

Knockbain Parish Church – A Brief History

As with so many parishes, names and places have changed considerably over time, and Knockbain is no exception. Two Pre-Reformation parishes, Kilmuir Wester and Suddie, were united in the 1760s to form Knockbain, recently united with Culbokie. The buildings and locations reflect a changing story, but the history is primarily about the people.

Early parish history, before 1762

Kilmuir Wester

Kilmuir today is a small settlement on the Inner Moray Firth, accessed from Drumsittal Road between North Kessock and Munlochy. The Medieval Parish of Kilmuir Wester (to distinguish it from Kilmuir Easter near Invergordon) is roughly the land to the east of Drumsittal Road, between North Kessock and Munlochy Bay (even the 1854 *Originæ Parochiæ Scoticanæ* says ‘seems to have’).¹



Figure 1. St Mary's Church ruins and Kilmuir Wester graveyard. The ruins are heavily overgrown by ivy, but still visible

Earlier documents dating back to the late 1300s refer to the lands of Culmore or Coulmore, a variant spelling of Kilmuir, but without reference to a parish church.² Financial records dated c.1400-c.1600 that mention Drumderfit and Kessock suggest that the small parish may have been fairly prosperous.³

Kilmuir Wester's parish church, St Mary's, is now a ruin in Kilmuir's graveyard (**Figure 1**), on the coast, about half-a-mile north-east of Kilmuir.⁴ The earliest mention of Kilmuir

Wester was in the 1560s, but the architectural style, including the still-visible stonework of the west window, suggests that it was built earlier, probably in the 1400s.

Suddie

The Parish of Suddie extended inland from Munlochy Bay up to the Mulbuie area, where it shared a boundary with Urquhart Parish. Broadly speaking, it is the area roughly bounded by today's A9 to the west and the road over Mount Eagle to the East. Today's farms of Knockbain, Auchterflow, Balnakyle, Belmaduthy, Easter Suddie, Knockbain, and of course Munlochy itself, all appear in records relating to Suddie.⁵

The earliest mention of Suddie was in 1227, of Thomas 'the parson of Sudy'.⁶

Suddie's medieval church, St Duthac's, was abandoned in 1762. The ruins and surrounding graveyard (**Figure 2**) are just over a mile north-east of Munlochy, near Easter Suddie farm.⁷



Figure 2. St Duthac's Church ruins and graveyard at Easter Suddie. The building is a family vault conversion, adjoining the ruins

¹ *Originæ Parochiæ Scotiæ* (1854), p.531.

² *Originæ Parochiæ Scotiæ* (1854) pp.533-34.

³ *Originæ Parochiæ Scotiæ* (1854) pp.533-36.

⁴ <https://easterrosschurches.co.uk/church/st-marys-church/>, [accessed 29 June 2026]. This gives a fuller account of the ruin.

⁵ *Originæ Parochiæ Scotiæ* (1854) pp.537-40.

⁶ *Originæ Parochiæ Scotiæ* (1854) p.537.

⁷ <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Monument/MHG8246>, [accessed 29 June 2026]. This gives a fuller description of the ruins.

Some of the Suddie and Kilmuir Wester Parish Ministers, 1560-1768

Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae is a multi-volume source of biographical information for every Church of Scotland Parish and Minister, including Suddie and Kilmuir Wester. Notable ministers included...

George Munro, minister of Suddie, 1614-42

George Munro (1577-1642) was the only Chanonry Presbytery minister to sign the 1638 Covenant. Perhaps remarkably for the times, he appears to have died of natural causes in 1642.⁸

Murdoch Mackenzie, minister of Suddie, 1645-47

As minister of Suddie, Murdoch Mackenzie (1600-1688) was deposed for 'preaching and praying with the Earl of Seaforth, eating and drinking with him, and saying grace, after his excommunication'.⁹ Mackenzie lived an eventful life, including serving as a regimental chaplain in both the Thirty Years War and the British Civil Wars; after he was deposed as a presbyterian, he joined the episcopalian party and after the Restoration, King Charles II appointed him Bishop of Moray (1662-1677), and Orkney (1677-1688).¹⁰

James Smith, minister of Kilmuir Wester, 1681-1694

James Smith (c.1638-1718) was ordained to Dores in the early 1660s, but removed from there in 1681 under the 1681 Test Act.¹¹ On submitting to the Test later that year, Smith came to Kilmuir Wester until in 1694 he was 'deposed for drunkenness'.¹² These were turbulent times, however, and the reason for his turning to drink isn't given, or this may simply mask a more political move.

John Grant, minister of Kilmuir Wester, 1711-1712

John Grant (c.1685-1732) was violently attacked on his arrival in the parish in October 1711 by a pro-Jacobite mob. The 1712 General Assembly allowed him to relocate to any available vacant parish elsewhere, and he moved swiftly on to Auchinleck.¹³ The parish remained vacant for nine years, before the Church of Scotland intervened and appointed his successor, Hugh Campbell.

Hugh Campbell, minister of Kilmuir Wester, 1721-1746

Hugh Campbell (c.1675-1746) was an experienced minister who had ministered in Ardersier and Kiltearn before coming to Kilmuir Wester. His experience, covering the '15 and '45 would be worth exploring.

John Munro of Suddie, minister of Suddie, 1716-1762

John Munro (c.1690-1762) was the last minister of Suddie Parish, which was his only charge. He was ordained to the parish in 1716 while in his mid-twenties, and ministered there until his death in 1762.

Robert Munro, minister of Kilmuir Wester, 1747-1790

Robert Munro (1720-1790) was the eldest son of John Munro (above); he was ordained to Kilmuir Wester, his only charge, in 1747. Donald Sage (1789-1869), writing in 1840, recorded several anecdotes about Munro, including how he was 'noted for his loquacity and pointed sarcasm'.¹⁴

⁸ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII (1928) p.17.

⁹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII (1928) p.17. Seaforth was excommunicated for siding with Charles I against the then Covenanter-dominated Kirk. Mackenzie, as a parish minister, would then have been under pressure to oppose the king.

¹⁰ <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne/item.php?id=2865> [Accessed 27 July 2026].

¹¹ <https://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1681/7/29>, [accessed 10 July 2026]. This was an Act passed in 1681 requiring an Oath of Loyalty from all public servants in Scotland. Church ministers had to declare they were neither Catholic nor Covenanter.

¹² *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII (1928) p.15. "... the Sunday after his settlement... he went by boat to the church, and when at a small distance from the boat (was) surrounded by (about two hundred) men and women who lay in ambush. Some of them had their faces blackened and a few were in women's clothes, some armed with dirks and heavy batons ; all the women had batons. G. had his hat knocked off and torn in pieces, his head badly cut, and was dragged by his cravat till almost choked... the mob... carried him to the top of a hill, and resolved to kill him, had not some more tender-hearted opposed this and rescued him."

¹³ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII (1928) p.15.

¹⁴ Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, Albyn Press (1975 Ed.), p.284. Sage also relates how once, when both were due to speak, Revd Joseph Munro pranked Robert Munro by taking his written sermon and preaching it to him. Robert Munro could do nothing, but promptly made up another sermon, praising the virtue of Joseph in Genesis, and how not all Josephs were like him!

Knockbain Parish Church, 1762-1929

In 1754, the Church of Scotland began to work towards uniting Suddie and Kilmuir Wester. This was largely driven by the ministers, who recognised the poverty of under-resourced parishes, and by the heritors (local landowners) who had to fund them. A single parish was, quite simply, more financially viable. Presbytery accepted the need, and approved the measure.¹⁵



Figure 3. The Former Knockbain Parish Church 1754-1934

Work began on constructing a new parish church and manse (now Knockbain House), on the boundary between the two parishes. This was to the south-west of Munlochry at the junction of what is now Drumsittal Road and the B9161 (**Figure 3**). Once this was complete, and the new church was opened, in 1762, the two former parishes were united to form Knockbain Parish. The parish boundary with Killearnan to the west was also adjusted, both Killearnan and Knockbain gaining and losing small amounts of territory. Following the

union of the parishes, the old St Mary's and St Duthac's churches were both abandoned, in 1764, apart from the graveyards. This left Revd Robert Munro as the minister of the new combined parish.

Though the new parish was called Knockbain, former parish names lingered for decades. The 1794 Statistical Account still referred to 'The Combined Parishes of Kilmuir Wester and Suddy', something even the 1836 Revision retained, although it did acknowledge the 'common usage of Knockbain'.¹⁶

Some of the Knockbain Parish ministers

Roderick Mackenzie, minister of Knockbain, 1791-1835

Donald Sage described Roderick Mackenzie (1751-1835) as "upwards of six feet in height... and universally allowed to be one of the finest looking Highlanders of his day... and a first-rate shot and deer stalker." Sage felt that Mackenzie "preached the doctrines of the gospel with Calvinistic purity, but in practice he coolly laid them all aside..." and that most of the Knockbain congregation "left his ministry", but he did concede that Mackenzie was "a man of unbounded charity, very benevolent and particularly attentive to the poor and destitute."¹⁷

John Macrae, minister of Knockbain, 1839-1843

John Macrae was 'a shepherd in early life' (his father suffered serious financial loss due to 'the perfidy of a friend'). He was a powerful and popular preacher, widely known as *Macrath Mor*, (Big Macrae)." In 1843 he left the Church of Scotland to be the first minister of Knockbain Free Church.¹⁸

Robert Williamson, minister of Knockbain, 1843-1870

Robert Williamson (1798-1870) became the first minister of Croick in 1828; but in 1840 he emigrated to Nova Scotia to be minister of St Andrew's, Pictou. Threatened by the clearances (as happened in Croick 1845), several parishioners asked to go with him, and Williamson chartered a ship for them all.¹⁹

¹⁵ <https://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/home/black-isle-communities/knockbain/knockbain-history/knockbain-old-statistical-account-page-1/>, [accessed 30 June 2026].

¹⁶ https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/data/pdfs/account2/StAS.2.14.57.P.Ross_and_Cromarty.Kilmuir_and_Suddy.pdf, [accessed 1 July 2026].

¹⁷ Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, pp.285-287.

¹⁸ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII (1928), p.16.

¹⁹ Williamson had already accepted a call to Pictou, Nova Scotia (mentioned in the October 21st Inverness Courier). "He made the most judicious arrangements for their comfort and accommodation, and procured a handsome sum to allow the humbler of them to emigrate. He got a vessel to come to Lochinver for them, the *Deveron*, Captain Maclean, which made the passage in 27 days to Pictou. Mr Williamson fully meant to accompany his little Highland colony, but his amiable lady's health detained him.

Robert Williamson returned to Scotland in 1843 to be the minister of Knockbain. The Inverness Courier reported on his first service in Knockbain, that "... Mr Williamson's discourses afforded great satisfaction. The rev. gentleman was highly popular in Pictou, and much esteemed for his usefulness no less than his talents."²⁰ Robert Williamson remained at Knockbain until his death in 1870, aged 72.²¹

Knockbain Free Church and United Free Church, 1884-1929

The Free Church of Scotland has its own history, but some of it is relevant to Knockbain Parish Church...

Two Knockbain Free Churches

In 1884, the Free Church decided to replace the original Knockbain Free Church at Bogallan, which was little more than a large wooden shed and in very poor repair (**Figure 4**). The decision to build this in Munloch



Figure 4. The field to the SW of Bogallan where the original Free Church stood. No trace of it remains

was controversial; many of the congregation were from the North Kessock area, and had no wish to travel further; they refused to leave.²²

Building nevertheless went ahead, and the new Church opened in August 1886. The offer to Bogallan of a probationer minister, supervised from Munloch, was resisted,²³ and the Free Church General Assembly subsequently divided the congregation.

Many of the original congregation remained at Bogallan, renamed Knockbain West; and built a new church nearby (**Figure 5**);²⁴ in 1888 they

called their first minister, Revd John Macaskill.²⁵ Meanwhile, James MacLeod, the Knockbain minister since 1879, and the rest of the congregation continued at the new church, Munloch Knockbain Free Church.

The United Free Church

Only twelve years later, in 1900, most of the Free Church of Scotland elected to unite with the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (Scotland's second and third largest denominations) to form the United Free Church of Scotland, with over half a million members.

Sixty-three Free Church congregations, mostly in the Highlands, decided not to unite. The remaining Free Church was a small minority nationally, but a majority in the Highlands. As a result, most Highland parishes had both a Free Church and United Free Church congregation, which led to the construction of many new church buildings during the early 1900s.

In Knockbain, Revd James Macleod led the Munloch congregation into the United Free Church. The Bogallan congregation remained Free Church. Members of Munloch who also rejected the Union rejoined the Bogallan / Knockbain West congregation which became, once more, Knockbain Free Church.



Figure 5. Bogallan Free Church, built in 1888 by John Rhind

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/6194855>

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A few weeks later, he went by *The British King* – a most tedious voyage, a fever having broken out on board, which carried off several of the passengers. On Mr and Mrs Williamson's arrival at Pictou, the passengers by the *Deveron* waited on their minister, to express to him their deep sense of the unremitting kindness of the captain, and of the owner, Mr Watson, who voyaged with them. These poor, grateful Highlanders were clubbing their spare pence to purchase a silver snuff-box for Captain Maclean."

²⁰ Inverness Courier, 4th October, 1843, p.3.

²¹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. VII, (1928) p.16.

²² The Northern Chronicle, September 10th, 1884, p.6. This gives a comprehensive account of the ongoing dispute.

²³ Edinburgh Evening News, 24th August, 1886, p.2.

²⁴ This is now behind Munro's Garden Centre, now a private dwelling after the Free Church moved to North Kessock in 1994.

²⁵ Edinburgh Evening News, 30th November 1888, p.2. This described the case as a "thorn to the Free Church courts for years!"

The 1929 Union between the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland

In the late 1920s, the United Free Church recognised that the original reasons for having left the Church of Scotland no longer existed, and in 1929 they voted overwhelmingly to re-unite with the Church of Scotland.



Figure 6. Munlochy Parish, formerly United Free, Church, built 1886

Where there were two viable congregations, they might continue side by side, as remains the case with Dingwall's St Clement's and Castle Street Churches, and also, for many years with Cromarty's East and West Churches. Elsewhere, churches united. In Resolis, the two congregations were holding joint services even before the Act of Union was signed.

Understandably, unlike the situation in 1900, a widespread union of Churches led to a surplus of buildings, not a sudden demand for more.

And where two Churches decided to unite, the issue was which building to retain. This became the case in Knockbain, which decided to keep the newer, more central, former United Free Church building (**Figure 6**).

Knockbain ministers 1884-1929

John Dow, minister of Knockbain Church of Scotland, 1892-1935

Revd John Dow (1863-1938) was the Minister of Knockbain for forty-six years. Born in Blair Atholl in 1863, he graduated in 1888 and that year was ordained and inducted to Strathfillan, Perthshire. He came to Knockbain in 1892, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Soon after arriving, Revd Dow became chaplain to the 4th Seaforths. He was an army chaplain throughout World War One, though being over fifty, he wasn't allowed to serve overseas. He retired from army chaplaincy in 1923 with the rank of Chaplain First-Class (equivalent to Colonel). In 1917, his son, Lieutenant Alastair Dow of the Camerons, died of the tuberculosis that he contracted while on active service, and is commemorated on the Knockbain War Memorial.

John Dow was also Chairman of the Ross & Cromarty Education Authority from 1929 until early in 1938. He was also active in promoting the 1929 union with the United Free Church,²⁶ and he became the first Moderator of the new post-1929 Presbytery of Chanonry & Dingwall. John Dow retired at seventy-two in 1935, staying in Knockbain until he died in 1938. He is buried at Suddie.²⁷

James Macleod, minister of Knockbain United Free Church, 1879-1912

James Macleod (1840-1913) was born in Achiltibuie, and ordained to Kilberry and South Knapdale Free Church in 1876 before transferring to Knockbain Free Church in 1879, and then Munlochy Knockbain (see above). He led his congregation into the United Free Church in 1900, and continued as the United Free Church minister until his retirement in October 1912; he died only six months later, the following April.²⁸

Donald John MacInnes, minister of Knockbain United Free Church, 1913-1924

Born on Harris, Donald MacInnes (1869-1935) was ordained in 1900. He came to Knockbain from Fort Augustus in 1913, and transferred to Stornoway English Church in November 1924. As minister of Lochbroom United Free Church in 1929, he joined the Church of Scotland,²⁹ moving to Helmsdale Bunilidh in 1935, where he died only three months later.³⁰

²⁶ Ross-shire Journal, 11th October, 1929, p.2.

²⁷ Ross-shire Journal, 8th July, 1938, p.8. This includes a detailed obituary.

²⁸ <https://www.ecclegen.com/uf-5-abernethy-to-chaplains/#Knockbain>, [accessed 1 July 2026].

²⁹ <https://www.ecclegen.com/uf-5-abernethy-to-chaplains/#Lochbroom>, [accessed 1 July 2026].

³⁰ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. IX (1961) p.672.

Knockbain Church of Scotland, Munloch, after the 1929 Union

The Church in Munloch

Knockbain had two viable congregations. At first, the former United Free Church was renamed Knockbain North, with their minister **Revd William Ewen**, continuing in post; and the existing Church of Scotland Parish Church by the War Memorial, with **Revd John Dow**, was renamed Knockbain South. This arrangement continued for five years, allowing growing co-operation between both the ministers and congregations.

But in April 1934, the two churches united, abandoning the old 1762 parish church and manse for the newer United Free Church building and manse in Munloch. Knockbain Parish Church was now a single united congregation in Munloch.³¹

The catalyst may have been William Ewen, the former United Free Church Minister, accepting a call to an Aberdeenshire parish in 1934 (unless he was responding to a known development). Weeks later, the Northern Chronicle reported the appointment of the Knockbain Parish Church organist to Munloch Church of Scotland, reflecting the union's consolidation.³² Even so, Donald Robertson's December 1935 induction as John Dow's Colleague and Successor was reported as being in 'Knockbain North'.³³ Old names linger.

Upper Knockbain School, Sabbath School, and Gospel meetings, c.1880-1950s

For many years, Upper Knockbain had its own school, which also hosted a Sabbath School, and regular Gospel Services. The earliest records show it was a Free Church initiative, which the United Free Church continued after 1900, and the Church of Scotland after the 1929 Union. The local press widely reported in 1935...

"A long-service presentation by Revd Dr Dow to Mr James McIntosh of Balnakyle, an elder for forty-four years, who has conducted Gospel meetings in Upper Knockbain for forty-nine years, and superintendent of the Sabbath School there, receiving the Diploma of Honour from the United Free Church."³⁴

Gospel services were still being held at Upper Knockbain into the 1950s, with services advertised in 1951 for Munloch at 11.30 am, Upper Knockbain at 3.30 pm, and North Kessock at 6.30 pm.³⁵ There is also reference to the Upper Knockbain Women's Guild in May 1953.³⁶

The school closed in July 1969 as the last nine pupils moved to Munloch Primary School. Revd John Mackay conducted the closing service, and James McIntosh, James McIntosh's son, led the singing of Psalm 23.

"It was appropriate that the prizes should have been presented by Mr D. Mackintosh because of the long association of himself and his family with the School in the past, not only on week-days, but also on Sundays, when his father often conducted services there, and he himself more recently..."³⁷

North Kessock Mission Hall

As well as Upper Knockbain, the parish also had a Mission Hall in North Kessock, on the foreshore (**Figure 7**), where evening services were held until the Church of Scotland gave up the Hall in 2014. Knockbain Community Council's minutes in March 2014 (below), which discuss the disposal, date the Mission back to 1935. However, there are mentions of a North Kessock Mission Hall as early as 1906.³⁸



Figure 7. The former North Kessock Mission Hall

³¹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. IX (1961) p.663.

³² Northern Chronicle, 23rd May, 1934, p5.

³³ North Star and Farmers' Chronicle, 7th December, 1935, p4.

³⁴ The Highland News, 13th April, 1935, p11.

³⁵ Ross-shire Journal, 24th August, 1951, p1.

³⁶ Ross-shire Journal, 1st May 1953, p.5.

³⁷ Ross-shire Journal, 11th July, 1969, p.5.

³⁸ The North Star mentions a North Kessock Mission on 18th July, 1931, p.4. There are also much earlier references to a United Free Church Mission and Hall in North Kessock (Highland News, 21st September, 1907, p.4 and Inverness Courier, 28th December 1906, p.2). This needs further research.

The 1935 date may relate to the 1934 Knockbain North and Knockbain South Union, or imply a break in continuity. The Community Council minutes shed light on the hall's use by local community groups as well as the Church, and also the reasons for its sale:

"Knockbain Church has used the building since 1935 during which time it has been used by a variety of community groups. On 28th March 2014 the Mission Hall will be handed back to the Mission Board. It will then sit empty and the risk is that current users go elsewhere and don't come back.

In 2010 a survey of the building was carried out, which identified asbestos in the roof and problems with some of the stonework. Repairs of around £50,000 were stated to be needed, which the Mission Board don't want to pay for, hence one of the reasons for the sale of the Mission Hall. The value of the hall at that time with these repairs required was about £75,000."³⁹

Wider changes in the parish

The Twentieth Century saw wider changes as well. The railway came (in 1894) and went (in 1960). The Kessock Ferry, a much-loved link with Inverness was replaced by the Kessock Bridge in 1982.

And like every parish, Knockbain was affected by the two world wars. Local men served in the army, mostly the Seaforth Highlanders, Camerons, and Gordon Highlanders, in the Royal and Merchant Navies, and in the Royal Air Force. Local women served in the WRNS, WAAFS, and ATS. The Knockbain War Memorial commemorates thirty-three World War One losses, including the minister's son, and fourteen men and one woman in World War Two.

The war memorial also reflects the impact of emigration, commemorating local children who emigrated and then served in the Canadian, South African, Australian and New Zealand forces.

During World War Two, Munlochy's Church Glebe was requisitioned for a prisoner-of-war camp, holding Italian, then German prisoners of war, and in the immediate Post-War period, Eastern European refugees.⁴⁰

Knockbain's post-1929 ministers

William Ewen, minister of Knockbain United Free Church 1925-1929, then Knockbain North 1929-1934

William Ewen (1892-1971) was originally from Huntly, but he came to Knockbain in 1925 from Natal, South Africa, where he had been a missionary since 1914. After leaving Knockbain in 1934, he served as a Church of Scotland minister in Belhelvie, Aberdeenshire.⁴¹

Donald Robertson, minister of Knockbain, 1935-1946

Donald Robertson (1908-??) was ordained to Tingwall Parish in Orkney in 1933. In December 1935, he was inducted as Colleague and Successor to John Dow, who had relied on an interim moderator for much of that year.⁴² Revd Robertson ministered in Knockbain throughout the Second World War, then accepted a call to minister in South Africa, leaving in July 1946 to take up a charge in Stellenbosch.⁴³ Stellenbosch United Church offers significant memories of Donald Robertson, particularly set against the rise of Apartheid.⁴⁴

³⁹ <https://christianstogether.net/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=130148> [accessed 27 July 2026].

⁴⁰ ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands), December 2014, <http://www.archhighland.org.uk/userfiles/file/ARCH%20Project%20Reports/Remembering%20Knockbain%20Parish%20rev.%20Dec%202014.pdf>, [accessed 30 June 2026].

⁴¹ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol IX (1961) p.663.

⁴² Ross-shire Journal, 13th December, 1935, p.7.

⁴³ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. IX (1961) p.663.

⁴⁴ <https://www.stbuc.co.za/History/>, [accessed 6 July 2026]. "Rev Donald Robertson, another Scot, was inducted in July 1946. He also left an indelible impression on the shape of our congregation. A Session report in 1948 states that "although we have few organized activities, our members are to be found taking an active part in the social welfare of the community, and are earnest in furthering every good cause." Robertson had a heart for Africa, in particular 'Native' Mission work. In 1951 he discovered the presence of 17 'Presbyterian Bantu' in Kayamandi, and strongly urged the congregation to become involved. Although supported by Mr Schelhase, a Board member, he received very little support from the rest of the congregation. He left the congregation in 1956 to be Principal of the Gloag Ranch Mission and Convenor of the PCSA's African Missions Committee. The General Assembly's obituary for Rev Robertson: "Frail in body, he spared not himself either physically or mentally. He had given himself to work among the Africans because he saw that there lay the real challenge to the Church in our own day."

John Lough, minister of Knockbain, 1947-1952

John Lough (1909-1982) was ordained in 1942 as chaplain to the 1st Seaforths, including in Burma.⁴⁵ He came to Knockbain in January 1947,⁴⁶ where he spent five years before moving to St Thomas' Gallowgate, a large Glasgow congregation.⁴⁷ In contrast to today's efforts to collect contributions for a leaving present without the leaver's awareness, in 1952 the church placed an advertisement in the Ross-shire Journal!⁴⁸

Revd John Mackay, minister of Knockbain, 1952-1978

John Mackay (1913-1998) was born on Skye and ordained to Glencoe in 1941. He became Knockbain's minister in December 1952, remaining here until his retirement at the end of 1978.⁴⁹

Revd Walter Campbell-Jack, minister of Knockbain, 1980-1998

W. Campbell-Jack (1946-) was born in Campbeltown; he grew up in Pathhead, leaving Dalkeith School at fifteen. He joined the RAF, but subsequently decided to complete his education. He was training as a teacher when he became a Christian and discerned a call to the ministry. He graduated from New College in 1978 to serve as a probationer in Nairn, before he was ordained and inducted to Knockbain in March 1980.⁵⁰ He then studied for his doctorate, awarded in 1983, and continued to serve in Knockbain until the end of 1998.

Also moving in 1998, to Dornoch Cathedral, was **Revd Susan Brown** of the neighbouring Killearnan parish. In 1999, while both Knockbain and Killearnan churches were in vacancy, the Church of Scotland linked them into a combined charge – separate parishes, but sharing a minister.⁵¹ The former United Free Church manse in Munlochry was replaced by a new manse, more central to both parishes, near the A9 (later replaced in the 2010s by a new manse in North Kessock).

Revd Iain Ramsden, minister of Knockbain and Killearnan, 1999-2013

Iain Ramsden (1948-) was inducted as the first minister of Knockbain and Killearnan on 3rd December 1999,⁵² remaining here until his retirement in 2013.

Revd Susan Cord, minister of Knockbain and Killearnan, 2016-2023

After a two-year vacancy, Susan Cord was ordained and inducted in January 2016, along with her husband James Bisset who was simultaneously ordained as an Ordained Local Minister (OLM) to the Presbytery of Ross. This appears to have been the Church of Scotland's first ever double ordination of husband and wife.⁵³

As in all areas of the community, the Covid Lockdowns had a severe impact on congregational life, and like many other ministers, Susan Cord learned to record and stream services online. The restrictions eased, very slowly, but in Knockbain they had a lasting impact on attendances. Susan continued as minister until she left parish ministry to become a healthcare chaplain, and to allow the Church of Scotland to dissolve the linkage with Killearnan, and to unite Knockbain with Resolis and Urquhart Parish to the north.

Culbokie and Munlochry Parish

The September 2024 union with Resolis and Urquhart parish formed the new parish of Culbokie and Munlochry. Sadly, declining numbers had meant that the Munlochry Church building was no longer viable, and it had already closed in September 2023. The former church building was then sold and completely renovated to re-open in June 2026 as a studio, shop and café. For the time being, the whole parish is served from Culbokie Church Centre, which values the former Knockbain members' support and fellowship.

⁴⁵ Ross-shire Journal, 6th June, 1952, p.4.

⁴⁶ Ross-shire Journal, 7th February, 1947, p.3.

⁴⁷ Ross-shire Journal, 6th June, 1952, p.4.

⁴⁸ Ross-shire Journal, 23rd May, 1952, p.1.

⁴⁹ North Star and Farmers' Chronicle, 8th August, 1998, p2.

⁵⁰ Ross-shire Journal, 4th April, 1980, p.8. The report of the induction service also gives some biographical detail.

⁵¹ Northern Scot and Moray & Nairn Express, 10th December 1999, p26.

⁵² Northern Scot and Moray & Nairn Express, 10th December 1999, p26.

⁵³ Ross-shire Journal, 23rd January, 2016.

Revd Terry Burns, minister of Resolis and Urquhart, 2017-2024, then Culbokie and Munloch, 2024-2025

Terry Burns (1955-) had been at Resolis and Urquhart since 2017. Terry was from Michigan in the USA, and a former Lieutenant-Colonel in the US Army. On retiring from military service, he responded to a call to the ministry, and after training, was ordained by the Presbyterian Church in America in 2004. After some time in Virginia, Terry became the minister of Nicosia Community Church in Cyprus for six years before joining the Church of Scotland and coming to the Manse in Culbokie. Like Susan Cord, Terry faced the challenges of the covid restrictions, and aided by his wife Cindy, livestreamed services weekly. Terry was heavily involved in the Union of Resolis and Urquhart with Knockbain, to form the new Culbokie and Munloch Parish.

The current situation

Following Terry Burns' retirement in October 2025, Culbokie and Munloch Parish became vacant, and is now in the process of seeking its next minister.

Postscript

Back in 1941, a somewhat wistful letter to the Ross-shire Journal reflected on the demolition of the Old Knockbain Parish Church,⁵⁴ and how it had gone the way of the Kilmuir Wester and Suddie buildings it had replaced, after only 180 years... And how the name 'Knockbain' never had much bearing on the location of the Old Parish church, and even less on the newer building. It concluded by suggesting the name revert to 'Kilmuir Wester and Suddie', or perhaps more simply, become 'Munloch Parish.' There is some irony in how this has now happened, but eighty years later, and only after the 'new' church had also closed.

Although churches are often associated with permanence, Munloch Parish isn't unique in how many divisions, unions, and relocations it has experienced. Churches have been both demolished and built; spiritual hunger has flowed as well as ebbed. History is mostly about the past, but often has lessons and insights to offer an unknown and uncertain future, not least to do with the importance of vision and hope.

Additional Information

The original, early 19th Century Free Church at Bogallan

"The site was researched as part of the ARCH Knockbain Heritage project in 2014. The first Free Church was a wooden temporary structure, situated near current Munro's nursery. This site was originally owned by the Baillie family who were the only landlord who would give them the land. It was in Killearnan at this time. In 1889 there was a parish boundary change – so that it then became allocated to Knockbain parish. The church was said to have been erected c.1843, and replaced with two stone-built churches in the 1880s due to a dispute in the congregation. A sketch on the document of 1881 shows a single-storey building with two bays. It had a tarred felt roof. The original Free Church in Killearnan was similar in design. Only a pile of stones survives of the original free church at Bogallan."⁵⁵

Knockbain Parish Church – a description From the deleted Knockbain Parish Church website

"As part of the Free Church of Scotland's second phase of building, the church at Munloch, constructed in 1886, is a good example of a finely decorated rural church which had begun to introduce fine decorative details in its interior and exterior, in contrast to the more austere building campaign of the early phase of Free Church building from the 1840s to 1870s.

"Knockbain Munloch Parish Church displays high-quality detailing to a typical three-bay rectangular-plan arrangement. Distinctive Gothic elements are applied to most surfaces, and they are of good quality and skilfully executed. Many external features are noteworthy, such as the detail on the carved stone and leaded windows.

⁵⁴ Ross-shire Journal, 14th November, 1941, p.6.

⁵⁵ <https://her.hIGHLAND.gov.uk/Monument/MHG60843>, [accessed 8 July 2026]

"Internally the pulpit, plasterwork, gallery, and supporting columns are of a particularly high standard for a building of this date and location. Inside, the Church is beautiful, with a pitch-pine ceiling; the pews and pulpit are also pitch-pine.

"The two stained-glass windows above the pulpit were donated by the late Mrs Ruth Macrae in memory of her husband, Revd Donald Macrae (1901-1975), formerly the Church of Scotland minister in Millport, who was born in, and retired to, Munloch. The windows depict age and youth. The left-hand window is for youth; it shows children entering Jerusalem, the top of it shows the lamp of learning and the book of knowledge. The right-hand window is for age, and shows St John the Divine writing down his revelation on the Island of Patmos. St John is attended by his muse (divine thought inspired by God to write his thoughts, and what to write by the Holy Spirit) the eagle, and is surrounded by the seven candlesticks symbolic of the seven churches of Christendom.

"The last Sunday Service was held in Munloch church on Sunday, 24th September 2023. The closing service held by the Presbytery was on 28th September 2023."

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