

St. Margaret's Parish Church



**Abel Place,
Touch,
DUNFERMLINE**

E-mail www.stmargaretscofsdunfermline.org.uk



Rev. I. M. Greenshields

registered charity no. SC007080

History of St. Margaret's Parish Church Dunfermline 1825 - 1975

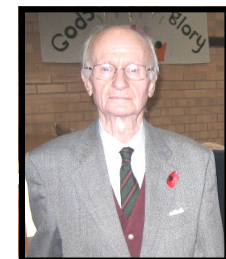


by

W. M. Mackay

Session Clerk

1972 - 1982



**ST. MARGARET'S
PARISH CHURCH**
Ministers

Robert Brown 1826 - 1828

John Law 1828 - 1850

David Russell 1850 - 1891

John Campbell 1891 - 1902

John Sanderson B.A. 1902 - 1928

Philip Douglas Lawrence M.A. 1928 - 1933

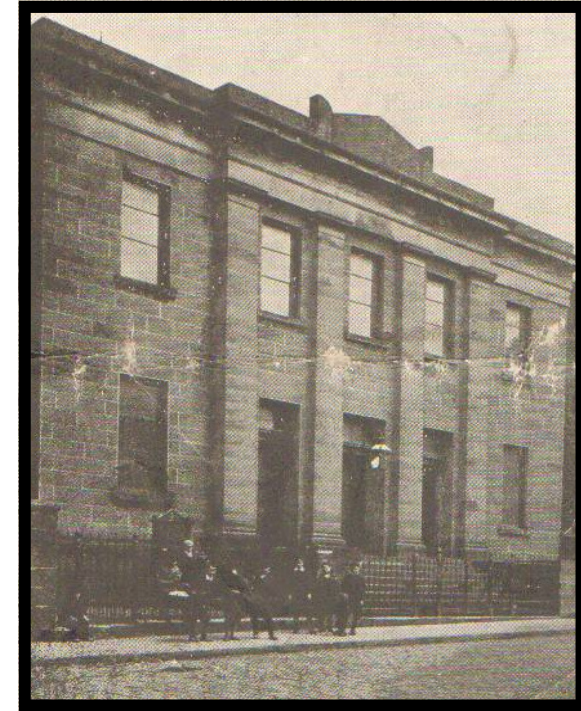
David William Hay M.A. 1933 - 1940

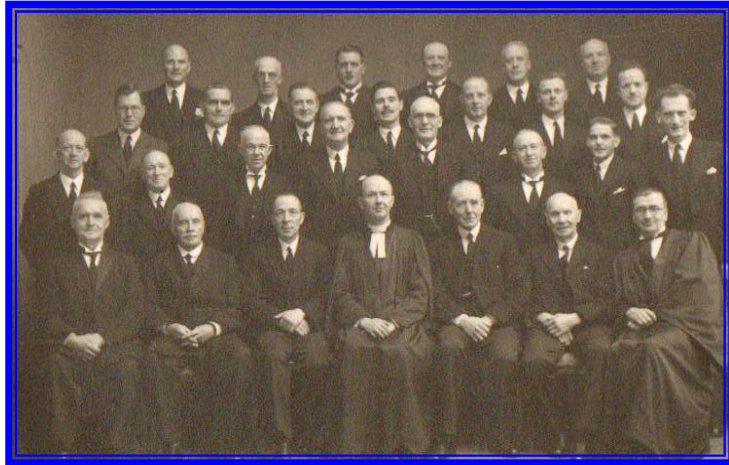
William Steven 1941 - 1948

Eric Marr Duncan M.A. B.D. 1948 - 1960

Duncan McLachlan M.A. B.D. ThM. 1960 - 1965

Colin Campbell Reith MacPherson M.A. B.D. 1966 1996





Rec. W. Steven and elders about 1943
 Among the members of the Kirk Session, the elder first on the right, in the second row from the back is John (later Sir John) McWilliam who became County Convenor and Lord Lieutenant of Fife.



Rev. Colin Macpherson and the Kirk Session at Touch. Our first women elders are in the middle of the second row from the front

History of St. Margaret's Parish Church - Dunfermline 1825 - 1975

In 1825 Queen Anne Street Church, later re-named Erskine, was, after the Abbey, the largest in Dunfermline with over 1200 members. A vacancy occurred due to the death of their minister and the congregation split over the choice of a successor. Passions ran high and eventually about 500 members walked out and obtained Presbytery approval to form a new congregation which they decided to call "St. Margaret's" after the saintly Queen of Scotland, wife of Malcolm Canmore and founder of Dunfermline Abbey. They quickly organised themselves, obtaining the lease of a chapel in Maygate from the Methodist Church. A Kirk Session was appointed and a Board of Management of Trustees and Managers was elected to look after the financial and other business matters. From the start the Trustees displayed considerable financial acumen, and lost no time in raising enough funds to start building a church and engaging a minister. Members were asked to subscribe towards the cost, the balance being funded by a loan, eventually paid off 50 years later.

In 1826 our first minister, Rev. Robert Brown, was inducted at an open air service in Pittencrieff Glen attended by over 3000 people. His stipend included an allowance for sacramental expenses, and his life was insured for £1000 payable to the congregation on his death. In 1828 St. Margaret's Church was opened in East Port on the site now occupied by Dunfermline Building Society. It became known as the Gas Kirk because it was the first to be equipped with gas lighting in the town, in spite of opposition from the weavers who objected to supporting such capitalist enterprise as the newly established Dunfermline Gas Company. Unfortunately Rev. Brown died this year so the Trustees reaped the benefit of insuring his life earlier than expected.

The Trustees again took out insurance cover on the next minister, Rev. John Law, this time for £500. During his time St. Margaret's was organised on a very businesslike basis, income deriving mainly from seat rents with 905 seats let in different parts of the church, from 1 guinea to £5 p.a. It was a matter of pride to rent the most expensive seat you could afford. It was also common for special collections to be levied not only for church repairs, but also for what we now know as "the wider work of the church". Baptismal registers show that most of the founding members were weavers, colliers, farm workers and shopkeepers. At this time weavers were self-employed, fiercely independent, self-educated in many cases, pioneers with other working people in the radical movement to achieve reform of the political system as well as in the church. They enjoyed a high standard of living and were influential in municipal and political affairs, being described by one writer as "aristocrats of labour".

Until statutory registration of births, marriages and deaths was introduced in 1855, parish ministers kept the registers, their accuracy depending on the individual minister. Mr. Law kept meticulous records, partly in shorthand so he must have been one of the first to make use of Pitman's invention of shorthand in 1863. In one year he recorded 102 baptisms, 29 marriages and 38 deaths. In 1849 an outbreak of cholera claimed the lives of 20 St. Margaret's members between September and December, their ages ranging from 2 to 75. At this time singing was unaccompanied and a Precentor was engaged to lead the praise, and allowed to use the church once a week to train the congregation to sing.

In 1830 a house at 33 East Port was bought for a manse. The Session now agreed to put names on each seat so that those who habitually used them without paying could be turned out. The collection of seat rents proved so time consuming that a paid convenor was appointed as collector. Records of this period show that the evangelistic feelings that had led to St. Margaret's being started

the East Port church, senior classes of the Sunday School had to meet after the morning service. To prevent the new arrangement causing a split in the congregation, it was also decided to introduce a tea and coffee break between the two services, to encourage members to keep in touch with each other. At this time the weekly Women's Fellowship was started by the late Mrs. Galloway.

The inaugural service was conducted by the then Moderator of the General Assembly, Dr. David Steel. In the traditional way he was met at the door by the Session Clerk and invited to enter and declare the church open for the worship of God. So a new life began for St. Margaret's as it had done for the original 500 members in 1825.

W. M. Mackay

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joined up in World War 2, 6 of them being killed in action. Rev Hay served as a Chaplain with the Scots Guards. Bob Roe, soon to be ordained as an elder, was mentioned in despatches for service with the R.A.F. In 1947 the congregation enjoyed a wonderful Christmas carol service performed by a German choir from Halbeath where there was a prisoner-of-war camp. In return 100 prisoners were entertained to a Christmas party in the church hall which seems to have been a very emotional occasion.

During the ministry of Rev. Eric Duncan (1948-1960) it was decided to discontinue the practise of allocating and letting seats and placing members' names on pews. A comprehensive refurbishment of the church at this time was largely paid for by contributions of one shilling a week from members, collected by district elders.

Rev. Duncan was replaced by Rev. Duncan Maclauchlan (1960 - 1966). Presbytery, being faced with an imminent vacancy in Erskine Church, suggested a union between St. Margaret's and Erskine. This led to a prolonged debate in St. Margaret's and in the end it was decided by majority vote of the congregation not to agree to the proposed union. As Rev. Maclauchlan had supported the proposal, he felt he could not continue as minister, and left for another charge.

He was followed by Rev. Colin Macpherson (1966 - 1996). During his ministry our first women elders were ordained - Fiona Aitken, Alice Farquhar, Moira Moyes, Grace Ritchie and Davina Reid. Our 150th. anniversary in 1975 coincided with our move to Touch where the Town Council had created a new housing development and set aside a site for a church, which Presbytery invited us to take up, as it lay within our parish. This presented a challenge which the congregation accepted unanimously. On our move to Touch, we decided to hold two Sunday morning services at 10 and 11.30 so that parents and Sunday School children, now 200 in number, could attend church together. Previously, due to lack of accommodation in

were now expressed in a willingness to contribute to the work of foreign missions, particularly in Jamaica, and also to the cost of maintaining a missionary for the "destitute mining villages" in West Fife and supporting a missionary in South Australia. (Nearer our own time, after a successful stewardship campaign in 1963, we donated £250 to St. Ninian's towards the cost of building their church, £250 towards a water supply for a mission hospital in India, and £100 each to Moncrieffe Church, Perth, Cairns Church, Cowdenbeath and Churchmount Church, Lochgelly, to help them run their own Stewardship Campaigns, examples of generosity which would have pleased our original Trustees.)

In view of increasingly poor attendances at evening services, it was agreed in 1847 to install heating in the church "to promote both the temporal and spiritual welfare of the congregation". The cost was met by an appeal to members for contributions. As this proved inadequate, a committee was appointed "to wait on a few of the most influential members to impress on them the necessity of increasing their Contributions."

After a ministry of 22 years (1828 to 1850) Rev. Law was replaced by Rev. David Russell (1851 to 1891). In 1854 the Session rather grudgingly agreed to a call from the Government to hold a day of humiliation and fasting on account of the Crimean War. At the same time they "repudiated as a church all state interference in matters of religion". They recorded the same decision 3 years later when Government again called for a day of humiliation and fasting for the Indian Mutiny.

During Rev. Russell's ministry there was a great surge in choir singing, establishing a tradition which was maintained till modern times. When the Precentor resigned the vacancy was widely advertised and 34 applicants received. The job description required the new Precentor "to lead the Psalmody at ordinary meetings for public

worship, also at Sunday Schools and Congregational Prayer Meetings and, besides training a choir, to give instruction in the theory and practice of sacred music, one night in the week for at least three months in the year, to all members and adherents who may choose to attend a class for that purpose.” Many young people joined and remained choir members all their days, competition for promotion from the junior to the senior choir being very fierce.

Until 1873 it had been the practice to stand for prayers and sit for singing. The Session wanted to reverse this arrangement, but thought it wise to proceed slowly, so they decided to ask the congregation to stand for praise but did not insist on sitting for prayers. No doubt the more conservative members who did not like change now found themselves standing for both activities! About this time instrumental music was introduced to accompany the singing, so the post of Precentor was dispensed with in favour of an Organist and Choirmaster.

As there was no church hall, organisations had to meet in the basement of the manse so in 1867 it was decided to build a hall to seat 120, the cost of £250 being more than provided for by the freewill offerings of members.

Although Rev. John Law had left for another charge in 1850, the Trustees had kept up payments on his life insurance. When he died in 1875, the policy proceeds of £822 were applied by the Trustees to paying off the original loan raised for building the church in 1828.

During the second half of the 19th century, when the prosperity of the town was growing with the development of the linen mills, St Margaret's was well served by a succession of office bearers with good business acumen, including linen manufacturers, mine managers, solicitors, surveyors, farmers and the newly appointed stationmaster. (The railway had arrived in Dunfermline in 1848). The membership

was now drawn from a wide area including Crossgates, Halbeath, Crossford, Wellwood, Carnock and Townhill. For many years the Session met every three or four weeks, mainly to consider applications for communicant membership, not all of which were approved, and to allocate seats in the church.

In 1894 the Trustees built a Mission Hall in Albany Street, hoping to attract local residents in the area who had no church connections. The building costs were funded by a loan of £620 from John Goodall, whose coaching business in Queen Anne Street later developed by his son and grandson into a thriving garage. The Mission Hall was closed down in 1919.

The Trustees again showed their financial expertise in 1913 when the manse was sold for £2000 and the present manse in Garvock Hill bought for £986. The profits on this transaction were applied to building a new and larger hall to seat 250 together with a new vestry, session room and kitchen. During the 1914-1918 war the hall was requisitioned by the army for about 5 years. Many members, men and women, went on active service including the minister who served with the .Y.M.C.A. In France. 19 made the supreme sacrifice.

Writing in the Parish News in 1937, the minister, Rev. David Hay expressed relief at the abolition of the “chesting service”. An ancient Scottish law decreed that, in order to help the linen industry, all shrouds were to be made of pure Scottish linen for burial, and the parish minister had to oversee the placing of the linen-clad corpse into its coffin, i.e. The “chesting”.

Rev. William Steven (1941-1948) came to St. Margaret's from Liverpool. The day after he left his manse in Liverpool was destroyed in the blitz. Two of his brothers were killed in action during the war.

As in the first world war, many members of the congregation