



HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: The Templar Bells of Scotland

23 June 2025

Hollywood Church, Hollywood, Dumfries,
Dumfries and Galloway, DG2 0RH

info@hiddenheritage.info

www.hiddenheritage.info

**A campaign to recognise
Scotland's hidden
medieval heritage**

The Archdiocese of Saint Andrews & Edinburgh

Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh, Archdiocesan Offices, 100 Strathearn Road, Edinburgh, EH9 1BB

By Post and Email: information@staned.org.uk

The Most Reverend William Nolan,

IMPORTANT: Artefacts of Christian Significance.

My wife and I respectfully petition the Roman Catholic Church for its earnest assistance and involvement in safeguarding and repurposing two unique twelfth century holy artefacts created in the name of Jesus, formerly set over the convent of *Sacro Nemore* as a call upon the faithful.

In 2019, my wife and I bought the redundant, dilapidated church of Hollywood, situated a few miles outside Dumfries. The previous developer, purchasing the church from the *Church of Scotland* in 2010, had abandoned a project to create a three-bedroom home for himself and his family. We intended to complete the project with the same aim.

The church, built over the basements of former *Dercongal (Hollywood) Abbey*, came with two reported sixteenth century bells, taken from the former abbey church. With the bells, came a contentious history over the bells' reported dating.

Instead of creating a home, we find ourselves in incredible circumstance, with an irrefutably significant discovery event, prejudicially denied and wilfully obstructed by academia and the establishment because of the challenge it presents. We find ourselves in perversity—impoverished, defending some of the most valuable and extraordinary medieval artefacts, outside a museum, against obduracy and dishonesty—surrounded by reticence to get involved or speak truthfully about a subject that has gained notoriety, without any demonstration of humility, integrity, or public accountability.

We have expended four years of focused, collective study to present a peerless scholarly understanding of the bells of Holywood Church. It was the first time the bells had been properly considered. In doing so, we have restored a historical narrative on the bells and the site, previously existing for hundreds of years, lost by speculative Victorian publication, which has become lodged into academic understanding.

There is no doubt of our discovery. Interrogation of our evidence will reveal fact and an uncharacteristic historical enquiry—comprehensive, collaborative and objective, complete with evidence and fact, not opinion or speculation. There is no supportable dismissal of our findings, no scholarly counterargument, even when presented for consideration before the two best regarded academic specialists. *Malcolm Barber*, recognised as the world’s leading Templar historian, advised us, we knew more about the specific area of our research than he did. *Lyon and Turnbull*, antiquities specialists confirmed, ‘we were the experts in the fields of our enquiry’.

The bells of Holywood were consecrated in the mid-part of the twelfth century, sponsored by William le Riche, carrying the religious dignity ‘*Masculus*’ as his title—a title overlooked by historians. *Masculus*, as the medieval Church’s recognition of classical masculine virtue, was awarded to a number of secular clerical knights serving the Church in at least the eleventh and twelfth centuries, to be phased out in the thirteenth century as holders died out. It was carried by several clerics, including one serving Bishop Odo de Bayeux, as his seneschal. Canons of the chapter of St Pauls also carried the title, with one reported to have served Henry I as his chaplain. Others were connected to French abbeys and churches along the pilgrim way, and several are contained within Scottish record up to the mid part of the thirteenth century, as land-owning knights, connected to William, Midlothian, and Holywood.

William le Riche is confirmed as ‘Father’ of the convent of *Sacro Nemore* in 1154, master within his holy order from around 1140 to around 1180, and a member of David I’s entourage, all while concurrently head of a confraternity of land-holding knights.

With William’s origins in Midlothian, and his father’s donation of his Midlothian barony most likely to a holy order, after the visit of Hugh de Payen’s, grand master of Templars, in 1128, it followed, William who could only have been ordained into a religious military order was very likely a Knights Templar—his bells cast to hang over a Scottish Templar preceptory, reported in the nineteenth century, but lost to the record in the twentieth.

This is significant news and historical discovery—denied for no other reason than reticence to support a Templar discovery, in amongst a surfeit of fictional and sensationalist media environment, and refusal to publicly acknowledge merit can, and does exist outside academia and over one hundred years of history gatekeeping—gatekeeping that has not necessarily improved our understanding, or provided empathetic consideration, or uncovered the truth of our history.

We present the detail and transparency of our investigation on our website, including the leading academics and heritage governance’s woeful response. All that interrogate the evidence objectively, declare there is unquestionable merit on one side, and duplicity and prejudice on the other.

We illustrate, through focused research, the disparity which exists between current superficial knowledge that forms a great deal of our supplementary historical record—and understanding that is formed from focused critical comprehension.

In the Church’s judgment perhaps the bells, in terms of holy purpose, are no different to any other bells consecrated to ring out to the Christian family. However, to the *World*, these bells have huge significance, attracting interest—to the manner of their discovery, the issues that had hidden their provenance, their rarity, and their fiscal value.

We originally had a definite view with what should happen with the bells, post discovery. That they be given a chance to be presented to the Scottish public, the record to be corrected, and on the strength of the discovery—the church redeveloped, not as a home, but as a signpost to Holywood’s historical past with a new appropriate owner and developer.

However, in contemplation of the guarded response to our discovery, time to reflect, the suppression of our find, and the ongoing risk to the bells, church and ourselves, we are now mindful the bells should be put to their calling; not kept as a curiosity at the mercy of a temporal establishment, subject to political correctness, but once again have the opportunity to serve the faithful, inspire even, in reverence to God.

The Finders

Rachel is a qualified forensic archaeologist and I, a retired senior building surveyor with a considerable legend in building conservation and historical enquiry.

I am a Christian without a church, living outside a Christian family. I entered Christian fellowship in the early Eighties, and left my church in 1995, disillusioned, not with God, but the schism my church fostered—arrogance towards and denigration of other Christian denominations. I am still imbued with an enduring love of God, belief in His Word, and unquestionable acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ, even though I am a soul still looking for his Christian family. My wife declares herself a primitive Christian, with an innate unquestionable belief that God’s hand is held over the beauty of the world in its natural form.

Our journeys are, as everyone’s, unique, but our arrival at Holywood Church in 2019 appears to have been orchestrated by a higher power. We are, what the World perceives, to be an odd couple—two disparate people partnered in 2015, under unusual circumstances with complementary skill sets, which appear perfect for the discovery we have made, *as if by design*. You would need to understand our unusual path to the church’s doors, and the exceptional and unusual talents attained along the way. Our disparate pairing is uncomfortable at times but perfect for the discovery we have made, in complete support for one another, solid against frustration and financial depravation. However, our ability to promote the discovery is questionable, as we both are insular souls, eschewing recognition, status, and superficial wealth—shy to promote and influence, and have a deficit of any social or family circle.

For four years, with no supportable dismantlement whatsoever, we have asked why we have not found anyone who will mentor our extraordinary discovery into public acceptance.

Disenfranchised by Scottish institution, unable to dismantle or disavow our discovery, they have chosen ignorance, prevarication and obduracy to obstruct our discovery, rather than support it, or present any kind of constructive challenge. This obstruction is presented, despite professional historians understanding the current historical record is problematic, because a considerable amount of academic work, and therefore the ‘traditional view’, is built on the shoulders of Victorian speculative theory, misinterpretation, and loss of contemporary evidence.

Please understand, we have appealed for intervention to the King, the First Minister of Scotland, the Prime Minister, politicians, enumerable public figures, interested international organisations and academics, the local community, the wider community, concerned social media groups, and journalists. Sympathy is offered, as is ignorance, disinterest, and referrals that lead nowhere. The Church of Scotland, for instance, from the beginning, washed its hands of the church, declining to supply any site history or display any interest in the discovery whatsoever.

An extraordinary event, that on proper interrogation presents a good news event for history, Christian heritage and for Scotland, has become another case study of public complacency, academic prejudice and institutional dishonesty. Yet, against all these vicissitudes, we maintain our moral obligation to fight in favour of an honest historical record and the saving of the bells.

Finding sympathy but no sincere support, we asked why the barriers presented against us seem to grow beyond expected scepticism, prejudice, indolence, and indifference. It appears the only worldly solution to us cementing the truth into human record, rather than 'scholarly' fiction, is to promote notoriety and commit to costly and complex legal action—against the very tenor of our own belief—*win-win*.

There is no doubt this is a challenging time for humanity, and as ever, the Christian family assailed by an increasingly immoral secular society, complacent with moral decline, dishonesty, and community cohesion. In amongst it all, we cannot help believing our discovery is purposed by God—purposed by its timing and by the selection of its finders. We wish to understand its significance and solemnly ask the Roman Catholic Church for its mentorship, so the discovery can benefit a greater good—whatever that may be.

The only constancy in the world, is God, and the perpetual Christian church is the Roman Catholic faith. As it was those under the benevolence of the Roman Church who sanctified these bells, we look to the Church to maintain its responsibility and not look away—to help us safeguard and repurpose them for the benefit of all—to mentor two souls lost and assailed within God's purpose, defending truth against deceit.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Huitson' followed by a long horizontal line.

For Mark Huitson and Rachel Bonde, owners of Holywood Church, Dumfriesshire

All the evidence is freely presented at www.hiddenheritage.info

Interrogate the facts. Support the campaign. Save medieval heritage. Sign the petition. Buy the book of the journey to campaign, 'Hidden in Plain Sight, Unmasking Scotland's First Knights Templar,' available on Amazon.

