

The Jubilee Book

of

Ness Bank Church

Historical Notes

Mr James Scott

Archive Note:

This document transcribes part of the booklet published in 1951 to celebrate the 50th Jubilee of the opening of the Ness Bank Church. It details the Congregation's history from the original Anti-Burgher Seceders of 1787 up to 1951. It was written by my uncle, James Edward Scott (1882-1954) and incorporates material he published in the 150th anniversary booklet in 1937. His father, Roderick Hugh Gallie Scott (1842-1906), was the youngest son of the Church's first minister, the Rev Dr James Scott (1791-1875) and his wife, Isabella Rose (1801-1876). The original booklet has been scanned and converted into a digital file, reformatted in A4 using Arial font, with minor typographical corrections.

Jim Scott (Great-grandson of the Rev James Scott) - March 2021

The Ness Bank Church

By Mr James Scott

This is not a history, for history requires time to adjust its focus; it cannot be written up to the minute. All that is here attempted is to gather and arrange some of the material from which, perhaps in 1987 (the bicentenary), our congregational history can be written.

OUR DENOMINATION

We began as rebels. As Seceders we broke in 1733 with the Established Church of Scotland over Patronage, the system which denied congregations any voice in the appointment of their ministers. As Anti-Burghers we protested in 1787 against a clause in the Burgess Oath. That was the year we accept as our congregational birthday.

In 1847, Burgher, Anti-Burgher and Relief (a third sub-division) amalgamated to form the United Presbyterian Church, which remained our denomination until 1902 when the U.P. and the Free Church United. This union coincided with the move from Union Street to the present building and to the adoption of Ness Bank as our particular designation.

In 1929 the Ness Bank congregation unanimously approved the Union of the United Free Church with the Established Church of Scotland. At our Ter-Jubilee meeting in October, 1937, the platform party included Bishop Maclean, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Right Rev. Dr Macfarlane, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

OUR BUILDINGS

We began in the open-air at the head of Raining Stairs on the Barnhill. Seven times did the Town Council turn down our petition for a site. Seceders were suspected and unpopular. In 1821 Mr Scott was ordained in a thatched cottage in Fairfield Lane, but that year our first church was built. It was a vast, damp and gloomy hall, holding 650, in Baron Taylor's Lane, and smelt strongly of the stables next door. It cost £1100, and only by the sternest economies and sacrifice did the small congregation of 50 finally liquidate the debt 18 years later.

In 1863, when Union Street was opened, we were offered a site at the corner of Union and Drummond Streets. Here for £2030 was raised our second church, and largely through the efforts of Mr George Robson, the newly appointed colleague of Mr Scott, the whole sum was paid off by 1870. The congregation at this time numbered only 160.

The Church had no halls and only a small vestry and session house; and as our congregation grew and our activities expanded it became clear that more room was essential. In 1901 we obtained £5500 for the old site; the building was dismantled stone by stone and re-erected in Alness; and the present building was erected in five months at a cost of £8500. This included £590 for a pipe organ.

The new building was dedicated on 92nd December, 1901, when Dr MacEwan, of New College, Edinburgh, conducted the service. By March the full cost of the church had been paid.

As in the First World War, so also in the Second, our Halls were requisitioned by the Services. During the period 1939 to 1945 great difficulty was experienced in finding shelter for the organisations, but help was forthcoming from sister churches, from the Town Council, and, above all, from Messrs Burnett, of our own congregation, who made their comfortable rooms available on many occasions.

In 1931 two memorial windows were unveiled to commemorate the work of the Rev. John Reid and his wife.

In 1948 a bronze tablet, in memory of members who fell in the war, and two stained glass windows were unveiled, and the following year thorough reconditioning of the church interior was carried out.

In December, 1950, two more windows were gifted by Mr Alex. Archibald in memory of his parents.

OUR MINISTERS

The ministry of the early years is somewhat shadowy. One James MacBean from Nigg held office for 20 years, till 1810, but the congregation was very small and very poor, and he had to take other work to help out. He probably was not cut out for the ministry, and he was eventually loosed by the Synod from the charge.

For 9 years there was no minister. Gaelic was still almost indispensable. Pulpit supply was casual and irregular. In 1819, however, Mr James Scott, from Pitcairn Green in Perthshire, took up the charge. He held sole command till 1866, when Mr George Robson was appointed as colleague and successor. Mr Scott died in 1875, and a marble tablet in the porch commemorates the 56 years of his ministry.

The ministry of Mr (afterwards Dr) George Robson covers 29 years, from 1866 to 1894, and coincides with the occupation of the Union, Street Church. A man of great talent and equally great industry, he built up the congregation from 150 to 380, founded and for many years edited *Life and Work*; was largely instrumental in starting the Blind Institute, and in 1903, after leaving Inverness, became Moderator of the newly united U.P. and Free Churches.

In October, 1895, Mr George Stewart, a probationer from Edinburgh, was ordained. He was essentially a missionary and, though greatly loved in the congregation, the call to serve in Kaffaria found a ready response, and in 1899 he went out to forge another link in the foreign field.

Another 9 months interregnum ensued before Mr Charles Robson, of Pollok Street Church, Glasgow, was ordained in December, 1899. To his energy and enthusiasm we owe the decision to build Ness Bank and the early fulfilment of that plan. He stressed the vital importance of Halls in the life and work of the church. In 1903 he accepted a call to Alloa.

In September, 1904, Mr John Reid, of Tay Square Church, Dundee, was ordained. He was in heart, in word and action a peacemaker. Despite indifferent health, he received many calls to outside duties in Germany, Bohemia and Hungary. In 1909 he was appointed Vice-Convener of the Highlands and Islands Committee. In 1914 came the War, and Mr Reid in *Life and Work* set forth eloquently the issues at stake. He was not to see the victory, for in 1917 he died. During his ministry began the custom of repeating the Lord's Prayer aloud by the congregation and the introduction of individual vessels for the Communion Service.

In September of the same year Mr T. W. Armour, of Fort Augustus, was called. During his seven years of office numerous changes occurred. Electric light was installed in the Church; the Free Will Offering was introduced - in this Ness Bank was a pioneer - the stipend was raised to £450, and Dr A. B. Macdonald, of Calabar, was allotted as our special missionary, thus initiating that close and cherished connection between us and the Leper Mission at Itu. Towards the end of 1924 Mr Armour accepted a call to Christchurch, New Zealand, where he died in 1947.

In February, 1925, Mr James Wright, of St Marks, Glasgow, was inducted and held charge till the end of 1945. These 21 years fell naturally into two periods - 1925 to 1938 were years of quiet but important advance; 1939 to 1945, the war years, swept us out of domestic anchorage into the troubled sea of national and world events. It was a stormy voyage and we have not yet made port; but we have proved our ship, we are better seamen and a more united crew,

and we have learned to trust our Pilot.

1925-29 saw the building of a bridge, to use Mr Wright's metaphor, across the differences between the U.F. Churches and the Established Church, over which the congregation in 1929 crossed into Union. In 1926 was held the semi-jubilee, when two former ministers, Mr Charles Robson and Mr Stewart, conducted the services.

In 1931 the present Manse was purchased for £1350. In 1933 the Woman's Guild was started, to develop speedily into a main congregational activity. In 1934 Mr Wright was chosen to hold office for six months in the Scots Kirk, Sydney, Australia, and for the nine months' absence this involved, the Rev. F. J. Maclauchlan, of Glasgow, worthily took his place. 1937 saw the celebration of the Ter-Jubilee of the founding of the congregation.

On 3rd September, 1939, the congregation met in the Church Hall and heard the Prime Minister announce that we were again at War with Germany. Ness Bank was used throughout the war years for church parades by the R.A.F. and W.A.A.F., and in 1945, on Mr Wright's farewell Sunday, the R.A.F. presented the congregation with the ensign which now hangs over the western aisle.

Many war-time activities were undertaken. Work parties made garments, parcels were sent overseas, the choir were untiring in their efforts and gave many concerts and sketches. Mr and Mrs Wright set an example by long and often gruelling work for the Red Cross, Orkney Service Hut, Canteens, etc. - and only the helpers know how much that covers.

In April, 1941, 80 of our young people were with the colours, and altogether over 200 names appeared in our Roll of Honour. Nine made the supreme sacrifice, 13 were prisoners of war for long periods. With no black-out arrangements for the church, the evening service during winter had to be held in the afternoon. No bells rang for church from September, 1939, till May, 1943. In 1943 the congregation united with the Old High for the summer months, and this was repeated for the four years following.

From 1943 till 1945 Mr Wright was Clerk to the Presbytery, and the additional duties involved, added to the mental and physical strain of the war years, told on his health, and at the close of 1945 he accepted a call to Boat of Garten.

From January to June, 1946, the charge was vacant, but Mr Pollok, of Edinburgh, in February, and Dr Sangster Anderson, for the remaining months, earned the affection and gratitude of the whole congregation. On 26th June Mr George R. Gilchrist, of Ranfurly Church, Bridge of Weir, was inducted, following a unanimous call. The number of members had by 1949 risen to 600 with 80 adherents.

THE SERVICE OF PRAISE

For many years there was no regular choir, and no instrumental music beyond the precentor's tuning fork. That official in 1857 had his salary raised to £4 per annum. Ten years later he was drawing £10. In 1875 the entire choir resigned because they were not supported by the congregation. From 1882 Mr David Petrie took charge of the choir as precentor, and the praise rapidly improved. In 1894 an American Organ was purchased, and when the present church was built a pipe organ was installed.

The mainspring of the choir for many years now has been Miss Jean Mackintosh, daughter of Mr John Mackintosh, of Ardchattan. As trainer, leader and accompanist, she laid the congregation under a very deep obligation. At least four times under her guidance the choir has won the 1st place at the Elgin Festival, and when in August, 1941, the service in Ness Bank was broadcast, the B.B.C. representative specially commended the choir.

MISSIONS

The first beginnings were in 1841, when £27 16s was collected 'to send the Gospel to others'; £4 was allotted to Foreign Missions. In 1856 Kaffraria, Jamaica and Calabar are specifically named for assistance. In 1866 collections for missions was £188, and in 1899 Dr Robson

himself visited the Jamaican Churches.

In 1893 our first home-bred missionary, Mr Weir, sailed for Calabar. Just 40 years later from Ness Bank pulpit he spoke of his work in Africa. Our fourth minister, Mr Stewart, left us to serve in Kaffraria.

The congregation's special interest, however, lies in the Leper Mission at Itu, West Africa, where Dr A. B. Macdonald and his wife have been since 1921 Ness Bank's peculiar care.

The story of this mission reads like a romance. In 1927 Dr Macdonald had three lepers, and leprosy was regarded as incurable. When he visited us in 1933 he had 1800, and in 1948 Itu reported a congregation of 2700 on Sundays. In 1950 there was a record discharge of over 800 patients 'symptom-free'. In 1934 the Young People's Association gave Itu a Communion Chair, inscribed: 'Ness Bank - Itu, One in Christ Jesus'. In January, 1936, a similar chair, with an identical inscription, was made and presented to Ness Bank by the leper congregation of Itu.

A disastrous fire in 1949 burned down the main hospital block. £7000 was needed to rebuild, and from all sides support rallied. Ness Bank raised a special collection of £210, which Dr Macdonald earmarked for X-Ray apparatus.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

The first mention in the records is 1850, but Sunday Schools must have begun some considerable time before this for in 1850 there are already seven teachers. Among the leading figures in this work in these early days, three stand out, Mr John Mackintosh, Mr C. A. Hendry, and Mr John Asher.

The Culduthel Sunday School was opened in 1922 and served that area until 1950. A new hut is being erected in the Hilton housing area to be run by the neighbouring parish. The main Sunday School now numbers 78 pupils, and the Primary Department, which meets in the Church at morning service before going off to their classes, now numbers 61.

Among many who have given devoted service to this branch of Church work in more recent years are Mr J. H. Davidson, who died in 1935, Mr R. Gilbert and Mr D. Brass.

THE BOYS' BRIGADE AND LIFE BOYS

The idea of the B.B. movement in Inverness began in the study of the Rev. John Reid, and in April, 1908, the boys of Ness Bank Church became the 2nd Company. Founders were Mr A. J. Fraser, Mr W. Treasurer and Mr P. Swanney. At the time of the semi-jubilee, 1933, the Company strength was 8 officers, 47 boys, an Orphanage squad of 14, and 37 Life Boys. They had their own Bible Class, Ambulance Class, and Wayfarers' Club. Their Captain was Mr James Gow, recently promoted President of the Inverness Battalion.

In May, 1943, the Diamond Jubilee of the movement in Britain, a Thanksgiving Service was held in Ness Bank, at which Mr Fraser, the mainstay of the B.B. in Inverness, read the lesson, Mr Wright preached, and the Provost and other civic dignitaries attended.

The Company celebrated its 40th anniversary in 1948, when the roll showed 50 boys and 8 officers, besides the complement of Life Boys. Captain John Maclean is now C.O.

Space forbids details of the many other church activities. The Woman's Guild and Work Party (which did magnificently during the war years), the Flower Committee (which does so much to beautify the Church in season and out of season), the Rambling Club and Badminton Club, and the recently formed Girls' Guildry and Greenwood - all are evidences of a congregation whose pulses beat strong, Sunday and week-day alike.

PERSONALIA

Although these notes are concerned primarily with the congregation as a whole, there are certain outstanding individuals who must, however, briefly be named. The difficulty is not to find such, but to admit that the restrictions of space must exclude so many justly deserving

mention.

In the last decade of the last century, Mr (afterwards Sheriff) Donald Davidson and Mr William Morrison were lost to the congregation, the former by transfer, the latter by death. Both held office for 30 years, both gave generously of their means and their service when both were sorely needed.

In 1912 died Mr John Chisholm, for 31 years an elder and a leader in many activities, and three years later he was followed by Mr John Mackintosh, Ardchattan. His was an unforgettable figure. 42 years an elder, 25 years Session Clerk, he stood foursquare for all that was best in Scottish Church Life and Work. Mrs Mackintosh also gave devoted service, particularly in Temperance and Child Welfare. Mr C. A. Hendry, 31 years an elder, served as Preses and Manager, and Mr John Cook, who died in 1924, was over 50 years a member and over 20 an elder.

Mr John Davidson in many ways resembled Mr Mackintosh. Like him, he was 42 years an elder and 24 as Session Clerk. He was also 40 years superintendent of the Sunday School. He died in 1935, as did Mr F. E. Martin, who for years brought to the Session his exceptional gifts of administration. They were followed two years later by another of the great figures, ex-Provost David Petrie. Beginning as Precentor in 1888, he served 50 years as an elder besides taking a leading part in all church activities. Mrs Petrie, who died in 1947, had an equally fine record in the women's work.

In 1944 died Mr John Burnett, after 50 years of membership and over 25 as elder. His was that selfless, unflinching service that means so much to minister and congregation. In Mr James Maxwell, now in retirement in the South, the congregation had another faithful servant and leader. He was 25 years an elder besides acting as Preses and Treasurer.

Many will remember Mr John Mackenzie, a Church Officer of unflinching courtesy and helpfulness for 31 years, from 1897 to 1928. He died in 1943.

In 1950 the congregation lost its senior elder in Mr R. Fleming, one of its longest and most faithful members, and with the passing of Mr Duncan Macpherson both church and community lost one who, as Town Missionary, was unwearied in well doing.

THE JUBILEE YEAR

The Year began with a Watch Night Service in the Church. Special services were held throughout the year, and the visiting ministers included Rev. Ernest Jarvis, D.D., of Wellington Church, a son-in-law of the late Rev. John Reid; Rev. James Wright, Boat of Garten; Rev. Professor Forrester, D.D., of St Andrew's University, and the Very Rev. Hugh Watt, D.D., of Edinburgh University. The professors were distinguished sons of the old U.P. branch of the Church.

Throughout the year the Prayer Fellowship, revived with the advent of Jubilee, formed a centre of devotion for the deepening of our spiritual life.

A special effort was made on the financial side to institute a Fabric Fund for the upkeep of the Church Buildings. During Holy Week direct contributions of £750 were handed in, and various other efforts by the organisations, including a Jubilee Fair in the Northern Meeting Rooms, brought the total Fund to £1700. The Jubilee Fair was opened by Mrs Ernest Jarvis, a daughter of the Manse and the President of the Woman's Guild of the Church of Scotland.

A Jubilee Social was held in the Church in December, at which Mr Wright and representatives from the Churches spoke. Messages were read from Mrs Armour in New Zealand, Miss Jessie Robson and Dr and Mrs Macdonald, Iru Leper Colony. A presentation was made to Miss Mackintosh on the occasion of her retirement after 50 years' service at the organ.

The Year is to close with a service conducted by the Rev. Professor James Robson, of Manchester University. Fifty years ago his father conducted the first services after the opening of the new Ness Bank Church.