

The Gilcomston Story

This account [The Gilcomston Story 1868 -1968, 1986 edition] of Gilcomston Church from its beginnings to 1945 is written by an Elder, Francis Lyall; and from 1945 to 1968 by William Still. Subsequent volumes of the Gilcomston Story were published covering the 52 years of the Ministry of Rev William Still (6 Volumes in all). Only the beginnings are published here.

REV JAMES KIDD

The Rev. James Kidd D.D., LL.OO.P., (which being interpreted is doctor of Divinity, Professor of Oriental Languages) is perhaps the most remarkable man who will be mentioned in these pages. Our spiritual parentage can be clearly traced to him, though he died before the Disruption gave us birth. He was Irish.

James Kidd was born on 6th November 1761 near Loughbrickland in County Down, Ireland. His father died soon after and his mother took him and his two brothers back to her own home, Broughshane in County Antrim. She was poor but, like many another young widow, was determined to do her best for her lads. He learned his letters first from the Shorter Catechism and then from the Gospels. As he grew, various friends assisted his education. Soon he began to teach, though this was a temporary expedient until he could get into the training for the ministry. During this period he married and taking his wife with him he went out to America in 1784.

His emigration was no small matter in those days. Shipping was erratic for all sorts of reasons, and America had only just shaken off British rule. The struggle for independence had only concluded the year before, and the Federal Constitution did not then exist being adopted in 1787, some three years after Kidd arrived in Philadelphia. After some years as a tutor to various families he enrolled as a student in the University of Pennsylvania in 1787 and 1789. During these years he began to study Hebrew and it was his interest in this and other oriental languages that brought him back to Scotland. It seems also to have been the single mindedness of his interest in Hebrew that caused his friend Dr. Benjamin Rush to give him good advice which he never forgot. "I think I see you coming back from Palestine and lecturing to empty benches: study men and things."

Kidd was lured back to Scotland by a wish to study under John Brown of Haddington, then Professor of Divinity of the Associate Synod, at that time one of the best known scholars of the day. But by the time Kidd arrived, Brown had died. Kidd then followed up the second reason for his return, the preparation for the ministry, and enrolled first in the University of Edinburgh, and later in the Divinity Hall. At that time, however, he still intended to return to America once he had qualified as a minister. He had left his wife and children in Philadelphia, and all extant letters show his intention of returning there.

In Edinburgh he studied extensively under Robertson the famous Hebraist, and his old interest in languages was consummated with knowledge. It was therefore a great opportunity for him when the Professorship of Oriental Languages in Marischal College became vacant. He was urged to apply, did so, and was presented to the chair by the patron, Sir Alexander Ramsay of Balmain, in 1795. Mrs. Kidd was sent for and came on that tragic voyage. for her youngest child was swept overboard during the journey.

Kidd was taken on trials by the Presbytery of Aberdeen in 1795 and was licensed to preach on 3rd February 1796. In the same year he became the evening lecturer in Trinity Chapel, like Gilcomston, a chapel of ease. In effect this meant that he was responsible for the evening services there, and it was during the following five years that he developed his preaching style, and became known to the people of Aberdeen. When Gilcomston became vacant on the translation of James Gregory in 1801, the congregation, using their then unusual privilege of calling their own minister, called Mr. Kidd by a large majority to be their minister. There he found the place made for him, and for which he was made, where he laboured all the remaining years of his life. Nonetheless he retained his chair at Marischal College throughout his ministry. In 1818 his American friends made him a D.D. of the College of New Jersey; thus he became 'The Doctor.' Kennedy, who is not over-charitable about some of the Marischal Professors, has this to say (Book II, Ch. V; Vol. II p.99)

"James Kidd A.M., Professor of Hebrew"

"By the rules of the Church of Scotland, students in Divinity are required to apply to the study of the Hebrew Language; but this class, having formerly been taught in a very superficial manner, was for many years almost neglected ... (Professor Kidd got the Presbytery to make a recommendation on the subject) ... This recommendation has accordingly been attended with the desired effect. The class for Hebrew now meets twice a day for five days in the week, during the period of the session of

students, and then delivers lectures on textual criticism, Jewish antiquities, and other subjects connected with the study of the Hebrew scriptures. He also teaches and gives lectures on the principles of the Arabic and Persic languages, which are chiefly calculated for young men who intend to prosecute their fortunes in the East Indies; and to those they are attended with considerable benefit."

In other words Dr. Kidd fulfilled the duties of his office very well.

In Gilcomston he similarly took over from a man who has left no mark on history, and carried the whole congregation, members and adherents, to a level they might well have not attained, and that both in spiritual and in material matters. Gilcomston Chapel then seated about 2,000 and he soon filled it. "Rabbi" Duncan has said that one half of his congregation came for comicality, and the other half for the rich truth of the Gospel, but even so, that means there were over a thousand in Aberdeen of those days interested in that rich truth. These were taught the things of God by the simple exposition of scripture, simple teaching, yet profoundly connected with the daily events of his time. The outlines of sermons, some of which were published after his death (*Sermons and Skeletons of Sermons by Dr. Kidd*, 1835), show the great effort and labour which that simplicity cost him. They are not the simple and somewhat unreal expository exercises one meets occasionally today, but are illuminated by everyday examples, comments on political affairs and so on. They show every mark of a faithful intellect which still has a good grasp of reality. Curiously, in view of the style of the present minister, *Recollections* (See Bibliography) published by a member of the congregation after Dr. Kidd's death note that in all his preachments Dr. Kidd "invariably followed" the plan of "the exposition of scripture in its consecutive arrangement of books and chapters" (at p. 8). In the *Short Sketch* (see Bibliography), Kidd is spoken of as having "argumentative energy", "vehement volubility", his manner being "warm, fervent and commanding", and his language "bold, piercing and energetic." David Masson writes that Dr. Kidd had come to know the poor and the ways of his adopted city. Such knowledge informed his sermons. "[He] had come to know the poor intellectually, and it was no vague grasp that he took from the pulpit, but the grasp of one who had all the chords at his touch. His style ... was wonderfully perspicuous. I do not believe that he ever preached a sermon without being thoroughly understood by his poorest hearers." (David Masson, "Dead Men" at p. 134). These sermons were, of course, delivered on Sundays. Three times every Sunday Dr. Kidd walked from his house in Chapel Street (named for the Church) along what is now Minister Lane (named for him) or the street now called Kidd Street to the church. As there was no vestry he went straight to the pulpit, where he observed the slow fill of the church. Then punctually at five minutes to the hour the service began. Dr. Kidd would announce the opening psalm, and explain its content simply before it was sung. In prayer he was free, with fluency and discernment leading his people in that integral part of worship. In addition it seems his prayers were businesslike, not essays in theology. Alexander Bain states:

"The first occasion when I resumed attending the church, I was taken all of a heap with listening to his (Kidd's) first prayer; the easy flow of language, the choiceness of his topics, and the brevity of the whole came upon me like a new revelation." (Bain, 'Recollections' at pp.298-9).

Unfortunately it seems while Bain learned the techniques of religious expression from Kidd, he never came to know Christ. As Emeritus Professor of Logic and English in the University of Aberdeen, Bain wrote more of Dr. Kidd in his *Autobiography* which was completed and published by his executor in 1904 (see Bibliography), but this bears no trace of what Kidd would call the great transaction. At his own request Bain was buried without religious ceremonial. Sad, for Bain himself was an outstanding man. Dr. Kidd also began the first Sunday school in Aberdeen, and was well known for his care of his flock. He cared. Beyond his congregation the children of Aberdeen knew him well, and he them. In his *Glimpses of Golden Days in Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen Free Press, 1870), William Buchanan speaks of Kidd buying rolls for ragged boys, but first tearing them in two lest they try to re-sell them (p.129). He also chronicles bairns of a Sunday lining the streets from the church to Kidd's home, and pressing close to the Doctor that he might pat them on the head - and crying if they were passed over, an accident which was soon remedied (pp. 129-30). At the beginning of his lengthy article on Kidd, David Masson also speaks of the popularity of the Doctor among the children, and his customary blessing: "Be all good."

In his later days, Kidd was regarded with affection throughout most of the city. He was good-humoured, bringing laughter with him both to his University duties and to his ordinary life. In a short time within the congregation there was harmony, and a regular congregation which filled the church, intent on what was to be said. "In his earlier days in Aberdeen he must have had vehement personal critics and enemies. But he had tossed and gored them, or they had died off or gone into corners; and one heard of them chiefly in connection with the Gilcomston legend that no one that had ever resisted the Doctor had prospered." (David Masson, "Dead Men" p. 155).

According to Masson, Kidd's dominant quality was courage. This led him both to confront sin within his congregation and in the city at large. It also made him a controversialist in matters where he considered false doctrine was being preached. He had a series of battles with "Priest Gordon" another famous Aberdeen character. Again, in 1830 Kidd published *Correspondence between the Rev. Dr. James Kidd and the Rev. Charles Fraser on Points of Doctrine*, which had begun with another attack on Roman Catholic doctrine. Fraser, a Catholic priest, replied in Latin, which Kidd corrected and translated for the publication. (Kidd himself employed an "amanuensis well acquainted with his handwriting to transcribe the manuscripts of his letters to Mr. Fraser - his own penmanship being somewhat difficult to be deciphered by those who are strangers to it.") There was quite a furore, with pamphlets by Grammaticus and Veritas on Fraser's side, and Philologus (who was George Melvin, Rector of the Grammar School) and another wholly anonymous person (the Popery Exposer) on Kidd's side. This last was met by another pamphlet, "The Popery Exposer

Exposed; the Trial of the Rev. James Kidd and the Rev. Charles Fraser at the Bar of Candour by a Layman of the Catholic Church of Christ" (Aberdeen: King, 1831).

Kidd published four books, a *Treatise on Infant Baptism; An Essay on the Doctrine of the Trinity*; a course of sermons on *The Covenant of Grace*; and *The Eternal Sonship of Christ*. In his Introduction to a new edition of this last in 1872, Dr. R.S. Candlish notes that Kidd seemed to have tried to avoid showing any undue familiarity with God, and as a result his style had become rather abstract and transcendental. "Dr. Kidd, in common with others pursuing the same line of thought, has, perhaps, been led by the fear of becoming or appearing too humanitarian in his theology, to obscure his reasoning with a kind of almost algebraic or mathematical method." The comment is just. The difference between Kidd's theological writing and his sermons is marked, not in my opinion to the favour of the theology!

His last publication was an intervention in the growing debate on patronage, when he edited *The Rights and Liberties of the Church Vindicated against ... Patronage* (Aberdeen: Collie, 1834), which had first been published in 1689. Whatever might have been had Kidd survived to the main years of the Disruption controversy we may not know, but all the congregations which owe their being to his work 'came out' in 1843 (see below, James Bryce). Irrespective, his own labours were crowned some eight months before his death, when, on 31st May 1834, Gilcomston was constituted a **quoad sacra** parish.

The Doctor died suddenly, of a stroke, on Tuesday 23rd December 1834, having gone as usual to meet his Hebrew class in Marischal College despite having been unwell. He was buried in a box-style tomb in St. Nicholas churchyard just off the east side of the main path from Union Street to the Church, about thirty yards from the Church. Unfortunately the sandstone topstone is damaged and well weathered but the sides still contain data on the Oswald's, Kidd's son-in-law.

David Masson, another life Kidd touched, speaks movingly of the funeral, and the impact of Kidd's death on a city where he had long been a leading and influential character. Masson, recalling events of thirty years before, goes far beyond the usual Victorian pieties in speaking of Kidd's impact on the whole life of the city, and drawing attention in addition to his knowledge of the poor and his caring for them, so different from organised charity. Kidd was a character, not above such comments in his sermons as: "I ... for once request attention, without the disturbance of coughing or throat-clearing, which so frequently obstructs both speaking and hearing." Or: "You, sir, No. 3 in the second seat from the front in the top-left, what are you asleep for? Rouse him up, rouse him up. Won't he wake? Put your thumb into him, his next neighbour." (David Masson, "Dead Men" pp. 154-55).

In sum, Kidd was "a man of mark and influence" (David Masson, "Dead Men" p. 159), giving his Gilcomston a root which has from time to time broken out anew with fresh growth to the glory of God.

Before leaving Dr. Kidd it must also be noted that he was one of the formative influences on "Rabbi" Duncan, later Professor of Hebrew in New College. Professor John Duncan was one of the founders of the first Scottish Mission to the Jews, in Budapest, in 1841-3, from which he was called to New College indirectly on its foundation after the Disruption. He is not now widely remembered but his influence is not yet dead. He published little, but his life, chronicled in Principal David Brown's *Memoirs of John Duncan* (Edinburgh, 1874) shows what God can do with a willing man. [In 1984 the Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church reprinted *Rich Gleanings from "Rabbi" Duncan* edited by J.S. Sinclair, which was first published in 1925. The Committee also reprinted Duncan's *Pulpit and Communion Table* in the 1970's.]

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Addendum

Subsequent to the printing of the above, an intriguing connection between the ministry of Dr. Kidd and that of Mr. Still has come to light. Mr. Still recollected that a cousin of his, Hilda Steven, had made a family genealogy, which had traced the Stills to an Alexander Still, born in the Holburn Street area in 1805. From this start, Aileen Stewart and Hazel Beattie have established that a William Still who was married to Elspeth Watson of Belhelvie on 18 May 1793, lived at New Bridge, somewhere near the town end of the Hardgate, perhaps where the Hardgate dips between Willowbank Road and where it ends at Justice Mill Lane. Alexander Still, Mr. Still's great-grandfather, was born to them on 27th January 1805, and was baptised by Dr. James Kidd on 27th September, presumably in the then Gilcomston Church, for Dr. Kidd did not baptise privately except in extreme circumstances. Alexander was the youngest of three sons, William, born in 1802, and the eldest, James Kidd Still, born in 1801, showing by his name his father and mother's interest in Dr. Kidd's ministry. Last, to record a well known Kidd tale, omitted above, but enjoyed by many. Once Dr. Kidd saw a member of the congregation asleep during the sermon. He threw his Bible at the man, with the words: "If you'll no' hear the Word of God, you'll feel it."

REV JAMES BRYCE

On the death of Dr. Kidd the congregation elected to call the Rev. James Bryce. His election was by no means unanimous and there were two secessions from the congregation. One group of families went to the Bon-Accord Church. This Church stemmed from Trinity Chapel-of-Ease (where Dr. Kidd had been evening lecturer in 1801) and had been formed by those members of Trinity Chapel who had wished to call the Rev. Gavin Parker in 1828, a move quite in keeping with the urge for church extension at that time. As Union Terrace Chapel-of-Ease the new chapel functioned satisfactorily and became a full charge with the name of Bon-Accord Church in 1834 at the same time as Gilcomston. The minister, Gavin Parker, was a quiet man but of full strength of conviction, leading his whole congregation out at the Disruption to form Bon-Accord Free Church; later Bon-Accord and St. Paul's and now (1986) by a curious reversal again Bon-Accord Free Church.

The other group of seceders formed yet another congregation, that of Holburn Parish Church. They built the buildings which now form Holburn Central Church and called a young licentiate who failed to keep the members together. On his resignation they called the Rev. William Mitchell, who led most of the congregation out of the Established Church in 1843. As Holburn Free Church they erected the building at the corner of Bon-Accord Terrace and Justice Mill Lane, now an electrical goods warehouse. Under Mr. Mitchell's successor, Mr. McQueen, the congregation agreed to a Presbytery request to move towards Mannofield and build the premises which now house the Holburn West Church, the manse being next door to the present Gilcomston manse, at No. 16 Beaconsfield Place.

As can be seen from the foregoing paragraphs there was a certain vitality and purpose in the congregation which Dr. Kidd built up during his tenure of the Gilcomston pulpit. This is further shown by the formation of Woodside Parish Church, created partially out of Gilcomston in 1828 with the full consent and concurrence of Dr. Kidd. Again most of the congregation and the minister went out at the Disruption. Dr. Kidd had taken part in the discussion of the Veto Act of 1834 from which the Disruption may be immediately traced and this may explain why all his daughter churches with most of their members 'came out' in 1843. But to return to the point, the two secessions did not drain away all the life-blood of the congregation of Gilcomston. Under James Bryce the work continued.

Mr Bryce was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Stirling on 27th April, 1819, and was ordained by them to the charge at Stamfordham on 18th May, 1824. On 30th April, 1835 he was elected and presented to the charge at Wooler in the Borders but remained only two months being inducted to Gilcomston on 2nd July, 1835. As one might expect it was difficult to follow in the steps of Dr. Kidd, but Mr. Bryce did so with acceptance to most of the congregation. He certainly was not in the image of his predecessor. David Masson (later Professor Masson of the Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh) in his book *Memories of Two Cities*, 1911, p.300 lists those ministers whom he remembers, and amongst them we find, "James Bryce, a large-bodied man, the successor of Dr. Kidd in Gilcomston Chapel, sed quantum mutatus ab illo (but what a change from him!)"

Further detail on James Bryce is to be found in *The Aberdeen Pulpit and Universities* (Aberdeen: J. Strachan, 1844), a series of sketches by James Bryce (editor of the "Fife-shire Journal") which first appeared in the Aberdeen Monthly

Circular, and later in book form in 1844. These give rather a jaundiced view of ministers, particularly Evangelicals, (though the same comments about sloppy thinking, hyper-emotionalism, and inanity hold true in some quarters today). But Bruce's astringent comments do give a welcome view of the other aspect of these gentlemen whose saintliness in the received biographies carries a touch of unreality. According to Bruce, Bryce was

"the only really gentlemanly-looking clergyman on the Evangelical side of the Presbytery. He is a man that, for personal appearance, might be an Archbishop; and he has a fine manly honest face, which ought no longer to countenance the people with whom he has too long associated, but whom we sincerely trust he will throw overboard as speedily as he conveniently can."

But Bryce did not throw overboard his congregation, for he came out with them at the Disruption. It is a question however, how far he led his people, and how far he was led by them. From the accounts he does not seem to have been a real leader of men. For example, in 1839, during the absence of the minister, the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne, who was abroad as part of the committee looking into the missionary situation on the continent and the near east, a revival began in St. Peter's parish, Dundee. In 1840 W.C. Burns (late of China), under whose preaching the Dundee revival had begun, came to Aberdeen and with some success conducted various series of meetings in our city. As a result of considerable debate, particularly by attacks on the whole proceedings in the Herald, (a local newspaper of the day) the Presbytery of Aberdeen formed a Committee on Revivals, to look into the matter of revivals with particular reference to Aberdeen. After enquiry into the facts of various instances of conversion the Committee reported favourably. But the conduct of Mr. Bryce is very interesting. Though a member of the Committee, his name is in little evidence in the transcript of the examinations, and he was not present at the final meeting which approved revivals. Again to quote Bruce, yet bearing in mind that man's obvious detestation of evangelicalism,

"nobody gives Mr Bryce credit for sincere attachment to the party with whom he generally votes, but all are inclined to agree with a lady who ought to know something about his sentiments, and who says that he would be as good a Moderate as the very best of them, had he only a proper bond for his stipend."

Yet Mr. Bryce did sign the Deed of Demission and on 15th June 1843 was declared no longer to be a minister of the Established Church of Scotland. With most of his congregation he left the church as a result of that most important upheaval of Scotland's religious life of the last century. Nor was he passive thereafter for, until the establishment of a faculty for the Free Church, he acted as lecturer in Church History at the classes which later were formed into Christ's College. He was also active in translation work (see Bibliography).

The absolute truth of the Disruption will probably never be known until heaven. Each and every writer has brought his or her own religious attitudes to the matter, and in the rare cases where there has been an attempt to be dispassionate, the historian has leant over backwards not to be biased. Suffice it here to say that the immediate question was one of the authority of the state over the church, in particular whether the civil courts of Scotland could interfere to compel the settlement of a minister on the wishes of the patron of a church, the feelings of the congregation expressed under the Veto Act, notwithstanding. As has been said, Dr. Kidd had been to the fore in the matter in earlier days, writing on the subject and allowing anti-Intrusion meetings to be held in his church, and it is likely that it is due to his efforts that the congregation of Gilcomston was so willing to 'launch out into the deep.'

On 18th May, 1843 following upon Protest of the Erastian constitution of the Church of Scotland, many of the ministers and elders, delegates to the General Assembly of the Church, withdrew from the Assembly and formed the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. The ministers and elders of the Church in Aberdeen who adhered to the Free Church met in Melville Church, Aberdeen on Wednesday, 7th June, 1843, and forming themselves into a Presbytery of the Free Church, authorised the various members, elders and ministers who had left the established church to form Kirk Sessions. Page 3 of the Minute Book of the Gilcomston Free Church session reads,

"In compliance with the ... directions of the Presbytery, the Rev. James Bryce, and the following adhering elders viz: James Reid, Gardener, Springbank, Alexander Wallace Chalmers, Governor of the Prison of Aberdeen, Alexander Mackay, Dyer, Aberdeen, William Henderson, Painter, Aberdeen, Robert Grant, Japanner, Aberdeen, Thomas Milne, Nurseryman, Sunnyside, William Murdoch, Cabinetmaker, Aberdeen, and William Jessiman, Builder, Aberdeen, met on the evening of Saturday the Tenth day of June, Eighteen Hundred and Forty Three, in the Session House of the Original Seceders in Skene Terrace, to form a Session for the Congregation lately assembling for worship in Gilcomston Church: ... The Session was then constituted by singing, reading and praying, and was declared to be formed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the authority of the Aberdeen Presbytery of the Free Church of Scotland ..."

Gilcomston Free Church, the congregation which through being Gilcomston United Free Church, came in 1929 to be Gilcomston South Church of Scotland, was thus born.

Of the first elders special mention may be made of Alexander Wallace Chalmers. Mr. Chalmers was ordained an elder in Gilcomston on 10th February 1833, presumably by Dr. Kidd. He was throughout most of the period from then until the end of his life, Governor of the Prison of Aberdeen. This prison was not the familiar Craiginches of today, but was the Bridewell, erected in 1802. Parts of the walls of the Bridewell can still be seen. As one walks north up Rose Street, about fifty yards north of Thistle Street just before one comes to what used to be Kennerty dairies on the east and Middleton's paper works on the west side of the road (now housing on the west and a garden centre on the east), there is a gap of about nine inches between the houses. This gap marks the southern wall of the old prison. Again if

one walks up Thistle Lane from Thistle Street, the wall on the right hand, beginning at the corner of the lane, is the old prison wall. Finally when one is at the Chapel Street car park, looking west towards the manufacturing works, the old wall is clearly seen, built upon with brick. At the southermost corner of the portion of the wall you can still see a half circle rose style church window, which seems to have belonged to the prison chapel. These are the few traces left of a building which was of great importance some one hundred and twenty years ago. [But (1986) things change: portions of the Bridewell wall are still there, behind the buildings on the west of Chapel Street south of the multi-storey Car Park, and north of the premises of a car hire firm. The half-rose window at the south east corner of the Bridewell has been boarded up. Another part of the wall can be seen in the back area of the flats on Thistle Street and Rose Street, best seen through the access at the west of Hebron Evangelical Church. The Thistle Lane wall is still there, but otherwise it is becoming more difficult to see these fragments of history.]

Mr Chalmers, the Governor of the Bridewell, was one of the leading men of the congregation, and, at the Disruption, it was he who took much of the initiative in procuring a new place of worship. He was immediately appointed Session Clerk, and also Convener of the Committee of the Session and the congregation anent the erection of a new church. From the detailed minutes of both the Session and of the Committee which he kept and which are still in the keeping of the congregation, it is quite obvious that he fully discharged his duties to the best of his abilities, and was mainly responsible for the successful settling of the congregation in their first place of worship. His name also appears once or twice in the public press of the time, but normally without controversy. However, there is one revealing instance in which he was the subject of a considerable degree of animosity. It appears that he was in the habit of visiting the condemned criminals in their cells before their execution and of talking with them about Christ. In so doing he was following the example of Dr. Kidd, but in Mr. Chalmers' case there was the difficulty that he was an official of the prison. So the accusation arose that he was abusing his position to preach his own peculiar opinions to a person who was already under considerable stress. After enquiry Mr. Chalmers was fully absolved from any such accusation, and continued to visit the condemned - because that was what they wanted. For the rest of his life he apparently took an active part in the church affairs, including as Session Clerk until 4th September 1854, and latterly as Treasurer, attending almost every meeting of the Deacons' Court and Session. This service was broken only by his death on 20th June, 1862.

With Mr. Chalmers presiding, the Committee for the New Church got to work speedily. Until they should have obtained a site it was arranged that the congregation should worship at first in the church of the Original Seceders in Skene Square, but this proved somewhat small for the number - over 1,300 of the congregation had come out with the minister and Session. On 17th June, 1843, it was reported to the Committee that the Banqueting Room and the Lobby of the Public Rooms (now the Music Hall) had been rented until the end of November for 30 gns. The congregation provided their own seats, and these were removable so that they could be taken to the new church when that was ready. This accommodation was not very suitable, for only 850 seats were available in the space, while over 1,100 sittings had been applied for; but for the period it served.

On 17th June it was decided that the new church would have to accommodate at least 1,200 and an approach was made to William Henderson who was building a church in Footdee to see if he would undertake the planning of the new church. On 21st June, 1843 it was reported that several sites had been inspected. These included sites in Skene Street, Union Street, Union Terrace and Crown Street but the most favoured was a site extending 70 feet along Huntly Street and back to Union Wynd. This site feued to the congregation for £16:10/- per annum, is opposite the former Blind Asylum (now offices). For many years after 1868 the former Gilcomston church was in use as a public hall, "The Royal Albert Hall" (see Ordnance Survey map 1901). In 1968 the premises housed Aberdeen Motors body shop. Thereafter it was a chemist's depot, then an oilfield hydrographic base. In April 1986 it was up for sale.

On 4th July, 1843 Mr. Henderson submitted plans for the new building (for which he refused his fee). It was to be a single storey building, seating 1219 people with an allowance of 18 inches each. After deliberation on the interior arrangement this was approved, and it was also suggested that provision be made for a school room (Note: in those days education was provided by private schools, and church schools were one of the most important of these institutions). Finance seems to have been one of the least of the problems of the congregation at this time, and building was commenced before even the grant from the Free Church Building (5/- per seat) had been allowed. There seems to have been no ceremonial at the commencement. The Minutes of 28th July, 1843 state that there was no ceremony at the laying of the foundation stone, since there was no room to hold such.

Building was swift, and with the simple form of building selected, the church was opened for worship on Sunday 5th November 1843, again apparently without ceremonial. The degree of effectiveness of the church seems, however, to have waned, for reasons to which we shall come, but the school attached to the church prospered to some degree. And so matters continued until failing health required Mr. Bryce to retire to Edinburgh, where he lived for the rest of his days. In 1856 he published *The Rules and Practice of the Free Church in so far as differing from the Established*, and was made an LL.D. of Glasgow University in 1858. He died on 23rd March 1861.

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REV WALTER CRAWFORD MACGILVRAY

Mr. Bryce was succeeded by the Rev. Dr. Walter Crawford Macgilvray. He was born at Bowmore on the island of Islay on 4th November 1809 (the date on his tombstone is an error) and, though not to the extent of Dr. Kidd, had strong Irish connections. He took an M.A. degree at the University of Glasgow and, before entering the ministry, spent some time in Norfolk acting as tutor to the family of Sir William Jackson Hooker, the famous botanist, then Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. He became minister of St. Mark's Glasgow in 1835 and later of Hope Street Gaelic Church, where he was at the time of the Disruption, and which he, with most of the congregation, left. But there were still ties with Norfolk. On the 24th March, 1846, in the Parish Church at Irstead, Norfolk, he married Maria, one of the daughters of W.J. Hooker, and sister of the famous Joseph. Shortly thereafter he was sent out to Canada by the Free Church authorities to visit the Presbyterian church there. On the way, in September 1846, their boat, the *Great Britain*, which was at that time the largest ship afloat, and the ship for which James Watt had invented the screw propeller, struck rocks and sank. Many hundreds of the passengers were saved, and, only a little daunted, the Macgilvrays returned to Liverpool and re-booked their passage. This journey, by sailing ship, took some six weeks but was without incident.

Arriving in Canada, Dr. Macgilvray and his wife spent eighteen months in Sankleek Hill, and Lochiel of Glengarry, building churches and manses for the emigrants from Scotland. But not only did he preach in the Atlantic Canadian provinces, he was also asked to preach in New York, and, as a result of one sermon in that city, was gratuitously made a D.D. of Lafayette College. Soon after this unexpected academic honour, he received a call to St. Mark's, Anderston, Glasgow _ the Free Church equivalent of his first charge, _ and accordingly he returned to Scotland with his wife. However, at St. Mark's there were many difficulties, and ill health did not help, accordingly when the call to Gilcomston came he accepted.

Unfortunately the whole matter was not the simple resignation of Mr. Bryce and call of Dr. Macgilvray that might have been expected. Mr. Bryce had suffered from a throat complaint from about the time of the Disruption and in late 1851 acting on medical advice, and with Presbytery approval, he went to Edinburgh and remained there. He did not resign as this would have meant the loss of his stipend, to which he was entitled by law. There was an attempt, led by Walter Chalmers, the Governor of Bridewell, to have a colleague and successor to Mr. Bryce appointed in 1852, but Mr. Bryce was content that the services should continue to be conducted by the Rev. John Turnbull, who had been acting as assistant _ salary paid by the Deacons' Court. So then the Deacons' Court tried to have the salary of the assistant deducted from the sum due as stipend. But Bryce threatened to discharge Turnbull. The matter went to the Presbytery of Aberdeen who suggested arbitration, but the congregation refused to take the matter away from the courts of the church. Eventually a compromise was worked out, which Bryce insisted should be sanctioned by the General Assembly of the Free Church. (One remembers Bryce's gibe about his principles.) Approval to the scheme by which Bryce was to resign in order that another minister might be called, but was still to receive the sum of forty pounds a year, was given in 1853.

Eventually, therefore, it was possible for the Church to seek a successor to Mr. Bryce. Of a short leet of five, three refused to be considered for the charge, and it was agreed that an outsider, Dr. Macgilvray, should be called. This was done, the call being signed by 718 communicants and 105 adherents, a total of 823. Dr. Macgilvray was introduced to the charge on Sunday 22nd January, 1854, having been inducted on the Thursday previous. He found the Church in a somewhat uncertain state. Partially this was due to the acrimonious dispute between the Church and Dr. Bryce, but the roots were probably deeper than that. Apart from the other indications of the quality of Bryce's ministry given above, the general tenor of the minutes of the Deacons' Court and the Session during his ministry tend to fall off in interest, becoming stylised, and dead. Another indication may be seen in a point made by the Deacons' Court during the dispute with Dr. Bryce. Some 1,300 persons had come out of Gilcomston at the Disruption. Of these only 1,000 were left by 1850.

Dr. Macgilvray seems to have put new life into the congregation and attendances rose again. Dr. Macgilvray was a man of lively intellect, and of forthright speech. His name appears often in the local Press reports of the meetings of the Free Church Presbytery, and his points are mostly well argued. He was to the fore in many disputes, especially in matters regarding the Church of Rome, for he had all the dislike of a Protestant Irishman for that denomination. Other matters which exercised him included the proposal in 1873 for a union between the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church. This proposal was abandoned at that time, Dr. Macgilvray's voice not having been without effect. Again he stood firmly by the concept of an established church, though he could not for reasons of conscience join the Church of Scotland.

In most of these matters Dr. Macgilvray's beliefs and opinions left him in a minority, and it is suggested by an early writer in the Gilcomston Record (January 1895) that in this way he alienated himself from the more powerful elements in the church. This, it appears, cost him a chair in the Free Church College, Aberdeen. The lost chair was that of Hebrew, to which in due course Robertson Smith, later deprived of his appointment for reasons of heresy, was appointed. Dr. Macgilvray was also a candidate for the chair of Systematic Theology in New College, Edinburgh, the appointment going to Dr. J. S. Candlish, then minister of the Free East Church (and, as we have seen, editor of Kidd's The Eternal Sonship of Christ). But all was not disappointment. One notable success was Dr. Macgilvray's election to the School Board of Aberdeen at the first elections. He then came top of the poll by a majority of over 5,000 over his Roman Catholic opponent.

One may wonder about the spiritual state of Gilcomston at this time. In the period of 1858-60 there was a revival of religion. This revival began in America and spread to Ireland and by 1858 had reached Scotland. In the literary publications of the day this "phenomenon" was much discussed, and from this it seems that one of the first manifestations in any place was the gathering of a prayer meeting. In Aberdeen a daily prayer meeting began in the city in July 1858, and, by the invitation of Professor Martin of the chair of Moral Philosophy, Marischal College, Reginald Radcliffe (later Lord Radcliffe) came to Aberdeen on an evangelistic mission. The interesting thing about this revival is that it seems to have begun not among the established older church members, but among the young of the city. Bibles were read on trams, out of interest and not of affectation. Some young men had all night meetings in Rubislaw quarries. There is little immediate trace of this impetus of the spirit in the records of Gilcomston save only the holding of "a day of thanksgiving for the late abundant harvest" by appointment of the Synod on 12th November 1859. On 24th June 1861 Dr. Macgilvray reported to the Session that on the preceding Sunday he had read to the congregation the "Act anent the Work of Grace in the Land" of 28th May 1861, and had intimated that in accordance with the Act there would be a prayer meeting every night that week. But it is not too much to say on the basis of the other knowledge we have of Dr. Macgilvray that while he was not one of the leaders in the Revival, he encouraged it as he could. And the church benefited, for soon the Huntly Street building was too small for the attendances. James Reid, the assistant minister at Gilcomston, and later minister at Banchory, was well to the fore in the revival and must be given much of the credit for the increase.

It was at a meeting of the congregation on 9th December 1863 that it was decided that a new church should be obtained. "The meeting was largely attended and marked by great unanimity" (Deacons' Court Minutes). One week later the Deacons' Court met and heard a report from Mr. Jenkins, the Convener of the Buildings Committee, then Inspector of Works to the Town Council. It appeared from this report that the Huntly Street buildings were in a bad condition, in particular that the roof had fallen from its proper line, and that the walls were not thick enough to bear the weight that was being put upon them. It was agreed that a new church was the best solution, but the question arose where to build? After much discussion it was decided to seek a new site not too far away from Huntly Street and to sell the old building. This was done; the last sermon in the old building being on the text, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give you rest." (Ex. 33:14; 30th March 1868) In March 1869, once the congregation was well settled in the new church, the old building, despite Mr. Jenkin's assessment of its faults was sold to Mr. George Brown for £800. As to its later history, see p. 18 above.

At the time of the decision to move, Union Street had not been wholly feued out, and it proved possible, after much negotiation, to obtain the present site. The original area offered by the Town Council was only eighty feet wide, along Union Street but this was increased to eighty five feet, the feu duty being agreed at £24.7.6d per annum. The Disposition of the site was not executed until 24th August 1868, but the bargain was agreed upon by 2nd March 1864.

Looking at the title deeds it appears that there were several things which we are bound to do and not to do. It was stipulated that the exterior of the building should not be altered in any way without the written consent of the Magistrates of Aberdeen, but on the other hand we had the right (now probably gone) to dig out cellars under the Union Street pavement. There are other restrictions. We may not carry on the business of tanning leather, refining of tallow, making of candles, soap or glue; we may not slaughter cattle, erect glassworks, distilleries, smithies or iron foundries; we may not make brick or tiles or in any way employ the premises in any trade which is hurtful, noxious or nauseous to the neighbours.

Soon after the site was secured William Smith was appointed architect and drew up a preliminary set of plans. These were revised several times, the main alteration being that, as it was discovered that an edifice completely in granite would cost over £6,500, the present arrangement of freestone and granite was adopted. In addition the thickness of the walls was reduced. Even with that modification however, the cost was considerable, and Dr. Macgilvray offered that the manse be sold to help the building fund. His offer was accepted and the manse fetched £1,100. Still other economies had to be adopted. The plans were approved by the Town Council in April 1865, but the cost was still prohibitive, accordingly permission was sought for only part of the building to be built _ the main tower and the hall accommodation being omitted. This permission was granted in part, it being required in the title deeds that the tower would be built within five years.

Though the plans of the new building had been passed by the Town Council in April 1865, it was not until April 1867 that actual construction of the lesser project commenced. Building proceeded apace and the main part of the building was opened on Sunday, 5th September 1868. The Moderator of the Free Church Assembly, the Rev. W. Nixon of Montrose then preached on 1 Cor. 3:10-11, "According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise

masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." At the afternoon service Dr. Macgilvray preached on Ps. 132.8, "Arise O Lord into thy rest; thou and the ark of thy strength."

Thereafter the church prospered for many years under Dr. Macgilvray, although always in the background the question of outstanding bonds for the financing of the new church caused a degree of worry. There are regular references in the Deacons' Court Minutes from 1868 onwards to the Debt Liquidation Committee. Indeed the question does arise in one's mind whether the ensuing bad health of Dr. Macgilvray was not seriously contributed to by this worry.

At this time in addition to the normal services in the church, the congregation was also responsible for a Sabbath School in Skene Street, and for a congregational mission in the Hardweind (see D.C. Minute of 11th February, 1867). This street was in the Hard Ward area - just east of the old Gilcomston Church, (Gilcomston St. Colms (later) and now (1986) Denburn Church) stretching out towards Cardenshaugh - the area now crossed by Carden Place. Latterly this endeavour was called the Denburn Mission which separated from the church in 1871 and later was part of the Free East Church. Also there was still the schools run in connection with the church, both boys and girls being taught. (The Deacons' Court used always to meet in the Girls' School until the hall extension in 1879.)

In 1854/55 there is a very interesting series of minutes in the records of the Kirk Session. On 4th September 1854 the Committee of the Northfield Mission, Gilcomston, petitioned the Kirk Session to take the Mission under its "protection and fostering care." It was stated that the Mission would remain financially independent, but wanted the closer interest of the congregation to help it in its work. More details are given in the report of a Committee of the Session on 11th December 1854. The Northfield Mission which despite its name was in the Jack's Brae area, was begun by Alexander Laing, Coachbuilder, of Skene Street and a Gilcomston elder from 1847. While acting as a Superintendent of the City Mission, Laing had observed that the area was 'religiously destitute', and, had almost entirely at his own expense arranged the erection of a chapel and a school. Indeed it was known as "Laing's Kirkie." Unfortunately he was not successful in getting the approval of the Presbytery for the endeavour despite frequent application to them. As a result it had been necessary for the Northfield Chapel to be established as one of the stations of the City Mission. It was now hoped that if Gilcomston would take the Chapel under its wing the minister would come and take a communion service there twice a year and also dispense the sacrament of Baptism. Mr Laing also offered to resign from his position as Catechist, if, in the future, the chapel should increase sufficiently in size as to be erected as a church in its own right.

The Kirk Session was very willing to take the Chapel under its charge. The members of the Chapel were to be considered members of Gilcomston under the control of the Session on matters of discipline. However, the Session was not willing to proceed without the sanction of the Presbytery and asked Presbytery approval. This was not forthcoming. The Presbytery (Session Minute 5th February 1855) referred to their earlier statements on the application for recognition, under which they recognised the Northfield Chapel as a station of the Aberdeen City Mission. They recognised the work done by the Chapel in 'the reclamation of the spiritually destitute population' but would not sanction the administration of Sealing Ordinances in 'Mr. Laing's Chapel.' The function of the Chapel was 'not the providing of ordinances for those who are already Members of the Free Church or of any Evangelical Communion.' One cannot help feeling on reading the minute that the Presbytery was more interested in keeping the members of the several congregations represented coming into Aberdeen to those churches than in the reason they give. However, Presbytery had spoken and Gilcomston was obedient to it. But the interest in the Mission which the petition aroused was not without effect for from other sources it appears that we continued to take an interest in the outlying parts of the city, an interest which has persisted to some extent until the present. In passing it may be observed that Mr. Laing resigned from the eldership in 1860. No reason is given in the records, but it may be that he wished to devote more time to the Mission. It may illustrate the man somewhat in that the only other time his name figures in the Session minutes was on 2nd November 1857 when he gave notice of his intention to propose a discussion in the propriety of having Prayer Meetings established in the different districts of the congregation, and of commencing Sabbath morning young communicants' classes to be conducted by the elders. [Another account of the Northfield Chapel (written from the records of the Free Church Presbytery and other sources) can be found at pp. 172-6 of A.A. MacLaren, *Religion and Social Class: The Disruption Years in Aberdeen*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974)].

But despite the church not being allowed to take up the Northfield Chapel project, it was still able to continue with its other projects. Of these perhaps the most important was the Denburn Mission referred to above.

On 16th May 1870 the Session agreed to have the Sabbath School re-opened, and shortly after there was a thriving Sunday school of some 50 to 60 children. At the same time it was decided that the Superintendent of the Denburn Mission School should also submit regular reports. I am not sure, but I suspect that this school, originally started in connection with the Mission, is the direct ascendant of the present Skene Street school. Unfortunately Dr. Macgilvray's attitude to the question of church union (and probably the new supervision) caused a split in the congregation and a secession. The element which left and joined the Free East Church was also those most interested in the Mission and accordingly the Mission ceased its connection with us and was taken over by the Free East in 1871.

Through all the records of the early years of the new building there is a growing undercurrent of finance. Take this extract from the session minute of 5th February 1872:

"The Session unanimously requested the Moderator (Dr. Macgilvray) to publish the Sermon he preached yesterday ... and also the continuation thereof which will shortly be preached, provided no loss is sustained thereby."

That surely speaks for itself.

On 6th December, 1875 the Interim Moderator, the Rev. A.M. Bannatyne, informed the Session that Dr. Macgilvray had been told by his doctor that due to a heart complaint he was not well enough to continue his work in Gilcomston, and that Dr. Macgilvray (no doubt remembering Mr. Bryce) wished the Session to take proper steps to appoint a colleague and successor to him. The Session regretfully agreed to his request, and the Deacons' Court arranged payment of a stipend of £200 per annum (later reduced to £190) for him. The Session resolved,

"to record the expression of their very deep sympathy with Dr. Macgilvray in his severe and continuous affliction: their thankfulness to the Great Head of the Church for having enabled him to labour in the Ministry for upwards of forty years, and as their pastor for twenty one years ..."

So Dr. Macgilvray left us and retired to Edinburgh where he died on 30th June, 1880 at the age of 72 years. He was buried in Nellfield Cemetery, the Church undertaking the upkeep of his grave. In 1880 it was decided that a memorial tablet should be placed in the vestibule at the front of the church. This was done and the work completed in early 1881.

Dr. Macgilvray stands with Dr. Kidd as one of the men who have shaped our congregation's life. He was a man of great conviction, and of fiery utterance. In addition he was a writer, several of his books being still in the libraries of Aberdeen. These include *Ministry of the Word*, London, 1870, *A Life of St. Chrysostum* 1871, and *Lectures on Jude*, 1876. A confessedly incomplete, but extensive list appears in *The Aberdeen Book-Lover*, November, 1913. From such works the keenness of his mind, and the capacity he had for transmitting his enthusiasm for Christ is quite obvious. The Book-Lover article also contains a photograph of a head and shoulders portrait of Dr. Macgilvray, which is stated to hang in the Session Room of Gilcomston. Its present whereabouts are unknown. Can anyone help?

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REV ROBERT ALEXANDER MITCHELL

The Rev. Robert Alexander Mitchell was inducted to Gilcomston on 25th January 1875, and remained our minister until he died, somewhat suddenly after an attack of pneumonia, on 31st October 1897. He was a native of Nairn, where his great grandfather, grandfather and uncle had been successive Sheriffs-Substitute, his father being a captain in the Royal Navy. Another uncle, Donald Mitchell, was the first Scottish missionary to India. Mr. Mitchell graduated from Edinburgh University with First Class Honours in Classics and Philosophy, and, during his divinity course at New College, acted as Assistant to the Professors of Logic and Moral Philosophy at the University. From New College, as holder of the Cunningham Fellowship, he spent two years studying on the continent, at Bonn and Berlin - the other holder of the fellowship being his friend James Candlish, later Professor in Glasgow.

On his return from the continent, Mr. Mitchell was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and, for a time acted as Assistant to Principal Candlish (Dr. Macgilvray's conqueror) in Free St. George's. On 5th November 1864 he was inducted to the charge of Carnbee in Fife, from which he moved to East Kilbride in 1869, remaining there until he was called to Gilcomston as colleague and successor to Dr. Macgilvray, becoming sole minister on Dr. Macgilvray's death in 1880.

During his tenure of office much was done. In particular the remaining debt on the church buildings was cleared off and the halls were built. There was also a striking increase in the number of organisations connected with the church; for example, a Band of Hope was inaugurated in 1894, a Ladies Work Society, which later became responsible for the annual Sale of Work began in 1885, a Tract Distribution Society operated as a branch of the Women's Guild, and a Cycling Club was formed in 1896 - some of the routes chosen for outings of this club being very arduous.

One of the outstanding occasions in Mr. Mitchell's ministry can be pieced together from the records. On 12th June 1884 Mr. Mitchell announced to the Session that

"Isaac Cohen and his wife Rebecca Cohen who had been brought up in the Jewish religion, had embraced the Christian faith and were anxious to be admitted to the ordinance of baptism along with their children."

Mr. Mitchell was satisfied with their knowledge and character ... but let Miss Hunter take up the story.

"One outstanding event of his (Mr. Mitchell's) ministry was the baptism of a Jewish family. The church was packed. I was twelve years old at the time and was put at the end of the pew where I could see up the passage. I remember a dark haired man and a tall woman with a boy. I do not know if there were others in the family. A considerable time afterwards it was found that they had been baptised in another place. They would likely do it again as I expect they found it profitable. It was a great blow to Mr. Mitchell." [Source: Miss Hunter, who wrote her recollections of early Gilcomston for me while I was abroad in 1963-4 (F.L.)]

Despite this setback, Mr. Mitchell continued to be interested in missionary work at home and abroad. He fully supported the 1896 evangelistic campaign in Aberdeen and encouraged interest in the congregation. One married couple went out to the Gold Coast and soon after in 1894 Miss Elizabeth (Lizzie) Stewart went out as a missionary to Livingstonia. She taught there for some years and the congregation made several donations to the Livingstonia Mission to provide bursaries and prizes for her school, the Overtoun Institution. Some replies from the children of the school appear in early issues of the Gilcomston Record. In August 1901 Miss Stewart was married to Robert D. McMinn, a Missionary Teacher, and a son was born in July 1902. Unfortunately after returning home to their station at Bandawe, Livingstonia, Mrs. McMinn and the baby took sick. Both died within a week of each other in October 1902. This tragedy served to fix the church interest and for years an annual donation was sent to the Livingstonia Mission.

As would be expected from his academic qualification, Mr. Mitchell was a scholarly man, and also very shy and sensitive. Most of his work went into the preparations of his sermons, and apart from a few of these published during his life, he left literary proof of the quality of his mind only in "Scripture Beatitudes", a little tractate, and in "Words of Good Cheer", a copy of which is in the Special Collection of the University Library. Several times he was recommended for professorial positions within the Free Church, and for some years he acted as the examiner in Apologetics and Dogmatics, but he preferred the pastoral side of the ministry. The only time he ventured into public debate was during the Robertson Smith controversy when he spoke out for toleration.

But he was not the remote man that such a description might lead one to expect. He had many friends among his brethren as the variety of tributes to his memory in No. 13 of the Record make clear. In addition the wide variety of topics on which he lectured to the Woman's Guild show his breadth of interest. During his time also the Sunday School seems to have been very effective, as one would expect where the minister had been author of a series of Notes for Teachers. Finally the most revealing indication of his nature may be seen in his and his wife's adoption of an orphan of the congregation.

On the death of Mr. Mitchell, Professor James Iverach, a great friend of his, took over the duties as interim moderator in the vacancy. The actual task of ministry was taken up during the ten month vacancy by the Rev. Alexander Walker, who came from Australia. The only comment which we have on this period is not favourable. "Mr. Walker's sermons were mainly stories, and it was thought that he got them from a book called '1,000 Anecdotes suitable for the Pulpit.'" (Miss Hunter).

REV ROBERT FORGAN

The search for a new minister took longer than had been anticipated but eventually Robert Forgan came to the charge in October 1898. It is quite apparent from the Minutes of the time, that he immediately took a firm grip of matters. In particular he had a meeting with the Officebearers of the church on 22nd August before he came, and had his notes of this conference agreed by the Deacons' Court and entered in the Minutes. These provided that within the limits set by the Free Church he was to be free to arrange the conduct of worship and all matters relating to the spiritual work; that a harmonium should be obtained at once, and a pipe organ as soon as possible; that there be sundry alterations to the church fabric (these were mainly done in the 1909 re-fit, see Appendix); and details relating to finance were also laid down. On 23rd November the Session agreed to hold its meetings at a later hour to avoid a clash with the mid-week meetings on Wednesdays which Dr. Forgan started, and also that there should be a quarterly communion. (see Appendix) The new Hymn Book, on which compilation Mr. Mitchell had worked, was also speedily introduced, and, in short, one gets the impression that the church was awakened, having to some extent fallen asleep during Mr. Mitchell's later years, as his health failed. Spiritually also there seems to have been an infusion of new life. The Minister's Bible Class reached an enrolment of 130, while the minister noted that there were still quite a number of young folk who had not put in an appearance.

Dr. Forgan (D.D., 1919) was a native of St. Andrews, and a graduate with First Class Honours in Classics of the University there. He received his training for the ministry in New College, Edinburgh, and during his period there he obtained many prizes, including the Cunningham Fellowship, which had been held at one time by Mr. Mitchell. Graduating B.D. in November 1885, he served for one year as an assistant in the North Leith Free Church, from which he went as colleague and pastor to Free St. George's Montrose. In March 1892 he was elected as colleague and successor to Rev. Dr. Elder of the Free West Church, Rothesay, coming to it in 1898 as noted above. Dr. Forgan's wife was Mary Grace Rose whose father the Rev. Donaldson Rose was minister in Brechin. His brother, William Rose, shipbuilder, was the original owner of Hazlehead House, now Hazlehad Park, the house being leased to a cousin of the Forgan's, Donaldson Rose Thom, bursar of the University during the early years of the Forgan ministry.

During Dr. Forgan's long ministry the missionary interest of the church continued. It was particularly strengthened by two members who went out to the mission field, George G. Wilson in 1903, and Dr. Margaret Rose Forgan in 1913. Mr. Wilson was appointed Master of Works for the London Missionary Society in Peking, and was in charge of the re-building of the mission after the Boxer uprising. After that task was satisfactorily completed he was transferred to the United Free Church Mission in Manchuria where he carried out a similar task. The Record of October 1907 contains this extract,

"In the Missionary Record for October, one of our missionaries at Liaoyang, Rev. George Douglas, makes the following appreciative reference to Mr. Wilson and his faithful work - 'Ever since the Boxers destroyed our former quarters seven years ago we have been pursuing our work under hampering restrictions. Last year, however, was one of material reconstruction. ... The building programme was a very heavy one, including Church (the Wylie Memorial Church), Men's Hospital, Women's Hospital, and Bible-Women's Training Home as well as our own Mission House. These all went up simultaneously and without any interruption of the more spiritual upbuilding - our ordinary missionary operations. Fortunately we found a genuine and gritty piece of Aberdeen granite in our Master of Works, a Mr. Wilson, who is an elder in Mr. Forgan's church, and a son of our own manse. (Mr. Wilson's father was minister at Longside, and retired to Aberdeen.) He earned the respect of all by his steady devotion to duty, and by his patient continuance therein in all sorts of weather. We have dubbed him 'The burden and the heat of the day.'"

After his service in Manchuria Mr. Wilson served for many years as Secretary to the Union Medical College in Peking, being invested, with the consent of King George, with the Imperial Chinese Order of the Double Dragon by the Chinese Emperor on 27th October, 1913. This was conferred in recognition of his work during an outbreak of pneumonic plague in the city. During the First World War Mr. Wilson returned to the U.K. and enlisted. Sent to France, he rose to the rank of Colonel in the Labour Corps and was twice mentioned in dispatches. After the War he returned to China, but visited Gilcomston when on furlough, on one occasion bringing with him a little Chinese boy. During this period of his life he was given the O.B.E. by King George, and the last Empress of China honoured him with the Order of the Green Dragon. He returned to the U.K. about the early 1930's and worked for some years with the Mildmay Mission in London. Finally he retired to Aberdeen where he was again an asset to our congregation during the initial years of Mr. Still's ministry, until he died in December 1950.

Ten years after Mr. Wilson left for China, on 3rd November, 1913, another member of the congregation landed in Shanghai. This was Dr. Margaret Rose Forgan, who was on her way to a mission in Moukden in Manchuria. Her departure caused immense interest in the congregation as might be expected especially since she was one of the first woman doctors to be trained in Aberdeen. She worked in Moukden for many years, marrying the head of the college there, Mr. Findlay. The couple visited the church when on leave during the remainder of Dr. Forgan's ministry and thereafter. They were present during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and were then compelled to leave the country. Miss Hunter tells the story of how Mrs. Findlay was once in the Mission when the Japs came in. Looking at the Ten Commandments painted on the wall the Japs said that that would not do and the commandments would have to be changed. Dr. Findlay and her daughter returned twice to Manchuria thereafter.

Until the first edition of these pages was published, I had no knowledge of what happened to her after that. However, a copy of this *History* was seen by Dr. Findlay, and she wrote to Miss Hunter. The Findlays came home on leave in 1938, after Mrs. Forgan's death, and Dr. Forgan gave his daughter the gold wristlet watch presented to her mother by "Members and Adherents of Gilcomston United Free Church, 27th June 1919." Dr. Findlay wore it till her death in January 1982.

In 1942 the Findlays were repatriated by the Japanese in exchange for Japanese civilians. Mr. Findlay became minister of a church in Leith for several years. Then, in 1946 they returned to Manchuria where the Communists took over on 1st November 1948. "In March 1949 Jim took a sudden coronary thrombosis and passed away to the great grief of the Chinese Church. Mary [the Findlay's daughter] who went to Kalimpong, Himalayas in January 1946, joined the hospital in Moukden in May 1947."

"We were among the last group of six Church of Scotland missionaries who left in August 1950 to make it easier for the Chinese Church to carry on. For the Chinese Church it has become steadily more difficult. We know [1968] of Chinese friends who have been in prison and of these, two have died. We know of others condemned to 'reform through labour', who have returned home with greater faith to reduced status and salary. A few have accepted Communism. For a time we had direct news, but now none is getting through."

Dr. Findlay also noted that her brother, Robert, was then living in Essex, her sister Irene (Lady Macdonald) was living in Edinburgh, and Winsome (Mrs. Toombs) in London. Mrs. Toombs was in Aberdeen in 1985, and visited Gilcomston then. Correspondence with Mrs. Toombs allows me to add that Robert Forgan, her brother was M.P. for West Renfrewshire, 1929-31, and that a grove of trees was planted in his honour in Hazlehead grounds. (We have not yet traced it.) Dr. Findlay's son Ian is in the Borders and her daughter Mary is in general medical practice in Fife. However she has retained her interest in China and at the time of writing is at Lixonang (formerly Moukden, served by her parents and herself) teaching 'medical' English to Chinese doctors.

At the end of the entry relating to Gilcomston in Gammie's *The Churches of Aberdeen* it is observed that "Mr. Forgan takes a more than average interest in the Church Courts, and his reputation as an ecclesiastic - which is already high - is steadily growing." In 1903 Dr. Forgan was appointed with the Rev. W.T. Cairns of Abernethy to visit the Missions of the United Free Church in India, notably those at Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Bijnore and Mysore. During his

absence on the three month visitation the Rev. John Irving, M.A. of Innellan and Nice took charge of the church services, Dr. Mackintosh of Beechgrove Church acting as Interim Moderator. But Miss Hunter observes that this absence of the regular minister was not a good thing as many of the people drifted away from the church. The visit was, however, of value both to the visitors and the visited. In particular Dr. Forgan was able to visit one of his brothers who was then a missionary with the Church in India. In 1921 Dr. Forgan was sent as one of the United Free Church delegates to the World Presbyterian Alliance Conference in Pittsburgh, U.S.A., which considered the 1920 Lambeth Appeal, and to the International Missionary Council at Lake Mohouk, N.Y. This visit also was not without its uses and reflected Dr. Forgan's great interest in missionary work, which had been noted in the lauration for the degree of D.D. conferred on him by the University of St. Andrews in 1919. Indeed throughout the later years of the twenty-five that Dr. Forgan spent as minister of Gilcomston his interests in the wider work was becoming more and more apparent. This was finally consummated when he was appointed as Convener of the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church in 1923. The double task proved to be very arduous and, on 6th June of that year in consequence of a medical certificate Dr. Forgan resigned from active work in Gilcomston, retaining his connection for the purposes of the church courts.

Dr. Forgan went to Edinburgh and served for some years as the Convener of the Foreign Missions Committee of the United Free Church. After the union with the Church of Scotland in 1929, he became latterly the Convener of the Business Committee of the General Assembly of that Church. In 1936 Dr. Forgan completed fifty years in the ministry, over half of which had been spent as our minister. He died on Wednesday 10th January, 1940, just before his eightieth birthday, Mrs. Forgan having died on 2nd February 1938.

Looking back over his ministry there are several things which stand out about it. Firstly there is the way in which he took the congregation in hand at the beginning, the conduct of worship, rising attendance and general interest in missions. He was able to build well on the foundation laid by Mr. Mitchell. He carried out the reconstruction of 1909 and was responsible for the organ. All the memorial windows were installed during the initial years of his ministry.

But there are some surprises, which may or may not be due to Dr. Forgan. For example, Dr. Macgilvray was very strongly against the union of the Free Church and the United Free Church when this was first mooted in the 1860's. Yet when the Union came in 1900 there was no apparent protest raised. Partially this may have been due also to the tolerant attitude of Mr. Mitchell which would have had ample time to transmit itself to the congregation, yet the apparent lack of interest in the matter is surprising.

Dr. Forgan also took us through another crisis, one of interest to the lawyer. Following the case of Overtoun in 1904, (when it was decided that the Free Church continuing had right to the assets of the whole Free Church), and the consequent Churches (Scotland) Act, 1905, there might have been some question as to the title to the present buildings. However, thanks to the foresight of the original Trustees for the congregation, and Dr. Forgan and his session, our title was confirmed as it now stands.

Yet some questions do arise in one's mind. Dr. Forgan took over a large number of organisations in the church, and he added to them. Christian Endeavour was started (September 1902) as was a Young women's Group, and in December 1909 a Gilcomston tent of the Order of Rechabites was begun to aid in the temperance work which was of great interest at the time. The Band of Hope, began under Mr. Mitchell functioned until 1920. The 7th Company of the Boys' Brigade was started in December 1899 and continued until 1950. Connected with it was an Old Boys' Association and a team of Life Boys. Choir work burgeoned after the organ was installed, at one point there being a Senior, Junior and Children's Choir.

The Session and Deacons' Court minutes also show a similar proliferation of subgroups within the church, and it may well be that the growth of committees for this and that was a result of Dr. Forgan's increasing interest in the Courts of the church. The ultimate was reached when a committee was established for the Revision of Committees and Appointment of Officials, but they did not do their work too well, for on 9th June 1920 the Deacons' Court appointed three men "a committee to assist the Church Officer and the attendants in rolling up the Linen used for the Pews after the Communion." But while one may find so many committees strange, there is no doubt Dr. Forgan was a good steward of Gilcomston.

REV JAMES G LUNN

After a vacancy lasting eight months the Rev. James G. Lunn from Sherwood, Paisley, was inducted to Gilcomston on 10th June, 1924. There is much in the Deacons' Court about the obtaining of a new manse, which, it appears was promised Mr. Lunn before he came. Finally one with rooms large enough to take his grand piano was obtained in Albert Street. For a time things went well, but then, according to surviving members of the time, he seemed to lose interest. His sermons tended to depress due to lack of fire. This may have been due to the onset of an illness which several times prevented Mr. Lunn's attendance at officebearers meetings, and which required a serious operation in January, 1931.

Under Mr. Lunn there were certain innovations. In particular the Freewill Offering scheme was adopted on 22nd March, 1926 and the Wayside Pulpit was set up in May, 1933, from which time it has been used of God in many ways. But for all that, it can only be said that a certain poverty crept into the church. One manifestation is in the Record,

where the initial paragraph for some seven Novembers running gives roughly the same message with slight variation in terminology. "The winter's work has begun and all the organisations are getting into their stride."

There is little or no other data of interest either in the Minutes or in the Records for this period, but, reading in from later proceedings it is clear that there was a break-down in communication between the minister and the officebearers. This came to a head at the Annual Meeting in February 1935 when the minister, without reference to the Session stated that unless the financial position and membership improved the Church would have to think either of union with another congregation, transfer to another place, or suppression of the charge. At the next meeting the Kirk Session dissociated itself from these sentiments and Mr. Lunn apologised for his failure to confer with the Court before making them. The Kirk Session went on to disagree with Mr. Lunn's assessment of the situation - membership 460, overdraft £130 - and pointed out that there was another avenue open which Mr. Lunn had not mentioned in his remarks: he could effect a change in the ministry.

In April, 1938 Mr. Lunn accepted a call to Abbey Church, Perth. Again there seems to have been a split in the membership, for, while the Session Clerk, James Fraser, knew of the impending move, the Clerk to the Deacons' Court, Samuel Troup, first heard of it when the Presbytery's sustaining of the call was announced in the local Press.

There was debate for some four months after Mr. Lunn left in June as to whether the congregation should continue at all. At length at a congregational meeting on 1st September the decision was taken to carry on, and a Vacancy Committee was formed soon after.

REV W LINDSAY STEWART

On the advice of Dr. Gossip the congregation called the Rev. W. Lindsay Stewart, who was inducted on 24th February, 1939. Mr. Stewart was qualified not only as a minister but also as a psychologist. Great crowds used to come to the evening services when Mr. Stewart related the insights of the psychologists to the Christian religion, and in the first year of his ministry the membership rose from 385 to 515. The organisations also prospered. In April 1940 the 48th Aberdeen Company of Girl Guides was formed in connection with the church, though this did not replace the Girls Guildry already existing. (Both these organisations ceased about 1960.)

In November, 1940 Mr. Stewart married one of the members of the church, Miss Margaret Paul Hood, thus becoming the only minister so far to have married while in the charge. A daughter was born in October, 1941 - two of Dr. Forgan's five girls were born during his Gilcomston ministry.

The outbreak of the Second World War disrupted the activities of the church. Since the A.R.P. had taken over the halls, it was not possible for any of the organisations to carry on their programmes. However, since it was decided to obtain blackout material, it was possible to make full use of the church for both normal services.

In April 1942 Mr. Stewart applied for a commission as a Chaplain in the Royal Air Force. After discussion it was decided that he should resign if he obtained this position. In October it was decided that he be asked to stay on in any event. The Session Clerk, James Fraser, resigned at this time. Then at a later meeting that month this latter decision was confirmed and it was agreed to request a temporary union with West St. Andrews Church. For some time this arrangement worked with the congregations meeting alternately in each church. Then in December, 1943 Mr. Stewart finally resigned.

The following appreciation of Mr. Stewart by Mr. Still was printed in the Record for June, 1965 subsequent to Mr. Stewart's death in May of that year.

"We deeply regret to record the death of a former minister of our congregation, the Rev. W. Lindsay Stewart, in Canada.

Mr. Stewart who belonged to the South of Scotland was trained in psychiatry as well as in divinity, and his coming to Gilcomston and Aberdeen created a great deal of interest in the community, and many came to hear him preaching on the relation between the Christian faith, the science of psychology and the healing art of psychiatry. Mr. Stewart drew around him a good many who were in need of such ministrations, and practised with enthusiasm and success. He was a man of great sympathy, being not of over robust constitution himself; he had a gift for friendship, which he exercised in interesting many in Christian things far outwith the church.

He commenced his ministry in Gilcomston in the first year of the second Great War and soon was uneasy of conscience about remaining in a pastorate especially since he was specially qualified to undertake certain aspects of a padre's work in wartime. At last he decided, and resigned the charge, to serve in the R.A.F. where he rendered special service. In 1947 he became Chaplain and Counsellor to the University of British Columbia, Canada, but the next year returned to Scotland to become Minister of St. George's Tron Church, Glasgow. In 1954 he became a Minister of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States and was seconded to work as the Chaplain and Clinical Director of The Salvation Army Men's social Service Centre, San Francisco. In 1962 he became Executive Director of the Edmonton Day Centre for homeless unemployed men, and last year Mr. Stewart was readmitted to the United Church of Canada.

We honour him for the depths of his compassion for men in their human plight, and for his life of tireless service to relieve them, and to restore them to human decency and dignity. His last unfinished sermon, which was to have been

preached on the Sunday following his death, was a heart cry against the devilishness of racial bitterness, and the hideous things men, black and white, do to each other in the furies of their hatred and bitterness."

In the period from Mr. Stewart's resignation in December 1943 to June 1945 when Mr. Still was inducted, there were attempts to suppress the charge of Gilcomston South and to merge it with another - West St. Andrews being the obvious choice. Both Mr. Leith and the then Session Clerk, Mr. S. Troup, were to the fore in the discussions. One remarkable point emerges from the minutes of these meetings. Less than seventy members attended the deliberations. Only fifty-eight out of a roll of about six hundred were at the meeting which finally decided to carry on. Twenty-six voted for continuing, eighteen for union and fourteen for dissolving the congregation. Even allowing for the War, the fact that only 5% of the congregation voted to carry on, is telling. Concomitant with that, the Session minutes contain lists of those asking for disjunction certificates. To meet this crisis in part, the joint arrangements with West St. Andrews were ended in May 1944, since it was felt that the church was breaking up and had to meet in its own premises if it were to preserve its identity and integrity. The Rev. G.M. Denny Grieve, then an assistant minister, came and took the services.

REV WILLIAM STILL

Eventually the Presbytery sanctioned the calling of a minister and a Vacancy Committee was set up. Various men were heard, Mr. Still not being among the number. Just about this time Mr. Still sustained a severe fracture of the ankle and returned to Aberdeen from his assistantship at Springburnhill, Glasgow, to recuperate. A Committee went to see him and he was asked to preach. Thereafter he was elected as our minister, the call being signed by seventy-four members and two adherents out of a congregation of almost six hundred. The induction was on 7th June, 1945.

One of the first tasks which had to be done was the revision of the times for the meeting of the courts, and a monthly session meeting on the first Monday of each month was agreed on 13th June, 1945. On 25th June the time of the evening service was put back from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. an innovation retained until 1963 when the present 7.00 p.m. service was introduced. On 10th October Gordon Ross was appointed organist, taking over from Verden Sykes who had been locum tenens for some eighteen months. The Record of December 1945 (No. 124) pays tribute to Verden Sykes and welcomes Mr. Ross noting that he already had become a tower of strength in prayer. "Give him a friendly word of welcome when you see him, it helps such a lot." Mr. Ross continued as organist until his death in November 1984. He was succeeded by Mr. Andrew Tulloch. The present Church Officer, James Sinton, was appointed on 23rd July, 1950, taking over from George Emslie. Mr. Sinton's mother, Mrs. Marjorie Sinton was church cleaner from 1946 till 31st October 1985. We have an unrivalled tradition of long faithful service by so many members and officebearers.

The Session Minutes show an interesting pattern in these times. In the years 1942-1945 there are many entries relating to disjunction certificates, and then after Mr. Still had been in situ for some three months there starts a spate of new members. Many names familiar today are to be found as admitted in these lists.

But there was a struggle to come. The initial enthusiasm of some, including a number of those who joined in the early years of the ministry, soon waned. In addition the various organisations had either to associate themselves with the fresh evangelical impetus of the church, or be replaced by activities more in keeping with it. It is unnecessary to go into the detail of the execution of the policy, as a result of which not a few officebearers left the church. But the fruit of this emphasis is easily seen.

The following was written by Rev W Still.

BEFORE 1945

The second part of this history deals with the present ministry, which at the time of writing (1968) is in its twenty-fourth year. If Dr. D.T. Cox and the Presbytery of those trying days had had their way, Gilcomston South would have been closed down as a Church of Scotland congregation, and the building by now might have been either a Congregational Church, or, appalling thought, a warehouse or club. It is a pity that the turning point in the congregation's affairs then hinged on money, although money or the lack of it is often eloquent of the presence or absence of something of greater importance. It was the proceeds of the garden fete at David Henderson's home, Kererra, which constrained Presbytery to permit Gilcomston to call another minister. The story of what followed, up to the time of writing, is therefore closely bound up with the subsequent call to that minister. And because the work in Gilcomston South has had wider repercussions than within the congregation and within the city of Aberdeen, the only way I can recount the story is to begin by telling of God's early dealings with me. A few strokes of the pen ought to suffice for that, before I plunge into the story proper.

From the age of seven I suffered a series of set-backs in health which seemed by adolescence to confirm my inability to make anything of my life. I tried to work with my father in the fish trade at fourteen, turned to music at seventeen, to Christian service in The Salvation Army at twenty-three, and in six months was in a state of nervous exhaustion. Four years later, somewhat improved in health, I offered for Salvation Army work again, but was rejected on the

grounds of health, and immediately decided that I must try to fulfil my, by then, clear call to divine service, elsewhere than in that branch of the Christian Church.

God was in this, although my immediate reason for joining the Church of Scotland was that there was a Church of Scotland College in Aberdeen, which meant that I could remain at home when I was not very well. Within five weeks of deciding on this course I had taken the English Prelim, which then included the whole of British History. I worked almost night and day, having little educational background because I had left school for good at the age of thirteen, a sick boy. The passing of that examination seemed a miracle to me, and God used it to fire me to new endeavour and thus to strike a major, if not mortal, blow at my crippling sense of inferiority.

I entered the University next year at the commencement of the Second World War, 1939, and although the life of the nation was in a ferment by then, and my first year was rather humiliating academically, especially in Greek studies, by my second year I found my feet and emerged first equal in history out of a class of eighty. My joy was unbounded, but beyond the pleasure at that success there was the confirmation that God was with me helping me, and that if I followed Him I could do what in my fondest dreams I and my best friends thought impossible. Of course in certain studies at the age of twenty-nine I had an advantage over youngsters ten years younger, but this told, especially in essays. I remember Rex Knight, our Psychology Professor, asking in class (a large one) while reviewing examination papers "Is Still here?" "Yes, sir." "How old are you, Still?" "Twenty-nine and a bit, sir." "I thought you were older, your paper shows experience." It was bitter experience, mostly, but God was in that to see me through.

I spent three years in Divinity following my modified Arts course, and as health returned, plunged into active student life. I became Director of Publications for the Students' Representative Council, composed and conducted music for a students' theatre show, helped to begin Morning Song, the short student service at King's College, which continued for more than thirty years. I played the organ. Music loomed large then, and with the help of other student musicians such as Eileen Watt and Kitty Benson, filled some of the largest churches in town for music recitals. Thus my name came to the fore in this sphere before I left Aberdeen to take up an assistantship at Springburnhill Parish Church in Glasgow under the Rev. William Fitch. Climbing tenement stairs in Springburn was different from the glamour of University life and from popularity with masses of Aberdeen's Kirk and musical folk, and since my faith was not yet very biblically founded, although real enough, I became a little cynical about my calling and doubtless grieved William Fitch by some of the things I said from his pulpit.

Then came the "argument" with a train which leaped too quickly into motion at Troon railway station. I had gone to that town to speak to Tom Fitch's Woman's Guild. The result was a badly broken ankle, although my life was saved. I lay in the Western Infirmary, Glasgow, from the last day of November 1944 until February 1945, thence home to Aberdeen on crutches. While in the Western Infirmary, Glasgow, an informal approach was made to me on behalf of Gilcomston South Church to enquire if I would be interested in becoming their minister. The answer was a polite but firm, No: my teacher, the Master of Christ's College, Professor G.D. Henderson, had advised against ministering in one's home town. It was while hirpling about Aberdeen, first on two crutches, then on one, and on two sticks, then on one, that my maternal Aunt Bella, recently widowed, came to the West Church of St. Andrew with me one evening for the 7 o'clock service. It was an informal service and the minister chatted with people in the aisles afterwards. He saw me and asked what I was going to do. I said, "Erskine Blackburn of Holburn Central Church (who was Interim Moderator in the Vacancy) has asked if I will accept a call to Gilcomston South. What do you think?" He said, "I wouldn't. My assistant (a contemporary of mine) says 'not even Saint Paul could do anything with that place.'" The opinion of the assistant in question was not worthless, because Gilcomston South had been informally linked with West St. Andrew during the absence of the Gilcomston minister, the Rev. W. Lindsay Stewart, on war service with the R.A.F. The West St. Andrew's assistant had some pastoral oversight of the Gilcomston congregation and paid much appreciated visits to its aged and sick members. Later that evening while waiting at the 'bus stop, my aunt asked me "What was the minister saying?" I told her. "And what do you think of that?", she asked. Then almost casually and with, as I recall it, a far-away tone in my voice and no sense of the dramatic, and certainly no sense of destiny, I replied, "Maybe less than Paul will do." I now know that these words sealed my call. On Erskine Blackburn's next visit to my home, he found me quite assured that I should accept the call. How many times since I have mentally pinched myself and said, "Man, you were mad!" I could not say, but I know that it never occurred to me thereafter to question my madness.

How Gilcomston South kept alive in hard times is a long tale, which has often been told me by its older members, especially Walker Leith, long-time Treasurer of the congregation, how the few fought bravely to guard the congregation life. In the light of subsequent events I have no doubt that God was in all their doughty struggles with the Presbytery to keep the remnants of a congregation together when all seemed lost. Walker Leith had heard of my filling Aberdeen Kirks for music recitals, and also knew that I had a Salvation Army background, and, spurred by his friend, David Henderson, who knew me personally and who had opened his gardens for a fete which cleared £400 of debt in Gilcomston, he set negotiations in motion, being convinced that I was the man. This was after twenty-seven applicants and a leet of four preachers had been rejected because the call to minister at Gilcomston at that time was an all-or-nothing bid. It is as clear as day now, and perhaps was to those involved in it, then that God was certainly at work.

And this has been the continual note of the Ministry since. It is the knowledge that God was in the call that has given authority to the preaching of the Word of God in such a way as to call men to Christ and to His service. This is also the

the boldness of what I wrote then, and as I recall it there was the same note in the pulpit. Small wonder that so many have found within the walls of Gilcomston South the certitudes they sought and needed for lives of purposive service for Christ. We have always insisted, and do still, that whether it is a matter of vocation or fellowship (the two things life is about) God means his children to be sure what his will is for them.

Obituary by F. Lyall

William Still, who died at the age of 86 on 30 July, was minister of Gilcomston South Church of Scotland, Aberdeen, for fifty two years until his retirement in May this year.

The son of a Salvation Army fish-merchant, William Still entered the ministry of the Church of Scotland after training at the University of Aberdeen where, during the early years of the War, he found time to act as a musical director of the annual Students Show, and to organise and take part in musical recitals in the town.

After a year as Assistant to William Fitch at Springburnhill, Glasgow, he accepted a call to Gilcomston South, and was inducted to the charge on 7 June 1945. Gilcomston was then in such a financial and spiritual state that the Presbytery had attempted to close it, and one minister of the time had suggested that not even St Paul could do anything with it. In later years Mr Still recalled musing that 'maybe less than Paul will do.'

Mid-week bible study and a meeting for prayer on Saturday evening were soon introduced, and have continued without break since. In the earliest months of his ministry William Still was fiercely evangelistic, Billy Graham coming as one of a team of four for meetings in 1946. In 1947, however, he began an expository ministry and also the writing of daily bible notes in the Congregational Record. The systematic coverage of the whole bible, verse by verse and chapter by chapter was an innovation in the Church of Scotland of the time. Many have since fruitfully followed the pattern.

Gilcomston South developed in various ways, but, in the early years, not without pain. His friendship with the Rev James and George Philip, and staunch office-bearers such as William Leslie, John Smith and John Hardie, sustained him through awkward times. Convinced that the core of the kirk should be worship, prayer and the preaching of the Word, William Still sought the simplification of church structures. He passionately believed that the congregation should worship as a family, and deplored the way in which smaller groups in churches often became mere social clubs. Many traditional activities therefore ceased in Gilcomston- the Women's Guild, Boys Brigade, Youth Fellowship, even the Sunday School for those over seven. Such a concentration on the basics of church life was attractive to many. These fell into two groups: those long-term members of Gilcomston who saw to its affairs, and others who, in Aberdeen for a period, often in higher education and latterly in the oil industry, attended for several years before moving on to responsibilities throughout Scotland and, indeed, the world. Large numbers of latter group kept and keep in touch with Gilcomston. The former group learned to work as a family rather than as part of an organisation. Mr Still was not a man for the tedium of meetings and agenda, and he knew it, keeping formality to a minimum. Thus, although it was at the time misunderstood by some, it was a blessing that he several times declined nomination as Moderator of the Presbytery of Aberdeen.

For him the essential matter was that many were converted. Many ministers owe their calling, or their re-invigoration to the Still ministry. In the 1970s, he began a meeting of like-minded ministers in order to discuss common problems and share expertise. This has developed into the informal Crieff Fellowship, which meets three times a year and is attended by men and women from many denominations in the U.K. and beyond. Chaired until recently by Mr Still, Rutherford House in Edinburgh, an evangelical think-tank now ably warded by David Searle, stems partly from the need, perceived in the Crieff Fellowship, to provide a resource by way of library, discussion groups, publications and conferences through which evangelical views can be properly articulated in Scotland. Of course this has been viewed with alarm by some in the Kirk, who fear an organised 'evangelical party' but their fears are misplaced. William Still was loyal to the Kirk, opposed schism, strove to maintain unity and surely cannot reasonably be faulted for standing firmly on the Kirk's basic beliefs.

Until aging began to over-take him in the last ten years or so, Mr Still was in demand as a speaker throughout the U.K. Many of his conference addresses, sermons and the bible-reading notes and Minister's Letters in the Record have been re-worked into publications. Recordings of his sermons are available in several tape-libraries in the U.K. and U.S.

But this recital of facts and events omits the most important element of his ministry. Living a life of prayer, close to Christ, Mr Still was a sympathetic friend, listener, and guide to many. His correspondence was immense. He rarely failed to recall even small encounters with this individual and that, and his concern for each, without being directory in his advice, resulted in his helpful friendship being sought even during his last period of weakness.

When William Still's ministry began in the closing months of the War, there were few evangelical ministers and fewer prayer meetings in the Church of Scotland. That the picture is now very different is in large measure the result of a life rich in spirituality, and in devotion to his Lord.