
The Witness of the Kames Free Presbyterian Church, Argyllshire

NORMAN CAMPBELL

Reformed principles as they affected the work of believers at local level have not been the focus of many studies. This article examines how these principles are seen in the history and witness of one Argyllshire congregation between its establishment in 1893 and its closure in 1997, as well as the lessons from the strategies employed to attempt maintenance of the witness in rural areas. Kirk Session and Presbytery records relevant to the Kames congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the Cowal peninsula provide a picture of believers striving to witness in a period when the Reformed faith – never strongly-rooted in the area – was increasingly less influential in wider Scottish and British society. The tiny Lochgilphead congregation of the same denomination is also discussed. Appendices highlight the early elders and their place of residence, the number of communicants, the role of the Gaelic language, and the resignation of one minister.¹

¹ This article is supplementary to the one entitled “Resistance to the 1892 Declaratory Act in Argyllshire”, *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 2 (2012), pp. 221-274. The writer wishes to thank the Kirk Session of St. Jude’s Glasgow Free Presbyterian congregation for kindly granting access to the Kames Kirk Session records and to other Kames and Lochgilphead congregational documents. Miss Catherine MacPherson of Kames and Glasgow, who along with her parents and grandparents was instrumental in maintaining the work of the congregation, gave a great deal of advice and provided photographs. Two sons of the Kames manse, Revs. Dr. James R. and John Tallach, were generous with their memories. Jackie Davenport, Archivist for Argyll and Bute Council, located and copied a photograph of the Lochgilphead church. Murdo Maclean (Glasgow)

1. 1843 to 1893

During a government inquiry into the issue of sites for churches following the Disruption of 1843, Rev. Macintosh Mackay (of Dunoon Free Church) provided data for the Cowal peninsula. He estimated that half the total population of around 2,000 in Kilfinan parish had sided with the Free Church in the Disruption. A site for a church had been offered by the landlord; while lying in the geographical centre of the area, it was unsuitable as the people lived at the two extremes of the 16-18-mile long parish. A sheepcote/barn was used by Free Church supporters at one end, and a room in an inn by the Free Church people at the other. Support for the Free Church was even stronger in Strachur where between four-fifths and four-sixths of the population had left the Church of Scotland.²

The Kilfinan congregation of the Free Church of Scotland had followed their minister Rev. Joseph Stark out of the Established Church at the Disruption. They were eventually to erect buildings at Kilfinan village in the north end of the parish in 1861, at Millhouse in the southern in 1850, and a stone church in Tighnabruaich in 1863, the last being made a separate sanctioned charge in 1877.³

Part of the groundwork for the position adopted by the majority of the congregation in 1893 was laid in the 1859-1860 revival. The work of the Holy Spirit at that time in south-west Cowal was largely through the instrumentality of a local farmer, Archibald Crawford. He gave lectures against Arminianism and these were blessed to the conversion of many people. In 1905, some of the Free Presbyterian elders who had been eye-witnesses to these events paid tribute to him. A Memorial Minute agreed by the Kirk Session referred to his labours in the gospel being “greatly owned” in the community and to his “expounding the scriptures and the way of life, in Millhouse Church” during the awakening forty years previously. The awakening had been characterised by people giving “a great attention to the concerns of the soul and eternity”. The Memorial

and Edward Greene (Oxford) assisted and advised. Thanks are also due to staff at the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh and at the Inverness Reference Library at Farraline Park and to Stornoway Public Library. Revs. Alfred MacDonald (Gairloch) and Alexander Murray (retired, Lairg) were consistently helpful.

² *First Report of the Select Committee on Sites for Churches (Scotland)* (London, 1847), pp. 112-113.

³ W. Ewing (ed.), *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1914), Vol. 2, pp. 108-109. See also *Oban Times*, 16th September 1893, p. 3.

continued that in Crawford, “unusual natural talents, breadth of view, sagacity of judgement, and keenness of discernment were crowned, sanctified and mellowed by a rich unction of grace that made him a polished shaft in his Master’s hand”.⁴

Further details of the 1859-1860 revival were provided in an obituary for Archie Crawford, which pointed out that he had settled in Kilbride near Millhouse in 1846.

Noticing the spiritual destitution of those about him soon after his settlement at Kilbride, he began to keep a Sabbath school, but officious tyranny stepped in and put a stop to it. Henceforward for the space of about twelve years Mr. Crawford took no active part in public work. But at the expiry of that period he was led to take steps that had important results.

He was known as a serious, thoughtful, intelligent man, and some of his neighbours and acquaintances on the occasion of a movement among them in which unsound doctrine was prominently brought forward came to consult him with regard to the things they were hearing. Week after week they came, until at last every Friday evening he had a meeting of his neighbours and servants to whom he opened up the Word of God and the way of salvation. This meeting was soon transferred to the church at Millhouse, where for two years a crowded congregation waited on his instructions. These were times of refreshing. A quiet, genuine, solid revival work was in progress, and many to the day of their death, and some we believe that still remain, were the fruit of these meetings. There was no excitement or crying out. There were no sensational measures employed, but the pure word of the Lord was applied to the consciences of the people, to a great extent in the form of proposing questions and answering them, and only the floor and desks wet with tears after the congregation went home testified outwardly to the emotion called forth at this blessed time. Many were then born in Zion. The burden of opening up the Scriptures to his fellow-sinners lay heavily on Mr. Crawford’s spirit, and at this period he would sometimes, in spite of all the demands that his worldly position made on him, spend whole days with his

⁴ MS, *Minutes of the Kirk-Session of the Congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland at Kames, Kyles of Bute, 1894-1929* (hereafter, *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*), 26th April 1905. The minutes in fact date from April 1895 to May 1930.

Bible in private. At last the season of steady spiritual work came to an end, and, kept down in his own inward experience, he found it hard to meet the craving that was all around him to break the bread of life to his spiritual children. At this juncture he made the acquaintance of the late Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall alike in his ministry and in his person. This acquaintance proved one of the turning points of his outward life.

When his lease of Kilbride was out, Mr. Crawford lived for some time in Kames, and while there he statedly held Sabbath services at Kilfinan, seven miles away. These services were in Gaelic, as it was seldom that he undertook to conduct any public exercises of worship in English.⁵

After the ministry of Joseph Stark, the Kilfinan Free Church charge was to be served by Rev. Duncan Campbell from 1877 to 1891. He had been born in Knapdale, raised on Islay, and had himself come to faith in the 1859-1860 revival. His health broke as a result of the scattered nature of the charge in which services were held in several villages. According to Mr. Campbell's obituary, on the day before his death "he had the most unbroken peace and joy, and seemed completely loosened from all human concerns, wholly resigned to the Father's will". Early on the Sabbath morning of 2nd June 1891, "he exclaimed in the language of Hugh McKail: Farewell all earthly delights, welcome blessed Jesus, welcome eternal glory".⁶

It was as a result of an "urgent invitation" from Mr. Campbell in the spring of 1891 that Neil Cameron, then a divinity student, had come into contact with the Kilfinan Free Church charge and especially with those who were to separate two years later from the Millhouse section of the congregation.⁷

In June 1891 Archibald Crawford and Mr. Cameron forged their opposition to the Declaratory Act and in their ensuing discussions agreed they should separate from the Free Church should it pass the

⁵ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 8, February 1904, pp. 388-395. The writer thanks the editor of the magazine, Rev. Kenneth D. Macleod, for permission to quote at length from the obituary by Principal John Macleod. This was transcribed by John M. Macleod for the writer several years ago.

⁶ Obituary in *Campbeltown Courier*; 6th June 1891; cited in Angus Martin, *Kintyre, The Hidden Past* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 52.

⁷ See *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 30, 1925-6, p. 22.

Declaratory Act.⁸ Congregational meetings were held in Millhouse in September 1891 and 18th May 1892 at which consistent opposition was shown to the Act. The earlier meeting saw Mr. Crawford advise the people not to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Campbell's death.⁹

As described elsewhere, a Free Presbyterian congregation separated from the Free Church in the Millhouse section of Kilfinan charge. This took place on Monday 29th May 1893, at the end of a congregational meeting with the Rev. Donald MacFarlane, Raasay. He explained that he had tabled a Protest against the Act at the General Assembly of the Free Church on the previous Thursday, 25th May, 1893.¹⁰ Deprived of the Millhouse Free Church building, by an action of the Free Church in the Court of Session in January 1894, the new Free Presbyterian congregation worshipped in the Millhouse school. This continued until their new corrugated iron church – its users to be nicknamed the “Tin Kirkers” – was completed. It seated three hundred people.¹¹

The old Free Church congregation of Kilfinan had been part of that denomination's Presbytery of Dunoon. On the evidence of the Presbytery's minutes at least, there appears to have been little organised or sustained opposition to the Declaratory Act movement by this Church court. In March 1890 the Presbytery had memorialised the College Committee to take action with regard to the terms of Marcus Dods junior's appointment. This was with the hope of “allaying the widespread anxiety” which had been “occasioned by his utterances”.¹² However, their approach to the Declaratory Act was somewhat mixed. In December 1891 they voted 11 to 5 against a motion to “disapprove of the overture proposing the Act”. The motion against the Act had been made by Rev. Duncan MacNicol and the amendment in favour had been

⁸ “Anecdotes relating to Archibald Crawford”, *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 2, (2012), pp. 264-274.

⁹ “Resistance to the 1892 Declaratory Act in Argyllshire”, pp. 225, 236-7. Resolutions at the meeting of May 1892 were proposed and supported by “Norman MacCallum, farmer, Auchtervory”, “Mr. Currie, Kames”, “Mr. John MacCallum, farmer, Stillaig”, “Mr. Thomson, farmer, Invertees”, “Donald MacCallum, farmer, Kames”, “Mr. Thomson, colporteur, Kames” and “Mr. Donald Whyte, farmer”, *Northern Chronicle*, 1st June 1892, p. 3.

¹⁰ “Resistance to the 1892 Declaratory Act in Argyllshire”, pp. 225-6.

¹¹ *Oban Times*, 3rd February 1894, p. 3; 30th June 1894, p. 3; “Resistance to the 1892 Declaratory Act in Argyllshire”, pp. 245-246.

¹² MS, *Free Presbytery of Dunoon, New Series Vol. 1*, National Archives of Scotland (NAS) CH3/99/1, 4th March 1890, pp. 110-111.

moved by Rev. Donald McKerchar, seconded by Rev. John Irving, both of whom were to loom large in later discussions of the Kilfinan congregation's opposition to the Act.¹³ Almost a year later the court considered the "Report on the Confession of Faith" and voted 5 to 4 for a motion by Mr. MacNicol that they take no action about the Report. The amendment which it defeated had been moved by Rev. Robert MacMorran and seconded by Rev. Andrew Sutherland. This would have approved the report in regard to the Questions and Formula but omitted from it the proposed preamble to the Declaratory Act.¹⁴

The relationship between the office-bearers in Kilfinan and the Presbytery unravelled during the period 1891 to 1894. In April 1891 the Presbytery had supported the Session's application for a grant from the Highland Committee in the light of the minister's ill-health, presumably to pay for supply. Two months later Rev. Alexander MacGilp was appointed interim moderator of the Kilfinan Kirk Session, following the death of Rev. Duncan Campbell. The Presbytery noted their sense of loss at the latter's death.¹⁵ The ongoing refusal of the Kirk Session to move towards filling the vacancy exercised the Presbytery to the extent of asking for minutes of the local vacancy committee in May 1892. When the Clerk reported to a subsequent meeting in July that no reply to the request had been received, a committee was appointed by the Presbytery to meet with the Session and congregation and urge the desirability of "taking steps as soon as possible to call a minister". In September 1892 the special committee's convenor, Rev. John Irving, reported that two candidates for the vacant charge were to be heard soon in Kilfinan.¹⁶ However, tensions rose further in February 1893 when the Presbytery

¹³ *ibid.*, 1st December 1891, p. 153. Donald McKerchar was born in Kenmore in 1842 and ordained at Kilmun in 1867. John Irving, born 1847, had been ordained at Inellan in 1874. In 1898 he was translated to Nice. See *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, pp. 191, 240.

¹⁴ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 8th November 1892, p. 173. Duncan MacNicol of Dunoon, born 1829, had been ordained in Lochranza in 1857 and then translated to Dunoon's Free Gaelic charge (Macintosh Mackay's old charge) in 1876. Robert MacMorran had been inducted to the Dunoon English Free Church in 1870, following pastorates in Torpichen and Chryston. Andrew Neil Sutherland, born 1855 had been translated to Rothesay Free Parish in 1886, following his ordination in 1881 in Muthil. See *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, pp. 252, 254, 335.

¹⁵ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 7th April, 1891, p. 138; 9th June 1891, p. 143; 7th July 1891, p. 145. MacGilp, born in Lochgilphead in 1857, had been ordained to Kilmodan in 1886; see *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, p. 228.

¹⁶ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 3rd May 1892, p. 167; 5th July 1892, p. 168; 6th September 1892, p. 170.

opposed an application by the Kilfinan Kirk Session to the Highland Committee for a grant to pay for a “student missionary”. This was on the basis that there was insufficient information in the schedule drawn up by the Session to justify the Presbytery supporting it; the court decided to appoint another committee to meet the office-bearers and Kirk Session in Kilfinan to address the failure to deal with the vacancy itself. By March it was reported that the Session had been advised to widen the membership of the vacancy committee; the Presbytery then proceeded to support the application to the Highland Committee.¹⁷

By July 1893 the Presbytery heard in private that a meeting of Kilfinan congregation had refused to recognise any of the courts of the Free Church because of the Declaratory Act. Mr. MacGilp stated that the meeting had been held without his knowledge or agreement or the sanction of the Kirk Session. It was disclosed in the public session of the same meeting of Presbytery that three out of the four elders in Kilfinan had refused to meet Mr. MacGilp as they did not recognise any Free Church court. The Presbytery at this point appointed Revs. Robert Forgan, Robert MacMorran and the elders John MacKinlay and Donald MacDonald from other congregations, as assessor elders to Kilfinan. A week later the local elders boycotted a Presbytery meeting with the congregation, and it emerged that the meeting had not been announced locally. The four local elders later refused to meet the assessor elders; at this point it appears that the Free Church decided to recommence services of their own, initially in the local school.¹⁸ In August 1893 the four local elders were formally removed from office by the Presbytery, at which point the assessor elder Mr. MacDonald resigned from the Kilfinan Free Church Session.¹⁹ The next month saw the neighbouring congregation of Tighnabruaich call a minister, with forty-six communicants and thirty-one adherents signing the call to Mr. Rankin.²⁰

In December 1893 the Presbytery sanctioned legal proceedings for the “recovery of the property” associated with the Kilfinan congrega-

¹⁷ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 7th February 1893, p. 179; 7th March, 1893.

¹⁸ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 4th July 1893, pp. 189-191; 11th July 1893, p. 192; 25th July 1893, p. 193. Forgan, born 1860, had been ordained to St. George's, Montrose, in 1886 and translated to Rothesay (West) in 1892; see *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, p. 158.

¹⁹ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 22nd August 1893, pp. 195-6.

²⁰ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 5th September 1893, p. 198.

tion.²¹ Recovery of the Millhouse building did not immediately stabilise the residual Free Church congregation of Kilfinan. In early spring of 1894, Mr. MacCormick of Rothesay turned down a call from them: the Dunoon Presbytery admitted at their April meeting that there had been a “huge secession” at Kilfinan. The Presbytery had ruled that a pledge by this remnant to pay a minimum salary of £32 per annum was sufficient to allow them to call a minister. In May 1894 a congregational meeting of the residual Kilfinan Free Church elected a probationer, Duncan MacNeill, to whom a call was then sent. This was signed by twenty-three communicants and seventy-six adherents. Mr. MacNeill’s ordination and induction took place in the Millhouse building on 5th July 1894.²²

2. Organising the new congregation

The Free Presbyterian majority of the Kilfinan congregation, concentrated in the Millhouse section, had been active in the meanwhile. February 1894 saw the first formal meeting of a local committee of the Free Presbyterian congregation, presided over by divinity student George Mackay, at which they agreed to build the church in Kames if a site was obtained, but also to hold a monthly service in Millhouse for the convenience of those living beyond the latter village.²³

The new congregation were crystal-clear about their *raison d’être*. A note on the first page of Kirk Session records states: “This congregation separated from the Church calling herself the Free Church of Scotland, in June 1893, because the Assembly of that year refused to repeal the Declaratory Act which was passed into a standing law of the Church by the preceding Assembly.” The first communicant roll in the Kirk Session records has thirteen people living in Kames, four in Millhouse and eight in Tighnabruaich, while others were in Deargach, Stillaig, Auchenlochan, Ardlamont, Kilfinan, Portabhaita, Strone,

²¹ *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 5th December 1893, p. 205. The success of the Free Church in their legal action was not recorded in the minutes and the Millhouse church building was not mentioned in the minutes of the next three Presbytery meetings.

²² *Free Presbytery of Dunoon*, 3rd April 1894, p. 211; 8th May 1894, pp. 214-5; 21st May, p. 217; 5th July 1894, p. 224. Dugald MacCormick, born 1846, had been ordained to Lochranza in 1877 and translated to Rothesay Gaelic Chapelhall congregation in 1885; see *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, Vol. 1, p. 218.

²³ MS, *Millhouse Congregational Committee*, 9th February 1894.

Glenachuil, and one in Tayvallich.²⁴ The congregation was made up of farmers, shop-keepers, and fishermen and was dispersed through the main villages and the rural hinterland of south-west Cowal. People from Portavadie used to walk to the Kames church for services and created a track through the heather. Another man from Portavadie used to cycle to the Kames church, while families from Ruban further north than Kames walked the four-mile round journey twice on a Sabbath. The “Tin Kirk” – opened in summer 1894 and capable of seating around three hundred people – would be packed in the summer months of the ensuing decades as tourists increased the attendances.²⁵

Rev. Alexander MacRae was inducted as minister of the congregation in November 1894 and the initial meeting of the Kirk Session took place on 9th April 1895. One of the Session’s first actions was to agree to observe the Lord’s Supper in early May: Mr. MacRae had invited Rev. John R. Mackay, Gairloch, and Rev. Neil Cameron, Glasgow.²⁶

The situation on the ground was seen by some as a clear lesson about the divisive effects of the Free Church leadership’s policies. In an 1898 letter to the *Glasgow Herald*, an “A. Macneilage” said that he had argued at the August 1893 commission of Assembly of the Free Church against taking legal action. “I was as one crying in the wilderness and was practically put down by the Moderator.” MacNeilage argued that the Free Church should have left the Free Presbyterians in possession of the more rural Millhouse building, and focused their efforts on Kames village. Because they were unable to continue using the Millhouse Church, the Free Presbyterians had built in Kames and thus been able to “tap” the summer visitor stream and do well financially. The Free Church’s subsequent erection of a building very close to the Free Presbyterian one was “a splendid object-lesson . . . of the effects of the Declaratory Act policy of the Free Church leaders”.²⁷

3. Vacancies and ministries

As already noted, Kames was not to wait long for a minister: Alexander MacColl MacRae (1867-1919) was ordained and inducted on 13th

²⁴ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*. The first communion roll does not state for which year it is relevant. One anomaly is that a 1921 roll includes a Mrs. MacCallum at Brackley Farm, Lochgilphead, an area where a separate Free Presbyterian congregation existed.

²⁵ Information provided by Miss Catherine MacPherson.

²⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 9th April 1895.

²⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, January 15th 1898, p. 8.

November 1894. He was minister for almost five years, being translated to Portree in October 1899 where he remained until he joined the Free Church in November 1918.²⁸

The somewhat scattered nature of the charge meant that in May 1895, the Kirk Session agreed to ask divinity student Donald Beaton “to conduct services in the Kilfinan district for four Sabbaths during a part of July and August”.²⁹ In those days travel to Cowal from Glasgow and other areas was largely by ferry steamer. On one of these occasions, Mr. Beaton’s colleague Neil Macintyre gave a vigorous critique of the Declaratory Act while arguing with a fellow-passenger who supported the legislation. Afterwards, an old man who had overheard the exchange encouraged Mr. Macintyre for the way he had spoken, and introduced himself as Bishop J. C. Ryle of Liverpool.³⁰ At the time of his meeting with Mr. Macintyre, J. C. Ryle may have been recuperating on the Clyde after one of the many illnesses from which he suffered during the 1890s and which led to his resignation in 1899.³¹

By the November 1899 meeting of the Session, with Mr. MacRae having left the previous month for Portree, Rev. Neil Cameron was interim moderator. A congregational meeting was to be held on Monday 27th November with a view to calling Rev. John MacLeod, then of Ullapool. Mr. Macleod (1872-1948) had served the Lochbroom charge from 1897-1901; he was to pastor Kames from 10th January 1901 until December 1905.³²

The Kames congregation passed through a trial with the loss of Rev. John Macleod in December 1905 when he joined the Free Church

²⁸ He had served as Moderator of Synod in July and November 1896. Mr. MacRae died in 1919. See *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 24, 1919-20, pp.280-2.

²⁹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, May 1895.

³⁰ The incident is recorded in the obituary for Mr. Macintyre published in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 59, May 1954, pp. 1-9.

³¹ Ryle (1816-1900) was ordained as a Church of England “priest” in 1842, awarded a D.D. in 1880 and appointed Bishop of Liverpool in the same year. Better known today for his writings and commentaries, while alive he was known for “staunch Protestantism” and “unflinching opposition to ritualism”, as well as for prominence as a speaker and leader within the evangelical wing of the Church of England. See Ryle’s entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. See also P. Toon and M. Smout, *J. C. Ryle, Evangelical Bishop* (Cambridge, 1976); I. D. Farley, *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool* (Carlisle, 2000); E. Russell, *J. C. Ryle, That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child* (Fearn, 2001).

³² *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 25th November 1899. Mr. Macleod held office as Moderator of Synod in November 1904 and July 1905 and also as Clerk of Synod from 1897 until 1905; he had been a tutor from 1897-1898. See G. N. M. Collins, *John Macleod, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1951).

of Scotland. The Free Church minority had begun the process of removing the Declaratory Act earlier that year and this led some within the Free Presbyterian Church to suggest that the two bodies would be sufficiently similar to warrant talks being held about closer future cooperation. The Free Church had made overtures in previous years. There was a firm Free Church aspiration for union, including the establishment of a committee with that specific purpose, but caution in 1902 on the part of the Free Presbyterian Synod led to that move faltering.³³

Mr. Macleod had lectured in Systematic Theology and New Testament Exegesis at the Free Church College in the latter half of 1905, while still a Free Presbyterian minister.³⁴ Those Free Presbyterians in favour of talks in 1905 believed there was an increasing amount of common ground and that it would be to the benefit of the cause of Christ to move closer together. Those opposed to formal discussions believed that key issues such as the views of a Free Church professor on Scripture, and the new body's understanding of its own and the Free Presbyterians' previous relationship to the Declaratory Act of 1892, warranted not holding talks. Mr. Macleod was sympathetic to the pro-negotiation viewpoint. In the November 1905 meeting of the Free Presbyterian Church's supreme court, the Synod, he moved that a committee be set up for the purpose of negotiations with the Free Church. This was defeated 18 votes to 5 by a motion by Rev. Neil Cameron. Two ministers and an elder then joined Mr. Macleod in his dissent against this finding. In December, Mr. Macleod, the two other pastors and a divinity student were received into the Free Church.³⁵

The local effects in Kames seem to have been varied. His biographer stated: "He knew that they were not unanimous in the view that they took of his joining the Free Church, and he feared lest he should be the cause of disunity among them."³⁶ In the months leading

³³ See *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland 1900-1909* (available online), 21st May 1903 Session 5: "Anent Union with Free Presbyterian Church. The General Assembly having heard the communication from the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church, express their regret at the terms of the message, and therefore, with reluctance, pass from the subject and discharge the Committee. Nevertheless, the Assembly declare afresh their friendly feeling towards that Church and their readiness to give effect to that feeling whenever that is practicable in view of the circumstances in which many congregations of the two Churches find themselves in close neighbourhood."

³⁴ Collins, *John Macleod D.D.*, pp. 88, 98.

³⁵ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970* (Inverness, n.d.), pp. 100-108.

³⁶ Collins, *John Macleod D.D.*, pp. 95-6. For his Farewell Letter, see Appendix IV.

up to Mr. Macleod's departure there appears to have been reluctance on the part of several newly-elected elders to accept office. In late 1904, an election of elders had resulted in Hugh Thomson (a stone-mason living in Kames), John Taylor, and Allan MacLachlan being elected. In March 1905 it was agreed that all the existing elders should attempt to use their influence on those elected to accept office. Three weeks later it was decided that the Kirk Session as a corporate body would ask the three elders elected to meet with them.³⁷ Another meeting of Session was held a week after this, on 12th April 1905. Two of the three newly-chosen elders appeared. Mr. Thomson consented to accept office, but Mr. MacLachlan did "not see his way clear at present". In his case and that of Mr. Taylor, it was decided to delay proceedings, "to see if their way might be opened up", but to proceed to Mr. Thomson's ordination.³⁸ Following Mr. Macleod's departure the congregation held together, partly due to his asking them to do so. However, in July 1907 the new elder, Hugh Thomson, resigned over the denomination's attitude to the Free Church. His resignation was in the face of repeated pleading by the other elders and Rev. Neil Cameron for him to reconsider the matter.³⁹

After Mr. Macleod's reception into the Free Church in December, 1905, the Kirk Session met formally on 8th January 1906 under their new interim moderator, Rev. Neil Cameron of Glasgow. The minute of this meeting refers to "the peculiar circumstances" of their minister having left to go to the Free Church. The Kames elders "desired to hear Mr. John Mackay, missionary at Greenock", while the interim moderator Neil Cameron pointed them to James Cameron, student. The elders left the future supply in Mr. Cameron's hands. Mr. Cameron was instructed to sound out Rev. Donald Beaton of Wick to see if he would consider a call; he was also asked to seek the services of Rev. J. R. Mackay and Rev. Donald Beaton for the forthcoming communion in May.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, meetings of 30th November 1904, 16th March 1905, and, 4th April 1905.

³⁸ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 12th April 1905. The 30th April 1905 Kirk Session minute was the last to be written by Rev. John Macleod, and referred to the ordination of elder Hugh Thomson.

³⁹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 25th July 1907.

⁴⁰ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, meeting of 8th January 1906. John Mackay, who died in 1928, was a son of Isabella Mackay, a respected member of the congregation in Halkirk, Caithness. For Mrs. Mackay see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 19, 1914-15, pp. 111-13. For John Mackay himself see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 33, 1928-9, p. 300. James Cameron (c. 1870-c. 1960) was born in Achterneed near Dingwall and became a divinity student in 1894, but was never ordained a minister. He served as a missionary in



Rev. Ewen MacQueen with his wife Jessie and family in Kames; he served there from 1912 until 1919. The picture is believed to date to around 1915.

[Photo courtesy of Miss Eona MacQueen]

By early 1906 Rev. Donald Beaton had not encouraged the prospect of a call from Kames. Rev. Neil Cameron was asked to approach Rev. J. R. Mackay, Inverness.⁴¹ Nothing came of this, and that summer Mr. Cameron was asked by the elders to approach Rev. Ewen MacQueen of the Lairg, Rogart, Dornoch, and Bonar joint charge in Sutherland about a call. He urged delay until the Stornoway congregation's call to Mr. MacQueen had been dealt with. In late September 1906, Mr. MacQueen refused the Stornoway call.⁴² The Kames elders' interest in

Strathpeffer around 1900, and by 1905 was in the same capacity in Tomatin. Later he supplied in Beaulieu. See MS, *Free Presbyterian Northern Presbytery* records for 18th August 1905, 24th November 1905, 22nd May 1907, and 28th June 1907 (information supplied by Rev. Alexander Murray, retired, Lairg). Mr. Murray recalls Mr. Cameron conducting a service in Bonar Bridge in the early 1930s and says that he was regarded as a godly man.

⁴¹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 29th March 1906.

⁴² *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 9th August 1906. The Stornoway call had been signed by 120 members and by 683 adherents – 803 in total. The numbers reflect the much higher



Rev. Ewen MacQueen in front of the Kames manse with one of his family. The manse was built very close to the original tin church. The building remained as the Free Presbyterian manse until the congregation was disbanded in 1997.

[Photo courtesy of Miss Eona MacQueen]

Mr. MacQueen persisted and in February 1907 they asked Mr. Cameron to have him assist at the May sacrament that year.⁴³ This interest did not reach the stage of sending him a call and attention focused again on Mr. Beaton. A call to Mr. Beaton was signed in late 1908 but was subsequently turned down.⁴⁴

The ongoing vacancy exercised the elders so much that in April 1910 they asked Mr. Cameron to write to the Oban elder Duncan Crawford enquiring if he would agree to be “ordained over them”. Mr.

population of Lewis at the time and would have included sections in Achmore, Breasclete, and North Tolsta – the last of which only became a separate charge in the late 1940s. Mr. MacQueen told the Northern Presbytery that he had given “no encouragement to the Stornoway Congregation at any time” and that “he could not encourage the Stornoway Congregation to send commissioners across the Minch”, see MS, *Free Presbyterian Northern Presbytery* minutes, meeting at Dingwall, 27th September 1906. I acknowledge the assistance of Rev. Alexander Murray, retired, Lairg, in accessing this material.

⁴³ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, meetings of 9th August 1906, 11th February 1907.

⁴⁴ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 3rd December 1908.

Crawford had been raised partly by his uncle, the late Archibald Crawford of Kames. By October he had replied that he was “not suitable for such responsible office” and the Kames elders agreed to have Rev. Walter Scott supply them for a few weeks. Walter Scott (1854-1916) had been a minister in Australia and was formally received as a Free Presbyterian minister on 2nd January 1911. He was later to serve in the Ontario charge in Canada from 1912-1916.⁴⁵

In early summer 1912, a congregational meeting agreed to call Rev. Ewen MacQueen, of the Lairg-Bonar-Rogart-Dornoch charge. Mr. MacQueen accepted the call and was inducted to Kames on 22nd August 1912.⁴⁶ The call from Kames to Mr. MacQueen had been signed by a total of two hundred and one people: five elders, twenty-one members and a hundred and seventy-five adherents. It had come before the 26th June 1912 meeting of the denomination’s Northern Presbytery.⁴⁷

A native of Camastianavaig near Portree on Skye, Mr. MacQueen (1866-1949) had been ordained in 1901, serving in Harris before the Lairg-Bonar-Rogart-Dornoch charge in Sutherland. During his time in Kames, Mr. MacQueen was one of the many Free Presbyterian ministers who acted as chaplains to military forces based in England in World War One. His role was to preach in late 1914 at barracks at Bedford and Buckden, as well as at naval bases at Portsmouth and Chatham. His visits preceded those of Rev. Neil Cameron in early 1915.⁴⁸ Mr. MacQueen was also to be absent from Kames for much of the period from November 1915 to November 1916, when he acted in the role of an official chaplain, including a spell in France. Like the other twelve Free Presbyterian ministers involved in various forms of chaplaincy to the forces, he found that the work brought him face to face with the horrors of war but also provided contact with a wider variety of Highland people than normally

⁴⁵ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, meetings of 30th April and 27th October 1910. The minutes do not make clear if the request was simply proposing that Duncan Crawford be appointed a missionary over the congregation or that some more unusual procedure be followed. For Walter Scott, see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 21, 1916-17, pp. 19-24; William MacLean, *In the Footsteps of the Flock: a Memorial to Rev. Walter Scott* (Gisborne, N.Z., 1960).

⁴⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 30th May 1912.

⁴⁷ The writer thanks Rev. Alexander Murray, retired, Lairg, for this information.

⁴⁸ Mr. Cameron was to write that in some Free Presbyterian congregations in 1914, the usual communion season Friday morning Question Meeting had been replaced by a prayer meeting for soldiers and sailors, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 19, 1914-15, pp. 337-340, 379-383.

would have been the case.⁴⁹ Mr. MacQueen moved to the Inverness congregation in April 1919.⁵⁰

Following Mr. MacQueen's departure to Inverness, the first instinct of the Kames people was again to approach Rev. Donald Beaton, Wick. Supply was requested in the following year (1920) from the divinity student Malcolm Gillies. In the summer of 1921 hopes of having Mr. Beaton faded as he had given "no encouragement to proceed with a call to him" but, following an approach to Rev. Duncan Mackenzie of Gairloch, the latter had agreed to consider a call.⁵¹ An Ardnamurchan man by birth, Duncan Mackenzie (1858-1930) had been an important figure in the separation of the Oban Free Presbyterian congregation. After divinity training, he was ordained and inducted to Gairloch in 1906 where he was pastor until his transfer at Kames on 29th September 1921. As will be seen in a later section of this article, his Kames ministry saw the communicant roll rise steadily. He died there on 17th September 1930 and was buried at Kilbride in the parish.⁵²

The vacancy caused by Mr. Mackenzie's death was filled eight months later by the induction of Rev. James Andrew Tallach who had been licensed in 1926 and had given supply in Canada and London. Mr. Tallach (1896-1960) laboured in Kames for over twenty-one years before taking up ministry in Stornoway in the autumn of 1952. His Kames pastorate was the longest one in the congregation's history and, like that of his predecessor Duncan Mackenzie, was marked by a significant

⁴⁹ See *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 20, April 1916, pp. 458-459; Vol. 21, June 1916, p. 59. For a wider analysis of this aspect of the Church's work, see James Lachlan Macleod, "Its own little share of service to the national cause: The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's chaplains in the First World War", *Northern Scotland*, Vol. 21, (2001), pp. 79-97.

⁵⁰ Ewen MacQueen served as Moderator of Synod in July 1907 as well as in 1928 and 1933. He was to leave the denomination in 1938 and set up the "Free Presbyterian Church 1893" in Inverness. He had tabled a Protest at the supreme court of the Church, the Synod, in June 1938, against its finding in relation to a discipline case. See *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*, pp. 175-7, 181-2. He died on 27th November 1949 and is buried in the Tomnahurich cemetery, Inverness.

⁵¹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 27th August 1919, 1st May 1920, 13th July 1921. Malcolm Gillies (1885-1945) was ordained and licensed by the Southern Presbytery as minister to Canadian Mission in September 1920. He pastored the Halkirk congregation from 24th August 1921-1925 and the Stornoway congregation from 30th March 1925 until 1945. Some notes of his preaching entitled *Fragments and Sermons of the Late Rev. Malcolm Gillies, Stornoway* (n.p., n.d.), were published in 1987.

⁵² Neil Cameron, *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, Roy Middleton (ed.), (Settle, 1993), pp. 22-27.

number of conversions and professions of faith.⁵³ Following Mr. Tallach's departure for Stornoway, Kames had formally been preached vacant on Sabbath 14th September 1952 by the new interim moderator, Rev. John Tallach of Oban.⁵⁴ The Kames Kirk Session paid tribute to Rev. James A. Tallach, who had "endeared himself to all sections of the congregation". The Session recorded "its appreciation of his ministry as a preacher, and his unfailing interest and sympathy with his people".⁵⁵ Sixty years later, Mr. Tallach's preaching in Kames on one occasion from the verse "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away" was still vivid to a hearer, as were the monthly services on a Sabbath in the Ardlamont village hall. The unusual location of the latter venue added interest for the young people from various families who would attend. Flags were displayed on the wall facing the congregation in the hall. Mr. Tallach's son John recalls his father preaching there from the words "I waited for the Lord my God" in Psalm 40.⁵⁶

In the ensuing period from autumn 1952, the Rev. R. R. Sinclair (Wick), Rev. D. A. MacFarlane (Dingwall), Rev. John Colquhoun (Glendale) and various divinity students were approached about becoming the minister of Kames but to no avail.⁵⁷ However, services were held from mid-1963 until the summer of 1968 by the then divinity student John MacDonald.⁵⁸ This must have been a considerable aid to the Session and the congregation.⁵⁹

In February 1969 it was decided to hold a congregational meeting in Kames, in order to send a call to Rev. Donald A. MacDonald. He was

⁵³ James A. Tallach died in January 1960 and was buried in Sandwick cemetery, Stornoway. He was Moderator of Synod in 1934, 1944, and 1957, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 65, 1961, pp. 337-342. A memoir, with specimens of his pulpit ministry, was published as *Sermons and Meditations by Rev. James A. Tallach* (Dingwall, 1962, 2nd edn. 1978).

⁵⁴ John Tallach (1890-1955) belonged to Dornoch. Ordained on 11th October 1924, he worked as a missionary on the denomination's Zimbabwe mission field in what was then known as Southern Rhodesia from 1924 to 1947. He took up the pastorate of Oban in 1949 and died there in 1955. See Catherine J. N. Tallach, *Mfundisi Tallach* (n.p., 2012); *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 60, 1956, pp. 362-8.

⁵⁵ MS, *Kames Kirk Session Minute Book 1931-1989* (hereafter, *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*), 16th September 1952.

⁵⁶ Rev. John Tallach; e-mails to the writer 20th October 2011, 13th March 2012.

⁵⁷ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, various dates.

⁵⁸ Mr. MacDonald's son Ian provided this information.

⁵⁹ Rev. John Macdonald (1925-2000) went on to serve as minister of Staffin from 1969 until 1981 and then in North Tolsta from 1981 until 1991. He died on 25th November 2000 and was buried in North Tolsta, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 107, 2002, pp. 24-5.

resident in Edinburgh by this point, having given supply in Australia the previous year. In May he was inducted to Kames. Mr. MacDonald left Kames in 1975.⁶⁰ There were to be no more Free Presbyterian pastors in Kames after his departure.

4. Leadership

Kames was noted for strong leadership among its ruling elders, the early ones having taken the courageous step of separating from the Free Church of Scotland in May 1893, when only one minister in Scotland (at that stage) had done so. Later Kames office-bearers and assessor elders (elders from other congregations who helped the Kirk Session when local office-bearers were not available) displayed much resilience.

Steps were taken in early 1896 to strengthen the Kirk Session and it was agreed to hold an election of deacons and elders. Alexander Thomson, John MacCallum, and Benjamin Dawson were the three who received most votes; they all accepted office and were ordained on 5th April at the close of the ordinary service. That gave a new total of six elders. Up until then there appear to have been only two able-bodied elders regularly attending the Kirk Session: Donald MacCallum and John MacLachlan.⁶¹ Session meetings were often held in the home of Donald MacIntyre at Craig Cottage.⁶² Mr. Thompson passed away in 1899. In a Session tribute, they recorded that they felt that “by his removal in the wise and holy providence of God, a sore breach has been made upon them”.⁶³ Mr. MacIntyre, who had been a deacon from 1872 to 1889, then an elder, died in May 1902.⁶⁴

The death of Archibald Crawford on Monday 21st December 1903 marked the end of an era. In a Kirk Session tribute, they referred to him as “a nursing father to the Lord’s inheritance in this district”. He had never seen his way clear to accept office in the church. The memorial continued: “In him unusual natural talents, breadth of view, sagacity of

⁶⁰ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 6th February, 8th May 1969. Rev. Donald A. Macdonald had been ordained in the Free Church in 1942 and received into the Free Presbyterian Church in May 1966. He joined the APCs in 1989 and died on 11th October 1990, being buried in Fodderty.

⁶¹ For an obituary of John MacLachlan see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 25, 1920-1, pp. 245-7; republished in *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 127-9.

⁶² *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 29th January 1896, 1st March 1896, 4th March 1896.

⁶³ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 9th September 1899.

⁶⁴ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 2nd February 1903.

judgement, and keenness of discernment were crowned, sanctified and mellowed by a rich unction of grace that made him a polished shaft in his Master's hand."⁶⁵

Long before his death, Archie Crawford must have been a role model for the younger men who were now the office-bearers in Kames. Rev. John Macleod's obituary for Mr. Crawford gave a clear outline of his spirituality, particularly in these later years and as he approached death:

Mr. Crawford was much given to self-examination, and one of the passages that for years kept him at a standstill was the words in Philippians iii: "being made conformable to His death." With regard to this he was quite clear at last, and quite characteristically he found the key that opened the lock in the narrative of Jonah. With his questioning, searching spirit, he was much kept down, and much distressed, at the inward experience he had of the power of sin. This served to keep him abiding in Christ, esteeming all his own righteousness as filthy rags. But, much as he was kept under for years, the end was triumphant. He was concerned as it drew near that he might have the full use of his faculties to the last, and this was granted him. Inquiring one day during his last illness as to how a neighbour was, whose end was being daily looked for, and who was still alive, he remarked, on being informed of this, "He keeps the world hanging on a hair's breadth of His purpose". The old pith and vigour were in the words.

A few days before the end came, a question was put to him purposely to draw out his views in prospect of what was before him, and his answer was – "The life that is above, that death could not seize, that is my portion, if portion I have." A day or two before the end the difficulties that oft beset him melted away, and the time of the singing of birds was come – "O," said he, "that He would say to my soul, 'Arise, my love, and come away'." In this he seemed to rest and to rejoice: "My Beloved is *Mine* and I am *His*." He laid stress on the Mine and the His. In the delightful enjoyment of communion with the Lord he was eager to depart, "to be with Christ, which is far better". With all this personal comfort and assurance as to the future he forgot not the care of the generation he was leaving behind; and what he often expressed his

⁶⁵ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 26th April 1905.

ardent longing to see, showers of grace descending for the refreshment of the Lord's garden, he prayed for to the last. In these last days words that had often exercised him were sweetly on his lips, "Said not I unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?". He was now on the eve of seeing and enjoying the blessing of him that believes to whom there shall be a fulfilment. Thus as a shock of corn fully ripe, a patriarch has been removed from among us.⁶⁶

Archie Crawford's influence went much further than Kames, not only through his friends in the northern Highlands but also through his family connection to Oban, where his nephew Duncan Crawford was one of the leaders in the formation of the Free Presbyterian congregation. Duncan Crawford's son Archibald was himself to become an elder in Oban, dying on 26th May 1945. He was noted for "looking after the interests of afflicted and needy persons" but also for a somewhat timid nature which meant he had never exhorted in public services.⁶⁷ A sister, Miss Ann Crawford of Ardbeg, Oban, passed away in January 1949 after years of ill-health, cared for by her sister Miss Lizzie Crawford, and showed deep interest in charities for orphans and in foreign missions.⁶⁸

An ability to communicate the needs of the Kames congregation to the interim moderator in the years after Rev. John Macleod's departure 1905 is seen in a minute of the Kirk Session in 1909. "Rev. D. MacLeod" was to be asked to supply for six Sabbaths "as the congregation stood very much in need of being visited by a minister in their homes".⁶⁹

One key figure was the elder, Allan MacLachlan, whose brother John held the same office. Allan's character was sufficiently respected for him to be instructed by the Synod to accompany Rev. Neil Cameron to Ontario, Canada, in 1902 for meetings with groups of people sympathetic to the denomination. He died in August 1921.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 8, February 1904, pp. 388-395.

⁶⁷ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 50, October 1945, pp. 110-11.

⁶⁸ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 54, 1949-50, pp. 131-132.

⁶⁹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 28th October 1909. The reference is to Donald Norman Macleod (1872-1967), a North Uist man who had been licensed and ordained on 1st June 1908. He pastored Harris from 3rd August 1911 until 1924 and Ullapool from 9th July 1924 until his death in 1967. He was buried in Ullapool.

⁷⁰ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 26, January 1922, pp. 268-72; republished in *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 155-9.

One of the main links with the past was lost in April 1923 in the person of Benjamin Dawson, who had been a bosom friend of Archie Crawford. Rev. Neil Cameron wrote that Mr. Crawford had regarded Benjamin Dawson as one of the most exercised Christians he had ever met.⁷¹ January 1925 saw the passing of the veteran Kames elder, Norman MacCallum, at the age of 93.⁷²

Another leader in Kames was Dugald MacCallum, who died in 1932. He had been appointed an elder on 23rd October 1921. His obituarist, Rev. James A. Tallach stated: "As long as he had been associated with the congregation – over 30 years – he acted as beadle, a difficult task, and in this case made specially so by the venom and malice which characterized the attitude of some towards the Free Presbyterian cause in Kames. Dugald was a rare combination of patience, meekness, firmness and sincerity. His smile of welcome at the church was something to be seen to be appreciated. Christianity, welcoming stranger as well as friend to the House of God, beamed from his very countenance. . . . He was ordained to the eldership in 1921, and from then to his death his chief interest was the prosperity of the cause of Christ. . . . Tears used to stream down his cheeks as he spoke of the rebellion of his thoughts and will against the Most High. Doubtless these tears were put into God's bottle and for mourning he now has joy."⁷³

The year 1933 saw the passing of Donald MacCallum, who had also been ordained on 23rd October 1921. The denominational magazine published a substantial obituary of him. This stated:

No one, not even the most careless, could be long in Donald's company without discovering where his heart lay. The prosperity of the cause of Christ made him rejoice: news of adversity saddened him even to tears.

As a young man, his mother said of him: "I have two sons in the ministry, but the best minister of the three sits at the fire side." In support of his mother's opinion the following incident, among many, might be related. As he was one day going his rounds with the milk cart, he was met by a man of the district whom he knew

⁷¹ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 28, 1923-4, p. 95. His obituary is on pp. 342-4; republished in *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 130-2.

⁷² *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 30, 1925-6, pp. 22-26; republished in *Ministers and Men of the Free Presbyterian Church*, pp. 133-6.

⁷³ See his obituary in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1933-4, p. 222.

well. In the course of conversation the man said: "Well, Mr. MacCallum, I've decided to stop going to church altogether. I never got any good out of it and I'm thinking it's just a waste of time."

"Well, John, I was just thinking you're very impatient. Don't we read in the scriptures of one who lay for thirty-eight years waiting for a cure, and Christ healed him at last; and you're not nearly that long waiting." The man continued to come out to church, and it is reported on credible authority that the Word was savingly blessed to him before he died.

Donald MacCallum was a man of sterling character, who ever loved peace, but who was prepared to do battle when peace could no longer be maintained without violating conscience. He was an exceedingly prudent and well-informed man, who seriously considered the state of religion in his own day, and weighed well his personal duty thereto. Having decided on a course of action, he possessed great tenacity of purpose in carrying it into effect. He never made boastful promises which he afterwards found it convenient to forget, but spoke rather by deeds than by words.

Throughout a life-time of forty years the Kames congregation has seen many changes and experienced some bitter disappointments, but in the goodness of the Lord they always had a reliable friend in "Uncle Donald", as he was affectionately called. He never failed them – calm, wise, resolute, what a tower of strength such a one is in a congregation! What a breach his removal makes!

Mr. MacCallum enjoyed robust health until a few weeks of his death. He was confined to his bed for about ten days before the end came. Although he never married he was surrounded by those who counted it an honour and a pleasure to wait on him in the smallest detail up to the last. We extend our sincere sympathy to his one surviving sister, and to his other relatives.⁷⁴

The seriousness with which Duncan Macpherson viewed the office of the eldership and particularly the duty of taking services in the absence of a minister was remarked on in his obituary. When his senior

⁷⁴ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1933-4, pp. 247-251.

colleague in the eldership and his uncle, Donald MacCallum, was gravely ill, Mr. Macpherson was found weeping and stated that the reason was his feeling of “utter unfitness for the work” should his uncle pass away. Rev. James A. Tallach wrote that Duncan showed “ripe judgement” and that his “wise counsel and whole-hearted sympathy made it pleasant and profitable to be associated with him. . . . As a man who was prominent in the public life of the community at large his help and advice were often sought for and ungrudgingly given. Although in the course of business, often coming much into contact with men who differed widely from him in religious questions, he never hid his light under a bushel . . . he



Duncan MacPherson, who died in 1935, was one of the second generation of elders in Kames and wept with a feeling of “unfitness” for taking services.

[Photo courtesy of
Catherine MacPherson]

set a high value on the weekly prayer meeting as a welcome relief from the toil and worry of business.” Another illustration of the practical stamp of the Kames people is perhaps alluded to in further points made in the obituary: “Mr. Macpherson was a man who recognised that Christianity is more than an empty profession. His services to the Church in Kames, although making considerable demands on his time, were not only freely given, but, apart from his family and business, constituted his one interest in life.”⁷⁵

The years of World War Two took their own toll in south-west Cowal. Large numbers of military personnel were based in the area as the land and waters around Ardlamont were deemed suitable for training purposes. American troops were billeted temporarily in the old “Tin Kirk”. There was little Kirk Session activity but the meeting of 3rd May 1941 is the first which appears to have been held in the new church at Kames, which had been completed a year earlier. A few previous meetings had been in Glasgow. In December 1943, Donald

⁷⁵ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 40, 1935-6, pp. 219-221.



Donald MacPherson, shop-keeper and “spiritually-minded man”, served as an elder from 1943 to 1981 and was largely responsible for keeping the Kames congregation open; he is pictured here with his wife Catherine (née MacLachlan).

[Photo courtesy of Catherine MacPherson]

MacPherson and Christopher Mackenzie were ordained as elders. The March 1944 meeting was noted in the Kirk Session record as being the first meeting “for many years” where the Session was “comprised entirely of elders belonging to the congregation” and they expressed thankfulness to God.⁷⁶ Sadly, Christopher Mackenzie’s association with the main body of the Free Presbyterian Church was to end in late 1945 out of sympathy with the Rev. Roderick Mackenzie of Glasgow, in whose support for a short period he held separate services in Kames. Rev. Roderick Mackenzie took the funeral worship when Christopher Mackenzie’s wife died. Christopher Mackenzie had run a butcher’s shop in Kames called “Whyte and Mackenzie” in partnership with another Free Presbyterian.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 3rd May 1941, Sabbath 12th December 1943, 14th March 1944.

⁷⁷ For the Rev. Roderick Mackenzie’s case, see *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*, pp. 185-6. Rev. Roderick Mackenzie did not instigate the services in Glasgow and Kames. Christopher Mackenzie’s mother, Ann Mackenzie of Badfean,

It is perhaps a sign of the decline in the congregation that after Christopher Mackenzie parted company with the Church, Donald MacPherson had no fellow-elder resident in the area until 1969, twenty-six years after his own ordination to the office. Capt. Hugh Cowan was ordained in July of that year.⁷⁸ One of the strategies employed in pre-war years by the Southern Presbytery had been to appoint assessor elders from other congregations and this was to happen often again for Kames. Assessor elders for the congregation included many of those in the St Jude's, Glasgow charge. Two of the most noted were Alex. Alexander (1913-1979) of Glasgow and Captain James Henderson (1909-1996) of Dumbarton. Both had belonged to a circle of young men in Glasgow who were converted in the 1930s, worshipped at St. Jude's, held private prayer meetings in the late 1930s and early 1940s in addition to attendance at the stated congregational weekly meeting, and went on to give sterling service to the church.⁷⁹

The end of an era came with the death of Donald MacPherson on 23rd October 1981.⁸⁰ Mr. MacPherson had his leg amputated in 1977 but continued to take services. He is remembered as an unusual speaker: he prepared his exhortations by meditating as he did his work in the grocery and butcher's shop which he ran.⁸¹ The Kames Kirk Session recorded its sense of loss, stating that he had been "highly respected as a Christian" and said of him: "a spiritually-minded man, he was a most acceptable speaker". It also paid tribute to his diligence in holding the Kames services, Sabbath and weekday.⁸²

While geographically isolated by road, Kames had the advantage of being accessible by ferry steamer for congregations from which the

Aultbea, died in April 1945 and was a highly respected member of the Church. She had been born in the now uninhabited island of Crowlin in Applecross parish; see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 50, October 1945, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁸ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, Sabbath 13th July 1969.

⁷⁹ Mr. Alexander's obituary is to be found in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 87, 1982, pp. 47-9 and Capt. Henderson's in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 102, 1997, pp. 49-51. For the circle of young men in Glasgow, see A. E. Alexander, *Beauty for Ashes: A brochure in memory of the late Miss Barbara and Miss Isabella Morton, of 53 St Vincent Crescent, Glasgow* (Glasgow/Trowbridge, 1945), reprinted as *Beauty for Ashes, The Lives of Two Godly Women Remembered* (Inverness, 2003).

⁸⁰ Donald MacPherson, of "Mayfield", Kames, died on 23rd October 1981 and was survived by his wife Catherine née MacLachlan, three children and two grandchildren, *Glasgow Herald*, 24th October 1981, p. 2.

⁸¹ This information came from his daughter Catherine MacPherson.

⁸² *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 1st May 1982.



Rev. James MacLeod (1883-1963), minister of Greenock FP Church, is seen here at a wedding in Kames, where he served as interim-moderator at one time.

[Photo courtesy of
Catherine MacPherson]

Southern Presbytery could appoint interim-moderators and assessor elders to assist them. One such figure was Rev. James Macleod of Greenock, who often preached there and is remembered as making new friends by teasing customers in Donald Macpherson's shop. Mr. Macleod (1883-1963) was minister of Greenock from 1932 to 1963.⁸³

5. Reformed witness

From time to time the Kames elders were faced with issues outwith the normal round of internal congregational business: a few examples from the early decades are mentioned here as these shed some light on the things which mattered to them. In early 1907, a collection was organised for the Chinese

famine.⁸⁴ A meeting of the Kirk Session in autumn of 1922 refused the request of the local parish minister, Rev. Patrick Barrowman, that they "lend local practical support to Flag Day on 11th November".⁸⁵ The denomination had taken the view that if prayers at the grave were unscriptural, there was a danger that War Memorial services would run into the same error. The attitude of the Church to religious commemorations of the War was to be summarised in a Statement of Differences between it and other Churches, first published in 1933. This stated: "The habit common throughout the country of having religious services at the War Memorials once a year is liable to create a spirit of hero-worship, tends to idolatry, and leans in the direction of prayers for the dead. . . . It is no lack of patriotism or want of sympathy with the bereaved that moves us to condemn these services, but a deep

⁸³ For Rev. James Macleod, see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 67, 1962-3, pp. 355-6; Vol. 68, 1963-4, pp. 225-233.

⁸⁴ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 11th February 1907.

⁸⁵ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 11th October 1922.

sense of the honour that is due to God.” The Statement was updated in 1962.⁸⁶

This should also be seen in the wider context of the Church’s view that World War One had been a just war, but that unbiblical views of the value of death on the battlefield had emerged in that time through liberal clergymen. Many of its adherents and communicants had been killed in the War; the denomination had provided thirteen ministers for chaplaincy support for soldiers based in the south of England as well as two official British forces chaplains for service abroad.⁸⁷

In April 1923, the Kirk Session agreed to write to the Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law, to complain about the prospective visit of the King and Queen to the Pope. By that date, Bonar Law had probably begun the month’s leave from work – on the advice of his doctor – during which terminal cancer of the throat was diagnosed. He resigned, dying in October of the year; he had been prime minister for only 209 days.⁸⁸ The issue was stated by the editor of the denominational magazine “to be a matter in which the claims of conscience assert themselves”. It caused widespread debate among the churches of the UK at the time as it was perceived as giving inappropriate recognition to the Vatican, weakening the Protestant nature of the Crown within the British Constitution and being wrong on the King’s part as the titular “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England.⁸⁹

In December of the next year, the Kirk Session refused to intimate a Temperance Meeting from the pulpit, as requested by Rev. Patrick Barrowman.⁹⁰ The precise nature of the proposed service is not apparent, but the proposal would have been problematic on two counts. The Free Presbyterian Church did not hold joint services with other denominations (funerals involved family worship in which sound men of

⁸⁶ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*, “Synod Statement of Differences”, pp. 365-384 (see p. 382).

⁸⁷ For an example of opposition to the teaching of “death-in-battle” merit, see “Greater Love hath no Man than this”, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 21, October 1916, p. 201. For the wider context, see James Lachlan Macleod, “‘Greater Love Hath No Man than This’: Scotland’s conflicting religious responses to death in the Great War”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1, (2002), pp. 70-96.

⁸⁸ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 18th April 1923. Bonar Law is today seen as the first of the modern Tory leaders and as having been the first Conservative leader not to be born into the aristocracy; see his entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸⁹ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 28, May 1923, pp. 1-3.

⁹⁰ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 17th December 1924.

other denominations might on occasion be asked to assist). Secondly, while opposed to the unrestricted sale of alcohol, it had not adopted an official stance of teetotalism. The denomination had declared itself in favour of Public Houses being shut down in 1918. This was in the context of the terms of the Temperance (Scotland) Act 1913. During a subsequent protracted debate over several years involving its minister in Canada, Rev. William Matheson, the Synod made clear that it did not condemn “sober and restricted use” of alcohol as medicine and a beverage so long as strict sobriety was maintained, while also urging self-denial for the sake of the brother of weak conscience, 1 Corinthians 7:12-13.⁹¹

In 1927 it was suggested that Kames congregation cease to have a collection on New Year’s Day for the National Bible Society of Scotland as had happened in the past.⁹² It is not clear whether the day of collection or the Society itself was the issue at stake in that year. Deep concerns were being expressed in the preceding years by the Trinitarian Bible Society over the British and Foreign Bible Society’s attitude to Roman Catholic translations of Scripture, the Unitarian heresy, and the doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Bible. The Trinitarian Bible Society, however, had made it clear in 1922 that the National Bible Society of Scotland took the same stance on inspiration. It may be that the Kames and other Kirk Sessions felt it more appropriate to focus limited resources on the Trinitarian Bible Society as the one closest to the Free Presbyterian position.

It was not until twenty years later (on 13th October 1947) that the National Bible Society of Scotland amended its constitution to permit the Society to publish versions of the Scriptures in the English language other than in the Authorised Version, and it was as a result of this decision that the Free Presbyterian Synod in the following year decided formally to have nothing further to do with it and to support the Trinitarian Bible Society instead.⁹³

⁹¹ *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*, pp. 131-7.

⁹² *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 17th April 1927.

⁹³ See *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1893-1970*, p. 198; *The Quarterly Record of the Trinitarian Bible Society*, No. 250, October 1922, pp. 14-16; No. 251, January 1923, pp. 11-14; No. 252, April 1923, pp. 8-12; No. 256, April 1924, pp. 11-15; No. 257, July 1924, pp. 18-21; No. 258, October 1924, pp. 11-14; No. 259, January 1925, pp. 11-15; No. 260, April 1925, pp. 14-21; No. 264, January 1926, pp. 7-11. The June 1926 issue of the denominational magazine had recommended that readers peruse the recent *Quarterly Record* material. The February 1927 edition reported a National Bible Society of Scotland meeting in Glasgow but with no negative comment. See *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 31, June 1926, pp. 76-7; February 1927, pp. 396-7. In 1827 the various Scottish Bible societies

In early January 1945, the Kirk Session heard from Mr. Tallach that “certain members of the Tighnabruaich Curling Club had been on the ice curling on the past Sabbath”. The Session agreed to write to the Club to protest, describing curling on the Lord’s day as a breach of the Fourth Commandment, a “sin against God . . . and an outrage against the religious convictions of Christian people”. A copy was to be sent to *The Buteman* newspaper but it does not appear that this was ever published.⁹⁴

6. Professions of faith

At an early stage it was agreed to hold one communion season every year in Kames on the first Sabbath of May.⁹⁵ Revs. Neil Cameron and John R. Mackay were invited to assist the new minister Rev. Alexander MacRae at the first such sacrament in the new congregation in 1895.

At that May 1895 communion season, three new members were added to the congregation. Two applicants wishing to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper for the first time appeared at the Kirk Session and were “addressed on their duty and responsibility”. The two had approached Mr. MacRae who had been “satisfied with their knowledge and profession” and the “Session confirmed” that judgment. (Another member was added by disjunction certificate from the Established Church.⁹⁶) Two further members were added to the Communion Roll at the 1896 communion season.⁹⁷

The practice whereby Mr. MacRae, as the local pastor, carried out the first interview with those wishing to profess faith was by instruction of the Kirk Session.⁹⁸ In April 1898, another man was admitted to the Lord’s Supper, having previously been examined by Mr. MacRae who was “thoroughly satisfied with his knowledge and profession” – the Session were unanimously in favour of admitting him.⁹⁹ A “Mrs.

had withdrawn support from the British and Foreign Bible Society over the decision of the BFBS to include the Apocrypha in some of its versions, and they had subsequently united in 1861 to form the National Bible Society of Scotland. Since 2000 the National Bible Society of Scotland has called itself the Scottish Bible Society. The writer is grateful to Edward Greene, Oxford, for these references.

⁹⁴ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 24th January 1945.

⁹⁵ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 9th April 1895.

⁹⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 6th May 1895.

⁹⁷ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 2nd May 1896.

⁹⁸ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 9th April 1895, 1st April 1896, 10th April 1897, 5th April 1899.

⁹⁹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 23rd April 1898.

Campbell, Tayvallich, North Knapdale”, was admitted to the Lord’s Supper in May 1899.¹⁰⁰

Following Mr. MacRae’s departure to Skye, the practice seems to have changed and usually the interim moderator or minister and the elders jointly interviewed candidates for communion at a single meeting. This was the case, for instance, with Rev. Neil Cameron in 1905 and again in 1912.¹⁰¹ By 2nd May 1913 Rev. Ewen MacQueen was pastor. At that communion, he and the Session again appear jointly to have examined a candidate for the Lord’s Table.

The 1920s was a time of blessing in Kames. The communion roll rose steadily during Mr. Mackenzie’s ministry, going from 24 in 1921 to 36 by 1931. Thereafter there was a sharp drop. Many of the office-bearers passed away at that time and probably a considerable number of long-standing members as well. Indeed the congregational roll was prevented from near-collapse only by the admission of eight new members at the communion of May 1934. Thereafter there was a small but sustained trickle of professions of faith but after the 1940s they became rare.¹⁰²

Only one communion season had been held in Kames every year. In 1969, presumably on the suggestion of the new minister, Rev. Donald A MacDonald, it was agreed to hold two communion seasons in the congregation. These were to be held on the 2nd Sabbath of May (not the 1st Sabbath as previously) and on the 3rd Sabbath of October. The change does not seem to have become permanent.¹⁰³

The last person to profess in Kames was Donald McRae of Point farm, Ardlamont who “came forward” in 1989. He was a son of the first minister who had served the congregation, Rev. Alexander McRae. The last *surviving* communicant was Mrs. Jenny MacPherson (née MacLachlan) a sister-in-law of the elder Donald Macpherson and the widow of the late Rev. Alexander MacPherson; she passed away in December 2011 having professed faith many years earlier in Kames.

¹⁰⁰ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 6th May 1899.

¹⁰¹ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 4th May 1907, 5th May, 1912.

¹⁰² See Appendix II of this article; also *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 8th May 1934.

¹⁰³ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, Sabbath 13th July 1969.

7. Lochgilphead

Kames had a number of links with the small Free Presbyterian grouping in Lochgilphead in mid-Argyll. It seems that a significant number of mid-Argyll people supported the new denomination in 1893 onwards. Had they been able to call a minister, the Tarbert (Loch Fyne) and Lochgilphead Free Presbyterian congregations could have been stabilised. Writing in the late 1920s, the Rev. Donald Beaton stated of the early days: “The chief difficulty was to find preachers for the number of congregations asking for them. There can be little doubt that the Church would have been larger today if it had been able to supply congregations with preachers at the beginning.”¹⁰⁴

Some measure of the scale of support in mid-Argyll is reflected in the records of collections for the construction of the Free Presbyterian church building on Lorne Street in Lochgilphead in 1904. This included twenty-two names in the “Lochgilphead section”, nineteen names in the “Aird section”, six names in the “Ardrishaig section”, seven names in the “Kilmartin section”, and nine names in the “Knapdale section”.¹⁰⁵ Contributions were recorded from other congregations, including that of fourteen people in Tarbert (Loch Fyne), £4 from Kames congregation, and £4 and a shilling from “Miss MacLeod” who had collected money in the Stornoway congregation. “Friends” of the Lochgilphead congregation who also gave to the building fund were also listed. “FRIENDS in Lochgilphead” lists thirty-nine people, while forty-eight people were named as “friends” in Ardrishaig. Gifts were made to the congregation: these included a gate, clock, and pulpit Gaelic Bible for the new building from “Mrs. Gillies, Stag Hotel, Lochgilphead”, while others presented the congregation with collecting cards and English psalm books. There were also collections by “friends” in Glasgow, Greenock, Lochgair, Dumbarton and Oban as well as from those on board some ships. Thus, allowing for some error in distinguishing between actual attenders and mere sympathisers willing to donate to a special fund-raising effort, there appear to have been somewhere between fifty and seventy active Free

¹⁰⁴ D. Beaton, *Memoir, Diary and Remains of the Rev. Donald MacFarlane, Dingwall* (Inverness, 1929) p. 32, cited in James Lachlan Macleod, *The Second Disruption* (East Linton, 2000), p. 242.

¹⁰⁵ MS, *Lochgilphead Building Committee Records*, pp. 3-5. Remarkably, the Knapdale list included the Rev. Lachlan MacLean (1838-1913), the parish church minister, who had been in North Knapdale since 1878. Licensed in 1862, he had been ordained assistant in Arisaig in 1863, and inducted to Ardnamurchan in 1870; see Hew Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (2nd edn, 7 vols., Edinburgh, 1915-28), Vol. 4, p. 17.

Presbyterians in the Tarbert-Lochgilphead district in 1904; this alongside a fair body of others having a positive disposition to the ecclesiastical position they had taken up.¹⁰⁶

Lochgilphead benefited at various times from the presence of divinity students who studied with the denomination's tutors in Oban after 1930 and in Glasgow after 1960. Rev. James A. Tallach of Kames actually preached his first sermon in public at Lochgilphead. The text was 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying . . .".¹⁰⁷ One pillar of the Lochgilphead congregation was John MacEwen who acted as missionary there for some years prior to his death. Born in Silvercraig, three miles outside Lochgilphead, in 1861, he passed away in December 1939. "John's prayers in public were most impressive," according to his obituary. "They were the utterances of one who was familiar with trading in other waters than those of Lochfyne. Gaelic was his mother-tongue, but when asked, he prayed in English, although not so much at home in it. But somehow language was forgotten when John prayed. There was a spiritual unction on his petitions – a straightforward honesty – which never failed to arrest the attention of sympathetic listeners. Humble and reverent in his approach to the Mercy Seat he yet spoke to God as to a friend, face to face."¹⁰⁸

The ensuing decade seemed to see the Lochgilphead group lose heart. It appears that no services were held in the church building in the years 1943 to early 1946, and an offer to buy the property from them was met with support among the Lochgilphead congregation. The proposal to sell to the County Council came before the Southern Presbytery on 5th February 1946, a letter having been received from Claxton and Brown, solicitors, Lochgilphead (on behalf of the Council) offering £700 for the property. The Presbytery referred the matter to the Synod which discussed the offer at its meeting of 22nd May 1946. This was apparently the first occasion on which a Free Presbyterian building was considered for disposal. Mr. Tallach reported that the congregation had been unanimously in favour of the sale to the local authority but that the Kames Kirk Session "recognised that it would be deplorable" that any church building belonging to the denomination should be on the market.

¹⁰⁶ MS, *Lochgilphead Building Committee Records*, pp. 6-10, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Rev. John Tallach, e-mail to the writer, 7th May 2012.

¹⁰⁸ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 46, May 1941, pp. 13-15. The obituarist was Rev. James A. Tallach of Kames who had been the interim moderator.



The Lochgilphead Free Presbyterian Church building stood on Lorne St. in the town and was paid for by members of the congregation and friends across mid-Argyll and further afield. It was shut down in 1973 and demolished soon afterwards. A telephone exchange was built on the site.

[Photo courtesy of Argyll and Bute Council Archive]

He added that the building had not been used for three years and there was no one there capable of maintenance work. Mr. John Grant moved, seconded by Rev. Neil Macintyre, that the sale should not go ahead and this became the finding of the Synod. Members of Synod suggested that the congregation might grow again and that someone based in Lochgilphead might be able to conduct the public worship. Mr. Tallach informed Synod that the Oban elder, John MacDonald, had offered to help out as much as he could.¹⁰⁹

John MacDonald (1880-1957) was also to become an assessor elder for Kames itself in 1952.¹¹⁰ Mr. MacDonald was often in Kames and was noted for his beautiful singing. He had been born in Mull and brought up in Oban where he worked as the foreman in the Goods department of the town's railway station for many years. His role in Lochgilphead was to be as "part-time missionary" and he attended the last church service of his life there three days before his death. Mr. MacDonald

¹⁰⁹ *Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Proceedings of Synod. May, 1946* (Glasgow, 1946) pp. 10-13.

¹¹⁰ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 16th September 1952.

was regarded as one of the “outstanding” laymen in the denomination and as “an uncompromising witness for the Lord” by his pastor Rev. Malcolm MacSween.¹¹¹

It is not now clear if the three-year gap in the use of the Lochgilphead church from 1943 to 1946 meant that no services at all had been held there; however, the decision to keep it open, and the supply from John MacDonald and Rev. John Tallach (Oban) in the 1950s, helped stabilise matters. By the late 1960s, services were being held on a monthly basis. These were often conducted by divinity students studying in Oban. The denomination may have been encouraged by the experience in Fort William where attendances had declined to two people in the late 1940s but had risen strongly with the settlement of Rev. John Angus MacDonald as pastor and as new employment opportunities attracted people in from other areas of the north-west Highlands and islands.¹¹² After Rev. Malcolm MacSween left Oban, Donald Macpherson of Kames would hold one service a month in Lochgilphead, the half-dozen Lochgilphead people being supplemented by his own family who would accompany him.¹¹³ As noted in *SRSHJ* 2, Lochgilphead Free Presbyterian services were discontinued in 1973 and the church building demolished, a telephone exchange taking its place.

In addition to the Lochgilphead group, there was a Free Presbyterian family living in Arrochar in the 1950s and Church people travelling to and from Argyll, including Rev. D. J. Matheson of Glasgow when acting as the Kames interim moderator, would often stop there and hold occasional services.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Miss Catherine MacPherson recalled his singing voice. See his obituary by Rev. Malcolm MacSween in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 60, 1955-6, pp. 52-4. His father, Allan MacDonald, had been an important figure in the consolidation of the Oban Free Presbyterian congregation and was noted for “great tenderness of conscience” and as a valued visitor to the sick and dying, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 8. 1903-4, p. 21.

¹¹² The writer acknowledges the advice of Rev. John MacLeod, London, on these points.

¹¹³ Miss Catherine MacPherson. Rev. Malcolm MacSween’s obituary is in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 85, 1980, pp. 85-9.

¹¹⁴ The writer thanks Donald MacCuish, APC elder in Inverness, for this information. Mr. Matheson (1890-1962) served in Glasgow from 1946 to 1960, followed by a short pastorate in Daviot, Inverness-shire, see *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 67, 1962-3, pp. 248-9, 335-8.

8. Aspects of congregational life in Kames

On the basis that around 1,000 people in Kilfinan parish had joined the Free Church in 1843 Disruption, the Free Presbyterian cause centred on the Millhouse section of the Kilfinan congregation took the equivalent of a quarter of that figure out of the Free Church body in 1893. In November 1894 Rev. Alexander MacRae was inducted to the Kames Free Presbyterian charge. This followed a call signed by a total of 234 people: 36 communicants and 198 adherents. As seen earlier, the remnant Kilfinan Free Church had gained their own minister in the spring of 1894; his call was signed by 23 communicants and 76 adherents. Thus, allowing for a few accessions from the neighbouring Tighnabruaich Free Church, one can conclude that well over two-thirds of the total active Kilfinan Free Church congregation in 1893 joined the Free Presbyterian cause.

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, the Kames Free Presbyterian congregation was probably larger than that in Oban. As noted earlier in this article, the Kames call to Rev. Ewen MacQueen in 1912 had been signed a total of 201 people; an Oban call later that year could muster a total of 190 members and adherents.¹¹⁵

One major factor in the decline of the congregation was the demographic collapse of the community to which it witnessed. The population of Kilfinan parish fell from 2,709 in 1911 to 1,253 in 1951. A key employer had been the gunpowder factory at Millhouse. Opened in 1839, this had continued until 1921: five fatal incidents occurred during its history. Run by water-power and having its own designated pier in Kames, it was a large operation and employed many local people down through the decades.¹¹⁶ One observer indicated that the closing of the Powder Works at Millhouse resulted in a number of families moving to Ayrshire and that by the 1950s holiday homes were becoming common.¹¹⁷

The Kames Free Presbyterians were surrounded by a sea of increasingly liberal Protestantism in the Cowal peninsula. The liberalising ethos in the pre-1893 and pre-1900 Free Church, as articulated by Principal Rainy, did not itself continue as a clear evangelical witness into the twentieth-century in Cowal. Outwith the

¹¹⁵ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 17, January 1913, pp. 365-6.

¹¹⁶ Kennedy McConnell of Dundee, "The People of the Powder Mill", at www.kylesofbute.com/gunpowder.html – downloaded 7th May 2009.

¹¹⁷ Colin M. MacDonald (ed.), *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: the County of Argyll* (Glasgow, 1961), Parish of Kilfinan by Rev. George Cairns, p. 318.

Free Presbyterian, Free Church, and Baptist congregations in Dunoon, and the Free Church witness in Strachur, distinctly evangelical teachings seem to have been unknown in the churches of the peninsula other than in the Kames Free Presbyterian church. By the 1950s, even the form of worship in the Kames Free Presbyterian congregation was sufficiently unusual in terms of the norm in Argyll for an observer to remark: "In the form of service at public worship the members adhere to the old custom of standing at prayers and of remaining seated during the praise, which has no instrumental accompaniment and consists only of psalms."¹¹⁸

Scotland moved away from membership of Christian denominations after the 1950s but the roots of the decline stretched back into the loss of the larger Churches' own confidence in the Scriptures during the 1870s to 1890s. Evangelical religion as a force in communities was in retreat too. Even in areas with a stronger recent Calvinistic heritage of evangelical revival, and in which a stand for confessional Calvinism had been made in the 1890s, the ethos was changing between the 1920s and 1950s. A writer describing one rural Highland area in the 1950s, Duirinish parish in Skye, noted that the men who returned from service in the First World War no longer believed in the form of Calvinism in which they had been brought up and disliked the Church's resistance to social pastimes. Only the conservatism of the women and the older generation of men had prevented great change at that point. Even following the end of the Second World War, in which many women had served, in north-west Skye there still tended to be outward observance for the sake of the older people but an increasing defiance of previous mores with regard to open dancing, and drinking was evident. By contrast, the tipping-point away from the reformed evangelical heritage seems to have occurred around World War One itself in coastal south Argyllshire.¹¹⁹

There were disappointments for the believers in the Kames congregation as they endeavoured to witness to the community. Mr. Tallach spoke to a businessman about his soul and his response was,

¹¹⁸ *The Third Statistical account of Scotland: the County of Argyll*, Parish of Kilfinan by Rev. George Cairns, p. 317. In 1918, Rev. Kenneth MacRae, then of Lochgilphead, referred in his diary to the "Moderatism" found among the adherents of all the churches of north-west Cowal and to their "indifference" to the gospel, see Iain H. Murray (ed.), *Diary of Kenneth A. MacRae* (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980) p. 140.

¹¹⁹ Hugh Barron (ed.), *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland: the County of Inverness* (Edinburgh, 1985), Parish of Duirinish, Skye, pp. 466-7. For the earlier shift in Argyllshire, see *Diary of Kenneth A. MacRae*, p. 46.

“Mr. Tallach, give me an hour on my death-bed and I’ll put things right with my Maker”. The man was ill for three weeks before he died, but the whole time was spent pressuring his family about the business and its related equipment. Right up to within five minutes of the end of his life, this man was caught up in the details of his business. It appears he never gave thought to the needs of his soul. Mr. Tallach told this story later in his ministry while preaching in Stornoway, to urge people not to delay asking God for the salvation of their souls.¹²⁰

A number of people have stated to the writer that the Kames people were “different” to the rest of the denomination, heavily influenced as it was by connections with the northern and western Highlands rather than the southern areas of the Highlands like Argyll. As noted in *SRSJJ* 2, the Kames people valued pastoral care and the preaching of godly ministers, but did not show undue deference to them. This may have been due both to Archie Crawford’s influence and their ecclesiastical history. Crawford showed “native independence of judgement and of speech”.¹²¹ This may have been similar to the feature noted of the evangelicals on the nearby island of Arran that they “do not take everything that comes out of the pulpit for the gospel”.¹²² There had been many links between the religious revivals on Arran and in Cowal, with both areas largely affected by the same preachers, and it is possible this left its own stamp of independent thought on the people in both communities. It has been suggested that the mystical strain of some Highland spirituality was not as pronounced in Kames as it was further north. Part of the reason may lie in the attitude of Archie Crawford. Principal John Macleod stated of him that, while “by no means disposed to be credulous in regard to the uncanny or supernatural”, he did try “to explain to himself the meaning of the out-of-the-way things that befell himself and others of his acquaintance whose word was credible”.¹²³ Whatever the differences, it is safe to say that in its early days at the very least, Kames leaned more to the experience-focused and Scripture-shaped spirituality said at that point to be more characteristic of the Highland than the Lowland churches. It was said of the Disruption-era

¹²⁰ The writer owes this note to Cameron, John and James R. Tallach.

¹²¹ Principal John Macleod, “An Argyllshire Worthy”, in Collins, *John Macleod D.D.*, p. 260.

¹²² Rev. Archibald Cook, speaking of Kilbride parish on his own native island at a Presbytery meeting, quoted in *Inverness Advertiser*, 8th July 1851, p. 5.

¹²³ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 265-6.

Free Church minister of Kilfinan that he had “no gift” to read the meaning of his parishioners who might use Scripture to illustrate their inward spirituality. Rev. Joseph Stark, a Lowlander who had learned Gaelic, “was very matter-of-fact, and had little sympathy with the Highland inwardness or mysticism which was as strong in Cowal as it was in any part of the Highlands”.¹²⁴

However, a straight-talking and practical bent was perhaps more prominent than in people from other districts. One son of the Kames manse felt that the introspective colouring of some Highland spirituality was not so strong in the people there and that this was exemplified in the person of Donald MacPherson: “I would see this absence of fascination with the subjective as borne out in the case of Donald MacPherson. . . . He was more inclined towards the principle, ‘For every look you take towards yourself, take ten thousand looks towards Jesus Christ’. He had an intelligent grasp of Christian doctrine and experience, but this went along with a cheerful involvement in practical things. He gave outstanding service to the church in Kames, in that he kept the services going. . . . They did not see religion and life as occupying two different spheres. They were practical people, and their religion was part of their whole approach to life as a whole. If I am not mistaken, Donald MacPherson did a lot of his preparation for preaching while he went about his work as a butcher and grocer. If he was carving up a carcass to have joints of beef to sell in his shop, he was also carving up a text to have something to say at the next service.” Mr. MacPherson was known for his integrity by those familiar with him at his workplace.¹²⁵

The reputed readiness on the part of the Kames people to speak their mind may have been shared with the Lochgilphead congregation. One of the Free Presbyterians there was in the habit of visiting Kames at communion seasons. This man had been a sailor and often used allusions to that life when discussing spiritual matters. Rev. Roderick Mackenzie (Glasgow) was in Kames preaching on one occasion. The Lochgilphead visitor remarked to him of one his sermons in the following style: “You began well, Mr. Mackenzie. Then you lost the wind

¹²⁴ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 240-1. Principal Macleod gave the example of an elderly lady who complained (using Scripture metaphor) to an uncomprehending Mr. Stark of the “old man” who lived with her, beat her, and had no time for Law or Gospel.

¹²⁵ Rev. John Tallach, retired of Aberdeen and Cromarty; e-mail to the writer 20th October 2011.



Friends at the May 1963 communion season in Kames, when Rev. Petros Mzamo from the church's Zimbabwe mission had assisted the interim-moderator of the Kames Kirk Session, Rev. Donald Maclean (Glasgow). Back row: (L-R): Hugh Cowan (Kames), Rev. Donald Maclean, Donald MacPherson (Kames elder). Front row (L-R): Rev. Petros Mzamo and Alexander Mpofu (missionary/elder).

for a bit and you were going back and fore. But then you caught the wind again, and you were really going!"¹²⁶

Communion seasons in the Kames congregation did not include the Friday morning Fellowship Meeting. As seen in *SRSHJ* 2, the reason was that Archie Crawford did not approve of Fellowship Meetings.¹²⁷ Further proof that this was due to concern about the forum having been used for controversy rather than mutual edification is seen in the comments Crawford made during one of his trips north after speaking to the Question in Fodderty, Strathpeffer. His biographer explained that Mr. Crawford felt that the "lines of distinction" between the believer and the hypocrite were "not well or safely drawn" at this meeting. He stated

¹²⁶ Rev. John Tallach, retired of Aberdeen and Cromarty, recalled Donald MacPherson telling this story.

¹²⁷ The writer was told this by Rev. Dr. James R. Tallach and the late Rev. Donald Maclean and the late Dr. R. MacSween.

that some who had spoken “were on the one hand puffing men up into windbags, and on the other they were hurting the oil and the wine”. What was understood by his remarks was, in the words of Principal John Macleod, that “he did not approve of giving as conclusive marks what were no such things, nor, on the other hand, of giving as necessary marks what was fitted to hurt true, but tried and feeble, believers”.¹²⁸ So unfamiliar were the Kames congregation with the practice at Fellowship Meetings that when Donald MacPherson attended one in Glasgow and was the first to be asked to speak, he had to ask the man in the next seat what was expected of him.¹²⁹

Until the early 1970s, the rhythms of life in Kames had been regulated by the arrival of the steamer, as it was only then that the construction of the “high road” out of the area was organised. The western road out of the area was prohibitively long for easy access. One could go to Glasgow for a day trip by the steamer. Preachers would be met off the ferry steamer at Tighnabruaich pier by the Macpherson family.¹³⁰

The normal attendances outside the summer months in the 1960s were around forty to sixty but this dwindled to twenty or less by the late 1970s.¹³¹ The period between 1987 and 1988 saw a significant decline in strength. The attendances dropped from fifteen down to seven in both the morning and evening services, while the prayer meeting went from twelve to six people. There had been four children in the congregation in 1987 and none in 1988. There had been two communicants in 1987; there was one in 1988.¹³²

After the 1960s there were very few visitors to Kames communions and it may be that in the ensuing decades its closure had come to be seen as inevitable. It is thought that the division of 1989 in the denomination severely stretched the Southern Presbytery’s ability to provide supply, Kames being on its periphery. Affection for it, as the first congregation to have joined Mr. MacFarlane in his separation of 1893, did not develop into sentiment: resources were not specially targeted towards Kames in

¹²⁸ “An Argyllshire Worthy”, pp. 260-1.

¹²⁹ Mr. MacPherson’s daughter, Miss Catherine Macpherson, confirmed this story. The man whose advice he sought was Donald MacCuish of Inverness.

¹³⁰ Tighnabruaich pier is now the only one of the main ferry steamer piers in the Kyles of Bute to have survived to the present day. Kames steamer pier was being used until 1928. See Alistair Deayton, *Clyde Coast Piers* (Stroud, Amberley, 2010) p. 103.

¹³¹ This was recalled by Catherine MacPherson.

¹³² Donald M. Boyd, *The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland Year-book, 1989* (privately printed, 1989) p. 12.



*A view from the rear of the second Kames Free Presbyterian building,
now converted into a dwelling house.*

order to prevent its closure. The last meeting of Kames Kirk Session was held on 28th September 1994. Those present were Rev. Donald Maclean as the interim moderator, with Mr. Ian A. M. Mackinnon and Dr. Duncan MacSween (the Clerk) as assessor elders. They simply noted that at the meeting of Synod of 18th May 1994 it had been agreed to change the status of Kames from a congregation to “a preaching station under the jurisdiction of the St. Jude’s Kirk Session”.¹³³ In its last few decades of existence, Kames was recalled as a small, loyal, and welcoming congregation; it had good singing despite its size and was one which people enjoyed supplying – Rev. Lachlan Macleod of Greenock used to say that he felt “like a bird” with pleasure at the prospect of going there to preach.¹³⁴ The last service at Kames was held in 1997 and the property sold. Although converted to a private dwelling-place, the church building is still clearly recognisable as having been a place of worship.

¹³³ MS, *Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Kames Kirk Session Records, 1989-1994*, 28th September 1994. That Kames’ being the first congregation to separate in 1893 did not result in its being made a special case for resources may have reflected the opposition Archie Crawford is said to have expressed to ecclesiastical pride.

¹³⁴ E-mail from Duncan R. MacSween to writer, 9th April 2009.

9. Conclusions

In the providence of God, the means of grace were maintained in the relatively remote congregation of Kames in several ways. These included pastorates which saw blessing, the ability and willingness of several local elders to take services, and supply from the Presbytery. The greater part of the witness was of course raised in the everyday lives of the people: both the early generation who made the initial sacrifice of separation from the Rainy-led Free Church and their grandchildren who came to faith and public profession in the 1920s to 1950s. The Kames congregation itself contributed to other congregations through donations to Church funds, Presbytery elderships, and by supply.

APPENDIX I A "ROLL OF ELDERS"

as listed in the first volume of Kirk Session records is reproduced here in bold font, with additional material in parentheses¹³⁵

Donald MacCallum, Farmer, Kames (Born 1st January 1838, died 3rd April 1933. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1933-4, pp. 247-51).

Norman MacCallum, Farmer, Auchtelvora (Born 14th May 1831, died 17th January 1925. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 30, 1925-6, pp. 22-6. The name of the farm was given as "Auchtervory" in a *Northern Chronicle* article of 1st June 1892; it is rendered as "Auchadalvorie" on modern maps of the area).

John MacLachlan, Gardener, Tighnabruaich (Born 1st January 1836, died 30th April, 1920. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 25, 1920-1, pp. 245-7).

Donald MacIntyre, Gamekeeper, Craig Cottage (a number of Kirk Session meetings took place at his home).

Alexander Thomson, Colporteur, Kames (Died 1899).

John MacCallum, Farmer, Stillaig.

Benjamin Dawson, Commercial Agent, Tighnabruaich (Born 18th June 1845, died 23rd April 1922. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 28, 1923-4, pp. 342-4).

¹³⁵ *Minutes Kirk Session, 1894-1929.*

Hugh Thomson, Mason, Kames, RESIGNED 25.7.1907.

Dugald MacCallum, Millhouse (Born *c.* 1853, died 9th December 1932. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 38, 1933-4, pp. 222-3).

Duncan MacPherson, Merchant, Kames (Born 10th June 1872, died 5th July 1935. *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 40, 1935-6, pp. 219-21).

APPENDIX II

THE NUMBER OF COMMUNICANT MEMBERS IN VARIOUS YEARS

1894.....	36
1908.....	32
1912	26
1921	24
1931	36
1936.....	23
1937	25
1938.....	24
1939.....	22
1940.....	22
1942.....	22
1944.....	20
1948.....	21
1949.....	22
1969.....	10
1975	8
1976.....	6
1977	6
1985.....	2

– The two communicant members listed in 1985 were Mrs. C. MacPherson, “Mayfield”, Kames and Mrs. Millar, “Stillag”, Kames.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, communion rolls and meeting of 3rd December 1908; *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, communion rolls and meeting of 14th June 1975. The very low 1975 figure includes the elders (Donald MacPherson and Hugh Cowan), as indeed do the other figures. For the 1912 figure, see MS, *Free Presbyterian Northern Presbytery*, 26th June 1912. The writer thanks Rev. Alexander Murray, retired, Lairg, for the Northern Presbytery information.

APPENDIX III

THE ROLE OF GAELIC

The Free Presbyterian Church's use of Gaelic in Kames congregation was natural, as the language was still known by the majority in the rural hinterland of Kilfinan and by around half the people in the larger settlements of Tighnabruaich and Kames. (This is akin to the linguistic position today in the Western Isles.) During the 1877-1891 ministry of Rev. Duncan Campbell in Kilfinan Free Church, the normal linguistic pattern in worship had been a Gaelic service followed straight afterwards by an English one.¹³⁷

There was a request at a very early stage of the Free Presbyterian congregation's life for a commitment to maintaining Gaelic services. This became apparent at a meeting in February 1894 of the committee which preceded the Kirk Session. A Malcolm Millar of Portavadie asked, on behalf of that part of the congregation which he represented, if the committee would pledge themselves "to hold Gaelic service in Millhouse all the year for the benefit of that part of the congregation residing beyond Millhouse". A member of the committee, Donald MacCallum, said "the committee could not agree or see their way for doing so but only as far as lay in their power owing to the peculiar circumstances in which the congregation as a whole was placed not having a minister of our own".¹³⁸

The very first Sabbath in which services were held in the new church building, the "Tin Kirk", saw the language given a prominent role but not the predominant one. Arrangements had been made to open it on Sabbath 15th July 1894. The English service was to be at 12 noon, with the Gaelic at 1.30pm. Whether this became the normal Sabbath arrangement for the two languages is not clear but seems likely.¹³⁹

This evidence from congregational records is borne out by the evidence from the census about the strength of the language in the area. The census figures show that in 1891 the majority of the inhabitants of four out of the seven civil parishes in Cowal spoke Gaelic. Kilfinan parish had over 1100 speakers who made up 53% of the population, while

¹³⁷ Obituary, *Campbeltown Courier*, 6th June 1891; cited in Martin, *Kintyre, The Hidden Past*, p. 52.

¹³⁸ MS, *Millhouse Congregational Committee*, 19th February 1894.

¹³⁹ MS, *Millhouse Congregational Committee*, 9th July 1894.

immediately to the north the 228 Gaelic speakers in Strathlachan parish represented 84% of the people.¹⁴⁰ Despite the anglicising influences of tourism, 263 people in Tighnabruaich, 49.4 % of the population, were listed as being speakers in the 1891 census. A particular pocket of strength in 1901 was the Portavadie area, whose 132 Gaelic speakers made up 80.5% of the people living there.

Kames and its closest surrounding communities (Tighnabruaich, Ardlamont and Portavadie) had a combined total of 991 Gaelic-speakers in 1891. This was still a numerically strong Gaelic area ten years later when the census recorded 888 speakers in the four communities; over 50% of the overall population were Gaelic speakers in three out of the four places. However, the 1911 census showed the attrition setting in strongly with a total of only 436 speakers left in this combined district.¹⁴¹

The arrangements for the 1901 communion season services show that English was clearly the main language of worship but that Gaelic still had a strong secondary role. The Friday service at 12 noon was to be in Gaelic, with the English at 7pm. On the Saturday there was to be English at 12 noon, followed by Gaelic at 1.30pm. On Sabbath the communion service itself was to be in English and commence at 11.30am, but with the second table of the Lord's Supper in Gaelic and "Gaelic to conclude the service" – presumably the last singing.¹⁴²

It also appears that there was a problem of some kind at this period in relation to the language of sung praise and that the main stated precentor may not have been able to lead the praise in English. In January of that year, the Session agreed to ask the acting precentor "to continue his services until the congregation could secure the services of a man able to sing both in Gaelic and English".¹⁴³ It is reasonable to assume that Gaelic services continued in the 1910s and 1920s given that the two ministers resident in these decades were able Gaelic preachers.

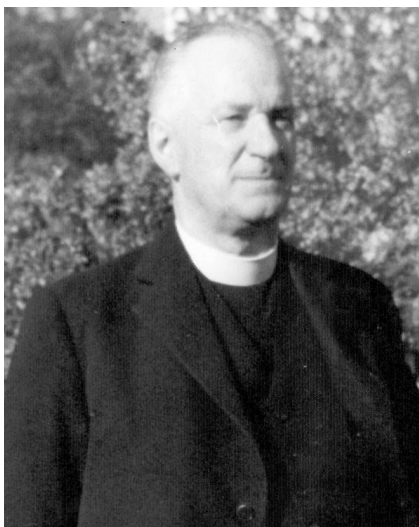
One analysis of the anti-Declaratory Act movement suggests it was frequently characterized by a three-fold chord of Gaelic language,

¹⁴⁰ Kurt C. Duwe, *Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Studies; Vol. 26: Comhal, Siorrachd Bhòid & Dùn Breatainn (Cowal, County of Bute & Dumbarton)*, 2nd Edition, March 2012; p. 25. This is available online at http://www.linguae-celticae.org/dateien/Gaidhlig_Local_Studies_Vol_26_Comhal_Bod_Ed_II.pdf.

¹⁴¹ Duwe, *Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Studies; Vol. 26*, p. 8.

¹⁴² *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 29th April 1901. It was also agreed at this Kirk Session that the notice-board be renewed and the prayer meeting be held "in the church". It is not clear where it had been held prior to this date.

¹⁴³ *Kames Kirk Session, 1894-1929*, 14th January 1901.



Rev. James A. Tallach, pastor of Kames from 1931 to 1952, saw a number of conversions and professions of faith.

[Photo courtesy of
Catherine MacPherson]

Highland religion, and resistance to change.¹⁴⁴ This appears on the surface to be borne out in Cowal. By the 1890s there was a clear linguistic division between the heavily anglicized eastern parishes around Dunoon and on the Isle of Bute on the one hand, and on the other, the western areas where Gaelic was still a community language such as parts of Kilfinan, Strathlachlan and Strachur parishes. In the Presbytery of Dunoon, such leadership as the Constitutionalist party had was from Mr. MacNicol of the Dunoon Gaelic charge. Free Presbyterian strength after 1893 and post-1900 Free Church Constitutionalist support was largely in the relatively strongly Gaelic parishes of Kilfinan

and Strachur. However, a reformed critique of this analysis might frame the movement's geographical strength in Cowal in terms of the will of the Most High. It might also point to the semi-separatism of the first large group of evangelical converts in the early 1800s, the MacArthur Baptists, in the west of the peninsula. It would also point to the influence and leadership of Archibald Crawford and Rev. Neil Cameron in Kilfinan. That the underlying religious tendency in south Argyllshire prior to 1843 had been Moderatism, and that the Free Church itself had not always been what it might, may have led to stronger lay leadership and independence of thought and action.

A critical juncture for the maintenance of Gaelic in the Kames congregation came with the arrival of Rev. James A. Tallach in 1931. There was a persistent tradition in the new minister's family (in later years) that he had held Gaelic services at the start of his ministry, but that these had stopped by the time he left for Stornoway in 1952, due to the attenders having largely died off.¹⁴⁵ This tradition is supported by

¹⁴⁴ Macleod, *The Second Disruption*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁵ The writer thanks Rev. Dr. James R. Tallach, Stornoway, for this recollection.

the fact that the notice-board on the outside of the church was amended in 1931 to include his name and the fact that there would be a 4.45pm Gaelic service on Sabbath.¹⁴⁶

That there was still a substantial body of local people in the Kames district in 1931 capable of appreciating public worship in Gaelic is beyond doubt: making the effort might even have been an evangelistic opportunity. Mr. Tallach had learned Gaelic to increase his usefulness as a minister.¹⁴⁷ In 1931 the 265 Gaelic-speakers in Kilfinan parish made up 17.8% of the residents; the 63 Gaels in Strathlachlan made up a third of the inhabitants.¹⁴⁸ By the early 1930s, the erosion of the local culture amongst the younger generations was being matched by a severe decline in population in the rural parts of the parish. One old man in Kilfinan village stated in the early 1930s that 100 pupils had attended the local school in his youth and that all spoke Gaelic, whereas the roll was now seven and none of the pupils could speak it.¹⁴⁹ The Kames Free Presbyterian elder Duncan MacPherson (who died in 1935) used the language most of the time with his wife Catherine but the couple did not pass it on to their children.¹⁵⁰

The question of churches providing Gaelic pastoral care in Cowal emerged shortly afterwards in the nearby Church of Scotland parish of Kilmodan, just north of Kames and Tighnabruaich. A special Commission was despatched by the Church of Scotland General Assembly in May 1934 to investigate the situation, following a decision in April by the Presbytery of Dunoon to suspend progress towards filling a vacancy there until the language question was cleared up. A newspaper report quoted the Commission as stating that “all their information suggested that, though Gaelic was no longer necessary in this parish, it was most desirable”. The August Commission of General Assembly decided to change Kilmodan’s language status from Gaelic Essential to Gaelic Desirable.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ *Kames Kirk Session, 1931-1989*, 27th May 1931. This was Mr. Tallach’s first Kirk Session meeting in the charge.

¹⁴⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 13th January 1960, p. 12. “He went to Lewis as a young minister in the early 1920s to learn the language and when he had become fluent he took up his first charge in Kames, Argyll.”

¹⁴⁸ Duwe, *Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Studies; Vol. 26*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁹ Seton Gordon, *Highways and Byways in the West Highlands* (1985, reprint of 1935 edn), p. 399.

¹⁵⁰ His grand-daughter, Catherine MacPherson, advised the writer on this point.

¹⁵¹ *Glasgow Herald*, 9th August 1934, p. 10.

Precisely which year the language ceased to be used in the Kames Free Presbyterian congregation is difficult to pinpoint. There was no Gaelic service in Kames on the Sabbath in 1945 when the late Rev. Donald Maclean preached his first sermon as a divinity student.¹⁵² That the language was still a strong feature of Free Presbyterian life in Argyll during the first half of the twentieth-century is seen in the remark about the Oban elder John MacDonald that “his being bilingual also added greatly to his usefulness”.¹⁵³ People who lived in Kames as far back as the 1940s cannot recall hearing the language spoken publicly in the village. By 1951 the collapse was very apparent: only 95 Gaelic speakers were left in the whole Kilfinan parish (almost 8% of the population there) and only 27 speakers further north in Strathlachlan parish (12%).¹⁵⁴

In the early 1950s, the minister of Kilfinan parish, the Rev. George Cairns, wrote: “Gaelic . . . is still alive and used by a few, mostly among the older people; others of a younger generation understand Gaelic but do not speak it. It appears indeed to be on the way out.” A neighbouring minister wrote at the same period that in the parish of Kilmodan, only a few of the Gaelic speakers were actually born there.¹⁵⁵ A Mr. John Whyte, who is thought to have lived until the 1960s, was known in the Kames area as being able to speak Cowal Gaelic.¹⁵⁶ The last handful of native speakers of the dialect was dying out in the 1980s.¹⁵⁷ The last speaker died in 1997.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Telephone conversation with Mr. Maclean, 12th May 2009.

¹⁵³ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 60, 1955-6, p. 53.

¹⁵⁴ Duwe, *Gàidhlig (Scottish Gaelic) Local Studies*, Vol. 26, p. 22.

¹⁵⁵ *The Third Statistical account of Scotland: the County of Argyll*, Parish of Kilfinan by Rev. George Cairns, pp. 318, 327.

¹⁵⁶ Mr. Whyte is recalled as having the local byname of “Tooktem”. He was brought up on one of the farms in the Ardlamont area and acted as chauffeur to a Miss Watson of Ardlamont House at one time. Christopher Mackenzie’s daughter, Mrs. Katie MacDonald, supplied this information via Mr. Alan M. Boyd.

¹⁵⁷ The writer was told this by David Clement of the School of Scottish Studies in December 1989.

¹⁵⁸ This information was kindly provided by Adam Byrne who has studied and promoted the use of the Cowal variety of Gaelic.

APPENDIX IV

REV. JOHN MACLEOD'S FAREWELL LETTER TO KAMES

The departure of Rev. John Macleod to the Free Church of Scotland was marked on his part by a pastoral letter to the Kames people.¹⁵⁹ This sought to justify his attempts to unite the two denominations and to explain his acceptance of a teaching role in the Free Church College.

In Mr. Macleod's view, the Free Church minority had cleared the way for union in two ways. The first was by their stated aim, following their 1905 General Assembly, to repeal the Declaratory Act. The second was by the explanation given to him, by a Commission of Assembly, of words used in their refusal to join the Church union of 1900 – words which had been seen as denying the validity of the 1893 separation. Mr. Macleod framed his explanation of the teaching role at the College as “rendering the Free Church the assistance that their special circumstances called for”.¹⁶⁰ However, the fact that he did not consult the Southern Presbytery about providing such assistance was to cause disapproval. This led to the supreme Court, the Synod, passing a motion at its November meeting which expressed “regret” for this failure to consult. The debate saw Mr. Macleod state that he would have accepted the post at the College “no matter what was the opinion of Presbytery or Synod”.¹⁶¹ In his letter to the Kames congregation, Mr. Macleod was to deny reports that he twice asked the members of the Southern Presbytery for their view of his accepting the post at the College.¹⁶²

His letter to Kames also aimed to defend his resignation when his fellow office-bearers in the Church courts expressed disapproval of the college role. He hinted that the resignation might not have been necessary had the Southern Presbytery used the interval between his giving notice of resignation and their next formal meeting to seek to dissuade him. He went on to claim that the information he had subsequently received while in negotiation with a committee of the Free

¹⁵⁹ John Macleod, *Farewell and Explanatory Letter Addressed to Kames Free Presbyterian Congregation by Their Late Pastor* (printed for private circulation; n.p., 1906), 8 pages.

¹⁶⁰ *Farewell and Explanatory Letter*, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 10, December 1905, pp. 284-5.

¹⁶² *Farewell and Explanatory Letter*, p. 3.

Church Commission of Assembly could have led to a change of the Free Presbyterian Synod's stance about union.¹⁶³

This claim seems optimistic, with the benefit of hindsight. The successful motion by Rev. Neil Cameron at the November 1905 Synod had not only reiterated the July Synod's opposition to union with "any church which does not hold the absolute infallibility of the Old and New Testaments, and the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, both in her profession and practice"; Mr. Cameron's motion had also authorised measures to assert the Free Presbyterian position at congregational level, as well as warning office-bearers "of the danger of following divisive courses contrary to the solemn engagements under which they came at their ordination". Mr. Cameron had said that "he was not opposed to union, and as soon as a Church could be found fulfilling the requirements of the motion he had submitted he would consider it his duty to consider the matter of union with it".¹⁶⁴ By late 1905 the Free Presbyterian leadership had moved on from the Union question.

The overtures made by the Free Church to Mr. Macleod were a means of gaining a highly talented intellectual for the training of her ministry. The episode came in the wider context of the Free Church trying to staff its college through individuals like David Hay Fleming and, more controversially, Professor William Menzies Alexander. Professor Alexander, DSc, DD, (1859-1929) was to serve in the college from 1904 until 1929, and as Moderator of the Free Church Assembly in 1911. His views on Scripture as expressed in his book *Demonic Possession in the New Testament* (1902) led to a dispute between the Free and Free Presbyterian denominations as to whether he was sound on the Doctrine of Inspiration. Rev. J. R. Mackay was to describe the book as "written by a writer occupying a position far down the rationalistic stream".¹⁶⁵ In his *Farewell*, Mr. Macleod argued that while the Free Church's *handling* of the case had "glaring" defects, their Free Presbyterian critics in the matter "did not do justice to the situation that had to be faced". He went on to argue that "no strength of prejudice can honestly allege that any

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

¹⁶⁴ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 10, December 1905, p. 283.

¹⁶⁵ Roy Middleton, "David Hay Fleming (1849-1931): Scottish Church Historian and Antiquarian," *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 1, (2011), pp. 129-240 (see pp. 167-8). For the Alexander issue, see *History of the Free Presbyterian Church, 1893-1970*, pp. 105, 110-113. A letter on the subject to the *Northern Chronicle* by J. R. Mackay was reproduced in *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 10, August 1905, p. 127.

toleration for lax doctrine with respect to an inspired Bible will be found within the pale of the Free Church".¹⁶⁶ The Free Church General Assembly of 1905 had received two overtures, one from the Presbytery of Lochcarron and the other from the Synod of Glenelg seeking action to allay anxiety over Professor Alexander's writings; on being told the book had been withdrawn, representatives of these two Church courts departed from their overtures.¹⁶⁷

One argument that Mr. Macleod made in justification of his *personal* co-operation with the post-1900 Free Church was that cooperation with other bodies on the part of its ministers was something which the Disruption Free Church had sanctioned. Characterising opposition to this "constitutional liberty" as being a "narrower doctrine" than that held by the majority in the Disruption Free Church, he went on in the *Farewell* to accept that continued opposition on his part in the Free Presbyterian Church courts to the non-negotiation stance would have led to him facing charges of contumacy.¹⁶⁸

While strongly expressing the view that the Synod had impinged on his liberty as a preacher of the gospel in the matter, he tried to reassure the Kames people that their position was different and that they need not emulate his response. "Your individual and congregational liberty has not been invaded," he wrote. "Though most of you, I believe, are favourably disposed to a policy generally the same as I sought to carry out, yet the dissent lodged against the finding of the Synod is sufficient to guard your position".¹⁶⁹ In fact, two dissents by Hugh Thomson the Kames elder had been recorded; he had supported both of Mr. Macleod's dissents at the November Synod.¹⁷⁰ As seen elsewhere in this article, Mr. Thomson was to resign his eldership two years later.

Free Presbyterians in Kames cannot but have reflected on the advice Archibald Crawford had given to Rev. Neil Cameron about the minority 1900 Free Church, quoting the scripture from Jeremiah 15:19: "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them." The text had been impressed on Mr. Crawford's mind, at the same time as two

¹⁶⁶ *Farewell and Explanatory Letter*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ D. F. Wright and G. D. Badcock (eds), *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996* (Edinburgh, 1996) pp. 223-4.

¹⁶⁸ *Farewell and Explanatory Letter*, pp. 2-4.

¹⁶⁹ *Farewell and Explanatory Letter*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 10, December 1905, pp. 283-4.

other highly respected believers in the Highlands were led to believe that it was relevant to the new situation.¹⁷¹

That the Free Presbyterian leadership found the entire episode saddening at the personal level, as well as the corporate, seems clear. John Macleod's care to avoid splitting the Kames congregation in early December 1905 was such that the Southern Presbytery "expressed pleasure at the procedure Mr. Macleod intended to follow in the matter". He had informed the 5th December meeting that "he intended quietly to resign his charge, and not to commit his congregation to any course he might think it necessary to take".¹⁷² Three weeks later the same court stated on receiving his resignation that it was "their painful duty" to declare him no longer a minister of the denomination.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ This was stated in the booklet *A Reply to Rev J. R. Mackay's Pamphlet on Union with the Free Church* (n.p., 1918) written by "Lovers of the Truth" (i.e. Revs. Neil Cameron and Alexander Mackay). By 1918, Rev. J. R. Mackay was preparing to take the same step as Mr. Macleod had done in 1905.

¹⁷² *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 10, January 1906, pp. 357-8.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 359.