

During the middle ages there was a church called St. Columba's down by the mill in Kingussie, the ruins of which can still be seen in the old cemetery.

At the time of the reformation there was a church in Kingussie run by the Carmelite Monks and as at that time relations between the people were very good, the church was divided in half by a partition and the Catholics used the east side of the church and the Reformed church used the west side.

The first parish of Kingussie was set up in 1863 covering the villages of Kingussie, Newtonmore and Laggan. The first church in the area was built in Laggan and it was dedicated to St. Michael. The population over the years moved away from the area and the church was not used and became derelict. The church was blown up around 1955 because it was in such a bad state of repair and had become dangerous. The ruins are in the woods behind Strathmashie.

It had been long seen that the centre of the mission had shifted from where the old church had stood for many a year in Laggan to the growing village of Kingussie, which at that time had developed into a small town, with all the dignity of a Provost and Town Council. The town had many fine hotels and streets lit by electricity. It is not without regret that those who knew the history of the mission witnessed the change. For a hundred and fifty years that history was connected with a church on the spur of a well-known hill called "Stron-a-duin". A chronicle of events of that time has been preserved in a book used by priests for mission records from nearly the beginning of the 18th century. The following summary is mainly taken from this Chronical:-

'Many years after the "Reformation" the new religion had made no headway in Badenoch. It was not till early in the eighteenth century that a minister of the Kirk took up residence in Laggan amidst much hostility from the population. As late as 1737 Father Tyrie reported as follows: Among the inhabitants are many Catholics of the Clan Macpherson (around 200). Were they given a resident priest there would hardly be one protestant left among them. They never hear Mass except when some missionary chances to pass their way when going to the low country. Highland Catholics should never forget that they owe much to the Dukes of Gordon, especially in those parts where they owned property as in Laggan. It was due to their influence that the faith was preserved in the district.'

The first priest permanently stationed in Badenoch, Laggan, was Fr. Alexander Macdonell a native of Glengarry, afterwards Bishop of Kingstown in upper Canada. No definite date is given of his arrival but he left in May 1791. A succession of priests followed, one of these, a well-known priest, Father M'Eachan, built a chapel, on Stronaduin, about three miles from Laggan bridge. This was around the time of Trafalgar in 1805. Another priest Father Rankin collected funds for a new church on the same site, the fine building dedicated to St. Michael which stood until 1955.. It was not completed until Fr. Rankin had left Laggan for Moidart in 1838. A few people collected in or near Kingussie when Father Alexander Campbell was appointed to the mission in 1847 and for their benefit he opened a small chapel there. This was used up until 1931 when it was superseded by the

new church. This chapel which has done duty as a chapel for more than eighty years, was the upper floor of an old house to which entrance was obtained by an outside stair at the back. There are few people now, of any denomination, in the district of Laggan. As an illustration of the depopulation among Catholics, St. Michael's church had seats for 300, however, this dwindled in later years to at most 20 people, but the older generation can remember when it was filled to the door and on occasions some would have to stand, even outside.'

On 23rd October, 1928 Mgr. Hugh Cameron took charge of the Mission of Laggan as it was then called, he succeeded Father Duncan Maclean. Mgr. Cameron's first act was to change the priest's residence from Laggan to Kingussie. This was made possible by the late Mrs. Stephens offering him hospitality in her house 'Ardcolm' on West Terrace, this property is now the home of one of our current parishioners. Fr. Maclean had already started a fund for the erection of a church in Kingussie and with this start Mgr. Cameron set out on a vigorous campaign to get the necessary money within a short time. This he accomplished, receiving assistance from many benefactors, but above all from Mrs. Stephens, who contributed so lavishly as to be rightly considered the principal founder.

The church was built in 1932 by Rev. Hugh Cameron and the solemn opening of the church was on 26th July by the Right Rev. Donald Martin, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles. The parish house was built later in 1950 by Rev. Ronald Hendry and called 'Loreto'. Fr. Hendry spent many years as Diocesan Treasurer and the money for the house was donated by a Mrs. Beech who had resided at the house next to the church called Avondale. On moving from Avondale Mrs. Beech gave the use of the house to the parish as a presbytery. The church is dedicated in honour of Our Lady of the Rosary, (Feast Day 7th October) and to St. Columba, the great Irish saint who did so much to spread Christianity throughout Scotland, (Feast day 9th June).

The new congregation continued to grow and the church with seating accommodation for nearly two hundred, was by no means too large, indeed in the summer with visitors it was fairly well filled. The church was designed by Norman Dick, of the firm Sir John Burnet, Son & Dick. The style is Norman, with characteristic windows. The glass, however, follows a Celtic pattern having a twisted rope design, quite in keeping with the rounded windows. In the chancel, which is separated from the nave by an arch there are three narrow windows, two at the back of the altar and one let into the wall on the south side. While there is sufficient light, it is so controlled that an effect is produced suitable to the sanctuary. The beautiful stained glass window to the right is in memory of George & Bella Nolan and the one to the left is in memory of Dr. Felix and Mrs. Savy. Dr Savy lived and practiced at Sonnhalde on East Terrace. The side windows are dedicated to

The whole interior is artistically plain, handsome and in good taste. Besides chancel and nave there is a side chapel dedicated to Our Lady. Both the high altar and the altar in the side chapel are massive, constructed of marble, with pillars and carved capitals and except for beading with no other ornamentation.

The exterior is local grey stone. There is a fine square tower sixty feet high, bearing a heavy but sweet-toned bell. The bell was rung for many years by Angus Mackenzie, Lexie Rooney and Derick Young until the access became unsafe in 19???? The exterior beauty is enhanced by a very artistic porch after a mediaeval pattern. Altogether there is no church for many miles around that can compare for solidity and beauty with the Catholic church in Kingussie.

The font situated at the back of the church was donated by Topsy McDonnell.

The carving of the head of Christ, situated in front of one of the side windows, is by John MacGregor-Blain and was given to the church in the time of Canon John Angus Macdonald. John was Rod Blain's father and a great character, a good man, kind and generous, brimful of jokes and good humour and would have been happy to know that his carving would be in a place where it would be appreciated and loved.