



Old Dailly Church, Dailly Parish, Ayrshire, Scotland

Our earliest Watson ancestors in Dailly Parish likely worshipped at the Old Dailly Church before a new church closer to the center of the parish opened in about 1696. Some of our direct ancestors were buried in its churchyard.

Dailly Parish is an ancient parish, and at one time it was much larger than it is today. In those days, Duncan, the 1st Earl of Carrick, supported the construction of a church near the center of the parish in about the year 1186. This would become the Ecclesia Sancti Michaelis de Dalmulkerane, i.e., the Church of St. Michael of Dalmakeran, Dalmakeran being the early name of the parish before the name was shortened in the 1400s.

The old church was aligned due east and west, and was about 92 feet long and 26 feet wide. A belfry existed at each end. The burial vault for the Dalrymple-Hamilton family of Bargany is enclosed in the east end of the church. Walled enclosures outside the east end of the church are burial grounds for the Boyd family of Penkill and the Hughes Onslow family. On the northeast side of the church is the burial vault for the Cathcart family of Killochan.

Large portions of the parish lands were separated from Dailly when Girvan Parish was created and then much later when Barr Parish was created. Some lands from Kirkoswald Parish were transferred to Dailly Parish. These boundary changes had the effect of making Dailly Parish much smaller and centered further to the east northeast, leaving the parish church near the western boundary of the parish.

The church heritors, the wealthy parish landowners who supported the church, decided to build a new church near the center of the boundary-shifted parish. This plan was delayed due to the Covenanter Movement of the late 1600s, but by about 1696, the new church was completed, and worship at the old parish church was discontinued, its roof removed allowing it to fall to ruin.

The ruins of the Old Dailly Church still stand in the village of Old Dailly. Much of what we see in the ruins today was likely constructed in the 17th century, but there are elements of an earlier structure, probably the structure first built back in the 12th century.

Dailly Parish church records at best go back only to 1691, and the earliest known record involving one of our Watson ancestors dates to 1702, so we do not have evidence that any of our Watson ancestors actually worshipped at the old church. But if they were in Dailly for the generation that produced Robert Watson, the blacksmith mentioned in that 1702 record, then that church played a role in the religious lives of our ancestors. That is also true if our Cathcart ancestors include the Cathcarts of Carleton.

Those ancestors were also likely interred in the Old Dailly Church churchyard. There are only three markers in the churchyard tied to our family. One is for John Watson (Wason) and his wife Helen Skeene (Skeen). We are direct descendants of John and Helen through their second of two sons named John. The other two markers are for other descendants of John and Helen, distant cousins of ours.

The Ayrshire Ordnance Survey Name Books 1855-1857 described the Old Dailly Church ruins this way:

List of Names as written on the Plan	Various modes of Spelling the same Names	Authority for those modes of Spelling	Situation	Descriptive Remarks, or other General Observations which may be considered of Interest
Old Dailly	Ola Dailly	Thomas Scott	L1-15	<p>Examined on the 11th June 1857 with a view of Churchyard. Considerable what is known as Old Dailly, the walls of the old Church stand about the centre of the Churchyard, but are rapidly crumbling away. A small portion of the East end has been recently roofed with tiles and kept in pretty good repair the door of which is completely covered with the names of visitors so much so, indeed that it is "sinking under the load" The last tombstone erected in the Churchyard is dated 1852</p>
Church (in ruins)	Do	W. McCulloch		
Martin's Tomb	Do	J. B. D. Gray		
	Nil			
	Nil			

Ayrshire Ordnance Survey Descriptive Remarks for Old Dailly Church Ruins: "The walls of the old church stand about the centre of the churchyard, but are rapidly crumbling away. A Small portion of the East end has been recently roofed with tiles and kept in pretty good repair the door of which is completely covered with the names of visitors so much so, indeed that it is "sinking under the load" The last tombstone erected in the churchyard is dated 1852" [sic]

Photos of the Old Dailly Church and Churchyard



The Old Dailly Church ruins and the surrounding churchyard. The sequence of three markers left to right starting with the large marker at the left in the photo are for some of our ancestors and distant cousins.



The Dailly Parish Church ruins. The fenced area marks burial grounds for the Boyd family of Penkill and the Hughes Onslow family, one-time prominent families in the parish.



Old Dailly Church had two belfries, both visible in this photo.



The structure attached to the side of the church ruins and surrounded by a fence is the burial vault of the Cathcart family of nearby Killochan Castle. We are likely but unconfirmed descendants of the Cathcart family through Jannet Cathcart who married John Watson in 1728.



The entrance to the churchyard. From this angle, we get another view of the private burial grounds of the Boyd and Hughes Onslow families as well as the east belfry.



Inside the Old Daily Church ruins. Stones have sealed off the burial vault of the Dalrymple Hamilton family of Bargany at the east end of the church.



Burials still take place occasionally in the churchyard. If you're a member of the Dalrymple Hamilton family you might qualify for burial inside the church itself. At the time of my 2012 visit, the most recent Dalrymple Hamilton grave was from 2003.



The Blue Stones a.k.a. Charter Stones of Dailly

Secured inside the ruins of the church are two stones. Tradition holds that these are charter stones, used to recognize charters when writing was not widespread. However, the culture of charter stones generally predates the construction of the church here, when written charters were indeed readily available. And in general, only one charter stone was needed when they were used, but here we have two.

Some suggest that these are sanctuary stones. If a person is in certain kinds of trouble, he could enter a church that housed appropriate sanctuary stones and be protected in some way. A charter stone in nearby Girvan reportedly provided one sanctuary from creditors by turning one's back on the stone. Some seem to have transferred that sanctuary power to the Blue Stones of Dailly.

Folklore suggests that the stones offered a cure for stress and anxiety. Of course, there is no evidence to back up those alleged properties.

Stone lifting was once a popular challenge in Scotland. The two stones are estimated to weigh between 250 and 350 pounds, certainly providing a challenge to anyone who might try to lift one of them. But to prevent them from being “lifted”, the stones have been attached to the wall, so their days as Scottish lifting stones are over, if they ever had such days to begin with.

Basically, there is little in the historical record to support any of the claims made about these stones. But they have such a long tradition of association with the church that after the new parish church was built in what became New Dailly, and Old Dailly Church was allowed to fall to ruin, the people of New Dailly felt that the stones should move to the new church in their village. The people of Old Dailly would have none of that. A physical confrontation followed, which Old Dailly obviously won.



These markers pay tribute to five Covenanters buried in the churchyard and three others from the area put to death elsewhere. Dailly was a hotbed of Covenanter Movement-related activity in the late 1600s.



The Watson family plot in the Old Dailly Church churchyard. The center marker is for our direct ancestors John Watson (Wason) and Helen Skeene (Skeen). The marker on the left is for their granddaughter Jane Wason, her husband John McGill and their family members. The marker on the right is for their great grandson Charles Dalton Wason, his wife Margaret and their family members. Jane, Charles and their descendants are among our many Dailly cousins. There are a number of unmarked graves nearby, likely including graves for other Watson ancestors and distant cousins.

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