

# Broomknoll Parish Church



The First 150 Years

## Genesis and Exodus The First Fifty Years

The Church of Scotland suffered its first great split in 1733 when the Erskines, on a matter of conscience, seceded and formed the nucleus of a rapidly growing body of dissenters. Airdrie, as might be expected had its quota of Seceders, and they thought nothing of travelling anything from 10 to 20 miles to Sunday worship. However by 1789 there were enough of them to set up a Secession congregation in the town, the first congregation to worship inside Airdrie itself. Their place of worship was in Well Wynd where the present New Wellwynd church stands to day.

They were a stern uncompromising lot of folk and it was only to be expected that they would have differences of opinion among themselves. These came to a head with the battle between the *Auld Lights* and the *New Lights*, and when the *Auld Lights* were outvoted, there was only one thing for them to do, to separate from their brethren and start their own congregation. By 1804 they had chosen their site for a church, on a bit of land feued from Patrick Waddell of Bogo on the Broomknowe, and there they started building for the future.

Singing at public worship was of course, led by the Precentor, and the Session was stern in its demand that the method of "line singing" in which the Precentor gave out each line before it was sung (an odious importation!) was to be followed, ultimately making a great concession in allowing him to lead the singing once in the evening without giving out the line. Disputes as to who should control the singing were resolved by compromise, the Session allowing the congregation, through the Managers to control the singing, so long as absolutely no changes were made.

## The Sessions Authority

Elders were jealous of their position in those days, and did exercise a surprising control over their flock. Moral offences were dealt with continually, and when members absented themselves from ordinances, they were visited by two of the elders (although some defaulters were by no means docile).

“The Session agreed that J.L. had driven his cart on a fast day, and kept his shop open, and had absented himself from ordinances since he got his child baptised, he should be summoned to the next meeting of the Session”. When he did not appear, he was declared “contumacious, and his name dropped from the roll”.

“Appointed Peter Reid to converse with J.J. for having taken spirits to excess and to caution him against it: to converse also with Mrs. T. for having spoken improper language, and to caution her respecting what company she keeps, especially on Sabbath”.

“J.K. was refused baptism for his child for irregular attendance, and also for carrying much water publicly on the forenoon of a sacramental feast”.

It was reported that “D.McD. had been the worse of liquor on the third Sabbath of the last month and was “oxtered home”.

## Kirk Session Minutes

Although the minutes, by modern standards are scanty, the Session mentioned in passing many matters of interest.

In 1814 it arranged for a Day of Thanksgiving and Fasting, but observed that the Prince Regent had called for this day of thanksgiving for success in war, and “testified against the Prince Regent as head of the Church appointing any day... Christ Jesus being her King and Head as mentioned in our act of testimony”.

In 1826 it appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> March to be “observed as a day of fasting for the present aspect of Providence – for the many failures which have taken place, which is the cause of many being out of employment, and the situation of the mercantile world looking still worse...”.

In 1829 the Session sent a petition to the House of Commons and another to the Lords, protesting against the Bill, which would admit Roman Catholics to Parliament.

In 1832 it ordered a fast day before communion to be “spent in fasting and humiliation in relation to the cholera morbus which as a pestilence is going thro’ the length and breadth of our land”.

# The Second Fifty Years

## 1855 to 1904

### A Long Ministry Begins

During the second decade of this period, Reverend James McGowan was the minister, a worthy and highly esteemed man, who gave the impression of being advanced in years, though he was only 56 when he died suddenly in 1864.

After his death there was a prolonged vacancy. The Kirk was in a poor state, and for about three years there was considerable doubt about its future. However there were some staunch members, who persuaded Hamilton Presbytery to give Broomknoll another chance.

On 10<sup>th</sup> January 1867, a young man called William Reid was ordained and inducted to the charge, and it was a new beginning for Broomknoll. Never again was it in jeopardy, but rather made steady progress. When after 47 years at the helm, he retired in 1914 he left a congregation vastly different from that which he found shaped into the which we know so well. The story of 50 years of the congregation's life is largely the storey of William Reids' work and service of his Master.

### New Buildings

At the death of Reverend James McGowan the cottage adjoining the church ceased to be the manse, and for seven years the minister lived in a rented house. In 1874, however, Mr. Reid and his family moved into the New Manse, which was built in Alexander Street at a cost of one thousand five hundred and ninety-three pounds six shillings and five pence farthing. That must have been a proud day for both the minister and people, when the large imposing house bore the name "Broomknoll Manse"

The old church which was as plain as a church could be, had been extended in 1837, but some forty years later it was obvious that it could not last much longer. In March 1888, the congregation worshipped for the last time in the building which had seen Airdrie grow from a hamlet to a town, and the old structure was demolished, the only relic of it being a stone built over the entrance to the then halls. In May 1889 the new building was opened for worship, and Broomknoll, as we know it to day was in existence. The new church cost two thousand pounds, which meant that, with the cost of the Manse, the congregation had undertaken to pay off a very large sum of money within a few years. We are the heirs of their generosity and courage.

## At Worship

The changing pattern of life in the town suggested by the alterations, which were introduced from time to time in, the hours of Sunday worship. About the middle of the nineteenth century it seems that the big service of the day was in the afternoon, and the Session was perturbed by the poor attendance in the morning. Proposals were discussed for a time that services should be changed to 12 noon and evening and in 1888 that was finally accepted, however that lasted only until 1891, when the hours of worship were again altered to noon and 2.15 pm.

The singing in the church was, of course led by a series of Precentors, and was for many years entirely from the Psaltery. It was an innovation, when in 1882; the Free Church Hymnary was introduced. But when the new church building was opened there was a great innovation, for a harmonium was presented to the congregation by Sheriff Mair. It was not accepted without opposition, but when a ballot about instrumental music was taken, the new attitude was clearly shown by a majority of 300 to 8. Finally when the congregation was celebrating its Centenary, Broomknoll was brought right up to date by the installation of the new pipe organ.

The problem of what to sing and how to sing it roused much controversy at different times. For instance when the Precentor, Mr. Todd, wished to have his choir sing secular items at the Soiree, the request was sternly refused, and when the Deacons' Court suggested in 1894 that the new harmonium might be used for playing voluntaries, the Kirk session set its face against that too. As late as 1902 the choir was asking permission to sing sacred anthems at services and with one dissident, the Kirk Session agreed to allow it "as a privilege". Only with the appearance of the pipe organ was the organist allowed to play voluntaries.

In days when it appeared to be so hard to persuade folk to take part in the service of the choir it is strange to be reminded that a place in the choir was once granted as a favour, and that in 1882 the Kirk Session "left it in the hands of the Precentor to keep back from the choir on Sabbath those members whose conduct throughout the week can not be approved".

## Personalities of the Second Period

It appears that for about 15 years there was no Session Clerk; the minister Reverend William Reid, signed the minute as Clerk pro.tem. However in 1882 Robert Murchie took over the office. He was succeeded in 1887 by J.C. Carlisle and this appointment

Prominent among the names of officials of the Deacons' Court during these years are those of the Loudon family and the Knox family. Thomas Loudon, clerk in 1867 became treasurer, to be succeeded by his son, Thomas Loudon junior, who in turn became Clerk of the Court.

In 1867 Walter Knox (whose father James had long been an elder) became treasurer, and later his son the second James Knox also filled the post. It will be seen that during the third period the next Walter Knox also filled the position of treasurer.

At the time of building the new church the Clerk was Jon B Allan who though resigned his clerkship in 1901, was with us, a venerable figure on session until 1953.

Great personalities were these, to be remembered with pride and gratitude before God. One other must be mentioned – for over 44 years until 1891, Alexander Davidson was Church Officer, in days when the Beadle saw his salary slowly creep from £10 to £15 per year, and his duties included disposing of lairs in the Kirk yard, and calling on members who failed to pay seat rents etc.

What a great record of service to the Kirk!

## A Strong Line About Drink

Intemperance was such a problem in Scotland for a long time that mention of it inevitably appeared in Session records. In 1875 the Session passed this firm motion “Owing to the alarming extent of intemperance prevails in the district, and great hindrance it presents to furtherance of the cause of Christ, none should be admitted as members who are engaged in the sale of spirituous liquors without the matter being brought before Session. Resolution also applies to those at present members, and any who may connect themselves with the traffic aforesaid”.

Temperance advocates for long objected to the use of fermented wine at communion, and after many battles on the subject the introduction of unfermented wine was finally carried by a small majority in 1900.

## A Fourth Name – Broomknoll U.F.

The congregation had already had three names – “The Associate Congregation of Airdrie” – “Broomknoll Parish Church” – “Broomknoll Free Church”. In 1900 the Free Kirk and the United Presbyterian Kirk came together in union and so at that time of its centenary a fourth name was in use – “Broomknoll United Free”.

The Centenary was celebrated in an atmosphere heavy with alarm, for the Free Church had disputed the right of the United Free congregations to continue in possession of their ecclesiastical buildings. It looked for a time as if Broomknoll would find itself without either its Church or its Manse and the writer of the centenary booklet was moved to say “How the Church will emerge from the present crisis the future alone will reveal; but one can not imagine the splendid career of Broomknoll being wrecked, in the midst of her Centenary celebrations, by divisions within her own walls”. He concluded, “That the congregation may accomplish at least another century of usefulness must be the wishes of her many true friends”. The wish is still being fulfilled.

## The Third Fifty Years

### A Time of Wars

During the first period Broomknoll felt the impact of the Napoleonic Wars. Its second period began with the Crimean War and closed just after the South African War. During its third period it experienced the tragedies of the First and Second World Wars. If the wars of its first century affected the life of its people, Broomknoll felt with terrible keenness the terror of these latter times. In both World Wars many of her sons died, and the shadow of grief has lingered over many a home. Even in the days of uneasy peace between the wars there was trouble in plenty, when unemployment lay with grey heaviness over Airdrie. During such days the Kirk mustered its resources to serve the people in the name of Christ, the King and Head of the Church.

## Changing Ministries

Soon after the beginning of the third period the Reverend William Reid began to speak of his retiral, but it was not till 1914 that he saw a colleague and successor inducted, Reverend Joseph Gray. Mr. Gray was soon away as a chaplain to the forces, and a good part of his ministry of seven years was thus engaged, though he still managed to leave the imprint of his buoyant personality firmly stamped upon the life of the congregation.

In 1922 Reverend James McLaughlin began his ministry, but it was to prove an unhappily brief one, as he had to retire for health reasons in 1924. Then came Reverend Gordon Carmichael, who had been ordained in South Africa, and who had also seen war service. His virile leadership was invaluable to Broomknoll during the years of the depression, and he was a prime mover in the work of unemployment relief undertaken by Airdrie Churches' Council.

In 1933 there came to Broomknoll Reverend Archibald Bell, who, like two of his predecessors, had been through the experience of service in the First World War. As a Second World War broke out during the latter part of his ministry he was faced with a difficult task leading his congregation and ministering to his people during the blackest of years. This he did with such zeal and compassion that the affection he roused in many would live long in their hearts.

The sixth minister in Broomknoll's pulpit during this third period was Reverend John W Waddell, who succeeded Mr. Bell in 1946 a product of a newer generation, who had been in uniform during the Second World War.

During its first hundred years Broomknoll had but four ministers – during the next fifty it had five others – a sign of the less settled nature of the times in the life of the Church, or of a different concept of the value of the ministry on the part of the people.

## The Congregation Shall Show Forth Their Praise

The tempo of civilised life seemed to increase tremendously during the half-century 1904 – 1954, and in the rapidly developing Burgh of Airdrie life was getting steadily busier. It followed that, in the still growing congregation of Broomknoll, there would be a heightening of activity and a more complex organisation, with more and yet more agencies in operation. To bear the new burdens of administration and leadership men of great faith and ability were required, and in the Providence of God they were forthcoming.

Three Session Clerks held office during these years: Mr. William Jack, Sir William Knox and Mr. Walter Knox. Mr Jack was held in high esteem for his devotion to the Kirk and his eager service of its Lord. Sir James was an outstanding personality, whose leadership made him famous in so many activities in the Burgh in which he was Provost and the county of which he was Lord Lieutenant, and who brought to the work of the Church the same wisdom and imitative which provided the strength of the Airdrie Savings Bank. That clever, humble and devout man of God, Walter Knox, about whom we will see later in this history, followed him.

After the Committee of Management replaced the Deacons' Court in 1908 several fine men occupied the Preses' chair. Mr. Thomas Louden who had such wide experience of the old of the old Deacons' Court being succeeded by Mr. Peter Henderson, Mr. Thomas Hastings and Mr. Alexander Hay, men of beloved memory.

Clerk of the Deacons' Court who became Clerk of the New Committee of Management was Mr. J. Dunn. Russell, whose shrewdness and enthusiasm for the affairs of Broomknoll were invaluable. The increasingly onerous position has been filled by Messers E.C.Shaw, Robert Paterson and Hugh H Donald. Treasurers who have not already been mentioned in connection with other offices included Mr. David Simpson and Mr.R.C.McLean

Holders of such offices were not the only great servants of the Kirk. Let us not forget men like Thomas Weir and Daniel Moles, men revered by their brother elders and by all who were under their tuition in Sunday School. Mention of other benefactors and active workers like Thomas Forsyth, Andrew Pettigrew, Alexander Grant, Mr. J.D.Ballantine and Mr James Russell the later worked on the Weekly Freewill Offering Scheme.

So many names, yet so many more that can not be recorded, names of men working steadily, year in year out asking no reward but the knowledge that they do the Master's Will. Indeed the congregation shall show forth their praise.

## The House Made With Hands

In the first two periods we have seen the old Kirk built and then enlarged, and ultimately levelled to make a place for the new house of worship. But the work of improving and adapting buildings of the church never ends.

In 1929 a great reconstruction was made, when the organ, which stared the congregation in the face, was removed to the side galleries, and the beautiful War Memorial Windows were erected.

In 1939 there were further improvements, when the new building which includes the session room and vestry was built on to the gable of the church. And the result of all the work? Surely one of the most attractive Presbyterian places of worship within many miles.

The graveyard, which was behind the church, was closed by order of the Sheriff in 1908. To day there are only a few memorial stones left.

## After 150 Years

When Broomknoll achieved its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday its membership, which had been under 200 when Reverend William Reid was inducted had reached 813. The Sunday School with four departments had over 300 pupils, with a staff of 41. Its other agencies consisted of Church Choir, Woman's Guild, Men's Club, Bible Class, Young Peoples Fellowship, 6<sup>th</sup> Airdrie Boys' Brigade, 6<sup>th</sup> Airdrie Life Boys' 9<sup>th</sup> Airdrie Girls Guildry.

### Office holders at that time were

Session Clerk	Mr Walter S Knox B.Sc. J.P.
Preses	Mr William Smith
Clerk to Committee of Management	Mr. Hugh H Donald
Treasurer	Mr E C Shaw
W.F.O. Treasurer	Mr James Russell

### Organisation Leaders

Morning Primary Sunday School	Miss M D Henderson
Afternoon Primary Sunday School	Miss Elizabeth Knox
Hire Grade Sunday School	Mr A G McGilvary
Junior Sunday School	Rev J W Waddell
Bible Class & YPF	Rev J W Waddell
Woman's Guild President	Mrs Waddell
Men's Club President	Mr William Gemmell
Boys' Brigade Captain	Mr William Ross
Life Boy Leader	Miss Elizabeth Gardiner
Guldry Guardian	Mrs Margaret Jack
Organist	Mr David Smith
Church Officer	Mr Andrew Gemmell

## Celebrating The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The congregation celebrated the Triple Jubilee in many ways but certain events will long stand out in memory.

One will be the youth show when ten organisations each provided part of an entertainment to an audience of a thousand in the Sir John Wilson Town Hall. With it will be remembered the Ter-Jubilee Social also in the Town Hall when three former ministers gave addresses and there was a first class musical programme.

But outstanding were the services of Thanksgiving and Re-Dedication on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April 1954. A great congregation gave thanks to God at the morning service, in which four former ministers accompanied the minister, Reverend Joseph Gray M.A. Reverend D. Gordon Carmichael B.D. and the Reverend Archibald Bell M.A.

There were other services in the afternoon and evening and at each of these services the sermon was preached by one of the former ministers.

## The Next Fifty Years

So the fourth period begins. The world in which the Church is working is a world ill at ease. Peace is far from secure and the new threat of atomic weapons makes any threat of a rupture of peace a nightmare. Communism makes great strides in political advance and in its declaration of the gospel of materialism. Certainly this is a time when faith is being challenged, and the Church has a truly crucial work to do. Broomknoll congregation faces its future in good heart. It enters upon its fourth half-century of service strong and virile, determined to do its bit to the end that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Yet the new era has begun with changes. Within a few months of the Triple Jubilee we lost the beloved Session Clerk Mr Walter Knox. The Kirk Session elected Mr William Smith to be its new Clerk. At the same time the Clerk of Management Mr Hugh H Donald was appointed manager of a branch of a national bank and moved away from Airdrie, and the new clerk was Mr Thomas Henderson.

Broomknoll looks to the future with new men and women in its highest offices, but we know they will serve Christ in this congregation as truly and as faithfully as did the men of the past whom we honour in remembrance.

As long as men and women of faith are ready to give their time and their talents to the prosecution of Christ's Kingdom in Broomknoll, so shall the Master's work prosper in this corner of his vineyard.