. The upper two triangular panes are of stained glass with a foliate design, the rest of the glass is frosted with diamond leading superimposed (Illus 30-31).



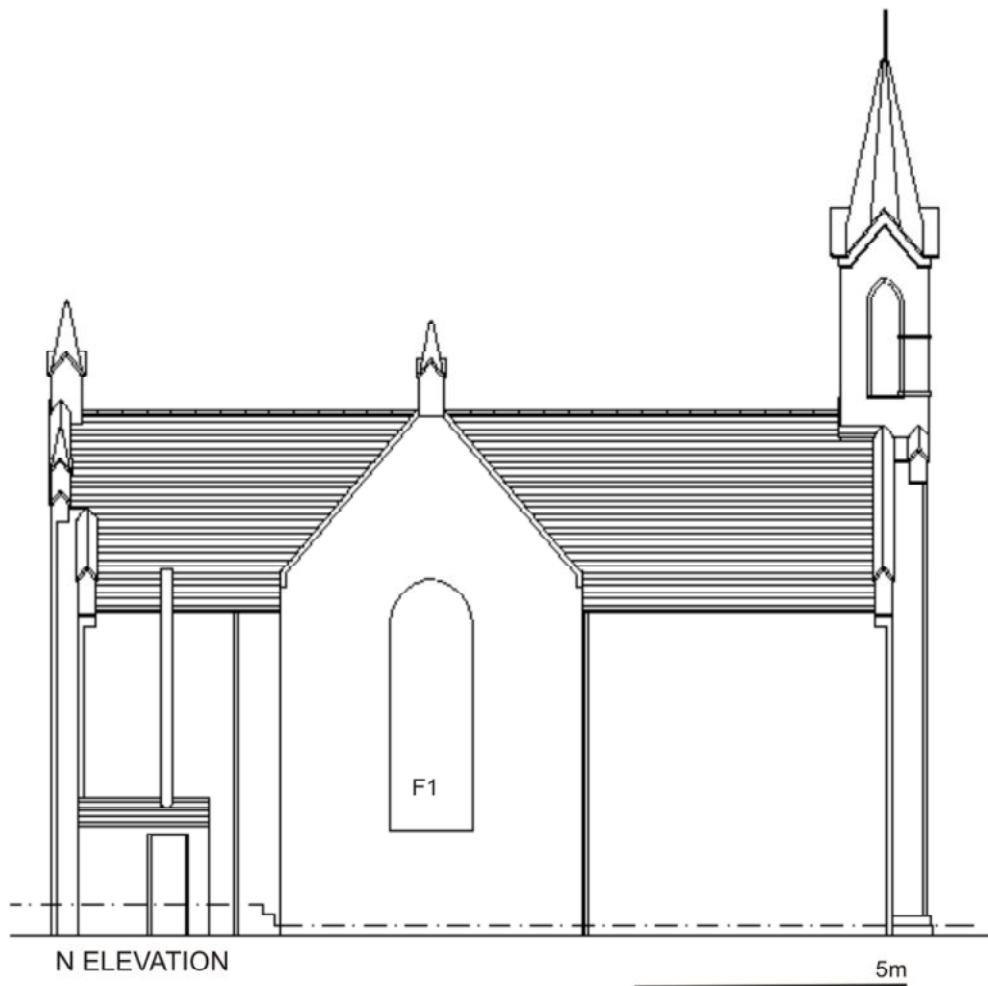
Illus 31 Detail of stained glass panels at top of W7

N wall

The N wall is very much the back of the building with a small boiler house abutting the E end. It has a slightly projecting transept but this has no window. Harling on this wall may be because this is the direction facing towards the sea.



Illus 32 N elevation



Illus 33 N elevation annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.

F1 There is a window shaped alcove in the centre of the N 'transept' This is blocked with what appears to be the same stone as the wall and it appears to have no sandstone at the margins (although the harling does partially cover it).

W: 1.5m. H: 4.6m (from elevation). (Illus 34)



Illus 34 N wall. Detail of F1

Interior



Illus 35 Interior looking E



Illus 36 Interior looking W

The interior is 13.6m long in total, with plasterboard partitions at the W end forming two small utility rooms (Illus 7: C, D, Illus 37-38) and a lobby (Illus 7:A,B, Illus 39). The internal width ranged between 6.75m in the main area to 7.75m at the transepts.



Illus 37 Partitioned room in NW corner



Illus 38 Partitioned room in SW corner



Illus 39 Lobby at W end.

The walls are painted white, with the exception of the E wall which is pale duck egg blue/green. The ceiling is pale blue. A break in the wall at the E end of the N wall showed that the main walls had been lined with lathe and plaster (Illus 40). Large heating pipes run along the inside of the walls.



Illus 40 Lathe and plaster exposed on inside of N wall

The ceiling is gently arched, with N/S arches at the transepts (Illus 41).



Illus 41 Underside of ceiling looking E

The floor is of wood, with the exception of large stone slabs along the central aisle and across the base of the chancel steps. Two timber steps divide the nave from the chancel, the upper one having slots where there had been uprights for a chancel rail which has been removed. The floor of the chancel is covered in black and white lino, with some carpeting.



Illus 42 Chancel steps looking N. Note sockets for chancel rail

Three white globe lights on chains lie along the longitudinal axis of the building (Illus 43). Two modern spot lights are directed on the position where the altar would have been.



Illus 43 Light fitting

Some of the pews appear to have been removed. The remaining pews are of plain pine (Illus 44). The NE and SE corners have been boxed off- the SE one being a cupboard where at the time of the survey there was a wooden ladder.



Illus 44 Pews

The Font, bell, lectern and pulpit are no longer in the church- and it is presumably these assets that that are referred to in the annual accounts for the church in the year ending 30th September 2016, where it states that the Vestry's priority

'immediately before and after the sale was to ensure the safe and appropriate disposition of the moveable artefacts from the building.'

allsaintsbuckie.aodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/getPart.pdf

Photographs of the wooden pulpit, reading desk and lectern and the stone font are on liner at the *Places of Worship in Scotland* website

<http://scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/10853/name/St+John+The+Baptist+Episcopal+Church%2C+Portsoy+Portsoy+Grampian>

The Memorials

Four memorials survive on the inner face of the N wall and a blank patch in the paintwork shows where a fifth memorial- or similar- has been removed.

M1 White marble against dark grey painted background. (Illus 45).

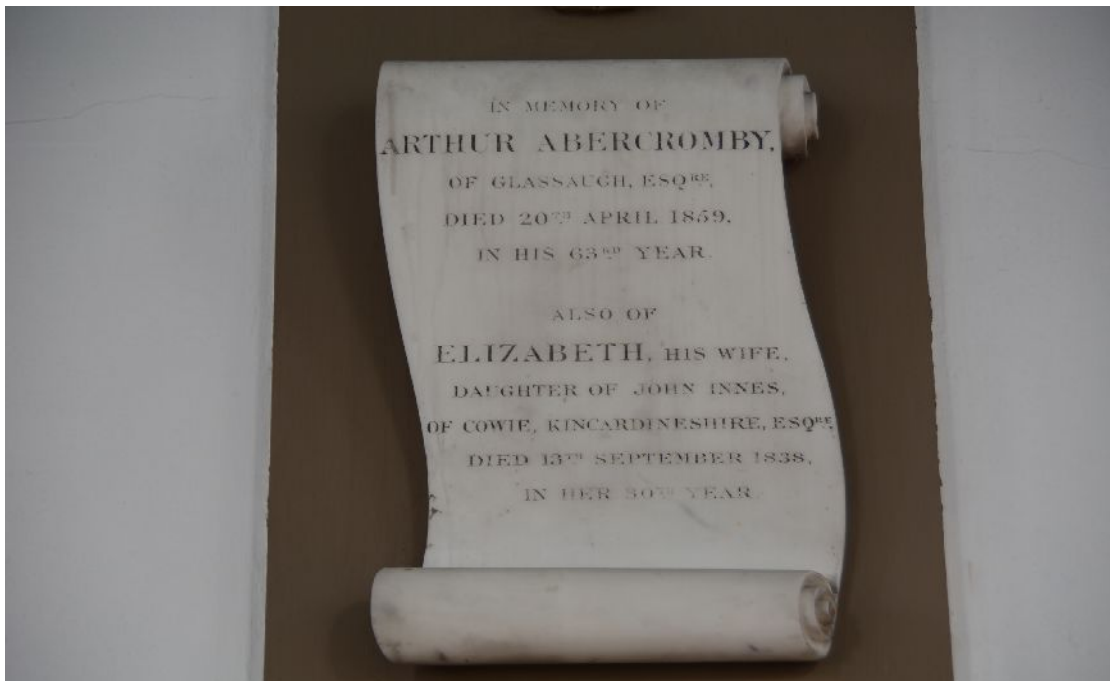
'In memory of James Wilson Esqr of Cairnbanno who died at Rose Acre Cottage, 27th October 1833 aged 42 years'.



Illus 45 N wall M1

M2 White marble scroll on stone painted dark grey. Coloured heraldic shield above.. (Illus 46-47).

'In memory of Arthur Abercromby of Glassaugh Esqr. Died 20th April 1859 in his 63rd year. Also of Elizabeth his wife, daughter of John Innes of Cowie, Kincardineshire, Esqr, died 13th September 1838 in her 30th year'.



Illus 46 N wall M2



Illus 47 N wall M2

M3 White marble on dark grey painted background. (Illus 48).

'In memory of the Reverend Alexander Cooper A.M. pastor of this church for 30 years and by whose exertions it was chiefly built. Died 10th September 1863, Aged 56 years.

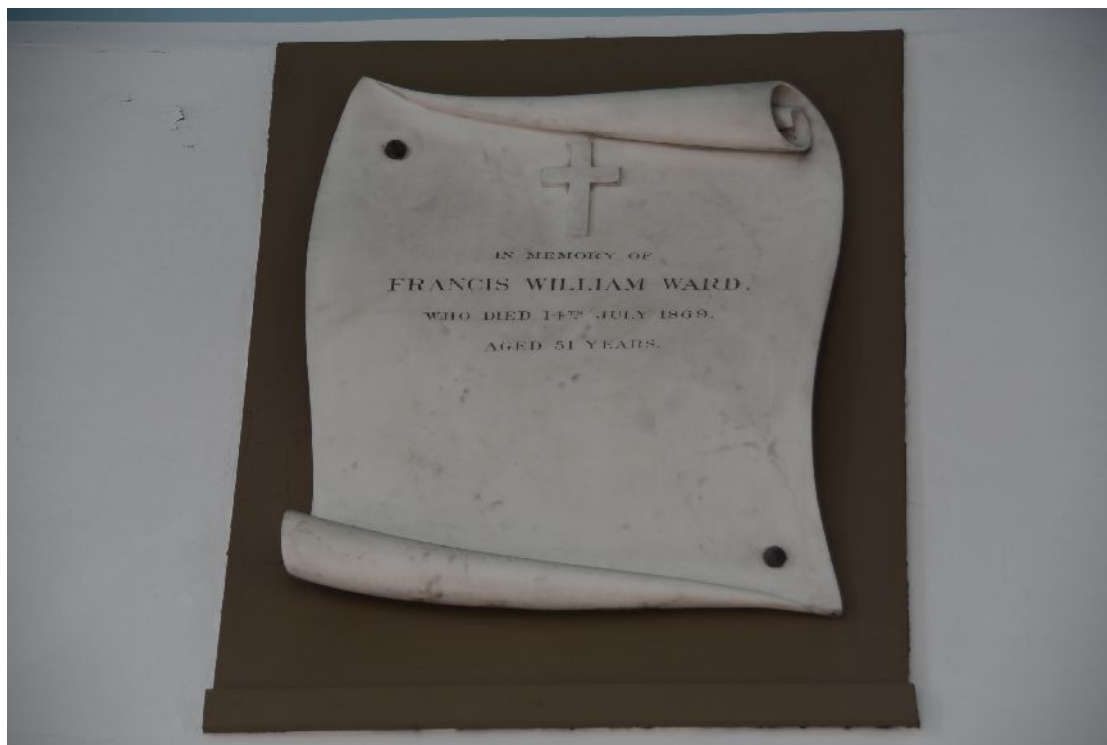
This tablet is erected by his attached congregation and friends in token of their sorrow and esteem'



Illus 48 N wall M3

M4 White marble scroll on dark grey painted background. (Illus 49).

'In memory of Francis William Ward who died 14th July 1869. Aged 51 years.'



Illus 49 N wall M4

M5 Unpainted patch where a memorial or panel has been removed. (Illus 50).



Illus 50 N wall M5

THE ENCLOSING WALL AND GATES

The church grounds are enclosed by a low stone wall with an entrance gate at the SW flanked by sandstone pillars (Illus 51).



Illus 51 Entrance gate.

7. Discussion

From 1746-1792 the Penal Laws had severely restricted Scottish Episcopalian worship. A priest, for example, could only minister to a maximum of four people at any time.

These restrictions began to be lifted after the Relief Act of 1792 and as a result congregations grew and in the first half of the 19th century a considerable number of Scottish Episcopal churches were built. From 1833 the Scottish Episcopalian church was influenced by the Oxford Movement which gave it an increased emphasis on ritual- this in turn was reflected not only in the worship, but also in the church buildings (Stranraer-Mull 2013). By the mid 19th century there was, for example, much greater emphasis on the altar and greater distinction between the nave and the chancel.

St John's at Portsoy was designed by James Ross and built in 1840 at a time when these changes were only beginning- in the same year he designed St Mary's Episcopal church in Inverurie- which is remarkably similar in external appearance

<http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/4136/image/13349/name/St+Mary%27s+Episcopal+Church%2C+Inverurie+Inverurie+Grampian>.

His son, Alexander Ross, who did later work at Portsoy during the renovations of 1889, was himself an Episcopalian and also designed a number of Episcopal churches and demonstrated much more influence from the new ideas (Maclean, 2014, 134-5). Through its links with both architects St John's church reflects a time of important change both in the Scottish Episcopal church and in its buildings.

8. References

McKean, C 1990 *Banff and Buchan: An illustrated architectural guide*. Royal Institute of Architects Scotland: Edinburgh.

Maclean, A 2014 'Scottish Episcopal churches 1860-1910: The continuing influence of the ecclesiological movement', *Architectural Heritage*, 25, 133-57.

Pirie, F 2013 History of Portsoy: The Wilson Family. Accessed (1/9/2017) on line at <http://toonloon.bizland.com/ppap/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Wilson-Family.pdf>

Pirie, F 2013 History of Portsoy: The Churches and Religions. Accessed (1/9/2017) on line at <http://toonloon.bizland.com/ppap/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Churches-Religions.doc>

Stranraer-Mull, G 2013 *Steps on the way: Scottish episcopal church history*. Accessed on line at <http://www.episcopalhistory.org/home>

8 Archive

A full set of photographs with the photo location plans will be supplied on CD to the Aberdeenshire SMR in Aberdeen and to the NMRS.

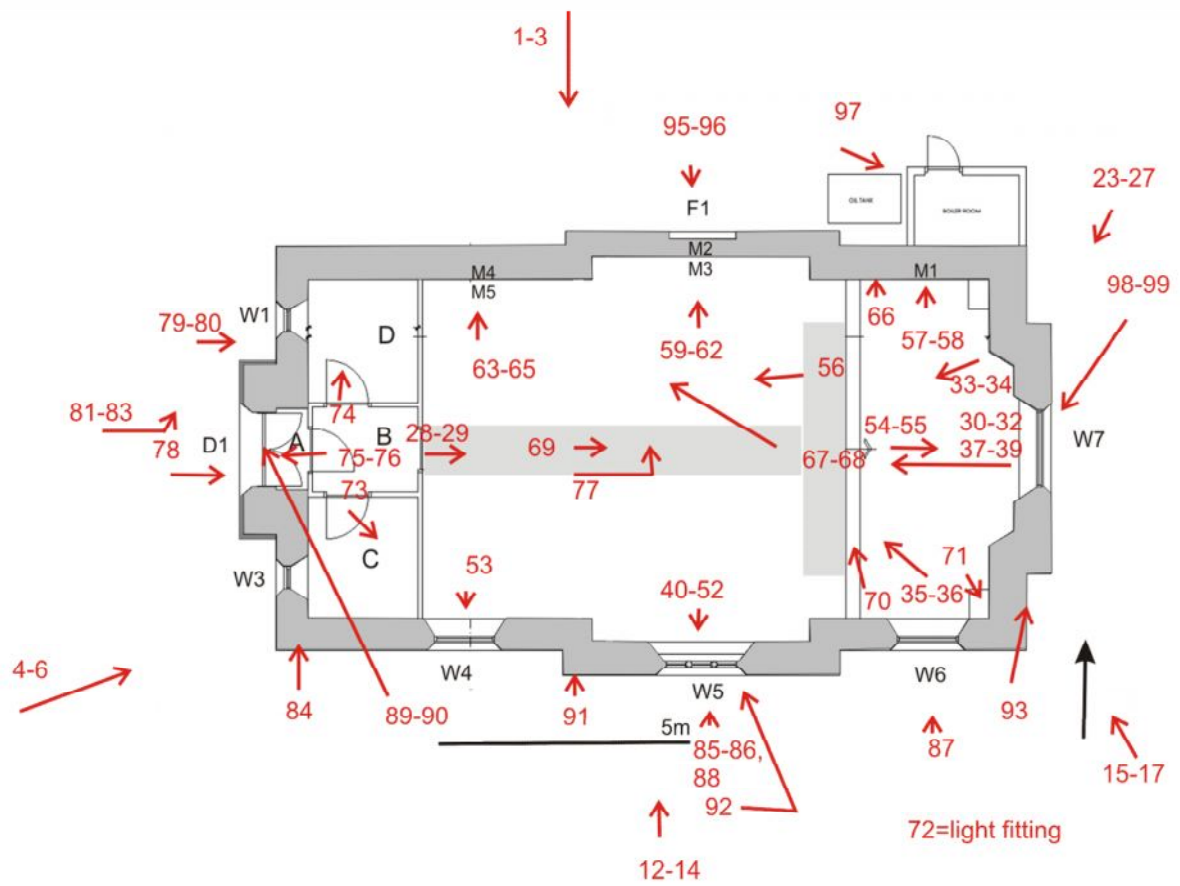
Appendix 1:

Photographic Catalogue

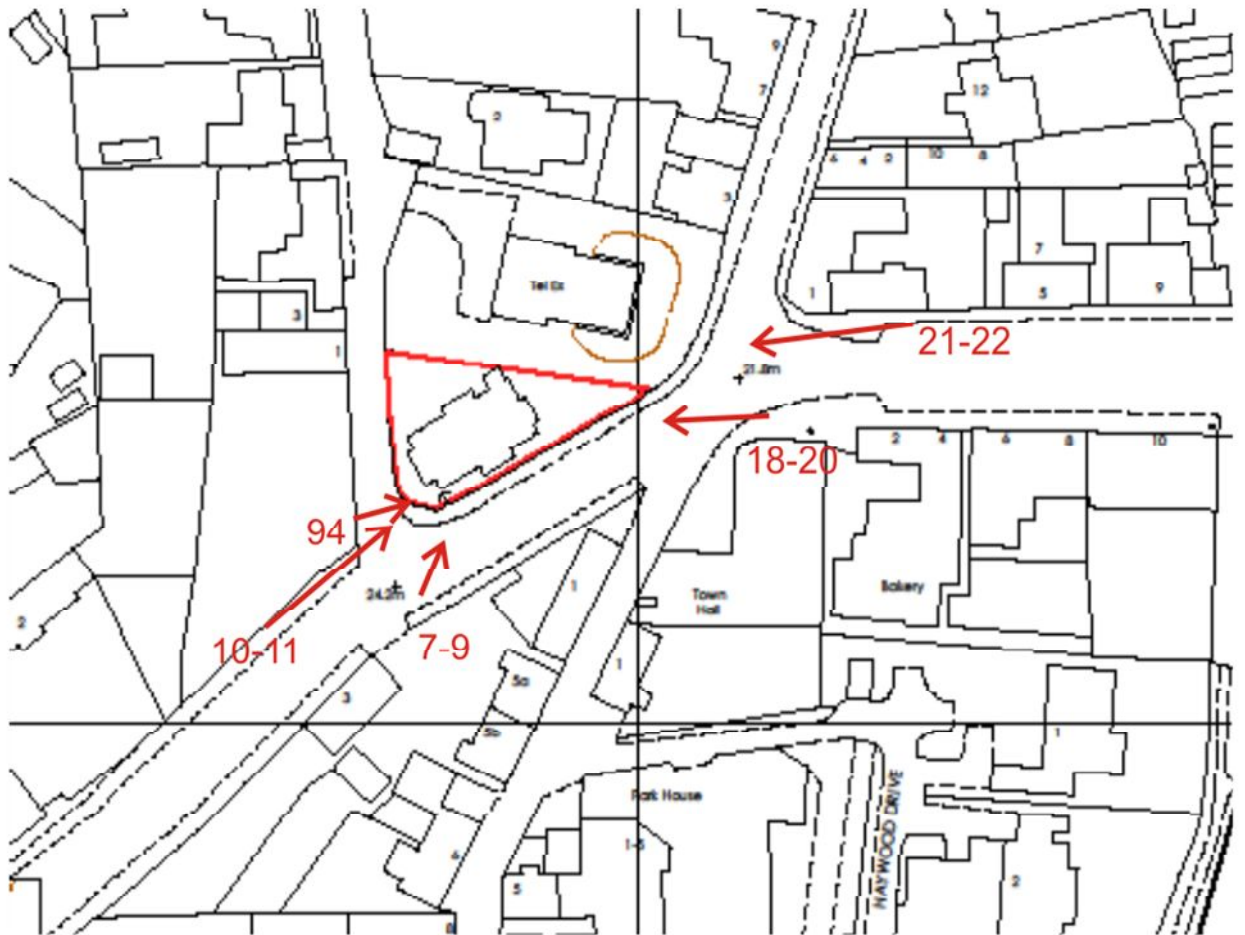
The position of photographs can be seen on annotated drawings Illus 52-53

Photo number	Content
ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, PORTSOY	
1-3	N elevation
4-6	W elevation
7-11	Setting looking E
12-14	S elevation
15-17	E elevation from S
18-22	Setting looking W
23-27	E elevation from N
28-29	Interior looking E
30-32	Interior looking W
33-34	Interior S wall
35-36	Interior N wall
37-39	Interior looking W
40-52	Stained glass window W5
53	Window W4
54-55	E window W7
56	W windows W1-W3
57-65	Memorials on inside of N wall
66	Lathe and plaster of inner face of wall

Photo number	Content
67-68	Pews
69	Paving on central aisle
70	Chancel steps and rail sockets
71	Cupboard in SE corner
72	Light fitting
73-74	Partitioned rooms at W end
75	Lobby at W end
76	Inside of main W door
77	Ceiling
78	W wall door D1
79	W wall window W1
80	Detail of stonework W1
81	W wall window W2
82	Belfry
83	Date on belfry
84	OS bench mark on N wall
85-86	E wall window W5
87	E wall window W6
88	E wall window W5
89-90	Belfry from SE
91-93	Details of pinnacles
94	Gate
95-96	N wall F1
97	Boiler house against N wall
98-99	E wall window W7



Illus 52 Main plan with photograph numbers in red. Annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.



Illus 53 Location map showing photographs of site setting. Annotated from drawings courtesy of Andrew Keir, Chartered Architect.