

JAMESTOWN PARISH CHURCH - A HISTORY

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Matthew 28:19)

Our Heritage

Jamestown Parish Church stands on the eastern bank of the River Leven, one mile from Loch Lomond and five miles from Dumbarton Rock and the River Clyde.

Jesus gave his disciples their “Great Commission” on a hillside in Galilee around 30 AD, thereafter the missionary endeavour of the apostles carried the Gospel - the Good News of the Kingdom of God - swiftly throughout the Roman Empire. Agricola’s first Scottish campaign commenced in 79 AD and a chain of forts, manned by soldiers of the Empire within a lifetime of the Crucifixion, ran along the Highland Line - with a camp as near to us as Drymen. The Vale of Leven is situated only a few miles from the western terminus of the Antonine Wall, which was for a time the northern boundary of the Roman province of Britannia. It is a distinct possibility, therefore, that some word of the Christian Faith may have reached our district, from soldiers of the Empire or from Mediterranean traders, within a few generations of the Gospel events.

Saint Patrick (385 AD - 461 AD) writing from Ireland, tells Coroticus, a king of the Britons, that, because his soldiers have been kidnapping newly converted Irish Christians, Patrick is excommunicating the Briton and his men. The inescapable implication of this is that Coroticus and his people were already Christian in the first half of the 5th century. Given that this British king ruled from Alt Clut - Dumbarton Rock, we appear to have here the earliest written evidence of the people of this district holding to the Christian Faith.

A profound Christian influence on our area came from the Celtic Church, with saints such as Kessog, Kentigerna, Rhonan, and Mahew, known to have been active on the shores around, and on the islands of, Loch Lomond. From the 5th to the 11th centuries the Celtic Church would have been the major spiritual force in these parts.

Saint Margaret of Scotland was an Anglo-Saxon princess who married King Malcolm III of Scots in 1070. Under her determined influence and that of her son, King David I, reforms were initiated which saw the introduction of the feudal system and the ancient Celtic Church being superseded by the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. The Parish of Bonhill (which originally included the small community which was to become Jamestown) came within the jurisdiction of the Deanery of Lennox under the Diocese of Glasgow.

At this point it should be noted that, as a daughter church of Bonhill, Jamestown Kirk’s roots are deep within the history of the mother church. In his definitive work, “By the Rivers of Water”, Dr. Iain Galbraith tells us that Bonhill Church would have been built “under the patronage of the earls of Lennox”. In 1188 Pope Clement III declared the Scottish Church to be independent of England and a “Special Daughter of Rome”. Although the earliest known written reference to

Bonhill Parish is dated 1270, the Earl of Lennox who may well have presided over the building of the first Bonhill Church was none other than Prince David, Earl of Huntingdon, who also held the earldom of Lennox between 1155 and 1199. Prince David was the great-grandson of Saint Margaret of Scotland.

Another spiritual influence which should not be overlooked is that of the Cluniac monks of Paisley Abbey. On St. Valentine's Day in the year 1273, Malcolm, 4th Earl of Lennox, gave grants of land and the fishing rights to Linnbrane Pool on the River Leven to the monks of Paisley. Here they maintained a religious house, netted salmon and operated a ferry. To the present day the location is known as "Dalmonach" - the field of the monks. Their work in our valley would have introduced a fresh spiritual current to revitalise the legacy of the earlier Celtic missionaries.

Just as no human being is infallible, so no human institution is faultless. By the beginning of the 16th century the degree of corruption within the Roman Catholic Church had reached a critical level. There were plenty of godly and able people at all levels in the Church but too many leading clerics lusted after power and wealth, living worldly lives and leaving parish priests with neither the means nor the education to satisfy the spiritual needs of their parishioners. To its credit the Church acknowledged some of its failings and made attempts to correct them. For many, however, it appeared to be too little too late.

In 1517 Pope Leo X was raising money by the sale of indulgences. That is to say, the Church was claiming to effect the immediate release of souls from purgatory on payment of cash. A priest of the Augustinian Order was so offended by this that he nailed a notice of ninety-five theses, in protest, to the door of his church in the German town of Wittenberg. In this way Martin Luther provided the spark which ignited the Protestant Reformation. In essence, the Reformers rejected Papal authority, stressed justification by faith rather than by works, held to the priesthood of all believers and insisted on the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. These ideas spread swiftly throughout much of Europe.

The Reformation in Scotland can be said to have begun in reaction to the martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart. Both men were burned at the stake at the insistence of the Roman Catholic authorities for preaching the ideas of the Reformation. In all, twenty-one persons were executed in Scotland for Protestant beliefs between 1528 and 1558. Countless more fled into exile.

John Knox was an ordained Catholic priest, but, very much influenced by the ideas of John Calvin, Knox provided the leadership under which the Reformation triumphed in Scotland in 1560. It was the hope of the Reformers to return to the ways of the Early Church. They rejected the power structures of Rome and introduced a more democratic system of church government. The "First Book of Discipline" established the principle that the ministry of the Kirk belonged as much to "the labourers and manurers of the earth as to the nobles". People were allowed to read the Bible printed in their own language, rather than listen to the Latin of the priest. A new form of church service and discipline was introduced in the elected elders and the Kirk Session,

based on the New Testament precedent (Acts 14:23). Preaching became much more important and the introduction of parish schools was initiated.

With the Reformation the Church IN Scotland may be said to have become the Church OF Scotland, but this must not be misunderstood. The Kirk belongs firstly to the universal church of Christ, secondly to its Reformed part, and thirdly to Scotland.

King James VI of Scots was an extraordinary man. In his person he united the crowns of Scotland and England in 1603, becoming the first King of Great Britain. As a young man it was his habit each August to travel westward, from Edinburgh or Stirling, to his royal castle at Dumbarton, then northward through the Vale of Leven on his way to Balloch. From there he would be ferried over Loch Lomond to the island of Inchmurrin where he would indulge his passion for hunting deer. The royal party would have ridden by the eastern bank of the River Leven and so pass within yards of the very spot where Jamestown Kirk would come to be built. James was highly educated and much interested in religion. It was he who gave the world the "Authorised Version" of the Bible.

King James determinedly held to the notion of the "Divine Right" of kings to absolute rule, not only in things temporal but also in things spiritual. He believed he had a God-given right to rule over the Church, expressing this feeling in the words - "The bishops must rule the ministers, and the king rule both." Arising from the Reformation, however, the Scots Kirk took the position that it recognised only one head, neither pope nor king, but the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it would govern its own affairs democratically through the General Assembly of its ministers and elders. So the stage was set for a bitter and often violent struggle between Scots Presbyterians and the Stuart dynasty which was to last for over a hundred years. In 1584 King James imposed the Episcopal system with its bishops on his Scots subjects. His son, King Charles I, having become Head of the Church of England, presumed he had the right to be Head of the Church of Scotland. It was his further intention to force the Scots into the same forms of worship as the English. To this end he attempted to impose the "Book of Canons" (effectively an English prayer book which included Roman-style ritual) on Scotland. This provoked the "National Covenant" of 1638.

The signing of this truly historic document commenced in the kirkyard of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, and before long copies were being signed by Scots of every social class throughout the length and breadth of the land. While taking care to express loyalty to the king, the Covenant made it absolutely clear that Scots Presbyterians were refusing to accept any return to Roman ideas and methods, that they were determined not to be incorporated into the Church of England, and that they would defend with their lives the independence of the Kirk. Those who signed the Covenant, and who lived and died in accordance with its spirit, became known as the Covenanters.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 1638 was held in Glasgow Cathedral. In defiance of the king, it abolished episcopacy, getting rid of the bishops and reinstating elders. There inevitably followed a long and complex period of warfare, which was made more

complicated by the English Civil War. Although Charles II actually signed the Covenant himself in 1650, in a cynical gesture in order to be crowned King of Scots, he reneged in 1660 and yet again episcopacy was imposed on Scotland. In response the Covenanters walked out of the churches which had been thus compromised and they conducted worship freely in open-air "conventicles". Three hundred Presbyterian ministers were evicted from their own churches, homes and livelihoods by the government for refusing to conform to episcopalianism. At first to preach at a conventicle was punishable by death. Later to simply attend a conventicle was also a capital offence.

Savage persecution of the Covenanters ensued and, tragically, much blood was spilled in the name of Christ. The Presbyterians were divided among themselves. Most were men and women of sincere and courageous religious principle, but there were also some, it must be recorded, who were murderous fanatics. It should in fairness be remembered that these were times when, in general, religious tolerance or willing compromise could not be expected from one persuasion or another.

The Vale of Leven had its Covenanters, of course. The one whose name comes down to us in the pages of history was Robert Nairn. He was a shoemaker who lived at Napierston - not half a mile from the site on which Jamestown Kirk came to be built. For worshipping secretly at the forbidden field conventicles, rather than attending the services conducted by the Episcopal minister who had been placed over the congregation of Bonhill Kirk, military and civil power was brought to bear on the Nairn family. Robert was at first fined. Then his home was looted by soldiers. Nairn's wife was imprisoned and his children were abused. Robert was forced into hiding on the open moorland above the valley. He was hunted and fired upon by dragoons from Dumbarton Castle. Although aided by courageous friends and neighbours, Robert Nairn, alone on the hill throughout a merciless winter, finally succumbed to starvation and the elements in April of 1685. His martyr's grave is in Bonhill Kirkyard.

At the terrible price of many thousands of lives, the Covenanters were, in the end, victorious. With the Revolution Settlement of 1690 the Stuart conceit of a "Divine Right" to rule over the Kirk was finally extinguished. Our present Queen Elizabeth was the thirteenth successive monarch to swear in the Accession Oath that she would "...inviolably maintain and preserve... the worship, discipline, rights and privileges of the Church of Scotland."

In the year 1707 the Church of Scotland, with the majority of Scots, opposed in vain the Union of the Parliaments of England and Scotland. It was in the first half of this century that there were several unsuccessful attempts to return the Stuarts to the throne of the United Kingdom. During the Jacobite uprising of 1715 a force of some three hundred men, led by Rob Roy's nephew, Gregor MacGregor of Glengyle, sailed down Loch Lomond and the River Leven to raid the Parish of Bonhill. At this time the small village which was later to be known as Jamestown, was called Damhead. The dam in question served the old Mill of Balloch which was located near to the salmon fishing community of Dalvait. In the early 1800s there was an old man living in Dalvait who spoke of the time when he was just sixteen years old. He was driving cattle out on the Fintry-Gargunnoch hills and he heard the sounds of distant gunfire. It transpired that this

was the Jacobite army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart at Cambusbarron, just outside Stirling. They were on their way to Culloden Moor. The year was 1746.

It is said that, sometime in the 1790s, several of the proprietors of the handful of properties in the hamlet of Damhead had the Christian name James, and this was the reason that the name of the little community was changed to Jamestown.

The parish takes in the village of Balloch. The old Balloch Castle was situated where the water of Loch Lomond flows into the River Leven. From the 1200s the castle was the seat of the Earls of Lennox (later the Darnley Stewarts). Matthew, 4th Earl of Lennox, had a son - Henry Lord Darnley who famously married Mary Queen of Scots. They had a son who became King James the Sixth of Scots and First of the United Kingdom. So it can be seen that, in a sense, the present Royal Family can be traced back to Balloch in the Parish of Jamestown.

Industry and Community

In a very real sense the Vale of Leven's textile industry was the beginning of the story of Jamestown Parish Church. The pure, swift-flowing water of the River Leven, fed by highland burns and surrounded as it was by wide, flat fields, provided the ideal conditions for cloth-bleaching. At Dalquhurn, near the village we now know as Renton, the first of the valley's bleach-fields was established in 1715. This was the beginning of a textile industry which would expand massively and sustain the several communities which came to flourish on Levenside. It was an industry and an art-form which would endure for well over two hundred years. During the eighteenth century the population of the district trebled as Highlanders from Argyll and Perthshire were drawn to work in the bleach-fields. Later, from around 1840, the workforce was joined by Irish immigrants.

In the 19th century, as far as the Vale of Leven was concerned, industry meant predominantly the bleaching, printing and dyeing of cloth, particularly calico printing and "Turkey Red" dyeing. In 1827 Turkey Red dyeing commenced at the Croftengea Works of Messrs. Turnbull & Jones. The Vale of Leven companies of William Stirling & Sons, John Orr Ewing and Archibald Orr Ewing quickly followed. Before long acre upon acre of textile factories were built - Dalquhurn and Cordale (Renton), Dillichip and the Wee Field (Bonhill), Dalmonach, Ferryfield and Croftengea (Alexandria), Milton and Levenbank (Jamestown). By the banks of the River Leven these Vale companies came to completely dominate the Turkey Red dyeing industry, exporting to India, the Far East, Pacific Islands, Africa and South America. During forty hard-working Victorian years the people of the Vale of Leven multiplied by thirty times the extent of their textile produce. This flourishing of industry inevitably led to a great increase in population and the growth of communities.

Of particular relevance to Jamestown were the Milton Works of Messrs. Todd & Shorridge, established in 1772, and the Levenbank Works which were set up under Watson, Arthur & Co. in 1784, taken over by Stuart, Arthur & Co. in 1808, and then by Archibald Orr Ewing in 1845. Five years later the Milton Works were also taken over by Archibald Orr Ewing.

Arising from the resulting increase in the working population, additional housing was needed, so Levenbank Terrace was built in 1859 and Milton Terrace followed in 1867. Haldane Terrace also accommodated workers and their families. It was anticipated that the Bonhill Kirk roll would increase by some five hundred persons. Accordingly the Kirk Session met with the heritors (local landed gentry) and put it to them that an additional place of worship was required for the folk of Jamestown. The outcome was the setting-up of a fund-raising committee and in due course the architects, Messrs. Clarke & Bell, submitted a design which was duly accepted by the Jamestown Church Committee on the 2nd of September 1867. Patrons of particular note were - Sir Archibald Orr Ewing (MP for Dunbartonshire), Alexander Smollett of Bonhill, Sir James Lumsden of Arden and A.J. Dennistoun-Brown of Balloch Castle. The Treasurer was James Murray, factor of Strathkelvin Estate.

Foundation

On the 17th of October, 1868, the foundation stone of the new kirk was laid. The ceremony was conducted by the Rev. John Alison, minister of Bonhill Church, and those present sang the 100th Psalm. A glass jar was buried with the stone. It contained, among other items, various newspapers, national and local, a copy of the "Missionary Record" of the Church of Scotland, abstract accounts of the Bonhill Parochial Board, the Statistical Account of the Parish of Bonhill and, perhaps most appropriately, a piece of Turkey Red textile which had been manufactured in the Levenbank Works.

At a cost of £2900, the new church was completed on ground which had been excess to the requirement of the parochial school. Sir Archibald Orr Ewing presented one of the stained glass lancet windows and A.J. Dennistoun-Brown presented the other. The stained glass wheel window was presented by Alexander Smollett of Bonhill. Sir Archibald also gifted the fine twelve hundredweight church bell.

On Sunday 15th of August, 1869, the first service was held. It was conducted by the Rev. Alison of Bonhill.

The first minister appointed to Jamestown Church was the Rev. Daniel Wright who had been an assistant at Bonhill. His was a short ministry and, when he moved on to Bellahouston in Glasgow, he was replaced in February of 1871 by the Rev. J. McGavin Boyd who had served as assistant at St. Enoch's, Glasgow.

A fine manse, designed by architect John McLeod of Dumbarton, was erected on land adjacent to Milton Farm. On the 19th of March, 1873, Jamestown Kirk was disjoined from Bonhill Parish and raised to "Quoad Sacra" status. The following elders constituted the Kirk Session - James Munro, James Anderson, Chester McDonald, Robert Young and Joseph McCallum. Mr McCallum was elected Session Clerk.

Rev. Boyd left Jamestown for New Monkland after a ministry of some five years. He was succeeded on the 26th of December, 1876, by the Rev. Daniel J. Miller who had been an assistant at St. Stephen's Church, Glasgow.

At a meeting of the Kirk Session on the 14th of December, 1881, two important decisions were made - firstly, that the church building should be extended, and, secondly, that a Church Hall should be built.

By March of 1883 the extension to the church had been built, enabling the kirk to accommodate approximately 1000 worshippers. On the 29th of February, 1884, the new Church Hall (the Arthurston Hall) situated adjacent to the kirk, was opened by Archibald Orr Ewing M.P. In that same year the Young Men's Guild was established in Jamestown. A church organ was installed in February of 1887.

Sir Archibald Orr Ewing, recognised as Jamestown Kirk's "principal and most active trustee", died in 1893. He, more than any other person, was responsible for Jamestown Church coming into being.

In 1881 the population of Jamestown Parish was 2925. The census of 1891 recorded that there were 74 Gaelic speakers living in the parish.

With the death of the Empress in 1901, the Victorian era ended and the Edwardian age was ushered in, with appropriate services of mourning, loyalty and thanksgiving being held in the kirk. 1905 brought the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Knox and again Jamestown held a special service to commemorate the great Scottish Reformer.

Much has been written about the causes of the "Great War" (1914-1918). It is important to know something of the mood of the nation at that time. In 1911 the Vale of Leven Natives and Residents Association had been founded. At its inaugural meeting the toast was to the King, the Imperial Forces, Natives and Residents and the Commercial Interest. The late John Agnew, a local historian who was working in Ferryfield at that time, wrote - "To us, the alternative to the British Empire was the German Empire. Other possibilities have all been thought up after it happened." Patriotism combined with propaganda created a sense of duty to fight for King and Country. To begin with, young men seemed willing enough to enlist, but those who were reluctant could expect the social cold shoulder or the public humiliation of being handed a white feather - a symbol of cowardice - by young women. It has been estimated that around 10 million men were killed in the First World War. In the conflict thirty-four men of Jamestown's congregation lost their lives. A memorial tablet bearing the names of the fallen was placed in the church.

Jamestown Church Hall had been commandeered to accommodate billeted soldiers. During the war, in 1915 the Dennistoun-Brown family gifted a new Communion Table to the kirk.

The slow demise of the all-important textile trade began in the aftermath of the war. There was profound disillusionment and a sense that the people had been betrayed by their leaders. The Federation of the Vale of Leven's Discharged Sailors & Soldiers expressed these resentments locally. Survivors had not returned (as promised) to "a land fit for heroes". They returned to massive unemployment and many resorted to emigration.

The 48 year ministry of the Rev. Daniel J. Miller came to an end with his death in January of 1925. On the 29th of May in that year the Rev. Dr. Malcolm Blair MacGregor was ordained and given charge of Jamestown Church. Born in Glasgow, he had attained his Master of Arts in that city's university in 1922. He attained his Ph.D. some seven years later. Dr. MacGregor contributed greatly in the field of child welfare and education. He worked for the Royal Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and as a school chaplain he was a member of Dunbartonshire Education Committee and the Vale of Leven Education Sub Committee. He was Leader of the Jamestown Boys Brigade (formed 1925) until that role was taken over by Captain Robert Woolam. He was also the Secretary of the Vale of Leven Ministers' Fraternal.

Dr. MacGregor was a literary man. His published works include - "The Sources and Literature of Scottish Church History", "The History of Jamestown Parish Church" (to which the present writer is very much indebted), and "Towards Scotland's Social Good" (a hundred years of temperance work in the Church of Scotland).

In 1932 a company of the Girls' Guildry was formed. In February of 1933 a serious fire broke out in the apse of the kirk and damaged the pipe organ. A new instrument was purchased and the fully restored church was ready to resume normal worship by September of the same year.

In the 1930s it became inescapable to the British people that the rise of fascism, and in particular the aggression of Adolf Hitler's Nazi party, was an evil which had to be resisted. In September of 1939 Germany invaded Poland and war was declared. Before long Nazi forces occupied most of Europe. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union and Japan attacked Pearl Harbour it was World War again. Quickly the Vale of Leven became a largely militarised area. Again there were munitions works, conscription, mobilisation, rationing and air-raid blackout. On the 13th and 14th of March 1941 the Luftwaffe targeted the shipyards on the Clyde with the infamous Clydebank Blitz. Bombs fell on Dumbarton and Dalquhurn, with stray explosions on the hills of Carman and Auchencarroch. However, Victory in Europe came in 1945 and a special commemorative Communion Chair in Jamestown Church honours the seven men from the parish who lost their lives in the conflict.

Rev. Ian MacLeod (1954 - 1959)

In the mid-fifties the Royal Naval Torpedo Factory in Greenock was closed and workers were transferred over to the R.N.T.F. in Alexandria. Many of the Greenock folk took up residence in the Vale, particularly in the newly built Haldane scheme. This led to a significant increase in the membership of Jamestown Church.

The Strathleven Industrial Estate opened in 1946 and it was to host employers such as Burroughs Adding Machines, Westclox (General Time), Polaroid Lens Manufacturing... In Balloch the British Silk Factory opened in 1929 and closed in 1980.

1953 - the year of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth - saw the commencement of the "Tell Scotland" campaign of evangelism, with the hugely successful revivalist meetings in Glasgow of Billy Graham, in 1955. In June of the following year, there was commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper According to the Reformed Rite. During this decade a merger of the Church of Scotland with the Church of England was suggested. This provoked much opposition and was dropped. Perhaps surprisingly, statistics reveal that Scotland was a more religious society in those mid-1950s than it had been a hundred years earlier...

In the summer of 1959 the move was made from the Arthurston Hall to the newly-built Lennox Hall.

Rev. J. Marshall Scoular (1960 - 1967)

Rev. Robert Patterson (?)

Rev. Donald MacQuarrie (1979 - 1990)

Rev. Ken Russell (1991 - 2001) School Chaplain to Haldane & Jamestown Primaries and to VOLA.

The Sweeney's Cruise Company of Balloch owned a boat - Skylark IX- which had been one of the famous "little boats" which had helped to evacuate Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk during the Second World War. Accordingly, the Dunkirk Veterans enjoyed an annual sail on Loch Lomond aboard the historic vessel. The Veterans started holding annual services in Jamestown Church during the ministry of Rev. MacQuarrie. A special Dunkirk Transept was established in the kirk during ministry of Rev. Ken Russell.

1994 - Celebrated 125 years of worship. The service of celebration was jointly conducted by Rev, Ken Russell, Rev. Ian MacLeod, Rev. J. Marshall Scoular and Rev. Donald MacQuarrie. Organist Andrew Black played and Elder William Inglis was presented with a long service certificate in recognition of his commitment to the church. Dignitaries present were John McFall M.P., Brigadier Donald Hardie, Provost of Dumbarton Pat O'Neill and Regional Councillor Duncan Mills.

Rev. Norma Moore (2004 - 2017)

Around Christmas of 2009, it was discovered that the church's 130 feet high spire was in need of repair. Scaffolding was quickly erected and a fund-raising campaign initiated to raise the required £100,000 for the necessary work. Grants were obtained from Historic Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund, but the congregation was left to raise in excess of £50,000. Reverend Moore said that "...there is a lot of history and the heritage of the building is very important. It is an intangible thing that you can't put a price on." Fortunately the money was raised and repair work completed.

Elders Mary Clubb, Rona Grant, Janette Lane, Margaret Nutter, Anne Park and Irene Sloss were presented with 30 years long service certificates on April 26th 2015.

After Rev. Moore's retirement in 2017, Jamestown Kirk was well served by locums Rev. John McCutcheon and Rev. Andrew Lees.

Final Service - 150th Anniversary - August 2019.

There is more to a flower than its petals and it is well to remember the importance of roots. As has been shown - the roots of Jamestown Parish Church are indeed deep.

It is appropriate to give the last word to Dr. MacGregor -

"While it is impossible fully to gauge spiritual influence, for 'the spirit bloweth where it listeth', we know that to many the very stones of the Church are dear. It is for them a place of hallowed memories where they may 'touch and handle things unseen' ...but with gratitude to God we remember that many things abide and that Jesus Christ whom He has sent is the same yesterday, today and forever."

I dedicate this short history of Jamestown Parish Church to the memory of my Grandmother, Hannah Scobie, and my Aunt, Catherine McDougall Scobie.

William Scobie.