

The Old Parish Church, Troon

An Essay by

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The village of Troon was originally in the Parish of Dundonald, and for ordinances of religion the inhabitants of Troon were ministered unto by the minister of Dundonald. With the commencement of the harbour works at Troon about the beginning of the last century, however, the population increased to some considerable extent, and the attention of the religious authorities was drawn to the need of caring for the spiritual requirements of the community in a more satisfactory way than could be carried out by the parish minister. The labourers were dwelling in wooden huts round the scene of their work and open - air services were conducted for their benefit. The United Secession Presbytery of Kilmarnock first hired a loft then built a small church in order to cater for the needs of Troon. The Established Church also entered the field and in 1823 there came to reside in the district a licentiate from the Presbytery of Glasgow, Mr. James Fleming.

Mr. Fleming was born in Glasgow on the 11th december, 1792 in the district known as Finnieston Road - now Stobcross. He received his education at one of the Burgh Schools of Glasgow and at the age of 16 he entered the University of Glasgow. After two years his father died, and as the call of business necessitated all his attention Mr. Fleming reluctantly relinquished for the time his university career. After three years as a timber merchant he resumed his classes and at the end of his college course was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Glasgow. His period as a probationer was interrupted by further family bereavements - particularly that of his brother to whom he had handed over the business - but ultimately he became assistant to Dr. Chalmers of St. John's Glasgow, Where he received a sound, if strenuous training. At the age of 30 Mr. Fleming came to Troon.

Troon at that time was a village of 1,000 or 1,200 inhabitants, with few houses of any pretensions. Mr. Fleming's first meeting house was a sail loft in which he preached for a couple of years. This loft was situated at what is now the west end of Portland Terrace. At times it was rather an inconvenient place of worship as the sea occasionally came up and flooded the place. On one occasion the water rose to such a height while the services were being conducted that the congregation had to be removed in carts to dry ground. The loft, though humble was not a despised place of worship for, during one year while the family of the duke of Portland were staying at Fullarton

House, they frequently came to the services in the loft, their carriage and four standing on the beach waiting to convey them home when the worship was over. The attendances became so large that the loft was found to be inconvenient and as the United Secession Church was now closed - the field having been found too limited for two bodies - it was rented by the Established Church Presbytery and the congregation removed thither. This Church was situated near the railway arch at the North Shore end of Barassie Street. Prosperity continued to attend Mr. Fleming's ministrations and after a time the new building became so crowded that it was necessary to take steps to procure a still larger place. Mr. Fleming set about the project with a determination to succeed; and having secured the cooperation of the Misses Muir of Shewalton, who gave him every encouragement, he collected subscriptions to such an amount as warranted him in proceeding with the building of a new church.

Records have been kept of the subscriptions received and some of the names will be familiar to many in Troon today. The Misses Muir of Shewalton, £130; Mrs. McFie of Troon, £10; Rev. Mr. Fleming, Troon, £40; Mr. Wm. Young, Troon, £5; Jus. Dickie, £5-10-6; Mrs. Wilson, Loans, £10; Miss Morris of Craig, £25; Mr. Dykes, Hillhouse, £2; Mr. Hay Boyd, £5; Captain Kelso, £5; etc. The foundation stone was laid in 1835 and at a meeting of subscribers held in the Manse on 27th March, 1837, "Mr. Fleming gave a narrative of the steps he had taken to procure subscriptions for the erection of a church at Troon, stating that the subscriptions had amounted to nearly £500, that a site for the church had been granted at a nominal rent by His Grace the Duke of Portland, and that the mason work had made considerable progress, being nearly ready for the gallery joists, of all which the meeting highly approved."

The enthusiasm engendered by the building of the new church made the congregation feel that the time had come for Troon to have a minister of its own, and a petition to this effect was sent to the Presbytery of Ayr. It read "The Petition of the undersigned inhabitants of Troon and neighbourhood humbly sheweth - that owing partly to the lamented and increasing infirmities of Dr. Macleod, minister of the parish, and partly to the inconvenient distance of Troon from Dundonald, your petitioners labour under very great difficulty in having the ordinances of Baptism and Marriage administered among them; and from the further circumstances of having no accommodation provided for them in the parish church, are subjected to great privations and inconvenience in attending the solemn services at the annual dispensation of the Lord's Supper - that your petitioners have the near prospect of a suitable place of worship being erected in Troon with the view of its being made a parish church with parochial territory assigned to it, - that having good cause to be satisfied with the fidelity and zeal of the Rev. James Fleming who, for the last twelve years, has laboured with unmoved diligence among us, your petitioners are extremely desirous to obtain the immediate benefit of his services as an ordained minister. May it therefore please the Reverend

Presbytery to ordain Mr. Fleming and invest him with the authority to dispense to the inhabitants of this populous district those religious ordinances which under the present circumstances they have so much difficulty in obtaining." The petition was signed by the principal inhabitants of Troon and sent to the Presbytery with a letter of concurrence written by the minister of Dundonald. The Presbytery granted the petition in 1837 and in the building rented from the United Secession Presbytery, Mr Fleming was ordained to the Holy Ministry.

The time taken to build the new church was extremely protracted. The contractors seemed to have entertained the idea that they would not be paid for their work and the proceedings became slower and slower until actually they ceased altogether. On an assurance given by Mr. Fleming that the money would be forthcoming the work was renewed and carried on with energy to the close. The only assistance given by the government to the building was the remission of the duty on the timber used in the erection, though of course a grant was given by the Assembly. The total cost of the building was £2,000 approximately, not including spire and clock. A constitution was drawn up and the new building became a Quod Sacra Church with a definite parochial area of its own. The church was opened for worship on the first Sunday of May, 1838. Prosperity still continued to attend Mr. Fleming's ministry, for after a year or two, a further sum of £300 was accumulated to build the spire and put in the clock. The church then became as it is remembered by many, before its transformation recently into the Main Hall.

The Rev. James Fleming was married on the 15th February, 1830, to Janet, youngest daughter of the Rev. Andrew Hamilton, High Church, Kilmarnock. The family consisted of three sons and four daughters. the eldest son became the Rev. Archibald Fleming of St. Paul's Perth. His son the Rev. Archibald Fleming of St. Columba's, Pont Street, London, helped conduct the Centenary Service in Troon Old Church on Sunday, May 1st, 1938.

Notes

(1) Reference to the petition and Dr. McLeod's subsequent letter can be found in "Dundonald" by James Gillespie, B.D. (1939) in Volume 2 Chap.6 which concerns Prebyterial oversight of the Parish of Dundonald.

(2) A shorter reference to the ordination and induction of Mr. Fleming can be found in "Troon and Dundonald" by Rev'd. J. Kirkwood (1875) in Chapter 5 concerning the 'institutions' of Troon. (R.G. 02.02.01)