



Ness Bank
Church of Scotland
INVERNESS

The present church, the third in the congregation's history, was designed by William Macintosh, an Inverness architect. It was built over a period of some fifteen months in late 1900-1901 at a cost of £8,500 and was dedicated at a service on 22nd December 1901. This church replaced a smaller building designed by Dr Alexander Ross in the Gothic revival style which stood on the corner of Union Street and Drummond Street on a site now occupied by Barclay's Bank.

The church, which is in early Gothic revival style, is built of Tarradale red sandstone with freestone dressings and is roofed with natural slate. The main gable has two pinnacles, a large traceried window with three small rose windows below and a frieze of ashlar built arcading with small pilasters. There is no spire but the gable is finished with a stone cross. The building is constructed with the church hall and other ancillary accommodation under the church, an arrangement for which the steeply sloped site, otherwise restrictive, is admirably suited. The church is cruciform in plan with nave, aisles, transepts, clerestories and apse. At the northern end there is a gallery with access from the entrance vestibule. The present seating capacity, as determined by Fire Safety Regulations, is 560. At the southern end there is a vestry and organist's room with a separate stair to the lower floor. The church is listed as a building of special architectural importance by the Secretary of State.

In 2006 after lengthy fundraising and protracted negotiations with various authorities, major alterations were carried out on the east side of the church to provide access for people with disabilities and to provide additional accommodation at the lower hall level. A masonry faced ramp provides access for wheelchairs and a new access door has been created at the vestry end of the building. A new disabled toilet facility has been formed off the main entrance foyer and in the additional space created at the hall level, new toilets, an upgraded kitchen and additional meeting rooms have been provided. Including the Disabled Access a total of half a million pounds has been invested in safeguarding the church building for future generations.

The windows to the church are lancet of the first pointed period type with leaded panes. In the nave are six pairs of memorial windows of modern stained glass of excellent design and execution. The three on the eastern side are the work of Gordon Webster, Isobel Gaudie and artists from the St Enoch studios, respectively.

Internally, the church has freestone pillars and arcading, plastered walls with match board dado and wood panelled ceilings and gallery front. The internal woodwork generally, including the pews, is in pitch pine. The doors are of the pointed arch type with recessed pilasters and hood moulds.

The church is fitted with an amplification system with microphones and an induction loop. Heating by pipes and radiators is fed from two modern gas-fired boilers controlled by an electric programmer. Lighting is generally by electric fluorescent fittings. The church is partly surrounded by wrought iron railings.

The congregation has an interesting history. It was formed on 7th October 1787 by a group of anti-burgher seceders who had left the Established Church over the issue of patronage, which effectively denied a congregation the right to call its minister. It later rebelled over a clause in the burgess oath which required burgesses to swear to uphold the 'true Protestant religion presently professed within this realm'. For the first 34 years, the then Associate Congregation in Inverness survived without a building or a regular meeting-place for worship and for a time held services in the open air at the top of Raining's Stairs.

The first church was built in Baron Taylor's Lane in 1821. In the previous year, as a result of a union, the congregation became part of the United Secession Church. After a further union in 1847, it became United Presbyterian. The first church was not a very satisfactory building. After 42 years it was replaced by a new church in Union Street on a site now occupied by Barclay's Bank. This was opened in 1864 and used for 38 years.

In 1900 the United Presbyterians merged with the Free Church to become the United Free Church. By this time the congregation had outgrown the church in Union Street and so the decision was taken to build the present church complex at Ness Bank. The Union Street church was subsequently demolished and re-erected at Alness. It is now used as a Masonic Lodge. Ness Bank has been a Church of Scotland congregation since the Union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929.

MEMORIALS AND FURNISHINGS

Appropriately situated in the entrance porch is a memorial to the second and, to date, the longest-serving minister of the congregation, the Rev James Scott, who served from his ordination in 1821 until his death in 1875. It was said of him - 'He found the congregation homeless, leaderless and despised. He left it firmly established, decently housed, with a respectable place in the comity of churches'. The memorial was transferred to Ness Bank from the former United Presbyterian Church in Union Street.

Down the east aisle from the vestibule are three pairs of stained glass windows, all designed and executed by Gordon Webster of Glasgow. The first pair depicts the scene in Matthew xv, 1 - 9, when Jesus reminds the scribes and Pharisees of the commandment: 'Honour thy father and mother'. The windows were gifted in 1967 by Mr R J Fraser of Michigan, in memory of his parents, Roderick and Margaret Fraser, who lived to celebrate their diamond wedding anniversary and were life-long members of the congregation.

The second pair depicts St Paul preaching with upraised hand to a group of people, including a woman with her child. Behind is the city of Corinth and below is the text from 1 Corinthians xv, 58: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord'. The windows were gifted by the congregation in 1965 in memory of the Rev James Wright, who was the minister from 1925 to 1946, and of Mrs Wright.

The third pair depicts, on the right, the scene described in 1 Chronicles xv, 28 when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Zion; and on the left, King Solomon making a sacrifice to the Lord to the accompaniment of music at the dedication of the temple, as described in 11 Chronicles vii, 6. The windows were gifted by the congregation in 1959 in memory of Miss Jean Mackintosh who served as the accompanist and organist from 1897 to 1951.

On the east and west transept walls are five wall hangings, four of which depict the main Christian Festivals, and were sewn by a group of ladies in the congregation to commemorate the centenary of the church building in 2001. Two in the east transept depict Christmas and Harvest and two in the west transept depict Easter and Pentecost.

The fifth, in the east transept, commemorates the centenary in 2008 of the 2nd Inverness (Ness Bank) Company of the Boys' Brigade. Also in the west transept is displayed the banner laid up by the 4th Inverness (Ness Bank) Company of the Girls' Guildry which, in 1965, became part of the Girls' Brigade. On the back wall underneath the gallery is a wall hanging made by the children of the Sunday School, again to commemorate the centenary of the building.

Hanging from the pulpit can be seen a blue velvet fall on which is inscribed the St John's Cross which is found on Iona and the original St John's Cross dates back 1,200 years. This cross is also carved on the Communion Table and on the Lectern. The Fall also contains other symbols that appear in the sanctuary, in particular the symbol of the Holy Trinity that is to be found in the large North-facing window. The Fall was crafted by Mrs Ruth Black and was donated to the Church by Ness Bank elder, Jim Duncan, in memory of his parents Adam and Isobel Anne, who were married at Ness Bank Church on 4 April 1947. The Good News edition of the bible used in the pulpit, was gifted by Iain and Christine MacKintosh, in April 2001, in memory of Dorothy MacKintosh, organist at Ness Bank from 1962-1976. The bible is kept in the vestry and always precedes the minister into the church at the beginning of each service.

The communion table was gifted in 1970 by the Gilbert family in memory of Robert Gilbert who served as an elder from 1919 to 1966 and as Session Clerk from 1935 to 1959. The finely carved lectern on the table represents celtic tracery on either side of a central cross.

The Edinburgh hallmarked pewter offertory plate is the congregation's oldest possession and the only surviving relic from the very early days. It was gifted to the Associate Congregation of Inverness by Mr K Treasurer in 1793.

The large chair behind the communion table recalls a longstanding missionary connection with the Itu Leper Colony in Nigeria. It was made by the lepers in 1935 and is a replica of a chair presented to the Leper Colony Church by the Young Peoples' Association of Ness Bank in 1934. Both chairs bear the same inscription; "Itu - Ness Bank One Christ Jesus". The two companion chairs were gifted by Mrs Annie Paton in 1956 in memory of her husband, Mr Thomas Paton, who served as Clerk to the Managers from 1933 to 1952.

The oak screen in front of the organ was gifted by the choir in 1940 in memory of Mr David Petrie who was the precentor of praise in the Union Street Church from 1883, when the praise was unaccompanied. He was an elder from 1888 to 1937 and Provost of the Royal Burgh of Inverness from 1922 to 1925.

The pipe organ was built and installed in 1903 by Messrs James J Binns of Leeds at a cost of £590. It has a two manual console and a mechanical tubular pneumatic action. It has 17 speaking stops, 4 on the pedal organ, 6 on the great and 7 on the swell. The electrically operated bellows were originally powered by water. Alterations to increase the organ's tonal range and brightness were made in 1980, when it was last comprehensively overhauled and cleaned..

The baptismal font was presented by the children of the Sunday School. The lectern was gifted in 1977 in memory of two faithful adherents of the congregation, the Misses Catherine and Mary Mackenzie of Argyle Street The lectern edition of the Good News Bible was gifted in April 2001 by Mrs Evelyn Francey in memory of her husband Duncan, who was an elder in Ness Bank from 1981 to 1999.

On the first pillar facing northwards up the west aisle is mounted a Royal Air Force Ensign. This is a recent replacement for the original which was presented at Mr Wright's farewell service in 1945 by No. 13 Group Fighter Command whose members used the halls and worshipped in the church during the war. Beneath the Ensign is a bronze plaque on which are inscribed the names of those in the congregation who gave their lives in the Second World War.

Their supreme sacrifice is also commemorated in the first pair of stained glass windows, which are the work of William Wilson. The subject is the adoration of Christ by the Magi. The window on the left depicts the glory of the Nativity. Below, representing the fulfilment of the hopes surrounding the Child, is the figure of Christ on the Cross and the triumphant words from 1 John V, 4 'This is the Victory which overcometh the World'. The window on the right depicts representatives of the nations in homage to their rightful Ruler, bringing the treasures of their inheritance to the feet of Christ - gold from the West, incense from the East and myrrh from Africa. Below, emphasising the true source of the unity of the nations, is the Risen Christ at the Lord's Table offering the Bread of Life, and the text from Ephesians iv, 3 "The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace".

Service is the subject of the second pair of windows, which were designed and executed by Miss Isobel Gaudie of Edinburgh. The windows were gifted by the congregation in 1930 in memory of the Rev John Reid, who was the minister from 1904 to 1917, and of Mrs Reid. That on the right, commemorating Mr Reid, portrays the legend of St Christopher finding Christ in carrying a child across a swollen stream; the panel below is of Christ carrying his Cross, a symbol of the sorrows of mankind. That on the left, commemorating Mrs Reid, portrays the service of Martha and Mary; the panel below depicts the better part chosen by Mary in being with Christ and listening to his words.

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The third pair was gifted in 1950 by Mr Alec Archibald in memory of his parents and "in the hope that they may symbolise in some measure the Church's thanksgiving for the faithful departed and its remembrance of loved ones". They are the work of the St Enoch Studios of Glasgow and depict the regal figure of the Risen and Ascended Christ, triumphant over death, facing an adoring group of disciples. The crown symbolises the supreme authority of Christ; the background symbolises the Rock of our Faith, while in the foreground streams the River of Life, its banks fringed with the "leaves which are for the healing of the nations" (Revelations xxii, 2).

On the south wall of the vestibule is a brass memorial tablet inscribed in black enamel with the names of the 22 men of the congregation who made the supreme sacrifice in the First World War. Traditionally, on Remembrance Sunday, before the two minutes silence, a poppy wreath is placed on each of the two memorials to our Honoured Dead.

***"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."***