

Kinfauns Old Parish Church – Desk Based Assessment

March 2015 - Jürgen van Wessel

Headland Archaeology was commissioned to undertake a desk based assessment on Kinfauns Old Parish Church, near Perth, by the Tay Landscape Partnership. This study forms part of a package of archaeological works designed to inform and mitigate proposed consolidation and repair works, and to improve local understanding of the building and its use. A wide range of documentary evidence was consulted, and a working hypothesis for the development of the building has been suggested. Four main phases were identified: the establishment of a dependant chapel to Scone Abbey at Kinfauns in the 12th century; the achievement of parochial status and the construction of the core of the extant building in the 15th century; substantial modification post-reformation; and finally continued use and some further modifications until abandonment the mid-19th century. The physical evidence for this phasing will be investigated further in forthcoming historic building recording and test-pitting work.

Introduction

Headland Archaeology has been appointed by the Tay Landscape Partnership to undertake a programme of archaeological work at Kinfauns Old Parish Church, near Perth. The work will inform and mitigate proposed consolidation and repair works, and comprises a desk based assessment (this document), historic building recording, test pit evaluation, and a watching brief, if required.

The Tay Landscape Partnership is a joint scheme managed and funded by Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust, Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust and The Heritage Lottery Fund. This 4 year landscape project will work closely with statutory and community stakeholders with an active interest in the local landscape. The Partnership's vision is: *"To celebrate and enhance for future generations the landscapes where the rivers Tay and Earn meet and to reconnect residents and visitors with the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area"*.

The village of Kinfauns (Illus 1) is located in the Tay valley to the north of the A90, approximately three miles east of Perth. The 'old' church was constructed in the early 15th

century, most likely on the site of an earlier chapel of Scone Abbey. The building has seen considerable alteration, particularly in the reformation and was abandoned with the construction of the adjacent new church in 1886. The building is a Scheduled Monument (Index Number: 5642) and is included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest as Category B (Reference: 13796). It is also included in the National Monuments Record for Scotland (site number: NO12SE 13) and the Perth and Kinross Historic Environment Record (ID: MPK5428).

At present, the rectangular body of the church is roofless, surviving to a maximum height of 3.5m and generally below the wall-head. The projecting south aisle is roofed but is no longer watertight. A resistivity survey was undertaken in the immediate surroundings of the church in 2007 (Morris 2007), and a structural assessment made in 2012 (Borthwick 2012) and revised in 2014 (Williamson 2014).

The present report aims to construct a broad phasing of the structure based on available documentary evidence, in order to provide a working hypothesis to be tested by the forthcoming programme of fieldwork.

Early origins - 12th-14th Centuries

The name Kinfauns is derived from the Celtic language and describes the situation at the head of a narrow valley which opens into the Carse of Gowrie, the stretch of flat land between Perth and Dundee along the north shore of the Firth of Tay. The first ecclesiastical reference to Kinfauns dates to 1115 (Smythe 1838, 31), when it was granted as a dependent chapel to Scone by King Alexander I, and confirmed by the Bishop Richard of St Andrews in 1163-78 (Fawcett *et al* 2008a). No further reference to the chapel was found until the late 14th century, with Bishop Walter Traill's 1395 confirmation of Scone's churches and Pope Benedict XIII's response in the same year (*ibid*). No reference could be found to the specific building relating to this period, nor do any earlier chapels survive in south-east Perthshire, with the possible exception of Stobhall, which may have had 14th century origins (RCAHMS 1994, 130). It is likely that the early chapel at Kinfauns was at the same location as the later medieval church, which implies either that it was physically incorporated or entirely removed and rebuilt. In the latter case, there is potential for re-used building materials, although these may be difficult to distinguish (*ibid*).

Construction of the present Church – 15th Century

The core of the extant building was constructed in the early 15th century and had achieved parochial status by 1419, with a supplication to the pope requesting an indulgence for all those visiting the chapel of St Ninian and contributing towards its maintenance (locating the chapel in the parish of Kinfauns; Fawcett *et al* 2008a). The parish measured approximately five miles in length and one-and-a-half in breadth, and formed mostly of arable land (Lewis 1846, 61-82). Bounded to the south-west by the River Tay, and by the parishes of Kinnoull to the north-west, Kilspindie to the North, Errol to the east and St Madoes to the south-east.

The building comprised a simple rectangular sandstone structure, measuring 7.9m north-south and possibly around 17m from east-west. The original length is uncertain but is likely to have been shorter than the surviving remains – the position of the western doorways is unusually far from that end of the structure, suggesting a later extension (see below). The size is similar to other contemporary parish churches such as that at Blair (Fawcett *et al* 2008b), Rait and Cambusmichael (RCAHMS 1994, 130). The height of the original building is unknown but was almost certainly gabled. It is likely that the principal façade was to the south, with possibly two doorways (for nave and chancel) and a window on the southern elevation, and a single round-headed door to the north.

A semi-circular-headed recess in the north chancel wall may be an original feature, although stylistically could be 16th century (MacGibbon and Ross 1902, 515). The location would be favoured for a tomb, being close to where the holy mysteries were celebrated, and also possibly used as an Easter sepulchre (Fawcett 2002, 305). Although stylistically different, another Easter sepulchre can be seen in the surviving chancel at St Ninian's Church in Stirling (Robertson 2012, 7), dating potentially to the early 16th century or earlier.



Plate 1 - The semi-circular-headed recess in the north wall of the chancel in 1902 (after MacGibbon and Ross 1902, Fig 1477)



Plate 2 - The same recess in a modern photograph (after Fawcett *et al* 2008a)

Comparison of a 1902 sketch of the recess (Plate 1) with a modern photograph (Plate 2) gives some indication as to the height of the floor level in the building. At least a full course of masonry from the back wall of the recess has been obscured, giving an indication that up to 20cm of debris has filled the interior of the church.

A small (now infilled) rectangular aumbry adjacent to the recess (possibly representing a simple sacrament house) and a small ogee-headed water stoup next to the western door on the south wall may also be original features.

There is evidence in the form of holes in the walls for timber dooks to support plaster, but it is unclear whether this is an original feature. Similarly, a painting on the plaster of the west wall was discovered during the dismantling of the building – it is unclear to which period this relates but is likely to have been covered post-reformation (MacGibbon and Ross 1902, 514). An indication of the interior fittings and decorations may be provided at Stobhall chapel, approximately ten miles north of Kinfauns. This 14th- or 15th-century chapel has retained much of its medieval character, including painted ceilings, water stoup, aumbry doors and a heavy stone altar (*ibid*, 359-369).

There are also three stone grave covers at Kinfauns dating to this early period, two of which have been used as lintels for the north door and south-east window, and the third positioned against the south wall of the church.

The structure may have been extended to the west shortly after construction to the surviving length of 21.6m. The addition of a large south-facing window in this extension may have been necessary to adequately light the enlarged space. The style of this window suggests a late medieval date, possibly in the later 15th century.

Post-reformation – 16th Century

The first explicit mention of the Kirk at Kinfauns (as opposed to the chapel) dates to 1561, immediately following the reformation (Smythe 1843, 216). The change in practice brought about by the Reformation required a number of modifications to the structure of the church. It is possible that the church was heightened - the position of the chamfered offset at the east end would normally align with the base of the gable, but here is positioned above a new doorway but at least several courses below the gable (Fawcett *et al* 2008a). This may suggest that the gable had been raised, perhaps allowing a window to be built above the offset, as at Stobhall (RCAHMS 1994, 131). A similar heightening is seen at Blair Church (Fawcett *et al* 2008b). In the latter case it is suggested that additional headroom was required for the installation of galleries at the east and west ends. This may also provide a reason for the provision of doors on both gables. It is not known when galleries were installed at Kinfauns but they were definitely in place by the 19th century; if the roof was raised, it cannot have been sufficient as the minister preparing the *New Statistical Account* in 1843 complained of the low walls and cramped headroom (McLean 1843, 1221). The four windows on the north elevation are of similar style and mirror existing southern openings. The sepulchre in the north wall may have been concealed at this time (Fawcett *et al* 2008a), which involved the cutting back of the hood mould. The adjacent aumbry may also have been blocked.

A small, square southern aisle was added, dated by an inscribed mural tablet to 1598. The building may not have been fully keyed into the

original, using at least one risband (butt) joint at the north-east corner (Borthwick 2012, 3). The style of the ribbed groin vaulting forming the ceiling of the aisle may suggest an earlier origin for this structure, perhaps as a medieval chapel (MacGibbon and Ross 1902, 515-6). This interpretation is also suggested for a similar groin-vaulted aisle at Blair church (Fawcett 2008b), although the author believed that on balance the structure is likely to relate the late 16th century. A burial aisle of 1635 at Kinnoull features a much simpler plastered ceiling. At Kinfauns, the date of 1598 corresponds with the establishment of a family burial aisle by John Charteris and his wife Janet Chisholm. Two opposing inscribed panels on east and west walls are more typical of this period. This aisle has seen considerable subsequent repair (Historic Scotland 1971).

Later Use - 17th-19th Century

The church continued in use until the mid-19th century.

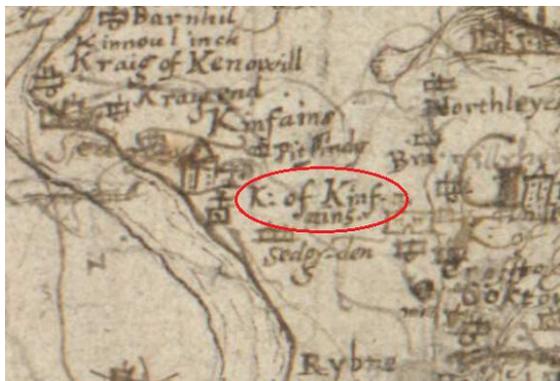


Plate 3 - Pont's late 16th century map (Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

Map evidence shows the continued presence of the church in the late 16th century (as 'K. of Kinfauns' on Pont - Plate 3), 17th century (as 'K Kinfauns' on Adair 1683) and 18th century (as 'Kinfaun' on Moll 1745).

The Statistical Account of 1793 mentions that the church was repaired in 1789 'and is now a decent and comfortable place of worship' (Chapman 1793, 222). The first detailed

mapping by the Ordnance Survey in the mid-19th century (25-inch 1860, Plate 4) provides more structural information.

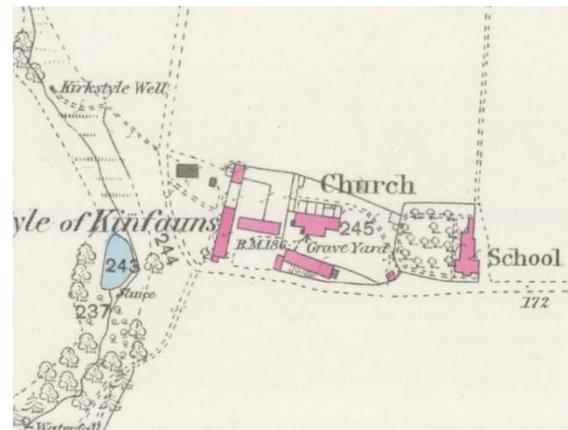


Plate 4 - Ordnance Survey 1860 25-inch (Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

The church by this time had a further stone building incorporated to the west of the southern aisle – this would appear to be a second aisle, built by Thomas Mackenzie in 1840 (Dictionary of Scottish Architects). Mackenzie was also responsible for modifications to the Manse and a nearby farmhouse. An Ordnance Survey benchmark was incorporated into this structure. The foundations were still visible in the early 20th century (MacGibbon and Ross 1902, 514). Two further wooden lean-to structures on the western side of the building and a series of small fences or walls, possibly demarking burial plots to the north are also evident. It is not clear how the latter would have affected access to the northern entrance. None of these later additions survive today.

The church fell out of use soon after, replaced by a newer church by Andrew Heiton in 1868. The old building appears to have been stripped out at this point, with only minimal effort made to prevent complete collapse (Fawcett *et al* 2008a). The 1901 Ordnance Survey 25-inch map (Plate 5) shows the old church in ruins, and the new one built to the west-north-west.

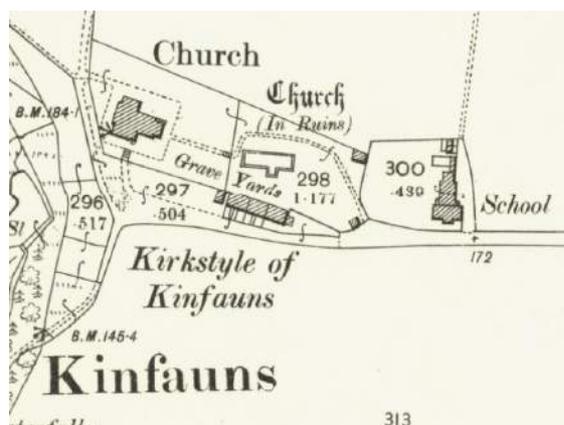


Plate 5 - Ordnance Survey 1901 25-inch (Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland)

Conclusions

Interpretation of the remains is made more difficult due to considerable remodelling on more than one occasion, and it is possible that many of the diagnostic features are later additions or modifications (Fawcett *et al* 2008).

It may be surmised from the above assessment that the church has seen four main phases of development (Illus 2). The first pre-dates the present building, described only by scant documentary evidence. The potential for buried remnants of this building may be low considering the generally negative results of a recent geophysical survey (Morris 2007), but the possibility for foundations to have been re-used in part or for earlier architectural fragments to have been re-incorporated must be considered.

The origins of the present structure lie in the early 15th century; with the confirmation of parochial status providing a *terminus ante quem* of 1419. Several probable original features have been highlighted above. The church may have been extended soon thereafter. There may be evidence in the fabric of the walls for this change, which will be investigated during the forthcoming historic building recording.

A substantial series of modifications were made post-reformation including potential heightening, addition of galleries and doors to access them, covering of paintings and the

Easter sepulchre and re-fenestration of the northern elevation. A burial aisle was either built or re-used to the south in the late 16th century.

Finally, further modifications in the 19th century comprised principally a second aisle immediately to the west of the earlier burial aisle.

The present report has pulled together available documentary sources in an attempt to generate a working hypothesis to be tested in forthcoming phases of field work. To what extent can the above interpretation be supported or challenged by a detailed inspection of the fabric of the upstanding remains? Can investigation of the lower courses of the walls by test-pitting show re-use of an earlier foundation or evidence for unseen features such a possible rood-screen or altar?

Little medieval fabric of any of the surrounding parishes' churches survives, comprising some possible remnants attached to a 1635 burial aisle at Kinnoull and some re-used stone at Kilspindie. No upstanding remains survive at either Errol or St Madoe's. In this regard Kinfauns offers a unique opportunity within this part of the Tay Landscape Partnership's study area to better understand the nature of medieval and post-medieval ecclesiastical architecture and activity.

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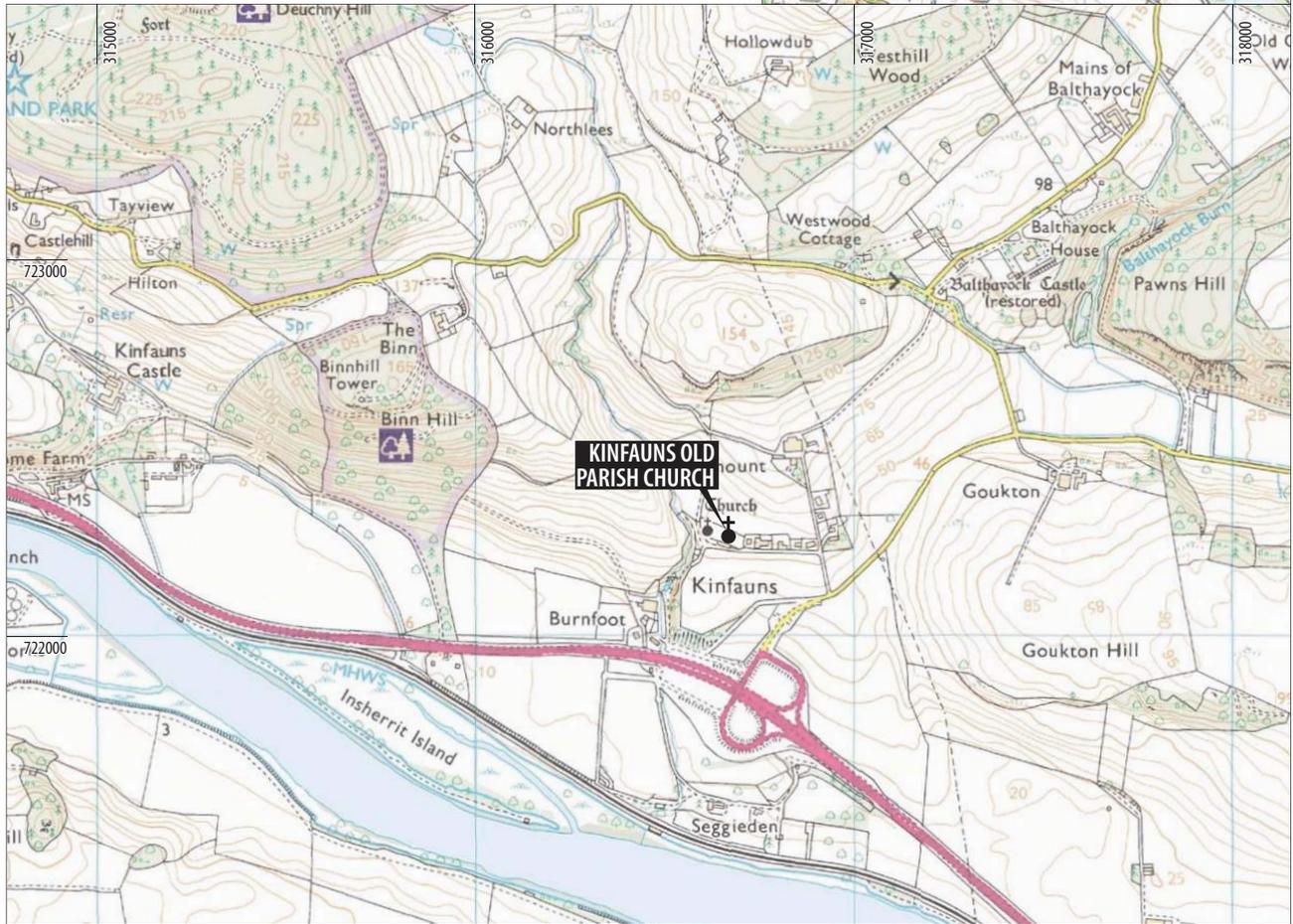
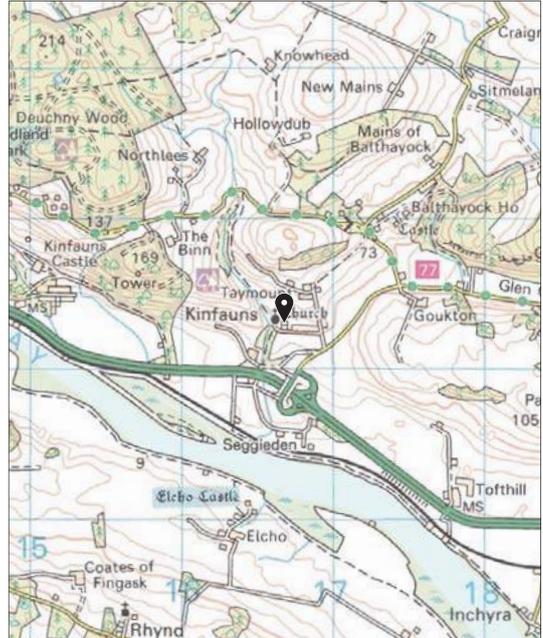
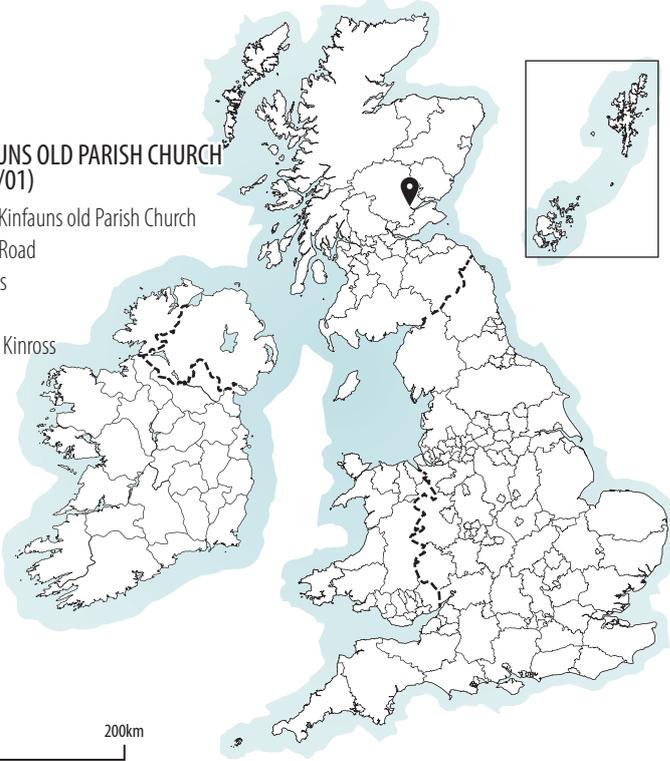
Ordnance Survey 1901 *25-inch Map Series - Perth and Clackmannanshire Sheet 098.11*

Pont, T nd *Pont 26: Lower Angus and of Perthshire east of the River Tay*

**KINFAUNS OLD PARISH CHURCH
(KOPC/01)**

land at Kinfauns old Parish Church
Church Road
Kinfauns
Perth
Perth & Kinross

0 200km



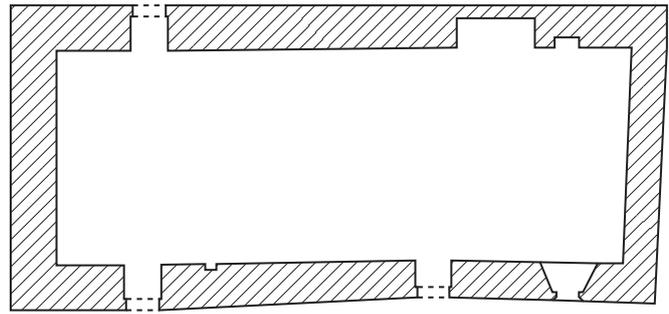
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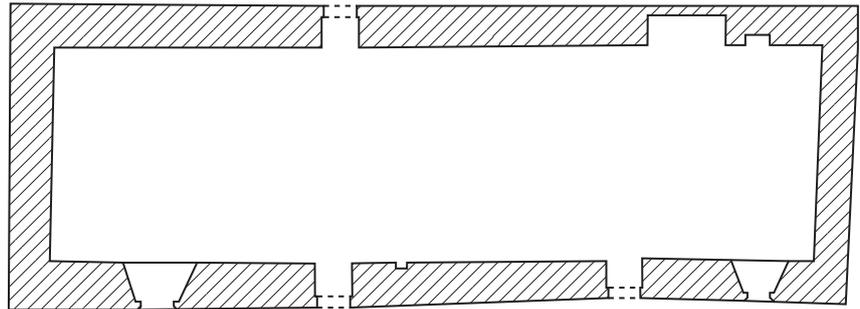
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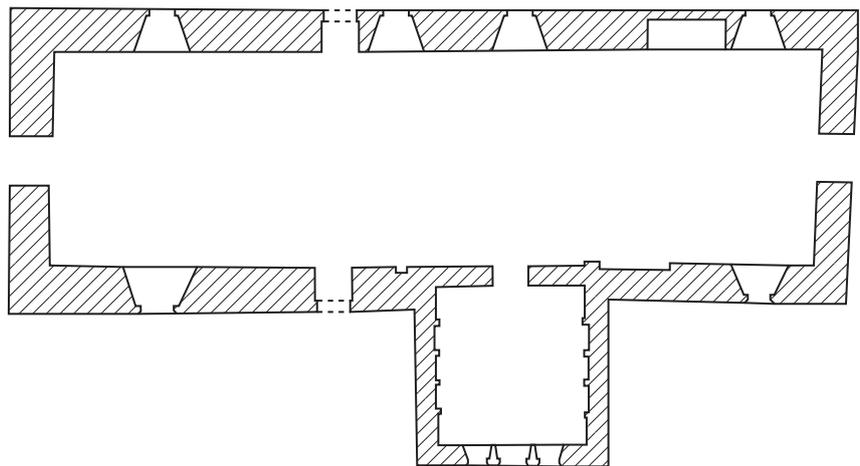
PHASE 2A
the original 15th century building



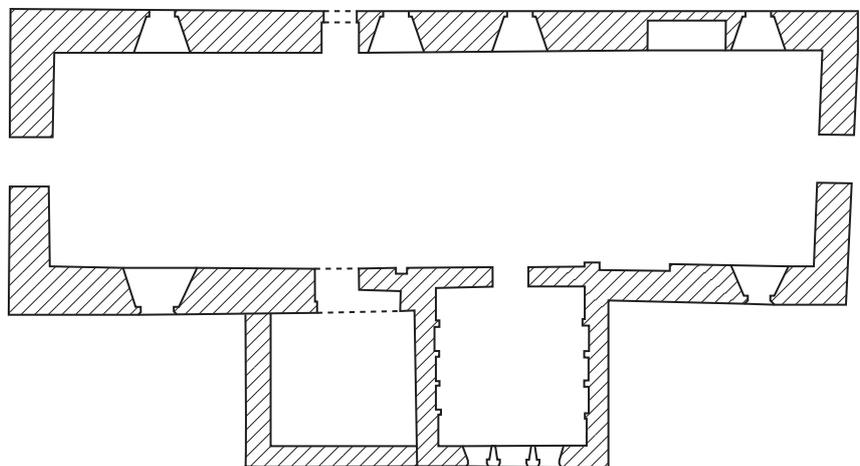
PHASE 2B
possible late 15th century extension



PHASE 3
post-reformation alterations



PHASE 4
final 19th century additions



ILLUS 2
Suggested phasing for Kinfauns Old Parish Church