

St. Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen The Millennium Murals: Saints of Scotland



St Mary's Cathedral Millennium Murals: Key



The Millennium Murals depict some of the saints of Scotland in rough chronological sequence, from St. Ninian to St. John Ogilvie. The saints and holy people of Scotland represented in the Millennium Murals are:

- 1A:** Saint Ninian
- 1B:** Saint Columba and companions
- 1C:** The death-day of Saint Columba
- 1D:** Saint Serf
- 1E:** Saint Enoch
- 1F:** Saint Mungo
- 1G:** Saint Maelrubha
- 1H:** Saint Adamnan
- 1J:** Pictish Warrior Missionaries on land
- 1K:** Pictish Warrior Missionaries at sea
- 1L:** The Nine MacDonalld Maidens
- 1M:** Saint Kentigerna
- 2A:** Saint Geradine of Moray
- 2B:** Saint Nathalan
- 2C:** Saint Duthac
- 2D:** Saint Margaret
- 2E:** Saint Magnus
- 2F:** Saint Gilbert of Caithness
- 2G:** Saint John Ogilvie

An outline of the stories of these saints and holy people follows. More detailed versions of their stories can be found in the Oxford Dictionary of Saints (ODS) and The Saints of Scotland (SS), and the Online Encyclopaedia Britannica (OEB).

1A Saint Ninian (c.360 to 432 A.D.). Very little is known of Saint Ninian. He is believed to have been a contemporary of Saint Patrick - they were probably born within a few miles of each other. Bede's history has a paragraph on Ninian which suggests that the southern

Picts accepted the true faith through the preaching of Bishop Ninian, who had been regularly instructed at Rome and may have been Bishop of Whithorn and Galloway. Archaeologists at Whithorn have found remains of an early church which was painted white (perhaps the *Candida Casa* mentioned by Bede).

Ninian is shown in the mural with *Candida Casa*, the white church behind him. He is holding his traditional emblems, a chain and his miraculous staff, which is also shown beneath him.

Sources: SS pp 195 to 203; ODS p 368; OEB

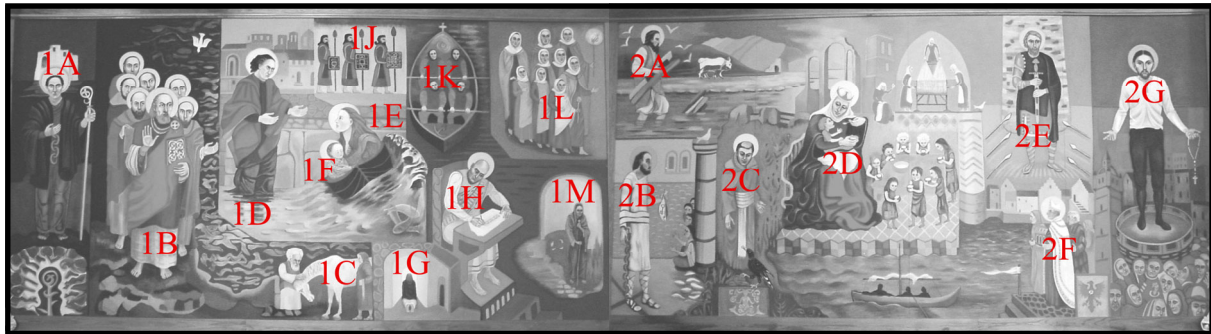
1B Saint Columba (c.521 to 597 A.D.) **and companions.** Saint Columba was an Irish monk who, in 565, left Ulster with twelve companions for Iona, where he founded a monastery.

He may have left Ireland for Scotland to act as advisor to the Gaelic settlement in Dalriada. But it is said that he copied a psalter from another monastery which he refused to give up. His refusal to give up the treasured book led to the battle of Cooldrebhne and his eventual exile. He is traditionally credited with bringing Christianity to Scotland, converting Brude, king of the Picts, and founding two churches in Inverness.

He is shown in the mural with some of his companions on Iona, carrying his psalter. At **1C The death-day of Saint Columba**, he is shown on the last day of his life, with his favourite horse who, sensing the saint's forthcoming death, stopped and wept, according to Adamnan.

Source: ODS pp 110 to 111

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1D Saint Serf (6th century). It is known that he was the apostle of Western Fife. Although his dates are uncertain there are many wild legends about him. At Logie, a ram he owned was killed and eaten by a thief. When the ram bleated from within the thief's stomach, he blushed with shame.

In Dunning, he slew a dragon, and to this day the local folk can show you the 'Dragon's Den'.

A story has it that while Saint Serf was bishop of Culross, he saved Saint Mungo who was washed ashore with his mother Thenew (Saint Enoch). They had been set adrift in a coracle by her father King Loth of Lothian (see below). The mural shows Saint Serf welcoming Saint Enoch (1E) and Saint Mungo (1F) to Culross and safety. In the water surrounding the coracle you can see the three fishes which represent Aberdeen.

Sources: ODS p.442; SS p.p. 227 to 229.

1E Saint Enoch (6th century). In the story, Enoch, the more popular name for Thenew, was wooed by Owain, one of the great Brythonic heroes. She was found to be pregnant and her father was angered and decreed that she must die. She was cast to sea in an open boat but it was supported by a great shoal of fish and carried up the Forth to land at Culross, where she was rescued and baptised, with Saint Mungo her son, by Saint Serf.

We have no details of her life, though she evidently moved to Glasgow.

Source: SS p.p. 83 to 85.

1F Saint Mungo (6th century). He is also known as Kentigern. His story is a mixture of legend and history. His nickname of Mungo, 'little doggie', was given to him by Saint Serf as he followed Saint Serf like a puppy when a young child.

When Mungo grew up he moved to Cathures (probably Glasgow) where he was reluctantly - because of his youth - persuaded by the inhabitants to become their bishop.

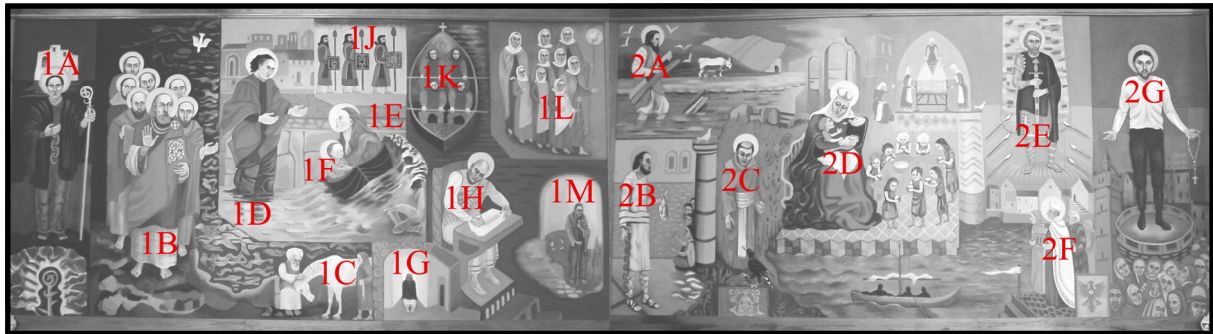
He took an extended journey southwards through Cumbria where no less than eight churches are dedicated to him, and eventually to Wales where he is believed to have made foundations at Llanelwi and Llancarwen.

During his final years, he focused his ministry on Annandale and the surrounding districts.

Source: SS, pps 83 to 85, 128 to 135, 227 to 229.

1G Saint Maelrubha (642 to 722 A.D.): 'The red priest' was one of the most important missionaries of the early British Church. He was born in Derry, a cousin to Columba. He moved to Scotland and after two years missionary work around the north-west of Scotland he settled in the remote peninsula of Appercrossan, where he remained until his death, with many excursions to found daughter churches in the mountainous glens and

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1G Saint Maelrubha (continued)
islands, including Skye.

In the mural, he is shown praying in a small church he built on an island in Loch Maree.

Sources: ODS p. 321; SS pps 148-152

1H Saint Adamnan (c.627-704 A.D.). Adamnan means 'wee Adam'. He was born in Donegal, a relative of Saint Columba. He moved to Iona, and became the ninth abbot at the age of 55. He wrote a book about the holy places of Palestine, *'De Locis Sanctis'*, and more famously, a biography of his predecessor, Columba, who had died twenty-seven years before Saint Adamnan was born. His only surviving memorial in Iona is the name of a creek, Port Adhamhnain, just east of the pier.

In the mural, he is shown writing one of his books - perhaps the biography of Saint Columba.

Sources: ODS pp. 4-5; SS pps 1-3

1J Pictish Warrior Missionaries on land
1K Pictish Warrior Missionaries at sea

Christianity was brought to Scotland by Irish monks such as Columba, but also by Pictish warrior missionaries who spread the word by land and sea.

The mural shows four of these saints (Droston, Colm, Medan, and Fergus) at sea

(**1K**), and marching on land (**1J**).
Source: SS pps 73-75

1L The Nine MacDonald Maidens. These maidens are said to be the daughters of Donald of Glen Ogilvie (Eighth Century). They grew up determined to be chaste, in spite of all difficulties. Only three of the maidens' names are known. Mayoca, or St Maik, was said to be the eldest and is remembered in Aberdeenshire (e.g. St Maik's Well in Drumoak). Fincana - St Fink - is known at Bendochy, near Blairgowrie, and also Echt, and at Alyth. The third known sister is called Fyndoca. She is remembered on Loch Awe and at Killonaig on Mull.

It is thought that the nine maidens were missionaries. The centre of their activities seems to have been Abernethy on Tay.

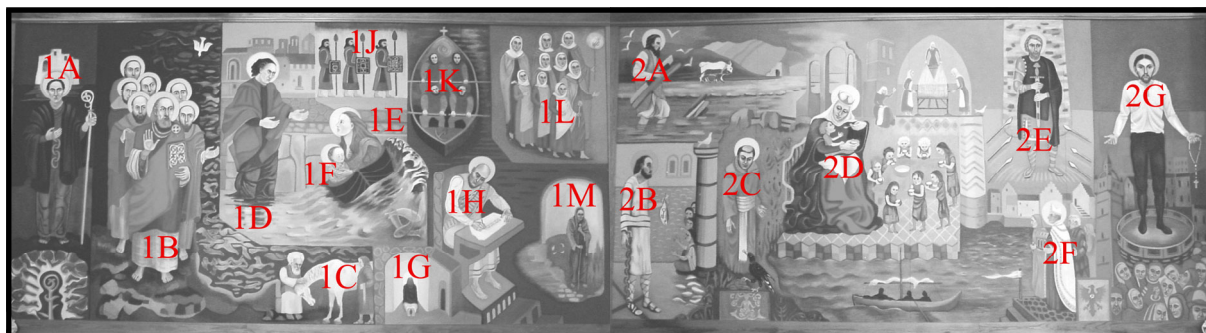
Source: SS pp. 145 to 147.

1M Saint Kentigerna (d. c. 733) was an anchoress who died on Inch Cailleach in Loch Lomond. She was of Irish royal blood and married a neighbouring prince and had a son Fillan.

After her husband's death she left Ireland, and eventually settled on Loch Lomond. She lived as a nun and the island church of Inch Cailleach, of which ruins remain, was dedicated to her.

Source: ODS, p.287

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2A Saint Gerardine of Moray (d. c934) was an Irish monk and hermit who came to Morayshire, first to Kinnedor, and later to Holyman's Head near Lossiemouth. The mural shows him finding a pile of timber that had washed down-river close to the spot where he had decided to build his cell. Onshore, a wolf and an ox are shown drawing a plough. The wolf had eaten one of Saint Gerardine's oxen. So the saint ordered the wolf to take the missing ox's place in the harness so that the ploughing could continue. Sources: ODS p.204; SS p.101

2B Saint Nathalan (d. c.678) was from the Aberdeenshire district. Born in Tullicht, he built churches there and at Bothelim and Colle. He was a nobleman who cultivated the land and fed people nearby in times of famine.

The mural depicts the story of how, as a penance, he locked his hand and leg together and threw the key into the sea. He made a pilgrimage to Rome. When at last he arrived, he bought a fish, and in its belly discovered the key to unlock his chain. Source: ODS p.361

2C Saint Duthac (d.1065). Born in Tain, Easter Ross, he studied in Ireland, returned and became Bishop of Ross. He is said to be the most venerated saint of Ross.

The mural illustrates a scene from a story in which a guest falls ill at a feast and sends the saint some pork to be cured. The messenger leaves the meat and a gold ring on a tombstone, but a hungry kite soon flies down and

steals them. When Duthac prays for their return, the bird flies back and the saint makes a bargain with him - the bird can take the meat, but Duthac keeps the ring.

Sources: ODS p.144; SS pps 75 to 77.

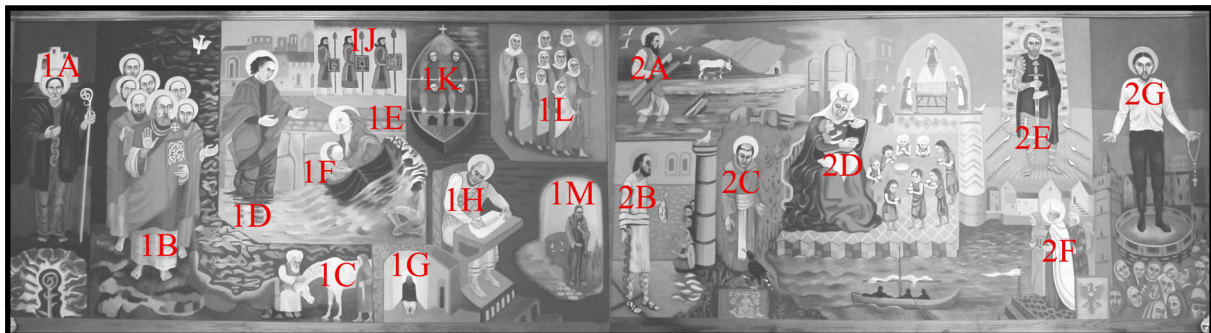
2D Saint Margaret (1046-93). Queen, married to Malcolm III, king of Scotland. Her public and private achievements were remarkable: under her influence the Scottish court became more civilized. She was a principal agent in the reform of the Church in Scotland; she revived the abbey of Iona; she built Dunfermline Abbey to be like a Scottish Westminster Abbey. Her private life was devoted to prayer, reading and works of charity. She is a Scottish saint universally celebrated in the Roman calendar.

The mural illustrates a number of aspects of Margaret: she is shown with the nine orphans she is said to have fed every morning before breakfast; the pillar to the right of the orphans suggests a pillar of Dunfermline Abbey which she re-built; below her a ferry crosses the Firth of Forth (Queensferry was named after her). She instituted a free ferry crossing for pilgrims. Above the orphans, weavers dress a loom, to illustrate St. Margaret's influence in the development of fine textiles.

Sources: ODS pp.329-330; SS pp.158-163

2E Saint Magnus (c.1075-1116). Earl of Orkney and Martyr. He is the principal saint of Orkney, Shetland, and North Scotland. In early life he became a sea-pirate but was converted to Christianity. He was captured by Magnus Barefoot, king of Norway, but

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escaped to the court of Malcolm III, king of Scotland. As soon as Magnus Barefoot died, he returned to the Orkneys to share the government with his cousin Haakon.

However, Haakon and his followers turned on Magnus and killed him at Egilsay. According to the Saga, Magnus refused to fight, accepting violent death as a sacrifice, praying for his murderers. The mural shows Magnus holding his sword peacefully like a cross, in front of a broch, at Egilsay.

Sources: ODS p.322; SS pp.152-156

2F Saint Gilbert of Caithness (d.1245) In 1223, Gilbert was appointed bishop of Caithness. Among his notable achievements were the building of the cathedral of Dornoch, and the provision of several hospices for the poor. He did much to civilize his diocese.

The mural shows him bringing a model of the cathedral at Dornoch. The design was inspired by his travels in Europe.

Source: ODS pps.208-209

2G Saint John Ogilvie (1580-1615). He was a Jesuit priest and martyr. Born in Banffshire, he was brought up a Calvinist. Sent to be educated in France he decided to join the Roman Catholic church. He joined the Society of Jesus at Brno in 1599. He worked in Austria and France until 1613. When he returned to live in Edinburgh he was tried for high treason. At his trial he said that while he was ready to shed his blood in defence of the king's temporal power, he could not obey him in matters of

spiritual jurisdiction. He was condemned to death, but was offered his freedom and a rich benefice if he would renounce or deny the nature of his religion. He refused and was hanged in 1615.

The mural shows him steadfastly upholding his rosary on the scaffold.

Source: ODS pps.374-375

The making of the Millennium Murals:

The murals were commissioned in 1998 as part of the celebration of the millennium.

Once designs had been prepared and agreed, work started on preparing the murals. Each mural (20 ft by 10 ft) is painted on four panels, each 10ft by 5 ft.

In the artist's studio an easel was built large enough to take two panels at a time:



Easel with one blank, primed, panel.

The making of the Millennium Murals

A combination of step-ladders and scaffolding were used to allow the artist to first draw in the design, and then paint each panel:



The artist drawing on a panel



Painting Saint Ninian.

When all the panels had been painted they were crated up and taken to the Aberdeen Cathedral, which was in the process of some

restoration. Using the scaffolding, the panels were put in place above the choir stalls and framed:



The scaffolding in the cathedral.



Mural panels in position above the choir stalls.

The scaffolding was removed, and the murals were consecrated as part of the Millennium celebrations in early January 2000, by the Bishop of Aberdeen.

The artist of the Millennium Murals

The Millennium Murals were painted by Fiona Forsyth (B.A. (Hons.), M.A., Univ. of Wales). She was born in Edinburgh, trained in Aberdeen, and has worked for the theatre, churches, and private clients since 1975. In addition to the Millennium murals, her work in Saint Mary's cathedral, Aberdeen includes:

The painting of Our Lady of Aberdeen (Lady Chapel - no photo) and:



The Four Evangelists, Alter Cloth Frontal



The Bishop's Tapestry, (1981 - 2006)

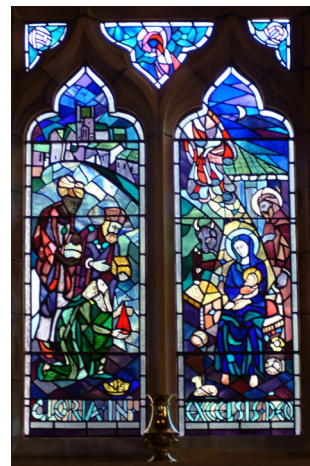
Other religious work in Scotland include:



The New Jerusalem, Tapestry, Corgarf Chapel



Crucifixion, Tapestry, Corgarff Chapel



Millennium Epiphany window, Dunning Parish church, Perthshire

The artist of the Millennium Murals



Millennium Window, St Mary's Church, Inverness. Noah's Ark (LH), and St. Peter with Jesus (RH).

Other religious works outside Scotland include:



Wedding Feast at Cana, Catholic Marriage Advisory Service, London



Falklands Memorial Tapestry, HMS Raleigh, commissioned by Ministry of Defence.