

THE BULWARK

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OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY

(a) To propagate the evangelical Protestant faith and those principles held in common by those Churches and organisations adhering to the Reformation;

(b) To diffuse sound and Scriptural teaching on the distinctive tenets of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism;

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How conservative denominations die:

learning from the demise of the Secession

Matthew Vogan

On 27th April 1986 or thereabouts, more than 250 years of history inaugurated by the Erskine brothers in 1733 came to a last feeble conclusion. The Secession movement that had spread across Scotland with considerable power, and separated into so many branches, now breathed a final gasp. Though long maintained, the protest against the controverted clause of the Burgess oath now fell silent. A fiercely burning Auld Licht flame no longer could be seen. To be sure, it might have been difficult to see the historic momentousness if we were witnessing the tiny handful scatter from their rented premises after having gathered

for their final read sermon. It might seem scarcely remarkable or poignant. But this is one way that conservative denominations die: in determined dogmatic final obscurity.

Thirty years earlier, another footnote in Scottish Church history witnessed the other remaining Secession body dissolve itself. A couple of congregations chose to extinguish themselves rather than defile their testimony within the bounds of another denomination. The remaining group, led by a few ministers, made a final halting procession to absorb themselves in the Church of Scotland

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after presiding over their own obsequies. Their adherence on paper to defending with full rigour the attainments of the Scottish Church in doctrine and worship, as well as its covenanting obligations, was ceremoniously blotted out. This is another way that conservative denominations die: with a determined dogmatic death grip on their identity but also through inertia, indifference, and doctrinal drift.

1. IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO US?

Should we care? Does it make any difference? If we are part of a conservative denomination, we should care enough to learn the lessons rather than stand by to watch Church history repeating itself. Perhaps we cannot envisage our ecclesiastical heirs so stranded in the face of an advancing tide. Neither could the United Original Secession men who remained outside of the union with the Free Church in 1852. They were to experience some degree of growth and vitality, remaining largely committed to their convictions for much of the century that followed. It might have been scarcely conceivable that it could have been all handed away with such alacrity. But while the Church of Christ will not perish, no particular church has a promise to continue indefinitely.

The degenerative disease that hastened the end is far more important to understand than the final end. It is this aspect of how conservative churches die that must compel our attention.

2. GROWTH AND CONSOLIDATION

The United Original Secession Synod came together in 1842, joining together some, but not all, of the heirs of the Secession who had been divided for almost a century about the Burgess Oath of 1746. Following

the Disruption of 1843, there were discussions about uniting with the Free Church. By 1852, union was proposed and effected. Yet some were not in agreement. They believed that there was not sufficient adherence to the continuing obligation of the National and Solemn League and Covenants, together with a further ten points. There was also a feeling that the whole process had been unduly rushed.

The result was that a considerable number, perhaps half of the denomination, continued as the United Original Secession Synod, while half joined the Free Church.

The first half-century that followed the division of 1852 was reasonably healthy. There was growth in congregations, some of which were genuine church plants. One such was Bridgeton in Glasgow, where, by the end of the century, the area had been divided into seven districts, with seven active elders visiting regularly. Two-thirds of the Sabbath School schoolchildren were from non-church families, and it was a significant means of outreach. This was even more evident at Mains Street, Glasgow.

Mission work was indeed conducted in many deprived areas, with missionaries employed to reach into the communities. These were missions attached to congregations, for which they took active responsibility. Home visitation, tract distribution, and house meetings were the constant tasks. The annual Home Mission report to the Synod was usually encouraging reading as was news of the foreign mission work in North India.

Whether connected with this or simply a clear statement of convictions, a young

minister, Rev. Thomas Matthew of Midholm (or Midlem), made some very pertinent remarks in addressing the Synod of the United Original Secession in 1882. His discourse was prefaced in the following way:

“The Church on earth has two leading functions, both of which she must seek to fulfil in the persons of her office-bearers — first, she has to maintain the whole truth of God; and second, to proclaim that truth for the world's conversion. Her mission is to some extent similar to that of her exalted Head who came to glorify His Father by ‘bearing witness unto the truth’ and to ‘seek and save the lost’. So far as she

fails in either of these, she fails to fulfil the purpose of her being. A firm and consistent adherence to Reformation principles in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, however commendable in itself, can never make up for the lack of visible results in the preaching of the Word. The best proof (perhaps I might say the only proof) that any Church can give that she is not dead is being the instrument of imparting spiritual life. If she is not doing this, ‘Ichabod’ may be written on her walls for her glory is departed.

Now, are we as a Church and as individual ministers thereof being



employed by the Master for this high and holy purpose? That is the question I wish to bring before you at this time, and surely its importance cannot well be overestimated.”

This very searching and vital question was presented with crystal clarity. According to his Presbytery, Matthew practised what he preached. After his death forty years or so later, they could “recall with gratitude his wise counsels and kindly encouragements; his unfaltering adherence to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus; his fearless declarations of the principles and distinctive truths of the Reformed and Covenanted Church of Scotland; his passionate fervour in his preaching of the gospel of salvation; his burning zeal for missionary enterprise; his ardent earnestness in prayer and his consistent walk with God from day to day.”

3. DECLINE

One would get the impression from the emphasis that Thomas Matthew made above that there was need for more concerted endeavour in gospel work than in witness-bearing, but in due course not all was well in relation to the latter. The reality is that by the end of the century, there was a growing unease amongst not a few of her office-bearers about consistent adherence to Reformation principles in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. Hence a considerable exodus of ministers kept leaking away from her ranks. In most part, this was to the Church of Scotland; and in many cases, it was because the ministers no longer maintained exclusive psalmody, or the continued subscription and obligations of the Covenants, or the complete exclusion of ministers from other churches from her pulpits. The latter principle would wear away quickly, but the

others remained on paper, despite some attempts to modify the ordination vows from around 1900 onwards.

It would appear that the trends within larger Presbyterian bodies in relation to doctrine and worship were coming to bear on the Seceders. The bleeding of students, probationers, and ministers appears to have been pronounced from around 1871 onwards, and it may be that the Moody and Sankey revivals had an impact here as in other denominations.

One illustrative example was Rev. George Aitken, who resigned from Kirkintilloch in 1902. He said that “there was no principle of the Church to which he was actually hostile, but that he found himself growingly indifferent to the cause of the Covenanted Reformation for which the Church” stood. The Presbytery gave him time to consider, but ultimately he left and joined the United Free Church along with many of his congregation.

4. A CHURCH IN TWO MINDS

On paper, things continued as they had been, but there was not the same wholehearted commitment to their testimony as in the past. When these matters came up in Church courts, it was clear that this was a Church in two minds. On the one hand, there was a group who largely maintained the old distinctives but as part of the overall identity of the Church and not necessarily with an outright zeal. On the other hand, there were those who were really not distinguishable from evangelicals in any other denomination.

In 1924, *The History and Doctrine of the United Original Secession Church of Scotland* was published, edited by Francis

Davidson. Yet this volume of essays by its ministers gave very little focus to Seceder distinctives. It was mostly a historical review that explored a more general sense of identity. Similarly, the Church’s magazine now claimed to “witness for evangelical truth and the principles of the covenanted Reformation” but this became increasingly vague as time went on.

When the Free Church proposed union in 1930, things looked very promising. Negotiations and arrangements were basically complete until things fell apart rather suddenly. There was an objection that the name Original Secession would be lost, and possibly some difficulty in sustaining the mission work in India with which the Free Church had co-laboured for some decades. The Free Church had now established their own work less than 50 miles away and were perhaps unable to sustain everything including an indigenous Seceder minister.

One cannot help feeling that the ultimate reluctance was due to those who had a stronger leaning towards the Church of Scotland, on the one hand perhaps drawing inspiration from their union with the United Free Church in 1929. Yet this outlook ironically combined with that of others who had a hidebound attachment to the Secession identity to quash union with the Free Church.

5. THE END DRAWS NEAR

In 1937, David S. Walker of Kilwinning resigned since he found himself at variance with the accepted standards of the Church. He was allowed six months to consider his position. After this period, Walker withdrew his resignation due to “certain happenings in the church in view of which he now

considered it more expedient to remain than to resign.” A motion was proposed that he be asked to resign; another that he be asked not to resign, which carried. Walker then accepted a call to Carluke.

Ten years later the Carluke congregation presented an overture to the Synod which was discussing slow negotiations with the Free Church. “We believe that there is now no principle, fundamental to our Protestant and Presbyterian faith, which separates us from the Church of Scotland, and so we can find no justification for a continued separation from the Mother Church. We therefore urge that all appropriate steps be taken immediately to seek a union of our Church with the Church of Scotland without further delay.”



Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh

The Moderator of that Synod, James R. Moffett recalled that of the 13 ministers in 1941 only 5 were now left. They were in serious decline, but not necessarily at death's door if only they had some determination and vision. The traditionalists were probably in denial at some level and were keen to explore some sort of federal union with the Free Church that would allow them to keep their identity. When this failed, the remaining option was to try to adjust the Constitution and the Testimony but there was no prospect of this having a real impact on retaining or attracting ministers. They seemed bewildered as to what to do. They were out of ideas, and the larger congregations with younger ministers were out of patience with these efforts running into the sand. In endeavouring to maintain the identity of the Church the traditionalists had lost both principles and identity.

The final momentum was to obtain votes from members on whether to join the Church of Scotland. Not all did vote, but of those who did, a clear majority were in favour. The three Irish congregations joined the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Two congregations dissolved rather than join the Church of Scotland, and one decided to join the Free Church. There were 13 congregations in two Presbyteries and 1466 members. The problem was that they had lost the will to live. This is one way that a strong confessional church can die – through drift, inertia, and lack of vision. They could no longer bear witness to the truth. There may be a slow abandonment of principles, but also an inability to distinguish historic identity from those principles through misplaced blind devotion. All the points that had prevented them from joining

the Free Church 100 years previously were now freely abandoned.

6. DEATH BY A DOZEN SPLITS

We must now turn to a smaller body that curiously began its history at the same time as the United Original Secession but outlived it by some time. The tiny group described at the start of this article hung on for almost 150 years as the heirs of the short-lived Associate Presbytery. This Presbytery was formed by those who had refused to enter a union with another Secession body in 1842 – a conjunction that had been negotiated for more than twenty years. The “two witnesses”, Rev. J. Wright and Rev. A. Lambie, came together to maintain a steadfast continued witness against the Burgess Oath, even though that oath had been abolished in 1819.

After seven years, however, these two men stopped speaking to each other in relation to the minuting of a meeting regarding a third minister who had briefly joined them but left. They adhered to a Testimony published in 1827, but Lambie went on to qualify this adherence in an appendix that was also subscribed to. The two ministers had also quarrelled over the question of lifting the bread in the administration of the Lord's supper. The impression is of two strong-minded individuals with their own decided ways of seeing things and the inability to alter from a position once adopted.

Despite some attempts to reconcile, no meeting took place between them. This led to division within Lambie's kirk session and, for a time, the closure of the congregation. The Associate Presbytery was not a tangible reality anymore.

7. SPLITS WITHIN SPLITS

After some decades, controversy would arise within Wright's Edinburgh congregation also. Wright was an able preacher and lecturer but not someone who would brook opposition. The pulpit was his podium of self-defence. There was debate as to whether an allegation against him could be tried at Kirk-Session level, whether he would submit to the Kirk Session, and how it could be done with him as moderator. He had a successor minister in the congregation, Rev. Walter Macleod, who was his staunch defender.

After a division in the Edinburgh congregation, most of the Kirk Session left, with some members, and joined Lambie who preached to them in Edinburgh at times. It only took three years before a dispute arose between this minister and his congregation in Edinburgh. He denounced their meetings about congregational affairs as entirely sinful and savouring of rebellion, treachery, apostasy, innovation, a violation of Scripture, independency in bud and principle. Needless to say, this led to a parting of the ways between congregation and minister. Yet, inevitably perhaps, for a time a small group adhered to him.

Ultimately the Edinburgh congregation could be said to have fractured into three separate groups. One of the three ministers, Henry Paton issued an appeal for unity in 1893. In it he indicated the spirit of divisiveness as not only the degenerative disease but also their great guilt. “Truth to say, Brethren, our divisions are at once our sin, our reproach, and our weakness”. None were prepared to say the same or to even meet on this question. This was hardly surprising, since Walter Macleod believed that to “parley, even for

one hour with such is dangerous”. It was a familiar story involving many documents, pamphlets, shrill accusations or warnings, and precipitous public actions but no discussions or meetings.

8. ANTICIPATING THE END

And so, in the process of time, one sole shrinking congregation remained. After Walter MacLeod's death in 1912 the prospects of having someone trained or ordained to be a minister seemed impossible. They were willing to consider some expedients and ordaining office-bearers was now done by the Session Clerk, still requiring opposition to the Burgess Oath of 1746. It is unclear if they would have considered issuing a call to someone to be minister without ordination as one of the other splinters had felt compelled to do.

They continued to haemorrhage and shrink. Yet they held on for around 75 years after the passing of Walter Macleod, the last minister. Such had been the powerful influence of those men which commanded such devotion. Macleod had warned them against the “least inlet of division”. Prayer and watchfulness would guard them against the spirit of contention. He felt that it emerged when one man thought he had superior gifts and abilities and began to propel himself forward and clash with others. No doubt he had instances in mind. Macleod was close to the mark but too specific. It is clear that a spirit of pride breeds contention and division. This may appear in more subtle forms than ambition. It may manifest itself in dogmatic, rigid assertion of the absolute rightness of one's own judgement and position and an impatience with and suspicion of those who

TO THE
**Members and Adherents of the Original
Secession Church in Edinburgh.**

BRETHREN,

In the providence of God, all who now remain attached to, and evince a desire to maintain a "testimony to the truths of Christ agreeably to the Westminster Standards as received by the Reformed Church of Scotland, and in opposition to defection from the Reformation sworn to in Britain and Ireland," or, in brief, who stand for our Covenanted Reformation, are in and about this city.* It is, however, a mournful fact that these have for a long time been rent into fragments by intestine commotion and dissension. Originally one body, we are now divided into several parties, none of which acknowledges the others, nor do we associate together for the attainment of those ends which all in common profess, and to endeavour the realisation of which we are in common under solemn vow to God.

The occasions of this deplorable state of matters are various, but the first is undoubtedly that set forth by Dr M'Crie in dealing with the subject of divisions in general, in the following solemn and weighty remarks:—"While we survey these mournful facts, my brethren," he says, "we must not overlook the hand of God. . . . The malignant spirit could not sow the seeds of dissension and division, nor could they grow up and spread without the permission of the Lord of the

* There are others called Seceders throughout the country, but it cannot now be said of such that they appear for our *Covenanted* Reformation.

differ. It may lead to escalating accusations and charges in the adversarial combat with brethren. It can involve refusing to "parley" with the enemy or to give any quarter as defensive positions are adopted behind respective lines.

There would be no further splits in the twentieth century, but it was too late; the weakened body was too wasted for that. It was now a case of holding out to the final end. Presumably there was the conviction of being the remnant but with the growing bleak realisation that remnants are not guaranteed an indefinite future.

Each of these splinters functioned as independent congregations yet with a sense that they were continuing as the true and sole heirs of the Reformation Church of Scotland, tracing back their heritage split by painful split. This is the way that some conservative churches die: due to slow internal bleeding from the wounds received in the house of their friends. Yet with their identity intact and still clutching their unique principles or idiosyncratic judgement.

Presumably any of the successors of the Associate Presbytery of 1842 right up to the bitter end might have used the language of one of their number, William Scott. "The designation we have taken is that of a remnant. We have no courts superior to a Kirk Session. Nevertheless, if we keep the attainments we have inherited, we are the Church of God, and his witnessing people". That certainty without qualification or embarrassment is one way in which conservative churches die. "We are the people and wisdom will die with us," they say, effectively, and they do die along with many (but thankfully not all) of their principles. We are the Church

of God, they said, no doubt thinking of themselves as its highest rather than its only expression. Yet to what extent were they carrying out or able to carry out the purpose of the Church in this world? They had a witness on paper to be sure. Yet to whom were they witnessing and what was the sum total of their witness?

9. CONCLUSION

These two streams of the Secession carried their testimony into the twentieth century but could not carry it on from there. Is our world any the poorer for not having the distinctives they clung to so tightly for so long?

It is a sad tale. One lost the will to live, while the other lost both the strength and reason to live. Measured against the purpose of the Christian Church they were sorely lacking. Whether it was a bewildered but dogged maintaining of a cultural identity with no discernible impact on their generation, or a lethargic indifference, they met their demise with a resigned fatalism.

Individual congregations die all the time in the western world. Usually, they have turned in on themselves, often squabbling over material matters, obsessed with their past and serving their own interests. There is no passion to reach the lost and a loss of connection with the Church's main purpose.

It is worth trying to apply all of these realities to our own situations. Could it happen to us? How many generations will our ecclesiastical heritage last? Are there signs of the decline described above? Death is by no means inevitable if the underlying issues are faced, and the Church's leading functions recovered.

The Covenanters and the Battle of Auldearn 1645

John A. Smith

In 1746, the last pitched battle (to date) on British soil was fought on Culloden Moor just south of Inverness, where Prince Charles Edward Stuart's Jacobite forces were decisively defeated by a Hanoverian government army commanded by his cousin William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland. The undoubted drama and romance of the Clansmen's last stand, and its blood-soaked aftermath, has cast a sombre shadow over the Scottish psyche ever since, and to this day, the battlefield, with its many evocative mass graves, has an atmosphere all of its own.

But only fifteen miles to the east, and just over a century previously, another major battle took place. Although very few of the modern-day travellers on the nearby A96 trunk road have even heard of it, the

Battle of Auldearn, on Friday 9th May 1645, was a disastrous defeat for the army of the Covenant, at the hands of the Royalist forces led by the brilliant but erratic former Covenanter, James Graham, Marquis of Montrose. It is notable that the village of Auldearn lay in the centre of an area, of which it has been written, "no doubt the great bulk of the people were Puritans from Reformation times."

I. BRODIE OF LETHEN AND BRODIE OF BRODIE

By far the most influential family in the vicinity were the Brodies of Brodie. Alexander (1617-80), second son of the 13th laird, had, in his younger days, amassed a large fortune in Edinburgh and become a burgess of the city. This enabled him to act as a banker to his neighbours



Brodie Castle

and subsequently funded his purchase of the estate of Lethen in 1637, as well as the extensive Kinloss Abbey lands in 1643. That same year he became member of the Scottish Parliament for Moray. Alexander "warmly espoused the cause of the Covenant".

His nephew, also Alexander, the young 14th laird, married Elizabeth Innes, the daughter of Lady Grizzel Stewart. The influence of this godly lady deepened her husband's spirituality and, following her early death, which was "an unexpected and bitter trial", Brodie heard "a voice almost audible to his physical sense" which spoke to him "assuring him that the Lord would make up his loss and give to him as good as he wanted". The sorrowing widower replied, "Lord, what canst Thou give me?

For children, house, another wife, estate, cannot make up for this. Nothing can make up for it but Thyself; if I may sanctify Thy name and may know and enjoy Thee, it shall suffice". Professor G.N.M. Collins wrote, "the edge of his grief was blunted and Christ filled the vacant place in his heart and home with His own consoling and strengthening Presence".

Having previously taken little part in public affairs, Brodie now made a commitment, together with his neighbours, to take a stand on the side of the National Covenant and against the imposition of Laud's notorious ritualistic service book upon the Church of Scotland. Brodie's distaste for Roman idolatry is revealed in an episode which occurred in 1640. Although Elgin Cathedral had long since been abandoned

as a place of worship, there remained within the building an ornate wooden rood screen adorned with statues of saints as well as murals depicting the Crucifixion on one side and the Last Judgment on the other. Together with his cousin, Innes of Innes, and Rev. Gilbert Ross of Elgin, Brodie pulled down this structure and broke it up for firewood. Their action, probably inspired by the 1640 General Assembly's Act for the Abolition of Idolatrous Monuments, was not without good reason, since the cathedral ruins remained a place of pilgrimage for those locals who still clung to Papist superstition.

II. CAWDOR AND ROSE OF KILRAVOCK

It has been stated that, "all the leading men in Nairnshire were staunch Presbyterians and at that time were nearly all connected with each other by marriage". Colin Campbell, Thane of Cawdor, who was married to Elizabeth, young Brodie's pious sister, was a member of the 1638 Glasgow Assembly which ended the rule of bishops. Hugh Rose, Baron of Kilravock, was one of the gentlemen who met the Assembly's Commissioners (Alexander Henderson, Andrew Cant, and David Dickson) at Inverness for the signing of the Covenant, and later took a leading role in besieging the key fortress of Inverness Castle, before taking it from the Earl of Huntly's men.

Hugh's brother, William Rose, another member of the Glasgow Assembly, was appointed, together with Revs. David Dunbar (Edinkillie) and John Hay (Rafford), to inform Bishop John Guthrie of Moray that he was deposed. Unlike the other Scottish prelates, who all fled the country, Guthrie decided to resist, vehemently preaching against the Covenant before withdrawing into Spynie Palace, his formidable fortress,

and strengthening its defences with artillery and stocks of ammunition and gunpowder. After Spynie was captured by General Robert Munro of Foulis, the bishop finally saw sense and left quietly to live in obscurity.

III. LOCAL MINISTERS

The local ministry likewise included many zealous Presbyterians. Rev. William Falconer of Dyke was a member of the committee appointed by the Assembly to inquire into the personal morals of the bishops; and the minister of Rafford, Thomas Hay, received the thanks of the Assembly for writing a work entitled, *A Censure Against the Service Book*. Rev. David Dunbar of Nairn, an enthusiastic Covenanter, was translated there in 1638 and a stone tablet above the door of the town's old church records in Latin that he, "with the highest character in fidelity discharged during twenty years the duties of pastor".

It is recorded that when the Covenant was signed at Nairn, "the people came forward most willingly". At Forres, the whole Presbytery subscribed, and at Elgin the council and townspeople all signed. According to the Earl of Rothes, the Commissioners' visit was "the joyfullest day they ever saw in the North, and it was marked as a special mark of God's goodness towards these parts, that so many different clans and names, among whom there was nothing before but hostility and blood, were met together for such a good cause, and in so peaceable a manner."

IV. THE BATTLE

In the summer of 1644, following the covenanting government's decision to



send most of its army to England to assist the Parliamentarians in the Civil War, King Charles I saw an opportunity to revive his cause and therefore sent Montrose to Scotland to raise a rebellion. In February 1645 Montrose decisively defeated the Presbyterian Argyll Campbells at Inverlochy on the west coast of Inverness-shire. But his attempts to subdue the Lowlands were met with fierce resistance and he pulled back into the lands of the sympathetic and mainly Roman Catholic Gordon clan.

A government force, with four regiments of regular infantry (Louden's, Lothian's, Buchanan's, and Campbell of Lawers'), under the command of the veteran mercenary, General John Hurry, was endeavouring to draw Montrose further north. Hurry, born in Pitfichie in Aberdeenshire, began his career as drillmaster of the Aberdeen militia in the 1620s before becoming a cavalry officer in the English Parliamentary

army. Subsequently, he changed sides to the Royalists, then back again to the Government, and at Cawdor, he strengthened his ranks with over 1,000 men from the Presbyterian clans – Campbells, Roses, Brodies, Sutherlands, Frasers, and Mackenzies as well as some 400 cavalry from the local area. Meanwhile, the Morayshire Covenanters kept Hurry well informed about Montrose's movements.

On the evening of 8th May, the Royalists were encamped around the village of Auldearn, in a strong position commanding the highway towards Nairn. While Montrose only had around 2,000 men, mainly MacDonalds from the Western Isles and Antrim, augmented by Gordons, the Covenanting force numbered at least 3,500.

General Hurry decided to launch a surprise dawn attack. As the Covenanters had last been seen withdrawing towards Inverness,



Kilravock Castle

Montrose mistakenly assumed that they would not stop until they reached the town. But when his scouts were sent out at first light they clearly heard, borne on the wind, “a thunderous report of musketry”. Owing to the rainy weather, the Covenanters had unwisely fired off their weapons to clear the damp powder, thus warning their adversaries of their approach. And besides, in order to move more quickly, they had left behind their cumbersome but crucial artillery.

Montrose watched the developing events from the hilltop Auldearn churchyard. Given the relative strengths of the two armies, he understandably chose to fight a defensive action. To make Hurry think that his main strength lay on his right, Montrose placed the Royal Standard there, defended by a small force commanded by his deputy, the fierce warrior Alasdair “MacColla”

MacDonald. The Covenanters taunted the proud MacDonalds for fighting from a concealed position, protected by “banks, dykes, bushes and great stones”. True to form, MacColla, his Celtic blood stirred, led his men out into the open, where they were quickly mown down by the superior musketry of the government troops. But the wily Montrose then cried out to the Gordon clansmen, who lay to the other side of the hill, “MacDonald is gaining the victory, come, my Lord Gordon, shall he carry all before him and leave no laurels for the House of Huntly!”

As the Gordons charged, they effectively flanked the Covenanters’ attack. The crucial point in the battle was when the Covenanting cavalry, under Major Drummond, “wheeled round unskilfully through his own foot and brake their ranks, whereby they were slain by the enemy”. Soon afterwards, the

Frasers and Sutherlands were scattered by the Royalist cavalry and most of the Mackenzies departed without firing a shot. Notwithstanding, the unit which resisted most fiercely was a company of Mackenzies from the Chanonry of Ross (Fortrose) who firmly resolved to stand fast around the standard of their Clan, valiantly defended by the bannermen of Kintail. This they did until they were annihilated. It is worthy of note that Auldearn was the last battle recorded in Europe which included the extensive use of archers.

V. THE AFTERMATH

The Marquis of Montrose won a shattering victory, and at least 1,000 covenanting troops were killed in the battle and the bloody withdrawal which followed. Wild cries of “no quarter” rang out as the Covenanters were pursued towards Inverness. Several of

the lairds, including the “Good” Earl John of Sutherland, Rose of Kilravock, Brodie and others narrowly escaped on horseback along with the cavalry. Several writers have suggested that both Hurry and the Earl of Seaforth deliberately fought to lose, a theory supported by the fact that they both changed sides shortly afterwards. Significantly, Major Drummond was subsequently court martialled and shot at Inverness.

Since the district was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Covenant, Montrose gave his men full license to plunder and destroy as they saw fit. After all, the prosperous lands of the “bodaich Mhoraidh” (carles of Moray) had for centuries been raided by the MacDonalds, who comprised much of Montrose’s army. They set fire to Auldearn village and part of Nairn, and attacked the castles and



The Covenanters Stone, Auldearn



Cawdor Castle

estates of Darnaway, Lethen, and Brodie. Though the lands of Cawdor were wasted, no attempt was made upon the formidable, moated keep.

Garmouth village, belonging to the Laird of Innes, was also burned. Montrose subsequently withdrew towards Elgin. Brodie recorded in his diary, "We fell before the wild Irishes six times without any interruption, and to mingle the Church's and the land's calamity with my private loss, my house, my mains and bigging, was burnt to the ground and my state made desolate, and no place left me, nor means to subsist."

The dead covenanting soldiers were buried in the field below the churchyard as well as in an area of waste ground now known as

Dead Men's Wood. Apparently, many of the officers were interred in the churchyard itself. A flat stone near the west door of the church and near the sundial reads "Here lyeth Captaine Bernard MacKenzie who in defence of his Religion and Country diet at Auldearne 9th May 1645."

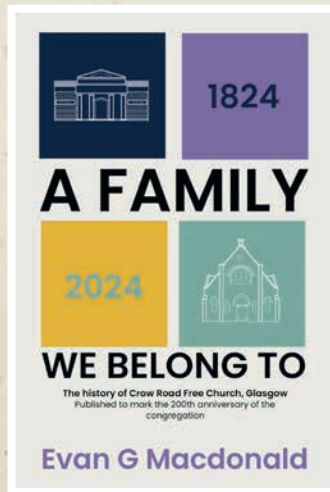
The Covenanters Stone, situated in the roofless medieval chancel to the east of the present parish church, commemorates three other officers. The present polished granite tablet is a nineteenth-century replacement of the badly weathered original, which was originally built into the belfry but was removed into the church vestibule by the parish minister, Rev. William Barclay, who adhered to the Free Church in 1843. It is the northernmost such grave in Scotland. The inscription reads, "This monument was

erected by Sir Robert Innes Younger of that ilk, in memorie of Alexander Drummond of Meedhope, Sir John Murray and Master Gideon Murray, who lyes here interred, who fighting valiantly in defence of their Religion, King and Country, diet at Auldearne 9th May 1645." Mr Barclay's wife, Isabella, was a daughter of Provost Alexander Brown of Aberdeen. Unusually, her two sisters were also married to Free Church ministers and her two brothers, Charles and Robert, were both noted Free Church ministers.

In spite of the suffering unleashed in the aftermath of the battle, the local people steadfastly held to the Covenant and after the restoration of Episcopacy in 1660, the area became a refuge for outed ministers who conducted many conventicles in defiance of the tyrannical decrees of the Stuarts and thus encouraged the local people to stand for Gospel Truth until the coming of better days.



Auldearn Parish church



A Family We Belong To: The History of Crow Road Free Church, Glasgow

Evan G. Macdonald
2024, 112 pages, £10

Review by John A. Smith

Whilst all the major Scottish cities attracted Highland migrants from the 1780s onwards, Glasgow proved particularly attractive to Highlanders in search of work and a better life for their family. The extensive and varied industries of that burgeoning city, along with its easily accessible west coast location, made it a veritable magnet for Gaels, so much so that, by 1840, Glasgow had a Gaelic-speaking population numbering nearly 50,000. In those days the Highlands experienced much Gospel blessing, so naturally, many of these displaced people were anxious to have access to regular worship and fellowship in the language

and in the manner to which they were accustomed. To cater for these folks, Glasgow's numerous Gaelic churches were established. Their history has been ably chronicled by the late Dr Ian R. MacDonald, Aberdeen, in his seminal work *Glasgow's Gaelic Churches: Highland Religion in an Urban Setting* (Knox Press, 1995).

I. HOPE STREET CHURCH

In this new and attractively produced book, Evan G. Macdonald focuses on one of these congregations, Hope Street, in much greater detail. The author, a Ross-shire

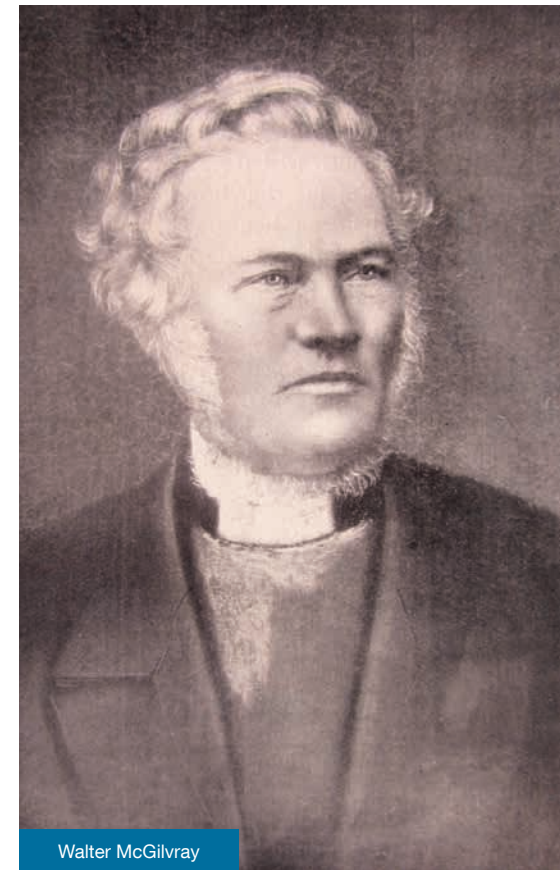
man and son of the Free Church manse, is well known as an expert in Scottish metrical psalm singing. Hope Street Church was targeted to a very specific constituency. Previous congregations (Ingram Street, Duke Street, and Kirkfield), were mainly attended by people from the Northern Highlands. Their ministers, by and large, were also drawn from that area. The promoters of Hope Street claimed, with some justification, "that the inhabitants of the Western Highlands residing in Glasgow, are subject to an inconvenience which to a highlander is extreme and insuperable. For the difference between the dialects of the west and north is so great that the natives of the one frequently do not understand at all the language spoken in the other." These west-coasters, mainly from Argyllshire, insisted on having their own congregation in Glasgow.

The General Assembly agreed to the erection of a new church, completed in 1824, exactly two hundred years ago. At this time, the noted Thomas Chalmers was at the height of his influential ministry in Glasgow (at the Tron and later St. John's), and Evangelicals in the city were inspired by his energetic example in reaching out to the hordes of unchurched and needy people in its crowded and poverty-stricken streets and closes. The well-known motto of the city is "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word". If any Glasgow congregation exemplifies this sentiment, it is surely that of Hope Street. Many readers will be familiar with the names of the following noted ministers.

II. WALTER MCGILVRAY

Dr Walter McGilvray, a native of Islay, was a man of "a sound and penetrating mind, a warm and brilliant imagination and a

severe and cultured taste." Though his pastorate in Hope Street divided opinion, when he later moved to Aberdeen, the Free Gilcomston congregation greatly prospered under his eloquent high Calvinist preaching. An impressive new church was erected for him in Union Street, the city's main thoroughfare. In the second half of the twentieth century, after it was almost closed down, that same building witnessed another remarkable ministry, that of Rev. William Still, whose scholarly yet applicable expository sermons inspired so many Aberdonians, as well as students from all over the world to "search the Scriptures" for themselves.



Walter McGilvray

III. DUNCAN MACGREGOR

Duncan MacGregor, later chosen as successor to the saintly Robert Murray McCheyne in Dundee, served Hope Street from 1854 to 1864, having been translated from Stornoway where he was the town's first Free Church minister. MacGregor, a Loch Tayside man, was characterised by Rev. Norman C. MacFarlane as "an ideal pastor who yearned over the souls of his people". He was the author of *Memoir of Campbell of Kiltearn* and the inspiring collection of sermons, *The Shepherd of Israel*, both of which are worthy of being reprinted.

IV. J.D. MCCULLOCH

James Duff McCulloch, translated from Latheron to Hope Street in 1889, was recently described by Rev. John Keddie as "a towering figure in the reconstruction of the Free Church after 1900". In McCulloch's day, Hope Street was a very demanding charge and the minister's duties on Sabbaths included one Gaelic and two English services, a Gaelic prayer meeting and a Bible class, as well as midweek Gaelic and English prayer meetings. The congregation also maintained three district missions in outlying suburbs of the city. Notwithstanding this heavy workload, from 1905 onwards, McCulloch continued his pastoral duties in conjunction with the office of Principal of the Free Church College in Edinburgh. A man of great energy, the whiskered Principal was recalled by G.N.M. Collins, at one time his assistant, as "the very personification of natural dignity and old world culture – a fact which gave him the impression of aloofness to people unacquainted with him," although he also had "an intensely human touch that endeared him to all and left no place for a feeling of constraint in his company."

Almost completely blind towards the end of his life, this remarkable man died, still in harness and at the age of 90, in 1926.

V. JOHN MACLEOD, O.B.E.

McCulloch's successor was Rev. John Macleod, a native of Lochcarron (known as "the O.B.E."- awarded to him for service as a military chaplain to the 51st Highland Division in World War One). His experience on the battlefields of Flanders no doubt sharpened his evangelistic zeal, and under his preaching, Hope Street became perhaps the most outreach-minded congregation in the Free Church. "A man of prayer and spiritual insight he knew that Christ crucified was the proper theme for sin-burdened souls".

VI. R.A. FINLAYSON AND DOUGLAS MACMILLAN

In 1940, Roderick A. Finlayson, another Lochcarron man and later a noted professor in the College, well known internationally as a champion of the Reformed Faith, came to Hope Street. And Rev. J. Douglas Macmillan, one of the foremost preachers within the Free Church in his day, served there from 1974 to 1982. Ironically, he was a native speaker of Argyllshire Gaelic, although by that time his much appreciated ministry in that language was exercised elsewhere.

Unlike most other Scottish congregational histories, Evan Macdonald's book effectively combines a commentary on the successive pastorates, with an insightful assessment of behind-the-scenes activities and the changing social demographics of the congregation, from a Gaelic-speaking artisan to an English-speaking "professional" congregation (in 1962 the requirement for bilingual preaching was dropped, with the induction of Rev. A. G. Ross, originally from Alness).

VII. ST VINCENT STREET.

In 1957, a dramatic event occurred when the Hope Street church building (located in fact on Ewing Place), was burnt out in a serious fire which took hold while builders were repairing the roof. The present writer has heard several people speak of the elegance of the Greek Revival style structure, spoken of by some as "the cathedral of the Free Church", and the location of the special General Assemblies held to commemorate the tricentenary of the Covenanting Glasgow Assembly in 1938 and the centenary of the Disruption in 1943. Thereafter the congregation moved between several locations, for a long period renting the impressive St. Vincent Street Church, designed by the famous architect Alexander "Greek" Thomson, before eventually settling in the old Partick Crow Road Free Church building in 2023.

VIII. MILTON AND PARTICK

Also included in this volume are accounts of two other Free Churches which have been amalgamated with the old Hope Street congregation: Milton and the minority group of Partick (Crow Road). Milton is notable as the church built for the noted and heavenly-minded Rev. John "Rabbi" Duncan. Remarkably he attained such popularity in another Gaelic congregation (Duke Street) as an English language evening lecturer, that they wanted to call him as their minister – in spite of his being a Doric-speaking Aberdonian with not a single word of Gaelic. Undaunted, Duncan promised that he could learn the language within two months. As a man who could reputedly "talk his way to the Great Wall of China", his extraordinary linguistic gifts would probably have been equal to the task, but the Glasgow Presbytery vetoed the idea. Not to be outdone, his

supporters decided to constitute a new English-speaking congregation and call him as minister there. As this was a time of extensive church extension, the famous publisher William Collins undertook to bankroll a new church in Cowcaddens, to be called Milton. Although Duncan's ministry there lasted only five years before he became a missionary to the Jews, Milton was a distinctive congregation within the post 1900 Free Church, not Gaelic but Protestant, Covenanting, and Conservative. Rev. Samuel Lyle Orr, an Ulsterman, who was an enthusiast for reaching out to young people and whose name was later given to the Free Church's children's medals for knowledge of Scripture, Catechism, and Church History, was pastor there from 1906-15. Walter Rounsfell Brown, for many years General Treasurer of the Church, was an elder in Milton.

After the Union of the churches in 1900, the Partick congregation had quite an amazing rebirth as it was reconstituted on the initiative of a group of only twelve members, who – well taught by the stalwart Rev. Henry Anderson who retired in 1898 – were determined to maintain unimpaired the Disruption testimony. Before long there were over 140 on the communion roll. In spite of being denied their well-founded claim to their property in Anderson Street by the Churches Commission, the group managed to erect their own church in Crow Road in 1909. The warmly evangelical and highly respected Rev. Hugh Ferrier, ministered there from 1963 to 1975 when he moved to the Free North, Inverness.

Mr. Macdonald's book is well worth reading and is obviously the product of exhaustive research into a subject which is very close to the author's heart.

SHBT MAGDALEN CHAPEL CONFERENCE

Report

The Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT) day-conference, entitled “The Magdalen Chapel: Past, Present and Future”, was held on 8th November at Riddle’s Court in the Lawnmarket, Edinburgh. Eight brief but informative addresses were delivered on different aspects of the Chapel, and some lively discussion ensued.

For the present writer, a few of the highlights were these:

1. The emphasis on the connections that Michael Macquhane and Janet Rynd, the founders of the Chapel, had with royal craftsmen. James V and Mary of Guise were actively improving the royal palaces at Holyrood, Linlithgow, Falkland, and Stirling at the time, and it is possible that the stained-glass windows in the Chapel were the work of Thomas Peebles, the master glazier to the crown.
2. The identification of one of the surviving glass fragments in the windows as “flaying knives”, and hence as the “St Bartholomew”, mentioned by nineteenth-century writers, but dismissed by twentieth-century writers as a puzzling mistake. This raised the likelihood that the stained-glass windows had originally featured the Twelve Apostles before the Reformation.
3. News that the archaeologist who investigated the Chapel in the 1990s is at last hoping to write up his findings. In particular, the skeletons that had been found buried in the Chapel – originally supposed to be those of the bedesmen – have been shown by post-mortem examination to include those of two elderly females and several children including a premature infant. It now seems likely that these were Rynd or Macquhane family graves.



St Bartholomew flaying knives

4. Confirmation that important parts of the Chapel clock probably date back to the late seventeenth century.
5. Information about the frontage of the Chapel on the Cowgate and its renovation at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The event was sold out, with about sixty people present. It is hoped that it will prove a stimulus to further interest and research in the Chapel. We are grateful to the SHBT for hosting the occasion.



ALEXANDER ALANE OR ALESIOUS

Growing up in the centre of Edinburgh after the year 1500, Alexander had an eventful childhood. He tells us of times when his life nearly came to a sudden end. Once he fell from a balcony but was preserved and another time he was kept from harm after creeping along the rocky ledge of a very steep hill on his hands and knees.

1. LUTHER

Alexander went to St Andrews to study and became a well-known scholar. It was at a time of great change in Europe. Perhaps you remember that in October 1517 Martin Luther published his 95 theses against the indulgences promoted by the pope? These ideas came to Scotland too, an emphasis on salvation by grace alone through faith and not our own works. Because of his great learning, everyone was pleased when Alexander came forward to attack the teachings of Martin Luther. It was very sad that he attacked the truth of the gospel as taught in the Bible. As the teachings of Luther began to come into Scotland, enemies of the truth looked to Alexander especially for help. When Patrick Hamilton was put on trial for his teaching, these things were put to the test.

2. PATRICK HAMILTON

Along with other experts, Alexander was appointed to convince Patrick that Luther was wrong. But the more Alexander talked with Patrick, the more he realised that he himself was wrong. Even though Patrick boldly defended and explained all that he had taught and showed how it came from the Bible, the authorities would not listen. Patrick was condemned. The punishment was death – the most horrible death of being burned alive. But Patrick was not angry even against those



who had treated him like this. His last words were “Lord Jesus receive my spirit. How long shall darkness overwhelm this realm?”

It was a great grief to Alexander to witness the execution of his new friend Patrick. He saw his bravery and faith, so did others, and they were moved to discover more of this faith that gave Patrick such courage. The Archbishop was angry at the support some monks expressed for Patrick Hamilton. He asked Alexander to preach a sermon. But it was a trap; he only wanted Alexander to say things that would get him into trouble. Alexander knew this but he still spoke very firmly against the wicked life of many of the priests. One of them, a

monk in authority over Alexander, was so angry at the way his own well-known wickedness was revealed that he ordered that Alexander be put into a horrible prison intending to force him to make a confession and have him executed like Patrick. But Alexander's friends orchestrated a secret escape, and he fled from St Andrews to Dundee, and then went abroad, never to return to Scotland.

3. EXILE

Alexander wanted to go to France and then Germany, but a storm drove the ship to Sweden. Here Alexander was able to see the Reformation in action. Eventually he settled in Wittenberg, Germany, where he became friends with Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon. Melanchthon gave him the Latin name 'Alesius', meaning 'wanderer' or 'pilgrim.' Here he was able to give lectures.

Disturbed by reports that the Scottish bishops had forbidden people from reading the New Testament, Alane wrote two urgent letters to the Scottish king, pleading for the Scriptures to be accessible in English. This must have been the New Testament translated by William Tyndale which was getting smuggled into Scotland at the time. It was the first of many books Alexander would write about this subject. The king and bishops did not answer his letters, however, except for giving the orders for him to be excommunicated. Alexander kept writing books for the benefit of people in Scotland; he also wrote many books explaining parts of the Bible such as the book of Psalms.

4. ENGLAND

Alexander went to England in 1535 where he became the first Professor of

Hebrew at Cambridge. The idea was to teach students about the Bible, not lots of opinions that had been developed by writers in the Middle Ages. He later became a medical doctor in London and held professorships in theology at the Universities of Frankfurt and Leipzig in Germany. Alexander was also invited by Archbishop Cranmer to help translate the First Book of Common Prayer into Latin. He knew Anne Boleyn and witnessed the way that she was treated by King Henry VIII who eventually had her beheaded. Alexander did not believe that she was guilty of the crimes that she was accused of. After Elizabeth I became queen, Alexander wrote to her about her mother, telling her of his memories of what she had been like. Alexander only had a few years in England before Roman Catholics were able to make things difficult once more.

5. KEPT BY GOD

In 1543, the Scottish Parliament passed a decree allowing the reading of the Bible and ultimately, reformation took place there in 1560. When Alexander passed away in Leipzig on March 17, 1565, he could reflect with gratitude on the significant role he had played in the Reformation, leaving a legacy of spiritual renewal in both England and Scotland despite facing severe trials and persecution. There may be different experiences in life as Alexander found but he knew that God was with him and would keep him wherever he went. David could say "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" (Ps. 56:8) He had his confidence in God. Because he had trusted him for salvation, he could trust him for everything else. That is how it is for everyone who truly belongs to the Lord. Is that you?

Alexander Alane

WORD SEARCH

CAN YOU FIND ALL THE HIDDEN WORDS IN THIS WORD SEARCH?



WORDS CAN BE FOUND IN ANY DIRECTION (INCLUDING DIAGONALS) AND CAN OVERLAP EACH OTHER.

L	R	O	T	C	O	D	H	I	I	O	H	I	E
O	H	I	D	A	E	X	A	I	N	L	A	O	H
O	U	E	C	H	O	A	M	S	O	L	O	D	G
W	C	I	Z	W	O	L	I	C	N	W	E	C	O
H	A	O	B	A	O	A	L	O	W	L	S	E	H
A	B	N	O	T	I	G	T	U	Z	A	I	E	T
E	L	N	D	I	E	E	O	R	Y	G	C	H	H
I	Z	E	O	E	A	X	N	A	H	L	L	Y	E
X	E	Z	S	I	R	I	T	G	E	E	E	N	O
H	E	O	L	I	I	L	T	E	X	I	X	O	L
A	R	O	A	O	U	E	X	D	W	P	R	C	O
A	E	O	A	L	E	S	M	S	O	Z	R	L	G
R	W	E	R	B	E	H	E	O	E	I	G	A	Y
Z	E	A	A	O	L	E	E	B	H	G	O	B	S



- WANDER
HAMILTON
LEIPZIG
- HEBREW
EXILE
COURAGE
- BALCONY
THEOLOGY
ALESIUS
- DOCTOR



SOCIETY & BRANCH NEWS

ABERDEEN BRANCHMEETING

The Aberdeen Branch resumed public meetings on 29th November with an address by Dr John A. Smith on the 1859 Revival in Aberdeen. The main instrument in the Revival was the Liverpool lawyer Reginald Radcliffe; other speakers included Brownlow North and Henry Grattan Guinness. Initially the addresses were aimed only at children – to avoid questions about laymen conducting such meetings for adults – but latterly the meetings became open to all. The meetings were widely, but not universally, supported by the churches, but they were endorsed by several conservative ministers including Alexander Dyce Davidson. In Aberdeen, there were 18 churches affected by the Revival, including 5 of the 11 Established Church congregations, and 8 out of 18 Free Church congregations. Many congregations in Aberdeenshire and further afield were also affected.

At the question-time, Rev. John MacLeod (retired) returned to the matter of laymen conducting such meetings, and asked about its propriety and its consequences, and whether the Revival had strengthened the Brethren cause in the North-East, often associated with hostility to an ordained ministry. A total of 11 people were present at the meeting.

PROGRAMME OF ONLINE WINTER SPEAKERS

One further speaker for the programme of online addresses is Isaac Gajendran (Inverness) who has agreed to speak, on Friday 18th April at 7.30 pm, DV, on the subject “William Miller of Madras College”.

VOL. 14 OF THE *HISTORICAL JOURNAL*

At the time of going to press, Vol. 14 of the *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal* is in its final stages of preparation. We apologise for the delay in the production of this issue.

ABERDEEN BRANCH, FUTURE MEETINGS

Rev. Robin Gray (Gardenstown),

Friday 28th February 7.30 pm

Subject: “The Visible / Invisible Church Distinction in John Brown of Wamphray.”

Paul Crowe (Faith Mission),

Friday 28th March 7.30 pm

Subject: “George Whitefield”.

Craigiebuckler Church Hall
185 Springfield Road,
Aberdeen AB15 8AA

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