TROON OLD PARISH CHURCH

Its Churches and Ministers

During the First

One Hundred and Fifty Years

1823-1973

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Ian M. Macintosh, 1973

INTRODUCTION

It is now 25 years since the article contained in this booklet was first published by Troon Old Parish Church. The present re-issue has been compiled to remind our friends in the Congregation of the early history of our Church and the Ministers who contributed so much to its welfare. Our present situation is in many ways similar to the one we were in when the original article was written. We have, of course benefitted from the contribution of a further two Ministers in the meantime and Mr. Alastair H. Symington was just recently inducted to the Charge.

We hope you find the article interesting and that it may give an insight into our progress over the early part of our one hundred and seventy-five year history.

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Acknowledgement

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In the old days, Troon was just a little place with a few houses, of little importance to anybody but seafarers, who used to shelter from storms in the lee of the rock that runs nearly a mile out to sea, on which part of Troon and the harbour are now built.

The Parish Church of Dundonald was the main source of religious instruction to this small community, although Crosbie Kirk was also used in those far off days. The Chapel of Crosbie was ancient, and attached to Dundonald. It was referred to as a *terris dominicalis*, - it belonged to the Lord of the Manor, i.e., the Fullartons of that Ilk, who lived formerly in Fullarton, Irvine, then at Crosbie Fortalice, and latterly at Fullarton House. Crosbie Kirk was in their possession since the 15th Century at least, and was the ancient burial place for the inhabitants of Troon and District. However, it is reported that in 1705, "that famely (the Fullartons) has a litell chapell near the house (Fullarton House), the minister of Dundonald used to preach now and then there, but it is in desuetude". So it seems that by the 18th Century, Crosbie Kirk was no longer used for religious purposes. It fell into disrepair pretty quickly, - in fact as most of us know, the roof was blown off on 25th January, 1759, in the same storm that ushered Robert Burns into this world

So we have a small community of perhaps two hundred people living near the shore at Troon Point. In the winter, the discomforts must have been great, as during a storm, the sea washed up into what is now Titchfield Road, Portland Terrace, West Portland Street, Portland Street and Barassie Street. There was an Inn, which ministered to the creature comforts of the locals, and which also acted as a rendezvous for those who dealt in the free trade. According to the Reverend John Mitchell and John Galt who wrote on the matter in the 18th and 19th Centuries, the Trin was one of the principal centres on the West Coast for the landing and transport of contraband goods. The religious instruction which came from Dundonald must have been of little moment, as we hear nothing about Troonites from the Session Minutes, - but perhaps this was a good thing? This, then, was the position until 1814, when a Petition was presented to the Burgher Presbytery of Kilmarnock for services of a preacher at Troon. This was not just for the original inhabitants of Troon themselves, for what had happened was that the last of the Fullartons, Colonel William Fullarton, had fallen on evil days financially, and in 1805, his Estate of Fullarton which included Troon, was put up for sale. At that time, the Marquis of Titchfield, (later, the Duke of Portland), who owned valuable property in the vicinity of Kilmarnock, was looking for an outlet for his coal mines. So he bought the Fullarton Estate, and in 1808, started modernising and building a new harbour at Troon. A horse-drawn railway was completed between Kilmarnock and Troon Harbour by the Duke, so it is evident that there were a large number of labourers, tradesmen and others employed at Troon, and they appear to have lived in wooden huts round about the harbour area. This attracted open air preachers, and as a result of the Petition already mentioned, a Preacher from the Seceders, rented a sail loft over a rope work situated where Portland Terrace now is, and held their services there. This was nine years before the Established Church appeared on the scene. These Seceders were the forerunners of St. Meddans

Church.The sail loft became too small, so the Seceders built a church in Barassie Street, (where it still is, but is now used as a Burgh Store). They left the sail loft in 1822 for their new Church, and the following year, 1823, the Established Church took over the sail loft, under Mr. James Fleming, who was a Licentiate from the Presbytery of Glasgow, and who became a resident preacher in Troon. Mr. Fleming was born in Glasgow on 11th December 1792. After attending classes at Glasgow University, he became an Assistant at St John's Glasgow, and at the age of thirty, he came to Troon. The Duke of Portland, who resided at Fullarton House during the Summer months, supported Mr. Fleming in every way possible, attended his services in the sail loft, along with the Duchess and other members of the family, and a large number of retainers. It must have been very rough and ready, worshipping to the sound of the sea, which was so near, with the smell of canvas and oakum in the background. In those days there was no esplanade, no sea wall and no grass embankment to keep the sea out. Sometimes, during the winter months, severe storms blew the sea into the village, and many a time our original congregation and their minister were marooned in the sail loft, with the sea swirling about the rope work down below. So no doubt our forefathers were treated to more than one sermon to keep their minds occupied, until such time as either the tide receded, or carts were brought up to remove the congregation to dry land.

The Seceders went through difficult times in their Church in Barassie Street, and as a result gave it up for some years. So, in 1825, the Established Church left the sail loft, and took over the Church in Barassie Street, which became known as "The Troon Church". In a few years, the population of Troon had grown to between 1000 and 1200 people. Mr. Fleming was ordained in the Troon Church on 26th October, 1837, and by all accounts, he was a tower of strength in the village. He was out ministering to his flock in all weathers, and he took part in all the village activities, which included being amongst the first members of Troon Golf Club, which was formed in 1878, and believe me, anybody who played golf on Old Troon in those days, had to be hardy. The course was formed out of rough farm grazing, bents, sandhillocks, brambles, whins and natural water hazards, where only the fittest survived. In fact,in "The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News" of 17th October, 1885, which was reporting on Troon Golf Club, Mr. Fleming is referred to as follows:- "the venerable parson is entering on his 96th year, and it is said preached the same thanksgiving sermon over Tel-el-Kebir (1882), which he did over Waterloo(1815). He still officiates in the pulpit twice a day, visits regularly all his parishioners, buries the bairns he baptised seventy years ago, and unites in marriage their great-great grand children".

Mr. Fleming found that his Church in Barassie Street was becoming too small, so he started raising funds for a new church, this time to be built in Ayr Street. He was a hard worker, and strove mightily to find the money to build the new church, which he did with the help of his many friends in the village and round about. The foundation stone was laid in 1835, and the church was opened for worship on the first Sunday in May, 1838. The cost of the church, excluding the steeple and clock, was approximately £2,000. After two or three years, a further £300 was raised, and the spire was built and the clock put in. The population of Troon and Irvine was increasing by leaps and bounds, and because of this, in 1837, the old Parish of Dundonald was divided into three portions, - Troon *quoad sacra*,Halfway or Fullarton, Irvine, *quoad sacra*, and, of course, Dundonald. Our congregation worshipped in their Church in Ayr Street for 57 years,

under the Rev. James Fleming, until May,1887, when the Rev. Robert Smith was appointed Assistant, and later, colleague and successor. Mr. Fleming died in 1888, aged 96, after a ministry of sixty-five years in Troon. He was beloved by all. Mr. Fleming was a bit of a humourist, and he often told the story of the day he visited one of the old toll men at the Loans as he lay dying.Just two hours before the old man drew his last breath, and the minister was praying for him, he surprised his spiritual adviser by touching him, and saying"Wheesht man, I hear a cairt!". The ruling passion strong in death?

In 1830, Mr. Fleming married Miss Janet Hamilton who was the daughter of the Rev. Andrew Hamilton, High Church, Kilmarnock. They had three sons and four daughters, his eldest son being Archibald Fleming, who became Minister of Fullarton, Irvine, and latterly Minister of St. Paul's, Perth. His son was the Rev. Archibald Fleming of St. Columba's, Pont Street, London.

The Rev. Robert Smith was born in 1858, and studied at the University of Edinburgh, so he was twenty nine years of age when he was appointed to Troon. Prior to Troon he had been Assistant at the Abbey Church, Edinburgh. When Mr. Smith took over from Mr. Fleming, he gave yeomann service, not only to his own church, but to the community in general. He was Chairman of the old School Board for the Parish of Dundonald, and it was under his guidance that the school in Barassie street was more than doubled in size, and for many years prior to the opening of Marr College, it was a Higher Grade School. On the occasion of the union of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, his colleagues did him the honour of electing him their first Moderator. Mr. Smith became a member of Ayrshire Education Authority, and was Convener of the Teachers Staffing Committee. Later, he became a Governor of Marr College. In 1935, he received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity, (D.D.), from the University of Glasgow. Reverting back to Troon Old Church, Dr. Smith became part of the village life. By 1891, the Roll was 681, there were 400 children in the Sabbath School, and 150 young people in the Bible Classes. However, the Church had become too small again, so Dr. Smith formed a Building Fund Committee with Mr. Adam Wood in the Chair, and a letter was sent out in December ,1891, to aall those who might be interested, advising that the Congregation of Troon Parish Church had unanimously resolved to proceed with the erection of a larger church, - once again in Ayr Street, beside the existing church. Mr. Hyppolite J. Blanc, A.R.S.A., Edinburgh, was employed to draw the Plans, the Church being modelled ofrom St. Matthews, Edinburgh. The Plans were exhibited in Troon Academy, for the approval of the congregation. The Congregation and their friends were generous in their giving, and on 28th October, 1893, the foundation stone of our present church was laid, "mid storm and rain", by the Duke of Portland. After the stone was laid the Duchess scattered corn, wine and oil over the stone. The stone is in two parts weighing half a ton each, and these are on the West Wall of the Chancel. About thirty articles are contained in a glass jar inside the stone, which include copies of the addresses delivered that day, photographs of the minister and senior elder, a list of the office bearers, a description of the new church, a photograph of the old Church, newspapers, church magazines and coins. The mallet, the level, and the square used by the Duke of Portland in setting the stone, were made from a piece of oak taken from a "pawl" which was at the pier end of the harbour in the old days, and which was probably used in warping sailing ships in and out the harbour entrance. The Church was completed by 1895, the dedication service being held in the Church on the 26th, and the first

Sunday service on 29th December, 1895. It has been recorded that this Church was built through the indomitable perseverance and abounding labour of Dr. Smith. About 1905, the Chancel was completed, the walls being lined with the wainscot panelling, the main feature being the exquisite reredos behind the Communion Table. The centre alabaster panel pictures the Last Supper, and the side panels show Moses expounding the Commandments and St. Paul preaching the Gospel. the officiating Ministers at the Dedication Service were Dr. Archibald Scott, Edinburgh, Moderator-Designate of the General Assembly; the Rev. James Miller, Moderator of the Presbytery of Ayr; the Rev.James Wilson Clerk to the Presbytery; and the Rev. Robert Smith, Minister of the Parish.

The Church was described in the Local Papers as "an exquisitely beautiful example of the Gothic architecture of the 12th Century". Members might be interested to know that the Pupit and Communion Table were made by Wylie & Lochhead Ltd., Glasgow, and that the organ was presented by the Ladies of Troon Parish Church, - part of the organ funds being raised at a very large Bazaar in July 1993, at which the Duke and Duchess of Portland took prominent part in the proceedings. The three windows in the chancel, about twentyone feet in height, have an inscription, "To the Glory of God. In memory of the Rev. James Fleming, first Minister of this Parish, born Dec.11th 1792, died Octr. 25th, 1888, and of Janet Hamilton, his wife, born Jan. 7th 1811, died June 9th, 1864. Erected by their daughters Jane and Rebecca, 1895". The original Church in Ayr Street became the Church Hall.

Mr. Smith was married twice, - first to Miss Janet Gilmore in 1901. She died in 1924, and in 1927, he married Mrs. Margaret Guthrie Moore. Mr. Smith had one son, Robert J. Smith, who was born in 1902, and who spent his working life in the Sudan, retiring as Head of the Irrigation Department.

The writer's first memory of Church going was listening to the Rev. Robert Smith some sixty years ago, and I remember the high regard and great esteem in which he was held, not only by his own congregation, but by the community in general. He had a great sense of humour, and his pawkiness and sensibility were known and appreciated throughout the County. He knew his flock inside out, the majority by their Christian names, - in fact latterly he had baptised most of the children and grandchildren of his original flock. Mr. Smith could be quite overpowering, especially in the eyes of a backslider. I remember, one day, Mr. Smith was walking along Ayr Street, when he saw one of his lady members approaching. When she caught sight of him, she jinked into one of the closes. A day or so later, he came face to face with the same lady on the esplanade, and as he raised his hat in polite salutation when passing her, he remarked with a knowing smile, " No closes here, Jeannie!". He told stories against himself . Many old Troonites will remember Mrs. Lawrie's cockatoo, which kept a strict watch on passers-by beside its home in Academy Street. It seems that every time Dr. Smith passed along Academy Street, the cockatoo invariably shrieked after him, "Awa' tae yer wark!". Once two shipyard workers, who thought the "Meenister" had a very easy job with little to do, one day lay on the knowes opposite the manse, which was then in South Beach, at the corner of Lochend Road, but they retired in discomfit, when they saw the number of people calling at the manse. (The older folk will remember the "Caddies' Links", which stretched from the last of the grey stone houses on the sea side of South Beach, out to the start of the golf course). Another day, when called to visit an old servant of a neighbour at death's door, for some reason she greeted him with, "I've seen

mony a brawer polisman than you...". In 1911, the Minister of Portland Church was the Rev. George Brander, and Father Hays was the Priest of the Roman Catholic Chapel just completed at the top of St, Meddan's Street. Dr. Smith and they were great friends. There is now the classic, but true story, that one night, Mr. Brander's Manse, which was opposite the new R.C. Chapel, was broken into, and amongst other things, a pair of Mr. Brander's trousers were stolen. Some days later, Father Hays invited Dr. Smith to look over his new Chapel, of which he was justly proud. As they stopped to admire the Confessional Boxes Dr. Smith enquired of Father Hays, "Any word of Brander's breek's?"

I remember, during the 1914-18 War, the 17th H.L.I. were billeted in Troon, and when it was the Battalion's time to move another step nearer France. Dr Smith gave a most moving and uplifting sermon to the Battalion, which was on Church Parade in Troon Old, and which even I, as a schoolboy, remembered for years after. The Royal Scots were billeted in Barassie Street School, with the result that, except for the Science Class, pupils were spread through various halls in the town, including our Church Hall. If I remember aright, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Intermediate Classes were distributed over the main hall, the gallery and the Vestry, the two latter now being out of existence.

After the 1914-18 War, came the years of depression, and it was during this time,(1934), that the Church and Hall were joined together, with the rooms and kitchen in between, and the Hall modernised. These additions were erected owing to the generosity of the late Mr. Adam Wood, and have proved a great boon to the Church. Shortly after they were completed, owing to age and ill health, Dr. Smith required assistance, and the Rev. James L. Cotter, M.A., B.D., was appointed as colleague and successor, and was inducted in November, 1934. Before coming to Troon, Mr. Cotter was Assistant at Glasgow Cathedral from 1931 to 1934, under Dr. Lauchlan MacLean Watt, D.D., and was ordained in the Cathedral in 1933, to undertake pastoral work during Dr. MacLean Watt's Moderatorial Year, and his subsequent visit to Australia. Dr. Smith died on 20th November, 1937, in his 80th year, after a Ministry in Troon of fifty years. So the first two ministers in Troon Old Parish Church, between them covered a Ministry of one hundred and fifteen years, and they were both instrumental in the building of new churches for our forefathers and for us.

It was a tremendous undertaking for the Rev. James L Cotter, at the age of twenty seven years, to take on Troon Oldse to the challenge, and for nine years he ministered to the people of Troon Old, and guided them with great acceptance, affection and high esteem. He invited Dr. Archibald Fleming of St. Columba's, Pont Street, London, the grandson of our first minister, to conduct a service in Troon Old, on Sunday, 1st May, 1938, in celebration of the Centenary of our first church in Ayr Street, and also as a reminderof the founding of the quoad sacra Parish of Troon in 1837. 1937 was also the Jubilee Year of Dr. Smith's Ministry, - the year in which he died.

Mr. Cotter married Miss Catherine Marguerite Miller in 1937, and they have three sons. Logan, a newspaper proprietor, Thomas, a B.B.C. producer, and Douglas, a Master at Marr College.

During the 1939-45 War, the Church Halls were used for evacuees and canteen purposes.

In May, 1943, Mr. Cotter left Troon to become Minister of Langholm Old Parish Church. In October 1959, he went to Dalserf Parish Church, from which he retired in April, this year, after forty years as an ordained Minister of the Church of Scotland. He has now come back amongst his old friends and

admirers. Many of those old friends will remember when Mr. Cotter played Rugby for Hillhead High School F.P., during which time he played many representative games. In 1934, he was capped for Scotland against Ireland at Murrayfield, and against England at Twickenham.

The Rev. Ronald H. Budge, M.A., was appointed Minister of Troon Old, and was inducted on 26th January, 1944. Before coming to Troon, Mr. Budge was Assistant at Broomhill Church, Glasgow, from 1937 to 1938, and was Minister of the West Church, Selkirk, from 1938 to 1944, during which time he saw War Service with the Church of Scotland Huts and Canteens in France, Lanarkshire and Orkney. In 1940, he married Miss Maisie Macauslan Main, the daughter of the Very Rev. Professor Archibald Main, D.Litt., D.D., L.L.D. During the War Years, the Canteen in Troon Old Church Hall did great service for H.M. Forces.

It was on 30th March, 1947, that for the first time our Evening Service was broadcast. That same year, the Memorial Plaque above the Baptismal Font was dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Smith. Two years later, the balance of the Memorial Fund was used to erect Memorial Gates and Railings round the precincts of the Church. (The originals had been removed during War time for melting down in aid of the War effort.) In this year, a War Memorial consisting of two windows and a plaque were unveiled and dedicated by the Moderator of the General Assembly.

During Mr. Budge's years in Troon, about 1450 new members were added to the Roll. He had a large capacity for organisation, and he was greatly missed when he left Troon Old on 3rd September, 1953, to be inducted at Murrayfield, Edinburgh, on the 16th of that month. Mr. Budge was appointed the first Convener of the and Budget Committee, in which he served from 1959 to 1964. He left Murrayfield for Crathie Parish Church, where he was inducted on 5th March, 1964. He was appointed Domestic Chaplain to the Queen when Her Majesty personally attended the meetings of the General Assembly in Edinburgh in May, 1968, - the first time the Sovereign had come in person to the General Assembly for four hundred years.

Owing to illness, Mr. Budge retired from Crathie on 17th October, 1971. On his retiral, the Queen conferred the M.V.O. upon him, and appointed him an Extra Chaplain in Ordinary in Scotland. Mr. and Mrs. Budge now live in Moffat.

On 20th December, 1954, the Rev. Allan Young, M.A., B.D., S.T.M., who was Assistant at Paisley Abbey, was inducted at Troon Old. He had married Agnes Tannahill Reid in 1954. She was the daughter of the Rev. John E. Reid, Isle of Whithorn. They have two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret, and a son, Allan. During his term of office, a great deal of work was put in, and in 1955, the heating was completely overhauled, and in 1957, the Church was completely redecorated. During 1964-65, the Organ was rebuilt and restored at a cost of £5000. In 1968, a new office was made to house the Church Secretary. The storms and salt saturated gales at Troon, having taken their toll of the outside stonework of the Church and Halls, these have now been cleaned and repaired at a cost of £10,000. This work was urgently required, so that we may maintain one of the loveliest churches in the West Coast of Scotland, lest we forget all the love and hard work that has been put into these buildings, first in 1838, then in 1895, and during all the years that followed. As a matter of interest, at the last count on 31st December, 1972, our Congregation numbered 2336 on the Roll. There are not many congregations stronger than ours in

Scotland.

Mr. Young has made a great impact, not only in Troon Old, but on the community as a whole, during his ministry of eighteen years. In 1967, the Presbytery of Ayr appointed him as their representative on Marr Trust, and in 1971, he became Chairman of the Governors. He entered wholeheartedly into the affairs of the Town, and amongst other offices, he became President of the Rotary Club of Troon. Anybody who attended a Wedding in which Mr. Young officiated will remember the fund of stories and the good humour which he showed when taking the Chair after the ceremony. One story which he told the writer, when talking about the Church in general and Dr. Smith in particular, was in connection with the photograph of Dr. Smith which used to hang in the Vestry, above the settee which was part of the Vestry furniture. Mr. Young recalls, "One evening, a lady recently returned from abroad came to see me about rejoining Troon Old Parish Church, in which she had been baptised. She began to reminisce about the old days, and in particular to refer to the stern and shrewd ways of Dr. Smith, who had been the Minister when she was young. She was going into great detail and occasionally verging on slander,when, believe it or not, the heavy framed picture fell with a crash from the wall behind her, and landed on her head. She fled from the Vestry. And I am sure it was not just my imagination when I picked up the Photograph - there *was* a twinkle in the old man's eye!"

Mr. and Mrs. Young have taken a great interest in the musical side of Church life, with the result that the Choir is outstanding. To celebrate the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Troon Old, a large Social was held in the Concert Hall, Troon, on 6th April, 1973, under the Chairmanship of the Rev. Allan Young. The Speakers were Mr. Robert Kennedy, M.A., F.E.I.S., formerly Rector of Marr College; the Rev. John Morton, M.A., Moderator of the Presbytery of Ayr; Provost A. D. Paton, Troon; the Rev. J. Gordon Grant, M.A., B.D., Minister of Portland Church; and the Rev. David G. Hamilton, M.A., B.D., Minister of St. Meddan's Church. The guests included the Rev. James L. Cotter, M.A., and the Rev. Ronald H. G. Budge, M.V.O., M.A., who conveyed his warmest and best wishes for the future of Troon Old. The Speakers were followed by an outstanding Musical Programme. There were three Special Anniversary Services- on 8th April, taken by Mr. Cotter; 15th April, taken by the Rev. James Richmond, M.A., B.D., Ph. D.,(a former member of Troon Old); and 22nd April, taken by Mr. Young, as his last service as Minister of Troon Old, prior to him taking up his duties as Minister of that very ancient and historical Church of St. John's, Perth, in May of this year. Mr. and Mrs. Young and their family take with them the blessings and the good wishes of all our members, for their future happiness and good health. They will be greatly missed in Troon.

TROON: May, 1973

I.M. Macintosh.