

## ***New Parish and Kirk***

The parish of Pitsligo was established on 28th June 1633 by Act of the Scottish Parliament, from the existing parishes of Aberdour, Fraserburgh and Tyrie following petition by Alexander Forbes of Pitsligo. It was the last parish erected within the Synod of Aberdeen.

The building of the kirk commenced prior to 1633, possibly as early as 1630. It became known to locals both as the 'Visible Kirk', especially by fishermen who used it as a landmark and 'Cant's Kirk' because of Andrew Cant, the first Minister of the new parish. The Act of Parliament notes "*Lord Pitsligo his anine propper charges and expenses buildit and biggit up ane new kirk*"

## ***Gravestones***

The kirkyard contains approximately 145 recumbent tombstones (tablestones) many of which exhibit outstanding examples of craftsmanship. The tablestone was a popular form of monument from about 1643 through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The



earlier stones were ornamented with the symbols of mortality and immortality with later examples from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century incorporating trade emblems.

These stones were almost always supported on 4 or 6 low pedestals, which could also be highly decorated. Perhaps the most individual tombstone is that to Anna Sim who died in March 1724 which depicts a resurrection scene incorporating angels wearing kilts. This can be seen on the south west side of the old kirk.

## ***Ministers of the Parish***

Particular note is made here of three former Ministers of the Parish who for different reasons are associated with major historical events at home and abroad.

**Andrew Cant** (1634–39), the first Minister of the Parish, became a leading figure in the Covenanting movement. **William Swan** (1687–1716) was the last Episcopalian Minister when ejected for his Jacobite sympathies. **William Mercer** (1720–1767) was the father of Hugh, a graduate in medicine from Aberdeen University and supporter of the Jacobite cause who following Culloden left for America. Befriended by George Washington he became a General in the revolutionary army and was killed at the Battle of Princeton in 1777.



***1724 tablestone incorporating Killed Angels.***



***Alexander, Lord Pitsligo panel in south west elevation of the***

## ***Kirk Architecture***

The kirk structure was typically plain with harled elevations, relieved by red sandstone dressings at doors, windows and corners under a pitched roof which was originally thatched and later clad in Scotch slate.

The simplicity was contrasted by the beautiful richly ornate bellcot thought to have been carved by Dutch craftsman and dated 1635.

This bellcot was restored as part of the Historic Kirkyards project in 2003.



***Reconstruction of the old kirk interior***

Originally external stairs provided access to the interior galleries. These were removed and new interior stairs were built during major renovations in 1793.

The plain galleried interior would have been dominated by the magnificent 1634 Forbes Loft, opposite the pulpit, and raised above the floor of the kirk.



***Carved detail from Forbes's Loft***

## Kirk History

The reformation in 1560 ended the practice of endowing masses to be said in perpetuity for departed souls. It also led to the General Assembly in 1581 forbidding the practice of burials within a kirk. These were often accompanied by the erection of elaborate memorials to draw attention to an individual's or family's status.

Burials could still however be carried out in vaults, which formed part of an aisle adjoining the kirk. Over the vault in this instance the Forbes erected a loft or family pen to celebrate their status.

Despite major renovations in 1793, by 1877 the building's condition was causing great concern.

Although a majority of the kirk session wished to see the building renovated, a minority, including the Minister, argued for a new building.

Whilst a new building was erected and finally opened in 1890 the intervening years witnessed great distress within the parish including petitions, civil unrest, and an effigy of the Minister being publicly burned.

The new Kirk, which was designed to incorporate an aisle to house the Forbes Loft, was closed for worship in 1997.

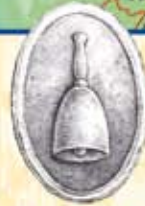
**In order to secure the future of the loft on this site, the building passed into the ownership of the Pitsligo Castle Trust in 2002. Details for viewing are displayed on the kirk door.**

## Decorated support for tablestone



## Pitsligo Parish

Tradition says Alexander Forbes of Pitsligo (1<sup>st</sup> Lord Pitsligo) resolved to form a new parish after hearing the parish Minister of Aberdour denounce Pitsligo, Pittullie and Pitendrum as the 'three pits of hell'.



## Aberdeenshire's HISTORIC KIRKYARDS

The kirkyards of Aberdeenshire are managed on your behalf by Aberdeenshire Council. This leaflet has been prepared by the Planning and Environmental Service with funding assistance from the National Lottery and Historic Scotland.



Supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund



## Aberdeenshire's HISTORIC KIRKYARDS



## Pitsligo Parish Kirkyard

Peathill, Rosehearty

