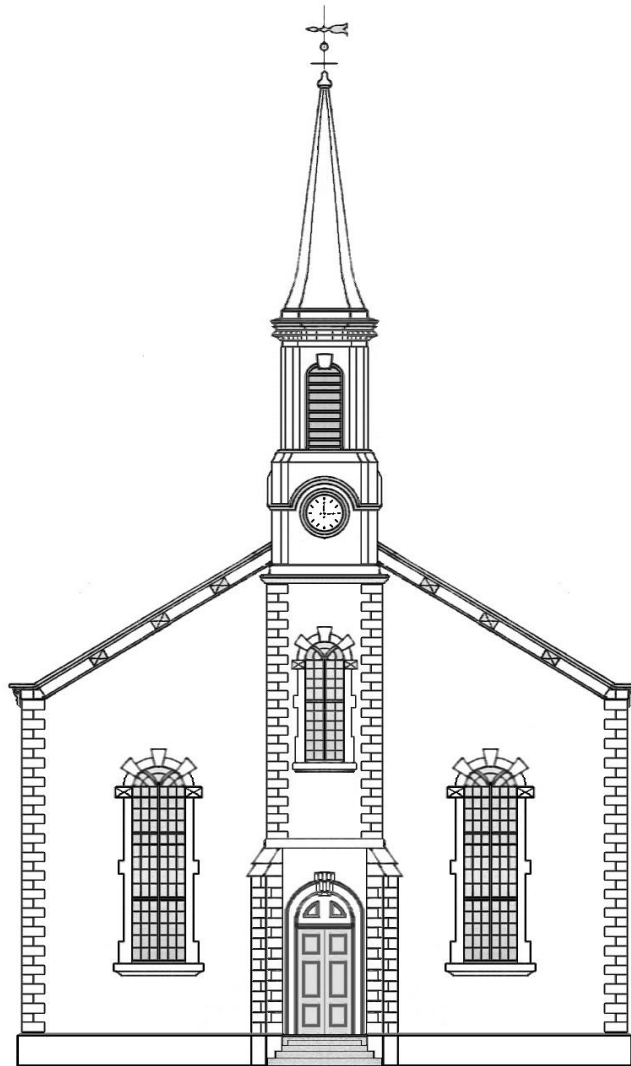


St. Andrew's United Free Church of
Scotland
Bellshill



A Brief History

1762 - 2012



Introduction

Many members of St Andrews will not be aware of the history of our congregation - "The First Relief Church in the West". The following pages are intended to emphasise the importance of our heritage and to rediscover some of the true values of the "Auld Kirk".

Two publications have already been written on the history of our St Andrew's congregation:

- "THE FIRST RELIEF CHURCH IN THE WEST"
by the Rev. W.R. Thomson BD. (1913)
- "THE NARRATIVE OF THE RELIEF CHURCH, BELLSHILL"
by the Rev. J. Wilson (1847).

A number of copies of the first book survive within the congregation, and I am sure could be borrowed by arrangement by anyone wanting to read more. The second book is much rarer - as far as we know only one copy exists, this book is being converted into electronic format and will be available soon for printing, or as a pdf (portable document format) document.

A series of "Historical Notes" (we think 4 in total) were prepared during the ministry of the Rev James Forsyth in the 1970s, and these too would be of interest to anyone wishing to read into the history of our church. We have only been able to find the first in the series (only one copy) and what we think are drafts of the other booklets. The first booklet in the series is available as a pdf document, and paper copies can be obtained from the committee, or downloaded from the church's website at www.standrewsukchurch.co.uk.

The “Dissenters”

The “Dissenters” who established our Congregation, withdrew from Bothwell Parish Church in September 1762.

At that time, any situation of vacancy was resolved by the “Law of Patronage”, this was the situation at Bothwell. Bothwell Parish became vacant in April 1761 and a Mr. James Baillie, minister of Shotts, was presented to Bothwell Parish as the Sole Nominee by the Tutors of the Duke of Hamilton - since the Duke (the Patron) was only a child.

There was no objection to Mr. Baillie on the grounds of character or ability (he was appointed in 1776 to a Divinity chair in Glasgow University). Nothing in the records shows that the dissatisfied members were looking for trouble - their only grievance was that Mr. Baillie was the nominee of the Patron - in this instance the young Duke’s factor.

Only 8 persons signed the Call, yet James Baillie was inducted to the Charge. The “Dissenters” withdrew from the church. The split in Bothwell was peaceful, in other situations soldiers were used to enforce disputed settlements.

The First Relief Church in the West

The “Dissenters” were unwilling to abandon the Bothwell church in which they had been reared, and they requested the Presbytery to allow the Elders to grant certificates (lines) “to persons who wished to observe sealing ordinances in the neighbouring Parishes”, and promised to attend Mr. Baillie’s ministry on ordinary occasions that “they might judge for themselves” whether or not they would be able ultimately to submit to it.

It was this determination to “judge for themselves” that led to the Dissenting movement. The request was refused by Presbytery and the “Dissenters” applied to the “Relief Presbytery”, where their application was readily granted.

Thomas Gillespie was the minister of the Parish of Carnock near Dunfermline, he was deposed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1752 for refusing to take part in the forced settlement of a minister at Inverkeithing. Thomas Gillespie preached to his own congregation - initially in the open air but later in a dissenting

"Meeting House". In 1761 he founded the "The Presbytery of Relief", initially linking with the Church in Jedburgh, which was erected in 1757; the second was at Colinsburgh, a small village in the East of Fife, in 1761; the third was at Blairlogie in Stirlingshire built in 1762; the fourth at Auchtermuchty, in Fife, which was erected in the same year. Bellshill was the fifth church - the first in the West of Scotland.

By the year 1765 there were 120 Relief Churches throughout Scotland with a total membership of 100,000.

The History of St Andrew's Congregation

The "Dissenters" who established our Congregation, withdrew from Bothwell Parish Church in September 1762 and worshiped in the open air in Bellshill.

Thomas Gillespie visited Bellshill on the 9th December 1762, preaching to the people in the open air and baptizing children. Thomas Gillespie visited Bellshill for a second time in April 1763.

In 1766 a Session minute records that it was "agreed to lodge in the hands of Mr Simpson 4 cups, 3 flagons, 3 tablecloths and 4 servets" In the following year "2 powder (pewter) plates for elements and 4 more plates to gather the collections" were found necessary. The Communion vessels - the cups, plates and flagons displayed in the church give us a tangible link to the founders of our congregation. These items are inscribed -

"Luke 22: 19, 20 RELIEF BOTHUELL – Mr A. S. – Oct 27, 1763"

a reference to the Communion text, the name of the church, the initials of the minister and the date of the first Communion.

In 1847 the Relief Church joined with the Secession in the United Presbyterian Church and the church's name changed to Bellshill United Presbyterian Church. A U.P. Constitution (short for 'United Presbyterian') was adopted at this time, the main feature of which is a 'Committee of Managers' rather than a 'Congregational Board'. Both have essentially the same function but are run slightly differently.

In 1900 the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church of Scotland united and the church became Bellshill West United Free.

Eventually the practice of Patronage was relinquished and the relationship between the established Church of Scotland and the State changed. Many now felt that there was no reason for the United Free Church to remain separate and consequently in 1929 a union between the two churches took place. Both Moderators jointly visited our church - the "Kirk at the Cross", the symbolic centre of the Lanarkshire industrial area. At this time most U.F. Churches - including our own, united with the Church of Scotland. Part of the agreement allowed former Free Churches to keep their Constitution and property. Our Church exercised those options and to this day we still have our U.P. Constitution and own our own property. A minority of congregations still felt the united church did not have enough spiritual independence and remained separate, to form the United Free Church (continuing), which became the U.F. Church we know today.

The union brought with it another change of name, and after much discussion a new name for the church was decided - "West" was given up to the church farther West and "St. Andrew's" was chosen: "but we have no right to this honoured name unless we are an active, progressive and missionary church" (Year Book 1929).

In the 1950s, Orbiston Church was founded, and several members of St Andrew's congregation moved to Orbiston to support the new church and its organisations.

Over the last thirty years or so there have been a number of changes in the life of the church. In 1981 St Andrew's was linked with Orbiston Church, with the two churches sharing one minister.

In November 2000 the congregation met and decided to notify Hamilton Presbytery, that with instant effect the congregation of St Andrew's, were to deced from the Church of Scotland. The decision was made because the Church of Scotland told the congregation that they had to close and merge with the MacDonald Memorial Church, this was rejected by the congregation. At this time an approach was made by the congregation to rejoin the United Free Church. This application was accepted by the UF General Assembly in June 2001, and St Andrew's became St Andrew's United Free Church. A Service of Admission was held in August 2001.

Church Buildings

The first church on the site was completed in August 1763 - it was built to sit 700, but enlarged shortly after.

In 1846 the old, plain church building with its loft and floor was taken down.

On 7th May, 1846 the foundation stone of the current building was laid, the church opened for public worship on the 13th December 1846.

A vestry and waiting-room were added to the church in 1878.

In 1881 a "substantial building in close proximity to the church" was built (on the site of the gardens at the cross, which now features some modern street furniture). Part of the ground floor of this building was let; the remainder was used for the accommodation of the Session, Managers, and Congregational Library. The upper floor consists of a "handsome hall" capable of holding 300 people.

In 1891 an organ was installed for the first time, three years after the Session had first considered it.

About midnight on the 3rd of December 1895, during a thunder storm, the spire of the church was struck by lightning and was seriously damaged, with a "couple of tons of masonry being displaced".

Electric light was installed in 1910.

New Halls were the aim in the 1930's: Crossgates was opened in August 1934; the Neilson Hall in March 1935.

On Saturday, 11th January, 1941, not long after the beginning of the Second World War, the church was destroyed by fire, only the four walls remaining.

Bright, modern, and costing £21, 437 15s. 11d. (Year Book 1951), the church was reopened on 1st September, 1950, free of debt. The Year Book also states "It is pleasing to note that this expenditure has been made without outside assistance".

On its re-opening the following gifts were presented:

Pulpit - gifted by the Dramatic Society.

Pulpit Bible and Hymnary - gifted by Mrs Jas Hamilton.

Pulpit Fall and Book Markers - gifted by the Choir.

Communion Table - gifted by the Woman's Guild.

Communion Table Cloth - gifted by Mrs Young and Mrs Ramsey.

Communion Chairs - gifted by the Crossgates Guild of Friendship.

Baptismal Font - gifted by the Crossgates Sunday School.

Reading Desk - gifted by Mr Robert W. Muir, Motherwell.

Silver Vases - gifted by the Girl Guides and Brownies

Choir Chairs - gifted by the Boys Brigade

Wood Panelling - gifted by Mr and Mrs James Scott and others

Vestibule Table - gifted by the Austin Family

Hymnal Board - gifted by the Men's Club

Brass Table Lectern - gifted jointly by the West Church and the MacDonald Memorial Church.

In October 1962 a week of Thanksgiving was held to celebrate the bi-centenary of the church, an occasion commemorated by the dedication of the present pipe organ on Sunday 21st October.

Crossgates Hall was sold to the Church of the Living Waters in 1991.

Internal alterations to the church began in 2005, with the area under the balcony being converted to provide a kitchen, toilets and a large area which became the Saltire Café.

The First Ministry

The first Minister of the newly established Relief Church in Bellshill, was Alexander Simpson (1763 - 1771). Simpson was a licentiate of the Church of Scotland, and had written to his local Presbytery intimating that he had accepted a call to the Bothwell Parish, as the people there could not agree to a minister presented by Patronage.

The Presbytery took great exception to this and framed a libel against him. His Ordination was invalid as he had been ordained by Thomas Gillespie, a minister under deposition and by others calling themselves the "Presbytery of Relief", and that he

was about to exercise a Ministry without the consent of the Church of Scotland. Simpson, under the support and direction of the Relief Presbytery accepted the Call and became the first Minister of the Relief Church, Bellshill, he was ordained on the 27th October 1763.

Mission

Under the ministry of the Rev John Fleming (1884 - 1903) a Missionary Society was formed, as did the Christian Endeavour Union (Mr. Fleming became its UK President in 1902).

In 1902 the Rev John Clark inaugurated a Brotherhood meeting in the church on Sunday afternoons. The meeting had a varied syllabus and included lectures, debates, musical items and concerts. The meeting soon became very popular with the working man of Bellshill and it served a very important purpose in the community. This perhaps is an understatement. "The Brotherhood" was so popular that Sunday afternoons saw a large queue waiting to get into the Church building.

The Rev. W.R. Thomson accepted a Call to St Andrew's Capetown in 1904, he returned to Scotland in 1909 for health reasons, and soon after received a Call to Bellshill West Free Church (St Andrew's Congregation). He was duly inducted on 10th October 1910. Mr Thomson was intensely interested in Mission work - as his Call to St Andrew's Capetown signifies, and he took a very keen interest in the Douglas Park Missionary Society. The Douglas Park Mission Hall (the old "Tin Hut" as it was called) was situated in the area of the town where old miner's rows were prominent (where Blackmoss Crescent is now) and had a full-time missionary.

Mr Thomson took a special interest in the Douglas Park Mission Sunday School. The Sunday School was very popular and drew many of the miners children and their mothers into the afternoon meetings.

A Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was formed with Mrs Thomson as President. This society was the forerunner to the Woman's Guild. Mrs Thomson played a very active part in the Ministry of her husband and formed the Girls' Auxiliary, an organisation that proved to be very popular and successful within the congregation;

The first Boys' Brigade Company in Bellshill (1st Bellshill) was formed in October 1924.

Missionary work has been a very important aspect of the St Andrew's congregation as demonstrated by this excerpt from the Year Book of 1939: "The Missionary Collectors call early in each month to collect Members' subscriptions for the Home and Foreign Mission work of the Church. If any member is not called upon for this object notice should be sent at once to the Mission Treasurer. Every Member is expected to contribute at least One Penny per week to this part of the Lord's work".

In 1993 the Orbiston Neighbourhood Centre was established in Orbiston, with the support of the congregation at St Andrew's.

The Saltire Café opened to the public in March 2006, the café is open Monday to Friday and is staffed by volunteers from the congregation.

Historical Tradition

Our founders created their new church under a cloud of suspicion and rejection by the Established Church. What sacrifices did they have to make to enjoy their rights and privileges? There was nothing to encourage them - other than the righteousness of their cause.

The "Dissenters" were few in number, and for the most part poor. They had no support - financial or otherwise, no prospect of a church building, minister or manse, and no sympathy from other denominations.

It is important to understand a little more of the background of the so called "dissent", of our forefathers. The Church of that period was dominated by a Moderate clerical party which emphasised what its title suggests - moderation in religious beliefs and observance. It placed value on academic learning and cultural interests, and many of the moderate ministers were scholars of the highest order.

But, as often happens when the great Evangelical themes of our Faith are relegated to that of secondary importance, the whole spiritual "tenure" of the Church dissolves. Worship had become a cold formalism with emphasis upon ritual rather than preaching, with the place of the sermon being taken over by "cultured readings" - not always of religious content, in a fair number of churches. What preaching did survive was so clothed in scholastic terms that the ordinary believers were left in a vacuum.

Despite the intellectualism of this Moderate party there were some good and sincere Moderates in the Church, such as James Baillie - the Minister offered for Induction to the Bothwell Parish.

Alongside the Moderate party there grew up an opposing party of highly evangelical ministers, and soon the Church was in a period of great tension between the Moderates and the Evangelicals. Congregations were divided, some supporting the Moderate party, others the Evangelicals.

At the time of the withdrawal from Bothwell Parish Church the Evangelical party within the established Church was growing in strength and numbers. Praying societies were springing up all over Scotland as a counter-action to the coldness of the Moderates.

The "dissenters" then, who withdrew from Bothwell Parish Church in September 1762, were certainly determined to be freed from the "Law of Patronage" and "judge for themselves" who should be their minister, but they were also part of this developing Evangelical Party.

The Evangelical zeal of the worshippers struck a chord, and crowds gathered to hear Simpson and his Relief colleagues every Sunday. Worshippers came from Blantyre, Hamilton, Cambuslang, Strathaven, Cambusnethan and Shotts to attend the preaching in the open fields, subject to the elements - and no doubt the weather was just as varied then as it is today.

These worshippers were looking for something that the Church of Scotland of the day had neither the will nor power to give them. That something was a religious message that took the form of a direct appeal to the individual, and made religion a personal and practical concern.

This then is our historical tradition, a practical and pioneering tradition, built on the Evangelical faith of Scotland. It is this vital tradition that can be traced back through the generations, and to which we, in our present congregation, are called to pledge ourselves.

Sources

"The First Relief Church in the West" by the Rev. W.R. Thomson BD. (1913)

"The Narrative of the Relief Church Bellshill" by the Rev. J. Wilson (1847).

St Andrew's Parish Church - Historical Notes, by the Rev J Forsyth (1974)

Various Year Books

Life has changed greatly since the church was formed. It is very difficult to think how "simple" life must have been nearly two hundred and fifty years ago, and to think how complex it has become.

Over the years the people have changed, the habits of life have changed - everything has changed. Everything has changed except the purpose for which the Church of Christ stands. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Week after week over two hundred and fifty years a body of people have gathered, if not in the church building, at least in this place, to worship God.

Ministers

A. SIMPSON, D.D.	1763-1771
J. KERR	1775-1792
A. ROBERTSON	1793-1799
J. JAMIESON	1802-1832
J. WILSON	1833-1883
J. R. FLEMING, B.D., D.D.	1884-1903
J. A. CLARK, B.D.	1904-1910
W. R. THOMSON, B.D.	1910-1921
D. MCQUEEN, M.A.	1922-1929
K. M. MACLEOD, B.A.	1929-1937
A. S. RENTON, M.A.	1938-1945
A. R. MACPHERSON, B.A.	1946 - 1970
J. FORSYTH, L.Th	1970 - 1975
C. B. ROSS, B.A., L.Th., Dip.B.T.I., A.Ph.S.	1976 - 1979
C. GREIG, M. A., D. D.	1981 - 1988
M. JOHNSTON	1989 - 1999
D. LOOSMORE	2002 - 2007

History Timeline

September 1762 – withdrawal from Bothwell

