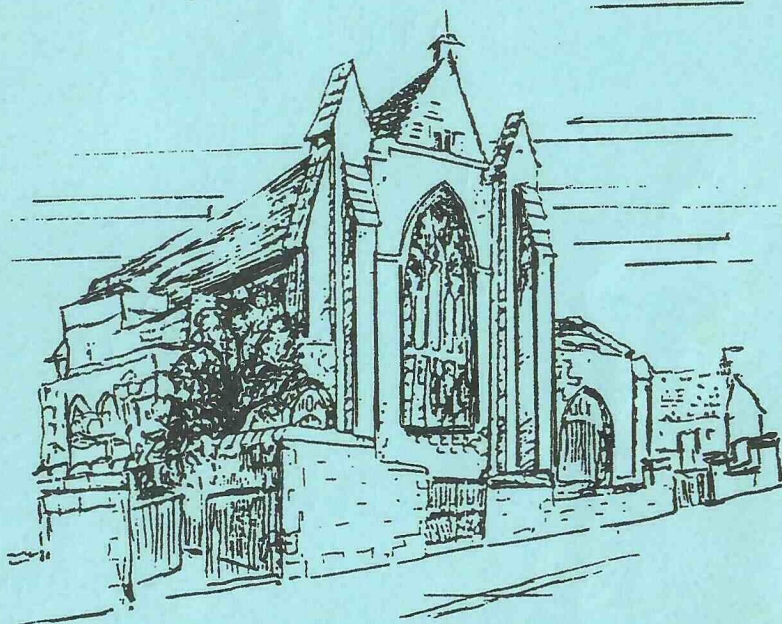


*1843-1993*



*Portland Parish Church  
Troon*

# Foreword

It was indeed fortunate that preliminary research by the Committee charged with the responsibility of publishing the present "*History of Portland Church*" chanced upon a copy of a Historical Sketch written by the Rev. W. Mackintosh Mackay, B.D. upon the occasion of the Jubilee of the Troon Free Church on 9th May, 1893. Mr. Mackay, minister from 1891-98, gives evidence throughout of scholarly erudition, of ability to weave a gripping story and of a deep love for the subject of his discourse. The Committee had no hesitation in submitting the sketch as Section I of this Anniversary History.

The same gifts of lively historical exposition were already well-known to the many friends of the late Mr. Jack Hay. His "*History of Portland Church 1893-1989*" – so attractively illustrated by Mr. Tom Hay – is adopted as Section II.

In Section III our readers are apprised of the present state of Portland Church by Mr. John Easton, Convener of the Committee and a Senior Elder of the Church.

Finally, we recommend to our readers the moving and beautifully expressed tribute paid by Mr. Hay as a "*Footnote and Apology*". No more fitting a conclusion could be drawn to our own commemorative "*History of Portland Church*".

## SECTION I

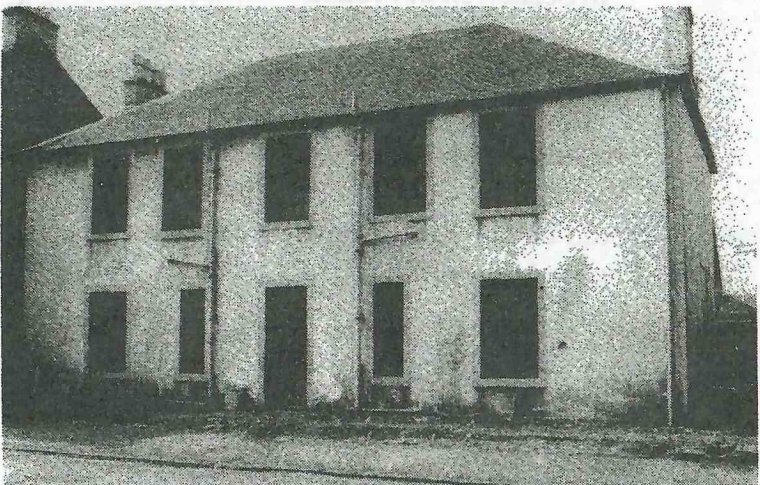
1843 - 1893

### *Introductory Note*

THE JUBILEE of the Troon Free Church was celebrated on the evening of Tuesday, 9th May, 1893. The Rev. W. Mackintosh Mackay (pastor) occupied the chair, and was accompanied to the platform by the former minister, the Rev. W.M. Macgregor, now of Renfield, Glasgow, the Rev. Dr. Livingston of Stair, the Rev. Dr. McCrie of Ayr, the Rev. Mr. Hamilton of Symington, Messrs. Gillies, Paton and Mackie. Congratulatory speeches were delivered by the gentlemen present and the following Historical Account of the church was read by the minister. It is now printed, by the authority of the Deacons' Court, as a memorial of the event.

FREE CHURCH MANSE,  
TROON, 1893

W.M.M.



*Barassie Street, 1843 - 1856*



**I**T has been truly said, that while the present year is the Jubilee of the Disruption, it is by no means the Jubilee of the Free Church of Scotland. But a little acquaintance with Scottish history will show that the principles for which our church fought and sacrificed so much in 1843, were the very same ones as animated the Church of Scotland all down her history from the Reformation and even from times long before that. The story of our country is indeed very much the story of a struggle for freedom, civil and religious and in contending for "spiritual independence" our Free Church fathers were only showing themselves the true heirs of all that was best in Scottish character and Scottish history.

But though not the Jubilee of our Church, the present year may be said to be in perhaps a special sense the Jubilee of our congregation. For we had not at Troon the advantage of the minister coming out himself with his whole congregation, as was the case elsewhere. There were indeed a large number who did come out, but they had to do so in spite of their attachment to their minister, and in the face of all the difficulties of building up what was practically a new congregation out of scattered elements. The two elders who thus headed the Disruption movement at Troon are worthy of honourable mention. Their names were –

MR. JOHN McMURRAY

MR. JAMES ALLAN

They were followed by a body of about 130 members; so that, as a congregation had only recently been started in connection with the Church of Scotland in Troon, these must have formed a pretty large proportion of the original church, probably from one-third to one-half. The reason of that was due to the peculiar course followed by the then minister of the parish. Mr. Fleming belonged – as to his honour it must be said he always did belong, down to the close of his long life – to the Evangelical Party of the Scottish Church. He was always to be found on the side of Dr. Chalmers in the divisions in the Church Courts. He may be said therefore to have educated his people up to the Disruption, and when that event came off it was confidently expected that he would be found amongst those who left St. Andrew's Church on the 18th May, 1843. Instead of that, however, Mr. Fleming



pursued the course which was followed by that party called "the Forty," who thought that the Evangelicals should not leave the Establishment, but contend *inside* the Church for Spiritual freedom. There is no need now of casting a stone at those who have passed away. Mr. Fleming doubtless thought he had good reasons for what he did then; but the congregation, whom he had educated up to the belief that loyalty to the Headship of Christ was something better than the advantages of Establishment by the State, could not see them, and the result was that, in spite of their undoubted attachment to their minister, so many were compelled to seek ministrations elsewhere.

As was the case in other places, the congregation had no place to worship when they first came out, and were compelled, like their covenanting fathers, to do so in the open-air. It may be interesting to know that the first place where the new congregation thus met was on the sand hills beside the sea-shore, on or near the spot where Mr. Wright's stables now stand. A member, who was then a little girl, says that she well remembers hearing Dr. Gilbert Burns of Monkton preach to the young congregation gathered there on these summer Sunday mornings. To Dr. Burns, indeed, the congregation owed a good deal in those days. He was a man of great spiritual earnestness. A nephew of Robert Burns the poet; it is said he was by no means proud of the connection! He had made a great sacrifice himself. He had just built the fine Parish Church, which still stands in Monkton and it must have been with a sore heart he left it at the Disruption. He was therefore all the more disappointed with the turn which events had taken in Troon, and was determined to make up to the people, so far as he could, for the defection of their minister.

It is a somewhat melancholy fact, that of the 120 or 130 members who thus "came out" and formed the members of our Free Church, not a single one remains with us; all have passed away.

It was probably due to Dr. Burns' fostering care that the congregation was so soon fully organised with a minister of its own. It is a little to be regretted that no definite account can be found of the settlement of the Rev. Robert Ross, the first minister of the congregation. From all that can be discovered he seems to have

belonged to Darvel, but was engaged as a preacher in Glasgow when called by the new congregation. A man of about forty, he appears to have been then only a licentiate; for an old member recollects his "ordination" as "the first ordination in Troon". Whatever be the circumstances of his coming, there can be no doubt that the choice was, in every sense, a good one. Those still remaining with us, who enjoyed Mr. Ross's ministrations, speak of him with the utmost tenderness. He was evidently an earnest and attractive preacher, and his lectures on the Pilgrim's Progress at the prayer meeting are remembered to this day. The Session minutes, written by himself, for he was Session Clerk, show him to have been a man of deep religious spirit and a faithful pastor. Perhaps it may be interesting to read a copy of the first Session minute of our congregation:-

November 22, 1843

*The Session met and was constituted – present the Rev. Robert Ross, minister; John McMurray and James Allan, elders.*

*The Session having taken into consideration the propriety of adding to the number of elders, resolve to add four to the present number. They further took into consideration the minute of the General Assembly of the Free Church met in October last in Glasgow, regarding the appointment of deacons, and agreed that six deacons be appointed in compliance with terms of the said minute, etc., etc. Closed with prayer.*

(Signed) ROBERT ROSS, Mod.

This minute shows that Mr. Ross must have been settled sometime in November – giving a vacancy of about five months – not a long time in the circumstances. The congregation was fortunate in getting a church to worship in almost immediately after the Disruption. This was the present Hospital in Barassie Street, a building which is interesting as being the birth-place of the three congregations of Troon – Established, Free and United Presbyterian. Originally, we believe, it was built by the Seceders; then it passed into the hands of the Established Church and their new church being just opened in 1842, it was lying empty at the Disruption. For a good number of years the congregation worshipped there. The floor was stone, and as it was used for a school during the week days, it could not be in very good order; but the old folks say that they seldom enjoyed such



good times as they did in the Old Hospital.

As already indicated, Mr. Ross's first work after his settlement was to proceed to the election of new elders and deacons. It may be interesting to give the names of those who were thus elected, and along with the two pre-Disruption elders, formed the original Deacons' Court of Troon Free Church. They were: Thomas Wilson, engineer, Peter Cameron, banker, John Walker, measurer and George Brown, tinsmith – elders and John Campbell, shoemaker, John McDowall, shipper, William Currie, waggoner and James Goudie, farm servant – deacons. His Deacons' Court formed, the next thing was the getting up of a school; for the Free Church at the Disruption had to undertake the work of educating her children amongst her many other arduous duties. Things were done cheaply in these days. The whole expense of building the schoolhouse is calculated at £90. The teacher's salary was made up from a grant of £10 from Edinburgh and the fees. It may be interesting to see the tariff of school fees in these days –

English	-	-	-	2/6 per Quarter
Writing	-	-	-	3/ per Quarter
Arithmetic	-	-	-	3/6 per Quarter
Grammar	-	-	-	4/ per Quarter

It is interesting to notice that Grammar was even then a *dear* commodity in Troon! As there were about forty scholars at the Disruption, this would give a complete school revenue to begin with of about £120. Though thus beginning small, the Free Church School did good service in its day. The last of its teachers was Mr. Jas. Paton, B.A., whose services still remain for the benefit of the congregation, though the School was of course taken over by the Board at the passing of Lord Young's Education Act.

Mr. Ross's preaching attracted large congregations, and a minute of Session about a year after his coming shows that the communicants had already increased to 146. Shortly after that, however, he was unanimously elected minister of St. Mark's Church, Glasgow. At first he absolutely declined the call, but the Glasgow church, evidently determined on their man, elected him a second time. Mr. Ross

meanwhile had been prostrated with a severe attack of bronchitis – a malady which ever since his coming to Troon had attacked him each succeeding winter. In this sudden stroke he seemed to see the hand of Providence, and in a long affectionate letter, which still remains in the minutes, states the reasons – the chief being the "strong air" of the place – which decide him for accepting the Glasgow call. He left in March, 1846, after a pastorate of about two years and a half. Unfortunately he did not long survive the change. Some two years after he caught typhus fever while visiting in Anderston and his feeble body soon sank under it, almost his last words being, "*My poor congregation!*"

The Troon congregation has long been honourably known as one of the most sensible and peaceable, during a vacancy, in the whole Presbytery of Ayr. Mr. Ross left in March, and only five months after, on the 18th October, 1846, the Rev. Andrew Cowan was inducted to the vacant charge. Mr. Cowan had already been minister at Denholm in the East of Scotland when called to Troon. He came, however, as a young man, so that practically his whole long ministerial life was spent here.

Mr. Cowan's character and work are too vivid in the memory of most of the congregation to need dwelling on here. He was a man of many gifts – being almost as well qualified to act as a doctor as a minister. His valued medical knowledge was always at the service of the poor, no matter to what denomination they belonged, and during the time of the great flood, when a low fever set in among the submerged houses, his generous help was unweariedly given. Many Roman Catholics remember still the services which he so ungrudgingly rendered.

Under Mr. Cowan the congregation steadily grew to the number of about 220, where for many years it remained absolutely stationary. This was largely due to the stationary character of the town which, for a generation, groaned under a Duke of Portland, who, living underground himself, seemed to object to seeing others live above it. During his long ascendancy almost no feus were given, and while the towns around were flourishing Troon was slowly dying. Fortunately a new and liberal regime succeeded with the present Duke, and the



town has since taken an upward leap.

But although the progress of the church was somewhat slow in numbers, in other respects it had marked prosperity. The most important of these was the building of the present church. As already remarked, the people worshipped at first in the present Hospital; but the building was ugly and comfortless, and at length became too small. In the year 1854 Mr. Cowan launched the scheme of building a new church before the Deacons' Court.

It was a heavy task for a congregation so small in numbers and limited in means; but all went forward to it with a brave heart, and the present building was opened in 1856. It may be worth stating at a time like this that the clock in the church steeple is an interesting relic of Dr. Chalmers. It was originally the clock in the old Tron Church in Glasgow – the church where he began his ministry in the western metropolis.

The complete cost of the building at that time was £1500; since then, however, it has been a good deal altered. A new "false" roof had to be put in. The walls also gave signs of yielding at the top under the enormous pressure of slates and the new rafters, and these had to be buttressed by the present handsome buttresses at the side. Altogether the church with improvements from time to time may be said to have cost £2,200. The congregation did good part in bearing the burden of this heavy debt; but it must be admitted that the heaviest part of it was borne by Mr. Cowan himself, who collected large sums for its removal. The last labour of his life was the getting up of a bazaar which wholly cleared off the remaining debt on the church and manse. As a result the Deacons' Court were left with a large surplus, and Mr. Cowan had the satisfaction of knowing that he had left the congregation, which he had found so poor, with a church and manse, and a handsome balance at the bank.

The other great event of Mr. Cowan's ministry was the great revival of 1859; which, beginning in Ireland, swept over the whole country, and did not pass Troon without leaving rich and lasting results. For a time meetings were held daily in the church and at the Communion there were no less than 22 young members who came forward to make public profession of Christ – the largest number of

young communicants in the history of the congregation. Some of these, no doubt, fell away – that happens in every such work – but the names of many who thus were gathered in testify to the lasting results of this great movement. Several lesser spiritual revivals have taken place since, but none of the power or importance of 1859; and perhaps the very best result of a meeting like this would be the renewal of the old Psalmist's prayer – "*Wilt thou not at this time revive us again.*"

After the great revival of 1859 the course of Mr. Cowan's ministry ran along in even tenour to its close. In 1870 a slight break-down showed signs of advancing age; but a three months' holiday in Montreux revived his drooping energies, and for sixteen years after he continued to labour amongst his people. In 1877 he suffered a great loss in the death of his wife – a true helper to him in all the relations of life. From this time his strength gradually failed till the end.

Yet, though old in years, he was youthful in spirit. Under his initiative the congregation in 1879 began a new movement in the praise of the church. At that time Mr. John Mackie, who for the long space of over thirty-five years had faithfully conducted the worship of the charge, retired from the office precentor. A choir was formed on his retiral, under the honorary leadership of Mr. Samuel Clark, and hymns were introduced. Mr. Arnott was appointed as regular precentor in 1887 – a duty which he was well discharged since. The full "*development*" of this musical movement was reached in 1892, when the congregation resolved to adopt an instrument in the public worship.

The last effort of Mr. Cowan's life, as has already been remarked, was getting up of a bazaar in 1885 to clear off the last vestige of the debt on the church and manse. It was abundantly successful. The sum of £600 was raised, and the congregation were left not only free of debt, but with £300 in their hands. But though giving new life to his church, it was death to him. The anxiety and worry connected with it sapped his small remaining strength. He never preached again in the old pulpit, and after a lingering illness passed away with messages of love and tenderness to his people.



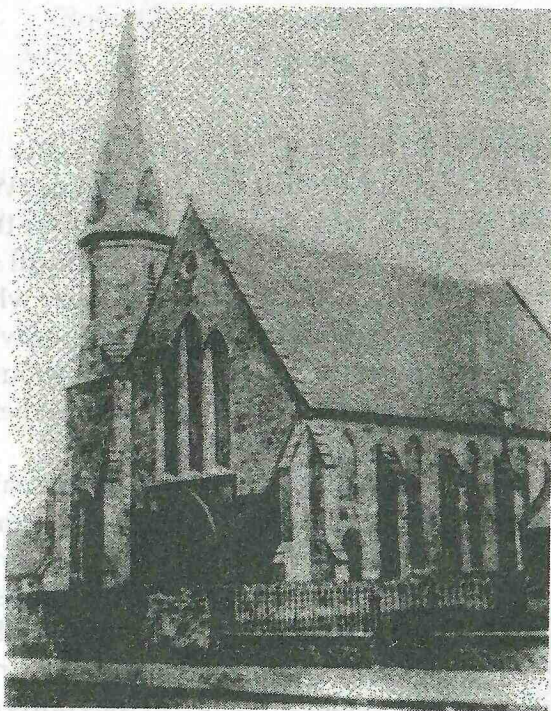
In the vacancy which followed the congregation were deeply indebted to the services of one, whose absence to-night we deeply regret, the Rev. John Miller of Ayr; always a true friend of the church. The congregation by his care steered safely through the "shallows" of a vacancy, and in February, 1886, gave unanimous call to the Rev. W.M. Macgregor, then engaged in work at Oldham.

Of Mr. Macgregor I do not intend to speak, for it is individious to praise a man in his presence. Suffice it to say, that under his able ministrations the congregation rapidly advanced in numbers and prosperity. When Mr. Macgregor came, on the 18th May, 1886, the membership was 255; when he left in July, 1890, it was 280. In fact the only defect in Mr. Macgregor's stay was that it was too short! However, your loss was Glasgow's gain and as we get so much from the Glasgow visitors in summer, it is only right that we should pay our debts. It is also one consolation that, though gone, he has not forgotten us. Indeed it is believed, that though so comfortable in his new charge, he occasionally looks back with a kind sigh to the fresh air and good friends he left behind him here.

And now I have done; for, not being the Apostle Paul, I do not feel at liberty to speak about myself. I have only to thank you for the hearty and unanimous way in which you called me in the November of 1890, and that the kindness which you then showed has only deepened with every year; so that I can only say that my work here is an ever increasing joy. Perhaps I may be allowed to add that our prosperity still continues. When I came in January, 1891, the roll, as purged, showed a membership of 266: it now stands at about 320. Our Finances, too, are in as healthy a state as any Chancellor of the Exchequer need desire. The income of the congregation at the Disruption was just about £86; last year it was £433.

May I add the hope, as I sit down, that with these outward tokens of God's blessing we are not without some inward signs of His presence, and that God is blessing, not merely with the wealth of outward prosperity but with the inward riches of character; and that we shall go forward from this Jubilee meeting with a deepened sense of loyalty and devotion to our great Master, the great King and Head of our Church, for whom our Disruption fathers sacrificed so much.





**1. Portland Street  
1856 - 1914**

**2. South Beach  
1914 -**

1.



2.



## SECTION II

# 1893 to 1989

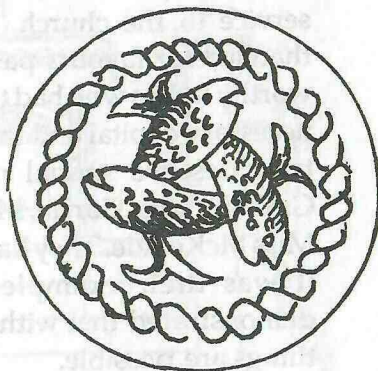
It is fitting that we celebrate, at this time, seventy-five years of continuous congregational life in our present church building. We give thanks with gladness and pride, because we are grateful for the privilege of praising God together in one of the most beautiful of sanctuaries. In doing so we are conscious of our debt to those who went before us, and especially those who had the vision and the will to create a magnificent place of worship. Perhaps, then, we should remind ourselves first of all of what went before the great achievement of 1914, and what kind of people built our traditions.

Christian worship goes back for many centuries in Dundonald parish, of which Troon was a part and our separate story begins shortly after the change to a quoad sacra parish church in Troon, and the ordination of James Fleming in 1837 as Troon's first parish minister. At last Troon had its own Established Church, but all of the 1000 or so inhabitants of Troon were not establishment minded, and many were suspicious of civil and secular influence in the courts of the church. Talk of secession was in the air. The Disruption of the Scottish Church in 1843 gave the opportunity and, in the event, gave birth to a congregation that later became Portland Church. Our founding fathers chose to follow Dr. Chalmers, and became part of the Free Church of Scotland. Like the Covenanters before them, adherence to principle meant great sacrifice, and often suffering, particularly for ministers and their families, unsupported now by parish stipends. In 1843, the Rev. Robert Ross started in Troon this brave journey into the unknown. With the support of 2 elders and their followers he occupied a two-storey building which still stands at the North Shore end of Barassie Street, and which gave temporary sanctuary at some time last century to three different denominations which later became Troon Old, St. Meddan's, and Portland Churches. This historic building has had an eventful history. When it ceased to be a church it became in turn a school, hospital, Burgh Police Court, and now a neglected Cleansing Department store.

Robert Ross was succeeded in 1846 by the Rev. Andrew H. Cowan who, like his four successors, was both ordained and inducted in Troon. By this time Troon was expanding, the population increasing, and the little church quite inadequate. Andrew Cowan and his flock were equal to the challenge and in 1856 the very handsome Portland Street Free Church was completed and opened, with seating for 450. It was situated in the area between the present-day Woolworth's and John Menzies' shops.

The next minister to occupy the Portland Street pulpit was William M. Macgregor, whose distinguished ministerial career was finally crowned by appointment to the Principalship of Trinity College, Glasgow. William Mackintosh Mackay (1891-98) and Alexander Whyte (1898-1905) both put their early experience in Troon to good use, and made their mark in Aberdeen and Dundee respectively. And so, in 1906, to George L. Brander, ordained and inducted on 29th March of that year, and whose ministry was to include the conception and birth of the present Portland Church.

Mr. Brander was an able and popular minister, with the result that congregation numbers steadily grew, and within a few years of his induction, with a roll now of almost 500, it was obvious that the Portland Street building would very soon be quite inadequate. On 13th January 1911, a meeting of the Deacons' Court passed this unanimous resolution: "*The Deacons' Court are of the opinion that the time has fully come when a new church should be built, and they hereby resolve to take such steps as shall adequately accomplish that object.*" This was confirmed shortly afterwards by a meeting of the congregation, and little time was lost in proceeding with the remit. A committee of fourteen members of the church was elected to act in concert with the office-bearers towards the end. The first necessity



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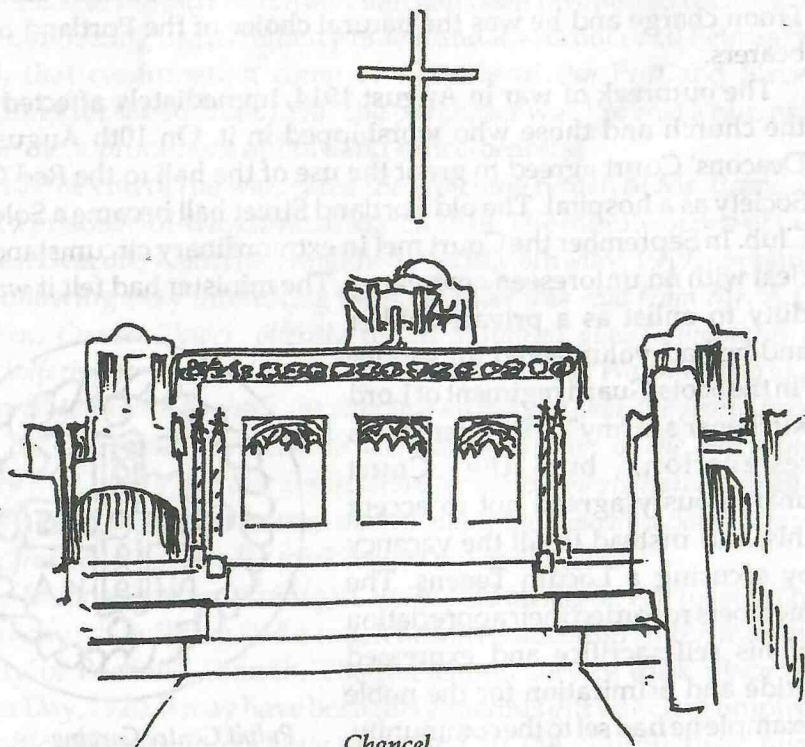


*Font Side Carving*

was a suitable site, and that was found at the corner of South Beach and St. Meddan's Street. By August of 1911 the purchase of the property, then called 'Auld Vale', was under negotiation and preparations soon under way to obtain Presbytery and Assembly permission for the sale of the existing church in Portland Street. It was also decided to sell the manse at the top of St. Meddan's Street, which was no longer entirely satisfactory. The new church site would cost £1500, and the church itself was estimated to cost £7000. The sale of the old church and manse would be likely to produce a small fraction of this total and a very large sum would require to be made up by the sacrifice and effort of members of the congregation. They were not found wanting. In February, 1912, the Deacons' Court held a special meeting to receive a deputation from the Woman's Work Party, who wished to have official permission for their project to raise funds by a three-day Bazaar which they proposed to hold in August, 1913. This historic meeting of the Deacons' Court was the first ever attended by the Woman's Work Party, who had for years done great service to the church, and they were graciously welcomed and thanked for favours past, and hopefully, in the near future. These worthy ladies who had the distinction of leading the fight to raise the necessary capital and the determination to undertake this daunting task, deserve special mention. They were:- Mrs. Brander, Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Currie, Mrs. Howell, Mrs. Muir, Miss Symington and Miss McKenzie. They have an honoured place in this history because it was their example which inspired the faint-hearted and demonstrated that with hard work, enthusiasm and God's help all things are possible.

By August, 1912, the necessary Assembly permission to proceed

with the new church scheme was granted. The building work alone, comprising mason work, joinery, plumbing, plastering, slating, glazing and painting was estimated to cost £7876-174½. Matters were not made easier for the congregation when the winter of 1912 brought flooding to Portland Street, including the U.F. Church and special collections were necessary to meet the exceptional expenditure occasioned by flood damage. But the Woman's Work Party and their enthusiastic supporters were undismayed. The 3-day Bazaar from 12th to 14th August became the event of 1913. The whole affair was a marvellous example of community and inter-church involvement. Thousands of people, the country gentry, Presbytery ministers, members of others churches and the general public gave time, talent and money most generously in support. The ladies had the use of Troon Higher Grade School to house the affair and the large central hall was transformed into the representation of an English village.



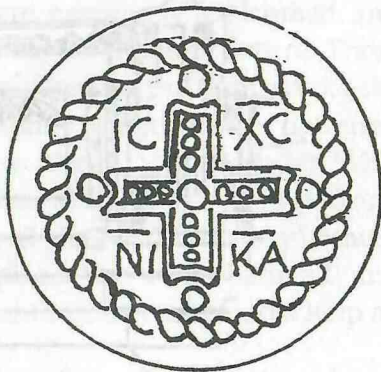
Chancel



Each day selections of music were given continuously by a professional orchestra and the Boys' Industrial School Band. The Bazaar was opened on the first day, Tuesday 12th August, by the Duchess of Portland, on the second day by Lord Rowallan and on the third by Sir David Paulin. This great combined operation was amply rewarded. Not only had it achieved a total of over £2000 – at that time a vast amount of money - but it had made it possible for minister and congregation to proceed with confidence and enthusiasm to the building, in the months that followed, of one of Scotland's most beautiful places of worship.

It was decided to open the church for inspection, seat-letting and dedication in mid-April 1914 and to invite the Rev. William M. McGregor, the most distinguished of Portland's ministers, to conduct the opening services. Mr. McGregor had left Troon for Renfield, Glasgow in 1890 and later was Principal of Trinity College, Glasgow. He had maintained all this time a live interest in the affairs of his old Troon charge and he was the natural choice of the Portland office-bearers.

The outbreak of war in August 1914, immediately affected both the church and those who worshipped in it. On 10th August the Deacons' Court agreed to grant the use of the hall to the Red Cross Society as a hospital. The old Portland Street hall became a Soldiers' Club. In September the Court met in extraordinary circumstances to deal with an unforeseen emergency. The minister had felt it was his duty to enlist as a private soldier and he had volunteered for service "in the Scots Guard regiment of Lord Kitchener's army". He offered his resignation, but the Court unanimously agreed not to accept this, and instead to fill the vacancy by securing a Locum Tenens. The members recorded their appreciation of his self-sacrifice and expressed pride and admiration for the noble example he had set to the community.



*Pulpit Centre Carving*

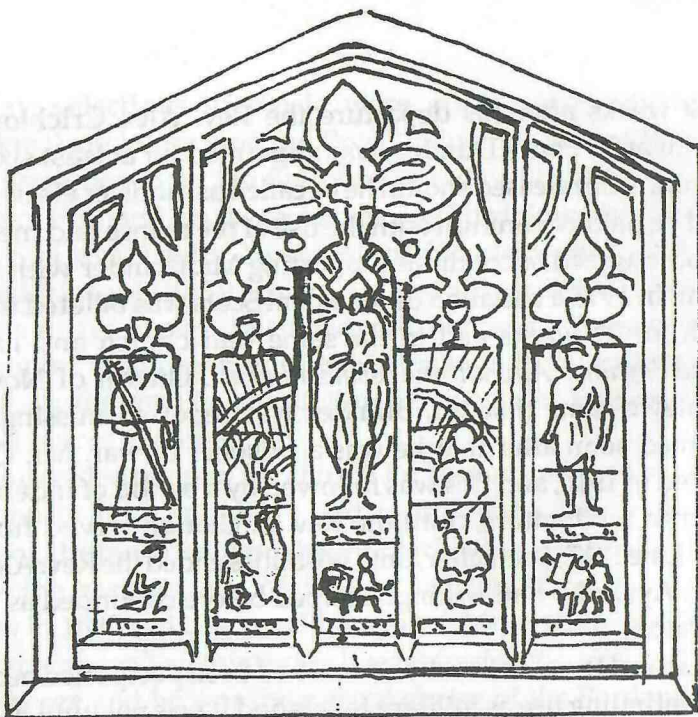
A few weeks after his departure the Rev. Alex Crichton, M.A., assistant at St. Paul's Dundee, was appointed for at least six months as locum, to be released should he be called as minister elsewhere. He would be paid per annum with the use of the manse and meanwhile the Court agreed to continue supporting Mr. Brander with £100 per annum. In 1915 a battalion of the Royal Scots was billeted in the old church for 21 weeks and in the same year church and hall were insured '*against Aircraft and Bombardment*'. On 9th of November, 1915, news came that Mr. Brander was reported missing. It was confirmed soon after that he was a prisoner of war. Mr. Crichton departed in 1916, and this was followed by a period of indebtedness to interim moderators, until the Rev. L. Clough served from June 1916 to June 1917. Thereafter, until hostilities ended the Rev. Alexander Taylor, Ayr, who had willingly helped before continued as Interim Moderator.

The sale of the old church and hall had been postponed because of their continuing use as military billets and it was not until February, 1918, that confirmation came of the sale of the Portland Street buildings for the sum of £1250. The purchaser was Provost Muir, one of the most prominent of Portland office-bearers.

With the end of the war, came the welcome return of Mr. Brander from a prisoner-of-war camp in March 1919. The minute of one of the earliest Deacons' Court meetings he attended (6th May, 1919) contains the following very interesting item: '*A letter was read from Mr. A.E. Stephen, Crosbie Tower, offering to gift a stained glass window as a Thankoffering to God for the victory won in the Great War and also as a memorial to those who made the supreme sacrifice to save the world from evil. The Clerk was instructed to acknowledge receipt of the letter and convey the Court's warmest appreciation for his extremely handsome and suitable gift and at the same time inform him of the Court's desire to leave him a free hands to have the work carried out as he desires.*'

Mr. Stephen's magnificent gift, we would all agree, is a focal point of our church building and a much admired addition to the interior beauty of Portland Church. The dedication service took place on Easter Day, 1920. It may have been this generous gift which prompted the office-bearers to consider installing in the church their own





CHRIST OUR PASSEOVER IS SACRIFICED FOR US  
THEREFORE LET US KEEP THE FEAST 1COR.5

#### *Memorial Window*

tribute in the form of a Memorial with a Roll of Honour. After much discussion about design etc., the memorial was finally unveiled on Armistice Sunday, 1921.

Post-war depression and unemployment were affecting members of all Scottish congregations and the winter of 1921 revealed a large number of necessitous cases in Portland. Elders and deacons were concerned and a committee set up to ascertain and relieve cases of distress. Over a period of weeks special retiring collections were taken to assist poor relief in the congregation. It was typical of the genuine concern that the members of the choir requested that they be not given a grant for their winter social on this occasion. They were thanked for their consideration.

The war years had postponed efforts to secure a new manse. By

1922 it had become a matter of urgency and a meeting in February agreed 'that we either build or buy a manse'. It must have been something of a shock, therefore, when a few weeks later, Mr. Brander intimated that a call to him was being presented to Ayr Presbytery from Highgate Presbyterian Church in London and if it were sustained, it was his intention to accept. By June, Portland Church had an Interim Moderator and an eventful ministry of 16 years had ended for George L. Brander. He left with the congratulations and good wishes of his office-bearers, who put on record *'their sincere appreciation of his work and ministry, and their admiration of his personal life and example and their earnest prayer and hope that in his wider sphere of labour he may be abundantly blessed in his own spirit and used by the Master in preaching and establishing the Kingdom of God on earth'*

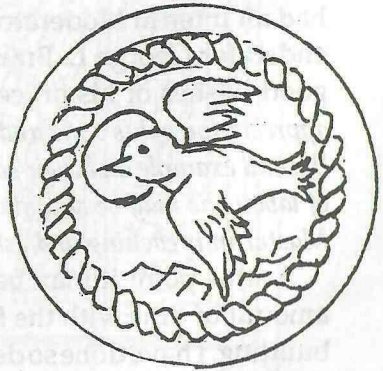
At this point it may be felt that I have spent a disproportionate amount of time with the first few years of the history of the present building. I have done so deliberately, first because very few members today have any recollection of the period and second because it was in those years (and in the 19th century ministries that preceded Mr. Brander) that fundamental decisions and sacrifices were made that resulted in the heritage that is ours in Portland today. In consequence there is not the same necessity, or the time and space, to discuss in detail the ministries that followed. It will be possible only to indicate the significant developments and characteristics that marked them.

Within six months of Mr. Brander's departure the post was filled when Glasgow Presbytery sustained the call to the Rev. A.G. Stewart and it was accepted. This coincided with the final stages of the search for a manse and in November a decision was made possible when Mr. Stephen, already a considerable benefactor of Portland Church, generously agreed to subscribe £1000 towards the purchase of 'Broomfield' in South Beach. The manse committee was instructed to make an offer not exceeding £3000 and *'to make such arrangements as were found necessary to accommodate Mr. Stewart and his belongings until such time as the new manse be ready.'* On January 23, 1923, Mr. Stewart presided at his first Deacons' Court meeting in Portland U.F. Church. It was a historic meeting in several ways, not the least that it was the first at which consideration was given to the use of individual



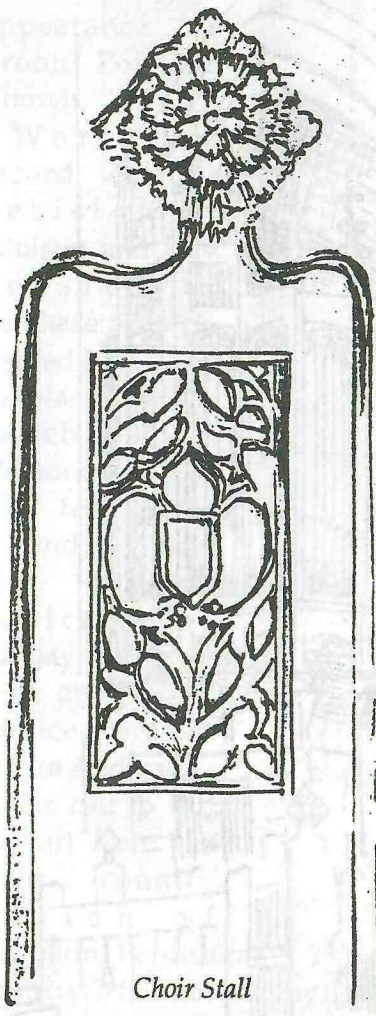
communion cups. A few weeks later 'Broomfield' was purchased for the sum of £2900 and one is not surprised to note that the Ladies' Work Party raised £632 towards the cost.

For the first time in eighty years the Free Church congregation of Troon had inducted a minister of experience. For Mr. Stewart's five predecessors Troon had been their first charge, and three had served the congregation less than ten years each. It is not surprising, therefore that the relative maturity of Mr. Stewart, added to the fact that he was Portland minister for over 35 years, gave him the opportunity to have much to do with the shaping of the character and progress of our church. A.G. Stewart was a Cambridge graduate, from a family long



*Font Side Carving*

experienced in the law and his talents possibly lay less in preaching than in contact with people and committee business, both local and national. He had a great zest for life and liked nothing better than an evening with the young leaders of the congregation. In this respect he was singularly fortunate, because his ministry was contemporary with increased numbers going to University because of Marr Trust grants and more important – nearly all travelling daily by rail to Glasgow and returning to their home and interests in Troon. He was fortunate, too, that it was still a time of family church-going. The pews were family pews, regularly filled and Sunday School and Bible Class well-attended. It was a period also when those in late teenage and twenties were catered for by the Young Men's Guild and the Girls Auxiliary (or Girls Association). These two groups held their own individual meetings, but met together frequently for badminton, socials and dances. It was indeed a period of flourishing organisations and by no means concerned only with youth. A well supported Church Golf Club met on Tuesday evenings on the Municipal courses and indulged in regular inter-church singles and



*Choir Stall*

foursomes. The connection with Irvine Fullarton Church golfers extended to invitations to each other's Annual Dances. And then there was the Portland Church Literary and Debating Society, which during the winter met weekly in the Church Hall and served the community in Troon, much as Troon Arts Guild does today. Some of us will remember with nostalgia the last session, 1939-40 and a typical evening when Rosslyn Mitchell, M.P., addressed an audience which, despite rain and black-out, filled the main hall and its two side rooms to overflowing. No one had then heard about television!

But possibly members and friends who know something of the story of our church might suggest its best-known heritage from the past is good choral music. This tradition is over 100 years old and there is particular mention of a Musical

Association to lead the praise in 1879. The congregation was fortunate to have a succession of very good organists and choirmasters, but it was Frederic Ely, master of the church's music from 1925 to 1948, who produced a choir of national reputation. He was the product of an English Cathedral choirboy training, with a gift for producing a very special sound quality. Portland Choir in his time had successes for many years at the Ayrshire Music Festival and on other occasions at Edinburgh, Greenock and Glasgow. It was also honoured by the

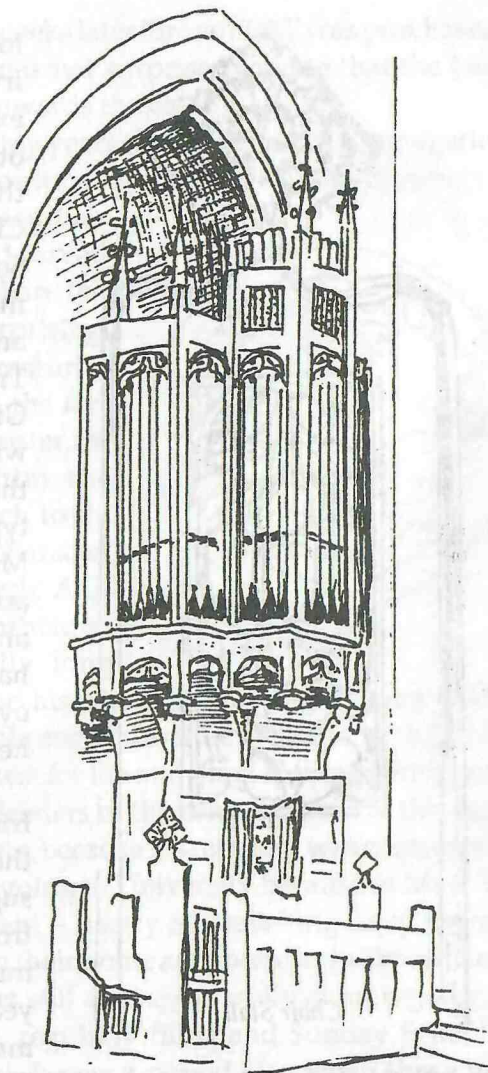


invitation to broadcast a selection of items on radio.

The Woman's Guild continued to flourish and to play a very special part in Portland's projects and enterprises, as well as the larger interests and missionary endeavours of the national church.

The unique contribution of Mr. Stewart to the quality and variety of preaching in Portland was to entice to Troon outstanding preachers from different parts of the British Isles – and U.S.A. – during his annual holiday period. He and Mrs. Stewart had no children and much of the manse was little used and so in these circumstances, he invited outstanding ministers and their

families to enjoy the manse and a pleasant seaside holiday during his own holiday break. In his capacity as President of the National Bible Society, he was successful in persuading such notable personalities as Pastor Niemoller (*the ex-U boat commander who bravely opposed Hitler and the philosophy of the Nazis*) and Billy Graham who, during his evangelical campaign in Scotland, made his only parish pulpit



Organ

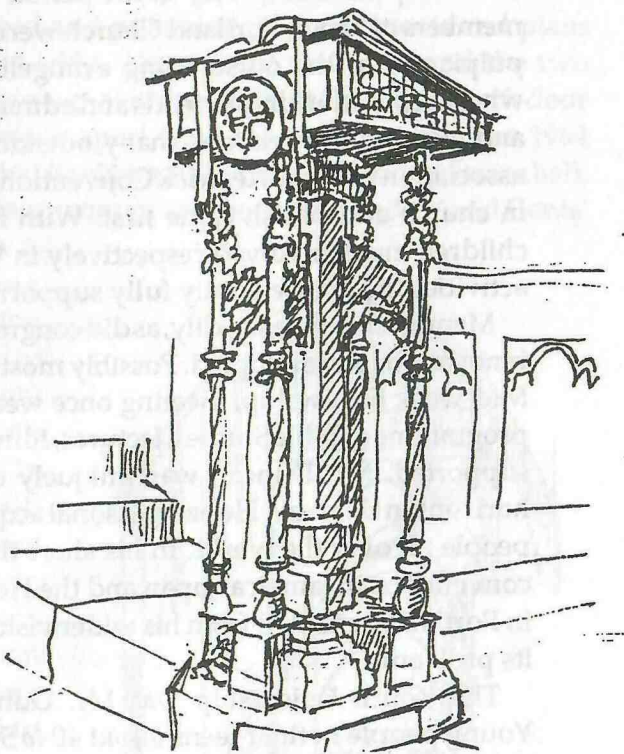
appearance in Troon Portland Church.

Worthy of record was the decision by minister and Kirk Session to purchase a much-needed Lectern, to be placed in the church as a Memorial to those who fell in the Second World War. It was dedicated on Sunday, 11th May, 1947, at a special service, by Dr. Whyte Anderson.

The call to Mr. Stewart from the little country parish of

Burrelton, Perthshire, in 1958, signalled the end of a remarkable ministry. It had not entirely been without controversy – Mr. Stewart's enthusiasms and ideas were not always universally supported – but it had been a period of wonderful congregational vigour and activity and with many moments that a great number would cherish.

The members of the Vacancy Committee in 1958, during their deliberations, were advised that the Rev. George B. Duncan, one of the outstanding preachers in Britain, was considering leaving the Church of England and returning to the church of his family in Scotland. Other well-known churches in Glasgow and Dundee were interested and it was therefore without absolute confidence of success



*Lectern*



that an invitation was sent, inviting him to preach in. He did so, was invited soon afterwards by an unanimous call to be minister in Troon and accepted. For a very short period of just over six years the members of Troon Portland Church were privileged to have in their pulpit one of the outstanding evangelists of his day, a preacher whose reputation drew friends and admirers to his services, morning and evening. He retained many outside interests, particularly his association with the Keswick Convention, but dedication to his work in church and parish came first. With Mrs. Duncan and his four children much involved respectively in Woman's Guild and youth activities the manse family fully supported his work.

Membership rose steadily, as did congregational giving and several innovations were adopted. Possibly most successful of these was the Mid-week Fellowship, meeting once weekly in the evening, with a programme of Bible Studies, lectures, films, etc., which was very well supported. Mr. Duncan was uniquely qualified to open up new horizons in this way. He had personal acquaintance with church and people all over the world. In his short time here he was invited to conventions in Jamaica, Japan and the Holy Land and his own flock in Portland benefited from his wider vision of the world church and its problems.

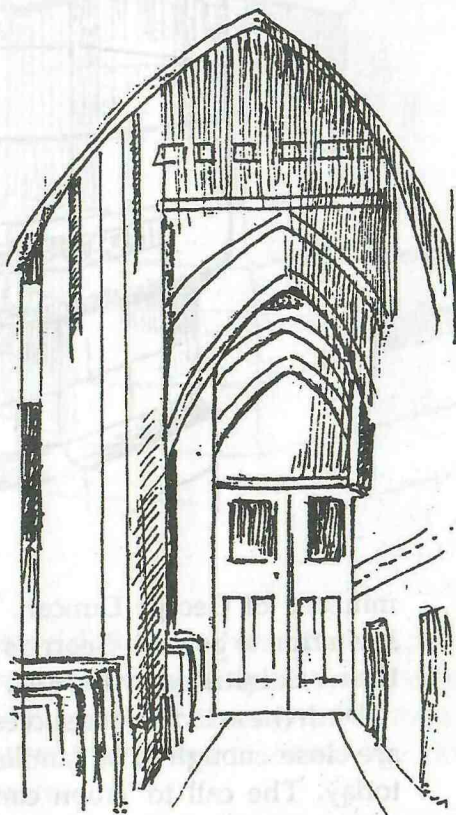
The Youth Fellowship was Mr. Duncan's own responsibility. Young people in their teens (*about 40 to 50 in number*), instead of, as before, forming a Bible Class, met after the evening service on Sunday, the meeting conducted by the minister. They also had other activities, such as excursion and games with other youth groups and an annual summer week at Capernwray Hall, Carnforth in company with about two hundred other Christian young people.

Mrs. Duncan was very actively involved with the Woman's Guild, which in 1960 had 380 members. A feature of this period was the success of the Woman's Guild choir, which was in considerable demand to give musical entertainment in other Guilds and churches.

The year 1962 saw the ending of seat-rents, mainly because with a congregation of over 1000 it was impossible to have any satisfactory system with only just under 800 seats available in the church. It was in the same year, too, that Mr. Duncan suggested to his office-bearers

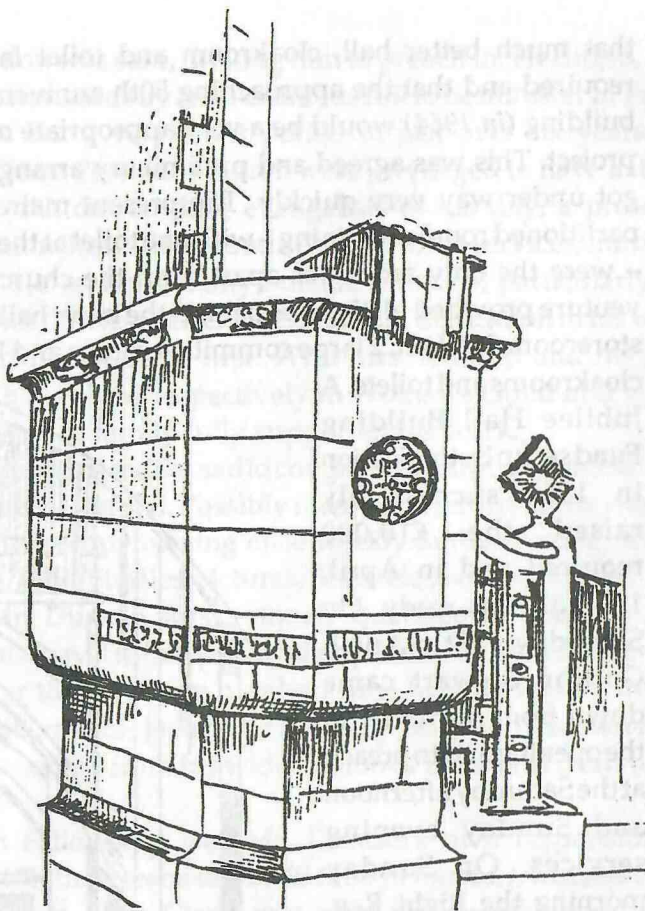
that much better hall, cloakroom and toilet facilities were now required and that the approaching 50th anniversary of the church building (*in 1964*) would be a very appropriate occasion for such a project. This was agreed and preliminary arrangements and plans got under way very quickly. The present main hall and the two partitioned rooms adjoining – with one toilet at the South Beach door – were the only amenities apart from the church itself. The 1964 venture provided all that lies behind the main hall today: lesser hall, storeroom, kitchen, 2 large committee rooms and Ladies' and Gents' cloakrooms and toilets. A Jubilee Hall Building Fund set up by the Session in 1962 successfully raised the £10,000 required and in April, 1964, all was ready. On Saturday, 18th April, Gordon Stewart came down from Burrelton to the opening and to preach at the Saturday afternoon and Sunday evening services. On Sunday morning the Right Rev. A.C. Craig, M.C., D.D., (*who remembered the opening in 1914!*) took the special service.

The new halls were certainly used. New groups were encouraged, like the Men's Association, the Young Wives' Fellowship and District Socials were attempted for the first time. The Jubilee memorial had been more than vindicated: it was likely to remain a wonderful memorial to the brief but unforgettable



*West Aisle*



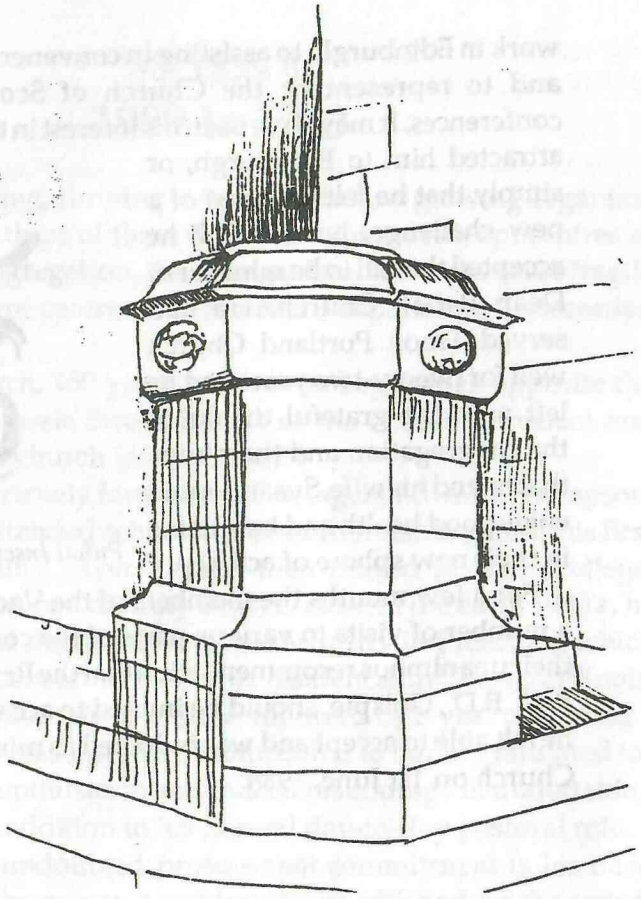


*Pulpit*

ministry of George Duncan. Within a year he had accepted the invitation to go to St. George's Tron Church in Glasgow, to carry on the work initiated by the Rev. Tom Allan.

With the arrival of his successor, the Rev. J. Gordon Grant, events are close enough to be familiar to his friends in Portland Church today. The call to Troon came to the young minister in Dyce, Aberdeenshire, a few months after Mr. Duncan's departure and his induction took place on 29th September, 1965. He faced a tremendous challenge in occupying the pulpit just vacated by a preacher of international reputation, but he had character and appeal of his own.

Gordon Grant was a young man of genuine conviction and sincerity, willing to befriend the members of his new congregation and to face with them the problems of the years ahead. It was his misfortune to coincide, in his Troon ministry, with a period of national decline in regular church-going and social and moral changes



*Font*

which presented new problems and difficulties. Nevertheless, due to his own earnest endeavour and the willing co-operation of elders and congregation, the very full programme of activities continued successfully. House Groups were introduced to encourage close involvement in prayer and service.

In time Mr. Grant was able to take a more active interest in the wider affairs of the church. He had a continuing involvement with the work of the National Bible Society, and latterly, considerable influence in the affairs and policies of the national church. His interest in ecumenical matters led to his appointment to committee



work in Edinburgh, to assisting in convenership and policy-making and to representing the Church of Scotland at international conferences. It may have been his interest in these matters that finally attracted him to Edinburgh, or simply that he felt the need of a new challenge, but in 1987 he accepted the call to be minister of Dean Parish Church. He had served Troon Portland Church well for twenty-two years and he left with the grateful thanks of the congregation and their hope that he and his wife, Susan, would enjoy good health and happiness in their new sphere of activity.



#### *Pulpit Inscription*

For a few months the members of the Vacancy Committee made a number of visits to various parts of the country and finally made their unanimous recommendation that the Rev. Edward J. Thompson, B.A., B.D., Golspie, should be invited to accept the charge. Happily, he felt able to accept and was inducted as minister of Troon Portland Church on 1st June, 1988.

### SECTION III

## 1989 to 1993

A church is a living, thriving – and hopefully – growing organism and relies for all three of these qualities upon its two epi-centres of minister and congregation. As an organism, it is at its most fragile when one of the epi-centres – the minister – departs and is succeeded by another.

Portland Church, 150 years on from its beginnings opposite the gas works in Barassie Street, is part of the church universal and today, part of the church international.

Portland is extremely fortunate in having, in Edward Thompson, a minister who attended school in Northern Ireland, gained his first degree at Durham University and then moved to New College, Edinburgh to acquire a divinity degree. Now in the early 1990's, he is studying for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Preaching which has its core three consecutive summer residences in Chicago, Illinois, USA in the last three weeks of June, followed by a year preparing a thesis related to preaching. Mr. Thompson is to be congratulated for his initiative, his enthusiasm and indeed his courage in undertaking such an arduous addition to his normal day-to-day pastoral role.

Added to his undoubted professional commitment is his deep family base and the manse, considerably refurbished for the arrival of the Thompsons, rings with the chatter and activity of three lusty young boys. Mention of Elizabeth – Mrs. Thompson – also a Durham graduate and the closely-knit family circle is complete.

Mr. Thompson's *'track record'* to date suggests that he has much that is original and innovative in his ministry which will enable him to take Portland Church into the second millennium and towards the successful celebration of 200 years of Portland.

What, then, of the second epi-centre? It is recorded that, even in the chaotic turmoil of the immediate aftermath of the Disruption, Troon Free was *'honourably known as one of the most sensible and peaceable during a vacancy'* in the whole Presbytery of Ayr. Today, Portland has the undeniable reputation of being a friendly church – friendly to



visitors, friendly to each other within the congregation and proactively friendly within the community. The minister is active in chaplaincy work in the local schools and now conducts end-of-term services in the church, thus introducing many children to the enriching experience of church worship.

It is also appropriate to take stock of the material strengths of a church as it leaves its 150 years of existence and to measure its preparedness for the journey onward to 200 years of Christian witness in the community.

The present building, now in its 79th year, is undoubtedly one of the most impressive church buildings architecturally in the West of Scotland. The buildings are well-maintained in every respect and much credit is due to the Property (formerly Fabric) Convener and the Church Officer. In addition to the sanctuary with its gallery which can seat some 800, there are four halls, two kitchens, vestry, counting-house, etc. A recent addition, at the instigation of the Minister, is a custom-built office. The office is equipped with a word processor, a printer, a comprehensive photocopier, telephone and excellent storage and work-top facilities. Much of the necessary church record-keeping is now held on computer disc and is readily accessed by authorised persons. Most of the congregation's printed material is now prepared in-house.

A successful church must, by definition, be a busy church, its strength lying in the activities pursued within its precincts. In addition to directly-related Portland activities – and there are many – community use of the halls has been encouraged and developed and this is evidenced by the presence of Brownies, Guides, Boys' Brigade representing youth; also, those now euphemistically entitled '*senior citizens*' who are members of Opportunities in Retirement, regularly meet in the halls.

The church, too, under Mr. Thompson's tutelage, has re-introduced evening services and is actively engaged in Holy Week Worship, Christian Aid Week and other spiritual activities.

The ecumenical strength of Troon Portland is sound, its spiritual guidance is in the capable hands of the Minister, Edward Thompson and of an active Kirk Session led by the Session Clerk, Alasdair

Macdonald. The congregation is in very good heart.

Together they look back on 150 years of Christian fellowship, influence and growth with deep gratitude to those who brought us to this point in Portland's history. Minister, Session and congregation now look forward to the next 50 years with quiet confidence and with the certainty of God's help on the journey.

It is said that faith can move mountains and it is well to remember that the faith of a few (comprising 2 elders, 130 members) but no minister and no church building in May, 1843, 150 years ago, has led to the present one minister, 65 elders, 850 members and a beautiful church seating 800. Who know what success the next 50 years will bring.

First Preacher	-	1843	Dr. Gilbert Burns
First Minister	-	1843-46	Rev. Robert Ross
		1846-86	Rev. Andrew Cowan
		1886-90	Rev. W.M. Macgregor
		1891-98	Rev. W. Mackintosh Mackay
		1898-1905	Rev. Alexander Whyte
		1906-1922	Rev. George L. Brander
		1922-1958	Rev. A.G. Stewart
		1958-1965	Rev. George B. Duncan
		1965-1988	Rev. J. Gordon Grant
		1988-	Rev. Edward J. Thompson



## FOOTNOTE AND APOLOGY

It is impossible, in a brief history of this nature, to pay tribute, or give special mention, to dozens of deserving men and women who have played a significant role in the story of Portland Church. It has been possible only to indicate the main features of the church's growth and development. The successes of those years were due to the selfless devotion of a remarkable band of session clerks and secretaries, treasurers and tea-makers, Sunday School staff and sports conveners, beadles and Bible Class leaders, cleaners and choristers, guildswomen and Guide leaders, Free-Will Offering and Foreign Mission Conveners, organists and organisers, etc., etc., a host of truly dedicated workers. We owe a tremendous debt to all those who were glad to devote their talent and enthusiasm towards the running of a successful congregation, helping not only in its activities, but mindful of those unable to participate, from the babies in the creche to the aged and housebound. They served the church because they felt it a privilege to do so, with no thought or regard or recognition. We salute them all.

J.E.

D.G.D.I.

P.A.M.

R.C.S.

Photos – L.A.H.