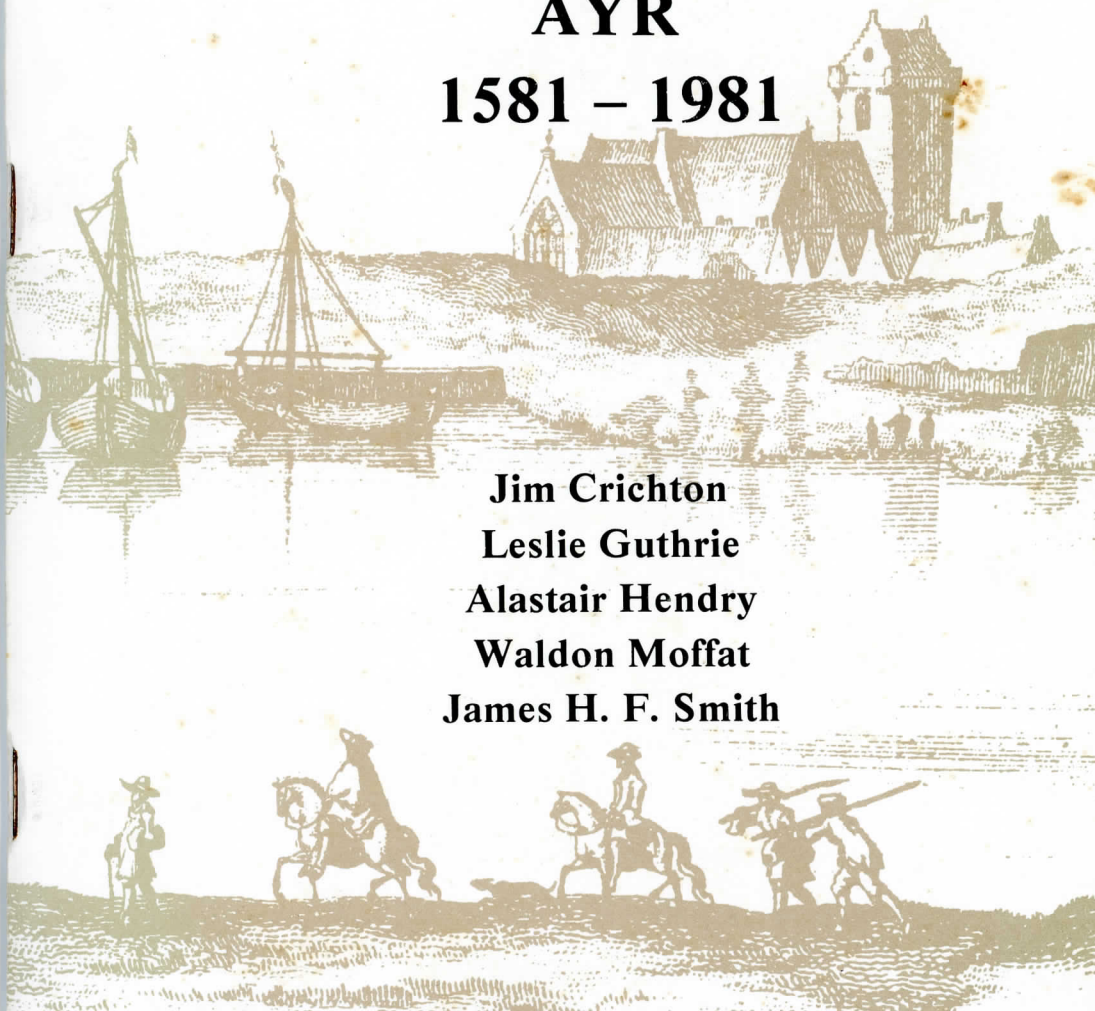


THE PRESBYTERY OF AYR 1581 – 1981



**Jim Crichton
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IN THE BEGINNING

At the General Assembly of October 1580, a committee was appointed to "devyse a Platt of Presbyteries and Constitutions thereof as best appeirit be their judgement". This draft plan or platt was submitted for discussion at the next Assembly held in Glasgow on 20 April 1581. There, it was resolved that "a beginning be had of the presbyteries instantlie in the places after following, to be exemplars to the rest which may be established hereafter, viz. Edinburgh, Sanct Andrewes, Dundie, Perth, Stirling, Glasgow, Air, Irwing, Hadinton, Dumbar, Chirnside, Linlithquo, Dunfermline. To some of thir presbyteries were assigned twelve, to some sixteene, to some twentie, to some four and twentie kirks, as the brethren departed to joyne them thought meetest, till better advice be had".

The execution of this task was entrusted to certain small groups of Assembly members and we find the Presbytery of Stirling, for example, established only four months later on the 8 August 1581. Its minutes, the earliest surviving of any Presbytery, record "the namis of the ministers and elders presentlie convenit quha acceptit upone thame offeice and plaice in the in the said presbytery be solem promiseis in the presence of god their hands beand haldin up promesing faithfullie to exerceis thair officis therein conform to the word of god unto the end of thair lywis as it sall plais god to minister unto thame the giftis of his holie spirit".

The brethren commissioned to erect the Presbyteries of Ayr and Irvine were "Mr. Johne Porterfeld, Mr. Johne Young and Johne Makcorne". Their work took longer than that at Stirling. On 17 October 1581, in Edinburgh, again "Becaus presbyteries were not as yitt fullie established everie where, the Assemblie nominated some brethren for everie countrie respective to travell diligentlie in erections of presbyteries betwixt and the next Assemblie".

In the list of areas lacking presbyteries, there still appeared "Kile, Carict and Cunninghame", but as far as we can judge from the absence of the names from later lists (e.g. at the next Assembly in April 1582) this further commission seems to have met with success. No exact date is known for the erection of the Presbytery of Ayr (whose area comprised Kyle and Carrick, the ancient divisions of the County of Ayrshire.) The extant minutes of the Presbytery begin on 20 April, 1642.

From 1560, the Church was governed by three Courts – the General Assembly, the Synods, and the Kirk Sessions. At different times, Bishops, appointed by the Crown, presided over the Synods and wielded authority within their dioceses. In addition, during the first two decades of the Reformed Church, 'superintendents' were appointed "to plant and erect Kirkes, to set,

order and appoint Ministers to the Countries that shall be appointed to their care where none are now." John Knox, also in his Book of Discipline, described the roving commissions of these officials: "After they have remained in their chiefe towne three or foure moneths at most, they shall bee compelled (unless by sicknesse they be retained) to re-enter in visitation, In which they shall not only preach, but also examine the life, diligence and behaviour of the Ministers, as also the order of the kirkes, the manners of the people. They must further consider how the poore be provided, how the youth be instructed; They must admonish where admonition needeth and dresse such things as by good counsell they be able to appease. And finally they must note such crimes as be heynous, that by the censure of the Kirk the same may be corrected".

In 1565, John Row, Minister of Perth, was thus commissioned by the General Assembly "to visit the Kirks and Schools of Kyle, Carrick and Cunninghame, and to remove or suspend ministers or readers as he found them offensive or incapable".

The introduction of presbyteries in 1581 removed the need for superintendents and created a four-tier system of Church government, which was to develop and grow but still retain its essential pattern up to the present day. The four Courts of the Church were now

- (a) the Kirk Session. This body consisted of the minister, who presided over the weekly meeting, and the elders and deacons. Initially elders were elected on an annual basis but from 1592 the appointment was for life. The responsibilities of the kirk session included the administration of parish affairs, the keeping of the roll of baptised persons in full communion, the care for the poor, the provision of testimonials for those moving to another parish, and the supervision of the discipline of all those within the bounds of the parish. In this latter, the session cooperated closely in the towns with the magistrates (some of whom would be elders) and in the country areas with the heritors or landowners (some of whom might also be elders).
- (b) the Presbytery. This Court was composed of ministers, doctors (assistant ministers) and elders, the elders being chosen out of each Kirk Session in the area. Elders were encouraged to attend the monthly Presbytery meetings, especially when the business was important. Ministers on the other hand were under obligation to attend at all times. In 1586 the General Assembly indicated the functions of Presbyteries:
"1 to give diligent labours in the bounds committed to their charge, that the kirks be kept in good order ; to inquire diligentlie of naughtie and ungodlie persons, and travell to bring them in the way again, by admonitioun, or threatening of God's judgements, or by correctioun.

2. . . . to take heed that the Word of God be purelie preached within their bounds, the sacraments rightlie ministered, the discipline mainteined, and the ecclesiasticall goods uncorruptlie distributed.

3. . . . to caus the ordinances made by the assembleis, provincially, nationall and generall, to be kepted and putt in execution.

4. . . . to make constitutions . . . for decent order of the particular kirk where they governe, providing that they alter no rules made by the Provinciaill or Generall Assembleis, and that they make provincially assembleis foresaid privie of the rules that they sall make, and to abolish constitutions tending to the hurt of the same.

5. . . . to excommunicat the obstinat, formal processe being led, and due intervalls of tyme being observed".

(c) the Synod. This 'Provincial Assembly' brought together usually in April and October of each year all the members of Presbyteries within a wider area. Although in 1582 the General Assembly indicated the Synod's "power to convey so oft as occasion shall requyre to advyse, intreat, conclude and make ordinances in such things as concern the weill of the Kirk, and thair charge in doctrine and discipline, with libertie to appoint tymes and places for that effect," they gradually diminished in importance despite a brief revival in the 17th century Restoration period. A Synod's main functions were to supervise the work and records of the Presbyteries within its bounds and to act as a Court of Appeal in cases referred from Presbytery.

(d) the General Assembly. The Supreme Court met annually, sometimes more frequently. At times it was dispensed with altogether by the Crown. From the 1560's it consisted "of representatives of the same three estates of the realm which at that time formed a Scottish parliament – barons, burgesses and clergy. Lords and barons attended these assemblies in considerable numbers, but as individuals and not because they were elders of the kirk or representatives of congregations or other ecclesiastical organs: burgh commissioners attended, appointed not by any ecclesiastical body but by the town councils; and the clerical element consisted of the superintendents along with a selected number of ministers". Much later came the present arrangement of ministers and elders elected as commissioned representatives 'by all the Presbyteries' in the Church. Its main functions were to deal with all appeals from Synods or Presbyteries, e.g. in cases involving doctrine, worship or the censure of a minister, to consider proposals for change in laws or practices of the Church and in general "to attend to all matters affecting the efficiency of the Church and the religious and spiritual condition of the nation".

In 1592, Parliament at long last, and for the first time, approved a

presbyterian system – but it was not until 1690 and the coming of William of Orange that Presbyterianism triumphed. In the century that lay between, the work of Presbytery was carried on against a background of changing social and economic circumstances and of not infrequent conflict between Crown and Kirk, between nations and, even at a local level, among the noble families of Ayrshire. It is not, however, within the compass of this book to explore that background. Others have described it in its fascinating detail. Suffice to say, the records of the Presbytery of Ayr add weight to the claim that, throughout, the Presbyteries were the most important single element in the ordinary administration and discipline of the Church. W. R. Foster, writing of the Restoration period, sums up thus: "To the average members of a kirk, the visitation of the presbytery was the chief visible sign of an ecclesiastical power and authority above that of the local parish. Both they and their ministers were judged by the authority of this presbytery. While it could technically be claimed that presbyteries were acting as agents of the bishop, since they met only on his approbation, this subordination would hardly be obvious to the average parishioner. He saw the members of the presbytery ride into town on the day appointed – the presbytery administered rebukes or noted its approval. For such laymen the presbytery was an important, integral part of their church life, while the bishop must have seemed to many a distant and somewhat irrelevant figure".

THE CHANGING FACE OF PRESBYTERY

In 1581 Ayr Presbytery comprised 24 parishes, served by 11 ministers and 7 readers. Almost all of these parishes had been served by the pre-Reformation Church. The sole exception was the charge "callit Air secundo" but, although founded in 1557, it did not have a minister of its own until 1613.

There were ministers at Ayr (one of the first 8 towns in Scotland to have a minister), Craigie, Cumnock, Dailly, Dalmellington, Dundonald, Kirkoswald (where most of the work was done by a reader), Mauchline, Ochiltree, Straiton and Tarbolton. Readers served in Girvan, Kirkmichael, Maybole, Monkton with Prestwick, and Symington. This meant extra work for some – like John Nisbet of Tarbolton with oversight of "Barneweill, St. Kevokis (formerly Sanchar-in-Kyle), and Monkton with Prestwick". When he died in 1610 he left "the kyndness of my land in Tarboltoun to my sonne that bruiks the kirk thair of".

Gradually the vacancies were filled. By 1600 Symington, Dalrymple, Girvan, Galston, Monkton with Prestwick, Maybole and Coylton had their own men. During the 1600's fresh advance was made with St. Quivox, Barnweill and Auchinleck finding ministers and Alloway enjoying brief independence from Ayr. New parishes were created at Muirkirk, Riccarton, Barr and Stair. In 1691 New Cumnock was put on its feet at the second attempt and the next year saw Sorn (Dalgain) re-erected.

For almost 100 years there were no more changes. And then the Industrial Revolution. Towns and villages began to grow rapidly and, to meet the needs of the shifting population, chapels-of-ease were built. These chapels, their financing, and their relationship to the original parish churches were to produce awkward problems. So much so that in 1798 the General Assembly enacted that the recognition of any such chapel would rest with the Assembly and not with the local presbytery.

Before then, however, the Newton Freemen had already built a chapel to serve their well-populated end of Prestwick parish. In 1779 the parish of Newton-upon-Ayr was formally erected. Catrine came next in 1792.

The 1830's saw the most striking progress. This was due largely to the efforts of Thomas Chalmers' Committee on Church Accommodation. Between 1835 and 1839 no less than 264 new chapels were built in Scotland. Ayr Presbytery had its share – Troon, Wallacetown, Fullarton, Girvan South, Crosshill, Maybole West (the Glen Kirk), Patna, and Fisherton all appeared before 1843.

One great impetus to this extension work had been the Chapels Act of

1834. This act was meant to give all chapels an enhanced status as parish churches Quoad Sacra, i.e. for ecclesiastical purposes only as distinguished from the old civil or Quoad Omnia parishes. After some bitter controversy the Court of Session declared the Act illegal. Some years later it was replaced by a similar Act of Parliament. By then, however, the damage had been done – the Disruption had taken place.

The issue underlying that conflict was the relationship between church and state, in particular patronage and the rights of congregations. Like the rest of Scotland Ayr Presbytery was exercised by the debate –

1840, January "Mr. Stewart of Sorn moved that the following petition be adopted by the Presbytery and presented to both Houses of Parliament . . . your Petitioners have learned from the decision of the House of Lords in the case of Auchterarder that the Law passed by the General Assembly in the year 1834 . . . has not been recognised by the civil Courts of the Country. May it therefore please your Honourable House to take this subject into your serious consideration and to pass such an enactment, as in your wisdom, shall seem best suited to guard against the settlement of ministers in parishes, in opposition to the will and feelings of the great body of the people, and thus prevent the most serious evils to the Church and to the Country . . . The Roll being called and votes marked it carried Petition; and therefore, the Presbytery did and hereby do resolve to present the above Petition to both Houses of Parliament". Dr. Hill and six others asked to have their dissent recorded.

1840, March "Mr. Wallace then read the following Overture, and moved that it be transmitted to the ensuing General Assembly – whereas the non-intrusion of ministers into vacant parishes against the will of the congregation, and the independency of the Church in all spiritual and ecclesiastical matters, are principles inherent in its constitution, involved in the exclusive sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and essential to the interests of religion and the just rights of the people; may it therefore please the General Assembly to adhere steadfastly to said principles, and adopt all measures which in their wisdom shall seem calculated to secure them inviolable and intact."

An amendment was proposed "in order that peace may be restored to our distracted Church, and the unseemly collision which has taken place between the civil and ecclesiastical judicatories be brought to an end". It wanted the Assembly to rescind the 1835 Act and to "take such steps . . . as may be consistent at once with the principles of our Church and the law of the land". The amendment fell.

In both 1841 and 1842 attempts to overture the Assembly to repeal the Veto Act were defeated. However, when the Act was finally declared to be illegal by the House of Lords, the Presbytery changed its mind and asked for its repeal. By now the final break was imminent and in May 11 ministers demitted their charges and left their homes – and the Presbytery.

A depleted court met in June . . . "And the Presbytery felt that they could not conclude this minute without expressing their deep regret that the above mentioned individuals whom they respected and esteemed as fellow labourers in the Vineyard of their Blessed and common Master, have judged it to be their duty to secede from the Church of their fathers, which the Presbytery consider to be pure in doctrine and discipline, which has long been a singular blessing to the people of this land, and which still opens up a wide and unlimited field for their zeal, the piety and the talents of the most gifted ministers".

It was not only ministers who left. At Dundonald, the minister had "only one officiating elder in his parish". At Ochiltree there were two but one was "considerably advanced in his life and not in good health". At Old Cumnock, Newton, and Monkton almost all the elders followed their ministers out.

The very buildings were almost lost. The managers at Catrine, Wallacetown and Girvan refused to yield the chapels on the ground that they were not parish churches. A law agent had to be brought in.

1844, December "The Presbytery recommend to all its members to make every exertion in their power in their several parishes to collect funds for the purpose of liquidating the debt of the Church and to defray the expenses of Processes for the recovery of what are commonly called Quoad Sacra Churches and that the members report to the Presbytery their diligence in this matter at the next ordinary meeting".

However, by January 1845 all the parish churches, if not all the chapels, had been filled. Slowly the work of extension was taken up again. A mission was started at Alloway in 1858 and two years later it was given Quoad Sacra status by the Court of Teinds. By the end of the century new churches had been established at Annbank, Glenbuck, North Newton, and Ayr St. Leonards. In addition the older chapels also gained the Quoad Sacra rank they had briefly held in the 1830's. In the first decade of the 20th century further progress was made with the building of Prestwick St. Nicholas. The outbreak of war prevented more work but the biggest advance of all was just around the corner – the Reunion of 1929.

For years the Presbytery had encouraged closer contacts with the Free Church, had welcomed joint ventures and shared in joint protests. They had openly discussed union since the old Free Church had come together with the United Presbyterians in 1900. In February 1929 the Presbytery "unanimously agreed" to the Assembly Overtures on the Basis and Plan of Union. That April replies from the congregations gave a consent which was almost unanimous, in only one congregation was there any dissent.

When the united Presbytery met for the first time on 9th October the roll of congregations was read. There were 77 charges plus a number of mission stations. This introduced a new element – readjustment. (It also required congregations to distinguish themselves with new names, hence the "Olds", "Saints", and "Memorials" alongside the Norths and Souths.) In the first year of the Union, readjustment was raised in Patna, Annbank, Symington, Maybole and Crosshill. Talks were abandoned at Annbank and Maybole – "nothing could be done" – and the first attempted union, at Patna, foundered after a few months.

Thereafter the face of Presbytery has been altered by both expansion and contraction. While new buildings have gone up to meet the needs of new communities in Prestwick, Ayr, Auchinleck and Old Cumnock, some of the older charges have been linked or united. Yet the aim of the reformers of 1581 to have a church in the midst of the people remains unchanged.

BUILDINGS AND STIPENDS

According to the First and Second Books of Discipline it would be simple. Churches would be built and maintained, and ministers – like teachers and the poor – looked after "upon the charge of the Church". That is, the money would all come from the wealth of the Old Church, in particular from what were known as "the Great Teinds". It did not work out as planned, the Church getting about one sixth of what was required.

Wherever possible the old church buildings were used. In Ayr the people went to the same church down the "bent lands" at the sea front, until Cromwell turned it into a citadel in 1652. The new church was then built "the room, place and stance of the Grey Friars Kirk".

There were other ways of utilising old property –

1650, June 26 "The Presbytery considering that the new kirk of Barre is to be builded, thairfore they thought it was necessair and expedient that the materials of Kirkdomini as yet standing be taken down and transported to the place where the said new kirk is to be builded".

Responsibility for the upkeep of property was vested in the heritors. They did not always fulfil their duties to the satisfaction of Presbytery, but it should be said that Presbytery did not always do much more than tell others what to do.

1687, September 13 ". . . Underwood came from the Paroch of

Craigie and Barnwell, desiring Mr Campbell's continuance among them; who was answered that if Craigie Paroch would give sufficient surty for his maintainance, he should be continued among them, otherwise declared transportable".

1688, July 5 " . . . Mr. James Boog appointed the excite the paroch of Symontoun to provide a meeting house for themselves, as also a maintainance and house for the minister".

A different kind of problem cropped up with the Revolution of 1689 and the removal of the "curates". " . . . were appointed to consult with Provost Muir how the manse of Dalmellington might be possessed, or any other manse in the like case, where the coformist continues to inhabit, or hath dampnified the manse".

Presbyterial oversight is shown in the following examples:

1746, May 27 Consideration of the Acompt of the particulars necessary for repairing the manse of Dundonald.

"To repair the garret in the manse with Dales nails and workmanship	£10:00:00
To thatch for the manse	40:00:00
To putting on the thatch by a thatcher	8:00:00
To a man to serve the thatcher	4:16:00
To point the Kirk 4 bolls lime and ¼ ct. Sclates	1:04:00
To pointing and sclatting	2:08:00
To two visitors	1:04:00
Total	£75:12:00"

Presbytery inquired into the state of the property when a new minister was inducted. This was not always a mere formality –

1747"The heritors and elders of Barr being advertised to attend the Presbytery instantly and after prayer compeared Mr. Kennedy of Ballymore, Mr. Martin of Dalwhairn, Mr. Ferguson of Auchinsoul, Mr. McCully of Changue . . . askt anent the Decreet of Locality . . . and as to the state of the manse and office houses they are in a ruinous condition but that they resolve to build a new one and are to fall on measures for that effect against next spring. As to the Kirk which is also in a very bad condition they likeways resolve to have the Kirk enlarged which cannot be done soon till all concerned agree thereto but in the meantime they resolve to repair what is necessary".

". . . workmen being called there appeared John McNeill, Sclater and Glassier, Robert Montgomery, Mason, Sclater, Glasier and Wright, and

Robert Gibson, Wright, . . . they brought in their report . . . the committee finding that the manse is to be new built do therefore appoint that one thousand pounds Scots be laid upon the heritors for the same end . . . the sum of seven pouns seventeen shillings twopence sterling is sufficient to repair the Kirk at present according to best of our knowledge".

1895" . . . the parish church of Ochiltree has fallen into a state of serious disrepair, that the walls are rent in several places, the cornice and plaster are cracked loose and in part fallen away . . . " "the Presbytery find that the said church of Ochiltree is not only unsuitable for public worship but in some respects dangerous, further find that the replacing of the present church by a new building is the most advisable and also the most economical course to be adopted".

Heritors handed over this responsibility in 1929, on the understanding that all buildings were in a state of "tenantable repair". They cannot have been too sorry.

At Girvan in 1923 the manse was found "in need of very considerable reconstruction and repair". Another house was offered to the new minister which he was keen to accept. However, this fell through and repairs were started instead. Presbytery found the repairs did not satisfy them. A proposed piggery had to be abandoned "under the Burgh Bye-laws". The study chimney was also argued over. In turn the heritors were put out that the minister "had converted part of the manse garden into an ash tennis court which has to a certain extent destroyed its usefulness as a garden".

A similar problem arose over stipends in the early years – the original stipend for Ayr, £100 Scots, was increased in 1573 when Alloway was added to the charge. A few years later the town added money from the former endowments of the old monastic houses – vested in the provost and magistrates – but not much. When John Welsh arrived as assistant and successor there was no house for him. The town did repay those who gave him accommodation and later during his imprisonment and exile they went on paying the stipend. This, however, is more a measure of Welsh's unique worth than an indication of overall policy.

1643, July 12 The Presbytery allowed the translation of the Alloway minister "in respect he has neither manse, nor glebe, nor competent allowance".

1613 The Kirkowswald minister left for Ireland for "lack of sufficient stipent".

Stipends were paid in parish churches according to the grain prices as determined by the local fiars' courts. Augmentation was a matter of consultation

1894 "... there were laid before the Presbytery an Extract Interlocuter of the Court of Tiends . . . showing that an Augmentation of three Chalders having been granted by the Court the stipend of Dalrymple Parish had been raised to twenty three chalders with ten pounds for Communion Elements".

Not that everything was always amicalbe –

1893 "The Freemen while admitting their liability in regard to the manse in the Sheriff Court have chosen by their subsequent actings that they mean to pay the expenses of the repairs and alterations ordered by the Sherriff out of the seat rents, or in other words to deprive the minister of what has been hitherto in use to be paid as part of his stipend and to apply this in discharge of their liability".

By the 20th century things were becoming organised at Presbytery. In 1919 contributions towards the increase of minimum stipends were allocated for the first time. The Basis and Plan of the 1929 Union brought an end to the old system, if not all the old problems.

TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

Presbytery oversight of students is shown in the case of Archibald Kennedy. From the 13th September, 1687 to 27th January 1691, the Presbytery reported on his progress on 34 occasions – "Mr. Eccles and Mr. Stevenson appointed to prescrib Mr. A. Kennedy a text and hear him privately upon the same . . . reported that they judged he might be entered upon his tryalls for the ministry he was appointed to have a homilie on 2 Cor. 5, 17 in privat . . . had his exercise and was approven . . . to have a pulblick tryall, both to expon and add . . . delivered his homilie in publick and was approven . . . he is appointed to handle the Controversie de Autoritate Scripturae . . . to deliver his common head as also his exegesis, and likewise to defend his theses, give an account of his languages, and answer chronologicall or other extemporary questions. He is appointed to preach his popular Sermon on 2 Tim. 4, 8 and to be ready to undergo the peeces of tryall formerly appointed . . . in all which he was approven, and licenc'd to preach the Gospel within the bounds of the Presbytery".

"Mr. Kennedy appointed to preach two Sabbaths at Stratoun, if desired by them . . . preached two dayes at Stratoun, who petitioned for advice concerning the said Mr. Kennedy to whom they had some inclinations to give a call! . . . he is in the meantime to supply them two Sabbaths . . . and also to catechise that Paroch . . . The Paroch of Stratoun presented a call to Mr. A. Kennedy, who declared that he had some scruples why he could not instantly

accept the said call . . . Mr. A. Kennedy gave back Stratoun their call to the end it might be subscribed by more Heritors: . . . he accepted the call of Stratoun and is to continue there, . . . in the meantime is to enter upon his tryalls for ordination". "This day Mr. A. Kennedy approven in the exercise: . . . was approven . . . having finished his tryalls with approbation this Presbytery appointed Mr. John Hunter to preach a day at Stratoun and to try the unanimity of the Congregation . . . Mr. Kennedy's edict to be served, and returned endorst . . . was served, and return'd endorst whereupon his Ordination was appointed to be solemnised at Stratoun the 27th of January 1691."

Presbytery continued to exercise control over the quality of new ministers. Before ordaining a probationer they had to be satisfied as to his academic attainment –

1746, July 2 "... the above call together with the attestation was read and approven as a sufficient call whereupon Presbytery appointed Mr Thomas Walker, Minister at Dundonald, to write to Mr. Allan signifying this to him that the Presbytery has appointed him to deliver the Exercise and Addition from Hebrews 7th and 6 as also a lecture – Romans 10th at the next Presbytery . . . and that he supply Barr as often as he can".

1746, July 23 "... delivered his Exegesis, defended his Thesis and answered the Extemporary Questions as also the Questions in Chronology, interpreted part of Psalm 112 in Hebrew and a part of the Greek Testament ad aperturam libri . . . thereafter he was approven in all his tryalls . . . appoint that tomorrow three weeks he be ordained minister at Barr".

Presbytery set probationers trials right up until 1931 – "... resolved to take Mr. Ewing on Trials for Ordination. The following Trials were prescribed:– 1. Hebrew: Psalm 11. 2. Greek; Mathew 5-7. 3. Divinity; the Person of Christ. 4. Church Law; Constitution of the Church and Duties of Kirk Sessions. 5. Pastoral theology." Equal care was taken to monitor the progress of local students –

1846, October 7 "Mr. John Whyte from Girvan and Mr. Archibald Murray from Muirkirk, students of Philosophy, were examined on Literature etc. by the annual committee . . . the Presbytery authorised the Clerk to grant them certificat".

There were similar reports in 1847 and 1848 and on 4th July, 1849 – "... strictly and privately examined Messrs. Rorison, Murray and White, proposed for probationary trials, and were well satisfied as to their knowledge of Greek and Latin, of Philosophy and Theology . . . Presbytery resolve to take them on public trials for license . . . appoint the following pieces to Mr. Murray, for homily, Mathew 5: 20; lecture, Luke 15: 11-24; exercise and addition, 2 Tim. 3: 14 to end; exegesis, 'An Sit Deus Praesciens?'; popular

sermon, 2 Cor. 5: 20. They also appointed him to read the 8th chapter of Genesis in Hebrew and the Greek New Testament ad aperturam libri, and to pass Catechetical trials on Divinity and Church History, particularly on the Arminian controversy". Mr. Murray duly delivered the pieces in December 1849 and February 1850.

"The Presbytery were fully satisfied therewith the said Mr. Murray was licensed to preach the Gospel".

Presbyteries are still responsible for the oversight of students within their bounds. However, they do not check up as 1860 – ". . . who were examined in Latin, on Livy book xxi, Virgil's Bucolics; in Greek, on Herodotus book 1; orally on Logic and Moral Philosophy; and by written questions on Natural Philosophy and Mathematics; and on the Shorter Catechism".

OVERSIGHT OF MINISTERS

Presbytery has always taken very seriously its responsibility for the good behaviour of ministers.

1645, November 26 John Maccorn of Straiton was deposed as he "usually frequents the aill-house, drinking indifferently with all sorts of persons from morning to night, except a little in the midst of the day, when he goes home to take a sleep."

1646, January 13 Robert Hamilton was deposed from Monkton for "various misdemeanours", including reading his sermons. This had had an interesting effect on worshippers at Monkton – "in tyme of sermon the most part of the people do nothing buy lay wajours upon the turning of the pages".

And there always have been two sides to every case –

1687, November 15 "Mr. William Eccles is appointed to writ a letter in the Presbytery's name to the Paroch of Barr, to stirr them up to be encourageing to their minister".

1688, October 23 ". . . but they left him as they found him; only he desired a testimoniall from the Presbytery, which they answered could not be given".

And there were happy endings –

1691, March 24 "This being the day for private censure in the Presbytery, all were approven, excepting onely Mr. Hugh Campbell in Muirkirk,

who was said to be sometimes guilty of drunkenness, and of too frequently meddling in secular affairs and country trysts".

1691, May 19 ". . . the session was called and interrogat concerning their minister's doctrin, diligence in visiting, catechising, and they approved of him in all, onely they complain'd of his negligence in catechising and his sometimes overtaken with drink especially when abroad the whole congregation was questioned to the same purpose to which answered that there were somethings in him that was offensive and stumbling to them. . . . it's their desire that he might be removed Mr Hugh was call'd in made no complaint of them, professed his grief for them, promising amendment for the future through the Lord's strength, adding withall his readiness to demitt and quitt his relation to that people, to concurr with them in a call to another minister, if they so inclin'd . . . the Presbytery unanimously concluded that the congregation should have liberty to call another minister, yet Mr. Hugh's relation should continue firm and valid as formerly till such time as they shoudl unanimously concurr in a call". In fact he stayed on until his death in 1714.

Scandal of another kind caught up with John Steele of Stair. Edinburgh Presbytery reported that he had been present at Home's tragedy "Douglas". Admitting his presence, he pleaded "the Playhouse being a great distance from his parish, he had no reason to apprehend that he would be known, or that his presence would would have given offence". A mistake for which he apologised, "declaring his firm resolution to abstain for the future".

One of the longest cases on record concerns Alexander Cunningham of Symington. In 1763 Cunningham was called before the Presbytery. "There were several stories talked of to his prejudice through the country". He did admit attending the Playhouse "but gave such an account of some instances that were mentioned as to induce the Presbytery to hope they were not so gross as was usually represented".

Then the next November a letter from the Symington elders complained that the minister had been "near a year absent from his charge". Presbytery re-opened the case and wrote to various other presbyteries for information on alleged misconduct by Cunningham. The prolonged absence was explained on the grounds that he had gone to Edinburgh on business and had been overtaken there by illness. He even produced a letter from an Edinburgh surgeon.

However, replies from presbyteries suggested there was a case to answer. Reports talked of his being "the worse for drink" at Irvine the time of the Synod there". Witnesses said "it happened in the house of James Shaw,

Vintner". Then at a Masonic gathering in the White Hart, Glasgow, Cunningham gave the toast "here is to the remembrance of Adam and Eve who forfeited paradise that we might have the pleasure of drinking and smoking". He had drunk at John Tait's in the Gallowgate till three in the morning before preaching in Shettleston. There were 8 other items of misconduct alleged.

In December 1765 the Libel was given, an answer to be sustained by February. Presbytery considered the reply, dropped the question of his prolonged absence, and sustained the other 7 charges.

Hearings began in May with witnesses called by both sides. For example, Mr. Witherspoon of Paisley (who would later sign the American Declaration of Independence), asked what he meant "staggering a little". "seemed to walk as one in liquor", replied that he meant "staggering a little". How did he know it was wine and punch on the table? The accused had "pressed him much to drink a glass either of one or the other". And so on.

Cunningham has been seen once walking his horse, red in the face and without his hat. Had there been an accident – or was he incapable of riding? Friendly witnesses tried to make light of a drinking session, saying he had slept through most of it.

Finally Cunningham spoke in his own defence. Admitting that "he has been in some respects blameable" he promised "to act a part in life for the future that will be approved by God and his own conscience". Presbytery unanimously decided that he "should be suspended from his office . . . for 4 months."

A rather unusual case occurred in 1808 – "Then a motion was made and seconded that whereas it has been generally reported and likewise asserted in this court, that Mr. James Wright, minister at Maybole, had at last hervest given from the pulpit encouragement to his parishioners to lead in their corn on the Lord's Day, the Presbytery do enquire how far said report and assertion are true".

This started a row. It was argued that the Presbytery should first have "conversed with Mr. Wright privately". He complained that the Presbytery had refused to ask if the Dalrymple minister had said that "Mr. Wright had endeavoured to erase the 4th Commandment from the Decalogue and to abolish the observance of the Sabbath day and to trample it under his feet – or words to that purpose?"

The upshot was the following decision – "... The Synod did and hereby do unanimously set aside all the proceedings of the Presbytery of Ayr. At the same time, recommend to all the Presbyteries . . . to exercise due vigilance for preserving and promoting a stricter regard for the Lord's day, and to caution

their members against offering such opinions relative to works of necessity to be done on that Holy Day as may prove a stumbling block to their people".

Changed days from the early 1600's when the Craigie minister reprovod his congregation for breaking the Sabbath and the laird threw a knife at him "which he avoided by stooping and it lodged in the back of the pulpit".

In addition, Presbytery had to ensure the orthodoxy of the ministers and their ability to get the Word across –

1789, July 15 a case that prompted Burns' "The Kirk's Alarm" – William McGill, Ayr second Charge, was accused of publishing false doctrine. A committee was appointed, met 6 times and drew up a 50 page report. Thereafter the case was passed back to the Synod. A two hour meeting resulted in an "Accommodation" and they "appointed one of their number to offer their thanksgivings to the Almighty".

1847, May 10 the settlement of a new minister in Girvan was delayed by "certain objections", all the more weighty because in Girvan "there is already so much dissent" (a reference to the strength of the Free Church).

July 7 "he is unable to speak his native language either intelligibly or grammatically . . . he even makes use of words which obviously he does not understand . . . his discourses are unimpressive, confused and unedifying, and display great want of judgement, narrow views of religion . . . he denied the allegations contained in the said objections . . . "The Presbytery did and hereby do admit the objections, which have been found relevant to proof, and allow the parties a conjunct probation . . ."

November 8 "Presbytery found that the objections may all be resolved into three" . . . first two "not proven", third found proven (i.e. his discourses were unimpressive etc.) "the presentee is not fit and qualified . . . to take the pastoral charge of the parish of Girvan . . . and hereby refuse to proceed . . ."

However, an appeal went to the Assembly of 1848. The Assembly "reversed the sentence of the Presbytery of Ayr". Mr. Corson then took the customary trials which he duly passed in July. Another attempt to reject him as unfit was "unanimously repelled", the Presbytery being "unanimously satisfied as to Mr. Corson's soundness in the Faith". On his ordination "a great number of the parishioners . . . received Mr. Corson as their parson".

Presbytery continues its work of oversight, but although a minister had to be threatened by a law agent as late as 1891, the emphasis is more on

...alking difficulties through in quiet consultation. At its most strict the
Presbytery still gave a hearing and was never vindictive. When left to
themselves the people of the church were much more direct in dealing with
offending ministers –

In 1637 William Annand of Ayr was attacked in Glasgow for defendng
Laud's Liturgy before the Synod – "Some hundreds of iraged women of all
qualities were about him with neaves, staves, and peats". He escaped but the
next day "at his onlouping his horse fell above him in a very foul myre . . .
which occasioned more speech".

And in the days after the Glorious Revolution the "King's curates" were
often helped on their way – "he was forced into the church-yard by 90 armed
men who discharged him to preach . . . and tore his gown . . . they returned
and forbade him to preach anymore at the church on which he deserted the
charge . . . took him out of house and after talking with him about an hour . . .
put him through the water of Irvine . . . outed by the people".

THE PRESBYTERY ITSELF

From the beginning the Presbytery has met "at Air" (apud Ayr). No
meeting place is mentioned but it is understood that the church of St. John
the Baptist was used. In addition the court went wherever business took it –
even unto Muirkirk and unto Barr. This in turn necessitated hospitality and the
building of large manses, probably at their grandest in the 1850's.

Presbytery meetings followed a steady pattern down through the
centuries. The Moderator served variously for a year or for 6 months, and was
for some time appointed on a simple rota. The clerkship was rather different,
continuity being more obviously a virtue. It is significant that in 1929 the
united Presbytery had one moderator – the most senior minister willing to
serve – but two clerks.

Many of the present day features of meetings date back to 1929. The
use of the County Buildings on a regular (and, briefly, free) basis was decided.
Robes were presented to the moderator for official wear – a "Presbyterial"
scarf being added later. And one notices an increase in the number of
standing committees to expedite business.

One difference – Presbytery had traditionally met in the morning, eleven
o'clock being chosen in 1929. This in turn had led to such developments as a
Lunch Club, a Choir, and a Library, all gone.

A SCHOOL IN EVERY PARISH

"Of necessitie therefore we judge it that every several kirk have one
School-maister appointed, such a one at least as is able to teach Grammar and
the Latine tongue if the town be of any reputation. If it be upaland where the
people convene to doctrine but once in the week, then must either the reader
or the minister there appointed take care over the children and youth of the
parish, to instruct them in the first rudiments and especially in the Catechisme".

Thus John Knox in his Book of Discipline highlights the significance of
education to the early reformers and their Church. The General Assembly,
meeting in 1638, reaffirmed this belief and stressed the importance of having
a school in every parish: indeed, it went further in advocating that grammar
schools be established in all towns and burghs. This policy was approved by
the Scottish Parliament and confirmed by an Act of 1646. "The Estates of
Parliament considering how prejudicial the want of schooles in many congregations
hath been, and how beneficial the founding thereof in every congrega-
tion will be to this Kirk and Kingdom do therefor statute and ordain that
there be a school founded and a schoolmaster appointed in every parish . . . by
advice of the Presbytery".

Over the centuries the Presbytery of Ayr shows a major concern for and
close involvement with the provision of education within its own area and
beyond

1645, May 7 "They regrated also that thair was no shole keiped at all in any
of the paroches (i.e. Craigie and Riccarton) so that thair children wer not
educat in learning".

The records bear witness to the varying success of its endeavours.

APPOINTMENT OF SCHOOLMASTERS

The Presbytery delegated to small groups of its members the task of
examining applicants. In 1693 Parliament confirmed that "all school-
masters and teachers of youth in schools are and should be liable to the trial,
judgment and censure of the presbyteries of the bounds for their sufficiency,
qualification and deportment in the said office."

1710, March 15 "Reported that Messrs. John Laurie & John Steell
took tryalls of Mr. William Mitchell forsaid, & that they found him qualified to
teach the grammar: he is to sign the confession of faith".

1763, June 8 "As Hugh Wallace who has taught the School of Dailly for some time past being the person proposed by the Heritors to be school-master of Dailly if found Qualified. The Presbytery called upon the said Hugh Wallace & examined his knowledge of English, Writing, Arithmetick & of the principles of Religion, were satisfied and judge him qualified to be School-master of Dailly."

In 1708, friction arose between the Presbytery and the magistrates of Ayr. The post of master of the grammar school of Ayr was left vacant by the death of Mr. William Rankine. On 27 October the Presbytery heard that the magistrates had acted swiftly and promoted Mr. James fergusone" without previous trial by the presbyterie".

The resulting dispute dragged on for many months escalating rapidly to involve also the Session of the Kirk of Ayr, and awakening a considerable number of local non-educational grievances.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

In 1690, after the coming of William of Orange and the re-establishment of Presbyterianism, Parliament enacted that no schoolmaster could be appointed or allowed to continue in office unless he signed the Confession of Faith.

1710, August 13 "All that have schoolmasters & chaplains in their paroches who have not signed the confession of faith are to advertise them to be present to doe it ".

1800, November 26 "The Presbytery then proceeded to take under consideration the Order and injunction of the last General Assembly, concerning teachers and Schoolmasters, when they appointed all the Ministers within their bounds to require all the Parochial and established Schoolmasters to subscribe the Confession of Faith and Formula, and also to inform all the teachers of Youth within their respective Parishes that they are to produce at next meeting of Presbytery attestations of their having taken the Oaths to Government; and the Ministers are to report their diligence in this matter at the meeting of Presbytery in March next."

1808, May 4 "The Presbytery finding that Mr. Smith, private teacher in Mauchline, declines the Oaths to Government, appoint Mr Tod to initiate to said Mr. Smith that the Presbytery are dissatisfied with his conduct in said instance, and that unless he takes the Oaths of Government or give up teaching, they will represent his case to the Sherriff of the County."

1808, July 6 "Mr. Tod reports that Mr. Smith, teacher in his parish, who had refused to take the Oaths to Government had given up keeping any school".

DISCIPLINE

Once appointed, schoolmasters were subject to a strict discipline, exercised by Presbytery.

1642, May 26 "Mr. William Wallace scholmaster (in Ayr) removed. The ministers . . . approved him in his Doctrine & facultie in teaching of the youth, and in the exercise of Discipline. Bot regrated his non attendance Diligentlie upon the schoole. The jarring and discord betuix him and the Doctor Robert Andro, quhilk was liklie to overthrow the schoole. As also regrated the keeping bak of some weil disposed shollers becaus of the dullnes and ignorancie of vthers."

1704, October 10 "Mr. Roger informed the presbytrie that Mr. John Reid a student of Theologie, & Mr. James Greg schoolmaster att Machlyne were both guilty of the scandall of drunkennes at Galstoun."

It is interesting to note that in the famous 'Orders' (guidelines for the master at Dundonald) included in the first volume of the records (from 1602 onwards) of Dundonald Kirk Session, the master is instructed to make use of 'censors'. "As without discipline no company can be kept in order, so least of all unbridled youth, therefore it shall be necessary that there be in the school a common censor who shall remark all faults and delate them to the master of whom account shall be taken once a week. And for more perfect understanding of the children's behaviour there would be a clandestine censor of whom none shall know but the master and he who is employed in that office, that may secretly acquaint the master with all things". References to the use of censors occur at different points in the Presbytery records.

1699, March 15 "It's overtured that each Session apply to and concur with the civill Magistrate and principall Leading men of the Paroch, that *censors* be appointed in each paroch to go about, visit, and delate delinquents for cursing, swearing, drunkenness, etc: and where there is a town or clachan in the paroch, that the censors goe through the town or clachan and delate such as shall be found in taverns or alehouses in tyme of divine service; so also on week days, especially on mercat & fair days, they go through the said town or clachan to notice and delate delinquents for the foresaid crimes; and likewise that the said censors or visitors go through the town or clachan and delate delinquents that are in alehouses at unseasonable tymes of the night."

In 1747 also, the Presbytery instructed its ministers to ensure that

schoolmasters were making use of censors to report 'every Saturday' on the behaviour of children out of school.

SCHOOLMASTERS' SALARIES

The Acts of 1646 and 1696 laid it down that the heritors (i.e. landowners) in every parish should provide a "commodious house for a school and settle and modifie a salary to a Schoolmaster which shall not be under one hundred marks nor above two Hundred marks".

1642, May 18 "thair culd not be ane convenient place for a shoole (in Auchinleck), in respect of the great distance of the parochiners from the kirk, Bot that honest men keiped thair bairnes at shoole at home besyde themselves. And that thair wes no setled maintenance for a shooldmaster."

1697, March 31 "All the severall members are required to use diligence to gett Sallaries for Schoolmasters settled in their paroch conform to a late act of parliament, & report."

1734, October 1 "the Committee, appointed to meet at Kirkmichael the 24th ultimo, did, And Mr. Laurie informs that since that time all the heritors (except two one of whom is at a good distance from this country and the other gave a verbal consent) have by letters under their hands agreed to have ane hundred merks settled as a constant sallary to the schoolmaster at Kirkmichael and that if more be found needfull they will not be averse from granting allowance for some more by a private grant but that no more should go into the act of presbytry. . . . The Presbytry appoint that a bond according to the tenor of the saids letters to be drawn up and presented to the heritors that they may subscribe the same and that it be put in the Register and ane Extract of it be preserved as a lasting document for the same." Unfortunately some heritors took a great deal of persuading to part with their money.

1697, July 21 "Some Ministers report that they have made intimation for conveening their heritors anent schoolmasters sallaries, & others tell they finde inconveniency to doe it, & therefor must labour to bring them up to it by degrees." Frequently, recourse to the law became necessary, i.e. "instruments were taken" e.g. in parishes in Sorn, Kirkoswald, New Cumnock (1698).

1735, September 2 "That these who have no school provyded nor a sallary to a schoolmaster according to law and have taken Instruments against their heritors for not doing it are the paroches of Dalgain Riccarton Kirkoswald Craigie New Cumnock Dailie, Barr Moorkirk Auchinleck Symintoun Stair & Monkton."

SCHOOL-HOUSES

The provision of the school-house also came within the remit of the Presbytery.

1741, March 4 "Mr. William Paton having represented that the heretors of his paroch intend to build a schoolhouse at the Kirk (in Dailly) he desires a Committee may be appointed to meet with them." This Committee was appointed and set to work immediately. Within a month their Report, prepared with the approval of the heritors (Sir James ferguson of Kilkerran, Sir John Cathcart of Carleton and Alexander Boyd of Penkill) and the assistance of a joiner and three stonemasons, was presented.

The schoolhouse, built "in the Northwest end of the Kirkyard at the door from the high way" cost a total of "*One hundred and Twentyseven pound fifteen shilling Scots.*" The account for the work was not rendered for some time!

1746, January 1 "Thomas Campbell mason having sometime agoe engaged with the heretors of Daillie to build a schoolhouse there and was authorized to uplift the money from the several heretors. And the said Thomas Campbell being dead since that time his son in law William Hunter has built the said schoolhouse and wants the Presbytrys Warrant to call in the said money to defray the charge. The Presbytry do hereby agree to and nominate the said William Hunter to call in and uplift the said money and if need be to use diligence against the recusants".

INSPECTION/VISITS

1707, August 27 "It was reported that the Grammar Schools of Air & Mayboll were visited by these appointed & having taken tryall of the scholars in both places they found they had made good proficiency, & that they heard a good report of the schoolmasters as to their good behaviour & christian cariage: with report the presbytrie were satisfied."

1742, August 31 "The Presbytry having communed upon proper expedients for promoting Edification in their several paroches Resolved and appointed as one most proper mean for this good purpose that Every minister shall in time coming Visit the paroch school once a month or as often as he conveniently can, And each time Instruct the scholars in the principles and practise of religion, and pray with them, and Enquire into their (i.e. the schoolmasters') diligence."

1747, April 29 "The Class of Ayr Judge it may Conduce greatly to make effectual the good Design of the Synod's Act for Visiting of Schools, that the

Ministers at such Visitation recommend to the School-master that he Begin the Morning Diet with Prayer and Dismiss the School at night in the same Manner.

That the Schoolmasters be exhorted to take some proper method of being Acquainted with the Behaviour of the Children when out of School Such as appointing Censors who are to Report every Saturday.

And also that the ancient good Custom of repeating the Catechism in the Church on the Lord's Day before Sermon in the forenoon and likewise that a portion of the Holy Scriptures be read after repeating the Catechism. The Clerk is to send copies hereof to the Ministers."

Not all visits resulted in the schoolmaster's being commended.

1695, March 6 "... These appointed to visit the grammar school of Mayboll report that they finde the schoolmaster there unsufficient to teach: whereup the Moderator is appointed to preach there upon a week day, & to cause warn heretors, magistrates, session, & heads of families to be present: & desyre them in the Presbyteries name to provide themselves with another sufficient school master."

At the 10 April 1695 meeting Mr. Patrick Findlay was declared "Unsufficient to teach a grammar school." Unfortunately his successor, Mr. Hew Campbell, formerly schoolmaster in Cumnock, did not hold the post for long. He "demitted the charge (being accused of the scandall of fornication he is fugitive from discipline)". The school was declared vacant 13 May 1696.

Careful attention was also devoted to the curriculum being taught and the textbooks used by the teachers.

1714, March 3 "These appointed to take tryal of the proficiency of the children that are taught by Mr. Hunters grammar, report they did it & were very satisfied with these scholars as to their knowledge of the three parts of Grammar, which they thought extraordinary, considering that they have attended the school only but about nine moneths."

1715, June 22 "The Committee appointed to visit Mr. Hunters grammar did agree upon the following report to be made to the presbytrie viz. That its their opinion the method is very good, & that he has done good service by his pains that way, & that the remarks they made are not so materiall, but that in the meantime, the presbytrie may endeavour to have it taught in all schools within their bounds, & that the presbytrie use their interest to have this method to obtain through the whole bounds of the synod. And in that case they finde Mr. Hunter is willing to give a second edition with amendments, &

subject the copy to the opinion of the presbytrie & synod, or any other they shall think fit to appoint to give their remarks upon it befor it be printed. The presbytrie approves & recommends accordingly." Mr. James fergusone, Master of the grammar school, however had his reservations about Mr. Hunter's book and success. He claimed that the success of the pupils was the result of "the more than ordinary pains Mr. Hunter had taken on them" and found that the text book was "greatly defective and in many things erroneous".

SCHOOLS IN EVERY PARISH

By the end of the 18th century the early reformers' objective of a school in every parish had almost been achieved. In 1735 some twelve parishes in Presbytery of Ayr had no school but by the 1790's only the parishes of Auchinleck and Stair were without one.

The 19th century however brought massive changes to almost every aspect of life in south west Scotland. Against the background of a growing industrialisation of society, the Presbytery's influence over the education within its bounds declined rapidly. The need for a literate electorate and work force encouraged the setting up of more and more schools by various bodies—so that by 1866, in Ayrshire, parish schools accounted for only 25% of pupils. State intervention in the financing, running and supervision of schools rapidly increased.

Despite its declining role in education, the Presbytery continued to seek to exert influence on decision making at national and local levels.

1869, May 5 Presbytery petitioned against the Education Bill.

- "1. Because no provision is made in the Bill for ascertaining the religious character of the Teachers of the new National Schools or the religious instruction they are to communicat.
2. Because it contemplates the complete overthrow of the present system of Parochial Schools, so long the boast and privilege of Scotland.
3. Because it interferes with the prosperity of a number of Schools at present in efficient operation such as Public Works Schools which have been erected on the understanding that the Government would continue to subsidize them.
5. Because it will put a stop to voluntary effort and introduce a system of rating which in many parishes will be complained of as a grievous and unnecessary burden".

1918, September 5 "A circular letter signed by the moderators of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and of the United Free Church

was laid before the Presbytery, recommending that steps should be taken to secure that provision should be made in the Education (Scotland) Bill, 1918 for Religious Instruction to be given in all public schools. Unanimously agreed – to convey to Prime Minister, The Secretary for Scotland, the Lord Advocate, and the members of Parliament for South Ayrshire and the Ayr burghs, the opinion of the Presbytery that provision ought to be made in the aforementioned Bill for Religious Instruction to be given in all public schools, Primary, Intermediate, and Secondary and further that a circular be issued to ministers of all parishes within the bounds strongly urging that action be taken in each parish on the lines recommended in the Moderator's letter".

1939, April 5 "Presbytery resolved to enjoin ministers (1) that they give every assistance and encouragement to any Headmaster who invites their co-operation and (2) that they leave the initiative in this matter to the teachers; and that a letter explaining the situation should be sent to every minister within the bounds".

1943, February 2 "Presbytery petition the next General assembly to approach the Secretary of State for Scotland with a view to having the Church of Scotland adequately represented on the Scottish Advisory Council on Education".

1945, February 5 "Attention draw to the fact that none of the 4 representatives of the Protestant Churches in Ayrshire to the County Council's Education Committee has been put on the Teaching and Staffing Sub-Committee. This was a distinct disadvantage in the matter of securing that sufficient attention be given to R.I. in schools. Presbytery instructed the committee to watch over this matter".

1949, September 6 "Mr. Wright explained that there are at present no School Chaplains officially appointed – but a number of ministers conduct religious services in certain schools from time to time and assist with religious teaching on the invitation of Head Teachers".

In 1981, this work continues.

"TO WARN THE SINNER, CHEER THE SAINT"

Throughout its existence, the Presbytery has shown concern for the general well-being of those living within its area. We now consider some of the ways in which that care and concern was shown.

THE POOR

The ideal of the Scottish Reformers was that the poor would be provided for by using some of the wealth of the pre-Reformation Church. That ideal was never realised. Instead, there were makeshift arrangements whereby the poor were supported, mainly by collections taken at Church Services, but also by income from lands and money bequeathed for that purpose, fines levied by the Kirk Sessions on those guilty of moral offences or other sources. Not a great deal of money was available from these sources for the support of the poor.

The Scottish Parliament passed various acts concerning the poor, but, by and large, these measures were ineffective. There was long and widespread opposition to any assessments being levied for the care of the poor, such assessments having been permitted by Parliament in 1574. In practice, the Kirk Sessions tried to care for their own poor as best they could with the limited resources available to them.

The records, particularly in the earlier period, show that the Presbytery would assist specific cases by giving to certain individuals the right to receive a day's collection from the congregation within the Presbytery.

1687, October 18 "One Mr. William Blair presented a supplication for charity, which being considered, he was allowed a dayes collection out of every paroch where there is preaching within the bounds of the Presbytery; and the same to be brought in and given him at the next meeting."

1688, May 8 "Overtur'd and concluded that a collection be gather'd for a poor lad in Stratoun called Thomas Herron, who is to be cutt of the gravell."

The Reformed Church inherited from the past the division of the poor into two groups – the able-bodied poor and the helpless, impotent poor. The general attitude to the former was that they should be punished for their idleness, whereas the latter – the aged, the disabled, the sick – were entitled to what care there was available. Each parish was expected to look after its own poor.

In the eighteenth century, the number of vagrants was causing concern to the Presbytery. In 1746 and 1747, the members were discussing this matter. The number of impotent poor had increased lately and vagrants were

obtaining charity which should have been given to the real and known poor. The position was aggravated by the high cost of food.

1747, February 4 "the Presbytery do hereby warn necessitous persons to repair to their respective Parishes as they are not after this to except any Supply where they are unknown and Expressly enjoyne all Such in their bounds which cannot be maintained by their own Labour and publick funds of the Parish not to wander abroad but to ask the Relief they stand in need of from their neighbours only who are members of the Congregation to which they belong, this being absolutely necessary to distinguish Real from pretended objects of Charity. And for this purpose the Kirk Sessions are appointed to give lines or badges as they find it necessary the effect of which is not to extend beyond the bounds of their own Parish."

By 1770, the practice of vagrant begging had reached such proportions that the Presbytery took action, in consultation with, and with the co-operation of, the Justices of the Peace of the County. On the first Sunday in October, 1771, each minister of the Presbytery had to read from the pulpit the Act of Presbytery and the Act of the Justices of the Peace.

1771, August 28 "The Presbytery of Ayr taking into their consideration the present state of the poor within their Bounds observe with regret that the practice of Vagrant begging which for a while was happily restrained in this county hath revived of late years and is at present come to a great height . . . and also considering the extreme hardships to which the real poor in every Parish must be subjected by these Vagrants intercepting a considerable part of what should go to their support . . . they therefore unanimously recommend it to their own members that no beggars out of their own parishes shall be encouraged by serving them and that they earnestly enforce the observation of the same."

In the early 1840's, the poor were still being supported by the traditional methods, despite the increase in population and the great changes which had taken place in Scottish society through industrialisation. In the parishes of Riccarton and Newton on Ayr there were assessments, but this was not the usual way of raising money for the care of the poor. When the Presbytery met at New Cumnock in 1843, it was noted that there "the Heritors have been obliged of late to contribute voluntarily in aid of the collections for the same purposes." That seems to have been the case in other parishes as well. The collections taken at the parish churches were not sufficient for the demands being made upon them.

Some parishes had received bequests for the poor, but the interest earned by such sums as £100 (New Cumnock), £110 (Sorn) or £208

(Craigie) would be limited in its effect. The Kirk Session of Kirkmichael received £5 6s 8d per annum in interest towards the relief of the poor.

The Poor Law Act, 1845, about which the Presbytery made no representations, removed the support of the poor from the Church to the new parochial boards of managers of the poor, on which the Kirk Sessions were represented. This reform of the Poor Law did not come soon enough, because no one could claim that the little amounts of money which the Kirk Sessions allocated to those in need were adequate. Nor could the old system cope with a large number of people being out of work in times of economic depression. The Church did the best it could with the limited resources available to it.

A legacy of the times when the Kirk had responsibility for the poor is the present day "Benevolent Fund" or "Fund for the Poor of the Parish.". Several parishes have such funds from which allocations, in cash or kind (perhaps coal), are made to those living on small incomes.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

In its care of the poor, the Church was attempting to alleviate their condition. From the Presbytery minutes, there is no evidence that the court made any attempt to influence the economic policy of the country or to speak out on behalf of those who suffered as a result of the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

In a county which, in the past, employed many men in the coal mining industry, it is sad to have to record that the Presbytery took no action to improve the life and conditions of the miners. An Act of the Scottish Parliament of 1606 had the effect of turning the colliers into slaves. This Act was an attempt to solve the shortage of labour facing the coal-owners. As slaves the colliers remained until 1799 when Parliament improved their lot and they were emancipated.

Sabbath observance was an issue which did concern the members of Presbytery. In the middle of the nineteenth century it was reported:

1849, September 5 "At Coal and Iron works it is a common practice to execute repairs of machinery on the Lord's day. The people employed at these works, and also in the construction of Railways, either spend the Sabbath slothfully at home, or they ramble about in the fields and on the highways. or they assemble together to indulge in the use of ardent spirits – an evil greatly promoted by the number of Public Houses, and by the practice of paying wages on the Saturdays.

Even in rural districts the salutary authority which heads of families were wont to exercise over their domestic servants on the Lord's day, has of late years been greatly diminished, and the younger servants particularly both male and female, claiming the Sabbath to themselves, have become irregular and careless in the discharge of their Sabbath Duties".

When the railway age arrived, the Presbytery put no obstacles in the way of companies which wished to build lines through any of the glebe lands. However the running of trains on Sundays was another matter. The Glasgow and Ayr and the Glasgow and Greenock Railway Companies received letters from the Presbytery Clerk:

1840, October 25 "I am directed by the Presbytery of Ayr, in Presbytery assembled, to express the very high satisfaction which they derive from your continued adherence to the christian and laudable resolution of not opening your line of Railway on the Lord's day . . ."

The Presbytery were also opposed to the mail being carried on Sundays.

Ministers were asked for information about conditions prevailing in their parishes with regard to the poor law, housing and the like. That information was supplied to the agency requesting it, but no moves seem to have been made by the Presbytery to change the economic conditions which governed the lives of the majority of their people.

WITCHCRAFT

The Parliament of Scotland enacted the death penalty for witchcraft in 1563. That it did so was a reflection of the widespread belief in witchcraft, a belief which was to be found throughout Europe.

It has been estimated by T. C. Smout that, between 1560 and 1707, somewhere in the region of 3,000 to 4,500 people were killed in Scotland because there were regarded as being guilty of witchcraft. There were times when the persecution of witches was severe, while at other periods there seems to have been little persecution. Nor was the whole country affected. There was not a large number of witchcraft trials in the Highlands and Islands, Galloway and Ayrshire.

The procedure followed, when a woman was suspected of being a witch, was that, first of all, she was reported to the Presbytery, who examined her. If there was evidence to support the accusation, then that person was taken before the burgh magistrates. If they came to the same conclusion, then

the Lords of Council, in Edinburgh, received an application for a commission to try the suspect. In this matter we have an instance of the civil and religious authorities working in co-operation.

The Ayr Burgh Accounts witness to the end of those guilty of witchcraft.

1586 "In expenses sustained in burning the with of Barnweill, to candles, to meat and drink, to pitch barrels, to coals, roset, hedir, treis and 'uther necessaris', £7 3s 8d."

In the Presbytery Minutes there is evidence of witchcraft being dealt with.

1643, March 22 (Ayr) "This day in respect of sundrie depositions given in before the Presbytrie against Susanna Shang spous of David Barclay burges of Ayr, wherein thair wer fund great presumptions of the sinne of witchcraft, thairfore the Prbrie considering heirof ordained a letter to be directed to the Lords of Counsell for purchasing ane warrand to try the said Susanna."

1650, May 1 (Ayr) "The Prbrie taking into their serious consideration the points of dittay presented to them by Gilbert Richard provost of Air and Gilbert M'Amount bailie there against Jonnet M'Graine, Helene Girvan, Jonnet Smelly, all guiltie by there awn confessions of that horrid and develish sin of sorcerie, did judge the particular points conteaned in he said dittayes against the said persones a sufficient ground to obteane a commission for there tryall and condigne punishment, and therefor ordained that a supplication might be drawn up by the saids magistrats to the Lords of Secret Counsell to that effect."

What the outcome of this was is unknown, with the exception of the case of Janet Smellie, who died in prison that same month and whose corpse was burned at the gallows in Ayr.

Some were fortunate enough to escape the death penalty. In the Ayr Burgh Records there is noted in 1595, the case of Agnes Hucheoun, the widow of a freeman of the Barony of Alloway. She was not accused of witchcraft but of being an abuser of the people. Her punishment, decided by the Provost and one of the bailies of Ayr, "with advyss of ye Ministeris of ye Presbitorie of Air", was that of being scourged at various public places within the burgh and of standing in the "branks" during two market days. When this sentence had been carried out, Agnes Hucheoun had to accept the discipline of the Presbytery and show signs of repentance.

In 1596, Margaret Reid, aged 16, from Galloway, was suspected of witchcraft, but she pled guilty to the lesser charge of "chairmering and

abusing the pepill". She confessed her crime before the Presbytery and was sentenced by the bailies to be banished from the Sheriffdom of Ayr.

Gradually the hold of superstition slackened and public opinion changed. In 1736, the death penalty for witchcraft was abolished, a move which was condemned by some of the Seceders, but not by the national Church.

GODLY DISCIPLINE

The First Book of Discipline (1560) described the duties of elders thus: to assist the Minister in all public affairs of the Church; to wit, in judging and decerning causes; in giving of admonition to the licentious liver; in having respect to the manners and conversation of all men within their charge.

The system of kirk sessions throughout the land was to be the means whereby society was to be moulded by Christian principles and standards. This was to be a society which would respect God's will as that was understood by the Reformers and their successors.

In the burghs, this policy was carried out more readily, for often the same men served both as bailies in the town council and as elder in the Kirk. Within a generation after the Reformation, the kirk session had established itself a power within a burgh. This process was slower in the rural areas but, through time, the influence of the kirk sessions was felt there. Over two groups in society the kirk sessions had no control. One was the nobility, who were powerful enough to ignore any criticism or judgement made by any kirk session. The other was the vagrants, who paid little or no attention to either Church or state. Despite these exceptions, the Kirk did come to have great power over the lives of the majority of the population. Without the co-operation of the civil authorities, this would not have been achieved.

Several moral offences were also crimes against the state, for example, adultery, fornication, and drunkenness. More important was the fact that excommunication by the Church was supported by civil penalties. That was the position until 1690 when these civil penalties attaching to excommunication were abolished. A few years later, in 1712, Parliament put an end to magistrates enforcing the censures and summons of the Church.

These two moves resulted in a reduction of the powers of kirk sessions, although they were still a force to be reckoned with. The various secessions from the Church of Scotland, which occurred during the eighteenth century, along with the Disruption, had the effect of weakening further the power and authority of the kirk sessions.

The majority of the cases dealt with by the kirk sessions concerned sexual offences—adultery and fornication. Those guilty of such offences were punished by having to do penance, dressed in sackcloth and before the congregation, over a period of several weeks.

One result which the interest of the kirk sessions in moral offences produced was a rise in the number of child murders. To escape the disgrace and the severity of Church discipline, some people would destroy the evidence by having illegitimate babies murdered as soon as they were brought into the world. With the coming of the "reign of the Moderates", ministers whose views were not so narrow, came the abolition of public penance and, consequently, child murder almost disappeared.

The Presbytery of Ayr had to deal with appeals against the judgements of the kirk sessions within its bounds and also with kirk sessions which were seeking guidance in the handling of difficult cases. Also before the Presbytery came "*delinquents*" guilty of frequent offences. The Minutes contain, with monotonous regularity, such entries as these:

1827, January 3 "Margaret McClelland, parish of Maybole, guilty of a quadrulapse in fornication, and Robert Murdoch and Margaret McVey, also from the parish of Maybole, guilty of adultery, and Isabel Boyd, parish of Ayr, guilty of a trilapse in fornication, having been summoned to appear before the Presbytery this day, and having been called, compeared, were solemnly rebuked and exhorted to repentance, and ordered to attend their respective kirk sessions to be taken under discipline."

1859, October 5 "Compeared Agnes McDonald from Ayr, Peter Urie from Maybole, Helen Murdoch from Straiton, Jean Samson from Mauchline and Agnes Hannay from Stair—all guilty of trilapse in fornication—and having been duly admonished by the moderator and exhorted to repentance, were remitted to their own Kirk Sessions."

On occasions it happened that the man accused of being the father of an illegitimate child would deny the charge, claiming that he was innocent. During the Kirk Session's investigation of the affair, he would protest his innocence and to prove that ask for the Oath of Purgation to be administered. This was of such a fearful nature that, during the period when it was in use, the Presbytery's approval had to be sought before this Oath could be administered. "I . . . doe therefor in the presence of the greit and dreadful majestie of the etternall everliving and everblessed God the searcher of the heart and reins in his holy sanctuary, humblie upon my knees, with my head lifted to heaven, protest and swear be the holie and dredfull name of the Lord the onlie trew

God, as I salbe ansyable to his majestie in that greit and terrible days wherein he sall judge the world in righteousness be Jesus Chryst whom he has appointed the judge of the quick and the dead, that I never committit the abominable sinne of . . . And this oathe I take in the presence of the allseing and sinner avenging God . . .” and so on, affirming his innocence and realising the punishment in store for those who swear falsely.

After the civil penalties attaching to Church censures had been removed, it was the case that, if a person chose to disregard the Presbytery, then there was not a great deal which that court could do about it. In 1836, the Presbytery were dealing with or, rather, failing to deal with, one Andrew Cowan of Ayr.

1836, February 24 “Execution of summons served pro 2do on Andrew Cowan, in the parish of Ayr, guilty of contumacy, was given in and read. Said Andrew Cowan was called but compeared not. As he was three times summoned to appear before the Kirk Session of Ayr, and twice before the Presbytery – all which citations he has refused to obey – therefore the Andrew Cowan, in the parish of Ayr, guilty of contumacy, was given in and under the sentence of the lesser excommunication.” In all likelihood, the sentence of the lesser excommunication (the loss of Church privileges) would have little or no effect on the life of Andrew Cowan. Once that sentence would have been severe but, by 1836, if an individual disregarded both Kirk Session and Presbytery, then both were powerless to act.

This type of discipline has now vanished from the Kirk: those guilty of such offences are no longer brought before Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries.

THE WIDER OUTLOOK

Although the work of the Presbytery was concerned mainly with the people within the confines of Kyle and Carrick, its records bear witness to its concern for those outwith its own area as well as its involvement in national affairs. We include a few examples from these records . . .

JACOBITE REBELLIONS

On 10th August 1715, an extraordinary meeting of the Presbytery was called and announcement was made of a “designed invasion by a popish pretender from ffrance”. Consideration was given as to what could be done at that time. After prayer, “and having taken the present circumstances of affairs to their consideration, they testified their Loyalty and affection and steady adherence to his Majesty King George.” Mr. Robert Cumming and John Hunter were asked “to draw the form of an addresse to his Majesty” within the next fortnight. On 24 August, the address was approved and the Clerk requested to “transmitt the same by tomorrow’s post” to the Earl of Loudoun so that he might present it to King George in London.

Similarly in 1745, hardly any support for the Jacobite cause was forthcoming from the South of Scotland. Glasgow was “much against” Charles Edward, and in Edinburgh “not one of the mob who were so fond of seeing him ever asked to enlist in his service.” Not a single minister of the Kirk supported the rising. Just over two months before Culloden,

1746, February 5 “The Presbytery considering the great service done this Church and nation by his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland do nominate Messrs. George Reid senior and William Walker and appoint them to correspond with the Presbytery of Irvine and if it shall be found convenient betwixt and the next Presbytery, that they wait on his Royal Highness in the name of the Presbytery and return him our most humble thanks.”

AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

The Slave Trade deeply concerned the Presbytery and in February 1792, we find “The Presbytery of Ayr have taken into their serious consideration the enormities attending the African Slave Trade, feel themselves constrained to join with many others of their fellow subjects in testifying publicly their abhorrence of a traffic so barbarous and unjust and contrary to the principles of the Gospel. Of this their unanimous opinion the reasons are obvious and need not be enlarged upon: suffice it to say that they do most cordially join with those societies who are appealing to Parliament for its speedy abolition; and that they most cheerfully contribute according to their ability to defraying the necessary expense of said Application. And they appoint their Clerk to publish this their resolution in the Edinburgh and Glasgow newspapers”.

NAPOLÉONIC WARS

The struggle against Napoleon made considerable impact on the lives of the people of South-West Scotland and the aftermath of Trafalgar and other naval engagements is reflected in the records.

1805, November "A motion was made that all the Ministers of this Presbytery should apply the collections to be made on the ensuing Thanksgiving Day being the 5th of December next for the purpose of affording relief to the Widows and Children of those who lost their lives, and of the wounded in the late naval engagements. Which Motion being considered the Presbytery unanimously agreed thereto. The Clerk is to inform absent Ministers of this appointment. The Collections to be sent to the Clerk who is to transmit them to the Secretary of the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's, London".

LOYAL ADDRESSES

Throughout the 19th century and particularly during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Minute Books of Presbytery are filled with loyal addresses to the Queen and to members of the Royal household.

1837, July 6 "Dr. Hill moved that a dutiful and loyal Address of congratulation be presented to her Majesty Queen Victoria, on her accession to the throne. This motion was seconded and unanimously agreed to. Drafts of these Addresses were produced, and after having been read and duly considered, were approved of – the tenor whereof follows . . .

To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, The humble Address of the Presbytery of Ayr.

Most Gracious Majesty,

We your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal Subjects, the Ministers and Elders of the Presbytery of Ayr, in Presbytery assembled, beg leave humbly to express our heartfelt congratulations on Your Majesty's accession to the throne, and our warm attachment to Your Majesty's person and government. . . ."

It seems that our forefathers set great store by these "loyal addresses" as they occupy many pages of the Minute Books. Not all, however, were directed to members of the Royal Family. Congratulations were sent, for instance, to James Brown, M.P., who had been Presbytery Elder from Annbank. "Presbytery congratulates James Brown M.P. an esteemed and valued member of the Court on becoming Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly".

It is interesting to note that the Presbytery, who had sent the appropriate congratulations on "the betrothal of the Duke of York to a Scottish bride", proposed that the Church of Scotland should be recognised at the Royal Wedding. "Presbytery expresses its conviction that the Crown authorities

should recognise the position of the Church of Scotland as a national Church by calling upon the Moderator of the General Assembly to take part in the Service in Westminster Abbey." Indeed this did happen and set a precedent for future occasions.

THE CHURCH IN INDIA

The General Assembly's first Missionary for the propagation of the Gospel in India was a Dr. Duff and arrangements were made for him to visit and address the Presbytery on 31st October, 1837 – quite an achievement to get a speaker of such calibre, in those days. "A numerous congregation being present, the four last verses of the 23rd paraphrase were sung, and the Presbytery was constituted with prayer. Mr. Ritchie, the Moderator, then mentioned what was the object of the meeting and addressing Dr. Duff, requested that he would make his proposed statement to the Presbytery and to the congregation assembled. Upon which Dr. Duff went to the Pulpit, and spoke at very considerable length. When he had finished, Dr. Auld moved that the cordial thanks of this Presbytery be given to Dr. Duff for the trouble he had taken in coming to visit the Presbytery and for the eloquent and energetic Address which he had now delivered, and in which he had so clearly explained the deplorable state of Religion among the Natives of India, and the Plan – the Success already attained – and the future prospect of the General Assembly's Mission . . .

A Collection was made at the Church in aid of the Funds of the India Mission, which amounted to Thirty six pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence."

FAILURE OF POTATO CROP

1847, February "The Presbytery having taken in to their serious consideration the present state of their countrymen in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and the destitution prevalent among them, in consequence of the failure of the Potato Crop, which formed the chief part of the food of the lower classes, unanimously did, and hereby do, recommend to all the members of the Presbytery to do what may be in their power, by obtaining subscriptions or making collections in their respective Parishes, to aid the Fund, which is being raised throughout the country of supplying the necessities of life to the inhabitants of these districts".

LIVINGSTONE CENTENARY

The centenary of David Livingstone's birth was in 1913 and we find Presbytery looking ahead in December 1912. "Presbytery recognise the propriety of having the Centenary of David Livingstone's birth celebrated. Co-operation was asked with the Foreign mission Committee of the U.F. Presbytery of Ayr towards that end." And again in February 1913 "Local evening Services to be held where practicable as well as Public meeting in Ayr.

Addresses on the life of David Livingstone would be delivered in all the Sunday Schools".

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Although an all male Court in 1913 it would appear that the Presbytery of Ayr could see the great benefit of women's point of view being expressed, particularly in government. On a vote the following was agreed " Presbytery while dissociating themselves from questions of party politics, desire to express their deep sense of the grave social and moral evils against which the movement for women's suffrage is mainly directed. They express sympathy with the desire for greater power to promote moral purity and social reform and recognize the justice of the claim that women's point of view should be presented in the government of the nation".

THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918

1914, September 15 In the first reference to the war it was recorded that the Rev. Oswald Milligan of Ayr St. Leonards would have leave-of-absence as Army Chaplain for one year.

1914, October Resolution: "Presbytery confident that Congregations will continue in intercession for our fighting forces and for those allied with us, take whatever steps seem necessary to encourage those qualified to offer themselves for the service of their country".

1914, December "In accordance with the wish of the King, the first Sunday of the new year to be set apart as a day for humble prayer of intercession throughout the nation. Presbytery are confident it will be so observed in every Parish within the bounds".

1915, February First casualty mentioned - Alan Fenwick a member of Maybole West "a student intending the Ministry". And so on throughout the years of war with many Ministers casualties as well as Kirk members.

1919 July The Moderator referred to the Treaty of Peace which had been signed and expressed the thankfulness of Presbytery and of the Church that the greatest war in history had ended in a victory for righteousness and in the prospect of lasting peace".

RUSSIA

Always quick to speak out against any suppression of religious liberty, Presbytery in February 1930, realising that the Russian people were being restricted in their Christian witness, recorded the following: "Presbytery place on record its protest against any suppression of religious liberty there (Russia) and call upon the President of the Soviet Republics to use his powers

to secure to all Russian subjects full and unfettered freedom in spiritual matters. Copies to be sent to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and to the Earl of Glasgow".

LEAVE OF ABSENCE FOR MINISTERS

This seemed to be a feature of the '30's when Ministers asked for permission to travel abroad either to visit Congregations with Scottish connections or to look after a Church. "St. Quivox Minister three months leave of absence to participate in the centenary celebrations of St. Andrews Church, Huntingdon, Quebec of which his grandfather had been the first Minister". Ayr Trinity Minister six months off "to visit India and Ceylon as Commissioner from the Church of Scotland to Scottish Congregations and Scottish Regiments in these countries".

Ayr 1st Charge Minister six weeks off "to accompany the Moderator of the General Assembly to Egypt and the Sudan".

Ayr Darlington Minister six months leave "to undertake charge of St. Andrews Church, Cairo".

SECOND WORLD WAR 1939 - 1945

Presbytery seemed to take greater notice of the Second World War as early as 8th March 1939 it was being stated "It will probably be necessary to increase the number of Ministers and Missionaries required in areas chosen to receive persons from the more congested and dangerous areas". "Ministers wherever possible to fit themselves by training for A.R.P. work and refrain from undertaking any pledge which would bring them automatically under control of local authority or Government Department without first consulting Presbytery".

And early in the War an increase in the Old Age Pension was called for, when Presbytery - "respectfully urge upon the Government to take immediate steps to increase the amount of their (O.A.P's) weekly pension".

Even then it seemed necessary to complain about the lack of Religious Broadcasting "Presbytery protest against the trivial nature of the B.B.C. programmes and the almost complete disappearance of Scottish Religious Broadcasts".

Ministers offered their services as Chaplains in Huts and Canteens. Ayr Presbytery presented a Mobile Canteen in 1941. In 1946 we find "concern aroused by the proposal to settle Polish Forces in Scotland and to give them nationality. Two matters had to be kept in view by the Presbytery - the prevailing unemployment in Scotland and the fact that the Polish Forces were largely Roman Catholic".

IRELAND

Throughout its four hundred years the Presbytery has maintained very close links with Ireland, particularly in times of trouble.

1689 April 24 "It is appointed that wednesday next, the 2st of May, be kept a fast day in every congregation within their bounds for Ireland's condition, the bad weather, etc."

1689 June 4 "Mr. William Eccles is appointed to receive the contribution for the distressed protestants of France and Ireland . . ."

1689 August 27 "Mr John Mairs submitted himself to the Presbytry, only reserving liberty to return to his own congregation in Ireland when he might have access thereto, which was granted, this Presbytry declaring that his fixing in Coiltoun for a time shall no wayes preclude his return to Ireland so soon as he may have access to his own congregation there".

In 1868 great interest was taken in a proposal to alter the position of the Episcopalian Church of Ireland. Presbytery sent a petition to the House of Commons . . . "your Petitioners view with alarm a preposition recently made in your Honourable House to disestablish and disendow the Church of Ireland. In the opinion of your Petitioners this is at once wrong in Principle and fraught with disastrous consequences to the peace of Ireland and the best interests of Gospel truth in that country".

In 1912, the Presbytery took a strong line against the HOME RULE BILL – IRELAND. A letter had been received from the Presbytery of Belfast asking Protestants in Scotland and England to bring influence to bear on M.P's to defeat the Home Rule Bill. After discussion, on vote "Presbytery express their sympathy with the Protestants in Ireland in view of the dangers to their religious liberty with which they believe and we believe that they are menaced by certain political proposals before the country".

More recently, in the 1970's when the severity of the problems in Ireland was escalating, Presbytery invited the Principal Clerk to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to address its members in Ayr to give them a report on conditions throughout Ulster. This Dr. Weir did and it was also arranged that Ministers and Elders be sent to Belfast, on behalf of the Presbytery, to assess the situation for themselves. Close contact has been maintained and in 1981 a further Deliverance was passed. "Presbytery, conscious of the link over many years between ourselves and our Christian Brethren in Ulster, express solidarity with them at this present time and urge them to remain calm and steadfast. Presbytery deplore the action of the media in personalising a convicted criminal already condemned by Cardinal Hume for seeking to take his own life. Presbytery request the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to keep them fully informed on events in the Province".

THE PRESBYTERY TODAY

The years have brought changes in circumstances and in methods but the Presbytery continues to exercise its traditional functions in the care of the Parishes within the Bounds, ensures that the Gospel is faithfully preached, exercises oversight of the work of the Congregations, encourages thorough education in the faith and tempers justice with mercy in cases where discipline is required.

As a Presbytery of the Church of Scotland – "part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church, worshipping one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" – the Court re-affirms at each Ordination or Induction of a Minister its belief in "the Gospel of the sovereign grace and love of God, wherein through Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, incarnate, crucified and risen, He freely offers to all men, upon repentance and faith, the forgiveness of sins, renewal by the Holy Spirit and eternal life". Each Minister is Ordained by the laying on of hands of those to whom it doth belong and each Ordinand or Inductee is required to acknowledge the Presbyterian form of government of this Church to be "agreeable to the word of God". Elders, subscribing to the same formula as to faith and government, are Ordained or Admitted to the Eldership by their own Kirk Sessions and serve in Presbytery when commissioned thereto by the Kirk Session or by the Court itself.

The Bounds of the Presbytery extend from Troon and Dundonald in the North to Ballantrae and Barrhill in the South, and to New Cumnock and Muirkirk in the East. In 1981 statistics are recorded as follows: – "Number of Congregations, 48; Communicant Membership 37,841; Elders 1,755: Sunday School scholars 4,815; Bible Class scholars, 1,242; Senior Youth Fellowship members, 133; Uniformed Organisations, girls 2,538, boys, 2,343. Christian Liberty, £875,548; Mission and Service, Allocated £94,210, Received £91,025; Average Giving per member, £22.95 per annum".

The Statutory meetings of Presbytery are held each month with the exceptions of January, July and August. The Moderator (primus inter pares) presides and the regular business is discussed under Committee Reports. The detailed work is done by ten Standing Committees and two ad hoc Committees – Doctrine and Students for the Ministry. Relationship with the General Assembly and its Committees are maintained by about one quarter of the Court's membership being commissioned to Assembly each year by each Convenor being a member of the appropriate Assembly Committee. Each Convenor reports to Presbytery on the work of his Committee and thus members share in making decisions as to policy and action.

The Presbytery meets annually for Holy Communion and for Conference on matters affecting the life and work of the Church. Recent subjects have been, the Pastoral care of the Ministry and Publicity for the Church's message.

The Presbytery, subject itself to Synod and General Assembly, exercises oversight upon the Kirk Sessions and Congregations within the bounds. Such oversight normally takes the form of two Quinquennial visitations to each Church and Parish; one by the Benefice and Fabric Committee to inspect and make recommendations or give instructions as to the maintenance of the Church and Manse buildings; the other by the Oversight Committee or its nominees to meet with the Minister, Kirk Session and Financial Board and to share worship with the Congregation. The purpose of these visits is not inquisitorial but rather to share successes and discuss difficulties. Matters which require further examination are normally referred to the Moderator's Committee for more confidential discussion.

At this time the Presbytery, in common with other Presbyteries throughout the Church, has two particular problems in the life and witness of the Church – a serious decline in membership with a shortage of students studying for the Ministry – and a decline in the number of scholars in Sunday School with the added difficulty of recruiting adequately trained staff.

The decline in Church membership, for various reasons, has involved the Presbytery in long and serious talks with many Congregations about the future and has resulted in a number of Unions and Linkages. Such re-adjustments are not entered into lightly and it is with deep regret that Church buildings, which have nurtured many in the faith and have housed the prayers and praises of generations of faithful souls, become disused. However, it is noted with thanksgiving that the re-adjustment results in a new identity of corporate worship which is stronger for having as its heritage the woven strands of the rich traditions of each of its integral parts; and, in Charges where Linkages are involved, a village may well regret that the Minister is no longer 'resident' but the new relationship with a neighbouring Church and Parish in the form of a shared Minister can be of mutual assistance and lead to further possibilities.

The problem of recruitment and training of staff has been undertaken by the Education Committee of Presbytery and, with the help of the General Assembly's Department of Education, it has been possible to set up a resource centre where ideas can be shared and advice given. The Presbytery are fortunate in having the services of part-time Advisers who each take responsibility for their own part of the work, Adult Education, Youth Work and Sunday School.

Other aspects of the work of Presbytery are reflected in the use of a number of speakers on the varied work of the Church at Statutory Meetings of the Court throughout the year and in the activities of all the Committees. The detail of the Church's Foreign Mission work is brought to each Congregation by the personal relationship of the Partner Plan; the Home Mission Committee is continually vigilant for opportunities of evangelism and service; The Social Responsibility Committee has its immediate concern in the Church's Homes within the bounds and is alert to influences on the well-being of the people; the Church and Nation Committee is diligent in presenting national issues for

debate from a thoroughly researched background; the Students Committee continues its efforts to present to Congregations and schools the claims of the Ministry as a life-work of service and fulfilment and exercises a careful assessment of possible candidates. The Committees on Maintenance of the Ministry and Stewardship and Budget have functions which differ in many ways but they each deal with matters spiritual and financial which involve national vision, congregational understanding and individual commitment.

The Presbytery of Ayr has a history of concern for the people and for the propagation of the Gospel in their midst. That history continues to be made and whereas there are indications that the Church's word is ignored in these times, it is to be noted that when the Presbytery communicates its opinion on any matter the authorities concerned invariably reply with interest and courtesy.

As a Court of the Church in place of a Bishop, the Presbytery of Ayr continues to show its concern for all within the bounds and performs its tasks with due regard to that human understanding which comes only from the heart of the Eternal.

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