

Berwick Parish Church

The Construction of Berwick Parish Church

As early as 1641 Berwick's small medieval parish church had become so dilapidated that the Mayor and Burgesses of the town petitioned King Charles I for the right to raise funds throughout England to build a replacement. However, the Civil War intervened and the foundation stone of the new church was not laid until April 1650.

The Guild of Freemen engaged a master mason from London, John Young of Blackfriars, to build the new church to his "*own moddell and draughte*". The design was to be simple, lacking a chancel, altar or stained glass. It is said that Oliver Cromwell personally forbade the addition of a tower and bells, insisting that "*a peal of bells were a useless tinkling of brass and iron*"!

The Guild purchased the site of Berwick Castle from the Crown, using some of the money that had been raised in 1641. It was considered that the ruins would provide a useful source of materials needed for the construction of the church.

Soldiers of Colonel George Fenwick's Regiment led cartloads of stones and timber from the castle and cut up fine panelling from the long gallery of the Earl of Dunbar's palace within the castle site to furnish the church interior.



Berwick-upon-Tweed Castle (1790 engraving)

A quantity of lead and stone was taken from the old church that stood beside the new building.



Berwick Parish Church (drawing by Thomas Sword Good, c. 1817)

As money for the building was still short, George Fenwick appealed for support for the project from some of his influential puritan friends in London.

Although John Young had been contracted to complete the work by 11th November 1651, the building was not advanced sufficiently in time for it to be used for the wedding in 1652 of George Fenwick to his second wife, Catherine, the 17 year old daughter of Sir Arthur Haselrig.

George Fenwick died in Berwick just four years later, on 15th March 1656, at the age of 53.

It was not until 6th July 1662, after the Restoration of the Monarchy under King Charles II, that the new Parish Church was consecrated finally by the Bishop of Durham.

The original communion table used on that occasion stands today in the church's south aisle.

Displayed on the wall nearby is a memorial to George Fenwick and a pair of laid-up Colours of the Coldstream Guards.



Colours of 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards