

Text for Kirkcaldy c. 1500 – Secular Characters

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SECULAR CHARACTERS IN THE CHURCH NAVE

Medieval parish churches were hubs of activity within their communities. All adults were supposed to attend mass each Sunday and on feast days (although, of course, not everyone did!), and the major events of most people's lives, from christening to funeral, were marked within the church. Socialising, business deals, and even disputes all regularly took place around – or in the middle of – weekly religious observances. The church was not empty on weekdays, either: the parish clergy said, or sang, multiple religious services each day, in a cycle known as the Divine Office. These services were often performed privately by the clergy at the altar, but members of the community who wished to spend time in personal devotion, along with pilgrims who were passing through on their way to St Andrews, would have been welcome here in the nave.

MARKET CROSS INFO POINT (if you want one)

The market cross (mercat cross in Scots) was an important element of Scottish burgh architecture. It marked the burgh's right to hold a market, and the physical space within which legal, taxed trade could be undertaken. Market crosses were often accompanied by a 'tron', which enabled traders to weigh goods, and the crosses themselves were sometimes inscribed with official units of measure, such as the ell (used to measure cloth). Kirkcaldy's market cross is mentioned in surviving burgh records from the late sixteenth century, and was likely present earlier. We don't know what it originally looked like, but some evidence of its decoration comes from the later burgh minute books, which in 1669 recorded that the top of the market cross had broken and needed to be repaired, with instructions for a new "Lyon and unicorne" to be put thereupon after the former manner'.¹ By 1782 the structure had again fallen into disrepair, and was taken down.

MARKET CROSS – PRODUCE SELLERS

In the mid-nineteenth century, elderly members of the Kirkcaldy community described the old market cross (destroyed in 1782) as 'a square consisting of steps, on which the

¹ Alexander Gibson, *Extracts from Old Minute Books of the Burgh of Kirkcaldy, 1582-1792* (collected from *Fife Herald* columns, 1862), unpaginated, under headings 'The Market Cross' (1669), and 'The Cross Taken Down' (1782).

country wives sat in the mornings and sold their butter, eggs, &c.’² This tradition went right back into the medieval period, when all burgh trade had to take place around the market cross, where it could be tracked and taxed. Even small quantities of local goods, including items like dairy and eggs produced in the hinterland surrounding the burgh, had to be brought to the market: you couldn’t just put a sign up at your cottage door or set up a stall along the road into town to sell your extra cabbages. Thus, local sellers and foreign merchants alike would all have gathered together at the market cross. Since we lack surviving images that show ordinary Scottish labourers or burgh-dwellers from this period, these butter sellers are dressed concerning a wider range of sources. Fashions in lowland Scotland appear to have fallen broadly in line with fashions in France and the Low Countries, as exchanges of both culture and material goods were supported by the extensive trade between these areas and Scotland’s eastern ports. Therefore, French and Flemish images were favoured in designing the Kirkcaldy produce sellers and other townsfolk: in particular, the images for June (mowing) and December (roasting) from the ‘labours of the months’ illuminations in the manuscript known as the *Hours of Henry VIII* (France, c.1500) show similar garments worn by working women.³

KIRK WYND – CRAFTSMEN AND CRAFTSWOMEN (OR ‘BURGH DWELLERS’?)

One of the rights of a Scottish burgh was a monopoly on all trade in the surrounding area: this meant that anyone who wanted to buy or sell goods in the vicinity of the burgh had to come to the burgh market. As a result, burghs became centres for a range of crafts, including tanning, brewing, pottery production, joinery, metalsmithing of various kinds, cobbling (shoemaking), and tailoring. The craftsmen and craftswomen who worked in these trades often formed guilds to regulate quality and pricing, and to provide support for one another. Burghs also attracted trade from further afield: in particular, Scotland’s eastern ports received shipments of items like fruit, cloth, and luxury goods from French and Flemish producers. Although we lack surviving images that show how Scots dressed in this period, we know from written descriptions that the fashions worn in the lowlands, and particularly those favoured by wealthier burgh-dwellers, were broadly similar to those worn by their French and Flemish neighbours. These fashions reflect a point of transition in clothing production: they retain many similarities with earlier, geometrically-cut styles, but they also show some elements of the new methods of garment shaping that became increasingly fashionable in the later 15th and 16th centuries, including the use of waist seams and pleated skirts to create more exaggerated silhouettes.

² Alexander Gibson, *Extracts from Old Minute Books of the Burgh of Kirkcaldy, 1582-1792* (collected from *Fife Herald* columns, 1862), unpaginated, under heading ‘The Cross Taken Down’ (1782) and related editor’s note.

³ New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, MS H.8 (*Hours of Henry VIII*, France, c.1500), f.3v, 6v.

